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# Book Two: Black Tarantula

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## “Grommet Billy’s Lament”

(Traditional Sailor’s Song—Author Unknown)

Boys and lads drawn to a hard life at sea  
Death, famine and loss paving their way  
Fortune and fame...A dream for them all  
A sailor’s fate is hard work and misery  
Young men grow old while chasing history  
    Grommet Billy...Grommet Billy...Man the sheets  
    Grommet Billy...Grommet Billy...Ain’t life sweet!  
Most ships are gone for years on end  
Time for young men to grow some hair  
Forget your Mom...Forget your Dad  
Forget your duties and taste the whip  
Grow up and grow old...Enjoy the trip!  
    Grommet Billy...Grommet Billy...Man the sheets  
    Grommet Billy...Grommet Billy...Ain’t life sweet!  
Food’s so dreadful, we’re served in the dark  
Maggots and weevils are constant mates  
Scurvy and pox haunt all of our days  
Forget the Doc...He’ll bleed you for sure  
Past practice and schooling demand this cure!  
    Grommet Billy...Grommet Billy...Man the sheets  
    Grommet Billy...Grommet Billy...Ain’t life sweet!  
Sea monsters and demons will lead to your doom  
Boys mature to old men...Weathered and seasoned  
Storms called hurricanes will cross your path  
Cry for you Mom...Cry for your Dad  
Complaining too loud will keelhaul a lad!  
    Grommet Billy...Grommet Billy...Man the sheets  
    Grommet Billy...Grommet Billy...Ain’t life sweet!

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## PROLOGUE

Welcome back aboard...landlubbers! My dire predicament has certainly not altered one bit during recent reminiscing on my past life's choices. The chunks of floating debris that surrounded me are ever so slowly disappearing one-by-one below the crashing waves. There are serious engulfing flames on each of the still floating fragments of wreckage. Some have even laid claim to my minuscule sanctuary. These fires are certainly not assisting my plight. As for my fellow wreckmates, the circling sea jackals have eliminated a vast majority of these hell-bound degenerates. With their brutal demise, the sea surrounding me has gone deathly quiet.

While my tale is far from concluded, I am certain that my floating wooden asylum will provide ample time to continue reminiscing. As previously disclosed, my early childhood was fraught with continual hardship and danger. Having successfully survived these harsh times, I can honestly vouch that I was blissfully unaware of the cruel and brutal realities that I routinely faced. In fact, I can faithfully attest that I subsisted in a seemingly contented state: albeit fraught with constant battles with sadistic bullies such as Scarf Rockingham and Mr. Bass.

Reminiscing on my past, it has been extremely difficult not to smile outright remembering jubilant times spent with my long-lost brother and aged uncle. These retrospectives remain vivid and wholly comforting until I happen to muse upon their horrific fates. Of paramount, Toby's disappearance and my inability to locate him has proven to be a continual nagging and haunting phantom that pays uninvited visits on an acutely regular schedule. These sudden negative reflections close the curtain on my heartwarming and stirring mental flashbacks invariably jolting me back to grim reality.

In making a detailed examination of the choices I had made thus far in my life, I can attest that I have chosen quite wisely. While self-preservation forced me to end the lives of several miscreants who threatened my very existence, by no means do I consider myself a murderer. Rather, I have simply taken strong measures to protect and safeguard my

livelihood even though these choices led to the destruction of several of my nefarious foes. Correspondingly, my quick thinking and ingenuity had served to save both myself and my closest friends on a number of occasions. While I have been hailed a hero and savior, I fully realize that in reality I strictly acted out of extreme necessity in each of these instances. Consequently, I judge myself a survivor not a hero, but obviously my companions perceive these matters in a wholly different light.

Since my story is far from finished, I have decided to continue my circumspect review in the short time that I have remaining on this earth. At this point, I return to my recuperative interval on Jamaica following my victory over the odious Sir Jonathan and the grievous demise of my mentor and closest friend, Handy.

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## Chapter 1: Rest and Recuperation

My recovery from my duel with Sir Jonathan persisted for a very long time, actually more than a full month. As I journeyed in and out of a dream-like fog, I never realized that the wound delivered by Powder Monkey's late owner was as serious as it had proved to be. Gertrude continued her continual ministrations so that I was dosed with every herb and medication known to mankind. While I certainly was in no condition to complain, it proved to be a slow and painful voyage to full recovery. Powder Monkey and I developed an even closer bond during this extended recuperation period. As we spent many long days alone, I discovered yet another rather startling talent that my new ward had kept secret. You see, Powder Monkey could actually talk! While the majority of the sounds and tones of his words were indeed strange to my ears, I nevertheless had no real difficulty understanding each and every word he vocalized.

After uncovering this ability fraught with unnatural enunciation, I made a solemn promise to continue to keep his secret masked, which earned me a huge smile of relief. In my mind, this shrouded talent coupled with his uncanny ability to read an individual's lips more than made up for his loss of hearing. As we spent more and more time together, we became very adept at communicating rapidly. Between his lip-reading, his somewhat slurred and mangled speech and our very unique sign language, we evolved into conversing with each other in a remarkably swift and efficient manner. I explained to Powder Monkey that his abilities were quite astonishing, and I was sure that the future would prove these skills to be extremely valuable.

Another frequent visitor during my convalescence was our very concerned Captain. He visited almost every morning to ensure that I continued my recovery and to engage in our daily game of chess. During one of his early visits, he had informed me of his vital need to fill the vacant position of First Mate. Despite Captain Adams' knowledgeable assistance, there seemed to be no likely candidate on the entire island to fill this position. The Captain confessed that he had given the matter

much thought and believed he had arrived at a very proper solution. Confused to the extreme, I quizzed him as to who he had decided upon to fill this vital post. Smiling broadly, he informed me that he was now looking directly at that individual. Still confused for a moment, I finally realized the startling message in his words. Marking my understanding, he continued by informing me that I knew as much about the everyday operation of the *Amafata* as he did. He confided that the crew not only liked me but trusted my judgment without question. He further divulged that my superior navigational abilities made me a sea artist in every sense of the title. Moreover, he confessed that my past quick thinking and ingenuity had saved his ship, his precious cargo and most importantly his life. He finished on a solemn note by informing me that our late mutual friend, Handy trusted in my abilities implicitly. For all of these reasons, the Captain was offering me the position of First Mate of the *Amafata*. Shocked and yet extremely pleased by this prospect, I begged the Captain for just a little time to think over his fabulous offer. Smiling once again, he responded that he had anticipated just such a response and would certainly allow me all the time I required. Winking as he moved a chess piece into a rather precarious position, he returned his full concentration to our ongoing match. For my part, concentrating on the match was almost impossible given the tremendous opportunity that I had just been offered.

Later that day, I received two much unexpected visitors. Long Tall Willie and Angry George. They had jointly decided to pay their respects to their recovering comrade. After filling me in on all the recent island scuttlebutt, I confided in them about the offer our Captain had recently proposed. They listened patiently as I described the Captain's logic and reasoning on his offer of promotion. When finished, I questioned both of my friends on their true feelings. Grinning from ear to ear, they both laughed and patted me on the back. They announced that I was perfectly suited to the role the Captain was offering. With their strong endorsement, I made my decision at that moment to accept the Captain's offer and planned to advise him on the very next visit.

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## Chapter 2: The Trial of Mr. Bass

A portion of the scuttlebutt reported by Long Tall Willie and Angry George concerned an almost forgotten Catstalker Gene. Frustrated and feeling lost and despondent over the incarceration of his mentor, Catstalker Gene reverted to his old tricks of torturing, mutilating and desecrating helpless animals. When the local cat and dog population proved inadequate to sate his sadistic tendencies, the lad decided to move onto larger and more challenging prey. Sneaking into Fat Dog's chimpanzee enclosure one night, the mentally diseased juvenile selected one of the weaker and more defenseless baby chimps to exercise his perverted mania. In plain sight of the entire chimpanzee troop, the knave tortured and brutally slaughtered this poor defenseless creature. Knowing the immature monster as I did, I was certain that he laughed in utter delight to the hoots, screeches and screams of the entire chimp pack as he went about this filthy work.

Having had a delightful time with his new victim, Catstalker Gene decided to repeat the experience the very next night. Once again, the vicious brute snuck into the barn that housed the apes. He had made a decision to repeat his depredations on yet another younger and more defenseless member of the troop. Having identified the victim the previous evening, he stealthily approached the cage where he had noticed the young ape. What he was not aware of was the fact that Fat Dog had taken the time to rearrange the cages in the simian compound following the unfortunate and suspicious death of the baby chimpanzee the previous night. As Catstalker Gene opened the cage holding what he believed to be the younger twin of his recent victim, he was greeted instead by a huge surprise. The cage he had unlocked no longer housed the defenseless infant but rather a fully grown male chimpanzee.

As he unbolted the cage, the fully matured male inside recognized his human liberator as the very devil who had grievously tortured and murdered one of its kind. The enraged beast literally tore the poor tar apart. Afterwards, all that remained of Catstalker Gene was a blood-soaked and mutilated torso. The poor unfortunate's arms and legs had

been literally torn off and scattered in every corner of the enclosure. His noggin had also been savagely torn from its moorings and was nowhere to be found. The bloody torso appeared as if it had been trampled by a herd of stampeding oxen. Besides the massive pool of blood, the mutilated body had been flattened to unrecognizable proportions. The shredded clothing that remained clinging to the murdered victim resembled sailor's slops, but without a head or any kind of recognizable marks on the corpse's trunk, the identity of the victim remained a total mystery. Eventually, the head of Catstalker Gene was recovered inside one of the chimp cages. Once identity was established, inquiries were made of the Captain and crew to attempt to determine the details surrounding the exact cause of death. Based on answers received, the authorities had no other choice but to rule the death purely an accident. They surmised that the unlucky youth had in all probability too much to drink and stumbled accidentally into the ape enclosure. Since one of the cages appeared to have been opened, the authorities ruled that the boy had made a series of inebriated mistakes that eventually cost him his life. Given his rabid addiction to bully, torture and annihilate all manner of weaker creatures, I felt absolutely no pity or remorse whatsoever for his tragic demise. The perverse lad was nothing short of an apprenticing monster and I concluded that his horrific end was more than justified

The trial of the hated First Mate, Mr. Bass opened during the weeks I was recovering. My weakened condition did not allow me the opportunity to witness the trial in person, so I dispatched Powder Monkey to act as my eyes and ears and to report back on each day's outcome. Since Sergeant O'Toole was very popular with the troops stationed at the fort, there was an abundance of fellow soldiers prepared to testify to his good nature. The first several days of the trial were spent hearing from these soldiers extolling the virtues of their former comrade and commander. Further, his loyalists trivialized his murder of Handy as a misguided attempt by their comrade to defend himself after his mortal wounding by Mr. Bass' dagger. Specifically, several witnesses proclaimed that their fellow compatriot retaliated entirely out of self-defense after being mortally struck by the defendant's blade, and as a direct result it altered his aim to a great and tragic degree.

Additional witnesses next took the stand and testified to Mr. Bass's