



Seahawk

The ships of old were the noblest ships,
To sail on the great, briny blue;
And the captains and crews that manned these ships
Were proven, worthy, and true.

The navigator kept them straight on their way,
With nary a guide but the stars.
He'd turn up his collar to the cold salt spray;
His companions: Orion and Mars.

Wafted along gently on God's good air,
Square-riggers and cutters set sail;
Stalwart and sturdy to sail where they dare,
Through high seas or tempest or gale.

Many a tale has been told to this day,
But none with such awe, one could grip.
And none, I dare say, could make brave seamen pray,
Like the tale of the dread pirate ship.

"Get over here, boy!" bellowed old man Craig.
Boy? That's me. Thomas ... Thomas Craig, a lad of
sixteen. I had been sent to live with my uncle, Captain

Joseph T. Craig, after the death of my parents. For now
he was my only kin.

Folks in the village had it that the captain was a
man of means, and could well be worth a fortune in
gold, but was either squirreling it away somewhere
or had lost it to the dreaded buccaneers who haunted
these mysterious waters. But if this was a fact, it was
beyond me to figure it for he lived a life of frugality and
expected the same of me.

Captain Craig was a seafaring man who had never set
his mind to marry, much less to care for a lad such as
me. The old man spent the greater portion of his time
at sea and was seldom home, and when he was home
he certainly wasn't warm and pleasant with me as a
father would be. Captain Craig was accustomed to living
alone and was neither given to hospitality nor idle talk,
but then, I never really expected an old tar like Uncle
to understand the ways of a lad. Ofttimes I felt that my
young ways were a most miserable intrusion into his
rigid lifestyle, though I'm sure he did the best he could
in providing a roof over my head and daily bread. I
reckoned that I owed him a debt of gratitude for taking
me in after sickness claimed my folks; therefore, I
determined to repay him someday, somehow.

"I swear, I'll languish away afore ya get the victuals on the table, lad!" protested the old man.

Whilst the captain was at sea, I was usually left alone to tend to the dingy hovel that Uncle Joseph and I called home. I learned to rustle up passable meals for the both of us, and would take care of the house as best I could. The rustic stone cottage sat nigh to the wharf of a fishing village, for that was the haven that Captain Craig fancied to winter in.

The simply and somewhat crudely furnished cottage clearly lacked the touch that an "Auntie Craig" might have added. Raingear, oars, and other such paraphernalia pertaining to boats cluttered the main room. The large fireplace provided us with heat in the winter and light at night, and was well nigh the only thing that brought a homey touch to the place.


That evening as the two of us sat at our meager repast, the remote clangor of ships' rigging and the lonely cry of the gulls in the distance were the only sounds to break the silence.

At length the old man paused from his meal. Peering up through his thick gray eyebrows he announced: "Thomas, I'll be settin' sail on the morrow for the Azores. Mrs. Lox will look in on ya now and again, so I want ya to mind your manners, and don't ya be getting into any mischief!"

"But Uncle," I started. "Couldn't I be going to sea with ya this time? I..."

The captain's reply was quick and stern. "Thomas, we've discussed this before. The sea's no place for a lad! And that's what you be, but a lad. Why you've never spent so much as a day on the sea, and she's a mad and contemptuous wench, she is. You'd lose your stomach, if not thy very heart out there, boy. Nay, you'll be a staying right here on dry land, ya will, and that's me final word!"





My uncle was a stern man, not at all like the cheery, plump dame who lived just over the dale. Mrs. Lox was her name, and she was kindly and good. And tho' I deemed it a wicked notion, I oft wished that she might be my kindred in the stead of Uncle Joseph. But poor Mrs. Lox was busy enough with her own, for she was widowed and had her own brood to tend to. Nonetheless, being the mother that she was, she would always find some time to drop over with a bit of something for me to eat and to make sure everythin' was all right.

She'd make a fuss about my clothes or hair and be sure I'd kept up with my studies. I never did go hungry, for Mrs. Lox would often drop off a bit of rabbit stew or a morsel from her own table. And though unlike my own dear mother (may the good Lord rest her soul), she was the nearest thing I had to a mother now, and for that I was right grateful.

The next morning, Captain Craig arose before dawn to make ready for his journey. I lay there awake, but not opening my eyes, as I waited for my uncle to be gone so that I myself might go to the docks unobserved. As soon as Uncle had left,

and while the sun still sat low on the eastern horizon, I started for the wharf to watch cargo being loaded onto the deck of Uncle Joseph's ship. It was a magnificent ship, and seaworthy, and she had a good crew. I noticed an air of secrecy in the crew's manner as they hurried to load sacks and barrels onto the deck and down below. Bein' the curious lad that I was, I nosed about trying to discover what it was that my uncle was taking aboard for his voyage.

There's only one way to find out what's on board, I thought. And that's ol' Smollett.

Straining my eyes, I searched the docks for the familiar face of my friend. Then I spotted Smollett's old cocked hat and saw him there, puffing his pipe over by the mooring post. I strolled slowly toward Smollett, my hands in my pockets and whistling a tune, for I hoped to appear nonchalant and idle, but I kept an eye out lest my uncle see me.

"Good Smollett, how be ya this fine morning?" I started.

Smollett tapped his pipe on his palm and smiled a broad smile, revealing the lack of ivory in his mouth.

"Aye, 'tis a fine morning, young Thomas, and I'm feeling cheery. Now pray tell me what it is that brings thee to the docks, laddie." Smollett's eyes became keen. "And pray tell me why ya aren't readyin' thyself for school."

"I ... I've come to see me uncle off, and to bid him Godspeed on his journey," I replied.

"Indeed!" responded Smollett, his eyes wide in mock surprise. "And when came the sudden change of heart in the old man?" Smollett knew Joseph Craig well, and he knew that the captain would not have me at the docks idling my time away.

"Now Thomas, me young blade, tell me what it truly is that brings thee here whilst thy uncle's ship still sits moored to this dock." Smollett looked into my eyes and smiled a shrewd, knowing smile. I was pleased that I couldn't hide the matter from ol' Smollett, but I'd never have let on.

Edward Smollett, once an able-bodied seaman, had met with a mishap at sea that had left him with three less fingers, a limp, and the job of a stevedore. I enjoyed listening to the tall tales and adventurous stories that the swarthy old seaman often told, though I supposed that dear Smollett enjoyed telling them even more.

I answered in a voice nigh to a whisper. "Well, good friend"—Smollett leaned forward to listen—"I'd be knowing what it is that the deck hands be loading onto Uncle's ship, and I reckoned that you could tell, if anyone could."

"Aye, and that I could," answered Smollett. "I know what 'e's loading, but not where 'e's going with it. But

I've been sworn to secrecy by none other than thy uncle himself. And being a man of honor, though some think me mean, I canna' break me word.

"Now young Thomas, take this penny and be off with thee before thy uncle spies both thee and me frittering away the time, and we both be the worse for it!"

Thus, I resolved to put the matter out of my mind ... for the time being. But one thing I would not be dismissed for, even for a penny, was to watch as my uncle's square-rigger, the *Seahawk*, set out majestically for the high seas with her white sails billowing in the wind like the breast of a proud bird.

Someday, I thought, I shall prove myself a sailor.



THE BUCCANEERS

That very night, in a dimly lit corner of the Jackal, a smoke-filled tavern and a den for some of the most heartless buccaneers and cutthroats ever to set sail on the high seas, sat three wretched fellows of evil repute. There, unbeknownst to Captain Craig, they laid pernicious plans to set upon the *Seahawk* and her crew for they knew that she bore most precious cargo.

Briggins, the largest and roughest of the three, spoke gruffly to the two other men. "Aye, me hearties, ye heard me right! Gold sovereigns stashed in the grain sacks! Even now Captain Craig is sailing with a good wind behind him, south to the Mediterranean. He'll put up in the Port of Lisboa in Portugal, and not raise anchor for three days. I say we make haste to the Azores, and thar we fall on the old man and seize the gold!

"We'll sail into the islands afore *Seahawk*, and lay wait for her. Once she's ours we'll split the booty amongst the three of us, and there we'll scuttle the ship and be done with the matter! What say ye scurvy knaves to that?"

Bartlett, a gaunt, hollow-eyed, haggard man, twisted his face into an ugly grin. Then leaning slowly forward, he croaked in a low, hoarse voice, "The plan seems a

rewarding one to me, but we'll not scuttle *Seahawk*. She is a grand ship and to me liking. I 'ave me own plans for her, I do. For I'd be off to the Caribbean, a pirate's paradise, and I need a bonny ship for the jaunt."

"And what say ye, McGuire?" questioned Bartlett.

"The ship be thine, the gold sovereigns mine!" recited McGuire with a sinister laugh that would send chills up the spine of anyone who heard it.

"I say we lift our glasses high in a toast to the sea which provides us with the wealth of others!" Briggins exclaimed.

And with that they lifted their glasses high in baneful salute.



A YOUNG BOY'S PRAYER

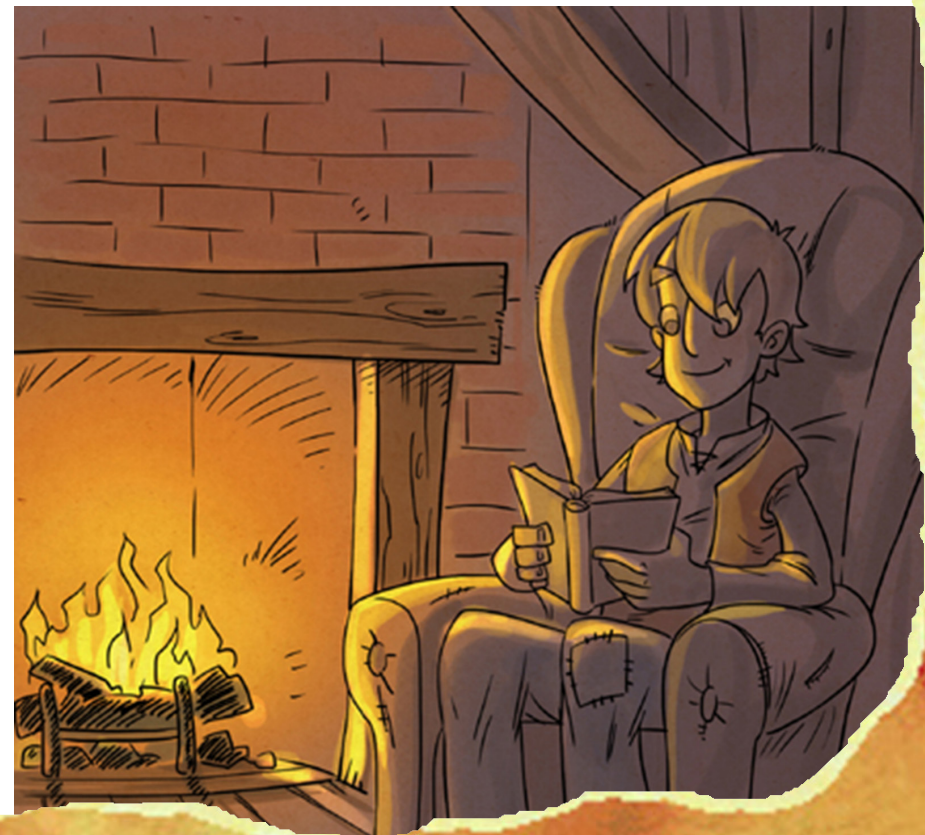
At home in my uncle's cottage that night, I laid aside my studies and wistfully began to thumb through the pages of the old, worn Bible that had belonged to my father and mother. Other than the old Bible, my father wasn't able to leave me much other than my Christian heritage, though it should not be forgotten that a Christian upbringing is of more worth than gold or silver.

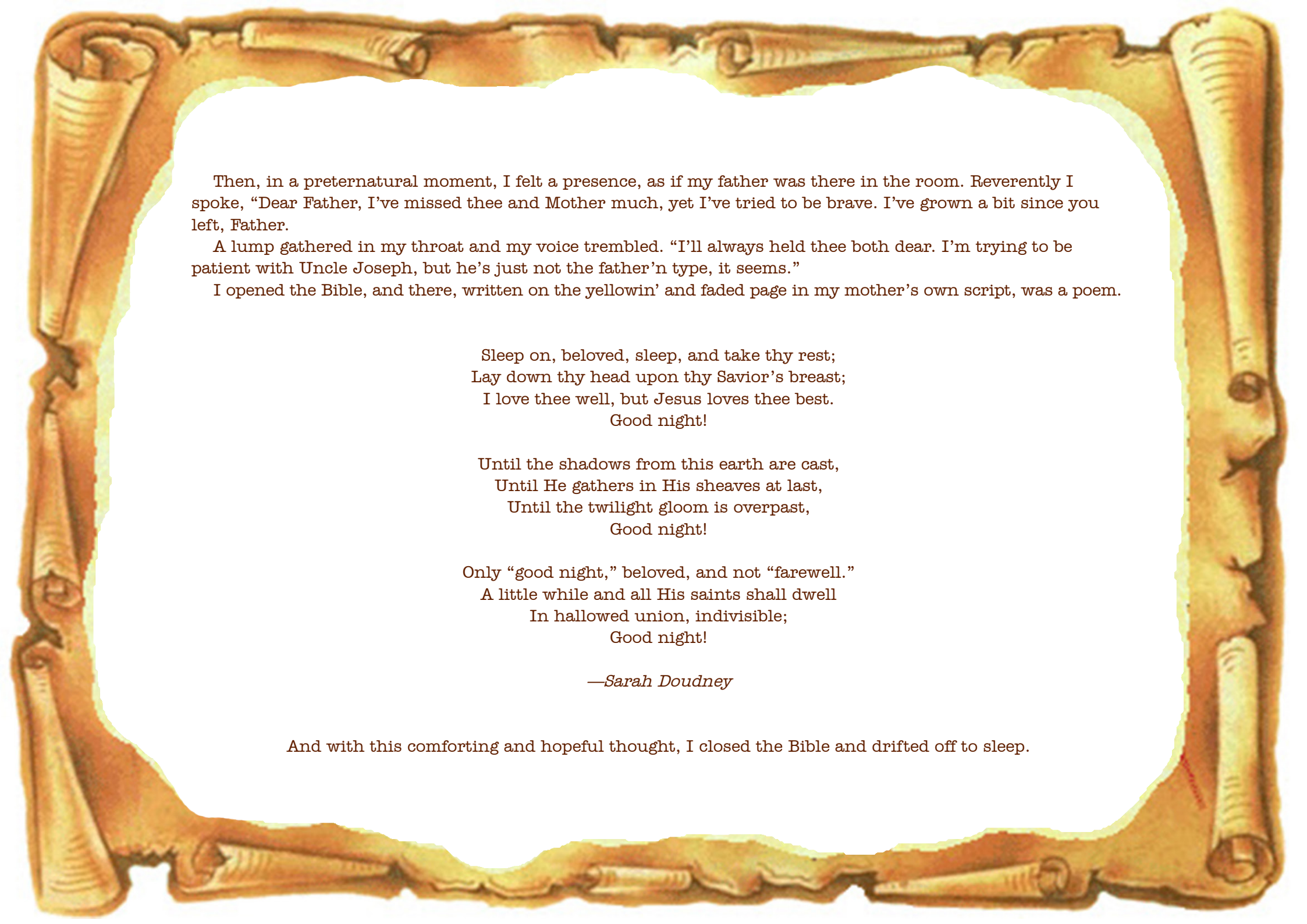
As I sat by the crackling fire, entranced by the flames that danced merrily in the hearth, I reminisced on the nights that my father would sit and read my favorite stories aloud by the fireside at home. I missed my parents immensely, but within the pages of this old, worn book burned a glowing flame of hope, for they held the promise of life eternal. I believed that I would someday be united with my beloved mother and father in the hereafter, but until that day I determined in my heart that I would stay true to the Christian teachings that my parents had instilled in me as a young child.

As I pondered these things I commenced, almost unwittingly, to speak a prayer. I remember I spoke in a manner that one might use when speaking with a friend. So natural was the tone of my voice that Red,

Uncle Craig's silken Irish setter, who was warming herself by the inglenook, perked up her ears as if wondering if the captain had returned unexpectedly.

"Dear Lord," I prayed, "I canna' understand why You've permitted these things to come about in my life. It seems to me that I lost so much when I lost my parents. Yet in Your Word, Lord, You said that 'all things work together for good to them that love God.'"





Then, in a preternatural moment, I felt a presence, as if my father was there in the room. Reverently I spoke, "Dear Father, I've missed thee and Mother much, yet I've tried to be brave. I've grown a bit since you left, Father.

A lump gathered in my throat and my voice trembled. "I'll always held thee both dear. I'm trying to be patient with Uncle Joseph, but he's just not the father'n type, it seems."

I opened the Bible, and there, written on the yellowin' and faded page in my mother's own script, was a poem.

Sleep on, beloved, sleep, and take thy rest;
Lay down thy head upon thy Savior's breast;
I love thee well, but Jesus loves thee best.
Good night!

Until the shadows from this earth are cast,
Until He gathers in His sheaves at last,
Until the twilight gloom is overpast,
Good night!

Only "good night," beloved, and not "farewell."
A little while and all His saints shall dwell
In hallowed union, indivisible;
Good night!

—*Sarah Doudney*

And with this comforting and hopeful thought, I closed the Bible and drifted off to sleep.

THE TWO DREAMS

That night, as I lay on my bed, a dream came to me. In it, my Uncle Craig sat on the deck of *Seahawk* pleasantly sipping tea and munching biscuits, blissfully unaware of the swirling, twisting whirlpool that *Seahawk* was soon to be plunged headlong into. The situation, being such an unlikely one, might have been a humorous sight for a young lad, had not it been so grave.

I stood on the shore frantically waving my arms and shouting to Uncle. The warnings, however, went unnoticed in the din of the raging torrent. Just as the ship was about to plummet into the churning abyss I awoke with a great start. I sat bolt upright in bed in a great sweat.

What strange dreams trouble me tonight, I mused. It must be that I'm overly anxious about Uncle. But I'm sure that the old seaman can manage for himself. I'd best lie me down and get some rest, and not be fretting about dreams and such.

I lay down again, but no sooner had I fallen into slumber than once again a striking dream came to me. This time Father appeared, just from the waist up and above the hearth. He told me in somber tones that my uncle was in grave danger.

"Thomas, ye must find your uncle and help him," my father said.

"How can I find him?" I queried. "I be not accustomed t' the sea, and I do na' have even the money for a brooding hen, much less for a search voyage to the Azores."

My father then held up an old tattered map clenched in his hand and spoke this conundrum:

"Take this map and study it well,
For it a secret holds.
You'll find the way to set thy sail
Bound up within its folds."

With that, he slowly faded from sight and the dream ended.

When I awoke the next morning I was fretful about the two dreams and wondered about the meaning of them, but I feared to tell the matter lest folks think me beside myself.

Several weeks passed and I, having chosen to dismiss the matter rather than face it, had all but forgotten the dreams. Then, early one evening whilst I was about my studies, a knock sounded at the door. It was in fact more of a forceful pounding than a knock and had a sense of urgency about it.



I hurried to the heavy wooden door and asked, "What desire ye, good pilgrim?"

The man at the door answered, "I be no pilgrim, but thine own good acquaintance, Thomas."

Recognizing the voice, I opened the door and there stood Smollett, quite out of breath and looking rather pale.

"Thomas, me lad," he said. "I've just got word that there's been trouble and thy uncle and his crew have fallen pitiful prey to the wicked buccaneers that haunt these woebegone waters."

I felt weak and sick at the news as I sat down heavily in my chair. I knew now that someone must be told of the dreams.

"Good Smollett, come and sit, for I have a most strange tale to tell thee now and ye must hear it," I said.

After the whole matter was told to Smollett, the old sailor sat back in wonderment.

"But why, Thomas, did ye not tell the matter before now?" he questioned.

"I scarce expected anyone would believe me, and I feared lest ye deem me mad," I explained.

Smollett looked at me with the most pitiful look and replied, "Many a thing there be in this wide world that I deem to be madness, young Thomas, but a lad's simple faith to believe the invisible be not one of those things. Now where is that map that thy blessed father spoke of?"

As quick as a hare I ran for my uncle's map and hastily spread it out on the table to study. Smollett stroked his graying whiskers and quoted thoughtfully to himself,

"Take this map and study it well,
For it a secret holds.
You'll find the way to set thy sail
Bound up within its folds."

"Now what do ya suppose tha' ca' mean, 'within its folds'?" I asked.

Then Smollett exclaimed incredulously. "Thomas, look at this! The folds of the map cross perfectly at this wee island, part of the Azores, the place thy uncle was sailing when he was last heard of!"





“Oh, Smollett,” I questioned, “do ya suppose that’s where Uncle Joseph could be?”

“But, even if he indeed be there, what chances are there of us finding a ship sailing to the Azores?”

Our excitement faded to despair.

Smollett took me by both shoulders and looking squarely in my eyes, said, “We dinna ’ave much choice other than to follow thy dream if we ’ave any will at all to find thy uncle.”

Then he looked almost mischievous as he continued, “And ya seem to ’ave forgotten, me young blade, that Edward Smollett was once the most seafaring swabbie ever to sail the high seas.”

I thought at that moment that perhaps I had never seen anything so splendid as Smollett’s toothless smile.

“Now Thomas, be a kind lad and make us some victuals. And fix me a hot toddy and a comfortable bed for the night, for me ol’ bones ache from age and cold. On the morrow we shall see if the good Lord will look kindly upon our endeavor to seek out thy uncle, and I will look for a ship heading to the Azores.”



FRANCES LOX

Days passed and I heard not a word from Smollett. Howbeit, I prayed for my uncle and Smollett's safety at every thought of them.

I know dear Mrs. Lox's heart went out to me when she thought of me being orphaned not only once, but twice now, it seemed. She wanted to visit more often, but she had her own five children to care for and all the work of the house to do, for as I mentioned beforehand, she was a widow. Her eldest daughter Frances, being fifteen years of age now, was a great help to her mother.

Frances was a lovely young maiden with long, flowing hair and piercing blue eyes. When she laughed, her bright eyes sparkled like moonlight on the water. Her inner strength helped keep poor Mrs. Lox through many a hard time.

In the days to follow, Mrs. Lox was busy making cheese and could not leave the farm, and so sent Frances to bring me some freshly baked cakes and a wedge of red cheddar.

When Frances came to the front door with her bundle of provisions, I was just finishing chopping wood in the back of the cottage.

"Good day!" called Frances, as she stood on her tiptoes peering gingerly into the front window. "Is anyone home?" she called.

Turning the corner to the front porch, I greeted her, "Hello, and how can I help thee, good friend?"

It gave Frances such a start that she let out a shriek and dropped her basket, spilling the cheese and cakes on the ground. Frances' blue eyes flashed as she chided me. "What on earth do ya think you'd be doing, scaring a girl nearly t' death like that?"

My face flushed red with embarrassment.

"I'm truly sorry, miss," I said apologetically. "I dinna mean to give thee such a fright."

Frances continued. "Now look what you've made me do. I've spilled all the cakes and the cheese on the ground and soiled them."

"Oh, it's all right! Truly it is," I assured her as I helped gather the cakes and cheese and placed them into the basket. "I'm right grateful for them. And besides, I've had worse, ya know. Ya should taste me uncle's cookin'. It makes those cakes, soiled as they may be, look like the manna from heaven."

This made Frances laugh.

"I'm sorry," apologized Frances. "Mother sent me to comfort thee and I'm afraid that I've not done so."

"To the contrary," I said. "My day is that much brighter after having seen thee."

This time it was Frances who blushed.

"Well ... I ... I'd really better be on my way home," said Frances, trying to hide her embarrassment. "My mother is very busy and needs my help."

Realizing that I had made her uneasy, I quickly said, "Will you come again? I ... I..."

Think, Thomas, think! I chided myself.

"I have fresh eggs that I'd like to give thy mother. Can you come to take them to her for me? She'd never accept them from me own hand, you know."

It seemed that Frances was rather fond of me, but was not accustomed to the attention.

"I'll ask Mum if she'll permit me to come again this week," she said. "Until then, fare thee well, Thomas Craig."

From that time I felt different. It was a strange sort of feeling, like that of a tingling in my stomach. I didn't quite know how to explain it, but I knew that it had something to do with Frances Lox.

She's indeed a fetching lass, I thought, and has changed much since I last saw her.





THE SEARCH BEGINS

A few days after the occurrence with Frances Lox, Smollett returned with favorable news. He had found a ship preparing for a trip to the Azores. The captain was an old friend of Smollett's, and with some of his crew taken ill, they were in need of extra hands. It was not an easy plan, for no one knew of the undertaking we had in mind. But Smollett and I were undaunted in our faith and determination. And now that we were a part of the *Albatross*, en route to the Azores, our spirits lifted.

The following morning Smollett escorted me to the docks to present the treasured ship, the *Albatross*. She was not what I had expected. The ship was small and in dire need of repair, which Smollett insisted was "of little importance and only on the surface."

"Underneath this rough exterior that ya see here, young Thomas, is a fine and beautiful lady that will, with the help of the Lord and thy father, lead us to thy uncle," declared Smollett confidently.

The ship was old, barnacle-encrusted, and the quarters were cramped and inadequate. After a fortnight of labor we managed to ready her for the sea. With all the needed provisions aboard and a good wind to speed us along, the *Albatross* was finally ready to set sail for the Azores.

My dream to go to sea was finally coming true, and as the days passed, I grew more accustomed to the rocking and swaying of the ship. The sea was favorable for the small bark as it made its way from Great Britain to the little islands in the middle of the Atlantic.

I could see that Smollett was an experienced mariner from whom much could be learned. He taught me the use of the sextant, the compass, and other navigational tools used to keep the ship on course. Going to sea had long been my passion, but the burden of the great responsibility Smollett and I were undertaking lay heavy on my young heart, for so much was at stake.

Smollett expected me to pull the load of any seaworthy sailor, and I was eager to learn my duties. I climbed the masts and learned to man the sails and rigging. I scrubbed the deck and hauled water.

I learned to measure the speed of the ship by throwing the weighted end of a long rope, knotted at intervals, into the sea from the stern of the moving ship and counting the knots that slipped through my hand in a given length of time. I learned of the ocean's currents and the wind that constantly battled to drive us from our course. My confidence as a seaman grew as I learned the secrets of the sea, and now I was sure it wouldn't be long until we reached the islands.

I grew anxious as I thought of the dim prospect of ever finding my uncle. Even if we did find Captain Craig, what then? Such thoughts plagued me, but I kept reminding myself that it was God who had sent my father to me in the dream and that we were simply obeying the leading of the Spirit. Yet, the very idea warred against reason so absolutely that I could only rest in the promises I had received. The circumstances were so grave that I had grown to depend more than ever on my time alone to hear the still, small voice of the Lord and to trust that all was well in His hands.

That night, as if from nowhere, a fierce wind began to rise from the west. Our tiny vessel was tossed about with such a fury that we were driven from our course and could see neither land nor stars nor sun for three days. Navigating only by dead reckoning, we were finally able to find the shelter of a small island. The bay, on the island of Corvo, proved to be calm enough to let us weather the storm, so there we anchored, thankful not to have to battle the open seas any longer.



Next morning the storm persisted so much in its fury that the captain decided to weather the storm in the bay until sailing could be safely resumed. The decision I knew was reasonable, but my impatience to find my uncle wouldn't allow me to rest as the crew and Smollett did.

I donned my rain gear and ambled my way through the downpour to the ship's railing. The other few ships moored to the docks tossed and swayed as the storm continued. As I stood on the deck, peering through the gray sheets of relentless rain, a crack of lightning drew my attention to something wondrous. I was sure that what my bewildered eyes beheld through the hazy fog and rain was *Seahawk*! *Was I crazed or was this true?*

Another crack of lightning proved the matter. I rubbed my disbelieving eyes, gaping through the pouring rain! There was *Seahawk*, docked in a secluded inlet a ways from the main dock.

What a strange act of God to have so skillfully directed us to this forsaken place! I pondered. Of a certainty this is *Seahawk*, but now, what of my uncle and the crew?

Are they aboard? I wondered. *Are they even alive?*

Thoughts raced through my mind like a gale. I ran breathlessly to the cabin where Smollett lay on his hammock puffing his pipe. Excitedly I made known the discovery to my gray-haired mate.

"Why, me lad," exclaimed Smollett, "is it possible that we have been led to thy uncle so readily? Let us have surer perusal of this matter."

Smollett scrambled up to the poop deck, set his spyglass to his eye, and there with the next flash of lightning, to his bewilderment, sat *Seahawk* as fit as the day that she first hoisted her sails for the high seas.

"But just as I supposed," muttered Smollett. "There's a different flag from ya uncle's beatin' in the wind, and certainly not his night watch."

"This is indeed *Seahawk*, Thomas," said Smollett gravely. "Foul play has befallen her, for the crew I spied aboard her is not that of thy uncle. Scallywags they be that now possess *Seahawk*, of a truth!"

"Good Lord, Smollett!" I cried. "What shall we do? Surely we aren't prepared for this!"

"Take heart, Thomas," Smollett said, as he placed a firm hand on my shoulder. "Tonight we shall seek our Lord, and surely He shall tell us our next move."

The plan would have to be a bold one. And a bold one it was.





THE PLAN

The storm had ceased its fury, and the waters calmed. Under the cover of night, Smollett and I took one of the *Albatross*' rowboats toward *Seahawk*. When we were nearer, I slipped quietly into the murky water and swam silently to the side of *Seahawk* with a length of rope in hand and a sealed pouch of gunpowder clenched between my teeth.

Upon reaching the side of my uncle's ship, I could hear the pirates drinking and making merry topside. I tossed the rope over the ship's railing, and the grappling hook caught securely to the rail. I agilely made my way up the side and onto the deck.

Reaching the railing and about to slip over onto the deck, I froze as two drunken pirates stopped above me. I clung helplessly to the rope as the two marauders came within a yard of the cord that held me. If spotted, surely it would be the end of both my uncle and me. They laughed and talked loudly and boastfully of their spoil.

Anger for these scavengers of the deep swelled in my breast so greatly that it robbed me of all fear. I was a brave lad, and strong. I thought myself a good match for these two drunken dogs. But I knew that I dared not reveal myself, as it was not my life only that was at stake, but that of my uncle and his crew as well. As soon as the two moved along, I was over the railing and onto the ship as quick and as quiet as a galley mouse.

I made my way to the ship's brig. There, as I had suspected, was my uncle and the crew behind bars awaiting their fate. I slid quietly to the cell and whispered my uncle's name.

"Thomas!" cried the astounded old man. "Is it thee, or am I dreaming?"

"It's me, dear Uncle, and we have a plan to free thee and the crew."

"How in God's name did ye find us here in this godforsaken place?" queried my bewildered uncle.

"We have no time for explanations now, Uncle. Ye shall know in good time," I answered, and quickly set about informing them of our plot. "Now listen carefully as I tell thee the plan. Take this gunpowder and divide it amongst the crew..."

On the morrow the captain brought our battered ship to dock for repairs. We had informed him of all that had happened and he agreed to help. Smollett made his way to the dock where *Seahawk* was moored with me bound and gagged. He held a flintlock to my head and yelled loudly and angrily as he marched me in front of *Seahawk*'s gangplank.

"The man whose boy this is will surely die for the evil deed he has committed against me and my poor unwitting crew," bellowed Smollett.

The morning watchman on *Seahawk* leveled his own musket at Smollett's head and sneered, "Be gone, madman, before I blast both thee and the lad to kingdom come."

"This ye would not think to do if ye knew what I know," yelled Smollett.

The watchman wavered momentarily, but again he snarled, "Be gone, I say, fool knave, or I'll blast the both of ya and feed yer carcasses to the fish!"

"This lad swears to be a part of yer ship." Smollett said as he ordered me to raise my shirt, revealing rosy red sores on my trunk and limbs. Slowly the watchman's countenance changed from a belligerent sneer to one of terror. Slowly he lowered his musket, stammering in horror, "It's the plague!"

His voice grew frantic. "The plague. And curse for curse has God seen fit, to plague us with this defilement!"

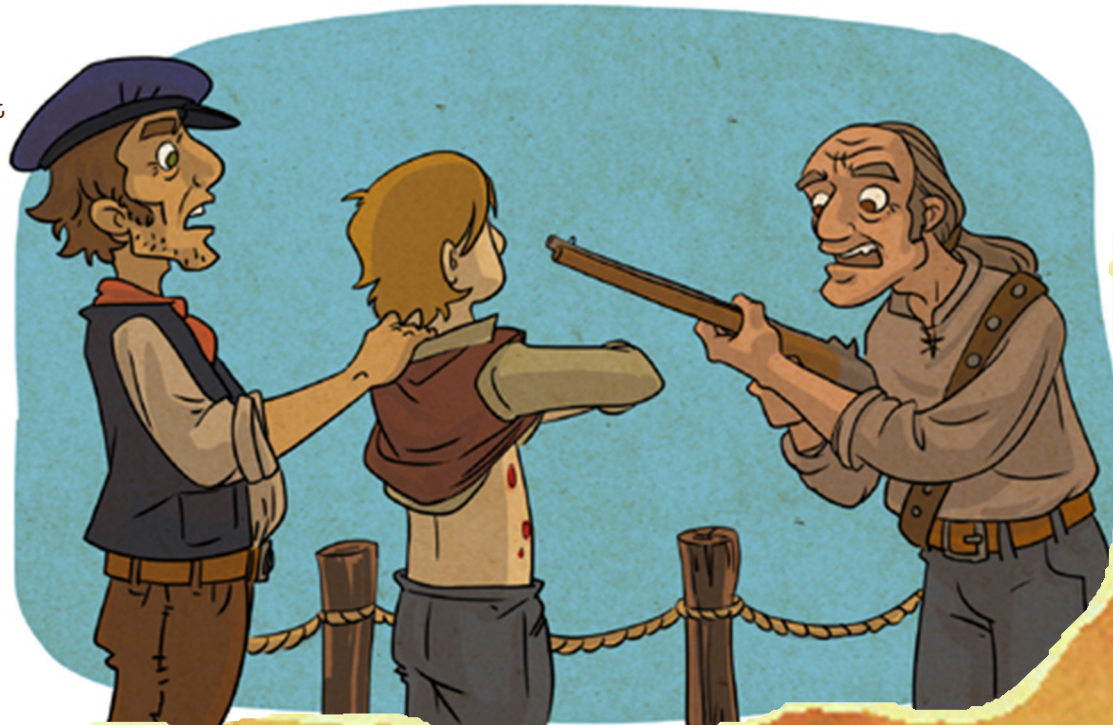
Roused by the commotion, McGuire and Bartlett clamored to the watchman's deck to know the cause of the excitement.

"What be the cause of this trouble, man? Have ye turned a raving lunatic?" bawled McGuire.

"A raving lunatic, indeed! For the men to whom we meant evil have brought the same on us all, for they carry the plague!"

"By the gods, it's trickery!" bellowed Briggins. "The captain and his crew have shown no signs of the plague. Go below now, and bring Craig for the crew to see, lest we 'ave mutiny aboard this wretched ship."

Two rough buccaneers stormed below and roughly ordered the captain to his feet. Straining to see in the dim light, the second man brought a lantern and held it to the bars. Ghastly pale grew the faces of the two, for the ruby cankers bore testimony to the truth: The plague was on board.



Topside the crew awaited the news. But the returning men failed to produce the captain and bore terror in their eyes. "The plague!" they cried. "It's the plague of certain death. God help us all!"

Insurrection spread like an epidemic.

"Don't be daft," screamed McGuire at the fearful crew, some of who had begun to jump ship. "You'll be shark bait out there."

"We'll take our chances," yelled a rough-looking seaman, moments before diving overboard.

McGuire, Briggins, and Bartlett continued to yell recriminations at their co-conspirators, and in the midst of the commotion Smollett and I acted quickly. Taking advantage of the confusion, I raced aboard the ship. Taking the flintlock below, I blasted the cell lock open and freed my uncle and the crew while Smollett gave the signal for the hidden men of the *Albatross* to board *Seahawk*.

Going topside again, this time with the advantage of numbers, we came face to face with the three instigators of this piracy. My uncle being free from his bindings, and holding a musket, now glowed with avenging wrath.

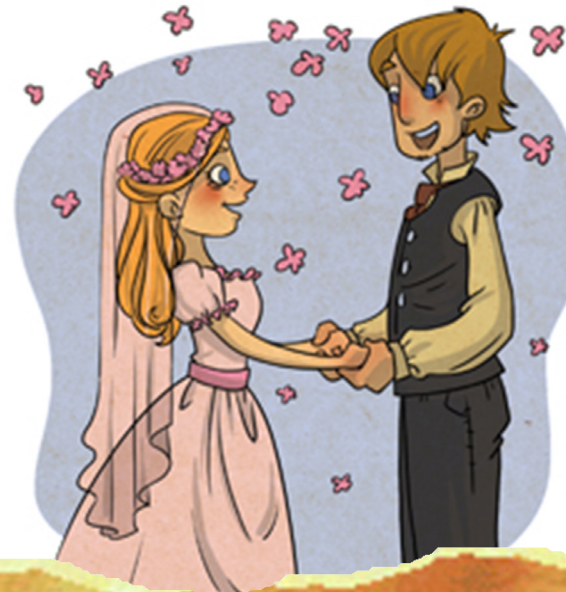
"Are you so foolish as to think you could make away with the *Seahawk* and that God would not punish ye? Men, bind these three and put them below. They'll be answering for their crimes, sure enough."

There was no need for us to take the matter of punishing these men into our own hands. On returning home, they were given over to the law and punished accordingly.

We received a hero's welcome on our arrival, but there was only one face that I looked for: That was the face of Frances Lox, whom I found and made my bonny wife.

Smollett was given the position of first mate on *Seahawk*, and I had proven myself a sailor. I always loved the sea, but with a good reward from my uncle and the hand of Frances Lox, I returned to my family's farm, where we raised a family of our own.

As it turned out, Uncle Joseph Craig was the miser that folks thought him to be. But a bold change of heart came over the old man after this episode, so that one would not know they were meeting the same person, had he not the same features, for his heart had changed. He gave of his wealth to the widows and orphans, to the poor and needy, so that he became known far and wide for his charitableness and goodness.



Mrs. Lox was well able to care for her little ones after Uncle presented her with a bag of gold sovereigns. And this story was passed on from the knee to all the young babes of the land, far and wide.

Oh, and I suppose you'd be wondering how we produced the cankers that looked so much like the plague. Well, with the gunpowder I carried in that bag that night I boarded *Seahawk*, each man of Uncle's crew placed a small quantity on his skin, grit his teeth and lit it. We were all an amusing sight for the next week or so ... and this amazing adventure added yet one more tale to good Smollett's list.

And with this bonny ending I'd add a moral:

There is no limit to what one can do with a positive outlook, and faith and trust in our heavenly Father.

And here our story, so dreadful,
Has come to a happy end.
The *Seahawk* was saved
By the good and the brave;
By the heroes of God and of men.

Good Smollett received a fine bounty,
And the crew was the talk of the town.
And Thomas, the lad,
Could never have had
A better reward, and a crown.

For the uncle and he were united,
And *Seahawk* lay safe at the docks.
He made a new life,

And he won a good wife,
When he won the fair Frances Lox.

And when they were old and were taken
To meet in the great by-and-by,
The sadness of yore
Was present no more,
In a land where we nevermore die.

For his father and mother did greet him,
When he came to that heavenly shore;
It was then that he knew
That God's promise is true,
As we meet with our loved ones once more.

The end