The 18 Fathoms

From The Sailings of Pirate Nonn

A daring pirate sets his sights on a King's treasure!

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While this story is historically accurate with places, towns, and naval tactics, the persons described it in are entirely fictitious. Any similarity to persons living or dead is purely coincidental.

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Chapter I
The Chase

The two ships had been locked in a deadly dance for the better part of the afternoon. They had traded cannon fire- both effective and wasted. Thanks to a persistent brisk wind, the ships ran, tacked, and jibed hoping to gain the upper hand, firing when they had the chance. Both crews were displaying their best sailing. However, the dance was almost over. The captain of one of the ships made the mistake of disengaging his attacker and attempted to flee to a safe port more than a day's sailing away.

He would never make it.

Waves crashed over the bow of the *18 Fathoms* as it knifed through the teal blue water. Closer and closer it drew to the Sloop. The Sloop's

sails were no match for the much larger and faster three-masted Corvette on a straight downwind track. Jibing and tacking, the smaller ship was able to keep its distance and even get farther away. In a downwind race, the brute force of wind against hundreds more yards of sail put it at a disadvantage. Straining against a brisk wind, the Sloop's fore and aft sails were as taut as a drum. The thick mast and rigging creaked as the sails tried to pull free and escape into the cloud filled sky.

"Tighten that Mainsail!" bellowed the captain of the *18 Fathoms*, "We'll steal her wind or I'll steal yours!" Hunched at the wheel with feet planted, he clenched it with the ferocity of the devil himself. Captain Nonn kept his eyes on his prey- the newly launched British sloop, *Unsinkable*. British ship naming practices almost begged for piracy, thought Nonn, *Unsinkable*, *Dauntless*, *Formidable;* they were painted on the ships as a challenge. Unfortunately for the British Navy, Nonn was never one to turn his stern to a challenge.

The Sloops sails drooped as the Corvette moved in position to her aft on the port side, blocking the wind. The sudden lack of wind power made the ship lurch forward as the mast straightened, even as the crew's bellies lurched in their bodies- their morale as sagging as the sails of their ship. Standing on the bow of the *18 Fathoms*, Tom Whiddon the first mate bellowed, "Stand fast! Anyone who fights will die, all who surrender will be spared!" He fought to keep a smile from his face as he turned to the pirate to his left. "No prisoners, no witnesses." he said. Prisoners required food, shelter and precious water. Gold, gems, and spices required none of those.

The *18 Fathoms* drew alongside the Unsinkable, a score of pirates armed with grappling hooks at the ready prepared for their task. Another score, armed with sabers and falchions, also stood ready.

Chapter II
Everyone To A Task

The two ships slammed together as the grappling hooks dug into the Sloop's railing. Armed Pirates swarmed over to engage the bewildered English sailors. The tide of battle never once was on the side of the hapless English seamen. Watching, Nonn reminisced to his early days as a cabin boy aboard a Spanish Galleon. He was young and eager to learn then and would watch earnestly as the ship conducted its day-to-day routine. Even as a young boy Nonn thought it odd that sailors acted as fighters and carpenters. The only job that seemed to have just one person assigned to it was the ship's cook. Young Cabin Boy Nonn watched and thought that when he had his own ship he would run it quite differently. Cabin Boy Nonn learned early on that there were only two things that kept a crew loyal; love of country and love of money. Nonn never presumed that he would be a Spanish sailor, or even a galleon captain, much less king. His only option for a loyal crew was to have men loyal to riches. Which was exactly what he had done. Having specific tasks; sailors, carpenters, fighters allowed his men to be experts in their chosen field. Because even a carpenter could work alongside a sailor in heaving in lines. Having less men meant that the treasure was split among less crew. The more money they received, the more loyal

the crew became. It was a perfect situation. Captain Nonn thought all this in the moments it took for his boarding party to gain the upper hand. The English sailors were good swordsmen, that much could not be argued. But since they also had to be good sailors, carpenters, gunners, or any other of a dozen tasks, they never mastered any skill. They were helpless against the two-dozen master fighters that Captain Nonn hired who augmented the rank-and-file seamen in the battle. True they assisted in running the ship's day to day activities, but being swordsmen was their main purpose.

Even before the fight was completely over, four carpenters scooted across the decks of the now doomed Sloop, quickly finding their way below the decks to where the treasure lay- a fortune in ballast. Any sailing ship required ballast to remain low in the water to provide stability. When a ship was sailing to the New World that ballast was in the shape of bricks. When returning, it was in gold, silver, gems and spices. Either way they were kept in large oak chests in the belly of the ship. Since the chests were required for the return trip, the only logical thing captains could do with them (instead of taking up the entire deck of their ships) was to fill them with ballast. Many a port colony was paved entirely with cobblestones- the preferred ballast of choice since it stacked so neatly. Once the ship arrived at port, the cobblestones were unloaded and sold as paving stones for new streets- ballast sold for profit, the true English way! The ship then refilled the chests with whatever riches were to be brought back to Europe. Like ants over a summer picnic, the carpenters emerged from the belly of the Sloop with tender morsels; two large chests that were the only ones that were

locked. If the order was given, other sailors would return to take food and water. Two men each struggled to pull the chests back to their ship.

Standing at the helm of the *18 Fathoms*, Captain Nonn did not even wait until the final Englishmen were dead before turning his attention to the chests- the last remaining persons on the ship would be the officers who had no doubt hidden until the last seamen was dead. He had some respect for the rank-and-file seamen- he had none for Royal Officers of Her Majesty's Navy. Captain Nonn drew his wickedly curved falchion and in a grand stroke, cut the iron padlock in one fluid motion. Nodding to his men, they opened the chest to reveal nothing more than gray colored stones. *The English sailors had given their lives for mere cobblestones*, thought Nonn as his attention returned to the decks of the Sloop. "Stop!" He bellowed; he was to get to the bottom of this mystery. And tragedy. "Bring the survivors to me." Sailors dying to defend a cargo of treasure was understandable; to die defending worthless bricks was profane. His men immediately stopped fighting. The captain had spoken- that was enough explanation as they needed. Three Englishmen were led over the railings to the rolling decks of the *18 Fathoms*.

Narrowing his eyes, he addressed the closest prisoner. It did not matter on his exact rank; he was captain, first mate, pilot, financier or someone else of importance- either way he should be able to answer the question. "Where is the treasure? The treasure bound for Spain." asked Nonn. There was no threat or emotion in his voice. The man looked on defiantly. "String him up" came the command. The captive struggled for only a moment. Captain Nonn's men knew they would face a far worse

fate if their actions were sloppy. Quickly several Pirates subdued the now panicking captive as they hoisted him by his feet. Nonn turned to the next in line, his falchion clacking back home into its sheath. He drew his dirk and pointed at the second man. A simple, much smaller weapon, it was still formidable as such close range. Nonn repeated the question. The man looked away, nervously.

Chapter III
A Skin Sweater

"I do not think you understand the gravity of your situation." Again, Nonn spoke without emotion. To show anger gave resolve to his captives. Nothing heartened a prisoner more than a tantrum from his captors. Nonn knew this from personal experience. Captain Nonn turned to the upside-down man and pulled his shirt to his armpits, exposing a pale, flabby belly. He glanced at the second man. "Allow me to demonstrate." Nonn spun the upside-down man once around. As he did so, he placed his blade against the man's stomach. A straight red line encircled the man whose eyes opened more in shock than in pain; the cut was barely more than skin deep. Glancing back to the two remaining prisoners, he stuck his dirk into the mast of the ship. He turned the man around so he could look at his upside-down face. "Tis the last time I will ask you; *where is the treasure*?"

Even though his tone had not changed, there was finality in his question. Neither of the two men who remained on their own feet answered, the one upside down was still unsure of what was happening and also did not respond; he was more concerned about the wound he had received which was already beginning to dribble blood towards his head. In one smooth motion Captain Nonn dug his fingers into the

sides of the upside-down man right at the slice he had just created. With a quick bending of his knees, he pulled the man's skin over his own head as if it were a sweater.

A scream leapt from the man that was like a gale wind through the rigging of the ship. Men who sailed along the coasts of England said that this sound was the sound of the Banshee, calling for the souls of those lost at sea. The two Englishmen on the deck of the *18 Fathoms* knew it was the wail of their Financier. The scream lasted longer than the Englishmen thought it could- until the agonizing burning caused by the salt laden air whipping against the skinned torso of the Financier finally caused him to lose consciousness. The Financier twitched even as he was lowered to the deck, oblivious to the pain, or at least unable to express it out loud.

Captain Nonn took two of the bricks and shoved them into the man's pants. They fell one each down to the top of his boot. "Off with him." He said.

With a quick heave, several sailors pitched the man into the rolling blue water. That awoke the Financier for a final scream, worse than the one before. Mercifully he quickly sank since his own torso's skin covered his arms like a thin sack, preventing him from even attempting to swim. Captain Nonn turned to the two remaining men.

Chapter IV
Treasure At Saona Isle

Captain Nonn pointed at the closest one to him, not expecting to even have to make the command. He was right. The man dropped to his knees and began to sob and beg for his life. "We stopped off and traded our gold for cobble stones. The Crown expected us to come under attack as we brought our payment into Spanish possession; we were to lure you away from the real treasure! I can show you exactly where it is if you have maps of the waters off of Hispaniola. Saona Isle to be exact. Have mercy on us! The treasure is on the east of the village of Manu Juan. Behind the Catholic Church! In a stone building. Two stories of stone with a thatch roof. When it is full it will be loaded and taken to Spain." The words came tumbling out of the Captain as one sentence. A death sentence. Captain Nonn nodded towards his pilot, "Mister Grint, Get the maps." Turning to one of his carpenters he added only one word; "Ropes." Both commands sent the men in opposite directions. To the remaining carpenters he gave the now familiar command, "Harvest what you will. I'm no Commodore, I have no need of a fleet," turning to his boarding party he added, "Fish for what is around." The commotion of a sea battle always brought large sharks that were accustomed to the noises bringing large amounts of meat to them. Shark meat, considered a

delicacy in the Far East was along with sea turtles, basic sustenance here in the Caribbean. Typically, there wasn't time for fishing aboard a pirate ship. The fighters used their swords to hack the English sailors to pieces, tossing them overboard to lure the ever-growing number of sharks closer to the ships. Through the churning red waters, a harpoon-man was busy skewering large sharks as four others dragged them aboard. There would be a feast tonight. And after smoking a good portion of the meat, halfway decent food for the better part of a month.

The *18 Fathoms* Pilot arrived with the maps before the carpenter returned with the ropes. Nonn noticed. He would have to give an extra share to the carpenter for remaining diligent- nothing would spook a prisoner more than for them to realize they were doomed no matter what they said. No sooner had the captain of the Unsinkable pointed to the small islet on the crude map that the carpenter returned with several dozen feet of thick rope. *A double share of the treasure*, Nonn thought to himself.

"There is a series of palms that run along the uppermost part of the beach, and a path." said the captain, trying to be as helpful as he could. "At the west end of the palms there is a small rise. A plateau, really. On it is a square building. A fifty by a hundred feet, I've been told. Built under the trees so it is difficult to see."

"So?" Captain Nonn coaxed. "I'm not in the market for a home."

"It is where they are storing gold and gems that are to be taken to Spain."

"In a building all by itself? No garrison? What kind of fool do you take me for?"

"That was the plan; a place that was inconspicuous. No one would expect treasure to be stored there. Rum perhaps, or food, but that is all. It even has a thatch roof so no one would suspect it contains a treasure. True enough, there are several soldiers there, disguised as monks. It keeps anyone from coming around." The captain looked from Grint to Nonn. He took a breath then let his words tumble out of him: "So if you run a line from the tip of the land at low tide to the farthest palm, it is right there. Practically covered by trees and overgrowth." He smiled weakly. "I'd be glad to show you in person so you're sure to find it."

No one said anything for a long moment.

Finally, Mister Grint broke the silence. "Only about six fathoms here, captain, this is more than enough," he said as he dropped the ropes.

The English captain's eyes widened, "Naval law prohibits you from killing the officers of a ship that's surrendered!" he protested as his arms and those of his companion were bound with the newly arrived ropes.

Chapter V
Less Than Six Fathoms

"I care more about naval tradition than law. A captain's only hope should be to go down with his ship!" Nonn smirked. "Well, technically you'll go down *near* it. Spirit of the law, letter of the law, and all that." In a flash his thoughts went forward to an unknown future where he saw himself on the decks of his own ship, knee deep in water. Blinking the thought away, he nodded towards the railing. "Get them off my ship."

The men's feet were lashed to the cannons from their own ship. With a shove, the cannons rolled from the deck and into the clear water, taking the slack rope with them. Almost in unison the two men were yanked over the railing of their ship, bouncing off the *18 Fathoms* as they entered the water. Typically, the movement of two ships lashed together caused so much grinding that it would almost certainly crush anyone caught in between them even briefly. The seas being cold in temperature as well as temperament, made sure that the one spared drowning was the captain.

Within minutes, all that was to be scrounged from the Unsinkable had been taken. The only thing remaining was to send her to the bottom. Two barrels of powder saw to that- with a long trail from a

third keg leading to the deck to serve as a fuse. As the two ships separated and the fuse was lit, Nonn looked for the captain, who to his amusement was still alive and gasping for air with each passing wave. The rope kept him in a fixed location relative to the seabed. Passing waves only gave him a moment to catch a mouth full of air in their troughs before the next wave passed over him. "Six fathoms, indeed," smiled Nonn, "five and a half seems more likely to me Mister Ederer," he added to the rope-fetching carpenter.

"Sorry about that captain," said Mister Ederer. "Must'a caught an up-rise since the last reading."

Nonn shook his head. "No, no. Actually, this is far more amusing." He watched as another wave washed over the captain. The two met eyes. Nonn waved to him.

"Curse you!" The man shouted. "You'll pay for what…" A wave rolled over the man, cutting off his threat.

"I gotta agree with you, captain," said Mister Ederer. "This *is* far more amusing."

The pair stood at the railing in silence, watching waves roll over the captain until several shark fins began to circle around him. "Well, that's a change in events," said Nonn. "Thought he'd drown."

A shark turned and headed straight for the bobbing man.

"Davey Jones'll take what he can get; even bits of sailors." Mister Ederer pointed out.

The two turned as the man's screams rose two octaves.

"Back to work Mister Ederer. We've a treasure to find."

"Aye captain. Isle of Saona. Windward side, false monastery it seems."

"Aye."

"Seems a little sacrilegious to me."

"Judge not, Mister Ederer." The captain cautioned with a smirk. "Let's be on our way."

Later that evening, the men feasted on roasted shark, cooked over a great fire near the very front of the ship. A large stone hearth protected the ship, flames licking forward safely away on the same wind that pushed the ship towards the newly discovered location of the treasure. Nonn did not partake in the festivities with the men; familiarity led to fatal mistakes. If someone was to be sent to their death, Nonn did not want to have to think about who would die; everyone was expendable. If he started playing favorites with dangerous assignments, those that were too-often selected would invariably take offence. Which would be hazardous to Nonn's health. So, while he was friendly with the crew,

never too much. Standing to the side of the wheel, he steered the ship towards the general direction of Hispaniola. Course corrections took the joy out of sailing; following the wind to wherever it wanted to go was the true wish of every sailor. He stared up into the rigging of the ship, using the glow of the fire to watch the telltales on the sails. Slight adjustments kept them tight against the sheeting, allowing him to keep the sails full of air- it was a game he enjoyed to no end.

The words "captain, a word with you" brought him from his bliss. He did not look at the man who spoke to him, but only nodded. He knew that the man must have something pressing to say, something that affected the entire ship, or he would have waited until Nonn was off the wheel. Disturbing Nonn while he ran the helm was often a deadly mistake. "I have been watching the wind, Sir, and I have noticed we are not making way as we should." Nonn looked at the man- the Pilot. He was fairly new to the ship and was hired because of his alleged talents as a navigator and sailor. He had saved his own life without even realizing it. "We are almost a full knot off from where we should be. When was the last time the ship was scoured?"

Nonn thought back. It *had* been a while. Maybe that is one of the reasons he had been in the market for a new chief navigator, he thought. "A knot you say? That's a good way to get sent to the bottom, isn't it, Mister Grint. Have you checked the charts to see where we can take a look at the hull?" If this man had interrupted him with a problem without having at least the beginning of a solution, Nonn thought to himself, he may well be once again in the market for a new pilot.

"I have captain. On the sou-west side of Isla Aves, there is a large sandbar. The other side of that is a nice cutout in a cliff that the British built for just such a purpose. We can beach there with the morning tide. It is off the Trades and we shouldn't have anyone give us any trouble. We could be there before dawn and start by first light. We would lose a day, maybe two on the hard, but we could easily make up the time with a clean hull in the water."

Nonn wished he could remember who had suggested this man to be the pilot of his ship. He would have rewarded him handsomely. The only thing worse than rot to a sailing ship was to wallow on the water with a half-ton of barnacles weighing it down and dragging against the water. His ship was by no means the fastest he had sailed, but it was also no scow. A knot lost to drag when a typical speed was just over six knots put the ship in grave danger; the combination of not being able to catch other ships to loot them, and not being able to avoid the authorities was lethal.

"Get us there, Pilot," Nonn scowled, "before we become the laughing stock of all the Privateers in these waters." He was angry more with himself than anyone. As the captain, he should have noticed such a change in the capability of his ship and annoyingly he had not. Now, by having to beach it right after sinking one of Her Majesty's finest, he put the ship at great risk. On the open waters, he could at least put up a fight. On land, bellied up on a sand bar like some great brown whale, the ship was an easy target for anyone who happened by. He would have to avoid contact with other ships until the beaching to make sure no one

followed him. The thought of running from other ships stoked his anger further as he turned and stalked amidships.

Chapter VI
Heavy Powder and Light Shot

Nonn's weathered boots made a solid "clunk" sound on the wood decks, and he measured his steps carefully to keep the sound rhythmic and ominous as he made his way back and forth along his ship well into the night. At this point, he was through being angry with himself, but wanted to maintain his sour mood to ensure the crew understood the position they were in. "Gunner," he called in no particular direction. As usual, his command was echoed through the ship until it reached the correct individual. Nonn understood that, at times, the person he wanted could be indisposed or in the complete opposite end of the ship from him, and because of this he did not hold it against a crewman if it took them a little time to come to him. Thanks to his reputation, no one ever tried to establish what would be too long to keep the captain waiting. To his amusement, the gunner appeared in under a minute and out of breath. *Thanks to my pacing*, Nonn thought. "Mister Bington, have you prepared the longboats?" Since the *18 Fathoms* would be helpless on her side, two cannons were to be moved to two longboats to provide cover while the ship was scrubbed.

"I have captain; a three and a five pounder per boat. They won't hold more than that and have enough shot to be worth the trouble, and

that's with only two men per longboat." (Typically, a cannon weighed 200 times the weight of the shot it could fire) "But what I have..."

"A three and a five pounder?" Nonn interrupted, "what are they going to hold off with those- a Xebec? You expect me to put my ship's future in the hands of four men and cannons that can't even make a Sloop think twice about coming around?" Nonn glowered at the Master Gunner, hoping he had some worthwhile explanation that would make Nonn not sorry he was part of the crew.

"Sir, if I used the twelves or sixteens, we could barely get one on with a man and five shots. The long nines are out of the question. By using the three'rs and five'ers chaser cannons from the foredeck, I can get twelve shots each, plus extra powder. If we have to use them, an extra half charge of power will give them the reach and sound of a ten or twelve pounder. Four of either would make a Brig give us a second thought if they'd just have to take the punishment 'cause they couldn't hit our longboats." The Gunner paused for what he hoped was a dramatic effect. "Plus, captain, I took a swivel gun and mounted it on your Gig. If any locals come around, that will make them look for easier pickings than us."

Nonn blinked at the Gunner. A one-pound swivel gun on his 16-foot Gig was something he had not thought of. He might just leave it there if for nothing else than show. "Sounds like you're all planned up and ready to go, Mister Bington," Nonn smiled at the man, "I know you're hoping to put your handiwork to the test tomorrow," he continued as his smile faded, "but I would prefer to just *think* they would

keep us safe, instead of having to see for myself if heavy powder and light shot could do it." With that he turned to go to his cabin, content in knowing that chance was on his side.

The Gunner also retired for the night, with his content coming from receiving the closest he would come to a complement from his captain.

Chapter VII
Off The Map

Nonn entered his cabin, which, as most captains' cabins, was located at the very back of the ship. However, unlike most other captain's quarters, in an unusual move, it had been modified to half its original size. Even more unusually, it was not equipped with a lock. Meetings were held in the room created from the front portion of his cabin. Maps were stored there as well. Because of this none of the crew had any reason to enter his cabin. More importantly, to enter Nonn's cabin would mean a certain and unpleasant death. With the sparseness of the cabin, it would be a wasted death. Occupying the center of the cabin was a small table- with only one chair. All along the rear of the cabin, right along the flooring, inch wide holes had been bored into the wall at foot intervals. A small dresser and a weathered chest were in one rear corner; the other was filled with Nonn's rope-rigging bed. Between the two hung a bucket. Below the bed was a neat square in the rear hull. At first glance one would presume the bucket was a simple nautical privy.

That presumption would be wrong.

Nonn moved to a chair and kicked off his boots. He exhaled slowly, relaxing for the first time for the day as he opened a lone bottle from the table. Equally slow, he inhaled the bitter rum. Following his usual routine, Nonn removed his overcoat, shirt and pants, folding each of them carefully before placing them next to the half full bottle. His stockings he placed beside the pyramid of clothes because like most pirates he didn't always wear shoes while aboard the ship. The clothes were stacked so they could be put on in reverse order without disturbing the pile. Naked, he moved to his bed and even though it was as uncomfortable as it appeared to be, he fell asleep within minutes.

When he originally took the ship that became the *18 Fathoms*, the crew was bewildered when he ordered the well-equipped captain's cabin dismantled. The additional deck space, he explained to the crew could accommodate two more guns and a meeting room. Two guns that could mean the difference between taking an enemy ship or being taken by it. The crew understood the reasoning behind this, and appreciated a captain that put the well-being of the crew and ship ahead of his own comfort. What they did not understand was when the captain ordered the previous captain's goose down mattress thrown overboard. In place of the mattress, Nonn had a sailor weave a lattice of rope, with holes about two inches wide on the now bare bed frame. At the same time, he had his carpenter cut a two-foot square hole and affix a hatch along the aft wall of the cabin. Before the new forward wall of the cabin was in place, the crew saw Nonn hammer a large nail above the small hatch, tie a rope to it, with the other end tied to a bucket, which he hung on the nail.

Growling to his crew Nonn explained, "When we are fortunate enough to take a ship with a woman aboard, I'd hate to spoil a nice mattress. Blood'll wash out of them ropes quick and easy. Whatever the circumstance, *anyone* that comes in my cabin, well...their blood'll wash out just as easy. Just remember; when you die, make it for something memorable like running a Xebec against a Galleon, or bedding a Governor's daughter - not for something as avoidable as entering my cabin. This cabin is off the map as far as you are all concerned." After just a week with Nonn as their captain, all the crew had seen enough of his actions that they decided they would heed his advice- at least while he was still alive. Some were fairly certain they would not enter his cabin even after he was dead.

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Nonn's dreams were of battles on the seas- some previous, some imagined. Not all were won. As was often the case, his dreams turned to future battles. These were the ones where the tides usually turned against him. Once again, Nonn was on the helm of his ship, barking orders to men who seemed to move just not quickly enough. The winds shifted, giving advantage to his unseen future adversary. The decks shook as shot after shot found their mark; invariably right at the waterline. Nonn never left the wheel, commanding his sluggish men to act. The seas rose, spray hit his face as the bow of the *18 Fathoms* plowed through wave after wave, never seeming to rise to the level it achieved the moment

before. Soon the spray became more substantive, until entire waves crashed over the front of the ship.

As it was replayed hundreds of times in his dreams, Nonn now stood of the deck of the ship, wheel tight in his hand, as the waves stopped crashing over the deck, and merely washed over it reaching Nonn's knees. With a start he awoke, the smell of urine strong in the room. Nonn scowled and thought back to a past before he devised his bed of ropes, when a mattress gave his secret to anyone who entered his room. Now no more. He moved to the two windows on opposite walls and opened them. They hinged back acting as sails forcing air into the room. Nonn then moved quickly to the hatch and lifted it. The air from the windows pushed out through the opening bringing in fresh air as he dropped the bucket to the water below. He hoisted it up and splashed the entire contents over the soaked ropes. Bucket after bucket he sloshed water under the bed and over himself, hoping no telltale scent remained to betray him. Finally, as tears streamed down his face, he stopped and returned the bucket to its nail. Sitting on his lone chair, Nonn took a drink to take the edge off his sour mood. A nervous knock on the door returned the edge. "What is it!" He barked. Nonn made it a point to never answer a knock on his door in a groggy voice; the captain may go to his cabin, but he never slept.

"Captain, we will reach Isla Aves before the end of the mid-watch thanks to a favoring wind," came the reply.

"Ready the longboats and load all the cannons," Nonn growled back as he took his socks from the neat pile…

Chapter VIII
Dawn's Breaming and a Morning Battle

Reaching for his socks, Nonn's mood did not improve. 'Favoring wind' kept repeating in his head. Although Nonn was not a light sleeper, he was never so far gone that the heavy listing of his ship wouldn't wake him- the uncomfortable ropes ensured that. *Favorable wind*. As Nonn removed his pants and shirt from the shrinking stack on his table, those words rang in his head. What favorable wind? The sailing was steady and true. The events of the previous evening rushed over Nonn like a rogue wave. There was no way they should have arrived until two bells into the morning watch. The ship wasn't off a knot. Or at least not a full knot. And more so, the Isla Aves was too conveniently mentioned to be good fortune. Nonn hooked his falchion on his belt as he stormed out of his cabin.

On deck, Nonn scanned for the Pilot in the pre-dawn darkness and found him on the Afterdeck. Taking the steps in pairs Nonn crowded him "So we're dragging in the water but we're ahead of schedule?" For the most part, when Nonn asked a question on his ship, he already knew the answer, and his men knew it as well. Lying was something you did to a wench, *not* the captain.

"Yes Sir. The winds were with us. If we prepare and beach as the tide goes out, we can get to work right away."

"Why don't we just get to work now?" He said with a smile. Although to the men (who were desperately trying to not be obvious in their eavesdropping) working around him it did not sound like a friendly suggestion; the simple sounding question was a death sentence. "Even with following seas, we'd not gain that much time. I've spent enough time over a map to know that well enough." Nonn finished as he drew his falchion, then to the two men straining to hear:

"You- hold this turncoat, you- get some cordage." As the one man ran forward, the other man drew his own sword. As soon as it was pointed at the doomed pilot, Nonn sheathed his and once again crowded him. "The only thing that will get scrubbed clean today, Mister Grint, will be your bones," he growled. Looking over his shoulder towards the man at the helm, Nonn saw that his hand was already holding the end of the clapper on the warning bell; he had been listening in as well. A quick nod from the captain and the man rang for all hands to come on deck.

Men swarmed to the main deck at the sound of the bell- they were already tense because of the grounding expected later in the day. As they came up, news spread quickly among them of the treachery of the pilot. The tense mood was increased with doses of fear and anger. Nonn waited for the few minutes it took for the entire crew to gather. "We're in for a trying day, men," Nonn bellowed. "Seems Mister Grint wants to

end our careers before the sun goes down on us this very evening." Chatter began among the men as their fear got the best of them.

"But that's not how this will play out." Nonn continued, "forewarned is fore armed and we'll be ready for what's in store. I tell you now, you will all see tomorrow's dawn!" The men nodded in accord. The foundation of their faith in their captain was built on many close calls- often against overwhelming odds. Except for what were considered acceptable casualties, the men all came through, and always a little richer. "I have to be honest, men. That's not entirely true," Nonn continued, hushing the chatter, "there is, in fact, one among us who won't see tomorrow." The men cheered in response. Nonn knew that by having his men think they would all see another day they would fight that way. From his experience, men expecting to die usually did. At the moment, only one person on the ship expected to die. He just wasn't sure how it would happen; his choice would have been quickly, unfortunately it wasn't up to him. "Lash this rat to the oldest sixteen-pounder. After we use it up, we'll dump them both. Load all the cannon and get something to eat, you're going to need your strength today." A thought occurred to him. "Where's Mister Childs?"

As the men scattered to their individual duties, a young man jogged up to Captain Nonn

"Mister Childs, you're apprenticing as Pilot, yes?"

The young man nodded. "That I am, sir. Things are going pretty well and I'm really getting good with the sextant." He smiled, glad to be

able to boast about his new-learned abilities; the regular crew didn't seem to care enough to listen at mealtime. "In fact, I was plotting our way to the Isle on my own so I could compare…"

"Yes, yes," interrupted Nonn. "That is all well and good. But as you will notice." He gestured to Grint as he was being tied to the oldest of the ship's cannons, located on the port side, farthest forward. This cannon and its starboard mate saw the most action since they could be pivoted forward enough to deliver rounds as another ship approached, or as Nonn's ship came about. "Mister Grint is going to be permanently preoccupied and no longer able to complete his duties as ship's pilot."

"Uhm," stammered Childs, "Yes. In fact, I heard something about that a moment ago."

"You are the new ship's pilot as of right now." Nonn stuck out his hand. "Congratulations are in order."

Childs shook it. "But sir, I'm still learning the position…" A thought occurred to him. He leaned in close to Captain Nonn. "And what if Mister Grint was *teaching me wrong*?"

"It would not have been in his best interest to do so; if anyone noticed he was mis-instructing you, he would draw undesired attention." Nonn let go of the youth's hands. "Besides, I've an idea where this Isle is so I can get us there." He smiled. "Letting you fail wouldn't be in the best interest of the ship, now would it?"

The young man looked relieved. "I'm glad to hear it." He turned to look out at the expanse of water. Suddenly it looked completely foreign to him, a vast blanket of water where he could not find even the biggest of islands. "Oh dear."

"Just learn what you can from anyone who'll give advice. Which will be most everyone once they realize you're open to it, I would imagine. And do the best you can." Nonn put his hand on the man's shoulder. "And, just in case some of what Mister Grint was rooted in truth, please plot our course tightly and let me know if we are indeed running slow in the water." He looked up at the sails. "To be honest, I am now doubting myself now that he has planted the seed."

"Sir?"

"Now I think we are running slow thanks to his suggestion. So, I want someone else to confirm or deny that we are indeed running slow before I put this ship on its side for a few days or a week."

"I see. Yes." The young man nodded. "I'll get the sounding rope and start keeping track." He hesitated. "If you could show me where this Isle is that we're heading to, I'd… I'd be obliged, Sir."

Captain Nonn nodded. "Well, Mister Whiddon knows where it is as well, since we were there together only a short while ago." He pointed out at the deck. "If you could talk to him about it first then I would be obliged."

"I'll go find Mister Whiddon then, captain," said Childs as he turned and ran off.

Nonn shook his head. "Youth."

Several hours later, as the morning's light was beginning to fill the sky, Mister Childs approached the captain. Nonn had taken a nap for a while and now stood near the front of the ship watching the sun rise. "Captain?"

"Always like watching the sun come up," said Captain Nonn. "Reminds me I've made it another day."

"That is always good," said Childs. "Uhm, captain?" He tried again.

"How are we running? Damn it all, I do think we're slow."

"We are, sir. We seem to be running around four and a half knots and according to most everyone who has an opinion, we should be running just over five with these light winds and following seas."

"Well, we will see what awaits up at the isle." Nonn pointed at a speck of land that was to be their doom or their maintenance point materializing out of the darkness. "There it is now."

Childs moved to the railing and squinted. "There's a ship already ashore there."

Nonn looked hard at the island. On the shore a large ship on its side was indeed taking form in the lightening skies. "Maybe we'll pay them a visit while we're in the neighborhood." He turned to Childs. "Good work Mister Childs. Tend to your duties and I'll tend to that ship."

Nonn walked amidships and watched the sailors work. After several minutes, he motioned to a passing gunner. The man was eating a piece of hard tack with some smoked shark meat on it as his captain summoned him. Unexpectedly beckoned by his captain, the man found his mouth dry and was unable to speak around the hard tack and meat that filled his mouth. He opened his eyes wide hoping that would be enough to have the captain relay his orders. Nonn, in his first moment of real humor of the past two days, chuckled, "Take your time swallowing that, sailor. I'd hate to lose a crewman to hard tack and shark." Even with the uncharacteristic humor from his captain, the man did his best to summon up some spit and finish his mouthful of food quickly. "Sir?"

"Find me a white flag," Nonn finally ordered.

"What in the world do we need THAT for?" the man quickly responded before realizing it. "Ahh, captain, what I meant was…" he stammered, suddenly fearful he would join the condemned pilot lashed to a cannon even after the light moment he had just shared with his captain.

Nonn ignored the man's attempt to soften his response; this was indeed a foreign request on the ship. Surrender was never even mentioned on board so the very existence of a white flag was an impossibility; pirates who surrendered were hung just the same as all other pirates. "Relax sailor. We're not giving up just yet. I have someone I need to talk to and I want to avoid any… misunderstandings. Find me something appropriate and bring it to my gig." Even as the ship on the island was becoming visible to Nonn, he knew the reverse was true. A talk with that captain would ensure they stayed on amicable terms. At least until Nonn wanted them otherwise.

As the dawn's redness gave way to clear blue skies, Nonn stood on the bow of his Gig, steadying himself with the swivel gun, as his men rowed towards the grounded ship- a schooner. Flying from an upraised oar was a patch of sail as an impromptu flag of truce. Nonn was relieved the captain of the *Dawn's Delight* honored the flag as they approached, though the greeting party included several musket-armed men and the captain holding a flintlock pistol.

"Ahoy! Good day to you." Nonn called, hoping to keep any accidental trigger pulls as his gig moved almost to the large ship. In a natural bend on the isle that was formed on one side by a large jetty, the sand seemed to have been dredged out, creating a natural depression to hold a ship even larger than the schooner that currently occupied it. "We are here to speak *and only speak* with you. Our quarrel is not with you. Your ship and cargo are of no concern to us." He continued as a sailor took the Gig's painter. Hauling them alongside the schooner, they

carefully avoided the men furiously scraping and burning the hull of the ship in hopes to catch the tide that was still six hours away. *Exactly the predicament I should have been in*, Nonn thought to himself as he climbed a rope ladder to the deck of the heavily listing ship. Four of Nonn's men joined him under the watchful eye and weapons of the *Dawn's Delight's* crew. Even though Nonn spoke to the other captain of not being a threat, both captains knew the schooner was at a distinct disadvantage; unable to move it could be pounded with cannon shot until everyone was either dead or had abandoned the vessel. Wanting to disarm the other captain in two ways, Nonn held out his hand, "I am Captain Nonn. As I said, we are not here as a threat." The other captain switched his pistol to his weak hand and grasped Nonn's hand as he returned the greeting.

"Captain Warren of the *Dawn's Delight*. Are you planning a shore leave or are you just neighborly?" Captain Warren shook Nonn's hand with a smirk. "I doubt you're here to help scrape."

"Far from it, captain," Nonn released Warren's hand and placed it on the railing of the ship. On a rolling deck, a seasoned captain could stand rock still -the first few days ashore however, they tended to wobble slightly. The crooked yet unmoving deck of the *Dawn's Delight* was quite unnerving. "We were brought here under false pretenses. Very soon, a ship will arrive that thinks we are sitting right where your ship is. In their haste, I imagine they might confuse your ship for mine. By the time they get close enough to realize their mistake, you and your crew will have better luck farming on this ship than sailing on it."

"If their quarrel is with you captain, why don't you go out and meet that other ship like men before they even get close to enough to fire upon mine?" Captain Warren tightened his grip on his pistol and stepped back.

To make his aim steadier, Nonn thought. The pistol was however still in the captain's weak hand. "Did I say ship? What I meant was ships. Two possibly three of them. And as you pointed out, I'm not that neighborly. I won't waste my time discussing this issue with you; I've plans to put into play. I just wanted to make sure you knew that my plans did *not* involve you. Sometimes cannon fire can get a man's blood boiling and make them do foolish things. What you need to do is sit tight and worry about your breaming. We are of no concern to you no matter what flags the ships coming are flying. If you interfere, once I have dispatched my current enemies, I will return here for my newly acquired one. Furthermore…" Nonn's words were cut short by a cannon shot from the *18 Fathoms*. Every man on the *Dawn's Delight* rushed to the railing to gawk over the side.

Nonn blinked in both amazement and annoyance; his impending threat was completely lost now since he was speaking to the back of every sailor -including his own- on the ship. Nonn made a mental note of how the men who he had just threatened now paid him no attention because of an unexpected cannon shot. He stored that behavior for future reference and without even trying to regain the attention of the sailors, Nonn stepped over the railing and began his climb back to his Gig. He was halfway down the ladder before his men noticed their

captain was leaving. They scrambled over themselves to make sure they weren't left behind.

Once his men were aboard, he met eyes with Captain Warren and as a final warning, tipped his hat at him. “Good day, captain. I truly hope to never have dealings with you again.” And to his men, “Row like your life depends on it men. We’re short of time to lay a trap.”

Chapter IX
An Ill-Gotten, Unwilling -- Useful Ally

Nonn's men deftly turned the gig and began to row with earnest towards their ship. Even from that distance, Nonn could tell that his cabin boy was up above the crow's nest. The boy split his duties between cabin boy and powder monkey. On top of that, he was also the *18 Fathoms*' lookout. Still under the age of 15, his eyes were sharp and he was able to clamber the extra eight feet above the Crow's Nest to almost the very top of the mainsail. The Crow's Nest was 115 feet above the seas, providing a typical man the ability to see 23 miles to the horizon. Adding the eight feet to the height of the crow's nest allowed him to see yet another 1 ½ miles, or almost an extra half hours' worth of warning of passing ships.

Within minutes, Nonn's gig bumped against his ship, moments after, he was once again on deck. "Mister Garvin, what have we got to deal with?" Nonn shouted to the man at the wheel. On the ship all commands and issues were relayed through and to the Helmsman. This not only provided a central point of information for the captain, but also

ensured that the person steering the ship was always aware of everything going on around him.

"We've got three ships approaching. Just barely at the horizon. Looks like a Schooner, a Tern, and a Brig. Might be two Terns, but they're definitely sailing a Brig. With the winds, we've got about four hours 'till they're upon us, captain."

Two fast ships and a slower, more powerful one. It would take longer for them to reach him, Nonn thought, but once they did, the more maneuverable pair could keep him in place while the larger one pounded him; outmatched for both speed and power. "More for us to sink then!" Nonn shouted louder than necessary. He was sure the men had done the calculations and came up with as grim an outcome as he had.

As Nonn quickly approached the Helmsman, he called for his first mate. "Mister Garvin, you'd best keep the fine details to yourself if you care to make it to tomorrow," Nonn spoke in a low voice. "The last thing we need is everyone a panic over our situation." Even though he was merely a crewman who just happened to be on his rotation for the wheel, having Nonn speak to him as if he were in authority helped bolster his nerves.

"Aye Captain," he nodded, taking his newfound status to heart, "What are your orders then? Want me to come about and take them head on?"

"Do that when you have your own ship," Nonn countered as his First Mate joined the pair. "Tom, we need to get rid of that Brig first and fast. We can deal with the smaller ships but not with the larger one pounding us." Nonn paused, expecting suggestions from the other two men. None came. "It's a good thing this is a three to two battle instead of three to one, isn't it?" He asked.

"Captain," the First Mate said, "There's but one of us. Who've we picked up as an ally since you've come aboard? With the wind at our quarter and the head start we have, we might be able to outrun them if they stay together. That Brig'll slow them down plenty."

Nonn smiled. "That's right; you didn't come with us to meet Captain Warren on his fine ship, the *Dawn's Delight*. We really hit it off, the two of us. And I am sure that he's willing to draw the attention of those approaching ships to help us out. Our ill-gotten ally practically begged to do it, in fact."

"So, captain, how's he going to help us out?" the Helmsman asked as he looked towards the horizon in the direction of the approaching ships, "They've the wind at their quarters and will make good time, Brig or not, and I think..."

"Right you are, Helmsman," Nonn interrupted, "so here's the plan. We're going to sail to the other side of this Isle and set anchors and wait for them to get here." The Helmsman began to speak when a look from the First Mate reminded him of his status when he wasn't at the helm. "In the meantime, we're going to register our guns, set up a decoy, and

float some wood. If there's time left, I might even work in a nap." He finished. "Be ready to get us around this speck of land as quickly as possible," Nonn said as he led his First Mate away by the arm.

"Get with a gunner, find out where he thinks those ships will lie up to pound that beached ship. Get six or eight sailors, and you take that gunner out in a longboat and drop a marker at that spot. Then have them get out of sight of the *Dawn's Delight* and unload a five-pounder and get it to the ridge above that ship. We're going 'round to drop anchor. By the time we've done that I want that marker and cannon in place."

"Aye, Captain," the First Mate nodded, "if we can get that Brig out of commission with a good placed volley, them other two might decide to leave us alone. But what if they don't?"

"They'll have to come around the Isle the same way we did and we'll cut anchor to show our guns to them as they come."

"If we could do it without losing an anchor, I'd say that's a great plan, captain."

"Lose an anchor? Momentarily maybe; I'm sure the *Dawn's Delight* would be happy to loan us one of hers. Especially since she'll not be using them again. After this is done, I want to explain to my dear friend Captain Warren why pointing a pistol at me without using it isn't such a good idea. Get the flag from my Gig so you can guide in our shots. One

flourish will be a fathom on whatever side you wave it. Get to your tasks. And I'll meet up with you when this is all over."

With that, the First Mate moved forward, grabbing sailors as he moved towards the closest longboat. "Helmsman," Nonn turned to the man who was desperately trying to hear his captain's plans, "Your Trick is over. If the ship is going to be in anyone's hands, it'll be mine. Get back to your duties."

Nonn waited until the First Mate and his impromptu crew was safely aboard a longboat and paddling towards where the Gunner on the bow was pointing. Nonn hazarded a glance at the *Dawn's Delight* to see if their actions were drawing any attention. All seemed quiet on that ship. *For now*, Nonn thought to himself, then out loud, "Raise anchors and drop the mainsail, and be at the ready! Those anchors'll be back in the water before they're dry!" Nonn spun the wheel hard as the growing wind yanked the bow around. They cleared the Isle in minutes and only had to tack once to get in position in a small lagoon. Nonn was pleased that from the crow's nest, the Cabin Boy was able to report he could still see the approaching ships.

"Quite easily now!" he quipped much to the displeasure of Nonn. Unfortunately, he was unable to see the floating marker in the water- a battered plank tied to a chain shot with a length of rope to keep it in place.

Nonn could see his First Mate on the crest of the ridge on the Isle. He had one, maybe two test shots before Captain Warren's sailors came

to investigate their antics. The First Mate held the makeshift white flag high above his head, in anticipation of the cannon ball splash. Nonn looked to a Gunner on the Starboard side that faced the Isle. "You'll have to guess the distance, but if the First Mate is in line between the plank, and us, you should be dead on."

In his travels, Nonn had acquired several Gunners' Quadrants and his men were adept in using them. The Gunner bent over the cannon, held the Quadrant in place and adjusted the angle of the cannon, in what he hoped would turn out to be the range between him and the plank. Once he was done, he personally fired the cannon. All eyes turned quickly to the First Mate, flag still above his head. For the briefest of moments, Nonn smirked at the thought of the shot actually hitting the First Mate. The First Mate, alive and well, turned his back to the ship and waved the flag five times.

Nonn was impressed; the shot landed almost within the width of a Sloop. Of course, with time to aim and no decks rolling, a precise shot is what he expected, "You're ahead of your target by about five fathoms. Make your adjustment good because you've one shot left."

The Gunner returned to his cannon, took a moment to make the mental calculations, readjusted his Quadrant, and then paused. He glanced at his captain who waited patiently.

"Are you a Gunner or a Carpenter?" Nonn asked.

The man smiled, checked his calculations and rechecked his Quadrant. He made no adjustments and fired the cannon. As all eyes looked on, the First Mate held the flag high above his head. Dead on, or so near that another adjustment might not help. "Good enough, we'll make a Ship's Carpenter of you yet. Get the other cannons aligned."

"How's the ships, son?" Nonn called to the Crow's Nest, "did the shots make them change course?"

"Not a bit Sir! I don't think they heard them with the winds blowing towards us." The boy shouted down as he leaned over the Crow's Nest, "We've got maybe a half-hour before they're on us."

Nonn turned to his port side Gunner. "Get those cannons aimed to hit a ship as it rounds the Isle, we want to get them broadside before they run past us. And triple check your aim 'cause you don't get a practice shot." A half an hour could drag as if it were a week when waiting for an attack. "Get something in your bellies, you're going to need your strength!" Nonn yelled to none of the crew in particular. Better to fill their time with some eating and drinking that could calm their nerves and keep their minds from getting clouded.

Chapter X
Odd Place For A Crab Trap

The half-hour passed fairly quickly with most all the crew at least eating something- they knew better than to gorge themselves before a battle. Nonn had learned over the years that a moment's respite to gather one's thoughts did wonders for the crew's morale before a battle.

Every ten minutes or so, the Cabin Boy would shout down an update on the ships; 'another tack to port! Another to starboard'. These did little to inform the crew since no one knew whose port or starboard the young man was using as a reference. It did provide some feedback of the enemy's actions and even a little lightheartedness as several crewmen would turn this way and that, trying to decide which port or starboard the boy was referring to. Morale was indeed high Nonn thought to himself; ignorance was definitely bliss.

The three ships approached the Isle Aves. The Brig was sailing all out to not slow the two faster ships more than absolutely necessary in

hopes of catching their prey completely helpless. They were rewarded with the sight of a ship on its side like a large, brown, beached whale. The ships slowed their pace and moved into single file; a typical attacking formation so that all three ships could let loose their cannons as they passed their target. The lead ship, the sloop *Demarche*, bumped into a piece of flotsam as it approached. The Helmsman smiled as he heard the thump; he had been aiming for that piece of lumber for a long time. Second in line, the Brigantine *Minotaur* had been ready to fire for over an hour and the crew, at their posts for three times that amount of time, were getting antsy. With less than 150 feet between them and the *Demarche*, the forward gunner saw the piece of wood thump around the lead ship as if it were tied in place.

Strange place for a crab trap, the man thought to himself. He looked over his shoulder at his own Wheelman who was also smiling. He was aiming for the wood as well and it looked to the forward gunner; he had a good chance of hitting it as well. No sooner had the gunner turned back forward to watch the approaching board that he heard the rapport of cannon. Everyone on all three ships ducked instinctively as the one cannonball smashed into the Demarche. It did little damage because it was a relatively light ball but no one seemed to notice its small caliber.

"Open Fire- she's STILL trying to put up a fight!" The captain of the *Minotaur* shouted to his men. Immediately, the entire flank of all

three ships erupted in smoke as they fired at the helpless ship. Only the Demarche was in position to actually hit it and only two its rounds did so. Screams could be heard from the ship as two long gouges were dug by the cannon balls as they raked up the newly scrubbed side. The gouges started well above the waterline due to the ship's angle and were about an inch deep. Since the hull was just over three inches thick at that part of the ship, the gouges did not penetrate the hull. Even so, the crew of the *Minotaur* was elated. The young sailor on the third ship, *Zealous*, a three-sailed Tern, glanced up and saw a man high above the beached ship raise a white flag, "They're surrendering already!" he cheered as he stood up, fists in the air. There was another rapport of cannon fire, this time farther away.

The gunner on the *Minotaur* had just stood back up after the single shot had hit the lead ship with hardly any damage. *Deck gun?* he thought as something in the water caught his eye. It was the piece of wood. Through it all, the Helmsman had continued his course for the wood. There must have been a bet involved among the Helmsmen he thought as his ship too, bumped it as well. "Now the bet's on the last ship." He said out loud to no one in particular just as he heard muffled explosions. Looking upwards, he saw a man on the crest above the beached ship with a white flag raised above his head, *Might as well surrender, you have no chance at all now that your magazine is going up*, he thought as a barrage of cannonballs smashed into the center of his ship. Pushed down by the force of the impact, the magazine of the *Minotaur* caught fire and

exploded, pushing the ship up out of the water. It cracked back down, spine broken; both ends drooping lower than the middle.

"Hog'ed her!" yelled the First Mate as he dropped the flag and ran down the sandy ridge to his fellow sailors in the longboat. "We Hog'ed the Brig!" he yelled again as he climbed on board the already floating boat. "Let's get back to the *18 Fathoms* before those other two figure out where we are!"

The *Minotaur* hung low in the water, its decks awash. Men scrambled to the longboats as a fusillade of cannon fire erupted from the beached ship. The *Dawn's Delight* was beached so that its port was facing away from the Isle. After his meeting with Captain Nonn, Captain Warren had ordered his men to block up the cannons so they could be fired at the waters in front of them. Looking at the guns as they normally would have sat on the decks, this would have had them pointing steeply downward, not ten feet into the water, but with the ship on its side, they were nearly level and aimed directly where the *Zealous* currently was.

"Fire Fire Fire!" Captain Warren shouted. He was irked that, as foretold by Captain Nonn, he actually did *not* care what flag the ships were flying. His only concern was his ship and his men. The shots caught the *Zealous*' stern, shattering her backstays and rudder. The mast,

under pressure from the prevailing winds that were now directly astern, crashed forward along the entire length of the ship, ironically releasing the figurehead, a buxom mermaid, back into the sea. "Reload men! They're past us now, but if they come about we'll give them another taste!" Captain Warren shouted while at the same time hoping he would not need to fire again. He needed the remaining ship to deal with Captain Nonn when they finally realized who their real enemy was. "Hoist a white flag! Maybe we can keep them off us long enough for them to spot that infernal Nonn!"

"We Hog'ed Her!" The First Mate yelled for the sixth time. Much to the relief of his fellow boat mates, a crewman of the *18 Fathoms* finally understood what he was shouting and relayed it to the captain. "Get them aboard and forget about the longboat," Captain Nonn ordered. "We'll either pick it up later, or we'll all be dead! Drop the Head Sail cut our rear anchor and get us about!" Nonn continued just as the final crewmen came over the rail. "Port side cannons at the ready!" Nonn shouted to his men, then looking up into the rigging, "Boy! Can you spot the other two ships? What's their course?"

"One's dead in the water Sir. The beached one got her. The other's gibed and hauled close. She's trying to come around from the other direction but it will take her a while to do it. She'll need several tacks if she wants to stay close to shore and make the pass quickly."

Cool headed and always thinking ahead. He'll make a great captain one day, Nonn thought to himself, *if we live that long*. "Our guns'r facing the wrong way! Cut the forward anchor and drop all sails! We need some speed to get around that Isle!" Nonn shouted to his men as he cranked the wheel around. Sitting still in the water, the rudder was useless since it was the water passing by it that gave them the power to maneuver. But as the wind caught their sails and they began to move, they would quickly begin to point downwind and gain speed.

"We'll come around the point and tack back around when we've got room to maneuver. Running downwind without them two anchors should give us another half knot." Nonn hoped. Even well rigged sailing ships like the *18 Fathoms* couldn't sail anywhere within a 45-degree arc of the wind. Square sailed ships just weren't able to. When they tried to tack against the wind, the sails would luff and they would be wallowing in the water until they had turned almost completely around. By dropping all sails, Nonn hoped to have enough speed to coast through the massive 'no sail zone' they had against the wind and pivot around for a close-hauled run around the Isle.

"Port side cannons; be on the ready, no tellin' what side we'll pass them on*!" From what started out as a well-played ambush, this was turning into a free for all.* "Keep a look out boy!" Nonn shouted upwards, "You'll be the first to see what our fate is."

Chapter XI
Ring 'Round the Isle

"Port side cannons." Something about the port side cannons tickled the back of Nonn's brain then he remembered. "You, sailor" Nonn called to one of his men, "go forward and check on that rat lashed to the leading port side cannon. Make sure he's not working himself loose up there. We don't need anyone causing us trouble right now."

The man was off like a shot to make sure he was still there. Pirates held very few people in high esteem; retired pirates, distillers, and fishermen were about all that were in that group. Tavern owners and blacksmiths were tolerated because they served a purpose. On the other hand, the list of people held in low esteem was quite long: Wealthy just beat down people like pirates; career sailors were mindless slaves; run of the mill landlubbers didn't know better and weren't trustworthy. On the very top of this list however were mutineers, traitors, and spies, in that order. The man tied to the cannon currently filled two of those berths.

"Let me go and you'll go free," the man croaked through parched lips to the sailor, "I have it in my power to save anyone who helps me out,"

The sailor was not prepared to believe someone who was going to sacrifice the crew and the ship. Facing the wrath of his captain for appearing to chat with him was also something he also did not want to deal with. Quickly he went to checking the knots holding the Pilot in place.

"I am an officer of His Royal Navy and can guarantee your safety. Help me rid this boat of Nonn and you are guaranteed a position of esteem." The Pilot continued.

Three births filled.

The sailor removed one of the Pilot's shoes and accompanying sock. Without thinking he checked to see if the shoe was his size. It wasn't so he dropped it without another thought. He hadn't worn shoes for well over three years as it was.

"I will remember you, you stinking pirate! And when I am freed, I will make sure that you are the first…" The pilot's threat was muffled as his own well-worn and quite dirty sock was shoved into his mouth. Threats were quickly forgotten as the Pilot worked hard to merely breathe through snot-encrusted nostrils; he hadn't picked his nose for the better part of the day.

The sailor returned quickly to his captain and reported the Pilot's status without mentioning the sock incident. "Good. We'll soon be done with that rat and we'll replace that cannon with a fresher one from the Isle. Once we finish this blasted game of Ring 'round the Rosy. Now

back to work with you. The sights are nice but this is no pleasure cruise." Nonn had realized while he was a crewman that it often did his morale good when a superior took even a moment to speak to him. Even if deep down he knew that his captain didn't care if he lived or died, or even knew his name for that matter, at least the young Nonn saw that he took a moment to give more than a one-word answer. Nonn had also worked for captains who refused to even speak to the crew, instead passing commands through one of the Mates, Quarter or Sailing Masters, and even the Boatswain. If ever a mutiny were to be discussed, Nonn was sure he would never even consider supporting a captain that couldn't even bring himself to speak to the crew. Because of this, after he became a captain, Nonn always ensured that he at least engaged his crew in conversation that amounted to more than just a single word answer. If nothing else, it could tip the scales in his favor if ever his crew decided to discuss a change in leadership.

"How's it playing out from up there?" Nonn called to his lookout.

The boy, already above the crow's nest and holding the top of the mast to the center of his chest, stretched his neck even higher, "The Sloop's almost out of sight, Sir. She's tacking again and looks like she'll clear this time so she'll be behind us soon. The other one is kind of just waiting for us, I think."

Nonn blinked. *Another one?* "Other one? Boy, there weren't but only ONE the last time you looked! Why, I'll whip you to death if you've let another ship sail in to these waters without even telling me!" Furious, Nonn stepped away from the wheel towards the mast, planning to climb

after the boy. "How many OTHER ships HAVEN'T you told me about? Is there something about a Royal Navy Flotilla that mayhap you've left out? Ship of the Line? Spit it out! What's going on?"

"Captain, it's still the same three ships!" The boy had moved up the mast even higher, trying to climb into the sky and away from Nonn's rage. "It's like I've told you Sir. Just three ships! One is sinking. The brig is sinking! A sloop is sailing around behind like I told you. The Tern is dead in the water and drifting. Their mast is down and the crew's just standing around the decks. She doesn't seem to be listing so I think they're waiting for the sloop to come back for them. They aren't even trying to lower their longboats. It's what I've been saying all along!" The boy had managed to get his feet onto the topmost rigging as he spoke and was now holding the top of the mast between his knees.

"What you've been saying? That's the most you've said in a week!" Nonn returned to the unmanned wheel. Nonn's steps had not taken him off the bridge and no sailor dared to even come close to him during his tantrum. "Hah! So, the Tern doesn't know we're coming about and can't sail? Which side will she be presenting to us as we come about? Are you sure she can't maneuver?" Nonn was afraid of any more surprises from his trusty, yet young, lookout.

"She's drifting close to the shore but I don't think she's grounded. As long as we come about on the other side of the point, we'll gibe just past her and have her between the shore and us. I haven't seen any sweeps by now so I don't think she's got them." Stopping for a moment

to catch his breath he remembered the question, "Starboard side, Starboard side!" he finished quickly.

Nonn looked over his shoulder while some men chuckled. "What's on the starboard side? Boy, you're getting on my nerves!"

"She'll present her starboard side to us when we go past her. She'll be nose on to us as we clear the point and we'll present our same to her! That's what you asked!"

Nonn was back to appreciating his young Cabin Boy's thoroughness. "You heard him men. She'll be nose on and her crew's lollygagging on deck. I doubt they've taken the time to reload the cannon on a useless ship. By the time they see us, they'll be sure to be loading then, so we'll have one volley before they'll respond in kind."

Things were looking a little better. It wasn't a full two on one fight, but a ship that could still fire its cannons was never something to take lightly. Nonn turned his attention to his sails, trying to keep them as full as possible and gain all the momentum he could as the wind brought him closer to the leading edge of the Isle.

"Pardon me captain," the Sailing Master approached Captain Nonn, "but we might be able to give then more than one volley." He had been on the ship for almost six months, hired after a vicious battle had taken the lives of half the crew. "If you care to hear me out captain, I might have something you may want to try."

Nonn always made it a point to listen to his crew when they had suggestions when in a tight spot. As a crewman, he was often annoyed when a superior didn't listen to a subordinate who had experience in a particular area merely because they were just a deck hand, or cook.

His job as captain was to make decisions that affected the lives of all the men under his command while raiding. He would be a fool to not listen to those same men when they thought they might have an idea that would keep them all alive another day. And since Nonn's temperament ensured that the crew didn't approach him with trivial matters or harebrained schemes, it was often worthwhile to listen. "What say you then, Mister Bainbridge?" Nonn coaxed the man.

"Sir, if we hold off on that gibe until we are well past that wreck, we can get two maybe three volleys off. If the winds stay their course, we can let loose with our port cannons when we clear the Isle on their starboard side. One at a time if need be. Then when we gibe, we can cut down across their nose and give them a starboard side volley or at least half them guns. If we then sail as if we're coming alongside, we can hit them point blank with the port guns again just as we get there. With the damage they already have, that should take all the fight out of them."

Another day it is, thought Nonn to himself, then out loud: "Take the wheel and make it so. I'll be amidships while you do your black magic and dance a jig on these waters." Nonn went forward, meeting his men's gaze as he did. He gave nods of approval and an occasional smirk as he went. Standing amidships he took survey of the men at their cannons. Mostly they all ignored him; fully focused for their task. Out of the

corner of his eye he caught sight of the man tied to the forward cannon. As Nonn approached he noticed that one of his shoes and socks was missing. Just one of them. *Strange. Who would take just one shoe and not its mate?* As he came near and saw the man's face, a second genuine laugh in days overcame him. "Comfortable, Mister Grint?" Nonn asked, still smiling broadly. "Seems the day isn't treating you well, and you've not yet heard your very own personal cannon even fire. We'll remedy that in short order. I'll be back to see you off." Nonn turned as the man thrashed against his ropes. "Fear not, good sir; the cannon firing will not be debilitating to you; just loud, hot, and uncomfortable. On the other hand, the drop into the water will be cool and quiet. And permanently debilitating." Nonn smiled again.

Nonn moved to the middle point between the starboard cannons. "Be ready men, and when you've got a shot, take it. You'll each have your chance to give them some iron, just be patient and make every shot count on this pass, then reload quick away for our second pass. If all goes well, we can save those for the sloop that's behind us."

Chapter XII
Cannon Fodder

Nonn moved quickly to the forward cannon as the *18 Fathoms*' bow sprint passed the tip of the Isle, "Take your shot when you have it. Let's not waste any iron on an easy target." Nonn patted the man on the back as he spoke. Since his presence, as with many captains (and especially pirate ones), tended to make his men anxious as he watched them work, Nonn hoped his pat would calm the man.

The man waited patiently as the ship slowly came into sight of his gun. Not enough speed to make the jibe, thought Nonn as the man fired. Nonn's attention immediately turned to the other ship.

The cannonball hit low between two cannons, centered on a scuttle. The scuttle exploded into hundreds of wooden splinters, showering the backs of the men franticly trying to load the two cannons. The men, knocked to the deck, rolled away howling. A perfect shot. "That's the way, sailor." Nonn congratulated the man as he prodded him with his foot. "Now get that thing loaded for another pass."

Nonn moved to the next cannon, "What say you, Mister Thatcher?" The man fired as soon as Nonn spoke; spooked into action. Nonn

scowled at the man but before he could berate him, the cannon shot skipped off the water a mere 20 yards from the other ship and arced over the closer railing. It slammed into a cannon on the far side of the ship, knocking it and the railing in front of it into the water. Harder than the first man, Nonn kicked him "Keep your cool or you'll go over the edge as well."

Realizing that he wasn't helping his men, Nonn moved once again amidships. The next cannon fired as the other ship finally responded. Both cannonballs were in the air at the same time. Nonn instinctively looked around, knowing he had almost no chance of actually seeing where it would land, much less dodging it. If it was his time, there was not much he could do about it. Just as the *18 Fathom's* cannon ball arced over the railing of the other ship and passed harmlessly through the empty space created by the previous shot, its partner slammed into Nonn's ship. The ball hit the railing near the bow sprint, shattering it. Slowed but not stopped the iron ball bounced on the deck once and missed the man tied to the cannon by mere inches. It split an upright as it continued it path to the water. "Keep calm blast it! Stop aiming where there's nothing to hit!" Nonn shouted to no particular gunner in particular.

"Caaaptaaain Nooonnnn!" came a long call from above, as if God himself were seeking an audience with the pirate. Momentarily flustered, Nonn looked around before realizing he should look up at his lookout. "Sir, the other ship's behind us. She's not be able to fire, but it looks like she wants to overtake us and give is a broadside!"

Nonn waved to the boy to set him back at his task of monitoring the deteriorating situation behind his ship. Nonn turned towards the aft of the ship "Mister Bainbridge! I suggest you coax some more speed out of them sails if you'd like to ever have another shore leave!" The man nodded to his captain without taking his eyes off the sail's telltales. They were flat against the canvas; the ship was going as fast as it ever would unless she lost tons of weight. Cannon shot alone wouldn't do it. Two simultaneous cannon rapports brought Nonn's attention back to the battle ahead. Nonn looked to the other ship hopefully. He was prepared to throw a sailor overboard as an example if another shot missed. He was pleased it would not be necessary; both cannons were loaded with chain shot and they arrived at the same time. They cut a swath eight feet wide across the deck of the ship, tangling up almost a dozen men before the balls slammed into the far railing, breaking it so it leaned dangerously over the edge of the deck. None of the pinned sailors moved. "That's the way, men! We'll make it through this yet."

The other ship responded in kind with three shots. One flew high over the ship, another splashed in the water in front of the ship, splashing the *18* Fathoms sailors, but causing no damage. The last shot skipped on the water thirty feet from the *18 Fathoms*. The men on deck ducked unnecessarily as the cannonball passed a full body length's height above them and landed in the water with a resounding "sploosh". *That's more like it*, thought Nonn, *they're panicking and just firing at random. I doubt they have even thought of loading their other cannons*. Nonn's men fired their remaining cannons with devastating effect. The other ship listed in the

water and the men began to jump overboard to swim the few yards to shore.

"No need for fancy maneuvers," thought Nonn as he moved to the wheel. "The ship ahead is done for so we don't need to dance about out here," he said to Mr. Bainbridge, "We need to get some space between us and the one gaining on us."

"Aye captain," the man agreed, "we can still give her a good broadside when we round the isle. She'll have all her guns loaded by now but at least we can keep her to a single volley if we jibe around this bit of sand."

"I am getting dizzy with this sailing in circles." Nonn replied, "But if we can get some of the fight out of that Sloop, all's the better."

The Sail Master nodded his approval, once again looking to the telltales to see how well he was using the wind. Nonn moved forward, confident in the man at the helm. "We're going to give that Sloop the same treatment we gave that Brig, men!" Nonn said loudly. Morale was increasing steadily as the crew caught sign of the burning and sinking ship. He needed to keep it there.

"Get those cannons reloaded and stand ready, we'll give that Sloop some lead shot and then duck behind the Isle. There's just a bit of bad news though." The men all turned to look at their captain; everything seemed to be going quite well, especially now that the battle was one ship against another as opposed to three on one. "I'm afraid we'll just

not be able to fire a certain port side cannon on this run, so we'll have to endure our guest a bit longer," Nonn continued with fake sadness. The men cheered in response.

The Sloop gained on Nonn's ship with every passing minute, close enough now that the sailors began to taunt each other. Shots weren't fired since there was still over 200 yards between them, but everyone knew the meeting of the two crews was inevitable. "Will we make the jibe or will we just wallow in place as they pound us?" Nonn asked the man at the wheel.

"Sir, I think we'll be all right. We've got a bit of speed and it looks like the current will help turn us about when we jibe. "Besides, we can drop our forward anchor and clubhaul to pivot around in short order." The man looked at his captain expectedly. He figured Nonn would make a plan from that one piece of information. He was right.

"Ahh, very nice. Since we'll be turning before they do, we can clubhaul and have our guns to bear first. If they want to respond, they'll have to tack away from us to get a shot off before we duck behind the island. If they do, they'll lose hard gained ground on us. If they don't, they will just take our rounds without anything to do about it. Either way, their crew won't be pleased. Well played."

Nonn slapped the man on the shoulder. There was nothing else he could do on the bridge so turned to go to his gunners to fill them in on

the plan. As he went down the steps, he paused. A thought occurred to him. "Tom! Mister Whiddon! Someone get me my Mate!" Nonn bellowed. The men were busy with their tasks and especially pleased with themselves, the odds were they might not hear him. Soon enough however, he was pleased to see his first mate come jogging from the aft of the ship. He and some men had been taking pot shots at their pursuers.

"Mister Whiddon, I've a thought. That ship there." Nonn motioned to the sloop- it had sunk but since it was in shallow water, the decks were still above water by about two feet. "She still has guns on her starboard side. What say you to taking five or six men or so over there on a longboat once we get just out of sight of that sloop? If you're quiet and keep low, you should be able to get ten or so of them guns loaded without them noticing. Then when you open fire, we club haul and give them a good raking. They can't sink the sloop. It's already on the bottom, and your guns will be at their water line." Nonn said it as a suggestion, but the First Mate knew the plan was to be carried out. There was only one thing to say.

"Aye captain. I'll gather some men and be ready to go over our starboard side when we can't see the sloop no more. They'll never see it coming." The First Mate's stomach was in knots. They would at least take a full broadside from the surprised sloop. Even if they couldn't be sunk, the First Mate and his men would surely be battered by cannon shot. As the First Mate went forward, he tapped men and motioned them to follow. Once he had six, he led his band of sailors like a mother

hen to a longboat. "Once we're out of sight of the sloop, we'll drop in the water and paddle quick to the sunk ship. We'll load the cannons and sit low until the Sloop gets alongside. Once we fire, Captain Nonn will club haul and rake them. That should take the fight out of them and we'll be back aboard in no time." None of the sailors believed their second in command.

The men who were volunteered for the mission sat in the longboat waiting to be cut free. Their fate had been made when the First Mate chose them. The morale in the longboat was dropping as fast as it was improving on the *18 Fathoms*.

"Be on the ready!" Nonn yelled to the deckhands over the longboat. Hatchets in hand, they waited for their signal to cut the longboat free. The quick thinking First Mate had suggested to them that they lower the longboat to within three feet of the water; their plan was to cut them free at deck level. The plan had enough problems without a thirty-foot drop to the water. The men at the aft of the ship let out a cheer just as Captain Nonn called, "Now now now!" The men in the longboat took a short drop to the water and immediately began to paddle in earnest for the still aflame ship. If nothing else, they had a better chance on the larger ship than in the easily sunk longboat.

Chapter XIII
Tide's Change

On the *Zealous*, Captain Theodore Ballantyne was fuming. For the past twenty minutes he had been pestered by fire from the ship he chased. It was not accurate fire in the slightest but every shot *had* to land somewhere. By chance, two men had been wounded and several railings were gouged. There would be a lot to clean up once this was over. He was not going to return to port without *all* the railing gleaming.

"Blast! Get that man to the Orlop!" he shouted for the third time; another fine sailor injured. This one was grasping his leg above his knee. Definitely debilitating. This pirate ship had caused Captain Ballantyne to lose his temper; something that did not happen often. "Keep your bloody heads down and wits about you! Are you *trying* to get hit? At this rate I'll be the captain, sailor, and gunner of this ship by nightfall! In the morning, I'll be heating up a stew!" He pointed at a nearby sailor "Take the wheel and keep in that ship's wake, you!" He shoved him roughly towards the wheel. This was the first time on board the Zealous he had laid a hand on a sailor. Even when the men earned a lashing, it was the Boson who dealt the blows.

Captain Ballantyne moved forward as another shot, this time from a deck gun, skipped across to his left. It left a foot long gouge in the deck before embedding in a railing. He heard a cheer from the other ship. His blood boiled. "I'll have you ALL lashed through the fleet when I get my hands on you!" He shouted at no particular pirate in general, yet all of them at once. Moving to a run, he leapt the forward railing and climbed out on the bowsprit. Drawing his sword with one hand and holding rigging with the other, he leaned forward past the very end of his ship "You'll all hang I tell you, HANG!" he bellowed.

"I'll take that over a lashing through the fleet, captain!" came the reply. Followed closely by another round of laughter and another shot. This one went wide and hit nothing.

"Lean a little closer captain; seems you're just out of range!" Another pirate shouted.

Captain Ballantyne leaned forward even farther, daring the pirates to fire again, almost losing his footing as his rage got the best of him, "You'll rue the day you crossed my wake pirate! Rue it!" He noticed a man leave the group at the aft of the pirate ship. *Change of tactics?* He thought, *we'll have them soon enough no matter what they do*. Lost in thought for a moment, his attention was elsewhere when his ship caught a wave and rocked to the left, making him finally lose his footing. If not for his hand firm on the rigging, he would have fallen overboard. Not wanting to drop his sword into the water, Captain Ballantyne struggled to regain his footing to the hopeful cheers of the pirates.

Thankfully they did not fire at him while he swung; they were too busy laughing. After getting his feet under him he carefully walked back down the bowsprit and over the railing. "I don't want a single one of them taken alive!" He ordered his men, "There will be NO reprieve granted and no parlay!" Fuming, he stomped back to the wheel of his ship. "Get me to that bloody pirate ship or I'll have you whipped until dawn!" He screamed at the man at the wheel.

"Aye, sir," was all the man could muster. Recently pressed into service, he was new to the ship and overall, inexperienced as a sailor. His attention was split between trying to stay in the wake of the ship ahead of him and praying that someone would relieve him from his current duty. It did not seem to him that they were gaining as fast as they were when the captain was at the wheel but he did not want to bring up that failure. In his short time aboard, he had seen the boatswain's talent with a cat of nine tails; he definitely did not want to experience it firsthand.

Calmed by what was apparently a good sailor at the wheel, Captain Ballantyne went forward, but this time only to the railing. He frowned. He expected to be closer to the pirate ship but the distance seemed to be the same, or maybe a little farther than it was moments earlier. *She must be coming into cleaner water as she clears that isle*, he reasoned. *We'll make up the ground when we get there too*. Even though they were his thoughts, he wasn't sure he believed them. Yet another shot rang out from the Pirate ship. The deck gun once again. Apparently, the amused Pirates were back to loading. The captain felt the shot as it passed by his shoulder; he ducked when it was already too late. From a crouch he looked back to see where

the ball would land. He shot a quick prayer that the ball would miss everyone. Unfortunately, there was someone on the ship who had built more favor because he had been praying longer than his captain. Praying to be removed from behind the wheel of the ship.

The man at the wheel looked down. The last thing he saw was his chest crushed in and gushing blood. Everything went black just as he heard a distant cheer.

Captain Ballantyne rose. "Someone get on the wheel!" He commanded. He turned to glare at the Pirate ship just as it began its jibe around the Isle; he caught a glimpse of some pirates cutting loose a longboat over the side. It dropped to the water out of view. He smiled broadly *Abandoning ship? Cowardly Pirates*, he reassured himself. He turned to address his men "We'll deal with that ship then we'll clean up the rats who have abandoned ship!" None cheered but some sailors nodded in approval. Morale was where it usually was when a fellow sailor died. Low.

"We'll avenge…," he paused. He didn't know the man's name. "We'll avenge that sailor's death!" He finished angrily.

"Row men! Row like your life depends on it!" Tom Whiddon encouraged his men as he too, rowed with all his might. He knew this was a fool's gambit. And if he knew it, his fellow long boaters did as well.

"What'r you think we're doin'? Enjoyin' the view?" Came an angry reply, "Did I mention ah'm glad y' picked me for this jaunt? I didn't think our plan was to crew a sunk ship, sir." Several other men grunted in approval. The group had worked together on several tasks and spoke freely among themselves even though the First Mate was the agreed upon leader.

"This isn't what we've planned, no. But this isn't the only ship in these waters, is it now? The breamed one looked to be in good shape and I'm sure Captain Nonn will help us get underway in it."

"I don't see Captain Nonn doing anything nice to a group of his crew planning mutiny," came the reply from behind the First Mate.

The First Mate stopped rowing and turned "Don't *ever* use that word again or you will feel the captain's anger. We're asking to freelance in *another ship*. We'll not ask for, nor take the *18 Fathoms*." The First Mate returned to rowing, "Say that again and I'll pitch you over and that goes for any of you!"

In silence the men reached the grounded ship. The fires had gone out but were still smoldering. "Work in twos and get a look at the cannons. If they won't aim where we want them to, go to the next. We've not time to dawdle." The First Mate pushed the longboat away from the Brig. If they were alive when this was over, Captain Nonn would retrieve it for them. In any other case, the longboat wouldn't matter.

The *18 Fathoms* finished its jibe slowly. As predicted, the current pulled it through the last of it with hardly any wallowing. "Fine job! Fine job indeed Mister Bainbridge!" Nonn commended the man at the wheel. Looking up he did not see his trusty lookout "Hey boy wake up! You've still work to do!"

"Aye Captain, I'm here. My legs were tired on the rigging so I moved to the crow's nest. I can still see the ship behind us, or at least most of it," came the reply from the boy.

Nonn could just barely see his head peeking over the side of the crow's nest but if he said he could see the other ship, he believed him. "Keep an eye on them. If they do anything out of the ordinary, give a shout." Nonn turned to the men on the starboard cannons, "Be on the ready men. If you're lucky you might get a shot off before we get behind this isle." The men nodded, eager to dole out more punishment to the ship that wanted them dead.

"Eight guns in working order, Sir," the man reported to Tom Whiddon. "They're loaded and ready to go. We're guessing where they'll pass us, but we should be pretty close no matter what. They'll not jibe too far out and lose ground. If they know what they're doing, that is."

"Good work, with the two we've got ready, we'll give them a welcome they won't soon forget." The First Mate was satisfied. Eight

guns, and fourteen pounders at that would be a devastating broadside. If they could survive the response, things would definitely go well. "While we wait, see if they left anything to eat below. No sense just sitting around." The First Mate took a cue from his captain and tried to keep his men busy with easy, self-satisfying tasks such as eating while they waited. *Good tactics are good tactics*, he thought.

Shortly, the *18 Fathoms* came coming alongside the sunk and grounded Sloop. Nonn did not see any of the men he had sent there. They would not have disobeyed him; that much he knew. Maybe the drop from the deck did the longboat in and his crew was too afraid to tell him. Again, unlikely. Then he spotted them; they were sitting on the deck eating. "This aren't no pleasure cruise!" Nonn bellowed. He moved between two cannons and leaned on the railing, "What'r you think you're doing?" he shouted.

"Buildin' our strength, captain!" came the reply as the First Mate raised a goblet in a toast to the ship. He smiled broadly. "To all our health, Cap'm!" The men on the *18 Fathoms* cheered.

All of the men liked the First Mate. He was dedicated, experienced, and very personable. Looking again, Nonn realized that the men having a picnic with him on the awash decks of the Brig were the same six he had chosen for an earlier outing. Thinking back, he realized that these

men were often picked by the First Mate for visits to shore or other ships. Nonn wasn't truly afraid of a mutiny; his men knew that he cared for them in his own way and always ensured that treasure was shared equally. Also, when a sailor decided to move on, Nonn gladly let him. Plus, he gave him, as he called it 'an extra coin or ten to send him on his way'. In his experience, it was easier to treat sailors fairly than dealing with mutineers. It was also far healthier. "Don't get yer hopes up, Mate," Nonn called "I don't think that ship suits you!" He was testing the waters to see what his First Mate saw in his future.

Smart captain, the First Mate thought, *if any of us do, he'll be the one that'll retire at an old age*. "Aye captain," he called back, " 'course this isn't the only ship in these waters! I hear they're even cleanin' up the hull for me!" The First Mate returned his captain's favor and tested *his* waters.

"Mighty neighborly of them!" Nonn smiled and touched his hat in a quick salute then to his men: "Back to task men, maybe the First Mate will save us some food for a feast once we're through this." Nonn returned to the center of his ship, "Stay sharp so we can give them what for." Something didn't seem right to Captain Nonn. He looked to the man still tied to the cannon. That wasn't it. It was something though. Itching at the back of his head. He sat to gather his thoughts. "Something's amiss. But what?" This was not the time to be losing focus. Nonn stood and looked around his ship, hoping something would jog his memory. As he scanned, his eyes passed over the man still strapped to the cannon. He had soiled himself since the last time he looked. "Might as well shove him over now before he starts to really

stink up my ship. No one's going to want to get close to that cannon now."

He smiled. *And a useless cannon just weighs down the ship anyway. Weight.* Nonn stopped smiling. *Anchor*. They had no forward anchor. There was no way they could clubhaul without a forward anchor in place; if they needed to execute that maneuver, there was no way they could. Bringing up the storm anchor would take far too long. It would leave the First Mate and his men as sitting ducks on the Sloop g without the *18 Fathom's* cannons to keep the attention of the pursuing ship. Captain Nonn walked over to the tied man and kicked him. "Mister Grint, good news! I've a new job for you since you've been relieved as ship's pilot!" he called to the man, "I'm short an anchor and you'll fill the position nicely. Linesman!" Nonn shouted to no one in particular "We need to rig a bower and I mean now!" Angry with himself for the oversight, Nonn went to the forecastle himself. He picked up the rope which until very recently was attached to their forward anchor and began to pull it from the windlass. There was no rode left. As he heaved the rope towards the mast, two sailors joined him. "What'll we use captain?" One asked between tugs. Without the rode, the anchor would be fairly useless as it was the weight of the chain lying on the bottom that generally kept the ship in place.

"Why our favorite Pilot, of course," Nonn answered as he pulled the rope back around towards the cannon, "I'm sure he won't mind, and he looks like he could use a cleaning. Tie it fast, we're short of time to make this work." Nonn stepped away from the cannon as the sailors

wrapped the rope around it several times and tied it securely. The man struggled against the added weight of the anchor rope to breathe. It was a problem that would be short lived. “Stand at the ready men and stay sharp! This will be a quick battle no matter which way it goes. And whichever way it goes, that filthy maggot gets shoved overboard.”

The sailors nodded in response. The smell alone from the man made them anxious to get him off the ship.

Chapter XIV
Slowing the Chase

Captain Ballantyne stood next to his forward most cannons hoping he could fire upon the ship he chased. It did not look as if he would have a chance. He had lost more ground in the time it took to get another sailor on the wheel and the mess of the previous one cleaned up. They would have to tack later than they wanted due to drift. That would put them even farther behind. "Prepare to jibe and you'd all best make it snappy!" he yelled at no one in particular. He noticed the man at the wheel was watching the telltales intently. "Good man! Get us alongside that ship!" He coaxed him.

The sailor at the wheel -Gibbs- looked forward. He was sure the captain had said something to him but he wasn't sure. He looked around and no one was pointing or giving him hints so the captain must have been speaking to someone else. A case of scarlet fever had left him mostly deaf and his fellow sailors knew it; if it were important, surely they would have told him by now, so he returned to watching the telltales on the sails.

The ship was angling farther from the isle and the tack was going to be even wider than he expected earlier. Captain Ballantyne turned to

look at the man at the wheel. He was still watching the telltales and sailing by the wind, not by where the ship should be going. "Port! Bring her more to Port or we'll take all day to get around this stinking speck of land!" The man kept looking at the telltales, brow furrowed with concentration. The captain was certain the ship was gaining speed. It was just in the wrong direction. "Blast it man! Aren't you watching where you're going?" The man never looked down. Blood boiling, Captain Ballantyne started at the man at a full run. Taking the steps by twos he drew his sword. "What's wrong with you?" He shouted as he slapped the man across the face with his sword. Even with the flat of the blade, it drew blood in a straight line from the man's chin to his ear. The man dropped to his knees. "Get up and sail my ship like I say or you're going over the rail!"

The man looked up, shock on his face. Another sailor came forward and helped the young man to his feet. He pointed towards the other ship and the young man nodded.

Captain Ballantyne lost control. "You'll listen to *him* but not *me*?" he bellowed.

The young man switched between looking at the other sailor and the captain as blood streamed down his face. "Sir, I'm following the other ship. That one over there," he pointed forward, "so I was going to…" The young man's words were cut off by another slap from his captain's sword. Another cut ran from his other cheek to his eye. "I thought…"

"Get below, you fool, before I run you through! I'll deal with you when this is over!" He shoved the young man away from the wheel. "Get this ship on the stern of that Pirate's or you're next!" he threatened the other sailor as Gibbs went below. The sailor took the wheel hesitantly. Captain Ballantyne knew why- the damage to their route had already been done and the upcoming jibe would be much farther out than it should have been. Pointing with his still drawn sword, he scowled "Do the best you can to fix that fool's mistake and get us on them, sailor."

"Sir, begging your pardon," the sailor said, "but Gibbs is mostly deaf. If he ain't looking at you, he ain't hearing you. I'll get us to that ship, Sir."

Captain Ballantyne stared at the man for a long moment. He was torn between his anger for Gibbs and the fact that he didn't know one of his sailors was deaf. "Get me to that ship." He said flatly. Stepping away, he sheathed his sword and stalked amidships once again.

Captain Nonn looked for the other ship but didn't see it. *Giving up?* He thought to himself hopefully, then aloud and upwards, "Hey-o! Son, what's that other ship up to?"

It took a moment for the boy to figure that out before answering. "Captain, they seem to be giving that point a real wide birth. I'm not

sure why since they saw us make it and we should take as much water as they do."

Those pot shots from the First Mate much have really shaken up the crew, thought Nonn. "Fine, but are they still looking like they'll make the jibe this side of land?" He knew it was a tough question for the boy to answer; the intentions of a ship that seemed to be sailing sloppily and inconsistently.

"Seems to me, Sir, they they'll make the jibe this side and have to really cut it hard to not wallow waiting for the wind. Otherwise, we'll be halfway around again before they get to where we are now."

Captain Nonn realized he was in danger of losing the ship chasing him and then his First Mate. "Loosen the mainsails so we don't lose them!" The men stopped to look at their captain, believing they misunderstood him. "Aye, you heard me right. I don't believe it myself but they're swinging wide around that point and if we keep running hard, them men on the sunk ship will be dead in the water! I've grown fond of Mister Whiddon, so get to those sails"

The men complied and began to loosen the lines on the main sails, dumping air past them.

Tom Whiddon, out of ear shot of the *18 Fathoms* looked to see ship's main sails begin to flap in the breeze. "What'r they all gone mad? Who furls sails in the middle of a battle? Stay on the ready men, I've got

a bad feeling this half-baked plan is going to play out even worse than we thought," he said. "Mister Tucker, see if you can get up the Mizzen to see what that other Sloop's up to."

"Aye, Tom, I'm on it. Never seen sails bein' brought in on purpose while in a chase." The man shook his head as he dropped his plate and made for the rear of the ship. "Damndest thing I've ever seen." The rearmost mast was still intact though wobbly. As he climbed, it leaned even farther, but the remaining rigging kept it from going over. By the time he was over half way, he could make out the masts of the other ship. "I can see them, Tom. Seems like they're angled away from us so they're giving a wide birth. Mayhap they take more water than the *18 Fathoms* so they need to swing wide," he called down.

"Then Captain Nonn is trying to stay close enough to keep his guns effective," the First Mate answered, "come down and let's see if we can get another couple of cannons in working order just in case he's too far away." Mister Whiddon looked over at the other ship. It had definitely slowed, but was still moving away from them. By the time the other ship was alongside them, they would be almost three hundred yards away. Definitely not how this plan was pitched to him when he cast off in the long boat. "We're in for trouble," he told his men. "We're going to need all the firepower we can get. Good news is that we can't be sunk since we're already on the bottom."

"Grape and chain shot worries me more than sinking, truth be told," one of his men replied as they all stood to survey the once passed over cannons. "We can practically jump to shore from here." Hopefully

more could be added to the ones already chosen. Eight cannons had just gone from being more than plenty to probably too few.

Captain Nonn looked back to the Sloop and saw his men moving about its decks. They were going to be much farther away than he wanted to and there was nothing he could do about it. Forward momentum was needed to club-haul. Dead in the water, they couldn't maneuver at all. They needed to continue to move farther away from the sunken ship with his men on it and closer to a beached one that was anything but friendly. "How close are we to the breamed ship, son?" Nonn called up to the crow's nest. "Will we get in their line of fire?"

Moments later the boy responded, "I can't see that ship sir, the land bends around too much. We're probably going to run pretty close to where our marker was if we don't change course though. If that makes any difference."

"That makes a hell of a difference if they've noticed that piece of wood. And that's a gamble I'd rather not take at the moment. How far back are they? Can we afford a figure eight?" Nonn was putting the fate of his ship on the shoulders of a young boy. The men listening to the conversation (which was most everyone on deck) stopped to look up. Everyone waited as the boy moved back up the mast for a better vantage point. "Even if the other ship sees it, they won't have a clue why you're doing it. I don't understand it and I'm here with you." More moments passed. "I think we could Sir. They're still behind the Isle and

will definitely wallow in their tack. They'd need sweeps to make it a smooth jibe. We'd need to do it quick to make sure we got…"

"Tighten the mainsail and bring us about!" Nonn interrupted the boy. "We're short of space and we need to be closer to our own men and their cannons than that breamed ship and hers!" Nonn continued as he moved to the wheel. "Mister Bainbridge, your trick is up."

"Aye sir, I'll go help with the sails." Mister Bainbridge was relieved that the Captain as opposed to himself would handle the upcoming maneuvers. Now, there was no one to blame if it didn't work.

Captain Nonn gave the wheel a fierce spin even before the sails were fully down. The men struggled with the rigging as they flapped but Nonn kept the wheel turned. "Stay sharp men and no fallin' on your heads! There's plenty of fighting left in this day for the lot of us!"

Chapter XV
Sweeps

Captain Ballantyne stood in the middle of his ship, hoping his presence would coax his men into more efficient work. "How we lookin' for the gibe Mister Gibson?" He yelled over his shoulder. He had heard the men talking the day prior and had overheard the man's name from another sailor. The men seemed to appreciate Mr. Gibson's talents as a seaman and for his willingness to share his experiences with them. Possibly officer material if things improved with him at the wheel.

"We're going to be short Captain and we'd wallow like a pig in the summer if we didn't have them sweeps out to bring us through our gibe."

Sweeps? Captain Ballantyne cursed to himself. *Sweeps*! In his fury he had completely forgotten he had them at his disposal; this was the first ship he had been on that had them. Mister Gibson's reminder had been given as just an offhand comment to ensure his captain didn't lose face in front of his men. *Definitely officer material*. "That's the plan Mister Gibson! Get the sweeps out and start building some speed. We'll get on top of this battle yet!" He moved forward to the railing and leaned forward, trying to coax more speed from the ship under his feet. He did

not look back to see Mister Gibson pointing to men to order them to go below and work the oars. The sweeps would be taken care of by Mister Gibson- as captain, his job was to watch the battle unfold.

The *18 Fathoms* slowly gained speed through its turn. They were beginning to move closer to the direction of the wind and were beginning to leave a substantial wake behind them.

"That's the way men!" Nonn shouted. The ship was closing the gap between them and his stranded men. "We'll get rid of that pest and get the rest of our crew back in no time!" Nonn turned the wheel a bit more, bringing the wind directly to their stern. They were going as fast as they were ever going to. "Everyone be on the ready! We won't be club hauling so we won't be surprising them that way. Seeing our prow might do the trick though! Mister Bainbridge! Come take this wheel!"

Within moments, the man was back at the wheel and Nonn confidently moved forward to stand among his men. "Stay at the ready men, we're on top of this now, but things can change quick." The men all stayed in their positions, ready to fire their cannons. In their anticipation of the upcoming battle, the ships' two powder monkeys had dangerously brought several reloads up on deck. "Heaven's above! Whose side are you on?" Captain Nonn admonished them. "Are you trying to get this ship blown up?"

"Sir," one of the boys answered sheepishly, "we brought up the first bit when we thought we was going to be in a full battle. Then when things didn't turn out that way, we went below and waited for the word. Then we brought up more when we thought we were going to blast them other ship. Then we didn't. So, we went below again to wait for orders. Then…"

Captain Nonn cut the boy off, "Lads, just keep an eye on what you're doing. I'd hate to have to feed you to the sharks for getting my sailors killed." His glower ensured the boys wouldn't bring more explosives on deck under their own initiative. The boys scurried back to the hatches to await calls for more powder. "And another thing," he called after them, "make sure you two…"

"Captain. Captain! God in heaven where are you?" The boy wailed from the crow's nest "Sir, Sir, SIR! We've got troubles! Where are you!?"

"Blast it boy! Quit yelling at me!" This brought chuckles from the crew. Normally such a breach of etiquette brought severe punishment from their captain. The relationship between the boy and the captain had, throughout this day, grown to where it would be overlooked. "Calm down before you fall out of that nest right onto my head! Get yourself together and tell me what's wrong now."

"Sweeps, Sir! They've run out sweeps, over a dozen a side! They'll make their gibe just fine!" The boy was weeping "I'm sorry, captain, I've killed us all!"

The men all turned to look up at the boy, more that several showing anger in their faces. One threw his ramrod to the deck in disgust and shouted up to the boy "I'll kill you before I go!"

"Stow that talk!" Nonn turned to the sailor, "I'll have you stuck on that ramrod if I hear another word out of your mouth. I have neither the time nor the patience to deal with the likes of blowhards. Get to your station and hope I don't pitch you over the next chance I get." Nonn spoke calm and low to the man, walking forward as he did. Panic could spread as fast as a fire on a ship, and was twice as dangerous. "Sailor, there's enough men on this piece of wood that I can do without the likes of a panicked barmaid wailing at the first sign of trouble."

"Captain, we've not a chance now!" The man answered, mistaking Nonn's calm tone for agreement as he picked up his ramrod. "Let's just tack out and let that buffoon First Mate deal with them Royal Navy ships."

Captain Nonn drew his sword and pointed it at the man's chest, "Get off my ship."

The man's eyes grew large, "But Sir!"

Captain Nonn turned back to the boy as the man continued to speak.

"We've not a chance now. Why stay and fight?" The man said.

Ignoring him, Nonn called to his lookout, "Let me know when they start their gibe and see if you can tell where we'll meet in the water compared to our other ship."

"What other ship?" The panicked man screeched. "The one sitting on the *bottom*? It's not of any use to us. By now the men on it have swum ashore and have abandoned it! We're lost in this!"

To no one in particular Nonn ordered "For the love of all the seas, someone get this wailing wench off my ship." Two sailors grabbed the man and a scuffle ensued. Another, very large sailor joined in and the man was soon being hoisted over the railing.

"Put me down! I'll stay and help and won't say a word, really!" The man pleaded.

"Sorry Mate" said the large sailor, "It's nothing personal, it's just that women on board are bad luck" He tossed the man overboard to the cheers of his fellow sailors.

Nonn smiled at the sailor, "Well done. Now let's get back to sinking our third ship of the day. Lost indeed." He knew that once sailors began to think they were going to die, they usually did. "Good work Mister Wigglesworth, now get back to your station. We've a tricky bit of sewing to do." He said to the man- everyone except the captain called him 'Wes'.

"Aye captain," the man replied.

Chapter XVI
Yards to Glory!

Tom Whiddon moved among his small crew of six as they worked on three other guns, providing guidance and help as needed. "Where will you be putting that third gun, Mister Tucker?" he asked his friend as the second gun joined the other nine in the already crowded side.

The man stood from the last gun they were going to make operational and appraised the deck. It was definitely getting crowded. "Mayhap we can put it up front, aiming back so we can rake a shot across their decks?"

"That sounds as good as any, Nate," replied Tom Whiddon as he joined Nate Tucker and the other two men in dragging the gun across the deck. "Let's get it in position." Guns were equipped with wheels to allow forward and backward movement when they were fired- aiding in loading and absorbing recoil. Maneuvering them around wreckage on a battered deck was far and away more than the non-turning wheels were accustomed to. Lining up the gun for a straight pull to the front of the ship, the four men gave the gun a shove to get it moving. Once it crossed the middle of the ship, the deck rolled under their feet. The men fought to regain control of the rolling cannon to keep it from

crashing into the far railing. One of the men loading an already positioned gun was caught by surprise and thrown overboard.

"Carter overboard!" shouted another sailor as he lay down and tossed a rope to his splashing crewman. "Grab hold and we'll pull you back aboard!"

"I've a mind to just make my way ashore, if it were up to me" replied the sailor with a chuckle, "cast off a sunk ship just *can't* be good luck." The man took the rope anyway and allowed himself to be hauled back on board. "Seriously sir, now we gots guns pointing at the water. Mister Whiddon, how much longer till we abandon this heap?"

Several other men nodded in agreement. "We've no time for a debate on this, men. That ship will be on us in minutes." The First Mate knew they didn't have much chance in the success of their endeavor but at the moment, it was their only option. "We need to be able to at least put up some sort of fight here. If those Englishmen take the *18 Fathoms* we'll have to deal with them. If our captain takes those Englishmen without us showing some help, we'll have to deal with *him*. Either way, our bed's been made. Let's get that cannon over to the port side to fix this listing and then we hunker low. If they see us on this heap, we're done for."

The men weren't happy but they quickly took to the task of muscling the list-causing gun to the far rail. The ship evened up and the six men took positions beside the nine working guns to wait. The English ship was less than five hundred yards away and closing fast. The

First Mate peeked around the cannon to his left and saw that the *18 Fathoms* was six hundred yards away but seemed to be moving faster than the English one. "Odd." He muttered.

Captain Nonn leaned out over the railing hoping to catch a glimpse of his men on the sunken ship but could not. "Maybe they took to shore, sir" commented Mister Wigglesworth. "Couldn't blame them if they did; they're in a right bad spot sitting out there."

"Wouldn't blame them? If they did make their way ashore to hole up till this is over, they better hope you're captain when we pick them up *Mister* Wigglesworth. I'm not as forgiving." Nonn had no problem with sailors deciding to find another ship to sail on, and in fact, while at port he often gave sailors who parted ways with him an extra share of coins for being above board about leaving instead of just disappearing in the middle of the night. In his experiences, Nonn had seen that sailors forced to stay and fight didn't fare nearly as well as sailors who did so of their own free will. Even so, the middle of a battle was no time to look for calmer seas to sail upon. He'd been through a lot with his first mate and would be surprised if he had just left, even after his captain had put him in a dangerous position.

As Nonn moved away from the railing, the man tied to the anchor caught his eye. He was asleep. Nonn kicked him in the ribs. "Wake up you dog! I'd hate to have you sleep through your own funeral. Make sure he stays awake!" He ordered no one in particular. The man awoke with a

start and looked around. Despair took his face as he realized he was not dreaming his current predicament. He began to cry as Nonn walked to the helmsman.

"How are we faring?" He asked as he reached the man. "Are we going to meet them at that sunk ship?"

"It will be close, Sir," the man replied. "They may be just cross them by the time we get there. Those sweeps gave them a little extra in that tack. But if they get to that ship first, at least that solves one problem, captain."

Nonn glanced at the man, expecting him to finish his thought. He didn't. Nonn waited a few moments longer. The man seemed to have forgotten his conversation with the captain and had gone back to sailing the ship. "Spit it out man! What problem?"

The man looked at Captain Nonn with a confused expression. It seemed painfully obvious to him so he didn't mention it specifically to not annoy his captain. Now it seemed that he had thought of something Captain Nonn hadn't and by telling him, he became worried the captain would become upset. "Ahhh, sir." The man stammered.

"Mister Bainbridge." Nonn took a calming breath. "We're running headlong towards a ship that wants us on the bottom. Our shipmates are sitting on a ship that's already *on* the bottom. If you've something useful to say concerning our predicament, this would be the ideal time to spit it out."

"The problem I thought of sir, while I was steering, was that that English ship may not pass close by the sunk one. It looks like they're aiming away from it from where I'm at. If we got there at the same time, we might be between them and the First Mate and his men. And if that happens, then why are they even there in the first place because they've no one to shoot at." The man looked at his captain, hoping he had explained the predicament well enough. "That's what I was thinking."

Captain Nonn turned his attention to the ship quickly approaching. It was indeed angling away from the sunken ship, probably because of the wide tack that it made. A quick calculation in his head led him to believe the ship would be a good 300 yards away from the sunken ship by the time it got there. "I'll be cursed. We need to get them a little closer to them than what they will be, Mister Bainbridge. Take us port to try and bottle them in, but don't make it *look* like you're trying to bottle them in."

"Sir?" Asked the helmsman, "how am I supposed to do that? Either we turn out or we don't. Right?"

"Sail casual-like. Drift out a few degrees and see if you can't get them to move to their port. If they go out even more then we've lost the aid of our First Mate." Furious, Nonn moved amidships. Less than 900 yards between the two ships with their only chance at success depending on what the pilot of the other ship did. Until now, that helmsman had been sloppy, inefficient, and worst of all, unpredictable. His actions in the next few minutes were anyone's guess. Nonn fumed- he had no control whatsoever of his and his ship's immediate fate.

"Stand ready men! We're mere *yards* from glory!" Captain Ballantyne shouted for what seemed to be the tenth time. "We're going to end this mess shortly!" The men nodded in agreement, mostly in the hopes that their captain would stop trying to motivate them. "Keep on that ship!" He shouted at the man at the helm. "We'll tear them apart!"

"Aye aye Captain," the man called forward, "Ahh, sir? Port or Starboard?" He had been watching the approaching ship and now it alarmingly looked like they were on a collision course. That was until a few moments ago when the approaching ship had drifted off to their port ever so slightly. It was probably to try and catch some more wind so they would be carried past quickly on their first run. After seeing how Captain Ballantyne reacted to steering that wasn't what he wanted, he did not want to make any course corrections without some approval. He was planning on just ramming the other ship head on if that's what it took to not have to deal with the captain's wrath.

Captain Ballantyne turned around fuming "What? Who's port or starboard? Ours? What are you talking about man?" He took a step towards the helm.

The helmsman became nervous with the newfound attention he had. "Nothing Sir! I've a handle on it, I was only thinking out loud." He finished quickly: "We'll tear them apart!" Deciding to just handle the

situation on his own and not incur any wrath from his commanding officer, he adjusted course to starboard slightly since, with their draft, moving a little closer to the isle wasn't an issue. Besides, even as angry as he was, there was no way the captain would want to ram the other ship.

"Good show!" The captain flourished his sword and moved to the starboard rail to get a better look at the approaching pirate ship. "Stand ready men!" he shouted. "Seven hundred yards to glory!"

Chapter XVII
Glad You Came

"Stand ready men," Captain Nonn said to the men on the forward starboard cannon. "We'll finish off what our good Mate starts." The two men looked at each other, both thinking that if they had been deposited on the other ship, they would have long since swum ashore. The English ship was less than 100 yards away from the sunken ship and looked like it would pass within 50 yards of it. "Just make sure you use up this cannon so we can heave it overboard this evening. I'd hate to waste a good cannon on this mangy dog." Nonn kicked the man tied to the anchor. "What say you? Will you wish us luck?"

The man snarled from behind his gag and thrashed against his ropes. His ear was bleeding where some crewman had kicked him to honor Captain Nonn's wish that there would be no sleeping on this day. After the order had been given, he had been kicked over a dozen times. Men would move from their station to give the man a kick. It had become a sort of game to see who could get the most response from the bound man. Kicks to his thigh caused the man to jump more than any other kick so that's where he received most of the punishment. The sailors were completely unaware that the sciatic nerve ran down the leg

along the buttocks and strikes there caused excruciating jolts of pain, but were amused none the less.

"Here we go," whispered the First Mate, "let them get almost alongside us before you show yourselves. After you fire your gun, run back and jump off the side and get to shore. We'll meet up just aft of the ship in the bushes. Then we'll signal Captain Nonn to pick us up afterwards."

Several men chuckled. "Tom," said Nate, "truly you have missed your calling. With all the Good News you've been spouting today, you would have made a hell of a preacher. If we ever get off this ship, you should take up a parsonage and preach to wayward pirates." This brought more muted chuckles from the men, including the First Mate.

"Shame on you Nate" the First Mate scolded mockingly, "don't be a ship in the mud." This brought more chuckles from the crewmen. "You of all people should know that there's always hope. We've been in worse situations than this. If you want to become *my* first mate, you're going to have to be a little more cheery."

"If we get through this day, I'd be happy to sail on your ship. Just pick something a little more maneuverable than this hunk. Honestly…" Nate's voice trailed off as the English ship came alongside them. He could hear the captain shouting at his men about finding glory when the first of their cannons went off. The round struck the English ship about

10 feet from the bow, about a foot above the waterline. Because of the close range, the ship leaned over ever so slightly from the impact.

"Port side! Port side!" Yelled a sailor as the deck beneath returned to an even keel. "Cannon on the port side!"

Captain Ballantyne was leaning over the starboard rail looking at the approaching ship, a mere 50 yards away now and closing fast when he heard the explosion and the rocking of the deck. He turned just as the second shot struck the ship, a little farther back than the first. He saw two sailors run off the far side of the ship into the water. *Two sailors*, he thought. *At least they only got two shots off. That's not enough to hurt us*. "That's nothing to worry about men!" Captain Ballantyne shouted, "We'll deal with those..." He was cut off as three more cannons fired simultaneously. The balls hit from less than 30 feet. *How had they gotten so close to the sunken ship*? He thought as the roar of four more cannons fired in unison tore through the air. The ship, already leaning from the three cannon balls, caught the following four right at what had been the waterline moments before- above the powder magazine, but just at the level where four young Powder Monkeys were waiting for orders they would never hear again. The ship listed even harder away from the sunken ship from the impact. As the ship leaned back over, the four distinct holes swiveled below the surface and allowed water to pour into the ship at a staggering pace.

Captain Nonn watched as the *Zealous* was rocked by the two nearly simultaneous volleys of cannon shot. The men on the *18 Fathoms* cheered as the ship leaned to starboard as the shots slammed home then leaned back to port. It ended up slightly more to port as water poured into its lower decks. The ship was almost on them by now, listing heavily but still making progress in the water. "Stay low men! Her guns are aimed high!" Captain Nonn shouted as he moved to the starboard side of the ship to greet the battle firsthand. He knew that this was not his day to die. "Fire at will!" He coaxed them as he drew his pistol to join in the attack.

Captain Ballantyne moved back and forth across his ship, unsure of where to be. There was a fire below, he could smell it, but at least the magazine had not been hit. "Stand ready men! Make them sorry they came! Stand ready *and fire*!" Already startled by the unexpected attack, two men on the starboard side fired their cannons at the command, splashing their rounds into open water. The cannon crew drew their pistols instead of trying to reload their respective cannons. They knew that at such a close range, and the amount of time required to reload a cannon – three to five minutes- the pirate ship would be long past them by the time they completed their task.

The ships sailed beside each other.

The *Zealous* listed even farther to port as each of the four 15-pound cannon balls had made almost two-foot round holes in the ship below

the water line. Water poured into the lower decks on the left side of the ship, finding its way to the bilge- which was almost completely filled. The *18 Fathom's* cannons fired in sequence as the other ship came into range. Because of the listing, the cannon balls hit just about deck level, on an upward trajectory, spraying crewmen with deck and railing splinters with devastating effect. The *Zealous'* rounds traveled over the heads of the crouching pirate crew, shredding rigging and canvas, but causing no casualties.

Within moments, the two ships had passed. "Damage report!" Captain Ballantyne called out. His ship was listing heavily; he could still smell smoke and now could see it billowing from hatches. Many of his crew lay injured on deck, bleeding from splinters, or in a worse state if actually hit by a cannon ball or chain shot. He looked to his helm and saw that no one was there. The body of the helmsman lay in a heap beside the wheel. As with the man, half of it was also missing. Captain Ballantyne ran to the wheel and spun it wildly. "Coming about to give them another pass!" The ship continued on its course as the fire below had made it to the rudder mechanism. "Man the relieving tackle! Bring us about!" He shouted in vain. Neither having ordered the safety feature rigged to the rudder nor identifying who would be responsible for it, none of the sailors had put the tackle in place. And it was far too late for that now. "Come on men! Let's make them sorry they came!" He cried out shakily.

"Do we need to come about so we can finish them off?" Captain Nonn moved from amidships to the helm, "What's our status Mister Bainbridge?"

"Sir, I don't think they'll be much to worry about." Bainbridge had been watching the ship as it passed and continued on. "They're done for. It's listing hard now, and there's more and more smoke coming out of it. Plus, she hasn't changed course so I think her helm's gone. She'll burn to the waterline or sink. Besides, sir, we need to repair some sail and rigging before we do much anything else. Their high shots did a game on us."

Nonn looked up at the tattered remains of rigging holding the mast in place. Bobstays and bowsprits missing, the spinnaker was in tatters - carnage all above the crew's heads. The mast wobbled without the required support but due to the light wind, it stayed erect. "Fine work today, Mister Bainbridge, fine work. But before we deal with this mess, there's some important business to get to." He slapped the helmsman on the shoulder as he moved forward. "Men! We've come through a tight spot and we're pretty well off, it seems. As long as no one looks up that is." He moved around some hanging rigging and canvas as he went "At least we crew are well off. We may need to tidy up a bit before we go too much farther today."

The men nodded in agreement. Any encounter that had not cost anyone their lives was a complete victory, even if the ship was worse for wear. It was practically a miracle that the entire crew could brag about sinking three Royal British Navy ships in one day.

"But before we get to work on the *18 Fathoms* we've some important business to attend to. Very important business!" Captain Nonn shouted. The men cheered as a nearby sailor delivered a swift kick to the shoulder of their captive. "That's it exactly Timmons. If you and a couple of sailors would assist me, I'd like to get rid of the extra ballast we've been carrying." Never wanting his men to do something he himself would not want to do, Nonn moved forward and cut the cannon loose as the man tied to it thrashed in vain. Once the cannon was loose and the forward blocks pulled from the deck, Nonn untied the gag. "Any last words?" Even as the man began a rant of obscenities, Nonn leaned into pushing the cannon overboard. With the help of four pirates, they were successful. With a resounding "sploosh" the man's curses were silenced. Nonn and the crewmen looked over the side as the cannon disappeared into the clear blue water. "My, it's deep here." Nonn remarked as the shadow of the cannon grew dim. "Ah no, wait. It seems bottom's not all that far away. I can still make out our dearly departed cannon from here." Nonn turned from the dark shadow, 40 feet below. "Now let's get our handy crewmen from that sunken hulk of a beautiful ship. And then we will relax till morning. Repairs can wait." He paused and looked up again, "but first let's get that mainsail down before some gust de-masts us. That'd be embarrassing."

The men moved to the task quickly. As it stood, the ship was definitely salvageable. Without a mast, they would end up waiting on shore until a ship passed by, and they would all probably be hanged. Saving the mast was a top priority.

The *Zealous* listed further and further as water poured in hundreds of gallons at a time. Fortunately, enough had entered the ship that the fire was out. Unfortunately, all the while, the ship sailed farther out to sea and away from the island. The lone intact longboat was not nearly enough to hold what was left of the crew and a fight ensued. Armed with pistols, several crewmen took charge of the situation. "Captain goes down with the ship is what I always heard," a man called as he kept the Captain and several other officers at bay as the longboat paddled off. "It's no hard feeling, Cap'n. It's just that I don't want to get in th' way of you getting to your glory."

Captain Ballantyne stood on the deck of his ship, along with several of his officers. He liked them as little as they liked him. "Gentlemen, I don't fancy dying around the likes of you. I'm to swim for it. Do what you will." With that, Captain Ballantyne jumped into the water and began to dog-paddle for the island several hundred yards away. By the time he was halfway there, he had stripped all his encumbering clothes to save his strength, which he still had plenty of. His spirit was further buoyed as he could easily hear the roar of the waves crashing on the sandy beach. *Not even rocks to contend with!* He continued his slow, energy-conserving swim to shore. If anything, it was refreshing.

Captain Ballantine's foot bumped soft ground- a sandbar perhaps and a smile came across his face. He would make it to shore and make that pirate pay dearly. Suddenly, the sandbar was gone and the water was again over his head. *Odd but no matter*, he thought, *I'm practically on the*

beach. Halfway again from that point, when the first shark bumped him, he realized he may have miscalculated his chances for survival and subsequent revenge. A second shark- or maybe the same one -bumped his back. He turned to look at the black tipped fin as it disappeared below the surface. It was bigger than both his hands held together and spread out. Looking forward he picked up his pace. At this point there was no need to conserve any strength. After several strokes in earnest, he saw that there were, in fact, at least two sharks. The one coming straight at him did not seem intent on merely bumping him. There seemed to be a good two, no; closer to three fathoms between its snout and its dorsal fin that cut through the water. Maybe even a little more than that. Its large black eyes turned white as the shark came in close to greet him.

"Mister Tucker, if you'd like to join me in a little prayer of thanksgiving, I'd be much obliged," the First Mate chuckled. He and the other men had sat openly on the beach watching the two ships as they moved apart. Even with the battle over, the entertainment continued with the men providing running commentary for the events unfolding before them. They provided voices for the captain and crew of the Zealous, listing so heavily its decks were awash as it wallowed now a good half mile from them. Then, daringly, they mimicked Captain Nonn and several of the crew- especially Mister Bainbridge as the battered *18 Fathoms* managed a horrible looking jibe that seemed to take most of the ocean to accomplish. By the time the ship was close enough to them to

drop its one remaining anchor - a meager storm one- and send a boat, the sun was already past overhead. Captain Nonn accompanied two other sailors as they rowed ashore.

"Men, you don't know how nice it is that I can greet you, as opposed to the captain of that sinking ship out there. Well done!" Nonn moved to embrace each man as he spoke. "Even though we haven't made a single coin from today's affair, I still think this is a most successful day."

"I agree, Sir. 'Course, once we make repairs, I think we need to see about making our way to Saona and see if what's there was worth all this mess." Mister Whiddon said as he hugged his captain. "Mister Ederer is *not* going to be pleased with the looks of the ship, I don't imagine."

"That he won't, Tom. But after an evening of drink here on the beach, hopefully he'll be in a better mood tomorrow. If I could impose on your men to scrounge up something we can roast, I'll leave you here and get the rest of the men and some rum ashore to join you."

The other men weren't listening closely, but Mister Whiddon caught the slip "your men" from the captain. Not wanting to discourage the mood, he didn't press him on it. "You heard the captain, men. We're through hunting for English ships, now we're on the hunt for something we can cook." The first Mate and his men raised accepted pistols, extra shot and powder from their captain and the other two crewmen. The first mate smiled. "Well Nate, I think we'll have some luck hunting on land as well. What say you?" As Mister Whiddon and his men drew their

rapiers and moved into the jungle, a lively banter sprang up among them.

"If they don't shut their mouths, we'll be eating *coconuts* for dinner," said Mr. Bainbridge as he shook his head. "Back to the boat, captain?"

Captain Nonn nodded. "For the moment."

Chapter XVIII
Stale Flag of Truce

Captain Nonn turned and walked to his Gig. "Let's get back, men and see what we can do about getting the *18 Fathoms* set to rest for the night. Then tomorrow we'll re-rig the mast." He stopped and looked at his ship, fifty yards offshore. "Tomorrow." He said absently.

"Captain?" Said Mr. Bainbridge.

"I'm not too sure about that other ship." Nonn said to no one in particular.

"Which ones? They're all sunk."

"Yes, yes. Double watches tonight to deal with any straggler sailors." Nonn continued to look at his ship. "But not the one that will be floating with the tide within the hour."

"We talked to him under a flag of truce."

"He should be gone with the tide, true." Nonn considered it. "But, once he's afloat, I'd like to think he'd be hard pressed to not sink us as he left." He turned to look at the men. "Mister Thomerson, round up

the fighters and again as many in crew. I think we should surprise our esteemed Mister Whiddon with a rather nice ship of his very own."

"Sir?"

Captain Nonn exhaled. "Mister Whiddon is a captain in his own right. He did, after all sink a British warship just this day, in fact. And with men who'll follow him wherever and whenever he wants. And I'm sure there's at least another dozen aboard that would do the same if he asked." He put his hand on the sailor's shoulder. "This is a good lesson for you; knowing when to allow sailors to find their own fortune. If you try to hold men too close to you, they'll oftentimes decide they don't like being caged."

The sailor nodded. "I understand Sir, but what..."

"He can take half of the crew and fighters and make his own name." Offered Captain Nonn.

"Yes, Sir. But what about the treasure?" He looked toward where Mister Whiddon and his men had disappeared into the jungle. "Will he just leave his share of that behind? Don't think I would. Even for a ship of my own."

Captain Nonn shook his head. "No; of course not. And no one's asking him to. We just have an opportunity to acquire a ship at the moment and we should take it. And, at least until the treasure is found and we part ways, I think I'll insist on being called Commodore." Captain Nonn smiled. "If anyone is so inclined."

The three men around him all nodded.

"I'll stand here and work on a plan. Go gather every fighter and again that many sailors. I want them all armed with shot and swords." He turned and moved farther up the beach and sat down. "And be quick about it. Once that ship's afloat, there's not much we can do but hope."

With more nods, the men moved to the gig and paddled furiously for the *18 Fathoms*.

Captain Nonn watched as each wave came farther and farther up the beach. The time the men were on the ship seemed interminable. Finally, out of frustration, he stood and began to pace. After only several laps on the beach, Captain Nonn was rewarded with seeing three longboats and his gig moving toward him. "Finally." He cupped his hands to his mouth. "We're losing the tide!" The men, paddling the boats picked up speed and within only another few minutes ran aground on the sandy beach.

"Ready, Captain," said Thomerson as he jumped over the bow of the longboat, pulling the painter with him as he came. When the other men jumped over the sides, he grabbed the line with both hands and heaved the boat several yards up the beach.

"We have but minutes, you maggots!" Scolded Nonn. "They'll be underway, our ship sunk, and us stranded until one of Her Majesty's

finest shows up to string us all up! Let's go!" He turned and jogged up the beach along the water's edge, men following close behind.

As they rounded the bend, several hundred yards from where they had come ashore, one of the sailors moved beside Nonn, who was still jogging. "What's the plan?"

Nonn nodded. It had taken his time on the beach, and half the jog to go through several plans and one seemed to be the best choice. "Take the fighters and half the sailors into the jungle above the ship where it's in that dugout cove. All the long guns." He paused as he gathered his breath. "You're to fire once when I put my hand on my pistol. Only when I put my hand on my pistol. Aim for everyone but the captain." He took several other breaths. "Or near me, if you please. When I draw my gun, you are all to stand and show yourselves. Even if you aren't reloaded, stand and present your weapons."

"A bluff?"

"We'll be lucky if the ship doesn't float off with us on it." He pointed at the jungle. "Get in there and get in position. They're just around this outcropping." He pointed at a tendril of the jungle that seemed to defy the beach and ran almost to the water's edge, using a wide span of rocks to help it along.

The men peeled off and ducked into the thick growth just as the ship came into view of Captain Nonn. He looked over his shoulder. He had six pirates with him. They all had pistols. *Perfect. Or at least as perfect as*

we can be under the circumstances. He looked at the ship. Water lapped at it and its rudder was well over half submerged. The ship rocked as it fought to climb out of the last bit of sand holding it fast. *A half hour at best.* "Stay close and do not under any circumstances fire your pistols until told to do so." He turned and looked at the half-dozen men. "Even when those in the jungle do." He had stopped jogging, but still walked quickly to the ship. It was nestled against rocks that had been stacked to create a flat backing for the impromptu dry-dock. It was, when all was said and done, a well-thought-out location to deal with any manner of issues below the waterline. He pointed at the rocks and began to climb. "If the shots come from the jungle, that's where they will look. If they fire from there, they will look there," he said as he thought back to his last interaction on the deck of the *Dawn's Delight.* "But remember; do not even put your hands on your pistols until I draw mine. Their attention needs to be elsewhere to gain the initiative."

As they climbed the rocks and got even with the deck of the ship, Captain Warren moved to the stern of his ship to watch them. "Now I am truly disappointed; I thought we were never to meet again, captain." He rested his hand on his pistol. He looked at the gangplank that led from the deck to the man-made cliff. He had twenty men still ashore bringing back last-minute rations.

Captain Nonn ignored him and made straight for the gangplank. When he reached it he quickly moved across it, followed by his men. Out of habit, he gave a quick salute to the mainsail as he crossed the

gangplank. "There's one more matter to deal with, Captain Warren. And I wanted to do it in person so there is no misunderstanding."

The Englishman kept his hand on his pistol as the pirate approached. "And what is that?"

Captain Nonn moved right past him to the far side of the ship, closest to the open sea. And out of the line of fire from where his men would be positioning themselves. He pointed out at the water and looked over his shoulder. A dozen crewmen had come on deck as word had spread that a certain pirate captain had returned. "That's a lot of water out there."

"Thanks for that bit of information, captain." Captain Warren raised an eyebrow. "I'll make sure we sail that way instead over the island." Several of his crew chuckled. "Most helpful, that."

Captain Nonn placed both hands on the railing and leaned out, looking down the side of the ship. "All clean, I see."

"Yes. Yes we are. And ready to set sail. All pirates ashore, if you please." This brought more laughs from the sailors. "I try to run a tidy, pirate-free ship."

Nonn turned around, hoping he had given his men enough time to get in position. He stepped to his right, making sure that the captain was directly in front of him. Thanks to the lack of rifling, muzzle loaded rifles were notoriously inaccurate- even at relatively short distances. "You know, Captain Warren. I just wanted to let you know that..." As

he spoke, Nonn put his hand on his pistol. Infuriatingly, none of his men fired. "... I honored our flag of truce earlier, and as we sailed around this little dry-dock of an isle, I made sure that you were not targeted by our guns. I understand that the other ships fired on you, but you will agree, I had no control over who they were going to engage." *Fire you fools! I'm running out of things to say! FIRE!* Inside, Captain Nonn's stomach did a flip. The plan was not working. "And just a few moments ago, when I had my shore parties move out to gather rations, I reminded all of them that as we… you and I discussed earlier…"

He was cut off as over a dozen rifles fired from the jungle behind the captain.

Unable to see their captain, the men had to reposition themselves in the jungle. When they had laid back down and saw Captain Nonn's hand was already on his pistol, a quick discussion was had as to whether they had missed the signal, or perhaps there would be one later. It was quickly decided that the signal had been given, so they fired.

Less than thirty yards from their targets, most of the bullets hit their marks with lethal results- center mass. Five hit extremities, the ¾ inch lead balls spinning their victims to the deck. Only three missed completely, one whizzing by Captain Nonn's head so close, he heard it pass. Instinctively he flinched even though the bullet was already passed by the time he did. The remaining English sailors, as well as Captain Warren turned to look in the direction of the unexpected fire. Captain

Nonn stepped forward, drawing his piston. He placed it against the back of Captain Warren's head.

Captain Nonn was pleased to see that his sailors drew their pistols as soon as he had. Each aimed at a different Englishmen. In the jungle- still in the direction that most of the sailors were looking, the pirates popped up one at a time, until all 18 were standing. Only four of the professional fighters had had the time to complete the reloading process. With another three seconds, all of the fighters would have all been holding loaded, ready to use weapons. Another ten or fifteen seconds after that, the six sailors would have also been ready. As such, the less-than-ten-seconds they had been afforded just wasn't enough time. The remaining pirates stood with weapons in various stages of the loading cycle. One had stood with his ramrod in the barrel. He furiously hoped no one would notice. As it would turn out, only his fellow pirates did, the two on either side of him shaking with laughter as they too trained their useless weapons at the sailors. "You ready, Ramrod?" asked the one on his left, christening him with a nickname he would carry to his grave- decades later as a long-time retired pirate-cum-blacksmith. None - including the fighters- had had the time to actually re-load their firing mechanism.

"It's time you left my ship," said Captain Nonn as he pressed his pistol harder against the back of Captain Warren's head.

"You stinking pirate. We had a flag of truce."

Nonn moved his pistol up quickly, knocking the captain's hat off his head. "Shut up. Get *your* men off *my* ship. Or I will order the rest of my men to fire and you'll all die right here." He brought the pistol back down to the middle of the man's head. "On the deck of my ship."

The English sailors stood rock still. Some were looking at the pirates standing in the jungle training their weapons on them as, ostensibly, their comrades were reloading out of sight, others were looking at the audacious pirate captain who had marched onto their ship and seemed on the verge of taking it. None dared to move their hands towards their pistols or swords.

"Give the order."

Captain Warren took a deep breath. Then another. He bent down slowly and picked up his hat. Carefully he placed it on his head, taking extra time to straighten it. "Abandon ship."

"Sir!" Said Captain Warren's First Mate. "Are you seriously considering...?"

Captain Nonn made eye contact with one of his sailors and gestured toward the man who had just spoken up.

The pirate nodded and shot the man in the face. The back of his head exploded as gore and the remainders of the ball round struck the Englishman behind him, bloodying his ear and coating his face with the brains of his superior. The sailor dropped to his knees as the First Mate fell backwards, bumping into him as he fell to the deck.

Captain Warren turned to face Captain Nonn. “I swear...” He began.

“Either make that order or you’re next,” interrupted Nonn. “The truce got stale. Not that you’d have just left us alone while we ran new rigging. Am I right captain?”

Captain Warren gave a curt nod. He took a deep breath. “Abandon ship!”

“Take nothing with you,” coaxed Nonn.

“Take nothing with you!”

“And get to the end of the jetty.” Finished Nonn.

The captain relayed that command as well. He lowered his head for a moment, then turned to watch as his men left.

“Follow them down,” Captain Nonn ordered his sailors. He looked at the man who had fired. “Nice shot, Wilkins.”

The man nodded without looking; he was reloading his pistol as he moved behind the last of the sailors. He was fairly certain none of his comrades on the shore had had enough time to be ready to fire.

The ship swayed as it lifted off the sand for a long moment. With a soft ‘thump’ it resettled lightly.

Nonn looked up at the men standing on the cliff face. "Get down here. Man this ship and get her alongside the *18 Fathoms!*"

The men clambered down the rocks but had to wait for the stream of English sailors to end before they could come aboard. They crowded together, vainly pointing their weapons at them as they passed. 'Ramrod' had managed to remove the rod from his rifle, but like his fellow shipmates, had not primed the firing mechanism. As the English sailors and pirates moved past them, they all furiously worked to add a bit of powder to their firing mechanisms and flipped the frizzen closed.

As the men filed onto the boat, Nonn beckoned one over. Holding the musket at 'port arms' he moved to his captain. "Captain?"

"Take two men and search the ship to make sure there are no stowaways." He pointed at one of the hatches leading below. "Do the best you can in short order." With all the cubby holes and crannies on a ship, he hoped that all the sailors were above deck or clearly visible below. A good search would take the better part of two hours- time he did not have.

With a nod, the man grabbed two compatriots and went below decks. Captain Nonn moved to the railing to where his sailors were guarding their captives. He had five sailors with pistols guarding what looked like twenty-five Englishmen. He turned to look at the ship. Several of his crewmen were busying themselves preparing sails; several others were busy with other tasks. "Give me five men," he ordered. "With rifles, if you please." The men moved to him quickly. "Lean over

this railing and provide cover for a moment. Then I want you five to go down and accompany them to where we beached the longboats."

The men moved to the railings, placing the stocks of their muskets on it for support. When they were in position, Nonn leaned over the railing. "Up here!" He called. All the men – his and captive alike- looked up. "Search them for weapons. If anyone tries anything, they will be shot. Once they are searched, wait for these five. Then move to the longboats." Even with ten armed men, Nonn was worried the Englishmen would try to overpower them, or make a break for the jungle. He had no idea that there were another dozen sailors still loose on the island. And they were armed. "I don't want any trouble from anyone; we're not aboard ship so leaving the captives here is the plan." He added, hoping to discourage any heroics.

Chapter XIX
One More Battle Yet

After the English sailors were disarmed, the musket-wielding pirates quickly moved down to assist in moving them to the longboats. Nonn watched them until they rounded the bend in the tiny island.

As he turned back around, the ship leaned left then right as it finally got enough water under it to remain afloat. "Sweeps!" Commanded Captain Nonn as he moved amidships. Now that they were afloat, in a newly cleaned ship, he did not want it battered against the cliff. "Get us pushed off!" He looked around the deck as the men began to move to their positions. He moved to the helm and relieved the sailor there. "Mister Smith, assist with the sweeps. If this ship is going to be sunk on its maiden voyage, I should be the one at the helm."

The sailor had not considered that option. Now that he had, he was glad to be below assisting with the oars- far from any sort of blame. "Aye!" He ran to the hatch and dropped out of sight.

Since the ship was nosed in, the flat stern was being slapped by waves, pushing the ship forward. "Pull us off!" Nonn called. The sailors on the deck moved to the side of the ship alongside the cliff. They

grasped the cliff and began to pull in an attempt to back the ship out. *If I'm ever here again, I'll put in stern first.* Slowly the ship began to move along the cliff, scraping as it went. Nonn couldn't help but smile. "Your first battle scars, Mister Whiddon."

As the aft-most positions cleared the jetty, long oars ran out the sides and began to shove water forward. As the third set entered, the ship began to make definitive progress against the waves. Thanks to the impromptu dry dock being on the side of the isle facing the larger island - even though it was several miles away- the waves they fought against were smaller than the ocean-side of the isle. Within twenty grueling minutes, the ship had backed out completely and the starboard oarsmen changed direction, pivoting the ship about. As it moved parallel to the isle, the sailors on deck dropped the main sail. It billowed into form and pulled the ship away from the shore. Captain Nonn looked up at the sails as he spun the wheel to coax more forward movement out of the ship. Being a smaller sloop, it required less wind than the *18 Fathoms* and it quickly gained speed. Nonn turned the wheel to bring the ship back parallel to the shore as it scooted deftly around the jetty. "We'll drop sail and use the sweeps to get alongside the *18 Fathoms* and tie up to her. She's down to one anchor so we'll set our two to keep her steady while we get the mast rigged."

The sailors on the deck nodded as they moved about the deck. Even though the sizes were different, pretty much all sailing ships were basically laid out the same. With one less mast, and less rigging, tending the *Dawn's Delight* was easy work for them.

As the ship rounded a small outcropping, the *18 Fathoms* came into view. "We'll drop the sails and let her coast in close." Nonn looked over at the beach casually as the ship moved closer to his. There was a full-blown battle taking place on the shore. "Belay that! Drop the sail and anchors and ready the longboats!" He could see that his men had tied the English sailors together and they all sat in a long line, crouched forward in hopes no wayward shot hit them, or worse- the pirates behind them decided just to dispatch them. For the moment, the pirates were being kept busy by the British sailors in the jungle.

"Cut the longboats free and load the port cannons!" Nonn shouted. He was in danger of losing over a dozen men from the English hunting party. Now that they had two ships, he really didn't have that many to spare. As it looked, two were already dead or injured. The others cowered behind the three longboats of the *18 Fathoms* as they tried to return fire to their unseen adversaries. The forward and aft anchor splashed into the water simultaneously. As chain played out, the sailor tending the large spool at the front of the ship kept his eye on his shipmate at the back anchor. After a mere fifty feet had played out, he raised a hand then locked the mechanism in place. The ship slid forward another dozen feet before it lurched to a stop as the anchors dug in. Normally, it was the weight of the chain that kept a ship in place, but with time short, the two had decided -rightfully so- to forgo another fifty to seventy-five feet of chain.

Captain Nonn was pleased they were still showing their port cannons to the isle. "Fire at will!" He called as he left the now useless

wheel and moved to four longboats secured in the middle of the deck, between the sails. "Off the starboard side so the guns can fire," he said as he assisted in getting the longboat to the railing. Eschewing any rigging to lower the boats into the water, he ordered them dropped over the side. With a large splash, the boat hit the clear blue water. Not waiting, he grabbed a rope and tossed it over the side, moving down it as it went. He reached the boat as it was floating away from the ship. The second boat splashed in the water in front of the one he occupied. "Get in, you maggots! We've men dying!" He called up. Obediently, the sailors clambered down the side of the ship and into the longboats. "Cast off!" He said as one of the ship's cannons fired. Then another. "Move straight behind our other longboats so we've some cover." He said as the longboats paddled around the *Dawn's Delight* and into sight of the beach. Nonn cursed to himself- two more men seemed to be hit. "Don't fire until we get up to our men. When we land, get the boats up and sideways to get behind." The men nodded as they furiously paddled for the shore. The rest hunkered down. Even though they were well over 100 yards from where the Englishmen were probably firing from, a stray shot would kill them just as efficiently as a well-aimed one.

Chapter XX
Crossfire

Mr. Whiddon and his men moved through the jungle toward where they knew their ship was anchored. They were moving slowly since they were dragging two full grown boars.

"Are we goin' the right way?" Asked a pirate.

"Ollie, you can navigate the boundless seas and not get lost, yet a half hour in the jungle has you turned around?" Asked another to the laughter of the rest of the men.

"Well, you can't see the sun nor the stars very well from here, now can you?"

"It's not but a little farther," assured Mr. Whiddon.

The crack of a musket echoed through the forest. Then another. The pirates all crouched down. "What's that?"

"Ollie, I swear, you get on land and you're as helpful as a teat on one of these," said one of the pirates as he pointed at one of the boars. The rest all laughed again.

"Quiet down," said Mr. Whiddon. "Sounds like it's the beach." He stood up. "Let's get there and see what is going on. Mayhap those Englishmen have waylaid our good captain."

"What about the boars?"

"Bring them. They'll be good for cover, then a meal." He gestured toward the sound of the gunfire. "Let's go!"

The group made their way towards the gunfire until a round clattered through the underbrush between them. The group turned sharply to the right, moving parallel to the shore and the sounds of the battle.

Finally, the group made it to the edge of the jungle. Directly ahead of them about fifty yards, they could see the barrels of muskets poke out of the jungle, fire, then pull back to be reloaded. Down the beach toward the water, almost forty yards away, they could also see their compatriots hunkered down behind their longboats. "It looks like Gibbs and Piggy are shot," said a Pirate. "What you want us to do, Mister Whiddon?"

Mr. Whiddon stopped to appraise the situation -as he had seen his captain do on many occasions. 'Slow is fast and fast is dead', Captain Nonn had often remarked. 'Take just a moment, appraise the situation, then you can act appropriately.' Mr. Whiddon did just that, seeing that the English ship was sailing towards the *18 Fathoms*. Or more precisely, coasting up to it. *Our men are going to be caught in a crossfire. We need to get*

them out. As he watched, the aft anchor dropped into the water. A familiar figure seemed to be at the helm. "That devil." Mr. Whiddon remarked. "That sly devil." He turned to his men. "Spread out here and move forward enough that you can get a good shot but still duck down to not be hit when they fire our way. Captain Nonn is on that Brit ship so we've reinforcements on the way." He pointed at the pirates behind the longboats. "They should be able to help keep those Brit sailor's heads down and we'll have them in a crossfire." He moved to a crouch. "Leave the hogs for the celebration later." He moved into the jungle toward the British Soldiers, his men close behind.

As Mr. Whiddon's men took up their positions, he moved behind them, "We'll fire all at once to put them off balance. When I fire, you all fire." He dropped to the ground between two pirates. "Fire at what will be waist high on them. Their muskets seemed kind of high so they're firing from a typical British knee." He aimed in the general direction of the rapports and fired. As soon as he did, his men all fired. And a cannon fired simultaneously. Then another.

The pirates all ducked down. "It's Captain Nonn, gents," assured Mr. Whiddon. "Reload quickly." Two more cannon fired as the men reloaded. "Hold on!" Mr. Whiddon called. He looked left and right. His men looked back at him. "Anyone hear any shots come our way?"

The pirates all shook their heads.

"The cannon drowned out our shots. They don't know we're here." A thought occurred to him. "Let's move behind them and flush them out onto the beach." He began to move to a kneeling position.

The pirate beside him grabbed his shoulder. "But Mister Whiddon, if we get beyond them sailors, our own folk's shots that miss them will be coming our way."

"Ahh, point taken." Mister Whiddon nodded. "An excellent observation, Mister Tucker. Let's not move *that* far behind them then; just to an angle so that we're shooting at their backs. That might get them to scoot out in the open." Another round of shots came from the jungle in front of them. "Move while they're reloading!" He grabbed the arm of the man holding his sleeve and pulled him along.

"Calm down Tom," said the man as he moved beside him. "There's plenty of time for glory."

"Mister Cochran, the time for glory is *now*," Mr. Whiddon grinned at him. "Let's go, Nate!"

The man shook his head, "Tom, you are indeed a nut." Nevertheless, he moved beside his friend and the pair led the way another thirty yards closer and to the rear of where the British soldiers were.

As they got there, the cannons fired again. A half-dozen rounds bounced through the jungle, slamming into trees and showering the British sailors with splinters and sand. The splinters were an annoyance

and far from deadly, however two sailors were hit by bounding cannonballs. They fared much worse.

"Fire!" called Mr. Whiddon has he fired at a standing sailor. The round went wide, hitting the tree beside him. The sailor turned as the rest of the pirates shot. Someone else's round hit the man squarely in the chest.

"Tom, you're a great leader, an excellent sailor and truth be told a fine friend, but you can't shoot worth shit."

Mister Whiddon looked down at his friend. "Is that so?"

"Yeah, you startled him, but I got his attention." Nate grabbed his friend's shirt and pulled him to the ground as a volley of rounds passed over them. "Now they've got *my* attention." He rolled to his side and began the reloading process.

"You sure you're just not startled?"

The pirates laughed at their First Mate and his best friend.

Mr. Whiddon shrugged. "Well, they got mine too, *truth be told*," he said to his friend and future first mate. He began to reload his musket as well. "Anyone hit?" When none replied, he continued: "We'll fire again, and when they fire then reload, we're going to charge them. They're on the edge of the jungle..." He was drowned out as another volley of cannons was sent their way. "Then we'll charge them and push them out onto the sand. Once the sailors on board see us, they won't fire the

cannons again, and the ones on the beach will come to our aid and we'll cut them all down between us."

"Audacious as our captain, I see," said Ollie. He held his rifle with the muzzle slightly upward- like the other pirates' weapons, it was reloaded. "Ready when you are, I suppose."

"Make sure you stay close so you don't end up running the wrong way," said a pirate behind Ollie.

Ollie craned his neck to look as a volley from the British soldiers ripped through the underbrush around them. Two pirates down from Ollie, a man flopped forward, a bullet through his head.

Not waiting to take another count of his men, Mister Whiddon jumped to his feet, his musket in front of him. "Charge!" He began to run, confident whatever men he had left, were behind him.

In fact, all except three were; one because he was dead, and two because they were too busy trying to staunch the flow of blood from wounds to their arms.

As Mister Whiddon pushed through the jungle, he counted to himself, hoping he reached the men before he got to fifteen. At that point, he expected to be fired upon, point blank. As he got to ten, he saw the British soldiers in front of him. They were down on a knee, in a classic 'L' pattern so they could engage both fronts- the jungle attackers, and the ones on the beach. Mister Whiddon aimed and fired while running at the nearest sailor. The round glanced the man in the

shoulder, spinning him to the ground. Mister Whiddon dropped his musket and drew his saber, still running at full speed. The rapports of rifles on both sides let him know he wasn't alone in his charge. Several sailors fell. One sailor raised his musket and pointed it to Mister Whiddon's left. He brought the musket's butt up to his cheek as he took steady aim. Whoever he was aiming at didn't stand a chance. Mr. Whiddon raised his hands up over his head- he was a mere five yards from the sailor, who only due to his tunnel-vision on his intended target has failed to notice him. "Hey sailor!" he called, waving his arms, trying to draw his attention. "HEY-O!"

The sailor squinted his non-firing eye and exhaled, then opened it wide as Mister Whiddon called to him. Suddenly presented with two targets, he hesitated, moving the rifle between the two, yet not really aiming at either. He raised the musket up to defend himself as Mister Whiddon brought his saber down on it. Three of the sailor's fingers went flying as they were caught between the sharp steel blade and the hard wood of the musket. The unfired musket dropped uselessly to the ground as the sailor grabbed the spurting ends of his fingers with his free hand. As he sat back, eyes focused on his hand, another pirate stabbed him through the chest.

Caught off-guard by the charge, the sailors facing the threat on the beach jumped to their feet and moved into the open to avoid the advancing pirates. The ones facing the jungle were all cut down as the pirates moved through them. Not even stopping to pick up the muskets- there was no telling if they were actually fully loaded or not, the mass of

pirates pushed the remaining ten sailors onto the white sands. After a full twenty feet, the sailors turned to make their stand.

A lone cannon fired. For a split second everyone froze. The round sailed on a nearly flat trajectory through the entire group of men -pirate and sailor alike- and into the jungle without hitting anyone. With Mister Whiddon in the lead, the pirates closed the distance between them, pushing the sailors even farther back, towards the pirates who had left the cover of the longboats and were closing the distance from their end. Nonn was leading that charge up the beach with half the men. The other half guarded the tied-up sailors to ensure the odds remained with the pirates.

The British sailors tried to fight off what suddenly was twice their numbers in vain. Within several minutes, all the sailors were dead. In a testament to the sailor's training, so was one pirate, as well as two were injured.

"Nice to see you again, Captain," said Mister Whiddon as he saluted with his bloodied sword.

"Good hunting, I hope?" Asked Nonn.

Mr. Whiddon turned to look at the jungle. "The rest of them are dead back there, so yes..." His face brightened. "And we got us two boar as big as Ollie." He pointed at the rotund sailor.

"That big?"

"Well, maybe not that big, but pretty close."

"I kin hear you talking, y'know."

Captain Nonn laughed. "Sorry about that, Mister Ollie. Really I am. Everyone has shown their mettle today, indeed."

"Thanks, Captain," said Ollie. He smiled. "They are pretty big hogs though."

"Well, let's get the wounded tended to, the dead buried, then we'll see about getting those hogs cleaned up and cooking."

A sailor- one of the cooks stepped up to Nonn. "Hog'll take a while to cook." He looked at the sky. The sun was past overhead. "It'll be good and dark before it's ready or you'll have a bunch of sick sailors. Which means I need to get started now. Where're those hogs?"

Mister Whiddon pointed towards the forest as two pirates staggered out of it, one had a bloody rag clutched to his arm, the other to his shoulder. "They're in the jungle that way, Stiles, behind where those two came from." He looked toward the men who were wiping their blades on the dead sailor's uniforms. "Help those two!" he ordered. "Ben Hunt is also there with the hogs. He needs buried." He pointed at several men. "Accompany the cook there, then help him with getting those hogs cleaned and cooking."

"Let's get going," Stiles said. "We need all the time we can get." He beckoned for the two sailors to follow as he marched off. "Now!"

Captain Nonn put his arm on his First Mate's shoulder. "I think I'll accept your resignation right about now, Tom."

The First Mate realized he had been ordering the men in the presence of their Captain. A serious faux pas. "Sorry about that, Sir." His shoulders sagged. "I truly am." Then Nonn's words sank in. "My what?"

Captain Nonn pointed at the *Dawn's Delight*, "I came across that so I brought it around for you. I figured you could use your own proper ship since your first one was more a floating dock than anything else. Even though you sank a ship from it; what a sight that was."

"You got me a *sloop*?"

"My first ship was a knockabout. It took me a year to get something with a bow sprint." Countered Nonn, defensively.

Now Whiddon put his hand on Nonn's shoulder, "Oh no; that wasn't a complaint *at all*." He smiled broadly. "I meant- you got me a sloop!"

Nonn returned the smile. "That I did."

"It's not a bad name, but you'll likely want to change it so you don't have every British sailor you come across giving you what for."

"That I will, Captain." He paused. "I'm not sure to what, but something appropriate will come to me, I'm sure."

With a nod the pair moved to where the several sailors were still moving among the dead Brits. They were picking up swords and pistols- always good items to have in large supply. "There'll be time for that later." He said over his shoulder to his former First Mate. "In the meantime, we need to get the *18 Fathoms* back in order so that we can sail both ships away from this blasted isle before anyone else shows up."

"Aye, aye," said one Pirate with a lopsided smile due to a musket shot through his cheek years before. He put a British hat on his head. With a finger he cocked it jauntily to one side. "*Commodore*."

Nonn smirked. "Just stick to your tasks, sailor. There'll be time to muck about once we're underway."

With a nod, the sailor joined several others who were heading back to the *18 Fathoms* to drop off the new-found supplies and to assist in the repairs.

Chapter XXI
Shore Leave

The pirates moved around the beach, gathering boots, belts, and other effects from the dead sailors as they buried them as well as their own.

"Stealing from the dead?" Said the English Captain to Nonn as he approached. "That's what I'd expect from pirates."

"They've no use for their earthly possessions anymore," said Nonn. "It's not like my sailors have the great British Empire to supply them with items, now do they?" He frowned at the man. "And, I'll point out that my men are burying your men properly which is more than you would have done for us."

"You'll forgive me if I don't hold pirates in high regard."

Captain Nonn gave a shrug. "It's a profession like any other. The rank and file that follow that calling are no less deserving of a decent burial at the end of their career than any other."

"Well then, I'll have to make sure I give you a proper burial."

"That will be difficult to do with you tied up on the sand like a turtle, captain."

"What are your intentions for me and my crew?" Captain Warren asked. "The day is still hot. Are we to be left in the sun to bake?"

Nonn turned from Captain Warren, leaving the question unanswered. "I have other matters to attend to." As he moved toward the longboats, he took a sailor by the arm. "Get two men and tend to the prisoners."

The pirate put his hand on his pistol. "Aye, sir. We'll dispatch them."

Captain Nonn startled. "No, no; just watch them so they don't try to escape. We've other things to deal with at the moment and I want the men to calm down and stay on their tasks. Not turn into a band of murdering dogs."

The sailor moved his hand from this pistol. "Sorry, Sir. I just figured that..." The sailor seemed confused by the sudden mercy being displayed by his more often than not, ruthless captain.

"We may need them yet if any other ships show up before we leave," explained Captain Nonn. "When we're sure we're leaving this isle, then we'll clip off the telltales."

Back in familiar territory, the sailor gave a crisp salute to his captain and moved off.

"Keep an eye on things here ashore, Nate," said Nonn. "I'll get aboard my ship to see about the repairs." He looked around the beach. There were groups of sailors standing about chatting, with only a few muscling the large pigs to where another pair were digging a large trench. "Get these sailors on task with cooking those pigs or we'll never eat."

Nate nodded at the other. "Right. And I'll get some more out and about to get supplies while we wait."

With a nod, Captain Nonn moved to his gig. There were two sailors standing by it, also chatting. "While you're spending the day recounting won battles, how about we go to the ship and get repairs moving along so we can be around for future battles?" He snapped as he started pushing his gig into the surf.

The two sailors quickly went to the aid of the captain, assisting in getting the small boat into the water. Once they were all knee-deep, Captain Nonn hopped onto the boat and took a paddle. The other two followed suit as the water quickly reached their waists. "Let's get going so we'll be back in time to eat." He said to them as he began to row. "I want to be underway before the sun comes up."

With nods, the two put extra effort into getting to the *18 Fathoms* quickly.

Within a few minutes, the gig bounced against the worn side of Captain Nonn's ship. He grabbed the rope and wood ladder that was hanging down the side of the boat. There were two longboats tied to the bottom of the ladder, bouncing off the hull with the waves. Nonn pulled himself onto the ladder. "Get on a longboat and back to shore and report to Captain Whiddon to see what tasks need to be done," he ordered as he began to climb. "I can manage my gig myself."

The two pushed off the side of the ship to return to the beach. Before they were two yards away from the ship, a heated discussion erupted about the newly promoted First Mate.

Captain Nonn climbed up the ladder with practiced ease. When he got to the railing, he rolled over it, landing on his feet. "What's the status of the rigging?" He said to no one in particular. He knew that if the sailors working on the deck didn't know right away, the question would be relayed to the Master Carpenter and he would get his report soon after.

A sailor approached Nonn. "Sir, we've not enough rope aboard to properly secure the mast but Mister Ederer has gone to the *Dawn's Delight* to see what rigging is in her stores. He said if there weren't what he needed there, he wanted to check that ship that was sitting on its keel that Mister Whiddon was on." He looked to the other ship. "He should be back soon enough or do you want me to go fetch an update now?"

"Fetch the update, Miller. If we can't fix this ship then we'll leave on the other."

"We'd abandon her just like that?"

Nonn shrugged at the sailor. "Never get too attached to a ship. They are just tools to get a job done; once that tool is used up, you get another."

The sailor grinned at Nonn. "So, they're like wenches then. Aye, Sir. I'll fetch an update." The sailor gave a wave then jogged across the deck and vaulted the railing from one ship to the other. Since the battle ended ashore, the two ships had been lashed together to provide quick access back and forth as repairs were done and supplies were evened between the two.

Nonn watched the man go as he cleared the other ship's railing and scooted to the hatch to go below deck. Morale was definitely high after coming through the battle against three ships - four really, if the one currently tied alongside the *18 Fathoms* was counted- with the ship intact and very light losses. He knew, however, that morale would take a quick turn if the sailors didn't see any profit from their actions. Stories of victorious battles were fine to have, but if there were no coins to buy drinks to tell them over, or wenches to tell them to, they were not very useful. Nonn needed to get moving toward the Isle of Saona to see what was worth the sacrifice of an entire ship and her crew.

He looked up; sailors were climbing the rigging like so many spiders repairing a web. There was quite a bit of chatter among the men as they went about their tasks of retying the rigging with what lines they could scrounge from the ship's stores. Nonn frowned- they should have had

enough line to re-rig the mast but repairs the month prior after a storm had used up their supply of rope. Even though they had made several port calls, and successfully sacked two ships, they hadn't taken the time to acquire more lines. *Next port call, a full complement of lines will be at the top of our list.* Nonn smirked. *Unless a nicer ship presented itself before then.* "Sorry old gal," he said aloud. "I'll make sure I take your name with me when I go."

The sailor reemerged from the hatch and once again vaulted the railing from the one ship, clearing the second, and landing on the deck. He trotted over. "Sir, there's plenty of line to get the job done from the *Dawn's* stores. Seems they'd restocked the stores recently. Mister Ederer is checking his figures again before he sends over the line to finish the job. He said he'd going to need two dozen hands to get the tension right so if you can get the men here, he says he can have the mast ready for wind in three hours." He smiled, happy that he not only had a complete and positive report to give, but that he had remembered all the important details.

"Two dozen *more* hands, or two dozen total?"

The sailor frowned. "I didn't ask that..."

"I believe he means two dozen total. Twelve fore and twelve aft."

"I'm really not sure, captain." The sailor admitted. He had never re-strung a mast before.

"From previous experience, a dozen each end should work." Nonn raised an eyebrow at Mister Moore. "How many men are on board right now?" Captain Nonn asked casually.

The sailor frowned again. "Sir, I haven't... That is, I don't know how to..." His shoulders drooped. "I have no idea, Sir."

Captain Nonn pointed at the man. "Ciphering is an important ability, Mister Moore. You need to learn it." He looked around the deck and up at the rigging. There seemed to be ten men already aboard the ship. "I'll send over enough to manage the job." Leaving the frowning sailor, he turned to where the rope ladder was tied to the railing. As he went, he mentally kicked himself for sending two sailors to shore that he was just going to order back to the ship. Having to countermand one's orders did not grow confidence.

Nonn got into his gig and untied it from the ladder and pushed off. Thanks to the tide having stopped coming in, it took him a little longer to get to shore. Nonn stepped off his gig into the water. Grabbing the painter, he hauled the small craft out of the water enough that it wouldn't wash away- for a while anyway. There were several sailors moving towards him, arms loaded with wood. There was now a long trench - long enough for both pigs to fit in nose to tail- with a large amount of wood in it already ablaze. The pigs were gutted and waiting to be interred. Nonn took a moment to appreciate the efficiency going on all over the beach. Then a musket rapport took him from his reverie. He looked at the prisoners. They had been moved to the shade of a coconut tree and were still tied together at their hands. They were all cowering.

As Nonn moved to the group, he saw that one of the Englishmen was laying back on the sand, a neat hole in his head. He twitched as he approached. "What is going on?" He asked tersely.

"Caught him trying to escape, Cap'n," explained a sailor as he reloaded his musket. The two sailors with him nodded.

"He was killed in cold blood," said Captain Warren.

"No, he weren't!"

"What else would you call it?" Countered the British Captain as the other prisoners nodded their heads and mumbled to each other.

Not wanting to take the side of the Englishman, Nonn moved close to the Pirate. "Escaping?"

The sailor nodded at his captain furiously. "Check his hands, captain. One of em's untied. He was reaching in his pocket when I shot him," he said quietly. Then louder so the rest of the prisoners could hear: "I told them all to sit nice and still, but all they did was complain about being in the sun, so we fin'lly moved them to the shade and told them t'sit still an' nothing'd 'appen to them. I even told them we'd get them a drink if they did what we asked. But they can't follow that simple request without acting up."

Nonn turned and moved to the dead sailor. He reached down and picked up his untied hand. "Seems like a simple request." He let the hand drop to the sand. "I suggest you all try to muster the ability to

follow it or you'll join this one here." He looked at one of the pirates. "Check their hands while they cover you." He looked at Captain Warren. "If anyone moves or causes any trouble, shoot them then their captain." Nonn shook his head as he moved away from the prisoners. He half considered just having them all killed outright, but shooting tied, unarmed men would probably rub some of his men the wrong way, and he needed them focused to get off the isle as quickly as possible. Besides, if another ship did arrive before they left, the live prisoners could be enough bargaining power to get away. From previous experience, tossing English sailors overboard at regular intervals as he sailed away was an effective way to get a pursuing ship to slow down to pick them out of the water. And it was quite entertaining as well.

Nonn looked at the fire pit. The Cook seemed to have three sailors assisting in placing wood in the roaring fire. He would point and bark an order and a sailor would toss a piece of wood in that location. If the wood didn't land exactly where he intended, a river of obscenities would be hurled at the poor sailor. On top of that, the fire seemed barely in control. "You going to let that burn down?" Nonn asked. "We need to get the crew fed and underway once the mast is ready."

"Cookin's what I do, captain." Stiles eyed his superior. "Cookin's what I do real *good*."

Of all the crew, Stiles was the one that seemed to mouth off to any anyone and everyone. He would also go on violent tantrums, throwing pots, pans, or anything else handy. Sometimes even when he was alone. Truth be told, he was an excellent cook. Once in fact, after a two-hour

long tantrum, he had made up for it by taking the time to remove all the weevils from grubby bread, fried them with coconut milk and some other spices, then served the resulting spread on the toasted remains of the bread, making what was probably the best late afternoon snack Nonn or anyone in the crew had ever had. Since then, everyone -Nonn included- tended to overlook the eccentric cook. To a point.

"Get those pigs properly cooked. We don't have time for some fancy recipe. I need fed and able sailors to get underway as soon as possible." Nonn said flatly to the man.

Stiles took several deep breaths.

Nonn braced himself for the building tantrum. He was prepared to leave the man behind if his crew didn't get to eat. There were limits to the allowances Nonn would make even for the cook.

"Aye, Sir," Stiles said simply. "Get some long green coconut frons and couple buckets of sea water and we'll get these pigs to roasting." Not wanting to be cursed at anymore, the sailors spread out to achieve their tasks.

Nonn turned from the cooking area. "What kind of shore leave is this becoming?" He asked no one in particular. Spotting his fellow captain, he gestured at him.

"What's the word with the ship, captain?" Nate asked as he jogged over. "Any longer ashore here and we'll need to elect a mayor."

Captain Nonn smiled at his friend. "Ederer needs probably fifteen men aboard to get the mast secured. There's enough line aboard your ship to make it happen."

Nate nodded. "That's good to hear. It'd be real crowded with all of us on that sloop. How long will it take?"

"Three hours he says."

Nate laughed. "Then it'll be done in two."

Nonn nodded. Invariably when Mister Ederer gave a time estimate for some dire task, he added half again as much time to what he needed. Then, when he accomplished the task quicker than his original estimate, he would beam and gloat the remainder of the day. "Probably so. But we need to get more men aboard."

Nate pointed at the fire pit. The sailors, under the cook's watchful eye, were wrapping the pigs in long coconut leaves, using the sinew from additional leaves to hold them in place. "No one can cook a whole pig in two hours. Not even him."

Nonn smirked. "You want me to go tell him he's got less than three hours to have those pigs ready or we'll leave them behind?"

Nate put his hand on Nonn's shoulder. "He's your cook, Nonn. I've yet to have one elected for my sloop." He looked at the cook, who was once again sewing together a colorful and imaginative string of expletives. "Besides, I'm not that brave."

Nonn laughed. "Fine, Nate, fine. Get my ship up and running and I'll deal with that devil of a cook."

"Deal," Nate said. "I don't envy you your task though. He's a great cook, but I don't think he's all there."

"If you want him, I could be in the market for a new cook."

"No deal." Nate moved off quickly before any more negotiations took place, grabbing sailors as he went. When he had a large group, they went to the two longboats, pushed them out, and made for the ships. Nate wanted nothing more than to be off the beach when the Cook was given the new timetable.

Nonn set a grim look on his face as he approached the Cook.

"They're going on now. Five hours and you'll have some of the best pork you've ever tasted."

"You've got…" Nonn's resolution faltered. "Two and a half hours at the most. We'll be underway by then.."

The Cook looked from his captain to the pigs and back again twice. The sailors stopped wrapping the pigs in the leaves to watch what would most likely be an entertaining eruption from the cook. "What?" The man seethed.

"I have neither the time, nor the patience to deal with any of your antics. You claim to be a master cook? You have two and a half hours.

Make this happen or the pigs won't be the only thing I leave behind on this cursed isle."

The cook drew his saber.

The three sailors who were watching the exchange stood quickly.

Nonn rested his hand on his pistol, neatly tucked into his belt. It was loaded and primed. He kept his eyes trained on the now-armed Stiles.

The two stared at each other for a long ten seconds. Other sailors on the beach turned to watch.

"We're making cutlets and chitterlings," said the Cook flatly as he pointed his saber at the sailors. "Now get your blades out because we've got to butcher these hogs." He didn't make eye contact with Nonn- as if the sight of him would ignite whatever fury he kept stoked at all times. "We'll need to get the meat on right away so it has as near to two and a half hours to cook as possible!"

The sailors looked at their captain. His nod provoked them to action; they drew their swords and moved to the cook.

As Nonn walked off, the cook let loose a vulgarity-filled tirade that was interspersed with instructions.

Over the next three hours – thanks to an issue with the rigging, the carpenter's initial estimate stood fast- Nonn sat and watched as the

sailors guarding the prisoners checked and rechecked their bindings, the cook ranted at his helpers, and several other sailors created a large pile of coconuts on the shore since all the longboats were moored to the two ships. Several empty barrels of water were even floated ashore and were filled from a nearby spring. *Strangest shoreleave I've ever partaken in*, Nonn mused.

Chapter XXII
Unwelcome Visitors

A pistol rapport from the *Dawn's Delight* made Captain Nonn look. Tom Whiddon was waving his arms over his head and gesturing at the mast of the *18 Fathoms*. Nonn took off his hat and waved it at him. Tom dropped his arms and moved away from the railing.

Nonn stood and walked to the cook. "Well, we ended up giving you a full three hours. What have you to say about the meat?"

The cook looked at the smoking mounds. "It's definitely cooked enough and safe to eat, captain." He nodded. "I know the men will appreciate you giving me that extra time."

"You know that we were waiting on the mast to be re-rigged, *not* the pigs to cook."

"Same thing." Stiles shrugged.

"Get that meat ready to move," Captain Nonn ordered. "We won't wait another moment for you."

The Cook nodded. "Oh, we'll be ready." He turned to the three pirates that had become impromptu assistant cooks. "Let's get the meat dug out and the meat moved to the boat!"

Surprised that the command wasn't given with a steam of curses, the men hesitated.

The curses followed soon after.

Nonn moved to the three pirates guarding the Englishmen. He leaned in close to one of them. "We're leaving. Both ships are repaired. Stay here and guard the men."

The pirate's eyes got large. "Sir?"

Nonn put his arm on the pirate. "If these prisoners see we're leaving they might try something as our presence on the beach dwindles. They may try to take prisoners from us to bargain their way off this island. I don't want to risk any of my men for the likes of these."

"But Sir," said the pirate again, afraid he was being left behind.

Captain Nonn was taken aback. "Think we'll leave you behind? After all we've been through already today?" He shook his head. "Don't worry, sailor." Nonn smiled at the man. "You're coming to help steal the treasure we were promised earlier." He put his hand on the man's shoulder. "We're going to load up and get the meat aboard first. Nice and quiet like. Then the remaining pirates will quickly make for the longboats."

The pirate nodded. "Yes, captain. And... us?"

"You're going on my gig with me. I'll get it in the water and when I do, you and your two cohorts are to make a dash for my gig. We're making a quick end of this shore leave before our prisoners are aware and can formulate a plan of attack."

The pirate smiled. "Sounds good to me captain."

"Let your two cohorts know the plan but tell them to not let on; I don't need an incident when we're this close to being on our way."

"Yes, sir," said the sailor. He moved quickly to his two comrades and explained the plan in hushed tones.

Nonn walked over to the English Captain. "I'm glad to see your men have taken to captivity so well." He looked back to where the cook was through uncovering the pigs. He was now slicing meat off of the carcasses that he felt were also cooked enough to go along with the fillets he had cut earlier. "There's a spring just over there." He pointed behind the tied-up group. "And plenty of meat will be left behind as well. More is cooked every moment." He shifted his pointing to the captain. "If your behavior stays constant."

"We'll abide by your request." The man said simply in return.

Nonn knew that he, like his men, had to be hungry by now. The offer of food would help ensure they didn't try anything drastic.

The cook seemed to have all the meat he saw as fit to eat heading to the first longboat wrapped in palm fronds- a dozen men were making their way to there, each carrying a large bundle. Satisfied Nonn moved to the beach to where they were loading the smoking meat. "Get to the ships and tell Captain Whiddon that I want all his cannon loaded and trained on those prisoners. As soon as he sees the three sailors guarding them make for my gig, I want him to open fire."

"Sir?"

"The prisoners are of no use to us anymore." He put his hand on a sailor's shoulder. "Williams, tell Captain Whiddon," He repeated, "when he sees those three guards make for my gig, he's to open fire on the prisoners to keep them busy while we make our escape."

Williams nodded at Nonn. "Got it sir."

As the longboat was pushed off into the water, the remaining sailors came to the beach. Nonn noticed the Englishmen were fidgeting. He went to meet his pirates. "Men, look over here," he said as he pointed off to his right into the jungle. "I want you to all get into those longboats faster than you've ever done before." He pointed further off into the jungle, hoping that the prisoners were watching him do it. A quick glance let him know they were all watching intently. "Now when the meat is all aboard, I want you to rush those two boats and get to the ships as quickly as possible." He gestured across the sky. "I'm going to take the three guards with me and we'll be just behind you in my gig."

"Aye, Sir," said a pirate, "you expecting trouble from them sailors?"

"You never know with British prisoners. Duty, honor, and country and all that." He led the group of men away from the longboats. The food was almost to the ships now. "It all depends on their leader. He might just let us go and be glad to be rid of us." He looked over. Captain Warren was looking at him. "Or he'll want some sort of revenge and try to get it before we're out of his grasp." He put his arm around the man and laughed loudly.

The sailor gaped at him.

"We're acting like we're not going anywhere."

The sailor laughed loudly. It sounded completely forced.

"If you're ever given the opportunity to join a traveling troupe," said Nonn.

"Yes?" The man said expectedly.

"Don't." Nonn walked off as the rest of his men laughed. Not wanting to speak to the English captain again, Nonn made his way down the beach as if he were trying to look further down it. He casually looked back at the beach to see what his men were doing when a pistol rapport echoed past. He looked toward the ships. The shot had come from the sloop. A sailor was moving up the rigging toward the crow's nest. Two others were waiving frantically from the rails and pointing out

of sight around the island behind them. Nonn cursed as he looked back at his men.

They were all looking at him, expectedly.

"To the boats, you maggots; we've company!" He shouted as he ran to his gig.

The men broke into a dead run as their captain shoved his gig into the waves.

Just as Captain Nonn had his gig floating free and had rolled into it, three sailors joined him. "What's wrong, Sir?" Asked one as he took an oar to join his captain.

"There is another ship approaching." He pulled on the oar furiously. "Or ships. We need to get underway before they decide to deal with us instead of the prisoners." He looked back at the beach as he rowed. Captain Warren and two other sailors were free from their ropes and were busy untying his men. Since they were unarmed, they posed no threat. Captain Nonn smiled. If nothing else, they would provide a distraction to whoever was approaching. The men rowed furiously and within minutes, the gig banged against the side of the *18 Fathoms*. The men at the front of the gig clambered up the steps inset in the side of the ship, taking the painter with them. When they reached the top, they tugged on the rope to keep the gig steady as the other sailor and Nonn climbed aboard. Once the gig was empty, the two hauled the gig to the deck by the ropes instead of taking the time to use the pulleys on the

mast. They shoved it towards its place beside the mast. Once the crisis was over, they would secure it properly, along with the two longboats.

Captain Nonn ran to the far railing, closest to Captain Whiddon's ship. "Fire!" He yelled. "FIRE! Damn You!"

A soldier on the other ship moved to the railing. "Captain?" He leaned over the railing precariously as he looked around. "At who?"

Captain Nonn pointed at the island. "At the prisoners! We need a distraction! Fire all cannons before making way." Captain Nonn looked past the man- there was a very large warship approaching. It was less than a mile away and making a hard tack away from them. When it turned back towards the island, the distance between them would be gobbled up quickly. "And make way, for the sake of God Almighty Himself!!"

The sailor nodded and relayed Captain Nonn's orders.

Nonn turned to assess the situation on his ship. Men were moving to their stations, unfurling sails and getting ready to sail off. The rear anchor was already hauled up. The front anchor had not been replaced yet. Where it should have been was a large pile of rope; it just hadn't been spooled onto the capstan. As Captain Nonn moved to the helm, the *18 Fathoms* drifted away from the other ship. A dozen cannon fired at once. Even though they came from the other ship, it was still close enough that it shook the decks. He looked towards the island as he climbed the stairs. Most of the shots missed their marks because the

sailors had been untied, but two hit where sailors were still sitting. Bodies and parts of bodies flew in all directions as the lead balls skipped through the group. *Excellent. Now there is a crisis for that other ship to deal with.*

"Ready to make way, Captain," said Stevens. "With the wind at our three-quarter, we'll make the other side of this speck of land without needing a tack. By the time they get here, we'll be clear on the other side and out of sight." He looked over his shoulder. "That's a fast-looking three-master. Here's hoping they stop to provide assistance to the sailors we just cut up."

"Hoping is no way to get through life," said Captain Nonn. He looked forward. "Load cannon!" He ordered. "Hope is what they talk about over your grave." He put his hand on Stevens' shoulder. "So we need to make it through the day so we're buried on land, eh?"

Stevens nodded. "Aye, Captain."

"Who's steering our other ship?"

"Thompson, Sir."

Captain Nonn nodded. "Good pilot, Thompson." He smiled. "As good as what we've got?"

"Not quite, Sir," said Stevens. "That fast little sloop is liable to get left behind by *this* hopeful sailor if he misreads his telltales."

"Have at it then." Captain Nonn left the man to his work- between the two he would have trusted them equally with his ship. He looked up as the ship lurched under him. The sails billowed and then filled with wind. "Excellent." He moved to the railing closest to the other ship. "Ahoy, Captain!" He called.

Captain Whiddon ran to his railing. "Ahoy to you, captain!" He called. "Where we heading?" He looked over his shoulder. "Straight to Saona?"

"Hispaniola yes, Saona no!" Captain Nonn shouted back.

"No?"

"We are owed a treasure!" He smiled at the other captain. "But first some housekeeping."

The two ships moved steadily apart- there was almost thirty feet between them. The lighter, faster sloop began to overtake the larger ship as its sails filled with the brisk breeze.

Captain Nonn looked at the approaching ship; it had finished its tack and was now heading at an angle toward where he and Captain Whiddon had just been; heading toward the British sailors on the beach. "Nice shooting back there!" He shouted.

"Where'll we rendezvous?" Captain Whiddon called.

"There's this isle to the south. Just a spit of land; Alto Velo south of Isla Beata. It's got the perfect place to bream. Built by a Dutch outfit a few years back but they don't use it no more; Spaniards kicked them out!" Captain Nonn yelled back- the ships were almost fifty feet apart and steadily getting farther away from each other.

Captain Whiddon waved his hand. "Know it! Close to Saona too!" The island was about 225 miles from Saona making it just under a two-day sailing - depending on the wind. "We c'n clean up your ship's hull then head there! Take the north rhumb." Captain Whiddon pointed at Nonn. "South!" He shouted as he pointed at himself.

Captain Nonn only caught half of what his friend had said, but was at least satisfied that the other captain knew where the isle was. Seeing the other's gestures along with 'north rhumb' and 'south' also let him know that the two ships would sail in an arc to their destination. Although it was not the true meaning of the term, he himself had used it before while describing to Whiddon his tactic of two ships sailing an arc to a common destination where the ships were never more than a day's sailing from each other but yet far enough apart that they would seem to be sailing alone if they were spotted. He gave a wave instead of trying to shout anything else. With a return wave from the other captain, both moved to tend their ships.

Chapter XXIII
A Pirate Sendoff

Captain Warren was watching the pirates as they milled around the beach. He was sure they were going to leave them tied up- the offer of food and more water was just a ploy to keep them in check. His plan was to remain submissive until the pirates left, then work on a rescue plan. As long as the pirates didn't just execute them out of hand before they left. He whispered to his men to keep quiet and still until they left so as to not provoke any of them.

A pistol shot made him look up, stomach dropping as he thought the pirates had begun shooting his men. When the pirates scattered and made for their boats, his spirits soared; someone else was approaching! Even marginally friendly ships to England would untie the sailors and provide food, water, and even pistols to hunt with, even if they left them behind. Or they would take them all and demand a ransom at a British port. Either would have been acceptable. He watched as the pirates pushed their longboats into the water like the cowards they were.

Movement on his former ship made him look in that direction. The pirates there were repositioning the cannons in his direction. "Untie yourselves!" He ordered. "They plan on firing at us when they're aboard

the *Dawn's Delight*!" Frantically the men fought with their ropes. Many had managed to untie themselves and were working to free their comrades when the cannons fired on them. Six men were killed outright as the iron balls skipped through the sitting sailors; several others were gravely wounded by glancing blows.

Captain Warren directed his men to use the ropes as tourniquets on the injured sailors as he ran towards the water. He was torn between motioning the approaching ship - or ships- to pursue his and the pirate ship, or to come to the aid of his injured sailors. The screams of his men made duty overcome revenge and he removed his shirt, prepared to wave it to signal whatever vessel passed by no matter what flag it flew.

Captain Warren removed his coat and waved it as the large ship came into view- the Union Flag snapped in the breeze above its topmost sail. Elated, Captain Warren waved frantically at the friendly-flagged ship. When the ship began to angle toward the little cove the isle provided, he turned and ran to his men.

"What is the status of the wounded?" He asked.

A sailor who was covered in blood looked up from the knot he had just tied. He gave his captain a solemn headshake in reply.

"Come here, Talbert," Captain Warren ordered the man.

Talbert walked over to his captain in a daze. He wiped his brow when he got there, only managing to smear blood across it. "It's not good, Sir," he said after a deep breath. "Not good at all."

It was fortunate that Talbert was one of the uninjured; he had been apprenticing with the ship's doctor for the past three months. If nothing else, he had received some sort of training that would ultimately save lives. "How many dead?" the captain said quietly.

"Six, Sir," said Talbert. "And 'nother two shan't make it the hour, I don't imagine." He looked over his shoulder. "They've lost a lot of blood and there's nothing I can do about that."

Captain Warren nodded at the man. "Well do what you can while I greet the shore party. We need to get these men aboard as soon as possible, I should think."

Talbert nodded. "I agree, Sir. Mayhap with a proper surgeon, some of the other'll fare better. Right now I've just stopped the bleeding."

"You've done a fine job. A fine commendable job."

"We need to get those pirates, captain, for what they done to unarmed men."

Captain Warren turned to look at the ship. It had dropped its anchor and was coasting to a stop near the middle of the cove. "Of that, I can assure you." Determined, he marched down the beach to meet the captain of the ship.

Chapter XXIV
Underway

Nonn watched as the *Dawn's Delight* moved farther away. "Meet you there, Tom," he said. Nonn turned to face the island as it shrunk towards the horizon. The other ship had indeed stopped to render aid to the sailors. Nonn felt nothing for the unarmed sailors he had attacked; the safety of his crew -and himself- was the basis for all his decisions. Not having to deal with a pursuit, or worse; yet another battle, was the best he could hope for at the moment. At least for the remainder of the day. Still, he was aware that the other captain, with his own crew's wellbeing at the forefront of his mind, would be searching Nonn out to exact his revenge. "Not today," he said to the isle. "Today we sail off, captain. And I hope to never see you again."

"Captain?" A voice brought Nonn out of his introspection. "Excuse me."

Nonn turned to look at the man. "Yes?"

The man, Brian by name, took off his hat. "Hate to bother you captain, but there's something that needs your attention."

"What now? We're in clear water with the wind at our back." Nonn put his hands on his hips. "Three ships sunk, treasure ahead of us. What needs my attention at this moment?"

"Well, Billings told me to get you so you could deal with the... new crew."

Captain Nonn startled. It was often the case that close encounters at sea resulted in sailors joining opposing crews as opposed to a more-final, more-fatal fate. For the most part, run of the mill sailors were indentured to the company that owned the ship so their loyalties only ran so far. Others were outright slaves who given any sort of chance, would move to another ship that would emancipate them. With ships of the British Navy, it was rare that a sailor would leave 'The Empire' to join a lowly pirating crew. "Oh? We've taken some crew from Her Majesty's finest?"

Brian shrugged. "Not sure where they're from." He pointed. "Billings has got them on the foredeck."

"Fine, fine. I'll deal with that. In the mean-time, pass the word that the crew needs to get back into their routine. Sleep's in order for those that will have the night duty. Mayhap naps for others as long as positions are held." He smiled. "Mister Rather," He said formally. "Are you in the market for a promotion?"

"Sir?"

"The First Mate seems to have abandoned us." He gestured toward the rapidly departing *Dawn's Delight*. "Need someone else to help with the management of the ship."

Brian Rather considered that for a moment. The additional share provided by being in a leadership position would be worth whatever extra work he had to deal with. "Captain Nonn, it would be an honor to serve as your First Mate. As long as the rest of the crew goes along with it." He stuck out his hand.

"We'll know by tomorrow if there are any dissenters. Until such time, the job is yours." Nonn shook the man's hand. "So if you please, get the crew back on some sort of routine so that we aren't slack jawed and droopy-eyed if we encounter any other ships."

"Aye, Sir," said Brian.

"I might even take a trick in my bed once I deal with our new additions." Nonn exhaled. "Mayhap three or four hours."

"I'll know where you are if I need you." Brian said with a smile.

"Then don't need me for three hours." Nonn turned and moved forward. There were three sailors he did not recognize as well as a young man. A very young man. "We breeding powder monkeys below decks?" He remarked as he approached. "Most improper, that."

"Found him down in the hold," said Billings. "Indeed, he was hiding behind the powder."

Nonn nodded. "It's where you'd expect to find a powder monkey." He looked down at the youth. "What's your name? How'd you get here?"

The youth looked at Billings, Nonn, and the other two sailors.

Nonn frowned. "Listen, lad. If you try me, your name will be known by Davey Jones alone because I'll pitch you overboard myself." He pointed at him. "If you want to stay aboard and dry until we get to where we're going where you can then decide if this ship suits you better than land, you'll do well to answer questions when they are posed to you. Especially simple ones like *what is your name.*"

"Thomas, Sir," said the youth. "I hopped the railings from the *Dawn's Delight* when the ships were lashed together."

"How long have you worked on a ship?"

"Almost a year. M'dad sold me for a coupl'a gold coins in Morne Rouge." He paused for the slightest moment. "'Tis in Grenada."

Nonn smirked. "I know where it is, Thomas. So, we have an understanding then?"

The youth looked again at the other two. "Yes sir."

"Fine then." He turned to the other two. "And you two gentlemen. What is it that brings you aboard?"

The pair exchanged glances.

"Well?"

"We were looking to improve our situation," said the first.

"Yes, definitely. Broaden our horizons as it were," the second added.

"Keep them in the brig until I've decided if we're to broaden their horizons or just leave them ashore to join the regular working class."

Billings gave Nonn a nod. "Aye, captain." He gestured to the hatchway that led below. "After you."

The two exchanged glances again. Thanks to both options being non-lethal, they moved to the hatchway and clambered down the steps.

"Now tell me Thomas," said Nonn. "Are you looking to get off somewhere near Hispaniola to make your way back home?"

"Sir?"

"Well, as I see it, you were indentured to the British Navy of which I am definitely not a part. If you are interested in going back to your home, then when we make land, you can find your way back there."

Reflexively, the boy looked out over the water. "Back to Grenada?"

Nonn shrugged. "We'll be seven hundred miles or so from it when we stop. Even so I imagine you can find some sort of ship heading in that direction. A week's easy sail, really."

The boy walked to the railing.

Nonn moved beside him. "Or you stay aboard. We've places to go. Ships to plunder."

The two were silent for a long moment.

"I'm not sure I want to go back. Dad might just sell me again. Then I'd be stuck." He looked up at Nonn. "I'm not stuck here am I?"

"You'll get the same contract anyone on the ship gets. Including myself; everyone serves to their utmost. No one runs in battle. When on land and not under duress, you can make your intention to leave the crew known and part ways with your share of whatever treasure is currently in the hold."

"Even you, Sir?"

"Captains come and go, Thomas." He gestured out at the water. "There is a lot of water and not always a lot of treasure. If this current endeavor does not come to a profitable end, then the crew can vote another into the position. Rightfully so, I might add."

"I believe I will stay aboard then, Sir."

Nonn patted Thomas on the shoulder. "Welcome aboard Mister Thomas. We'll have the word passed among the crew of your position. Oh, and until you are needed in battle, you as with the other lads, assist the cook. Just remember that your position does not always have to be powder monkey or cook's assistant; advancement as skills are learned is the way of life at sea"

"Cap'n Thomas."

"Well, let's give it a year or so, if you please."

"Yes, Cap'n."

"Brian's the First Mate." He held his hand up just over his head. "Tall fellow, missing most of an ear on the left side. Make sure you introduce yourself to him soon." Captain Nonn glanced over his shoulder at the hatchway. "And your two shipmates?"

The boy turned and looked, then returned his gaze to the water. "They're gunner's mates."

"Gunners mates trying to improve their situation?"

"Gunners mates planning to blow up the ship."

"Well, that doesn't fit well into the future of Captain Thomas, now does it?"

The boy continued to look out at the water. "No, sir." He said softly.

"Stop by the cook. The other lads'll be there to explain your duties on this ship." Nonn's stomach growled- he had not had any of the roast pig. "And if you could have someone run some of the pig to my cabin, I would appreciate it."

"Yes, sir." Without looking at Nonn, the boy made his way to the hatchway and disappeared.

Nonn moved amidships. "Where'd the First Mate run off to?" He asked a passing sailor.

"First Mate, sir?" He pointed at the water. "Sailing the other ship, last I heard."

Captain Nonn rubbed his temples. "I am aware of that. I mean…" He stopped when he realized that no one knew that he had appointed Brian Rather as the new first mate for the *18 Fathoms*. "I mean Brian Rather. He's the new first mate."

"One Ear Rather than Two, Brian? No, captain. Haven't seen him."

"Well, if you would please, let him know that the two occupants of the brig need to be pitched overboard."

"We have sailors in the brig? What happened?" His hand went to his sword.

"Calm down; they are stowaways from the original crew of the *Dawn's Delight*. They plan to blow this ship out from under us. If you could assist Billings and Rather in relieving the ship of them, it would be most beneficial to the continued sailing of the ship."

The sailor nodded. "Aye, Sir. I'll go help and I'll bring Wes with me to make sure they go as instructed."

"Wigglesworth?"

"Aye, Sir."

"That's a good choice, I should think."

The man nodded and went in search of the new First Mate.

Captain Nonn looked around and saw that the crew was busy with regular ship tasks. Satisfied that he could disappear for a short time, he made his way to his quarters. Closing the door behind him, he leaned against it as the adrenalin left him. Exhausted from the day's events, he kicked off his boots as he made his way to the lone table in his quarters. As he always did, he removed his clothes and folded them, and carefully stacked them in the middle of the table. Captain Nonn rolled onto the rope bed and immediately fell asleep.

He had the same nightmare he always did after a battle. And it ended the same way as well.

Chapter XXV
The Devil in the Details

Captain Nonn was still pouring water over his head when he heard a knock at the door. "What is it?" He called at it.

"Got your meal, Cap'm," said a familiar voice.

Nonn looked around the floor- there was only water around him. "Bring it in," he said as he poured the remaining water in the bucket over his head then moved to his stack of clothes.

Thomas shouldered the door open and entered the room. He casually looked around it as Nonn walked to the table. "Cook heated it back up again," said Thomas as he slid the plate onto the table.

Nonn cinched his belt tight then sat, shirtless. "Fine, fine. You eat as well?"

Thomas nodded. He did not look at Nonn. "While the cook was heatin' up yours."

"Something troubling you, Thomas?" Nonn he picked up a piece of pork. He popped it into his mouth. It tasted tart. "He put berries on this?" He asked around the morsel.

"Not sure what the cook did to the pork, Cap'm. I learned real quick to not ask him about his cooking methods." The boy looked at the rope bed. "No mattress?"

Nonn shook his head. "Never had a use for them." Nonn took a bite of flatbread.

Finally, Thomas looked at the Captain. "Like your name?"

Captain Nonn did a double-take then understood. "Yes, Nonn like the flatbread naan."

"Really? Is that on purpose or accident?" It seemed to the only sincere thing the youth had said so far.

Nonn thought back to his childhood as he put the bread in his mouth, unsure of what to share with the boy. With a shrug he explained: "My family was sailing along the coast of Persia on a smaller vessel. My father, mother, two uncles. They were attacked by a British ship for whatever reason a captain needs to attack a family just sailing on a nice day." He swallowed hard. "The British captain easily took them, killing my father and his brothers. He took my mother back with him to his post in India." He paused for a long moment. "The following year, I was born." He spread his arm wide. "And thanks to my heritage, I was far too olive-skinned for the social circles of that British man. He relegated

my mother and me to live with the servants. Even so, he christened me and gave me a proper British name." Nonn picked up the knife from the plate and stabbed it into a piece of pork. "My mother, violated by the man, refused to call me that and instead called me her little nonn since I was the color of fresh baked bread instead of the darker color of the Indian servants." He picked up a skewered piece of meat. "When I reached a certain age, I left."

"What was your Christian name?"

Captain Nonn examined the meat and selected a piece of bread instead. "I don't have it anymore. I left it in India along with everything else." He took a bite of bread. "At that certain age."

"You left your mother behind?" Thomas finally looked at him. "Really?"

Nonn picked up the piece of pork on the knife. "Of course not, young Thomas. It was when my mother killed herself after yet another violation by the man that I reached that certain age that I took matters into my own hands." He took a bite of pork. "And ended the life of the man who had taken everything from me, then I left to seek my own fortune."

"You what?" Thomas' eyes got large.

"It seemed only fair to take everything from him after he took everything from me. And I made it a point to make sure he knew exactly *why* I was killing him. Then of course, I left rather quickly."

"I see." The boy nodded. "Yes, that makes sense." He looked away again.

"Is there anything else?" Nonn turned the knife to bite the pork from the other side. The tartness wasn't growing on him. He made a face as he swallowed.

"No Cap'm. I don't think so. Thank you." Thomas turned and left the cabin, pulling the door closed behind him.

Nonn looked at the meat on the knife. "You're losing your touch." He let the knife clatter onto the plate. "Ruining perfectly good pork with wild berries." With a tired sigh, he nibbled on the bread and drank from a bottle of grog that he always kept in his room. After a few minutes, a rumble ran through his stomach. He looked down at it. The rumble turned to a gurgle. An urgent gurgle.

Nonn stood quickly and moved to the hatch at the foot of his bed. Even though the main purpose of it was to haul water up to wash himself and his bedding, it also served as a convenient privy since it was at the very back of the ship and hung over the water.

The feeling in the pit of his stomach became overwhelming. He snatched off his trousers and tossed them onto the rope bed. He squatted over the hole just in time as searing hot liquid poured out of him. He grabbed the edge of the bed for stability as he lost control of his bowels.

A long half hour later, a spent Nonn hauled up a bucket of water. He was still on his knees as he had alternated between throwing up and squatting. He kneeled over the hatch and poured the water over the back of his head, letting the cool water run down his back. He closed his eyes with relief as the water played down his back, between his buttocks and down into the wake of the ship. It was then that he noticed that the thumping that he thought was in his head was actually taking place outside his cabin. As he tilted his head and strained to listen to it, a musket rapport jarred him.

Nonn pulled himself to a standing position, stomach muscles still cramping. He took a large cloth from a peg and dried off quickly. Grabbing his pants, he hopped into them as he moved to the door. Just before opening it, he took his belt from a hook beside it. He drew his pistol as he slung his belt over his shoulder, putting the sword on his drawing side. Cautiously he opened the door and peeked out. Another rapport -a pistol this time- made him pull the door open and step onto the deck quickly. He panned around the deck with his pistol. There seemed to be sailors curled up on the deck, writhing. Others were leaned over the rails, ostensibly throwing up. "What is going on?" He called to a nearby sailor.

"Poisoned, captain," the sailor replied between heaves. "Something in the meat!" He leaned back over the railing.

Nonn moved quickly toward the hatchway that led below. It was blocked by two large barrels- they had been rolled over the hatch and a saber stuck into the wood in front of them to keep them in place. The

pounding was coming from below. Nonn started to put his pistol away to move the barrier when another pistol rapport made him duck. He looked around the empty deck then moved to the main mast for cover. If someone had boarded the ship while he was incapacitated, he wanted to deal with them personally. He backed up to the thick mast, pistol at the ready. Another wave of rumblings ran through his innards. He looked around the deck. He could see a few of his men lying down curled up. Some were moving, others weren't. The ones that were moving did not have the strength to make it to the railing and had soiled themselves. Another rumble ran through Nonn. He tightened as much as he could to avoid the same fate and stepped in front of the mast just in time to see Thomas shoot a writhing sailor in the head with a pistol. Casually, he flipped it around to reload it.

As another wave of nausea ran through Nonn's innards, he stumbled to the side, catching himself on a barrel. His concentration faltered and he felt a hot rivulet of liquid run down his leg. Furious, he pushed off the barrel.

The sound of the barrel jostling made Thomas turn. "Ahh, captain *no Christian name*. I was saving you until last so you could see my handiwork." He took the ramrod and jammed it into the muzzle of the pistol, compacting the shot and powder. "I'll just have to move you to the front of the line, then." He took a step towards Nonn. "And deal with you just as you had my father dealt with on the *Dawn's Delight*." The youth slid the ramrod back in place under the barrel. Thomas looked down as he tilted the pistol to the side to pour some powder into the

firing mechanism. "You stinking dishonorable pirate. You don't even *deserve* to stand on the deck of my father's ship, much less give it to another pirate. Did you like the asparagus berries? They were harvested by my father not a day before you arrived. He is…" The boy's voice faltered. "… *was* a scientist. He wasn't a threat to anyone! He was only the First Mate because he had funded the expedition; he wasn't even a professional sailor."

As the boy spoke, Nonn thought back to the first mate that he had his sailor shoot on the deck of the *Dawn's Delight*. Now that he thought about it, the resemblance was uncanny. Pushing the issue from his mind- the safety of his crew and ship was more important than anything else, he raised his pistol. His stomach lurched as he fought to keep from throwing up. He reached out for the barrel for support but it was too far. He struck his arm out for balance as he closed an eye to try and focus on his target that was annoyingly, going in and out of focus. He noticed as he squeezed the trigger that the boy was also raising his pistol. The recoil felt as if he were holding a cannon in his hand. The pistol clattering to the deck as Nonn staggered to the side, finding again the barrel. He looked for the boy, hoping he had hit him squarely. Normally he would not have missed at a mere ten feet, but the nausea was overwhelming. *Asparagus berries?* The rapport of the youth's pistol made him flinch back, expecting the hot sting of a ball running through him. He grabbed the wooden barrel with both hands for support as his bowels let loose completely.

Thomas had spun to the side as the bullet grazed his shoulder, leaving a deep furrow before continuing out over the water. His now-numb hand let go of the pistol. It went off as it hit the deck, firing harmlessly into the sea.

Nonn fought to get his blade out of his sheath as Thomas drew a dagger and advanced on him.

Nonn's vision got fuzzy around the edges as he tightened his grip on his falchion. He raised the point toward Thomas even though he knew the move was futile; in his weakened state he had no chance of actually striking the youth and once Thomas was next to him, he would have no way to deflect the dirk.

At the edge of his awareness, he heard the pounding increase in ferocity. He couldn't tell if the noise came from outside his head or in- it was pounding as well. Nonn sidestepped to put the barrel between himself and the approaching Thomas. He tried to raise his blade again but another wave of nausea made it clatter along the top of the barrel.

"At least you will know who killed you. A boy who has reached a certain age. How ironic." Thomas swatted Nonn's blade with his dagger, pushing it easily to the side as he moved around the barrel. "You stinking pirates don't…" Thomas began as a barrel crashed into him. It caught him high on the chest, knocking him onto his back. The barrel rolled over him, bloodying his nose and ended up against the railing.

Nonn looked at the incapacitated boy then over his shoulder.

"Hope you're alright, captain," said Wesley.

"Mister Wigglesworth, it is indeed a pleasure to see you." Nonn leaned over the barrel as his bowels drained down his leg. He felt as if his insides were on fire. "Although I am pretty sure I'm not a pleasure to see." He dropped to one knee to retrieve his pistol.

"Sir, can I get you anything?" Wesley asked.

"A bucket of water would be appreciated." Nonn said. As he started to reload his pistol, the boy groaned and rolled to his side then onto all fours.

When Nonn finally pushed the ramrod into its slot under the barrel, the boy had worked himself to his knees.

The boy picked up his knife. "You stinking…"

"Captain?" A voice said from behind Nonn.

"I've got him." Nonn dribbled a little powder into the firing mechanism as he used the barrel to get to his feet. "He's mine." He raised the pistol and saw the boy standing defiantly, knife at the ready.

"Go ahead you coward! You've taken everything from me. Go ahead!" Tears streamed down the boy's face. "Do it already!"

Nonn sighted down the barrel at the boy's chest. At this range there was no way he would miss. "I've got him." He said again.

"You're no better than your father." The boy snapped. He spat on the deck. "No better." He put his hands on his hips, defiantly.

Nonn's thoughts went back to the day on the tea plantation when his whole life was turned upside down. The scene before him- a defiant young man standing up to the adult who had ruined his life- was suddenly familiar. "Get one of the longboats and some supplies." Nonn said after a long moment.

"Captain?" Wesley said as he approached with a bucket of water. "What do you need?"

"Drop a longboat along with a few days' supplies."

Mister Ederer walked up beside the pair. "Captain; a longboat? We're down to just four of them."

Captain Nonn kept his pistol trained on the boy. "I'll buy a replacement from my share." He snapped.

"Aye," Mister Ederer said. He turned and looked across the ship. "A longboat and supplies. You heard the captain."

"And be quick about it, if you please." Nonn said. "I'd rather get cleaned up sooner rather than later."

"Aye." Two sailors replied as they began to muscle a longboat out of its blocks toward the side.

"Can you swim, Thomas?" Nonn asked the boy.

Thomas looked from Nonn to the sailors. They were holding the boat over the rail by ropes as several jugs of water and a sack was tossed into it. "What?"

"I'm giving you the chance I wasn't given." Captain Nonn cocked the pistol. "Get off my ship. There are islands to the north of here. Head that way."

The boy looked at Nonn. "What?" The splash of the longboat hitting the water made him look across the deck.

"Get off now." Nonn said. "Before I change my mind."

The boy took two steps toward the rail and looked down into the water.

"Make something of yourself that doesn't include hate."

Without replying the boy swung his legs over the rail and disappeared.

"Loose the longboat." Nonn pushed himself to his feet. "Let's get this ship cleaned up." He looked down. "And ourselves as well." He reached for the bucket. When Wesley let go of it, he marched toward his cabin not even bothering to see if the boy made it to the drifting longboat.

Thomas swam toward the aft of the *18 Fathoms* fully expecting to see the longboat being pulled back aboard- a final act of cowardice by the murderous pirate. He was surprised -and relieved- to see the boat floating free. Determined, he swam hard for the longboat lest it drift away from him.

As he rolled onto it, he looked up at the ship as it sailed away. No one seemed to even be looking back at him. "Treasure is all they care about." He said as he put an oar into its lock. "Stinking pirates." He looked back at the ship again. For a moment, he thought he saw the captain in one of the aft windows. With a head shake he put the other oar into its lock and turned the longboat northward. He decided that after giving him a longboat, the captain wouldn't have given him bad directions. He then started rowing slowly and deliberately in that direction.

It would take four days before he was spotted by an English schooler.

Chapter XXVI
Fair Sailing on the Dawn's Delight

Captain Whiddon moved to the bow of the *Dawn's Delight*. Mister Tucker was there speaking with two sailors. He stopped short of the trio to listen in without interrupting.

"I agree that a dog watch would be the best method but we're short on hands as it is," said one sailor.

"The cook'll be happier with a dogging, I can tell you that." Said the other. "But I've sailed under a starboard and port watch and it worked well for long voyages."

Mister Tucker nodded at the sailor. "Well, Starkey, if we were looking at a long haul perhaps, but we're just sailing a couple of days to Hispaniola then we can see about adding to the crew then."

"Done a fore, main, and mizzen for a while," said the first man. "Nice as well."

"We'll dog it, I think," Said Tucker as a smile crept onto his face. "It fits this crew in any case." He turned serious. "So then, Messrs

Starkey and Chay, I officially promote you to boatswains and I'll leave it to you two to put into practice."

"Aye, captain," said Starkey. "We'll get to it and have it running…" He glanced at the other man.

"By the next bell," finished Chay.

"Yeah; within the hour at the latest."

As the two moved off, discussing which sailor would be on which watch, Captain Whiddon approached his friend. "How're things looking, Nate?"

Nate shrugged. "We're light on crew but we've enough to handle clear or storm sailing; they're easy. We'll be hard pressed to man rigging *and* cannon at the same time." He gestured across the open water in the direction to where the *18 Fathoms* was sailing. "We should've borrowed some extra men if we're going to expect action before we reach the island."

"Well Nate, that's the trick; oftentimes encounters with none-too-friendly ships happen when you least expect them." He looked up. "So, leave the Union Jack flying just to keep things a little more calm while sailing in Englishman infested waters."

"Unless they come close and see we're all out of uniform." Nate smiled. "Or we run into some stinking pirates. Them folks're sailing on these waters, so I have heard."

Tom Whiddon nodded. "Well, we'll have to keep a lookout…" A thought occurred to him. "We didn't get any powder monkeys or a lookout, did we?"

"Not a one, now that you mention it." Nate looked up at the crow's nest. "Well, I imagine we can put young Carter up there; he's young and sharp of eye."

"A sound plan." He leveled his eyes at his friend. "A sound plan indeed from the First Mate."

"Well," said Nate, not catching what Whiddon had said. "He'd be able to climb up the mast if need be… What?"

"I need a first mate that I can trust and that can handle themselves in a tight pinch. And since you're promoting boatswains, it should at least be from an official capacity."

"Oh!" Nate said, realization hitting him. "Official like when their ship is sitting on the bottom and you're dealing with an English ship."

"Well, I'd rather not find myself in that position again any time soon. And especially with this ship; it's floating along so well right now, this *Dawn's Delight*." Captain Whiddon said sourly.

"*Dawn's Delight*." Nate stuck out his tongue.

"I agree. She needs a new name. A less English name."

"As First Mate I will come up with something appropriately inappropriate and have the stern adjusted. Mayhap even the bell even."

Captain Whiddon nodded. "An excellent first task." He leveled a finger at his First Mate. "Just keep that sense of humor under control as you accomplish it."

"You know that I have always liked *Passing Wind* as the name of a ship." He cracked a smile. "Passing wind is one of my favorite things."

"Well, save it for when you have your *own* ship." Captain Whiddon shook his head with a laugh. "Nonn'll be liable to toss us overboard himself if he sees that on the stern." He pointed upward. "I'll get Carter up to the nest if you'll keep with your new boatswains on getting the crew onto a routine."

Nate gave a sloppy salute. "Aye, aye, captain. And I'll get a good and proper name on this ship for you before we get to Saona."

"A good and proper name." Captain Whiddon reminded him. "Well, just so you know, we're going to a little spit of land first so the *18 Fathoms* can take care of that breaming."

"Thought that was just a ruse."

Captain Whiddon shook his head. "It was only a half-lie, it seems." He spread his arms out wide. "And with this ship, the *18 Fathoms* will need all the speed she can muster. So, we are going to meet them at this

isle near Mayreu, get our plan together then plunder what is probably the biggest hoard of gold in the Caribbean."

"Mayreu?" Nate said nonchalantly. "Never heard of it."

"It's near the Grenadines. It's an excellent careenage; I've been there myself so I'll take the pilot over the charts." He startled. "Oh! We do have a pilot, yes?"

"No idea." Nate smiled wide. "Mayhap we should have chosen our crew a bit more diligently."

"Huh. Well, the crew started out as an absurd mission to a sunken ship for a plan that I had little confidence in accomplishing." Captain Whiddon shook his head. "Well, I've worked as a navigator so I'm sure I can get us there without too much trouble." He absently looked around the deck. "But I think I may find myself an apprentice while I'm doing it."

"An excellent idea, captain," said Nate. "Especially since we're going after the largest pile of gold in the Caribbean. Or so the rumors claimed."

"It's true, I assure you."

"Whatever you say, captain. In the meanwhile, I think I'll take a trick at the wheel while you find Carter; it'll help me think of a proper name for this ship to actually sail it."

"A wise plan." Tom waved to his friend. "See you at dinner then. I think I got a good bit of that pork into our larder before the ships sailed apart."

"Seems we have a captain, navigator, and cook all in one. Does that mean you get three shares of that pile of treasure?"

Captain Whiddon laughed as he moved off. Without answering.

Chapter XXVII
Near the Isle of Hispaniola

Captain Nonn stood on the stern of his ship holding onto the railing because the ship was leaning heavily to one side. When they arrived at the isle before Captain Whiddon, the tide was just receding so he decided to run the ship aground and get started on the cleaning before the other ship arrived.

"It's her this time, captain!" The lookout shouted down to Nonn and pointed. "Finally!"

Captain Nonn looked up and waved. Two other ships had passed since he had laid the *18 Fathoms* into the small island however neither had veered closer to him; obviously merchant ships on their route. Time was foremost in those captains' minds because it was money-dependable money; looting was dangerous, unpredictable, and easily unsuccessful. It was something they never even considered. Often even a ship in need that was too far off their route would be ignored for the sake of making a deadline. "That's a good sight." He looked to his left as a sailor walked up to him. He was using the railing to steady himself. "Hang on tight."

"I am." Mister Wigglesworth said. "The tide'll be ready to pull us back out in four hours," He stepped beside the captain. "There's not much to eat on this island besides a few coconuts. We're going to try some fishing." He pointed to the longboat. "Until we need it to drop the anchor again." He leaned over the railing and looked down. "Nice. They'll be done as the tide comes in."

Captain Nonn nodded at the man. "Yes, so far this is working out nicely. Go fish for our meal, Mister Wigglesworth. Watching these men work isn't making it go any quicker."

"Aye." The sailor said then he laughed. "You going to make it young Paxton?" The youth was on his hands and knees as he crawled toward them. He reached out when he was close. "Here."

"Thanks." Said Paxton as he took the man's hand and let him pull him upright. He grabbed the railing with both hands. "I'm not sure I like this at all."

"First breaming?" Nonn said.

"Yes, sir."

"You know we'll be doing it again to get the other side right?" Wesley Wigglesworth said with a smile.

"What?"

"Can't just clean one side of the ship." Captain Nonn said with hos own smile. "We'd sail in circles."

"Oh."

"Well, I'm off." Wigglesworth said. "We'll see what we can catch out there." With that he half walked, half skidded away.

Paxton leaned over the railing and looked down. "They're burning the ship, Sir!" He leaned even farther out to watch the two sailors in a longboat using torches to burn the hull of the ship. A third had a bucket of water at the ready to throw in case the flames got out of control.

"They're burning off algae and barnacles. It's the fastest way to get it off." Captain Nonn explained. "Scraping it could damage the hull."

"It seems dangerous."

"It is in fact quite dangerous. Especially since the bottom of the ship has a coating of tar. But it's necessary. A clean hull means an extra knot or two in speed and five degrees in coming about, sometimes more. That could be the difference between life or death."

"Oh." The youth said as he continued to watch.

"So, it's a dangerous yet essential task in the care of a ship." Captain Nonn pointed to a man farther down on a bosun's chair. "And that sailor is replacing a bad piece of wood. Also, very important in keeping the sea outside the ship. Because it's always wanting to find its way in."

The youth nodded. "Then they'll burn the other side on the next tide next to get both sides completely clean?"

"It's called careening or breaming but yes they will. But they won't get everything off. To do that we'd need to get higher out of the water. We'd have to wait for a neap tide but those only happen twice a month and we just missed it. If we had the time, we'd do this over those two weeks using each neap tide to get the entire hull."

"A neap tide will let you do that?" The youth thought back to when he lived ashore. "Even with a big tide, I can't see how we'd get one side completely out of the water."

"Well, it's not just the tide; we would have to unload the ship instead of just moving cargo and the cannons to one side like we did this time." Nonn turned and pointed to the tall coconut trees. "And we'd run a tackle from the mast to those trees to pull us over even farther. But that takes a lot more time as well as waiting for the proper tides which like I said can take two weeks. It's practically a month to do the ship right. And that's if the men stay on task. Sitting around drinking and sleeping in the shade is very tempting. I've heard of ships sitting aground for months. And we don't have that amount of time."

"Because of those other ships?"

Captain Nonn nodded. "That and there's a treasure that I need to collect before it starts sailing towards Spain. Once it's out in the middle of the Atlantic, we'd never find it."

The boy continued to watch the men methodically burn the hull of the ship. "I heard about the treasure. A king's ransom, they say." While the boy had not been on deck when Nonn had interrogated the men, he had heard the gruesome stories. And of course, the description of the treasure had grown every time the story was told.

"It truly is. It's being gathered to take back to Spain. We are going to get it before the ships arrive to bring it there. Gold, silver, and gems designated for the King's vault."

The boy smiled. "I think I'll take my share and go home."

Nonn looked at the boy. "Thought you were an orphan. Stranded on Antigua after you escaped from that British ship."

"Well, my parents are dead but I have an uncle who grows sugar cane in Florida; Coronado Beach. I want to go there. If I have some money, I'm sure they will let me stay." He looked back at the captain. "If you'll let me go."

"Family is family." Nonn said. "You don't need money in your pocket to be welcome with family. And anyone can leave the ship if they want. I'm sure you've been told that."

"Sure, I heard that but I figured it wasn't true."

"Keeping sailors around who don't want to be around isn't a good way to keep a ship running, Paxton." Nonn looked back out at the

water. "There's always plenty of fools who think the sea is calling them to a grand adventure to replace the ones that have learned better."

"So why do you do it, Sir?"

"I've got nothing else to do." Nonn smiled. "Don't believe I could sit around and grow sugar cane."

"I'm going to use my share to buy a stake in the farm." Paxton said. "I think it will be a good living. A place where I can start a family of my own."

Captain Nonn chuckled. "How old are you?"

"Fourteen."

"And you're already looking at settling down, starting a family." Nonn chuckled again. "I envy you, son."

"It's just that...." He hesitated.

"Yes?" Captain Nonn looked down at the youth. "Spit it out, can't imagine there are many reasons I haven't heard yet."

"I don't like the killing. I don't think I can do this for a living, Sir."

"Then you definitely need to find a new profession." Nonn shrugged. "Before you become numb to the killing. Or worse."

Paxton looked at Nonn. "What could be worse than that?"

"Someone kills you because you can't kill them first." Nonn smiled. "Then sugarcane farming it is. I have to say I appreciate that line of work seeing as how fond I am of rum."

"If you ever do come ashore, you could visit. Do you know where Coronado Beach is?"

"Yes; inside Mosquito Inlet. It's a safe port for English privateers. However, if your hold is full of treasure, they're quite welcoming of any ship that happens to stop there." He smiled. "Mayhap after this endeavor we'll pull in there for some shore leave."

"Maybe?" Paxton asked.

Captain Nonn looked down at the boy. "If we aren't killed beforehand."

"Oh."

"Oh indeed, Mister Paxton."

"Ahoy!" Captain Whiddon shouted from his longboat. "Hello up there!"

Nonn looked down at the water. "Captain Whiddon, it is good to see you." Nonn shouted back as he waved. "We're almost done on the one side. We'll get the other tomorrow morning."

"Any trouble?" Whiddon shouted.

Nonn shook his head. "Couple of passersby, merchants most likely but no one who wanted to take a closer look at us. Having you here will ensure it doesn't happen. You? Or did we just find more favorable winds?"

"We swung wide of a couple of other ships. Couldn't afford to get close to any." Whiddon responded.

"My arms are getting tired holding on," Paxton said. "I'll going to go ashore and look for hermit crabs."

"That sounds like a good way to spend the day." Nonn said to him. "Or you can try fishing from shore. I'm sure there's an extra cane pole or two lying about down there." After the ship was securely in place, the majority of the crew went ashore and began to drink, sleep, and fish from the beach when they weren't taking their turn on the hull.

"Excellent!" The boy said. He squatted down and crab-walked away.

"Sugarcane farmer." Nonn said as he shook his head. "God help him."

"You want to get off that beached whale for a while?" Captain Whiddon said as his longboat pulled alongside the *18th Fathoms*. "I've some crewing issues for you."

Nonn smiled down at him. "Captain for a couple of days and already having management problems?"

"The problem is I don't have enough crew to manage." Tom Whiddon smiled back. "We need to do some evening out. That's why we were avoiding other ships. And we need someone who speaks Spanish."

"You don't speak Spanish?" With the hundreds of islands in the Caribbean owned by a half dozen different countries, pirates would invariably learn to speak several languages well enough to get about on them.

"Enough to order a drink, but not negotiate supplies and rigging. You?"

"That's me as well, I must admit. Well, I'll meet you ashore." He pointed toward the rear of the ship. "I'll slide down and meet you there."

"Excellent." Captain Whiddon waved as he and a sailor began to row in that direction.

Chapter XXVIII
A Plan is Set

Both Captains, First Mates and several other sailors sat under the shade of several trees, discussing the attack.

Nonn leaned forward and pointed at the map. "Okay, so it is decided; we will lay up here out of sight of the ships anchored and head to shore before dark while the *Devil's Delight* keeps an eye on the ships at port."

"And move ashore with seven or eight longboats," Tom Whiddon pointed at the map. "Here. And then make your way behind the church. On the way, I'm sure you can take two or three wagons to haul the treasure back. Nice and quiet like."

"I'm not sure how quiet you can be stealing wagons and mules." Nonn said.

Tom shrugged. "If it's getting on dark, they'll be in their homes most likely. A couple of swords will resolve the ownership of wagons quickly, I'd say."

"That sounds reasonable." Stevens, the pilot for the *18 Fathoms* said. "If I weren't translating for Captain Whiddon, I'd be proud to help steal some of King Charles' ill-gotten loot."

"But what happens if they don't have any longboats to sell me?" Captain Whiddon asked. "I'll have just the one after you take my other two. That's a lot of trips to load up supplies if we're pulling anchor after only a couple of hours."

"Tom, there's nothing we can do about that. Whoever sells you the supplies needs to be able to get them aboard your ship. Even if they don't sell you a longboat. What good is finding treasure if you can't get it back aboard? We need all the longboats to move as much of it as we can. Remember, we can only make one trip; the locals aren't going to let us make a couple of trips back and forth to the ship. And any soldiers we come across will be even less hospitable." Captain Nonn said.

"I think you should take more than twelve men, just in case." Brian Rather, the First Mate said.

Nonn shook his head. "The more men I take the less treasure we can carry. I'd rather have an extra hundred fifty pounds of treasure than another man along."

"But you lose any men and you won't be able to paddle back to the ship." Brian countered. "What good is a longboat full of treasure just sitting on shore?"

"I've a thought," said Tom. "If you're anchored close to the beach, fifty yards or so, you can run a couple of lines to shore. Run them out with the longboats. Then when you're coming back in, the crew aboard can haul the longboats back quick like. Even if you don't lose any men, it would get you off the island faster."

Nonn pointed at the man. "That is indeed a good idea. Mayhap we'll take the *Devil's Delight's* last longboat and run nine of them ashore."

"How would we even get to the dock?" Captain Whiddon said.

"I'm joking." Nonn said. "You keep your one, eight loaded longboats is plenty of treasure. Especially with the crew of the *18 Fathoms* helping pull them back aboard."

"Short longboats." Captain Whiddon shook his head. "What a predicament to be in."

"There's plenty of places in the Turks and Bahamas we can stop and pick up another three longboats." Brian Rather said. "Even if it takes us a couple of stops."

"Besides," added Stevens. "If nothing else, once we get to Mosquito Inlet, we can get them in Coronado. I've been there; it's a good-sized port. And there's a shipwright right there in town. Ropemakers too."

"I agree. And it's not like we will be stopping between here and there to wander ashore." Nonn gestured at Brian. "If we do stop and try

our luck at some ports along the way like you suggest, it will be just for that purpose. The crew needs to be aware of that; the treasure gets divvied up but we don't stop until we reach the town of Coronado." Nonn looked around. "Agreed?"

"Agreed," Captain Whiddon said. "No dilly dallying; a straight sail to Florida out of Caribbean waters. I can't imagine King Charles will be too pleased with us once he gets word."

"Spain owns Florida, you know." Stevens pointed out.

"Yes, while that is true, the inlet is a haven for English pirates. We should be able to disappear there nicely." Nonn said. He looked toward the ship. "We just need to make sure we get the ship cleaned and afloat as soon as possible. I'd hate to get to that treasure hoard and find that it's already on its way to Spain."

"Can't have too many men burning the sides, captain." Brian said. "This plan really needs two ships to succeed."

"True enough." Nonn said. "I will go back aboard and oversee it." He looked at the water. "Tide'll be coming back in in an hour so we need to be ready to pull her back out."

"We'll run our anchor line from the *Devil's Delight* to help get it afloat." Captain Whiddon said as he stood. "In the meantime, spread the word that if anyone wants to come ashore for a little bit, they should do it now because we'll be sailing hard for just over a week. It's twelve hundred miles to our port in Florida."

"We've got a good bit of fish caught as well as two turtles." Mister Ederer said. "Mister Stiles will be pleased."

"As will our cook." Captain Whiddon said. "Whoever that will be." He said with a smirk. "Any volunteers?"

"I can cook." A sailor said as he stood and brushed the sand off his hands. "Pretty good at it at one point."

"At one point, Michael? What happened?"

"Killed a man in town so I hopped on a ship to avoid the gallows." The man answered.

Captain Whiddon gave a salute. "We welcome our new cook; Michael Eckoff."

Several men clapped.

Captain Whiddon pointed at him. "Don't take swearing lessons from Stiles, if you please."

Nonn stood as well. "Yes, please no; one is enough."

"Yes, Sir. I will endeavor to run a swearing-free kitchen." Michael said with a smirk. "More or less."

"Less is better, I believe is what we are saying." Captain Nonn said.

"Indeed." Captain Whiddon added. "Well, let's get to it."

Chapter XXIX
Crowded Harbor

The *Devil's Delight* tacked hard away from the *18 Fathoms*. "See you at Canto de la Playa!" Captain Whiddon shouted as he waved.

Captain Nonn waved back. "Three hours!"

The two ships had been sailing within thirty feet of each other five miles off the coast of the massive island that was Hispaniola. The crew was chatting back and forth as the ships sailed the calm waters of the Caribbean. At the south eastern tip of Hispaniola was the Isle of Saona- it was only fourteen miles long and four wide. The small island was ahead of them about ten minutes or so; the ships moored in front of the harbor town Mano Juan were clearly visible.

They had been sailing slowly to arrive at the island two hours before dark so that once Captain Nonn and his men had stolen the treasure, they could move away in the twilight, then sail away under cover of darkness. With no lights running, it would be practically impossible for a ship to follow them. The plan was for the *Devil's Delight* to leave the port without lights as well to hide its direction. Then once they had sailed past the eastern edge of the isle, they would light several forward lights.

Once the *18 Fathoms* spotted the lights, it would light its aft lights. When the two ships were once again sailing alongside each other, every sail would be set to get as far north in the Caribbean as possible before daylight.

"How is it looking?" Captain Whiddon called up to the lookout.

"It's pretty crowded sir!" The man called down.

Captain Whiddon put his hands on his hips. "Crowded with what? Is the Spanish flotilla here?" He asked as his stomach sank. To him the port was a jumble of masts, because at sea level, he couldn't make out more than that. If because of the breaming they had delayed until the Spanish ships had arrived, Captain Nonn was walking into a hornets' nest, and he too was in serious trouble, cruising slowly toward the port in what was obviously not a government owned ship. "What sort of ships!"

The lookout panned his spyglass back and forth as he made a count of the ships.

"Well?" Whiddon shouted again after a minute.

"Okay. Okay, Captain." The lookout finally said. "It's okay. Looks like we've got a bunch of English ships in the port sir. There're a couple of Brigs, private looking ships, a Barque and a two masted Schooner. Plus, a Dutch Barque."

"They being invaded or something?" It was indeed a lot of ships to be at such a small port at one time.

The lookout raised his hands plaintively. "They're all moored nice and friendly like. One right beside the other. Maybe the food's good and the women accommodating?" He smiled wide. "How long are we staying, Sir?"

"Who else? Any Spanish flags?"

"A Cutter."

"Just the one Cutter?"

The man looked out at the approaching port. "Aye. Oh; we can lay up beside it or on the other end of the line of ships."

"Beside it. If the alarm gets raised we'll need to deal with it before it gets underway. That Cutter would sail circles around us putting cannonball sized holes in us till we sank."

"I do believe we might be able to handle a Cutter, Sir." The man shouted down.

"There's no reason to test that belief." Captain Whiddon shouted back. "Keep an eye out as we come in." He said as he walked toward the helm. "Mister Tucker!" He shouted. "Mister Tucker!" He didn't wait for a response; he knew that the crew would relay the message that the captain wanted to talk to his First Mate.

"Captain." Mister Starkey said as Captain Whiddon approached. "Where do you want us to lay up?" He leaned over the wheel. "Wind's at our stern so I can put her in any place you'd like."

"We'll come in on the port side of the other ships and drop anchor next to that Spanish Cutter."

"Want to keep an eye on those Spaniards?" Starkey said with a smirk. "Can't trust them no how or way."

"Partially. What we'll really be doing is training our guns on them so if Captain Nonn raises an alarm, we can deal with it while it's tied to the bottom."

"Good plan, Sir." Starkey pointed. "If you want to take us in, I'll get those cannon loaded and aimed down slightly before we get there. Hate to have them wonder why we're loading cannons before we moor alongside them." He smirked again. "They might decide they can't trust us no how or way."

"I'm offended, Sir." Captain Whiddon took the wheel. "What's this world coming to where you can't trust a Pirate?"

"What indeed." Mister Starkey said, walking toward the port side cannons. "Gentlemen!" He greeted the sailors who were lounging among the guns.

"What's the word, Tom?" Nate Tucker said as he approached his friend from behind. "We're ready to go ashore when we get anchored." He gestured with a thumb behind him. "Gonna take Mister Eckoff with me."

"Not Stevens?" Captain Whiddon startled. "Why the cook?"

"He speaks Spanish fluently; his Mother taught him. He's the best aboard, actually."

Captain Whiddon shrugged, "All I can do is order two beers."

"That's exactly my understanding of Spanish. Along with ordering beans of course."

"Right." Captain Whiddon spun the wheel to bring the ship into a broad arc to join the row of ships. "We'll drop rear anchor and get alongside that Spanish Cutter." He pointed. "If Nonn gets out without anyone in town noticing, we'll pull anchors and sail out nice and innocent like in a couple of hours."

"And if he doesn't?"

Captain Whiddon paused as he spun the wheel in the opposite direction, straightening up the ship. "Oh, if he doesn't we'll blast a bunch of holes at that Cutter's waterline, then pull anchor and sail out of here as fast as the wind will let us."

"Sounds like a good set of plans." Nate said. "As soon as we're moored, Eckoff and I will paddle over." He gestured. "We'll be waiting in the longboat for the word."

"Excellent." Captain Whiddon said. He watched the Spanish ship as he maneuvered the boat in line with it. "Drop rear anchor!" He shouted. He looked at his friend. "You could probably head out now. No need to watch us set our forward anchor."

"Aye captain." Nate Tucker gave a sloppy salute then walked off.

"Here we go, Nonn." Captain Whiddon said. "It all falls to you. Or you'll do the falling, old friend; right off the side of your ship into the deep blue sea where Davy Jones will have a go at you."

Chapter XXX
Hearsay Treasure

Captain Nonn maneuvered around the crowded deck toward the helm- longboats were strewn around. "Mister Childs, this deck is a mess; I think I need a bigger boat."

"Or less longboats. Less longboats would be easier, I think." Mister Childs said with a smile. "Why do we have eight longboats? Seven for the treasure and one for the kedge?" He asked, referring to the practice of using a boat to carry an anchor ahead of a sailing ship where it could then be dropped into the water and used to pull the ship out of a harbor, or if it were aground.

"We won't be dropping but one anchor, Mister Childs. When it comes time to leave, we'll be in a hurry. With the wind coming from the East, a fore anchor will keep up facing the sea. We'll haul that up to give us some forward momentum then wallow through a tack, then sail away from here." Captain Nonn explained.

"Aye, Captain. So that much treasure?"

"Yes, we might not even get it all back to the ship." Nonn pointed at the longboats. "Eight boats' worth is all we can manage, it seems."

"There's really that much treasure there, Sir?" The exact amount of treasure was never really discussed by Captain Nonn and the gossip from the crew ranged from 'more than imaginable' to 'a mere box of coins; we're on a fool's errand'. "I mean, from what I've heard…"

Captain Nonn smirked. "I know full well you have heard the treasure is from unimaginable to a couple of bent doubloons."

"And everywhere in between. So, which is it?"

"I'll be honest with you Mister Childs; this treasure will either secure my name in the annals of Piracy, or it may be the death of me. You see, I learned by happenstance that King Charles the third is trying to bolster his royal coffers. His reformation plans for Spain have been quite expensive and he is short of funds for that endeavor. He's been borrowing to keep his plans moving along. And while he has been exerting more direct control over Spain's colonies, he has been gathering a large treasure to be sailed back to his palace." Captain Nonn gestured at the small island. "And it is all being secretly held here on this tiny island far away and safe from suspecting eyes." He held up a finger as it looked like Mister Childs was going to interrupt. "And that information was corroborated from the captain of the *Unsinkable*."

"But the *Unsinkable* was a British ship."

"Indeed, it was. It seems that the British Empire would rather have that treasure for themselves so they are planning their own raid."

"But attacking a Spanish colony would undoubtedly lead to war." Mister Childs pointed out.

"True enough. However, if a privateer were to conduct the raid, all the Spanish crown could do would be to send a strongly worded letter to King George. And King George would just ignore a demarche for the head of a privateer."

"Especially when the treasure arrived to add to King George's coffers." Mister Childs nodded. "Yes, that does make sense. But…" He hesitated. "How did you come across such information that would likely only be court rumor?"

"A sailor on the Privateer vessel *The Blonde* told me of their plans to wait until the British ship was well and away with the treasure then to intercept the ship and bring the treasure to the United States."

"Sir." Mister Childs said seriously. "An American sailor told you that a British sailor knew where Spanish sailors hid a king's treasure?"

"And that is why this may be the death of me." Captain Nonn said. "If we get to this purported treasure trove and all that is there is hay, I will either be left behind on Saona for the local authority's pleasure, or I'll be brought back aboard the *18 Fathoms* and shot for the pleasure of the crew."

"I see." Miser Childs turned the wheel sharply and looked over his shoulder. "We're coming about; are the men ready?" He looked back at Captain Nonn. "Well, I hope that we can trust this American who told you about a Brit who told him about a Spaniard." He raised his voice: "Drop forward anchor!" He shouted.

Dutifully the sailors passed the message to the front of the ship until two sailors let loose the anchor.

"That is a fine sentiment, Mister Childs." Captain Nonn said as he moved forward toward the longboats.

Mister Childs just nodded. Truth be told, he was hoping it was correct because of the amount of potential treasure; Captains came and went. But his share of the treasure would allow him to return home and become a legitimate merchant of his own ship. He turned the wheel as the forward anchor's rode played out, slowing the ship. "Launch the longboats!"

Chapter XXXI
Fleet of Wagons

"Captain?" Paxton said as the man helped maneuver the last longboat to the ropes to lower it into the water. "Captain, do you have a moment?"

"Really, no." Captain Nonn gestured at the flotilla of longboats paddling away from the *18 Fathoms*. "I've pressing matters ashore and we're a little late as it is."

"I'd like to go with you," Paxton said as he picked up the rope that would be used to lower the longboat. "I think you need me."

"Two per boat is the plan."

"What if you lose someone? How will one man row a longboat full of treasure back?"

Captain Nonn held up a line. "I'll be dragging this to shore with my boat. We will be tying the boats together stem to stern and using the crew on the *18 Fathoms* to help pull them all back, rowers or not."

"I still think you need someone who speaks Spanish, Sir." Paxton pressed on. "Good Spanish."

"We've got Mister Ederer. His Spanish is more than sufficient."

"I grew up speaking it, captain. And I've talked to Mister Ederer in Spanish. His is fair at best."

"How is it you, Mister *Paxton*, speak Spanish?" Captain Nonn asked as they heaved the boat over the railing. He was aware that for some unlucky reason, there was no one aboard who was fluent in Spanish. And, if he recalled, Mister Ederer was reluctant to even admit he spoke it.

"That's my Father's name. My mother, before she took it was Castillo."

"Castilian?"

"Castillo, Sir. Her name was Maria Del La Castillo Paxton. She was Castilian, though."

"That is indeed a mouthful." Nonn stepped over the railing onto the longboat, making sure to pass the line around the rigging. He looked at the man at the front of the boat. "Ready?"

"We spoke it at home, Sir."

Captain Nonn exhaled angrily. "How is it that a Mister Paxton even married a Miss De la whatever?"

"The Castillo family had a huge plantation growing cocoa and coffee. The Paxton family owned a shipping line."

"A marriage of convenience."

"They were very much in love, Captain." Paxton said. "But it also helped both businesses. I grew up on the plantation, speaking Spanish. Father didn't want me on the ships at sea because it was dangerous."

"Fine, fine." Nonn leaned over the railing. "Get in, we're losing daylight by the minute." When the boy stepped closer, he hauled him aboard.

"Sir?" Said Andrews, at the front of the longboat. "A change of plan?"

"He weighs half a man." Captain Nonn said to the man, then to the ones on the ship: "Lower away; we're losing the rest of the men!"

With that, the longboat was lowered quickly into the water. As soon as it splashed down, Nonn pushed away from the *18 Fathoms*. "You get to row as well, Mister De La Castillo Paxton." He gestured at a set of oars. "Let us catch up." He smirked. "Empeza a remar!"

"Si, Capitán." The youth took up the oars and began to work them.

Within ten minutes, the longboats were all lined up on the shore.

"All right, men" Captain Nonn startled. "Mister Hererra. You don't speak Spanish?"

"It wasn't taught at the orphanage." Mister Hererra said. "My Dutch is really good though."

Captain Nonn looked at Paxton. "You're our main translator, Mister Paxton."

"The kid?" Mister Ederer said.

"He grew up speaking Spanish," Captain Nonn explained. He pointed into the jungle. "Mister Hererra, stay with the boats."

"Because I don't speak Spanish?" His eyes got wide.

"Not at all. It's because when we get back with the treasure, I want them to still be here."

"Aye, Sir." The man said with a nod. He sat on the side of one of the boats. "Oh, they'll be here. I'll even get them all tied together and pointed out to sea in the meanwhile."

"Excellent; let's get going. Daylight is running away from us. Let's head toward those houses there. We need to get to the building behind the Church before nightfall."

The group of nine moved into the jungle along a fairly large path that seemed to run up the hillside to the group of three houses. Farther up the hill to the left was ostensibly the church and the treasure.

"We should be able to get a wagon through here easily enough, I think." Captain Nonn said.

"A wagon?" Paxton asked.

Captain Nonn looked back at him. "I'm planning on taking a lot more treasure that we can fit in our pockets, Mister Paxton. We'll get wagons and animals from those three houses."

"Oh." The youth said as they continued to walk. He had wanted to go on the expedition because he thought it would be a fun adventure. Now he was going to be involved in the murders of several families. He had spoken the truth when he had told Captain Nonn that killing people did not sit well with him. Then a memory came to him. "Captain?" He called.

"Keep it down," Stevens the pirate beside him said. "We don't want to let folks know we're here."

"Sorry." Paxton answered. "It's just…"

"What is it, Mister Paxton?" Captain Nonn said, now regretting bringing the young man even though he did speak Spanish.

"I was thinking back to my time on the plantation, Sir."

"This jungle reminds you of Spain?"

"No, not exactly. But back home I used to work on the plantation with the workers because Father said I needed to learn how to grow and care for crops and…"

"We're trying to move quietly," Stevens interrupted. "This isn't a casual Sunday stroll."

"I agree." Captain Nonn said. He had slowed and was now beside the boy. "Do you have a point or are you reminiscing?"

"Well, the workers on the plantation didn't like the King. They hated him in fact. They would talk about how he would rob their money for his palaces and parties and keep them downtrodden. They'd try to hide how much they made to pay less in taxes and the soldiers knew they were doing that so they would get angry at them for it."

"That sounds like most any king." Captain Nonn said. "Again, are you just making conversation?"

"It seems to me that we could ask these people," Paxton gestured at the houses less than a hundred yards away, "if they would be willing to help us without… without…"

"Without us having to kill them all." Captain Nonn finished. "I understand that you don't have a stomach for killing, Paxton. But I can't see these people just giving us wagons and animals to pull them."

"Unless we left behind a box or two, Captain." Mister Ederer said. "The boy's point has merit. And while we are subduing one household, if the nearby ones hear, we may find ourselves in a hornets' nest. Angry locals are never a good thing."

Captain Nonn considered that for a moment. "That could definitely cause an issue, wouldn't it?" He nodded. "Fine then Mister Paxton, you can go to the first house and ask them for the use of a wagon and animals. Explain quickly what we are doing and their compensation. If they agree then they live. If not… If not, then you will need to step out of the way even more quickly."

"Yes, Sir." Paxton said, relieved that he now at least had a chance to prevent bloodshed.

The group moved quietly up to the house. As Paxton stepped up to the front door, the other pirates pressed against the walls on either side, prepared to enter the house.

Moments after Paxton knocked on the door, a very large elderly man opened it. "Sí?"

"Buenas noches Señor." Paxton said. "Yo tengo un problemo…" The boy continued in Spanish.

Captain Nonn was unable to keep up with the conversation with his limited Spanish. He looked at Mister Ederer who only shrugged back;

the boy and the man were speaking far too fast for either of them to follow along. After almost two minutes of speaking and gesturing, the man came down the steps onto the hard packed earth in front of his home. He turned around to face the pirates. "Buenas noches, Señores!" he said loudly. He spread his hands out wide. "Buenas noches!"

"Shhh!" Captain Nonn held a finger to his lips. "Tell him we're trying to do this quiet like." He hesitated then lied: "And we don't want anyone to get hurt."

As the boy relayed the message to the man, the Pirates sheathed their swords and stepped away from the house.

The Spanish man put a finger to his lips as well and smiled wide. "Si, si!" He said, just as loudly as before.

"So, what is the agreement, Mister Paxton?" Captain Nonn said. He still had his sword out. In case he didn't like the terms.

"Señor Ruiz has a small wagon that he will let us use. He has an ox that pulls it. And…" Paxton said.

"Well, it's a start. What did you promise him in return?"

"He would like to fill a box for himself when we get to the building."

"The treasure is still here then?" Stevens said. "Excellent."

"And what?" Captain Nonn said.

"And what, what?" Paxton said.

"You said he had an ox that pulls it, and then started to say something else."

"Oh, yes." Paxton pointed. "His neighbors are family and they aren't happy that all that treasure is going to Spain while they live on next to nothing. He said they are near starving."

"And they have wagons as well, this family of his?" Captain Nonn said. "I'm beginning to see a pattern here."

Paxton looked up at Señor Ruiz and said something to him in Spanish as he pointed at the other houses.

With a nod, the old man waddled off.

"That man is living on next to nothing?" Andrews said as they all watched the obese man leave. "I'd hate to see how big he'd be if he got a decent meal in him every so often."

"Indeed." Pirate Nonn said. He looked at Paxton. "And our new rotund friend is sure these others will accept the same terms?"

"It's his brother and his sister and her husband." Paxton said. "They are fishermen and sell their fish in town as well as coconuts. They are very poor. He seemed very excited."

The group waited in silence for a long five minutes. Finally, Señor Ruiz came jogging back. He was out of breath and unable to speak when he arrived.

"He looks like he's going to keel over right here." Stevens looked toward the house. "Anyone else in the house?"

"His wife is asleep." Paxton explained. "Está bien, Señor?"

The man nodded as he continued to breathe deeply.

"Daylight's wasting. Let him know that." Captain Nonn said.

"Right. Right, Sir." Paxton said then he relayed the message.

The man had recovered enough to answer and began to gesture at the other two homes.

After a moment of the two of them speaking in Spanish, Captain Nonn interrupted. "Well?"

"His brother is bringing his large wagon. He just has to get his fishing boat off it first. He is afraid to leave it on the beach in case it gets stolen. He has two oxen to pull it. His brother-in-law already had his boat off his wagon so he will… Oh, there he is."

The pirates all turned to watch as a wagon approached. It was seven feet across and twelve feet long. It had axles at both the front and back.

Instead of a single wheel on each end of the axle, there were two spaced a little apart. Between the gap was a foot wide strip of leather to help keep the wagon on top of the soft sand. There were two very large oxen pulling it.

"That there is a nice sized wagon," Stevens said. "Well done, Pax."

"And we have someone to drive it." Mister Ederer added. "Well done indeed."

"Okay, let's get Señor Ruiz's wagon ready to go while we wait on the third." Captain Nonn said. "If you could help the gentleman, Bington and Davis." He pointed. "Get his wagon unloaded and hitched up, we will be ready to go."

"Aye Captain," Bington said. "Señor? El wagon-o?"

"Si, si; el Vagon." The man said. He started around the house gesturing for Bington to follow.

"El wagon-o?" Mister Davis shook his head as he followed the pair.

"All right men. First part of the plan looks like it came together pretty well." Captain Nonn said to the smiling men.

Half of them expected to find no treasure at all and were planning on just shooting the captain before heading back to the ship.

"It is indeed," Roberts said. He was the head of the group that planned on shooting Captain Nonn, and any pirates that sided with him. "So, we'll put a couple of men in each wagon and stay low."

"Yes," Nonn said as he finally sheathed his falchion. He expected at least some of the men to turn on him if the treasure had already left for Spain. "Hopefully with locals driving the wagons, no one will give them pause." He looked up at the sky- it was getting very dark. "We've got maybe an hour of light left in front of us. Mister Roberts can you go see if that brother-in-law needs help while I coax Ruiz to move quicker?"

"Good idea, captain." Roberts said. "Ederer, Andrews, give me a hand." With that, the three moved toward the brother-in-law's home.

Chapter XXXII
Soldier Monks

"Las puertas está allá," the brother said as he pointed at the large wooden doors. In stark contrast to Señor Ruiz, the man was skeletally thin.

"Bueno, gracias," Captain Nonn said as he leaned over the back of the wagon. "It's like a small fort." He said to Roberts.

"Do you want me to walk up? No one would suspect a boy," Paxton said.

"And what will you do?" Captain Nonn said. He held out his musket. "Will you shoot that man in his tracks?"

"Oh." Paxton said. "I… never mind."

Nonn looked at the building again. "We do need to figure out a way to get those doors before they bolt them from the inside. If they do that, we're in for a fight. A loud fight that will bring reinforcements for sure."

The building was made of stone with high barred windows set evenly spaced near the roofline- much too high and small to climb

through. It was topped with a thatched roof. The jungle had been cleared away from it about twenty yards so there was no way to approach it without being seen. No trees or branches overhung the vulnerable roof either. There seemed to be several men in monk's robes moving around the building. 'Soldier Monks', Paxton has commented. After watching for a few minutes, the Pirates realized they were actually patrolling the premises at regular intervals. They had also learned that the large wood double doors were unlocked. The left one was wide open, ostensibly to allow a breeze to enter and the right one was not fastened in place. At one point as the men would come and go from inside when they made their rounds, a guard had grabbed the other door as he stepped around it and it swung freely. He casually pulled it back into position before walking off. The guards did not seem to consider the unlocked doors an issue because with the amount of open space in front of them; a large area had been cleared to allow a wagon to turn around so it would be easy to bar them from the inside before anyone got there.

"Hell's bells." Roberts said. "We've come a long way to just look at a building, Sir. What's the plan?"

Mister Ederer crept up to the wagon and peered over the back. "I've an idea, Sir."

"Excellent, Mister Ederer. What say you?"

"I say we put three men in the back of Mister Ruiz's wagon and rush the door."

"They'll get it closed before we get there." Roberts said. "Then we'll be stuck outside trying to batter in those giant wood doors. The whole island will know we're here."

"No, no." Mister Ederer said. "We go straight inside with his small wagon. It will fit in that double doorway just fine. That right one seems to swing both ways so it will just push in."

"Aye," Captain Nonn said. "And they sure won't be able to close with a wagon sitting there, will they?"

"No. Then the three men in the wagon can dispatch whoever is inside while the rest deal with the outside guards to keep anyone from running for help."

Captain Nonn considered that for a moment. "Well, we know there are only eight of them coming and going from that place." He held up a finger. "That we've seen, that is. There may be guards that just stay inside."

"I really think they're taking turns coming outside in those heavy robes." Roberts said. "There's got to be just eight guards."

"And an officer or two that don't come out." Captain Nonn pointed out.

"I agree," Mister Ederer said. "So we'll wait until four do their round so there'll be four to six inside. We can spread out to catch them on the opposite sides of the building. Two to each side."

Watching the guards, the pirates had seen where four guards left the building at the same time, two would walk clockwise around it and two counterclockwise. At the rear they would cross each other then return inside. They would walk at a very leisurely pace taking almost ten minutes to complete the circuit. Then after a minute inside, another set would walk the same route. It was then that Roberts suggested they were passing the robes among themselves and taking turns to avoid the heat in the wool robes.

"We'll send two left, two right, and three inside." Captain Nonn said.

"Fine then, Mister Roberts. Relay the plan to the other men. I'll move to the small wagon. When the men are in position, we will attack." A thought occurred to him. "Gather one each of their pistols. If at all possible, they need to subdue those outside guards without firing a shot. We may need the extra shot inside." When the men had left the ship, each had taken two pistols and a musket. Expecting close-quarters fighting they knew there wouldn't be a chance to reload a pistol so each brought two.

"Captain?"

"Outside, that rapport will travel to other ears. Inside the building, they should be muffled enough no one will hear. The outside men need to be dealt with by hand so we don't alert anyone else."

Roberts nodded. “Right, right. You and I and Bington will deal with the inside guards then.”

“He’s a good shot. That’s as good a plan as any.” Replied Captain Nonn. “Let the men know we will ram the gate when the two guards round the front corners.” He looked at Paxton. “Come with me to Ruiz’s wagon to tell him the plan. Then just stay in the wagon and keep your head down. And tell him to duck down once we’re inside.”

“Yes Sir, so he stays safe.”

“No; so he can drive the wagon out to back in it once we’ve secured the building.” Captain Nonn corrected. “He’d do it faster than any of us, I imagine.” He pointed at Ruiz’s brother. “Let him know the plan quick-like then meet me in the small wagon.”

“Oh.” Paxton said. “Right.”

“Go, Mister Roberts, we spring the trap when you return.” He looked up at the sky. It was almost dark out. “If we don’t hurry, the *Devil’s Delight* will end up sailing away before we do.”

Chapter XXXIII
The Treasure of Saona Isle

"Vamos!" Captain Nonn whispered as he prodded Señor Ruiz in the back. "Go, go!"

Señor Ruiz cracked the whip on the haunch of the ox. It moved quickly to a trot. The wagon moved out of the jungle after the two sets of guards had stepped around the corner of the building so no one saw the approach.

"Mas rapido!" Captain Nonn said as the wagon entered the clearing in front of the doors. "Faster!"

Señor Ruiz obliged with another crack of his whip.

The ox sped up some more just as a shirtless guard stepped into the opening. Trying to miss the right door, the ox shifted a little to the left and hit the man head-on. As it entered the building, the animal skidded to a halt with half the wagon still outside. The side of the wagon had knocked the shut door inward, opening the entire front of the building.

"Let's go!" Captain Nonn hopped over the side of the wagon, musket at the ready.

Roberts and Bington jumped over the side opposite Nonn, closer to where the guards were sitting.

Roberts leveled his musket at a soldier, caught unawares and still sitting at a table. He fired then dropped it. He drew both pistols as he advanced.

Captain Nonn leaned across the back of the ox and fired his musket at another soldier that had sidestepped to get out of Robert's line of fire. The soldier had reached for a pistol on the table as Nonn fired. Since it was less than twenty feet, the round caught the man square in the chest, knocking him backwards.

Bington fired at the third soldier just as he fired as well. The soldier fell straight back while Bington spun around then fell.

Captain Nonn threw his musket at the fourth soldier like a harpoon, making him duck. As the soldier stood back up, Roberts shot him with a pistol, dropped it and moved his last pistol to his dominant hand. He panned the room with both it, stopping on a Spaniard standing rock still and wide-eyed.

The soldier knocked to the ground by the ox moaned as he got to his hands and knees. Captain Nonn took two steps and kicked the man in the face. The man flipped onto his back and remained still. Nonn looked around frantically. "The others? Any others?"

"I got him. The officer." Roberts said. "Seems he's decided to sit this one out."

Captain Nonn turned to look. The Spanish Lieutenant had his hands over his head. "Nicely done, Mister Roberts. Keep him there. Paxton! Get out here and translate." He stepped around the mule to Bington who was on the ground. There was a large hole in the left side of his upper chest. "Mister Bington. How…" his voice trailed off when he realized that while the pirate's eyes were open, they no longer saw anything. "Blast it." He spun around and trained his two pistols on the surrendered Spaniard.

"Captain." Paxton said. "Captain, I'll have him move to the corner so he can get tied up."

Captain Nonn took a breath, then another. "Fine. Keep him covered." He twisted the pistols around and offered the handles to Paxton. "Here."

"Sir, I couldn't. I wouldn't be able…"

"You and I know that, but he doesn't, now does he?" Captain Nonn said. "Just point them in his direction until he's tied up. Just don't go too tight on the triggers."

Paxton took the pistols. "Yes, Sir. Thanks." He turned. "A la esquina!" He said as he gestured at a corner.

"Roberts, get him and that other one tied nice and fast." Captain Nonn said. "Paxton, tell Ruiz to turn that wagon around so we can start loading it, once it's full have the others come in. And we're in a hurry. Got it?"

"Yes, Sir," Replied Paxton. He kept his eyes on the Lieutenant.

At the sound of men approaching, Captain Nonn drew his falchion and Roberts spun around, pointing his pistol at the door.

"It's us! It's us!" Said Mister Ederer.

"Ederer and Davis. Excellent. Any issues out there?"

"No captain, not on our side." Davis said.

"Fine, fine." Captain Nonn said as Andrews and Stevens jogged up. "Gentlemen." He said as they came into view. "Issues?"

"None, captain." Replied Stevens.

"Good, then you and Andrews get those soldiers dragged in here out of sight while…" He looked at Paxton. "Paxton! Tell Ruiz to turn around that wagon so we can load it!"

"Oh! Yes, sir." Paxton said, then he relayed the message to Ruiz.

"God Almighty." Captain Nonn took a deep breath. "Okay. You two get those bodies out of site…"

Señor Ruiz clicked his tongue as he pulled back on the reins. Dutifully his ox back-stepped out of the building.

"You two get those bodies out of site," repeated Captain Nonn as he pulled the right door completely open. "And we'll get this treasure ready to move."

As Señor Ruiz turned the wagon around, Captain Nonn took a moment to look around the room. There were at least a hundred chests scattered around the room. Some were stacked three high. Every open space of floor had something on it. He stepped to one close by and opened it. It was filled almost half full with gold coins. He opened another. It was full of silver coins. "God Almighty." He said again.

"Three quiet cheers for Captain Nonn," Roberts said as he stood. He had tied both men together with an inordinate amount of rope. "We can't get all this to the boat." He said appraising the room. "We'd need a dozen longboats. Maybe two dozen."

"Agreed." Captain Nonn said. "I suggest we take only the ones with coins in them. And only gold." He reached down and pulled on the chest's handle. It was too heavy for him to move along. "It seems we'll stack them here for loading." He said to the laughs of the men.

Chapter XXXIV
A Longboat Procession

Mister Hererra sat up as a wagon emerged from the jungle. He moved to the other side of the longboat and leveled his musket at it. "Who goes there?" He called into the darkness.

"It is just us," Captain Nonn said. He was walking beside the wagon.

Mister Hererra lowered the musket. "I was getting worried, captain. It's been quite a while."

"We apologize for the delay," Captain Nonn said as he came better into view. "It took a bit longer than we expected."

"Any problems, Sir?" Mister Hererra said as he looked at the wagon. "A wagonload, outstanding! That's outstanding, captain!"

"Well, that's the good news," Captain Nonn said. "Mister Bington didn't make it."

"Oh." Mister Herrera's shoulders sagged. "That is a shame. He was a real mate."

"That he was."

"So, a wagon full is…" Mister Hererra sidestepped. "Two wagons?"

"Three. Three full wagons, good man."

"Three?" Mister Hererra sidestepped again. "Will it all fit?"

Captain Nonn looked out into the bay. Less than a hundred yards away the deck lights of the *18 Fathoms* were visible. "We should be able to get most of it in. Some goes to our wagon-owning benefactors. A deal is a deal, after all."

"Yes, I suppose so." Hererra said, not understanding. He gestured. "The boats are all tied together. I just haven't tied the main line to the lead boat. If we give a couple of good yanks on the line, they'll start hauling us in. I figured it would be a terrible thing if we pulled by accident and they started hauling in the longboats before we were ready."

"Very astute, Mister Hererra." Captain Nonn said. "Paxton!" He shouted. "Get these wagons lined up along the boats and let's see how much will fit."

"Paxton?" Hererra asked.

"His Spanish has been invaluable. I will suggest he gets an extra share because of his ingenuity and assistance."

The Pirate looked at the wagons as they came into view. "Seems there's plenty to make that happen."

"Aye," Captain Nonn said. "And while I hate being greedy, I think we need to fill the boats to the gills and swim alongside."

Mister Hererra looked back out onto the water. "Well, if they're pulling us along, that sounds like a good bit extra treasure to me." He shrugged. "I'll take a swim for my weight in gold."

"Our sentiments exactly." Captain Nonn said. He stepped forward as the train of wagons pulled along the sterns of the longboats. "Let's get loaded or we'll miss the *Devil's Delight*." He took off his jacket and put it on the beach. "To work, gentlemen."

With that, the pirates loaded the longboats as full as they dared to, then usually one extra chest was added. After an hour, the boats were completely loaded.

"Mister Paxton," Captain Nonn said. "Thank our helpful natives for their assistance. We will be shoving off momentarily."

Paxton turned to the three men and spoke to them, gesturing at the longboats, the several chests left in each of the wagons, then back at the jungle.

Captain Nonn turned to face Señor Ruiz. "Our business is settled then." He said as he held out a hand. "Gracias, Señor."

Señor Ruiz took his hand and shook it vigorously. "Sí. Sí Señor! Muchas gracias!" He looked at his brother and brother-in-law. "Vaciemos los vagones y volvamos de nuevo."

"Yes indeed, Sir." Captain Nonn said, not understanding the man as he let go of his hand. "Sounds good to me." He looked at the boats. "Make fast that line and give it a hearty tug, Mister Roberts. It's time we set sail before anyone notices us."

"My sentiments exactly." Mister Roberts said. He waded into the water and tied several knots on the lead longboat. "Everyone ready?" He looked back.

After the Pirates had removed their tops and put them in the boats, Roberts gave a strong tug on the line. After a few moments, he tugged on it again.

Still the line did not grow taut.

"Did they fall asleep out there?" Roberts snapped. "If I have to swim out there, I swear I'll…" He was cut off as the boat lurched forward knocking him face first in the water.

"Mister Hererra, help Mister Roberts up. I'd hate to lose him this far along."

"Aye." Mister Hererra reached down and helped Roberts gain his footing. The longboat was moving quickly away from the pair.

"Grab hold you two! Everyone else get one on a side!" Captain Nonn said as the second longboat pulled away from the shore. He quickly grabbed the side and followed it out into chest deep water before picking up his legs. The side of the longboat was mere inches above the water.

"I hope we don't swamp any of these!" Andrews said from the other side of Nonn. "Hate to lose an entire longboat because of one too many chests."

"Once we get to the ship, get aboard right away and get lines run down to hold these steady until we get them emptied," Nonn called back. He looked over his shoulder. Paxton was holding onto the boat behind him. "Paxton, what did that Ruiz say to you before he shook my hand?"

"He wasn't talking to me; he was telling the other two that he wanted to empty the wagons and go back to get more treasure."

"A man after my own heart." Nonn said back. "If we could get him aboard, I'd love to add him to the crew." He said to the laughs of the other men.

"He told me that if this worked out, they were all going back to Spain and start over." Paxton said back. "His family has some land in the south, near Cádiz."

"Smart man. Sudden newfound wealth when the treasury has been emptied is a sure way to end up in the gallows." Hererra said. "And a

nice quiet homestead in Southern Spain is the perfect place to start afresh. That doesn't sound like a bad plan at all."

"Except you don't speak Spanish." Captain Nonn said.

"I'm sure I could learn." Hererra replied.

"Por supuesto," Paxton said.

The group kept a lively banter as the longboats were pulled toward the *18 Fathoms*.

"Ahoy!" Captain Nonn shouted up. "Who's on watch?"

"Where are you?" Brian Rather called down. In the moonlight he couldn't see anyone in the boats. "You all fall overboard?"

"For the sake of our weight in gold, we all agreed to take a swim." Captain Nonn called back. "We need some lines to hold these boats above water till they're emptied. The one I'm with is getting swamped."

"Can't let that happen!" Rather replied then disappeared from site. Within moments a dozen lines were thrown over the railing. A few minutes later, the boats were all secured to the cannons on that side of the ship. As that was being done, another rope was used to pull the pirates back aboard.

"Thank you, Mister Rather." Nonn said after he got pulled over the railing.

"Captain Nonn, welcome back aboard." Rather said with a smile. "So… it was a successful adventure?"

"Quite."

"You got all the treasure?"

"Oh no, not quite." Nonn looked back at the island. "There's over three times as much as this left back there. We'd have needed another dozen longboats. But still…" Several gun rapports made him look to the island. "Oh, Señor Ruiz, were you a little too greedy?"

"Ruiz?" Rather asked.

"A local who helped us out in return for some of the treasure. He said he was going back to get more when he should have been content with what he had." Captain Nonn thought for a moment then lowered his voice. "Either he and his cohorts ran into some guards and met their demise. Or Ruiz didn't want to be identified by the ones we tied up and dealt with them. Don't mention that scenario to Mister Paxton; he assisted in tying them up. It wouldn't sit well with him."

Rather nodded. "I won't. Truth be told, I don't believe this is the life for that young man."

"It is not. In fact, when we get to Florida, he is going to join some family he has there. Sugarcane plantation."

"Sounds boring."

"He'll probably die of old age." Captain Nonn pointed out.

"Or dysentery, cholera, or typhoid." Replied Rather. "All without being on the water."

"Point taken." Nonn smirked.

"So you left a lot of the treasure behind?"

"Yes; it was actually quite a lot." Captain Nonn shook his head. "All left behind."

"Greed is what gets most people in the end. Be happy with what you got, says I." Rather rubbed his hands together. "Speaking of greed, let's get all that gold, gems, and such aboard."

"No, no." Captain Nonn shook his head again. "We left the gems and such. Even the silver. We just took gold."

"Well, I guess I'll have to make due." Rather grinned wide. "If you want to put dry clothes on, I'll get those chests aboard and those boats stowed."

"Yes. We definitely need to get underway. We're liable to miss the *Devil's Delight* if we tarry any longer." Nonn looked at the sky. "The moon's making its run. It's got to be close to ten."

"We're coming up on four bells of the first watch." Rather said, confirming that it was indeed almost ten o'clock.

"I'll be back shortly." Captain Nonn said as he moved off with a sigh. "Oh, we lost Bington. Shot."

"Damn." Rather exhaled. "Still, that's better than cholera."

Captain Nonn didn't answer; he wasn't sure which was worse. Or if young Paxton actually had the right idea with a life on land. The amount of gold they each would receive would definitely allow someone to set themselves up for life if they were judicious. The sad fact of the matter was that most of the crew would squander their share within six months. He tried to think of alternative careers but nothing came to mind. Having a ship of his own was the most he ever wanted.

Chapter XXXV
Underway

Captain Nonn climbed the stairs onto the deck nearly an hour later- he had sat down to rest for a moment and had dozed off. The rolling let him know that they were underway.

"Captain!" Rather called. "Behold; our favorite captain approaches."

Captain Nonn raised an eyebrow. "I assume I'm still in good favor with the crew?"

"Indeed, you are." Rather said. "Did you by chance count how many chests you gathered?"

"Oh, I…" Captain Nonn paused as he thought back. They had been so busy loading the chests as quickly as possible onto the wagons and then the longboats that they had actually not made a count. "No, now that I think about it I didn't. Why?"

"There are seventy-five chests."

Captain Nonn considered that. "That's one each with fifteen left over. Pretty handy for the ship." It was customary that when a treasure was divided up, three or four shares were set aside for the ship to replace sails and rigging, longboats, or anything else required for keeping the ship in good working order. And ammunition, of course.

"Sixteen." Corrected Rather. "Bington."

"Oh, right, right. Eight each then." Captain Nonn said. "Well, I promised Mister Paxton an extra share for his excellent translating that resulted in having three wagons. We'd have never gotten as much otherwise."

"No one will complain about that." Rather smirked. "Especially if we don't mention it again."

"Excellent suggestion." Captain Nonn moved to where the chests were lined up on the deck. They had been placed end to end behind the cannons. "All in a row?"

"It made it easier to move coins between them to make them all even. And I thought it would be a nice show for the other ship when we catch up with them. Or they with us, I suppose."

"Two chests each is going to get kind of crowded," Captain Nonn observed.

As with other sailors of the time, the pirates, along with a small berth that had a hammock or bed, owned a personal chest where they

could keep their share of any booty, personal items, and clothes. Adding a second chest to their small area would be difficult.

"They can combine them, I suppose. Stack them even. Or just keep the chest they like the best." Rather said. "Then pitch the empties overboard." He moved to the rail and looked out at the water. "Besides with half the crew on the other ship, we're pretty empty below decks. Mayhap we can hold onto the chests, trade them at a port. That'd be kind of nice, really, a half full ship."

"Wait for a month when no one's getting any sleep because there aren't enough to run proper watches. Or we get caught in a week-long storm. Or we run into an unfriendly ship or two. Or…"

"Yes, Yes." Rather interrupted. "I said it was nice, not that I want to keep doing it. We both need to sign on more crew."

"When we get to Mosquito Inlet, we'll definitely be able to pick up some sailors."

"Have you been there?" Rather asked.

"Once a few years ago." Captain Nonn answered. "It was bustling back then. Can't imagine it's not the same or even more so now."

"And young Paxton will be heading off to find his fortune." Rather nudged a trunk with his foot. "First thing he'll need to do is buy a wagon to carry all his loot. And a pistol to keep it."

Nonn shrugged. "Who'd think to rob some ragged looking boy in a wagon?" He frowned. "Then again, perhaps we should provide an escort of some kind."

"You're soft on him?" Rather said with a smirk.

"He's a good lad, truth be told. Good head on his shoulders as well." Nonn gestured at the trunks. "And this is his doing, really. We'd have gotten half this amount if he hadn't suggested paying the locals to help us steal the gold. We ended up with three wagons instead of one."

Rather nodded. "So, this family he's going to. Do they know he's on his way?"

Nonn shook his head. "Not a bit. That's why he wanted to have something to offer his Uncle when he got there."

"Family is family." Rather said as he moved to the rail and leaned on it. "Don't need a reason to visit. Or bribe them."

"That's what I told him. But he wants to be able to buy more land and start his own plantation alongside his family. Start a family even."

"At his age?"

"He's looking ahead. Like I said, he's got a good head on his shoulders." Nonn replied as he moved to the railing as well. "Maybe I'll accompany him to the plantation. Make sure he gets there in one piece."

"You thinking of retiring?" Rathers smiled at him. "Moving to land?"

"To what? Watching sugarcane grow? Not hardly." Nonn shook his head. "As I told Paxton, this is what I'm going to be doing until I can't do it anymore."

"Then what?" Rather had thought many times of finding a less dangerous career than piracy and with the amount of treasure sitting on the deck that belonged to him, it seemed as if a career change was finally within his grasp. "Run a ferry for some town on an inlet?" Being a ferryman was something he had considered doing. That or a river merchant. "Can't do this when you're old, you know."

"True enough. Maybe then I'll take Paxton up on an extended visit of his plantation." Nonn looked down into the dark water. "Or more likely, I'll have a nice long visit with Davy Jones."

Rather chuckled even though he knew that more often than not, becoming dead was how a pirate ended his career. "I wonder if Mister Jones will ever get tired of us showing up."

"I'll worry about that later on." Nonn sighed. "Why don't you get some sleep and I'll relieve Mister Childs of his trick at the wheel. That way he can be back on when we come across the *Devil's Delight* tomorrow."

"You're optimistic." Rather pushed off the rail and stretched.

"Oh, they'll be scouring the Caribbean for us, don't you doubt it." Nonn said. "Either to kill me because this was a fool's errand or to get their share of it." Nonn stepped away from the railing and turned toward the helm. "See you in the morning, Brian."

"See you, Nonn."

With that, Nonn walked to the helm and relieved Childs until dawn. While he was tired, he did not want to have his typical nightmare - not while he was elated by the overwhelming success in finding the treasure. He decided he would sail the ship until dawn, avoid any drinking, and hopefully have a dry, dreamless sleep in the morning hours. This was also something that kept him at sea; how could one deal with his problem in a closed room on land instead of on a ship surrounded by readily available water to wash himself and his bedding down? His thoughts became dark as he tried to understand why he had his dreams. And accidents. From what he could gather from the other sailors, none had the same issue. As he took the wheel, he tried to calm his frustration by watching the telltales on the sails, keeping them flat against it as he skirted around Hispaniola in what was hopefully a slow enough pace that the *Devil's Delight* would catch up.

Chapter XXXVI
Evening Out Cargo

"Captain!" Paxton said as he pounded on the door. "Wake up!"

Captain Nonn startled away. The room was bright and he wasn't sure how long he had been asleep. He had gone to sleep about an hour past dawn. He was relieved to discover he could just dress quickly. "What is it?" He shouted as he worked himself out of his net bed. "Have we company?" He asked worriedly. While he had sailed throughout the night, he had kept an eye at their wake, worried he would see the running lights of an approaching ship. Or ships. Since hearing the gunfire on Saona, he was sure that Ruiz in his greed had been caught and questioned. And because of that, there was now a flotilla giving chase.

In actuality, the opposite was true; Ruiz had dispatched the two guards who would have easily recognized him. After taking several other chests, the entire Ruiz family had gone to the port that very evening and purchased a midnight passage to Puerto Rico, where they would invariably board a larger ship bound for Spain. When other soldiers arrived in the morning, they would have no clue where the treasure had gone until they conducted an island-wide search. The missing Ruiz

family was their only clue but by then, they were safely anonymous on the large island of Puerto Rico. A ship later that week would take them and ironically a portion of the treasure safely back to Spain.

"Yes!" Paxton shouted back. "It's the other ship, they've found us."

"You're sure it's the *Devil's Delight*?" Nonn said.

"Yes Sir; they are about a mile away and gaining. We're luffing our sails to wait for them."

Captain Nonn let out a relieved breath. "Fine, fine. Tell them I'll be there shortly." When he didn't hear back from the boy, he decided Paxton had run off to deliver his reply. Elated, he hopped into his pants and pulled on his shirt. Since they were at sea, he did not put on his boots or take his pistols.

After a few minutes, Nonn came up the stairs into the bright morning sun. There was a crisp breeze from the south which had the sails flapping noisily as they had been loosened to slow the ship. He was pleased to see the *Devil's Delight* was sailing off their stern about five hundred yards. "Excellent. Most excellent." He said as he moved amidships. Someone had opened the chests so that the gold in them gleamed in the sun. They all seemed to be about half full; almost ninety pounds of gold in each. It was a veritable fortune for each sailor.

Even though they were left unlocked on the deck all night long, Nonn was sure that all of the treasure was still in them; the fact that anyone caught stealing would have immediately been thrown overboard kept sticky fingers at bay. Many things could be overlooked on a sailing ship but the one thing that could not -and was not- tolerated was stealing from fellow sailors.

"Good morning, Sir." Mister Childs said from the helm. "Thanks for the full night's sleep, Sir."

"Don't mention it." Captain Nonn said as he approached the man. "Do you have our bearings?"

"Aye." Mister Childs replied. "We've rounded the corner of Hispaniola. By this time tomorrow, we'll be sailing between Little Inagua Island and West Caicos. Then we're heading into the Bahamas. Clear sailing all the way to Florida, I say."

"That will indeed be nice." Captain Nonn looked up the sky; it was clear blue to the horizon in all directions. "I'll not tempt Poseidon by mentioning storms."

"That is a good idea, Sir." Childs said with a smile. "A brisk breeze and a relaxing sail is what I am calling for."

"Then that's what we shall have."

"Ahoy!" Captain Whiddon shouted as his ship closed the distance between them.

"Get those sails tight!" Captain Nonn shouted to the men in the rigging. "Or they'll pass us by!"

"How are we this fine morning?" Captain Whiddon called.

"Rich is how we are!" Brian Rather shouted back. "Run alongside us so we can even out our cargo!"

"Aye!" Whiddon shouted back as the *Devil's Delight* turned slightly to come alongside the *18 Fathoms*.

The *18 Fathoms'* sails billowed tight as they were once again secured in place. The ship lurched forward slowing the progress of the other ship in overtaking them.

"Steady as she goes, Mister Childs." Captain Nonn said. "Keep her straight and true."

"Yes, Sir." Childs said. He looked over at the helmsman of the other ship and raised an arm to get his attention. When the other man looked he pointed to make sure they both would go in the same direction.

Within only a couple of minutes, the two ships were running side by side, a mere 15 yards apart.

"So how will we do this?" Rather said to a man on the other ship. "Run a line from the Mizzen boom so we can swing the chests over? What say you Mister Tucker?"

"We'd have to get awful close for that," Nate Tucker replied. He looked fore and aft on the ship as he considered a better way of transferring the chests without having the ships sail within 10 yards of each other- the length of the boom. "It's pretty calm. That should work as long as we keep it steady." A thought occurred to him. "How many chests to transfer?"

Rather smiled. "One for each sailor, my good man. One for each sailor."

Tucker's eyes got large. "What?"

"Oh, that's not true, actually." Rather said.

"Oh, well…" Tucker said as he chuckled. "That would indeed be…"

"Plus eight for your ship's stores, of course."

Tucker's eyes got large again. "What?"

"Oh yes." Rather gestured at the deck behind him. "Get up on the rigging and see for yourself." He pointed. "That's what your crew's doing."

Tucker turned and looked up. True enough, there were two dozen sailors in the rigging above him looking down at the other ship as they pointed. "What see you?" He called up to them.

"A row of chests from almost stem to stern!" A sailor shouted back. "Every one of them full of gold!"

"Drop all but your main, we'll do the same." Rather said. "You'll have to reef yours because you're faster." He looked over his shoulder. "Mister Childs, take us in nice and steady." He called to the helmsman

Captain Nonn gave his first mate a nod then looked up. "Drop all but the main! We're coming in close!"

"Right, right!" Tucker called back. "Nice and easy. No one's around and I'd hate to give old Davey Jones a share of our treasure on accident."

Captain Nonn looked around the deck. "Paxton?" He shouted. "Paxton!"

"Sir?" Said the youth as he jogged over.

Nonn pointed at the crow's nest. "Get up there and keep a sharp eye out while we wallow along transferring cargo."

"Aye, Captain." The youth said.

Even after developing a rhythm, each chest took about fifteen minutes to secure in a net, swing carefully over to the other ship and then get untied, then the boom would have to be swung back to the *18*

Fathoms and reset. Since there were thirty-eight chests being transferred, the sun was low in the sky when the last one finally landed on the deck of the *Devil's Delight*. A cheer went up from the men, who had been taking shifts working the boom and tying and untying the crates.

Nonn had wandered off during a bit of the transfer since it became very boring to watch after the first half dozen crates. He had even taken a nap. He stood by the helmsman again now that the ships were a safe hundred yards apart and sailing with all their sails out. "Mister Childs, about seeing the shores of West Caicos." He said, letting his voice trail off.

"Hah!" Mister Childs laughed loudly. "It'll be an entire other day before we see those islands, sir. We've been wallowing along at three knots going nowhere fast." He jerked a thumb over his shoulder. "At least this answered one question."

"What's that?"

"If they knew we had the gold, they'd have easily caught us by now. From what Paxton was saying, the few ships he's seen have just been going about their own business."

"That's a fine thing. And the best answer to that question we could hope for." Nonn said. "Who has the next trick?"

"That'll be Stevens. Then me again." He looked at the Captain. "We really need to get a few more bodies able to steer this thing before too long."

"Once we get to Florida we'll set up in the harbor for some refitting and take on some new crew. Coronado is a good-sized town so I'm fairly confident we'll be able to round out the crew with another twenty good sailors." He gestured at the other ship. "Them as well."

"A signing bonus would make sure it happens." Mister Childs said. "Along with the insurance, there's no reason why a sailor won't sign up for a year or so."

It was common for pirating ships to provide not only a signing bonus to prospective sailors but also to offer a form of insurance as well. If a sailor lost a leg or an eye, they were compensated from the ship's treasury. It helped sailors decide to serve on a ship if they knew if something happened, they would be taken care of. In fact, the contract that Captain Nonn used also provided a death benefit to a next of kin; three quarters of the share that the sailor would have gotten.

"I am still using the same contract, Mister Childs." Captain Nonn said. He stifled a yawn. "Gads, this has been a long boring day."

"Now that the treasure has been divvied up and we're sailing in earnest for Florida. Hearing we'll contract more sailors is a beautiful sight." He gestured at the now full sails. "As fine a sight as that."

"Captain Nonn," Paxton said as he approached. "I am done on watch until tomorrow." He rubbed the top of his head. "Sure was hot up there today."

"Take time to relax, Mister Paxton. We are on the downhill run of this adventure." He patted Mister Childs. "The good Mister Childs has assured me we will have an uneventful sail all the way to Florida."

"To Mosquito Inlet?"

"Yes, in fact. We will procure a wagon in Coronado and I shall accompany you to your Uncle's plantation."

"You're going to stay there?"

"No." Captain Nonn shook his head. "I'm just making sure you get there safely. And if I can impose on your family to keep watch of a chest for me, I'd like to leave some treasure there for a later date."

"I'm sure that will be fine." Paxton said. "In case you decide to retire?"

"Yes," Lied Captain Nonn. "Just in case." He put his hand on the young man's shoulder. "Or just to keep it safe until I may need it later on as well, of course."

"Sure." Paxton smiled. "Of course."

"Then let's get something to eat. We've a relaxing voyage for the next five days, then we will see your family a day or so after that."

"Excellent." Paxton said. "Once you see the plantation I'm sure you'll decide to stay."

"Most likely." Captain Nonn tipped his hat at Childs. "Yes?"

"Sounds reasonable to me." Mister Childs responded even though he knew the Captain would never leave his ship behind unless it sank from under him or he was dragged from it to a waiting hangman's noose.

Chapter XXXVII
Mosquito Inlet

"God in heaven!" Mister Childs cursed as he slapped at yet another mosquito. "They need to rename this place from merely 'Mosquito Inlet' to 'Kingdom of Mosquitoes!" He looked around the deck. "Someone bring me more mud!"

The ship had sailed into the busy harbor close to evening time and were beset almost immediately by swarms of mosquitoes after anchoring. Sailors on a nearby boat suggested coating their skin with mud to protect themselves. Others said the smoke from burning tar would keep the insects away. The sailors of the *18 Fathoms* and the *Devil's Delight* immediately started dropping buckets into the harbor to pull up mud while others brought up tar from the ship's hold to set alight on deck. Neither seemed to be completely effective. While the ships did have thin linen cloths to put over windows and cannon ports to keep out bugs, those keeping watch on deck were completely at the mercy of the insects who ignored both the mud and smoke.

At daybreak the following morning, Captain Nonn and Paxton headed out with two chests in a wagon they had borrowed. Captain Nonn had pulled the man aside and told him they would return before

the end of the day while he had told Paxton that he had bought it outright. With a hefty tip, the man nodded at the boy to support the lie with a wave and "Take care of my mule and my wagon boy; they will serve you well for years to come." Pirate Nonn returned the wave as the pair rode into the morning mist- which was already buzzing with mosquitoes.

The crew had gotten off the boat right after daybreak but by midday were quite ready to sail onto less mosquito-infested ports of call. By late that afternoon, the missing longboats and rigging had been replaced and all that was lacking was Captain Nonn who had accompanied young Paxton to his sugarcane plantation, ostensibly just two hours away by wagon. While everyone tried to enjoy the town's hospitality, they all kept an eye on the *18 Fathoms*; it was agreed that when Captain Nonn returned, the ships colors would be raised.

Mister Wigglesworth walked up to Childs carrying two large buckets of mud. "Here you go; fresh off the bottom, mate." He smiled as he put down the buckets, sloshing water onto the deck.

Childs stared at the man. Inexplicably the mosquitoes seemed to ignore the massive man. "I demand you tell me!"

"What?" Wesley Wigglesworth smiled wide. "Tell you what?"

"What've you done to keep these biting demons away? Who have you made a pact with?" Childs said as he scooped up a handful of the mud and smeared it on his face and neck. "Who!"

"No one that I know of." Wigglesworth said with a shrug. "I've gotten a couple of bites as well you know." He pointed at his arm. "Honest."

"A couple? Merely two?" Childs leaned in to look. Unlike his own arm, Wigglesworth's did not have any raised welts; just two reddish circles. "Really? You could have fooled me."

"I'm sorry, I truly am." Wes said. It had been a point of contention that he and Mister Stiles the cook seemed to be the only ones on the ship that were invisible to the attention of the bugs. Nate Tucker on the other ship also seemed to be equally blessed.

Childs slapped the sailor on the shoulder. "Bah, I cheer your good fortune, Wes. Really I do." He smirked. "At least you're more presentable in town than the rest of us." He gestured at his mud-caked face. "What wench wants this around her?"

"A cozy bath for two might set the mood. And I'm sure when you flash some gold, they'll welcome you with open arms." Wigglesworth picked up the other bucket. "Hard to say no to gold coins. I've heard the rest of the crew is doing just fine ashore." Once the ship had docked, a schedule was quickly developed to ensure that at any given time there were ten men keeping guard on each ship. Thanks to the amount of treasure they each held, and the propensity for loose tongues after drinking, it was decided that extra guards were required. Even so, the majority of the crew had gotten off as quickly as they could, hoping the mosquitoes would be less prevalent on land. Unfortunately, it was not

the case. However, to deal with the insects, the businesses on shore had pieces of cheese cloth over their windows as well as two very large pieces over the front of their doorways. A patron would step between the hanging cloth and the door, open the door, step in quickly then close it. For the most part, it kept the mosquitoes outside. Moving from establishment to establishment was another story entirely.

"As long as Mister Ederer isn't late to relieve me in an hour, I will wish them all a fine time as well." He cocked his head to the side. "Of course, if our wayward Captain does return before my trick is up, I believe I will forego my time here and use it at a later date in a less-infested port of call."

"That's mighty gentlemanly of you." Wigglesworth said with a smile. "Well, on with my rounds. Give a yell when you need more." He said as he walked off, completely unaware that it was his and the other three sailors' AB blood that mosquitoes turned away from for the more desirable -and prevalent- O type blood. Between his blood type and lack of body fat, Wes Wigglesworth was even more unappetizing to mosquitoes than the other two.

"Thank you." Childs called after the man. He shook his head. "I hope these things are not swarming around the Captain and Paxton."

Chapter XXXVIII
Weighing Anchor

An hour later Mister Ederer relieved Mister Childs amidships. Elated, he turned and walked to the gangplank that led down to the water where the new longboats were tied. "Finally!" He said. "A decent meal of…" His voice trailed off as he saw that Captain Nonn was sitting in a longboat. He was tying it up to the gangplank that hung low to the water.

Since many of the sailors bought items while ashore, instead of using a rope ladder, the gangplank was affixed to the side of the ship so they could carry their barrels of ale, boxes of dried meat and fruit, or replacement clothes easier onto the ship. If all of the longboats were at the ship, they would yell to one of the watchmen to bring it to the docks. Usually however, sailors were moving back and forth so there was always at least one longboat at both locations.

"Captain!" Mister Childs said. "We expected you back tomorrow." He looked at the now-bustling town. "In the afternoon at the earliest." He added dejectedly.

Captain Nonn stepped onto the gangplank. "There was a change of plans once I arrived at the plantation." He lied. Secretly, he never planned to spend a night at the plantation because of his fear of sleeping in a regular bed. Even though there was nothing to be worried about, he knew that his dream even happened on calm evenings with pleasant sailing. There was no rhyme or reason to it. "No. I felt I needed to get back to..." He slapped at his cheek. "Blast these infernal winged demons!"

Mister Childs nodded. "They have named this place appropriately, it seems." He hesitated. "You have me worried now, captain; was there a problem at the plantation? Was Paxton not welcomed by his family?"

Captain Nonn shook his head. "No, quite the contrary." He gestured up the gangplank then continued to speak at the pair moved back to the boat. "They were very excited to see him; they thought he was dead as his parents were. It was a joyous occasion all around."

"Excellent. I'm truly glad for the boy."

"Indeed." Nonn said. "And after a hearty early lunch, I decided the family needed time together without some grungy pirate skulking about." He smirked. The lie even sounded truthful to him.

"Grungy?" Mister Childs patted his mud-caked face. "Well, only at the moment, it seems."

"Does that actually help?" Captain Nonn asked. Once the pair had gotten a little bit away from the port and into the open plains, the

mosquitoes seemed to thin out. They were almost gone as they traveled across a large grassy plain. Once they arrived at the plantation, there were practically none. The Uncle had explained that bats kept them in check. And to ensure they did, he had built hundreds of wooden boxes for the bats to live in all around the perimeter of the property. The plantation itself was a hundred acres of sugarcane as well as close to five acres of sustenance crops for the family. Several cows, chickens, pigs, and goats rounded out the operation. Nonn did actually feel a temptation to stay when Paxton had asked him, but it was overridden by his pride; he could never look young Paxton in the eye again if the boy found out about his predicament. And trying to convince them he needed a rope bed would never work. He swatted at a mosquito on his arm. "These things."

"The mud helps perhaps a little." Childs replied. "I'm afraid to go without it to see if it could get worse."

"Bats keep them at bay." Nonn said as the pair stepped onto the deck of the ship.

"Bats?"

"Yes, it seems they feed on them. The plantation has hundreds of boxes on poles for the bats to live in. In return, they feed on the mosquitoes. There were hardly any on the entire plantation."

"Interesting." Childs said. He gestured toward the wheel. "When do you want to set sail, captain?"

Captain Nonn swatted at another mosquito. "As soon as everyone is aboard, I would say. There are plenty of nicer ports we can rest in." A thought occurred to him. "Are the boats and anchors resupplied?"

"They are. We are both fully stocked on them as well as fresh rations and grog, a new mainsail, and rigging."

"Excellent. Then…" Captain Nonn looked around the deck. There were eight men standing guard in various places. "Strike the colors and fire a shot to let the crews know we are setting out. Oh!" Another thought occurred to him. "How is the crew compliment?"

"We have gained eleven sailors, the *Dawn's Delight* ten. We are short a handful each but it isn't as dire as it was." Childs replied.

"Again, excellent." Captain Nonn smiled. "I suggest we give the Bahamas a visit for a couple of weeks then."

"The Bahamas?" Childs considered that. "Yes; at least those Brits won't be too upset if they realize we're the ones that stole King Charles' treasure."

"The Bahamas are owned by Spain." Captain Nonn pointed out. "So I hope they don't find out it was us. The crew needs to be tight-lipped about our recent adventures."

"Spain owns the Bahamas; since when?"

"Very recently it seems. Paxton's Uncle told me about it." Captain Nonn said. "The Spaniards are siding with the Americans in their fight with England. It seems while the Americans were fighting the British on land, Spain was routing them out of the Caribbean."

"I see. And you still want to go there?" Childs frowned. "You think that's a safe endeavor?"

Captain Nonn shrugged. "Well, the Spaniards just took over the islands; most of the locals are still loyal to England. We can pick one of the smaller ports and be out of the watchful eye of the new government. San Salvador or Rum Cay are far enough from the Governor's mansion that we wouldn't raise an eyebrow, I should think."

"What about Turks and Caicos?" Childs asked.

"They are still British." Captain Nonn replied.

"Then if we're sailing that far southeast, those would be the better option." Childs suggested. "It would be safer to be there when some drunk sailor started bragging about their exploits to impress a wench."

"Aye; a better choice I suppose." Captain Nonn agreed. "Well thought, Mister Childs. They might even get a drink bought for them for the slap to King Charles' pride." Nonn pointed at the mast. "Raise the colors and get a shot off to summon the crew."

"Aye, Captain." Mister Childs swatted at his ear at a buzzing mosquito. "The sooner we are out to sea, the better. Mayhap when I

take one of the longboats ashore to pick up crew I'll send word to the mayor that he should set up houses for the bats to deal with these mosquitoes."

"Mister Childs," Captain Nonn tut-tutted, "aren't you the soft-hearted civic minded fellow."

"It's for my own benefit, captain. I'd like to think if we are back here a year from now or so, it would be more enjoyable." Childs shook his head. "Maybe I'm a little soft on the likes of young Paxton, but that's the extent of that."

"That's good to hear because after we rest for two weeks we'll be back on the seas plundering." Captain Nonn said.

"Oh, I'll be ready for that." Childs hesitated. "After a couple of weeks rest and drinking, that is."

"As well you should be, Sir." Captain Nonn said. "I'm going to change then I'll take the helm to take us out." Captain Nonn started toward his cabin. "I heard about a hoard of treasure in Montego Bay that might need our attention."

"Aye Captain!" Childs said as he walked toward the gangplank. "Now to get those grungy skulking pirates aboard."

The End

If you enjoyed the story, please take a moment to leave a review while it is fresh in your mind.

Reviews are a treasure to writers.

About the Author and this Story

I started working on this story while stationed at Fort Belvoir, Virginia in 2005. There was this new-fangled internet company called 'MySpace' that all the kids were talking about. It seemed to be very popular. Wanting to know who my kids chatted with online, I created an account on the site. Instead of trying to pretend to be a teenager (which I knew would never work), I decided I would write a serial that would attract the attention of the kids. So I started this story about Pirate Nonn, the ruthless and bloody pirate.

I was able to surreptitiously follow a couple my daughter's friends who then followed me back, then my daughters did the same. After about a month, I was following all of 'the gang'. This allowed me to see what they were posting online- I never posted anything besides a few hundred words of the story every week. This went on for a good three years until all the kids 'migrated' to Facebook. It was several years after that that I told them about the account. They never suspected it was me. I still have that MySpace account if you'd like to follow me there. It's kind of a quiet place but on the bright side you don't get inundated with advertisements or suggested pages, and you can find some good music: https://myspace.com/robertpwills .