Marooned Captain

By : Riovocci

A cabin boy is entranced by sounds of a mysterious violin beckoning him into the dark history of an afflicted captain.

Published on
Booksie

booksie.com/Riovocci

Copyright © Riovocci, 2013
Publish your writing on Booksie.com.

Marooned Captain

By the door to the crewâ s quarters, cracked barely enough to see hands tossing cards on an upturned crate in the lounge, a tiny candle flickered and cast a fuzzy orange hue on the wall but left the room mostly dark; it was a darkness that would render a full-size, wrought-iron cannon invisible. Sleep is a privilege on the ship, the *Pilotrema*, for young cabin boy, Jawny Smith. Now and then in the night he awoke to the discordant noise of a stool scooting against the dirty floor as one of the gamblers in the lounge repositioned after losing a hand. Sometimes an intense hand yielded shouts and whistling, of barbaric excitement. Other times the jingle of coins spread for a large bet beseeched Jawnyâ s unconscious greed. If a round of fitful laughter or a crusade of carousing also didnâ t spoil his time to slumber, then it was the night watchmen making his rounds on the main deck, causing boards overhead to creak with each heavy step the wide-bellied man took. Yes, sleep is a game that Jawny played as the men themselves made bets and turned cards.

And young Jawny, despite his small and lanky frame, slept on the top bunk. A tiny ladder nailed to the post helped him up. Crau Hoffs, a man with a body like a rum barrel and a smile that resembled curved piano keys, slept below. Crau snored like he was preparing to spit a weekâ s worth of phlegm overboard. At times he would talk in his sleep, in a storytellerâ s voice, of his angry wife, of his adorable children, of his home in the Port au Rideneize. Luckily the sweet tone is somnolent, but it often made Jawny reminisce of home. Awake, however, Crau hardly spoke a word. Most men go about their duties and socialize minimally; telling stories is the only real exception; for every man aboard likes a tale in his ear for his mindâ s toil on a sea that toils him.

The weather was calm, the pearly moon was bright. All was well in the midnight quiet when Jawny suddenly awoke. He sat up and rubbed his eyes, scattering the sand collected around the valleys formed by his small nose. Cards, one after another, amid silent glances, were slapped onto the crate in the other room and the tiny candle by the door, running low on oil, barely wavered. What had waked him? Rarely did Jawny awake to just noiselessness.

After sleepily looking around the room, and noticing nothing in disarray, Jawny laid back down. He listened, eyes open, for a few moments more; the men playing cards were not excited or angry and the night watchmen was not making his rounds above, nor had the sun stirred. With little to think of, the young boy began to slip right back into sleep as the lull of the motionless room made for such a calm atmosphere, for once. When Jawny did wake, he never remembered it the next morning. And so, after turning to face the bare wall opposite the door, he fell asleep believing the very same.

An hour, perhaps two, passed. Gamblers lugged heavy eyes and empty pockets to their bunks. Little noise had been made overhead, implying the night watchmen had dozed off with the chilly night winds. Even the candle rested after being blown out, and just gray smoke spiraled thinly, unseen in the lightlessness of the crewâ s cabins; an insomniac wouldnâ t descry it, for the cabins lay dark until the annoying beauty of pink and red strands, a horizontal source of predawn light, slip through the square holes in the hatch like a grader for sunshine, and eventually the luminous shavings crawl beneath the door of the cabins, waking the crew.

Meanwhile Jawny dreamt of clashing swords, of tropical islands surrounded by turquoise water and crescent strips of peachy sands; of massive ships that sail on unkind seas and gold doubloons locked in old chests, untouched for years, and stashed in obscure underwater caves.

Between dreams Jawny awoke again. His eyes quickly adjusted. Looking around, he saw all the other men in bed, asleep. As he laid his head softly on his pillow, ready to doze off once again, a glass bottle mysteriously rattled on a stool at the foot of the bunk. Startled, Jawny glanced downward. Nothing was there.

â Was it his imagination? Or could the ship be rocking hard in rough seas?â the curious boy questioned. Sitting up, Jawny tested his balance and noticed the rocking. He rolled back around to face the wall and closed his sleepy eyes. In his tired headâ a dark realm of invisible thoughtsâ all of a sudden a string of gradual sounds, of a violin playing delicately, distantly resounded. Jawny opened his eyes in excitement. He recognized the instrument; he knew only one person on the ship was adept with a violinâ Captain Monavascius.

Oftentimes Lebqueldon Monavascius, captain of the *Pilotrema,* the ship Jawny sails on, would retreat to his lavish quarters and play his violin so finely yet sorrowfully for the night. This was not unusual at all to hear if one were to stay up late, beyond the life of card games. Intrigued but exhausted, Jawny laid back and tried to fall asleep, unsuccessfully. The young boy was alert and his mind had taken the opportunity to reintroduce questions of all sorts.

When Jawny was a young lad residing in Port de Domingo, at night he would sneak out of bed, leave the mission, and climb the hill of tumbling gardens that grace the land above the vibrant port just to sit under the ballroom window of Lord Ciricaoâ s grand estate, which was opened to let in pirate breezes, the aggressive winds, drifting off the sea, and to be captivated as he listened to the Lordâ s personal violinist deftly play famous pieces of the era.

By the time the memories faded, Jawny was out of bed. He stealthily descended the ladder and crept into the crewâ s lounge. Nobody was around. Not a soul was around to tell of his late-night excursion, so he climbed the ladder to the main deck and slowly opened the hatch. Immediately Jawny heard the guard snoring and was relieved, but he became more excited at the sound of the violin, growing louder, beckoning his rediscovered joy to unite with the sorrowful tune.

Creeping among the contorted shadows sculpted by the brilliant moonlight, Jawny scurried till he discerned the slanted shadow of the mizzen, marking the aft. Ahead was the door to the captainâ s quarters, a yellow glow was embedded in the glass of the door, and the shadowy black contours of a man with a sword on his belt moved to and fro inside. Jawny huddled beside the door and put his ear against the wood. Although he was filled with anxietyâ still fearing being caught and punishedâ the harmonious violin soothed his worries. Yes, for Jawny, the tune was entrancing; and in listening, within a short series of notes, he quickly misplaced the looming consequences. Instead of worrying, he stared up at the stars, wishing that he could interconnect them with strings and produce the same beauty.

Footsteps shuffled around inside the room, moving farther away from the door, and the lessening volume of the sorrowful tune carried Jawnyâ s delight with it. From behind the door, where Jawny listened, the violin sounded as if it were separated by oceans. Disappointed, he sulked for a moment and pondered. Then he remembered something. One of those invisible thoughts sparked a bygone memory. Once Jawny had cleaned the captainâ s quartersâ which is how he knew the captain played the violin.

â Thereâ s a window on the outside, by the ledge!â Jawny silently rejoiced, remembering it. And then his joy anchored itself in reluctance. What if he fell while climbing on the exterior of the ship? Or what if the captain saw him? â It is worth it; music is worth the agony of discovery, of receiving lashes; if he were caught he would feel no compunction for his deed,â he concluded. Jawny couldnâ t deny that he loved the sound and would suffer just to listen to it; it was the music of home, of comfort.

As Jawny followed the ledge that passes by the captainâ s window, he realized the ship was rocking more than he had perceived. While he made his way, the ship rocked, continually ascending and descending sea hills. When he paused to reconsider, inside the violin began playing robustly, so alluringly that the daunting circumstances werenâ t enough to deter the determined lad from proceeding. Grabbing the carvings of the ship that adorned the exterior, travelling from carving to carving, Jawny inched his way along the ledge.

Again there was a yellow glow in the window that darkened now and then as if someone were walking around, pacing in the room, and then in front of the window. With each movement closer to the window the sweet sound returned, and now the violin was played fiercely. A deep bluish-black starlit sky framed the world overhead, romancing the sole violinâ s lonely cries. Jawny halted when he was close enough to reach in the window and steal something. The violinist oddly wandered back and forth between the window and something else, between playing and resting.

The glass pane of the window opened to the inside, so Jawny repeatedly saw red arms and golden buckles dash across the surface, and brown hands strumming in the same position a man would pose to fire a heavy rifle. At certain parts of the song the man mournfully hummed to himself. At one point Jawny even saw the captainâ s face, seeing his eyes closed and supernaturally connected with the tan hand strumming as it were clasping a knife, and the fantastic vibrations it produced.

Captain Monavascius was average height but his slender frame made him appear taller. His skin is golden-brown, and wearing merlot-red coats causes him to look tanner than he is. The long hair that drapes from his hat is absolute black; black as his beard that loops around his mouth, and connects with his hair in front of the ears; just as black as the bottomless sea is at the peak of night.

On his hairy fingers rest several rings, thin and thick, of tarnished gold with sparkling jewels flamboyantly encrusted. Upon his nose, halfway down, is a horizontal slit the men pretend not to gaze at, or wonder of how a man ever got close enough to wound the prudent swordsmen. The red hat with golden lace patterns sewn about the rim that the shrewd Captain wears atop his head has a single mauve feather which must have been plucked from an exotic bird, that droopily stands, especially in the strong gusts that unremittingly attack the ship during storms.

Not many know other than Jawny know this, for it is one of the captainâ s secretsâ to anchor his wide hat the captain inserts and ties bundled locks of his hair in a series of holes inside the hat. In effect, few ever see the captainâ s face aside from the shadows that the hat casts upon his flesh, always lending a darker guise to his already terrifying face.

The music suddenly ceased and footsteps moseyed to the window. Jawny flattened his body against the outside of the ship, trying to blend with the jutting ornament of a mermaid that was used to hold lanterns during night-time battles.

â Youâ re here â ¦ and ye made me wait â ¦ come in,â the captain scolded, from inside the room. The captain stood somewhere in the room, staring out the window.

Jawny could sense a nervous pain jolting through his chest as the captain looked his way; apparently the butterflies in his stomach had swords and were mutinous.

â Oh, dear boy â ¦ even the night must rest â ¦come in, fear not, wane not, for I am but the emissary of the sea, sent to reprise the glory of its waters to the valorous night, the captain said, seeing Jawnyâ s reflection in the window.â

Jawny, with nowhere to flee, shamefully slipped in the window and stood before the captain, mentally preparing to be beaten or scorned.

â Welcome to my audienceâ s â Lobuleâ young friend. Sit if you dare, stand if you will, fly if you can.â

Utterly confused by the captainâ s behavior, Jawny was drawn to the maroon-red liquid swirling in a large bottle that the captain held by the neck; it looked like the captain had spilled most of the bottle to achieve the color of his maroon-red coat. The captain held the bottle in front of a candle mounted on the wall, and then tipped the bottle, letting the maroon-red concoction disappear in the dark air of his thirsty throat, repeatedly gulping and swallowing, stopping after a few seconds to wipe his mouth of the reddish stain with his crisp white sleeve already fraught with plenty of what resembled lipstick kisses. For Jawny, the captainâ s laxness was temporarily relieving.

â Want to hear a story lad? ... Will you listen to a story no other men know, that no other men will accept? Do not judge me dear boy, just listen, and know,â said the captain, using his ring-covered fingers to rub his wrinkled eyes in the shadowy nest of his thick brows where they lay, under his hat.

â Aye captain, I shall not tell a living soul.â

â A living soul â¦â the captain repeated aloud. His maroon-red coat almost touched the floor as he leaned backward and howled a raspy laugh that appeared to stir a part of his lungs that had not been hollowed out of hilarity for years; a laugh of madmen.

The captain regained a straight face. He moved his eyes in a way that seemed as if he were looking into his own mind, turning them inward, cross-examining his soul, and displaying a rather puzzled face as if something were not making sense.

â Fear not the living soul lad,â the captain said emphatically, in a hoarse voice, placing his hand on Jawnyâ s shoulder. â For the ghosts of ye past are the most talkative. They, ye ghosts, are a garrulous bunchâ they know all ye secretsâ all ye sinful trespasses.â

Then the captain stood over Jawny like a father would, like a native over a small campfire, peering down in a solemn manner, with an expression that indicated he was preparing to speak; awhile speechless, the captainâ s eyes stole the fiery yellowish-orange of the surrounding candlesâ flicker, shining across his expanding black pupils. Again the captain finally spoke.

â Dead men are the whispers of sea.â A thunderous splash echoed outside the window as the captain finished the sentence.

Jawny could barely stand looking at the captain but he continued to gaze into the captainâ s eyes.

â Come and wonder of the sea!â the captain said, his words teeming with passion in each syllable.

Grasping Jawny by the arm, the zealous captain ushered him to the circular window of his cabin. Black liquid, the endless sea, sprayed cold mist through the window as waves subtly climbed to small knolls and fell as other knolls arose around the fallen. Meanwhile the stare of the pearly moon threw a shimmering path of silver wrinkles on the riddling dark sea.

â We are men because we feel and we fear! And when neither seems to slake our urges, those constant plights ye know of in your heart, we fight â¦ you see.â

Jawny could not quite look out the window, so the captain kicked crates and articles on the floor until he fetched a small foot stool from across the room and rushed back, his long curved cutlass twinkling in the candlelight. Jawny climbed the stool and scoured the night. They both met the moon, gazing fascinatingly at its wholeness.

â What is it dear boy? Tell me! What do you see?â

Jawny thought hard. He wanted to give a confident answer that would please the captain. However, to his own surprise, he said something unusual, something that lingered in his mind as he felt the ocean roll, and the color crash as gently as a wake, in his ears.

â Captain, is the sea not calm violence? Is the violin not calm violence?â

â Argh,â the captain coughed when he meant to talk. â â ¦Ye right on both accounts, lad. Nonetheless, are we not that same calm violence?â

Jawny must have given a perplexed look because the captain elucidated.

â You and I, we adore the seas that are so ferocious to us; and we adore the violin, an instrument that one must stroke the strings in sheer madness to play; and we, humankind, we adore each other, but are willing to kill another to love ourselves â ¦ to survive â ¦ to flourish!â

With that, the captain slammed the base of the bottle he held on a wooden table in fury, merlot swirled around in the bottle, staining the clarity of the pure glass until it settled, until it had the semblance of a bloody reservoir â and being as how tight the captain gripped itâ perhaps he had been the collector.

The captain returned to the window, digressing unintelligibly, rambling on, lost in a profound stare at the silver path, with his lips moving as softly as the waves churned. Then Jawny listened closely as the captain told a story.

â Long ago, when I was but a boy no taller than you, and just as timid I confess, I left home and sought refuge on a massive ship such as this. I was the youngest aboard, a scrawny but persevering lad, as you are, too. After two years on the sea I resisted any urge to be landlocked, and embraced the variance of life aboard a ship. Through many wars and skirmishes I survived and grew deft with a blade and accurate with a pistol. I made a habit of killing men just like me to sustain my greedâ and oftentimes I indulged this avarice so I could carry another gold coin in my raggedy pockets, so that it jingled when I added another, and remind me it was there when it would swing and hit my thigh as I walked along tranquil beaches and slogged through dense jungles that were nearly impassable, and I could feel a tiny sense of wealth, of accomplishment. None of which ever lasted in this rotting heart, lad. Years have gone by, and the more I meet old friendsâ those Iâ ve lost,â the captain said, holding for a moment to take a drink, finishing the residual merlot with one large swig. Jawny watched as lumps swelled and meshed with every gulp in his throat between the black tufts of his thick beard.

The inebriated captain shook his head and smiled, letting the yellow and maroon of his teeth show, acting as if he would continue with the story, but said nothing.

â Where was I?â the besotted captain asked.

â You said you wanted to feel accomplished â ¦â Jawny interjected. He was fixated on the story, for it had been a long time since anyone had told him a story without a crude joke involved. When he was young, living at the mission, he delighted in the biblical stories read to the children. Illiterate, Jawny relied on stories for doses of adventure.

â Argh â ¦yeah â ¦ sharp lad argh ye.â

â They show up at my window on nights like this, begging for me to play a heavenly tune. But the violin echoes melancholy. By day they remain marooned on a dead manâ s island that no compass can find, and no map shall discloseâ .â

â Your old friends show up?â Jawny asked, innocently confused.

â Aye, they do â ¦ they do â ¦ And these men, a damned crew of the sinful dead, have not a conscience to spare behind their black-hearted chains and starkly silver eyes, bold faces and emotionless expressions,â the captain said, sighing.

Jawnyâ s nerves thrashed like rough seas, as if the ship were viciously rocking, tingling down his chilled skin.

â Yet, at night, they may roam the seas â ¦ they roam near this ship, chained to their short boats by the sins they bravely forged, and bleeding a misty blue glow out on the tumbling black seaâ a blue glow that extinguishes candlelight and puts all brightness to shame. For when you stare at these scalawags when they approach in transparent bodies, the one who they seek, to haunt, can see their dismal future through them, in that endlessly dark picture they ominously instill of night compared to a lifeâ s day. And they, without shame or joy, are unaffected I daresay, by the change a storm so violently toils, or the sweet calmness of a waveless, starry night.

â They are ghosts?â

â Aye, they row their boats like a mutinous bunch, moaning the same cries they uttered before tearing out a manâ s heart and displaying it gruesomely before their obedient crew â ¦ They see me, but I do not see them. Nonetheless â ¦ dear boy â ¦ heed my word; I assure you young man, they are there. Oh, they are there! I am but a boy in this world young lad, an innocent boy who will leave this home for another place, a faraway place!â

Jawny shivered nervously, a little scared by how serious the captainâ s tone had turned.

â Be it known young boy, the miserable ghostsâ those I speak agonizingly ofâ must take ordersâ even the undead have captains, you see! ... Lest I join them one day, on this nightly voyage, take my map now, and come to a windowâ a window such as this, so I may have it back and return home.â

The captain removed a rolled up scroll from his coat and held it to Jawnyâ s chest, and then he fled to the window-side and recited a poem to the patient moon.

â To Aureliano, the evilest of us, who seized the sun, and who, with the point of a saber, made the sun surrender and raise its hands till they touched the stars,â the captain said.

If ye sail on the sun, in that molten orange sea;

And when blind ye may find a black crusts gleam.

Yet hotter are the waves, climbing the sides

So ye ascend the ratlines, awaiting harsher tides.

Then send ye distress by cannon into the misty dark

Wait around as ye sink and warily hark

Stars explode and rain their shattered shines above

In that isolated black the pattern forms a dove

An innocent bird that descries new land

Who swoops down for ye to grab with one hand

Lifting ye into the universe, far ye go

Where ye shall travel to ye do not know

Orange behind ye and dark ahead

It is as if life is gone and all thatâ s left is the dead

Air ye breathe and love lives no more

Once rich with life but now so quietly poor

The future, the beyond is as uncertain as a color

But the bird that carries ye is cannily certain, like a mother

Afterwards, the captain wandered to a broken cabinet. He set the empty bottle down and rummaged in the darkness, glass banged together as he did, awhile Jawny, in shock, unraveled the map in his hand. But before he could see the contents, he curled it up as the captain called to him.

â Listen boy,â the restless captain suddenly spoke, still rummaging. â Beyond this shot of rum I will sleep undisturbed, and I dearly urge you to seek refuge in your quarters,â the captain said, a shot of gold serum in hand.

â They heard me tell you of them â ¦ Yes, and I know they will be angry, and I know they will seek me come tomorrow night, and I shall battle.â But at that point Jawny was only half-listening. He was more obsessed with the map heâ d been handed than the captainâ s delusions.

Jawny practically bolted for the door at the order of the captain, muttering an â Aye, Captain,â as he did, then he crept to the hatch and descended the ladder without stirring the snoozing guard, and crawled soundlessly into bed. For the rest of the night Jawny slept as though his encounter with the captain was a mere dream, and kept the map heâ d received tucked in his shirt, safely out of sight.

Morning arrived and cawing seagulls circled the ship, perching on the masts in a method that likened to how the crew would soon line up to await orders. Jawny awoke and climbed to the main deck, where the sunâ s invasive yellow-militia enfiladed the ship, reflecting its spherical blur in the scattered puddles that lingered from nightly waves. Men were just gathering as the captainâ s door swung open and then the disorganized crew formed a straight line without dawdling, Jawny standing upright at the very end. The captain stumbled outside, his cutlass lit like a curvy silver flame, while his wide-brimmed hat shielded his eyes from the blinding light of the sun; clearly he was hung-over from late night carousing, as Jawny knew better than any other man aboard. As the men focused on the captain, Jawny suddenly remembered the map. He touched his

shirt to confirm it was still there.

The first mate sprang up and greeted the dazed captain. They talked for a minute or two. Facing the crew, the first mate gave out orders and the captain leaned against the mast, his head down and shadowy, suffering from the attention of the sun.

Knowing his duties, the ambitious boy set off to scrub the deck. But as he went to fetch a mop and bucket the first mate intervened.

â Jawny, the captain needs his quarters cleaned and floor scrubbed!â

â Aye aye,â Jawny answered.

By the time Jawny was done with the task he was certain the captain had indeed fought something that night. Of course he had foughtâ in his dreams; he had fought the memories that plagued him every full moon by numbing the pain with gulps of smooth merlotâ wryly marooning himself on an island of pain and disorientâ for maroon merlot mimics the color of blood of the lives he took on similar nightsâ and the rutilant complexion of rum merely reminds of goldâ s sheenâ and nevertheless, the troubled captain attempted to obliterate the sickening guilt he encapsulates, just as a bottle gains clarity upon pouring the guilty murk of its engrossing contents.

Jawny slaved away all day, going from chore to chore, eager to see what was on the mapâ yearning to know what secrets it may hold. By late in the evening, he saw the sunset which he compared to an eyelid shutting. Finally, he was in his bed, while the men sounded drunk in the lounge, and there was a fuzzy orange ball around the candle in the quarters. Checking to make sure nobody was watching, Jawny snuck over to the door, removed the scroll, unraveled it slowly and then held it below the light.

Nothing was on the scroll. Jawny frantically flipped it to check the other side only to be disappointed once again. He was angry for a second, but then he gained satisfaction in not seeing anything as he thought over what the captain had said. There were ghosts present the night before. He didnâ t see them. And there is a map on the scroll, and he wasnâ t cursed enough to read it.

Created from Booksie.com

Generated: 2013-05-21 03:22:37