



JOSEPH CONRAD

THE ADVENTURES OF JOHN SOMEBODY.

PART III.

There was no sleep on board that night. Most men remember in their life one or two nights of a calamitous sea. Nothing seems left of the whole universe but darkness, clamor, fury, and the ship. And like the last vestige of a shattered continent, she drifts, bearing an anguished remnant of itself manhood through the senseless distance, toward, and pain of a venal volcano. No one slept in the forecastle. The tin oil lamp suspended on a long string, smoking, described a circle on the ceiling. A thin layer of water rashed to and fro. In the bad places men lay rooted, resting on elbows and with open eyes. No one spoke and all listened. Outside the night passed as a solid, as if innumerable dross beating far off. Surjick passed through the air.

And out like a knife. Signs were heard, as if, perceiving that they were not to be "drowned in a hurry," tried easier positions. Mr. Creighton, who had hurt his back, started up, and set his feet. Some fellows belonging to his watch set about securing him better. Without a word or a glance he lifted his arms out after another to facilitate the operation, and not a muscle moved in his stern, young face.

They asked him with solicitude, "Easier now, is it?" He answered with a curt, "That'll do." For the first time since the ship had gone on her beam-ends, Capt. Alliston gave a short glance down at his watch. He was at his post—just one foot against the side of the skylight, one knee on the deck—and with the end of the vang round his waist, swung back and forth, with his gaze fixed ahead, watchful, like a man looking out for a sign. Below his eyes the ship, with its heavy seas that rushed from under her, flashing in the cold sunlight.

Courteous voices were heard shouting, "She'll do, boys!" Belfast exclaimed with fervor, "I could as well go for a drink at a pipe!" One of the passing dry tongues on their salt lips muttered something about a "drink of water." The cook, as if inspired, scrambled up with his breast against the poop-water tank and asked in a hoarse, guttural voice, "You want to drink?" He yelled, waving his arms, and two men began to crawl backward and forward with the mug. We had a good mouthful all round. Faces brightened.

"I've got 'em, got 'em!" he shouted. "Oh, there! He's gone; I've got 'em! Pull at my legs!" Wambro hooted unceasingly. The boat-swan shouted directions: "Catch hold of his belt, Belfast, pull straight up, you two; pull fair!"

We pulled fair. We pulled Belfast out with a jerk, and dropped him with disgust. In a sitting posture, purple-faced, he sobbed despairingly. "How can I hold on to a bloomin' short wood?" Suddenly Jimmy flew at him with brutal indignation, we tore the shirt off his back, we tugged at his ears, we panted over him, and all at once he came away in our hands as though somebody had let go his legs.

Wambro, who had been in the dark, and alarmed by a sudden ruck, fell down in a hunch. There was nothing to hang on to but a long brass hook used sometimes to keep back an open door. Wambro held on to it, and we held on to Wambro, clutching our Jimmy. He had completely collapsed and lay on his back.

"You are — Ought you're a first-classed beggar, Craig," granted Mr. Belfast. He answered, spluttering with indignation, "Look at 'em, see. The bloomin' dirty innards! Laughing at a chum going overboard. Call themselves men, too!"

But from the break of the poop the bloomin' dirty innards came out. Belfast scrambled in a hurry to join him. Five men, poked and gartered over the edge of the poop, looked for the best way to get forward. The others, twisting in their lockings, turning painfully, stared with a stolid, unfeeling stare at the long, thin, slender columns of spray rose straight up. And in the glitter of rainbows bursting over the trembling hull the men went over cautiously, disappearing from sight with deliberate movements.

"The men who had heard sent after him a look, and he looked back at them with a stare that said more than anything under heaven—we did not want to lose him. So we passed him carefully from hand to hand.

And he swung from one enemy to another, showing about as much life as an old lobster when it is being crushed. The man was a plump fellow, and it being a comparatively safe place, we lay for a moment in an exhausted heap, to rest a little. He began to move. We were all miserably anxious to hear what he had to say. This time he came forward, looking at us with some time to spare. I began to think the whole snarl of you had been washed overboard. What kept you back?"

When above the side of the house, they let go another another, and falling heavily, sprang, pressing their palms to the deck, and looking at us with a stare that said more than anything under heaven—we did not want to lose him. So we passed him carefully from hand to hand.

They hung for a moment in strained arms, and with closed eyes, then, letting go with one hand, balanced with falling heads, trying to grab some rope or stick, or anything that gave way. The man was a plump fellow, and it being a comparatively safe place, we lay for a moment in an exhausted heap, to rest a little. He began to move. We were all miserably anxious to hear what he had to say. This time he came forward, looking at us with some time to spare. I began to think the whole snarl of you had been washed overboard. What kept you back?"

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They all yelled merrily. "The mast! Capt. Tabor! A black squall howled over the ship. It lay on her side with the lower yards pointing to the clouds. While the tall mast, inclined nearly to the horizon, seemed to be of an unmeasurable length. The carpenter let go his hold, rolled against the skylight, and began to crawl to the cabin entrance, where a big ax was kept ready for such an emergency.

Capt. Alliston managed to stand up on his feet near the deck, upon which men swung on the end of ropes like nest-robbers upon a cliff. One of his feet was on somebody's chest. His face was purple, his lips moved. He yelled also. He yelled, leading down. "No! No!"

Mr. Baker, one leg on the thimble-stand, roared out: "Did you say no? Not out!" The captain shook his head madly. "No! No!"

Between his legs the crawling carpenter heard, collapsed at once, and lay full length in the angle of the skylight. Voices took up the shout, "No! No!" and upon the terrific noise of wind and sea not a murmur of remonstrance came out from the ship. The men who had been given over so many years of life to sea, they all believed it their only chance; but a little hard-faced man shook his gray head and shouted, "No!" without giving them as much as a glance. They were silent and gaped. They ripped up their shirts, and wound ropes ends under their arms; they clutched ring-bolts; they crawled in heaps where there was foothold; they held on with both arms, hooked themselves to anything to withstand, with elbows, with knees, with their heads; and some, unable to crawl away from where they had been flung, felt the sea leap up, striking against their backs as they struggled upward.

Hours passed. They were sheltered by the heavy inclination of the ship from the wind that rushed over the long unbroken masts above their heads, but cold rain fell at times into the uneasy calm of their refuge. The sky was clearing, and bright sunshine gleamed over the ship. After every burst of battering seas, vivid and fleeting rainbows arched over the drift, and in the air there were faint, blue wisps ending in a clear blue. It gleamed

with both feet leaped straight up like a spunk, causing the Clyde shipwrights to stop accompanying their work. He was by his thimble-stand, and he yelled also. He yelled, leading down. "No! No!"

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The Adventures of "John Somebody."

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DUMAS AND D'ARTAGNAN.

Alexandre Dumas, in his preface to the first edition of "The Three Musketeers," explains that the fortunes of the three heroes was discovered by him while collecting material for a history of Louis XIV. A writer in Blackwood's tells that for the first time what sort of a hero the real d'Artagnan was, as shown in his memoirs, and the description given there, we are told, does not in any way detract from the description given by Dumas.

It was an hour after noon, as I said, when the wave struck us. I remember little about the afternoon, more than that the wind was driving me steadily toward the coast, and I was making a day of the rest of the coast. Two hours after noon I heard breakers close at hand, and five minutes later was carried through a high surf and flung upon a sandy beach.

I took a walk of two miles along the beach, and then crossed the island. I found the length about three miles and the breadth half of that, but neither on the shore nor inland was there any evidence of occupation. There were birds, monkeys and serpents in plenty, and I found three or four more springs, and the greatest abundance of shell fish and fruit. When I returned to the captain to make my report I found his condition much worse, and he told me that he did not expect to live more than a few hours. By his direction I carried water to the cook, who was still unconscious, and tried to force some between his clenched teeth. I also dragged him into the cabin, but he would not move, and the case was beyond hope. When I reported, Capt. Dutton said to me:

"You must turn to and save whatever you can make use of among the wreckage. If you find traces of any man, keep a signal fire alight, burning day and night, on the west side of the island; you must get a flag-staff. Help will come from that side. Even if the place is not inhabited it must be visited by native craft quite often. You will sooner or later be taken off, and I will let you to tell how the brig was lost."

He then gave me a message to his wife, warned me to be careful of the moonlight, and the dew of night, and talked for half an hour about the singular fate of the brig and the sudden doom of her crew. The next day, when I was about to come back in an hour, I heard him praying aloud, and upon my return found him dead and a peaceful look upon his face. I went over to the cook and discovered that he was still breathing, but as you may suppose, being only a boy of fifteen, but I pulled myself together and began searching among the wreckage to save what I could. I found three chests of clothes, one of which had belonged to the captain, two barrels of flour, a barrel of vinegar, two boxes of matches, a box of canned fruit, condensed milk, three or four tins, a barrel of beef, and many other things unnecessary to mention. There were also boards and planks and a tangle of ropes and a few pieces of sail. I worked hard at getting these things up to the cabin, and it was noon next day before I had completed my labors. When I awoke in the morning the cook was dead. I at first thought to give both bodies burial in the sand, having found tools to dig with, but a few days' reflection on the island, and after debating awhile I settled the matter by dragging the bodies down to the water. The tide was at its highest at noon, and when I returned from a trip to the spring the dead had floated away. I took from the captain all his gold watch, which was afterward handed over to his wife.

Miles and Knots.

A statute mile is 5,280 feet long. It is our standard of linear measure, adopted from the Romans. A Roman military pace, by which distances were measured, was the length of the step taken by the Roman soldier, and was approximately five feet long; a thousand of these paces were called a Roman mile. The English mile is therefore a purely arbitrary measure, and is equal to a Roman mile by a statute passed during the reign of Queen Elizabeth; it has no connection with any scale in nature.

A nautical mile, on the other hand, is equal in length to one-sixth part of the length of a degree of a great circle of the earth. But the circumference of the earth is nowhere a true circle; its radius of curvature is variable; hence the nautical mile, as a matter of fact, depends for its length upon the shape of the earth's surface. The length of the nautical mile is equal to 6,080.27 feet, which is very nearly the value of the admiralty mile adopted in the English navy. Practically the nautical mile is 800 feet longer than the statute mile. In other words, one nautical mile is equal to 1.1515 statute miles, or one statute mile is equal to 0.866 nautical miles. Multiply nautical miles by 1.1515 and the product will be statute miles, or multiply statute miles by 0.866 and the product will be nautical miles. —Harper's Round Table.