

# **The Hinda Mystery**

W. Clark Russell



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# The Hinda Mystery

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Prepared by John Addy

IT will be thirty years ago since it happened. I time the yarn by recollection of the mariner of that age — a bronzed, plump, whiskered, smiling man, clothed in a short round jacket, with a corner of red silk handkerchief hanging at his pocket; his blue trousers flowed like the swell of the sea to his pumps; he also wore a check shirt, with a tarpaulin hat on nine hairs, from the brim of which, over his left eye, gracefully dangled half a fathom of ribbon. His costume dates my tale: now to proceed.

I paced the deck watching the moon rise. It was the Indian Ocean; hot as the atmosphere was, the long white gleam, sparkling under the moon as she soared into silver, was like the flash of bubbles under ice, and the faint breath of the damp night wind seemed to come along out of the East, cool and sweet from that streak of pure light.

I was chief mate of the *Canterbury*, a barque of five hundred tons; Henry Carter was her commander. We were from Calcutta for the Thames; but how long out at this date I forget. I had the watch from eight to twelve — it is called at sea the first watch; it was then about half-past nine o'clock. The captain was in the cabin playing chess with a lady, a Mrs. Godbold, the wife of an old friend of our skipper's. Her husband's ship had been hired to convey troops to China. His wife had neither the health nor the spirit to accompany him on a traverse that might run into months of ocean, and soul-subduing spells of detention in ports; so Captain Godbold put her under the care of Captain Carter, and we were carrying her home. Good soul she needed but little care. Her face was her constable. She required no stouter protector; yet the spirit of goodness beamed in her wall eye; and much more of the sweetness of the true woman lurked in her wide smile and yawning laugh than I have seen in lips trimmed to the likeness of rosebuds.

They sat together at table playing chess, right under the open skylight in the breeze from the heel of a windsail whose pillar-like form rose snaking and writhing out of the sheen to the dim gape of its jaws up in the dusk. Angels, how hot it was! All the heat of the day seemed to rise out of the solid plank underfoot and float to the nostril in an atmosphere of shipboard smells, blistered paint, and pitch 'twixt the seams like butter, with a relish of deeper matters as far down as the dunnage.

The faint air of the night wrinkled us onwards. We had steerage way; but the whole machinery of the helm seemed asleep, with the motionless figure of a man, his arm lazily overhanging a spoke, lifting against a dim star or two past the taffrail; in fact, a sheet calm was coming on; the soundless heave of the long black swell scarce did more than flap a shower of dew from time to time out of the pale hanging spaces. Yet there was refreshment in the noise of waters trembling along the bends; and in very loathing of the heat I stepped to the rail and overhung it, to get some coldness for the eye out of the shadow touched here and there with roaming glows and sunken puffs of the green sea-fire.

It was like blinding the sight and seeing strange lights. As the moon brightened a reflected lustre sifted from the squares of canvas into the dusk, and the figure of the barque stole out with veins of silver in her heat-softened rigging; every point of yardarm finding a pendent jewel in a star, so still and upright did we float. Suddenly my eye was taken by an object ahead on the port bow. It was close to, slowly coming along. It seemed to shine upon the liquid gloom; and I thought it was made by a star till I glanced aloft and saw nothing in the sky over it brilliant enough for that mirroring. I watched it as it drew nigh: it floated alongside, not a boat-hook's length off. The moonlight lay fair upon it; but it was not until the object was immediately under the part of the rail I overhung that I perceived it was the body of a woman lying on her back, resting as quietly as though she slept, and veering noiseless as oil into the blackness under our counter and astern.

I sprang to the skylight and shouted, "The body of a woman has just gone past, sir. She may be alive. She

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doesn't look to have been long overboard.”

In an instant Captain Carter was on deck. He ran to the quarter and stared on; and, seeing the body, called to the man at the wheel to put his helm down. The ship came sluggishly round. Captain Carter told me to get a boat lowered and pick the body up smartly. He spoke as though the sight of the thing floating plain in the moonshine, and now slipping away off the starboard quarter, had convinced him it lived. The watch tumbled aft promptly to my call, and in a few minutes — for on such a night as that there was nothing to hinder agility, so still was the weather, with the water sheeting into a smoky dusk westward, whilst eastward the wake of the moon came in a tremble of greenish silver to the very shadow of the ship — the boat was lowered, three hands in her, myself in the stern sheets shipping the rudder as we were water-borne.

Half a dozen strokes of the oar carried us to the body; I and another lifted it streaming into the boat, then, scarcely heeding our soaked white burden, we made for the ship again and were presently aboard.

The woman was dressed in white — muslin, I think, was the stuff. She wore a sash, but the colour was not to be guessed by moonlight. She was without a hat: her hair had washed loose; but streaky as it was with the wet, and dark with the saturation of brine, it showed of a wonderful abundance and of a yellow gold. Mrs. Godbold stood at hand ready to help. I and a seaman carried the woman below: we were followed by the captain and Mrs. Godbold. There was a clear light of oil-flame down here, and whilst we bore the body to a spare berth I looked at its face. I saw neither discoloration nor distortion; the eyelids were nearly shut, but I witnessed no glazing of death in the glance of the porcelain-like slips of white betwixt the long eye-lashes.

The steward had thrown a mattress into the bunk, and we laid the body upon it. I then returned on deck to stump out the rest of my watch, taking the skipper's instructions as I passed out to get the ship to her course again if there was any wind left. There was no wind. I felt for even the faintest trickle of draught, with a moistened forefinger lifted, to no purpose. So I let the old barkey lie as she was, and went from rail to rail with a night-glass searching the western dusk, and the eastern splendour, and the vague line of horizon between for a sail, but saw nothing. Whilst I was at this the captain came on deck.

“Do you make out anything like a ship?” he asked.

“No, sir.”

“Neither did I; yet the woman has not been long in the water. She has fallen overboard out of a passenger ship — *that's* sure, by the looks of her. Where's her ship then?”

He took the glass and carefully swept the ocean.

“There was nothing in sight at sundown?” said he.

I had been below at that hour, and could not tell.

“Strange,” said he, “that her clothes didn't suck her under. She has very little on, though. Mrs. Godbold says what she has is of the best. Everything is marked 'E. C.'”

“It's not often,” said I, “you hear of a body found floating at sea and nothing in sight.”

“Why, yes,” he answered. “They're mostly dead, however — dead, I mean, when launched. Yet I've heard tell of people found afloat, picked up insensible, after having been in, or rather on the top of, the water for hours. Women will float when men will sink. It's not a matter of clothes — it's obstinacy helped by shape.”

He returned to the cabin. The decks were ivory-white with moonlight; forward a couple of figures softly paced the planks, and their shadows stretched from their feet like streams of ink. Whilst I paced I speculated on the cause of the woman being in the water; I diverted myself by making up a story about it: first I allowed, with Captain Carter, that she had been a lady on board a passenger ship, — her attire warranted her quality; then I invented that she was a sleep-walker. She had lain down tropically clothed in her cabin, and in slumber had risen, passed through the large cabin window into the mizzen channels; her clutch missed, her foot slipped — but the height was trifling; she made no splash and was swiftly floating astern out of eyeshot and earshot. Perhaps *then* she awoke, and, realising her state, swooned and so died, still floating on her back as though rafted. Anyway it was certain she had not long been in the water: therefore the ship she belonged to could not be far distant ahead of us. I made a calculation, basing the figures on the breezes and speed that afternoon, and worked it out that the woman's ship might very well be clean out of sight from our decks, though the woman herself had not been floating above three hours.

Whilst I occupied myself with these thoughts six bells (eleven o'clock) were struck: the hush now upon the deep was as the stillness of a cathedral crypt at midnight. The mellow chimes trembled in echoes off the

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marble-like canvas, and thinned into the visionary distances in a mocking music of chimes that might have courted a thoughtless eye into searching the dusk for the loom of land. Looking aft, I spied a red star near the wheel, and scented the presence of the skipper. He came leisurely forward and exclaimed:

“Well, Mr. Berry, you've saved a life, but you've damned a soul, I reckon.”

“How's that, sir?” said I. I should tell you betwixt this captain and me there was little or no quarter-deck tension, nothing of the professional posture that keeps the eye askant and the mouth shut, and forces a colder and sterner isolation upon skipper and mate than is felt by the hermit in his bitterest mood of revolt and regret.

“The woman's alive.”

“Ha!”

“Mrs. Godbold's of opinion there's been foul play.”

“Where does the soul I'm concerned for come in, sir?”

“Why,” said he, with a short laugh, dropping his words betwixt puffs of his cigar, “if there's been a crime in this job yours will be the hand that must dangle the doer.”

“If she lives there's no hanging matter in it,” said I.

“She may out with her yarn, then expire,” said he.

“She's said nothing as yet, I suppose, sir?”

“No more than had we fished up a figure-head. But she's alive; and even at *that*, though she should presently die, it's a wonderful rescue.”

When the second mate relieved me at eight bells, on going to my cabin I met Mrs. Godbold. She was coming from the pantry with some wine. She told me that the lady was sensible and had spoken some sentences.

“What did she say?” said I.

“Just whispered a few syllables of thanks,” she answered, bringing her wall eye to bear upon me whilst she fastened the other upon the glass of wine she held up to the lamp. “She's in no condition to be questioned. I ache all over with rubbing her. She's quite a lily of a woman. Had she risen alongside and come aboard, Mr. Berry, with a length of silver fish's tail where her pretty feet are, you might talk to me of sea-goddesses with a grave face.”

She nodded, and we parted company, I to turn in and snore through four roasting dreamless hours of my watch below.

When I turned out in the morning I found a fine sailing wind blowing; the barque, all aslant from the wet and flashing gold of her sheathing to the cloud-like breast of royal that crowned the central spire of her three shining heights, was washing through it in thunder, crushing the white foam out ahead of her to half her own length, with every curtsey *then*, as it were, leaping the rich dazzle of yeast sheer into the blue rolling brine beyond till it roared from her bows again. The captain was on deck. He told me to keep a bright look-out for any sail ahead.

“If the lady's out of one of the tea waggons,” said he, with a proud look aloft and around, “we should be able to put her aboard her own ship again pretty smartly at *this*. We're in her wake — that must be the body, you see, — it's no longer a body, but a handsome girl, by the way — should prove the course steered by the two ships the same.”

“How is she this morning, sir?”

“Why, pretty middling — almost well, I should think. Keep a look-out for anything ahead.”

At breakfast that morning, the captain having left the table, I talked with Mrs. Godbold about the lady we had picked up.

“She is very reserved,” said she, “and I believe we are not going to get any information out of her.”

“What's her name?” I asked.

“She calls herself Eveleen Cole. She wears a wedding ring. She's sweetly pretty indeed, and I wish she would tell me how it happened. It comes to me she's been the victim of violence. It entered my head last night, and I told Captain Carter so. I don't know why I should think it, I'm sure.”

“What do you say to suicide?” said I.

She crooked her eyebrows and humped her shoulders, slowly wagging her head.

“Sleep-walking, then?” I said.

The kind soul eyed me thoughtfully and again shook her head.

“Well, then, Mrs. Godbold,” said I, laughing softly, and speaking quietly, for the woman's cabin was almost

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abreast of my seat, "won't the easiest solution prove the true one? It's commonly so in most conundrums. Let's have it, ma'am, that she fell overboard just as you or I might."

"She has no pockets," said Mrs. Godbold, with a smile that was like saying *I hear you*; "there's nothing on her but the wedding ring, a rather poor diamond ring, and a keeper, and they'll tell nothing if she keeps her mouth shut."

"Won't she give the name of her ship?"

"Not she!"

"How long was she overboard?"

"Well, now, I asked that question too. I watched her strain her face with the struggle to remember. It was genuine. She would answer *that* if she could. Her reply was, 'It was growing dark, I think, when I — when I ——' and then she stopped and turned horribly white, and her eyes swam, and I caught a shocking look of grief just as she rounded her face over to the ship's wall."

"Well," said I, "she'll have to take you into her confidence, I don't doubt, long before we are up with the Cape. Only think of two women locked up in a ship, one with a secret which t'other *knows* is a secret. How long need one scratch before the mole blinks?"

As I might justly consider I had saved the lady's life, I was naturally curious to see her. I was forced to wait, however. But on the afternoon of the fourth day following her rescue, on leaving the deck to go to my berth I saw her sitting in the cabin with Mrs. Godbold. Of course I knew she must be the person we had picked up, yet I certainly should not have recognised her from mere memory or the deathly face of the body I had helped carry to a berth.

When I showed myself at the foot of the companion steps, Mrs. Godbold said something to her companion, and there rose from the cushioned locker as charming a young woman as ever my seafaring eyes had rested on. Her hair was quite glorious: a magnificent heap of golden coils, with a fluffing of it over her white brows, so that the skin there took a peculiar beauty of colour, as though you saw it through a delicately woven golden veil. Her hair was indeed a grace, and the first thing I always mention when I talk of her. Otherwise she was pretty, scarcely beautiful, though Mrs. Godbold thought her so. She had soft blue eyes, well fringed; her white teeth glanced like light itself when she parted her lips; the hues of her skin promised richness, a summer glow, something to carry the fancy to orchards and milkmaids, when all should be well with her health and heart; but there was that in the chiselling of her nose, and in the over-defined projection of her mouth, which somehow called a halt to the first enthusiastic march of admiration, making delight pause, as though there was no soul, no spring of passion in what you looked at. Her figure was uncommonly good: I spied that quickly, despite the dressing-gown Mrs. Godbold had lent her, girdled into a very pretty waist by a coloured rope of silk.

She stretched out her hands, and, with a slight North-country accent, thanked me for her life.

"Where should I be now," said she, with a shuddering lift of her shoulders, "if you had not seen me lying, like the reflection of a star, upon the water?"

"That's how I described it," said I, letting my eyes fall from the full blue melting light of hers, so embarrassingly fixed and impassioned was the beauty's stare to a poor devil of a sailor, whose experience of the sex set him miles to leeward when it came to *talking* to ladies.

She resumed her seat beside Mrs. Godbold. I observed a sudden hardening of her face, as though, having slackened away a trifle in order to thank me, she had hove taut and short afresh — got behind the window of her countenance, in a word, and pulled the blind down.

"If this breeze lasts," said I, drawing out some pluck for myself from her composed and settled air, "we stand to overhaul your ship, unless she should have nimbler lines than ours, which is not likely."

She slightly started, and flashed a glance at me, settling her blue eyes once again upon my face; but said nothing.

"What sort of ship is she?" said I.

She looked a little piteously, and exclaimed, "I would rather not answer any questions — not even yours, Mr. Berry, though I owe you my life."

"Why," said I, "don't suppose that if you are questioned it's from any motive of vulgar curiosity. If your ship's ahead and we overhaul her, the captain will put you on board."

She tightened her lips, but said nothing.



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“All your clothes are in your ship,” said I, speaking with a sense of right; for I felt I had some claim upon this woman's candour, and her reticence was a violence to one's sense of kindness, and, in its way, an affront to us who were her deliverers. “You doubtless have friends there too, who would be as much rejoiced as astounded at sight of you. But how are we to know your ship if you won't name or describe her?”

“I wouldn't return to her for ——” she broke off with a strange gesture of her hands in her lap, as though she was washing them.

“It's no business of ours, my dear, of course,” said Mrs. Godbold, soothingly, yet with an interrogative twist in her note, “but I would only have you consider, if you won't tell us who you are, or drop any hint as to what friends you may have in England, what are you to do when you arrive?”

“I shall give no trouble when we get home,” she exclaimed.

“No; I didn't mean that quite ——” said Mrs. Godbold.

“I have friends, and ——, oh, I wish you wouldn't question me!” she cried; and, clapping her hands to her face, she rocked herself, moaning a little.

I took notice of her rings: the wedding-ring was thick, the jewelled one nothing very wonderful. They were white, plump hands, perhaps not so highly finished as her hair and eyes made you wish. She looked an uncommonly sweet young person, as she sat with her face half hidden, her fingers buried in the gold about her brow, her hair full of yellow gleams, glancing from the steady sunshine that was showering through the skylight and rippling in the polished bulkheads — But Lord! how should a plain sailor know how to describe a fine woman? Still, she was quite too choice a morsel for the sharks, which had mercifully left her unvisited, though more than one black, wet fin had followed, like the tip-end of a scythe, in our wake a couple of days before; and I felt my heart somewhat high with the thought of having saved her, as I rounded on my heel, with a short bow to Mrs. Godbold, and made for my cabin, leaving the pretty creature rocking herself; her face hidden, and a yellow sheen trembling about her hair, as though every fibre were a ray of light.

Captain Carter was a widower — a middle-sized, brown, rather good-looking man, somewhat blunt of speech, and he had an expression of arch humour in his eyes. I guessed he would fall in love with this lady, though it could never come to more than a frequent seizure of pensiveness, along with stolen glances, and a plenty of tobacco-scented sighs, in the face of her wedding-ring and her silence. But I was wrong. I mean he made no signs in that way at all. When he found she would have nothing to say about herself he seldom mentioned her in his occasional chats with me. He quitted Mrs. Godbold's theory of foul play after a bit, and came round to my notion of attempted suicide.

“She's ashamed of herself;” said he. “They usually are when they're rescued. I don't suppose she's given her real name. In fact, let her spin what yarn she will, I wouldn't believe her. She may guess that, and shows good sense in keeping all fast.”

“If she tried to drown herself;” said I, “she may attempt the same little joke aboard us.”

“I don't think so,” said Captain Carter dryly.

“The cause that drove her overboard must still exist,” said I. “It may not be fifty miles distant ahead. Call it grief; hate, fear — what you will, sir, the impulse, the influence came into this ship with her when she was lifted out of the boat.”

“She'll have had enough of it,” said he, and abruptly left me; and so the subject ended.

Well, a fortnight passed, and all went well with us and the lady. I had but little to say to her for the most part, it fell out that I'd take my meals when she was not at the table; then, again, it would be nearly always my watch when I found her on deck, and talk was out of the question with the ship's business on my hands — captain or no captain. She and Mrs. Godbold were much together. The skipper's wife gave her a gown or two, which she trimmed to her shape. Captain Carter gave her a small straw hat, which, perched somewhat rakishly upon her golden hair, topped off her prettiness charmingly. But then, whatever a fine woman wears takes from her the grace it carries. At times she'd step to the rail and overhang it, looking down upon the passing water. I'd catch the blue gleam of her eyes betwixt the fringes, as her gaze ran with the white dazzle alongside to the ship's wake, and wonder what she was thinking of, meanwhile keeping my own weather eye lifting; for if, as I held, she had made the suicide's jump once, who was to make me believe she mightn't try once again for the peace of the deep cool waters in some instant of unconquerable impulse and passion?

It was at the end of the fortnight after picking her up that we encountered one long day of very dirty weather.

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The barque was reefed down to a band of maintopsail; the sea ran in roaring ridges with a steady shrieking of the storm of wind atop of each boiling summit, and a breathless pause in the hollow, till on deck you felt nothing but little cross-shootings of hot air, though the noise of the seething of foam on either hand was hellish in the calm, whilst the strip of treble-reeled topsail reeled in the thunder overhead. Our trucks seemed to rend the flying rags of brown scud and stuff which flew like smoke low down, soaring off the whole line of working western seaboard, as though there was a world on fire just past the horizon.

This weather had burst in a flash and a plain crushed into foam far as the eye could measure; and it ceased with like abruptness, falling dead, as though the raging heart of it had broken, leaving us tumbling hideously. But next morning at eight bells it was once more clear, fair and sunny, the ship under all plain sail, and ahead of us, a point on the lee bow, a star of canvas.

Mrs. Cole, as she called herself; did not appear at breakfast. I heard Mrs. Godbold tell the captain that the violent motions of the ship on the preceding day had left her with a bad headache. It was my watch from eight to noon, and by ten we had risen the ship till the whole hull of her on the sea-line lay a clear figure in the telescope, the streak of her painted ports trembling above a blue gleam of mirage, so that she looked poised in air.

By this hour it was easy to see she was an Indiaman of a type that was even then decaying: square gilded stern and glittering windows and large portholes for the cabins with deadlights as though she had been a frigate. She ran a flight of colours to her mizzen gaff as we approached. I spelt out the bunting with the captain, and read that she wished to communicate: one was almost able to guess why; for, having brought her topsail to the mast, she lay somewhat athwart, giving us a sight of her bows, and I saw that she had lost her foretopmast and jibbooms, and showed no fore-and-aft canvas forward save some fragment of triangular cloth on the forestay.

Carter put the glass down and said she was a troop ship; indeed, already with the naked eye you caught a pulsing of red along her bulwark rails, a coming and going of crimson cloth like the dartings of the combs of cocks through the bars of a coop. We hauled up the mainsail, clewed down some of the lighter square canvas, and came to a stand within hailing distance.

She was a fine frigate-built ship, her waist and forecastle crowded with soldiers; a number of persons watched us from the poop—military officers, no doubt — and I saw several ladies. A tall man in a white coat and a wide straw hat stood beside the mizzen rigging and hailed us. When Captain Carter had told him what ship ours was, he cried back that he was the *Hinda* from Calcutta, so many days out, for the Thames, with such and such a regiment on board, giving us its name and the number of officers and men. He then informed us that on the yesterday the ship had pitched her fore-topmast over the bows, carrying the jibbooms away with it; three men had been swept overboard by the fall of the mast: his chief officer and four seamen went in a boat to pick them up: the boat had capsized and drowned the mate and two men which, with the first three, made a loss of six.

When the man who was apparently commander of the vessel had shouted this statement across the water to us he signed with his hand, bawling out, "I'll go aboard you." A bo'sun's pipe chirruped; several sailors tumbled aft to one of the Indiaman's starboard quarter boats and lowered her, and in a few minutes the man in the white coat and wide straw hat jumped into our main chains and sprang on to the deck.

He was a well-shaped, strongly-built, exceedingly handsome man, dark and stern, almost forbidding in looks. You saw the tar in his blood, in the peculiar dusky eyes and yellowish whites, red-tinged; he wore a scissors-trimmed black beard and moustache. I now noticed that a band of crape was stitched round his sleeve, whilst a like band round his hat gave a sort of mourning appearance to the whole man. He approached Captain Carter with a smile which, though it exposed a set of fine white teeth, rather hardened than softened his stern expression. His eyes bore no part in the grin he gave. He repeated in effect the story of the loss of his foretopmast, and wound up by asking Captain Carter to lend him a couple or three seamen to help him as far as Table Bay.

To this Carter said neither no nor yes, but fell a-yarning, as a man will on the high seas when he meets a stranger. The two captains walked apart, once or twice coming to a stand to look at the Indiaman, that, maimed as she was, made a noble figure as she rolled, lifting her wet sheathing full of light out of the blue brine, with some black goddess of a figure-head, radiant with stars of gilt, rising and falling under the huge spar of white bowsprit in queenly curtseys to the sea—flashes feathering athwart the path she overhung.

Presently I heard Captain Carter ask the other to step below and drink a glass of seltzer—and-brandy. The two men talked as though they had some seafaring memories in common. They went into the cabin. In about five minutes the steward looked out of the companion-way and said that the captain wanted to speak to me. Just when

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I was half-way down the companion-ladder, my sight being a little confused by the brilliant light I was fresh from, a piercing scream rang through the cabin. At the same moment I saw the captain of the *Hinda*, with his back towards me, take two or three steps in slow recoil; his arms were stretched out as though he warned off some apparition. Mrs. Cole stood beside her cabin door: she had evidently just issued from it. She it was who had shrieked. I never could have pictured such a figure of fright, surprise, and horror as she made. Her face was as white as the plank of the deck: she was shrinking and cowering when I caught sight of her. Instantly after she had screamed out she cried:

“Don't let him take me away! Don't let him come near me! He tried to murder me! O God! he tried to murder me! He will do it again if you let him take me!”

At this moment Mrs. Godbold ran out of her cabin exclaiming “What Is it? what is it?” whilst she adjusted her cap or otherwise completed her attire.

When Mrs. Cole saw her she flung herself into her arms screaming, “He would have murdered me! Don't let him come near me! He is my husband! What is he doing here?” And then she struggled and wrestled with Mrs. Godbold, striving to sway and heave her and herself into a cabin immediately abreast.

“You're quite safe here,” shouted Captain Carter: “nobody can touch you aboard this ship without my consent;” and he turned fiercely upon the other, saying, “What's the meaning of this lady's accusation? We found her floating. Are you her husband? What's your name, sir? What did you do to her?”

“He would have drowned me!” screamed the poor girl; and, indeed, she was scarce more than a girl in years, whilst in looks she might have passed for eighteen.

“Oh, guard me from him — make him leave the ship ——” And here she went into hysterics and screamed most dismally.

I made a step amidst all this uproar, and caught sight of the face of the captain of the *Hinda*. I dare not sketch that countenance as memory submits it, lest you should charge me with exaggeration. Only, you will consider that this man, however it came to pass that his wife went overboard, had for days and days fully believed that she was at the bottom of the sea, and now, stepping on board this barque and descending into her cabin, behold! whilst he stands in conversation with Captain Carter, a door opens and his wife appears! How should he look then? What should be his posture under a surprise so enormously tragic as this? I think that wonder and horror had blasted the tongue behind his clenched teeth. His outstretched arms slowly sank: if his face had whitened at first, it was dark with blood when I looked. His head was advanced in an incommunicable attitude, as of horrified expectation deep and wild with *his* silence.

Then, whilst the woman still screamed, and I was making for her to lend Mrs. Godbold a hand — observing, as I stepped, a huddle of hairy faces staring down the skylight in plain expectation of being in time to see the worst of it — the captain of the *Hinda* twisted on his heels, in a spring or two gained the deck, and was gone.

Captain Carter started as if to give chase, and violently arrested himself with a puzzled, hopeless swing of his whole figure. Mrs. Godbold did not want my help: the lady's shrieks fined down into a heart-moving sobbing when her worthy sympathetic companion told her that her husband had left the ship, and bade her open her eyes and see for herself that he was gone.

The captain went on deck, and I quickly followed and when I looked over the rail I saw the *Hinda's* boat making for the Indiaman. The men seemed to be pulling for dear life: probably they had heard the shrieking through the open skylight, and the captain may have started them hard at their oars with some affrighting lie about our ship.

“A scoundrel!” cried Captain Carter, fetching a deep breath after watching the boat a moment or two. “Of course he threw his wife overboard. He looked capable of it, and as if he had done it, too, by thunder!” He took several restless turns, and then exclaimed, “Fill on the barque, sir, — there's nothing to be done. The nearest policeman lives a long way off; but she'll get her revenge when we arrive.”

Even whilst our own white-tipped yard-arms glanced through the sparkling wind to the drag at the braces, swinging the fabric of white cloths into leaning and swelling breasts of canvas, the Indiaman, as her own boat was hoisting at the davits, filled on her maintopsail, and we started together. But I quickly saw that she was for losing us by the easterly course she made; and, indeed, long before the afternoon was gone, she had sunk herself below the horizon to the tacks of her courses.

That same evening Mrs. Cole took Mrs. Godbold into her confidence; and this is the story she related, just as

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it reached my ears a day or two after:—

Her husband was Captain Charles Cole, commander of the *Hinda* Indiaman, and the person who had come aboard our ship to borrow hands. They had been married three years. She told Mrs. Godbold that, from the hour of her marriage, life had been made a burden and a curse to her and himself by his jealousy. She had gone two voyages with him against her wish: she detested the sea; but he was too suspicious and jealous to suffer her out of his sight. A married sister of hers lived in London, but he would not trust his wife with her.

Well, it fell out that on board the *Hinda* — he was doubtless one of those figures I had observed on the poop of the Indiaman — a particularly good-looking young nobleman formed one of the dozen or so of officers who were going home in the ship. He began to pay Mrs. Cole marked attention before the vessel was fairly under way. She could only avoid him by keeping her cabin her husband requested her to do so. She refused to imprison herself in a small berth in a roasting climate. Quarrel after quarrel resulted. The captain's passions were made white hot by the significant looks and half laughs and purser's grins of my lord's brother officers.

One afternoon, whilst she sat on the poop, his lordship pulled a chair to her side, and entered into conversation with her. She could have had no other excuse than her husband's jealousy to rise and walk away. She remained seated. Presently, the officer was called on some pipeclay business to the quarter-deck, and Mrs. Cole went to her cabin. It was a stern cabin, under the wheel, lighted by a couple of large old-fashioned windows, both which were open. Whilst she stood at one of them, watching the pale line of the wake running from under her into the evening dusk, the door was opened and her husband entered. He approached her with the looks of a madman: he could hardly speak for passion. He charged her with infidelity; after which she remembered but little more than that, on her retorting with rage and shame and horror, he took her by the throat!

Captain Carter and I talked this yarn over, and clearly saw how the thing stood. The man had attempted to murder his wife in a fit of jealousy. No doubt she had provoked him to the last degree. He had backed her to an open stern window, choking her cries with his grip of her throat, and tumbled her overboard. The slope of the ship's great square counter no doubt fended off the noise of the splash — if splash there was — from the ear of the helmsman or any one else standing aft; and the figure floated white in the bubbles and foam-bells of the ship's furrow, and went swiftly and noiselessly astern out of sight in the gloom.

We calculated that when this tragedy happened the Indiaman was ahead of us by two hours and a half; sailing at our then speed of five knots, which was rapidly slackening into the stagnation I described at the beginning of this story.

To end which — for nearly all that is interesting in it is told — on our arrival in the Thames Captain Carter deposed to having rescued a woman in mid-ocean: fuller information was communicated to the police. Captain Cole was to be taken into custody on the arrival of the *Hinda* at the first Channel port she called at. This port happened to be Portsmouth; but when the ship was boarded the chief mate of the Indiaman stated that the commander had been found dead in his cabin three days after visiting a barque called the *Canterbury*. The ship's surgeon found that he had poisoned himself; and the body was buried at sea; the conviction throughout the vessel *then* being that he had made away with his wife, though no one imagined we had picked her up, or that the shrieks the boat's crew said they had heard on board of us proceeded from her.

Here would I gladly stop. With pain, however, I add that Captain Carter lost his heart to the widow, and, heedless of the experiences of the wretch whose poisoned body was sunk in the Indian Ocean, married her. With what result? Within two years he was suing the young military lord of the *Hinda* for damages in the Divorce Court.