



In December 2002 Roger and Tom Petrie were lost at sea, their ship vanished. They were found alive two years later on a deserted island. Roger wants to forget the past, but his new wife wonders—what happened to the brothers the two years they were lost at sea? And can Roger deflect her suspicions without destroying his family?

Plundering the Past

Tide of Times, Volume 1


by Robert A. Tayler

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PLUNDERING THE PAST

The background of the cover is a dark, atmospheric scene of a pirate ship, likely the Black Pearl, sailing on a stormy sea under a starry night sky. The ship's sails are partially set, and its hull is dark. In the lower-left foreground, a large, open treasure chest is brimming with a massive pile of gold coins, which are glowing with a warm, golden light. The overall mood is one of mystery and adventure.

A TIDE OF TIMES NOVEL

ROBERT. A. TAYLER

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First Edition

LOCAL MEN RESCUED AFTER BOAT SINKS

Saturday, December 18, 2004 1:59PM EST

By: James Dawson, Indianapolis Gazette

Aguadilla, Puerto Rico – A US Coast Guard helicopter successfully rescued two local Indianapolis men Thursday after their boat sank in the eastern Caribbean Sea.

According to a Coast Guard press release, Air Station Borinquen received a vessel on fire message from a C-130J aircraft on a training mission. “Watchstanders quickly dispatched a Dauphin helicopter with a medical team on board from Aguadilla, Puerto Rico,” the release stated, “after ordering the Hercules to drop supplies and mark the spot, which was approximately 400 kilometers east of Aguadilla.”

The helicopter crew found the men—brothers Roger and Tom Petrie—stranded on a nearby island. They had been missing ever since their previous vessel, the MV *Belvedere*, disappeared on December 2, 2002 during a violent storm. The ship’s charter company, Womack Lines out of Miami, FL, had declared her lost with all hands in early 2003.

The release further stated, “After a quick medical evaluation, the Petrie brothers were transported to Aguadilla. They were found to be in relatively good health for having been missing for two years.”

“Multiple factors played a role in the survival of these individuals,” said Lt. Carmen Oviella, watch commander at Borinquen. “They are experienced mariners whose quick reaction to the emergency saved their lives while making for a timely rescue operation. They were extremely fortunate; there are hundreds of uncharted islands in the

area. The odds of being rescued from one without proper communications equipment are fairly remote.”

Roger and Thomas are the sons of David and Christine Petrie of Fishers, IN. They declined to be interviewed for this story, other than to say they were “obviously delighted our sons have been found safe and sound, and we eagerly look forward to seeing them again.”

According to Lt. Oviella the brothers have provided few details about their experiences. The mystery remains as to what exactly happened to them the two years they were missing.



“We be Freebooters sure, shackled to the allure of all things that be shiny and bright.”

—Pirate Ditty

Indianapolis, IN

Sunday, June 11, 2005

6 months, 26 days since Reemergence

It was the perfect setting for a horror movie.

Late at night, dim lighting, empty building, our footsteps echoing eerily in the long, dark corridor—I would have been frightened, were I traveling with a group of witless, oversexed teenagers. Fortunately, it was just me and my older brother Tom.

“Tell me why we’re here, again?” he asked, looking around warily.

“Zykes came down to fifteen thousand on the Mustang, but he’ll only take cash. So, we’re here to get some.”

“And like most people, you store your cash in a creepy warehouse.”

“Something like that,” I said, un-pocketing my keys as we walked. “The interior walls are concrete block, there’s 24/7 security, so it’s perfect for what I need. Here it is, unit 126.” I unlocked the door and rolled it up, the sound almost deafening in the empty hallway. Inside, the storage space was unremarkable; old furniture, stacked boxes and plastic totes, miscellaneous junk, all piled up around the sides and back.

“‘Tis true, Roger. One man’s trash is another man’s treasure,” Tom said. “I only hope you can find yours amidst this trash.”

“You’re hilarious. Help me move this stuff.”

We slid boxes to the side, then pulled out a worn couch, behind which sat a distressed-looking armoire. I pulled out its bottom drawer, setting it aside. The armoire had a false wooden bottom, secured by four hidden clamps. I released the clamps, then lifted the thin sheet of plywood free. Underneath the plywood lay a one-inch sheet of foam shielding a layer of small leather bags, each tied with a leather strap. I reached in and grabbed one, hearing it clink satisfyingly.

“Let’s go, Tom, we’ve got what we came for.”

We walked down to the intersection of Meridian and Market streets, entering a building on the northeast corner. An upscale precious metals broker, GS Equity Partners, had offices on the fourth floor. When we arrived, the blinds were drawn over the door, but it opened when I knocked.

“Roger Petrie?” a soft voice inquired.

“Yes, Mr. Sullivan, along with my brother, Tom.”

“Come in, please,” a thin, bespectacled man whispered, urgently herding us through the door. After double-checking no one had followed us, he led us to an inner office, snapping on a hooded desk lamp. “May I see the articles we spoke of, please?”

I retrieved the leather bag from my backpack, undoing the strap and pouring some of its contents on the desk before Sullivan. His eyebrows arched in surprise as five golden coins spilled onto his blotter, reflecting the lamplight with ethereal beauty.

“Oh, my!” he exclaimed. “When you said the doubloons were in excellent condition, I had no idea they would be this pristine! Wherever did you acquire such specimens?”

“As we discussed earlier, Mr. Sullivan, my grandfather bequeathed these to me last year. The details on how he got them were pretty hazy.”

Tom coughed, suppressing a laugh.

“Indeed,” he said, picking up a doubloon. “With your permission, Mr. Petrie, I would like to inspect them. They appear to be genuine, but we *are* discussing a sizable sum of money.”

“Take whatever time you need.”

He moved to a side desk, donning a jeweler’s 10X loupe to inspect the coins. After a moment, he moved over to a microscope. I knew what he was looking for: bubbling, plating, or seams in the metal, indicators of forgeries or reproductions. He would not find any. He would also inspect the imprints—forgeries had fuzzy details; authentic coins would be more precise.

I was not concerned, for I knew the coins were genuine, having personally confiscated them from a pompous Spanish admiral.

After Sullivan’s initial exam, he consulted several resource books and proprietary internet sites. When he was finished, he

returned to his desk. "May I perform the acid test on one of these, Mr. Petrie?"

"Absolutely. I know that particular test is very accurate."

He smiled, excusing himself and walking out of sight. He reappeared shortly with the doubloon in hand, sitting down behind his desk once again.

"I'm satisfied these are authentic Spanish gold doubloons, Mr. Petrie. Their condition is quite remarkable, given that they lay under the ocean for three centuries. My references indicated they likely were recovered from a 1721 shipwreck several years ago. The *Nuestra de la Capistrano* was her name, I believe, a Spanish treasure ship reportedly lost in a hurricane."

"That's the one," I replied, giving him a wan smile. "Grandad said that was a popular opinion but insisted he had it on good authority she was attacked and sunk by a notorious pirate, the Red Raider, for aiding the British in laying a trap for him."

"Really? That would be exciting, would it not?" he said, laying fifteen crisp one thousand-dollar bills on the desk before me.

"Not for the crew of the *Capistrano*," I quipped. "It didn't turn out so well for them." I gathered the bills, securing them in my backpack. "Fifteen thousand dollars, as we agreed." I placed one more doubloon before him. "We would appreciate it if this matter was never discussed again, Mr. Sullivan."

"Of course. Discretion is a large part of my business."

As I zipped up my pack, he fixed me with a curious gaze. "You seem to be more familiar with this *Capistrano* business than one would think, Mr. Petrie."

"Aye, that I do, lad," I chuckled, standing up and turning to leave. "I be so familiar with the tale it almost be like I was there meself."

Tom snickered as we exited the office. I gave Sullivan one final glance—he was staring open-mouthed at us as we disappeared through the door.

Sarasota, FL

Saturday, October 20, 2007

2 years, 10 months, 4 days since Reemergence

Cans dragging behind my 1966 Mustang Fastback made an awful racket as I raced out of Mount Tabor Baptist Church's parking lot, heading for the Sarasota airport.

"Roger," my new wife Rebekah cooed from the passenger seat, "let's not wreck before we even start our honeymoon."

I smiled at her, drinking in the aura of this beautiful, raven-haired woman who had agreed to marry me six months earlier. "Can you blame a guy for wanting to get you alone as soon as possible?"

"Easy, tiger. You'll have your chance soon enough."

Random thoughts swirled in my head as we swung right onto University Parkway. My life had really taken off since I had moved to Sarasota. At one time, I figured I would spend my entire life at sea, but after the traumatic events following the shipwreck of *MV Belvedere* and the subsequent two-year ordeal following that, I was ready to come ashore.

Due to my nautical experience, I was hired on at a local international transport company in Indianapolis, quickly making a name for myself through hard work and a passion for customer service. My boss, David Fuentes, was hired away by TransCaribe, a respected Florida-based freight forwarding firm, in early 2007, calling for me to join him in Florida shortly thereafter.

Rebekah worked at a title company next door, captivating me with her natural good looks and the fact she was always smiling,

always had something nice to say. A genuinely nice person. Gathering my nerve, I asked her to dinner, we fell in love shortly thereafter, and the rest was history.

My future seemed secure. It was my past that I was worried about.

TWO

“I wish to have no connection with any Ship that does not sail fast for I intend to go in harm's way.”

—Captain John Paul Jones

Sarasota, FL

Sunday Night, October 21, 2018

13 years, 10 months, 5 days since Reemergence

“Come on, Riley, movie’s over, time for bed,” I said as the movie’s credits rolled up our TV screen.

I had let her stay up late to watch Steven Spielberg’s *Hook*, a special treat because she loved pirates, especially the classic ones from literature.

My pronouncement was met with gentle snoring. Looking over, I smiled as my nine-year-old daughter snoozed away, looking angelic with her eyes closed, long reddish-brown hair splayed over her pillow. I roused myself from the couch, bending over to pick her up,

trying not to wake her as I carried her to her room. When I kissed her forehead after tucking her in, she sighed and smiled, warming my heart as she turned over and continued sleeping.

Rebekah was a notoriously light sleeper, so I tiptoed into our bedroom as silently as I could. After changing into my pajamas, I eased the sheet back, slipping into bed beside her. The haunting French horn melody of Captain Hook's theme lulled me into unconsciousness as soon as my head hit my pillow...

"This cursed fog!" the captain roared. "'Twill allow our quarry to make good her escape!"

I was serving as forward lookout, holding fast to a forestay, steadying myself as the deck heaved beneath my feet. Renegade's prow crashed through the warm Caribbean swells, sending curtains of spray cascading over the forecastle, and me. Shaking myself off, I searched for any sign of the galleon we were pursuing. She was slow and heavy-laden with cargo, potentially Spanish silver from the Main. Her name was melodic, the Nuestra de la Capistrano. We had almost run her down, drawing to within ten ship-lengths and hoisting the Jolly Roger, when this blasted fog bank rolled in, obscuring our prey, and hampering our pursuit.

"See anything, Mr. Petrie?" the quartermaster shouted. I silently cursed his stupidity; if the galleon's crew heard our shouting, 'twould aid them in evading us behind the soupy fog curtain.

I ran aft to the quarterdeck, where the captain, quartermaster, and master pilot were huddled around the ship's wheel. "Not a blasted sight of her, Mr. Vogel. Last I saw she was making for the lee of the island to port."

The captain spewed vile curses, growling, "Aye, and we can't maneuver until this bloody veil lifts, lest we run ourselves aground! Mr. Vogel, take in sail 'til we can bloody see where we be going!"

“Aye, Captain!” Vogel gave the order to shorten the fore-and-mainsails and furl the topgallants, reducing the amount of canvas exposed to the wind, slowing us down until the fog burned off.

The curtain began to lift twenty minutes later, allowing us to navigate once more. I jumped onto the mainmast shroud, binoculars in hand. Scanning the ocean off our port beam, I beheld a small islet. Barely visible above its expanse of scrub were the topgallants of a three-mast sailing ship, moving slowly to the northeast.

“Sail ho!” I shouted, pointing out the direction to the captain.

“Mr. Vogel, full sail, tighten the sheets! Mr. Slocum, hard to port once we round these rocks!”

Sailors disengaged rigging winch locks, turning their handles to tighten the halyards. The fore-and-mainsails rose fully, billowing out as they captured the wind. Renegade began to accelerate, knifing through the azure Caribbean waters at over twice the speed the galleon was capable of. Passing the island’s eastern point, Slocum threw the wheel rapidly counterclockwise. Renegade heeled sharply to starboard, deck yawing more than twenty degrees as she headed smartly into a left-hand turn. We all grabbed onto anything sturdy while unsecured articles skittered across the deck, either stopped by the gunwales or falling through the scuppers into the blue-green sea.

By now the topsails were visible to all, but the galleon itself was still shrouded in fog. We charged forward as she began to emerge, first her bowsprit, then her bows. I watched uneasily; something was wrong in the ship’s configuration, her paint scheme all wrong—

BOOM!

A sharp report echoed across the water, followed by a loud whistling. Spellbound, we watched as a cannonball impacted the sea, raising a majestic column of water just off our port bow. The ship fast approaching was not a ponderous Spanish galleon but a

magnificent British Man-O-War, three decks of guns now clearly visible, large Union Jack flying from her stern.

Steering straight for us.

“Perdition’s flames, it’s an ambush!” the captain shrieked. “Hard to starboard, Mr. Slocum, get us away from here!”

Slocum threw the wheel clockwise, but our ship had slowed considerably since our last maneuver. Renegade heeled gently to port, beginning a plodding right-hand turn. The warship was now a half-mile distant, well within range of her long nines. Tongues of flame billowed from her deck, the long-barreled, nine-pound cannon firing solid shot our way. They would probably switch to bar or chain shot when they closed the distance, to rip our rigging and knock down our masts.

Fortunately, Renegade began to respond to commands. Master Rigger Rasmussen and my brother Tom were furiously tightening and loosening lines and halyards, maximizing our trim. The ship slowly increased speed coming out of her turn, but the warship was now less than five hundred yards away, crossing our stern. She veered slightly to port, unmasking all her starboard batteries. Fireballs bloomed along her hull as she fired a full broadside at us. 1700s naval cannons were notoriously inaccurate beyond three hundred yards, but enough shot hit us to cause moderate damage. The air was split by sailors’ screams as cannonballs smashed through our gunwales, creating deadly blizzards of splintering wood shrapnel that sliced easily through clothes and flesh.

Our nimble ship slowly pulled away from the behemoth, but the damage had been done. Crewmen writhed in pain about the deck, crying out for help. A few appeared to be dead. Doc Loechner attended to them as quickly as possible, but the number of casualties was daunting. We clung wearily to rigging and rails, ducking every

time the monstrous warship fired. A shot tore through the mainsail, another bashed our stern, then we were finally out of range.

“Captain, warship off the port beam!” someone screamed.

Everyone still on their feet rushed to see. Sure enough, a sleek Corvette was angling toward us from the east, attempting to head us off. She fired her bow guns, white puffs of smoke issuing from her barrels. Small guns, I surmised, much less powerful than the Man-O-War’s massive cannons...

Shards flew as cannonballs hit us from both directions. Blimey, another warship to starboard! My left hip felt like it was being stung by a swarm of hornets, causing me to holler in pain. Looking down, I saw blood oozing from a dozen holes in my breeches. The blasted British were using grapeshot on us!

We steered south on a starboard beam reach, the only direction out of the trap. Fortunately, Tom had engineered our sails to efficiently provide thrust even at severe wind angles, a marked improvement over normal early eighteenth-century sailing vessels. Trimming our sails to optimum configuration, we hurtled between the two smaller warships, our four brass breech-loading cannons blasting away in response to the warships’ guns. Geysers of fire blossomed as our technologically advanced, fin-stabilized high-explosive warheads impacted both Corvettes. They slewed sharply away, gouts of flame pouring from massive holes where our shells had impacted. We escaped the three-warship trap, which was Admiral Sir Alec Brannigan’s latest effort to destroy Captain Craven and the Renegade.

The pain in my hip drove me to my knees, where I encountered frightening sights: Quartermaster Edward Vogel, dead from multiple wounds to his head; Bosun Patrick Carney, grievously injured and unconscious; and Captain Craven, laying against the stern rail in an ever-widening pool of blood.

Grabbing my collar, he sat up and pulled me close, rasping out what were likely his last words: "Mr. Petrie, I am fallen. But if not for ye and your brother, Renegade would have been destroyed long before now. Seeing as me senior officers seem to be dead or dying, I be leaving her in your charge. Will you accept that charge, lad? Will you care for me ship and me crew as ye would your own?"

"Captain, I—"

"Avast, me hearties! I will soon breathe me last, and ye be needing to vote in a new captain. What thinks ye of Roger Petrie?" he croaked loudly. A chorus of approval sang out from the remaining able-bodied seamen.

He whispered, "When we first met, Roger, I had a mind to run ye through and be done with it. I be thinking now I be glad I did not. Take care of me ship, Mr. Petrie, and if ye survive, may your prey be plentiful, your take bountiful, and the women and wine be loose and cheap, in that order..." He sighed, the death rattle sounding in his throat.

And he was gone.

Wincing as I hoisted myself vertical, I assessed the tactical situation and it was grim indeed: torn sails, top foremast shot away, myriad holes punched in my ship (MY ship!), the dead and dying littering the deck. I could only imagine what it looked like below decks.

Slocum lay slumped over the wheel, dead, his body perforated by shrapnel. Guess I needed a new pilot. First Mate Newton Berger limped up, raising a sloppy salute. "Congratulations, Captain Petrie! What be your orders, sir?"

My orders? How did it come to this? The wounded warships had resumed their pursuit, half my crew was out of action—what could I do? Where could we possibly go?

I stepped forward to begin my new command when there was a great CRACK! and the mainmast slowly toppled, stays and shrouds snapping, hurtling down right on top of me. Is this how my pirate command ends I lamented as death rushed toward me...

I sat up abruptly, wheezing and drenched with sweat. As my eyes focused, I saw I was in bed, Rebekah at my side. Rebekah, who was staring at me in alarm.

“Roger, are you alright? You about gave me a heart attack, moving around like that! You nearly pushed me out of bed!”

Which is no small feat, considering we have a king.

“Yeah, I’m fine. Probably ate pizza too late last night, that’s all.”

“I don’t think so, hon,” she said, face etched with worry. “You used to have manic dreams when we first met, but I thought you were getting over them.”

“What are you talking about? This is the first one I’ve had in months.” I almost sounded convincing.

“Whatever. You were talking in your sleep, too,” she said, an odd timbre to her voice.

“Really? Did I say anything interesting?”

“Oh, I don’t know. I am wondering what the *Renegade* is, exactly.”

I froze at the name of the ship. My blood ran even colder at her next sentence.

“And who the heck is Captain Craven?”

Who was Captain Craven, indeed?



THREE

“The sailor’s life is at the best a life of danger.”

—John Tyler

MV Belvedere Ship’s Log
Master Roger M. Petrie
Monday, December 2, 2002

It was a dark and stormy night—on second thought, it was far worse than that.

Torrents of rain drummed against the windscreen, drowning out the corner stereo. I was too occupied with not wrecking my ship to care. As the ship pitched and rolled in the angry sea, I thought, *what a fabulous way to celebrate your birthday, Roger; steering a heavy-laden cargo ship through a tempest*. Atlantic hurricane season was over, but violent squalls like this one still popped up occasionally. The theme from *Gilligan’s Island* played in my mind as the wheel

vibrated in my hand, something about a tiny ship being tossed, then lost.

Appropriate, if you could call a three-hundred-foot-long, thirty-five-hundred-ton diesel-powered merchant vessel a “tiny ship”. *Belvedere* was fitted with one large jib crane forward, positioned between two large cargo holds. The four-story superstructure, which contained the bridge where I was currently situated, was located aft of the holds, just forward of the stern. *Belvedere* was old, built in 1974, but she was *my* ship, my first command—which held a special place in the heart of any seafaring man. No matter the type of vessel, being in command was an achievement to be proud of.

We were freelance freight haulers, operating under charter to Womack Lines Shipping. Our latest cargo was a load of electrical machinery and components from Brazil, destined for Miami. Presently, *Belvedere* was steaming north, riding the Gulf Stream along the east side of the British Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico.

Tough duty, I know, but somebody has got to do it.

I was startled when Jim Cable barged into the wheelhouse, water dripping from his curly red hair and bushy mustache. He brushed off his slicker, showering me with water.

“Cripes, man!” I barked, brushing off my now-soaked sweater. “If you’re going to shake yourself off like a wet dog, do it away from me!” Glancing at my watch, I added, “Five minutes late, Mr. Cable. That won’t do, especially in this weather.”

“Sorry, Captain. Our off-duty crew was engaged in, ah, a lively debate in the mess, and I lost track of time. It won’t happen again.”

I slapped the back of his head a la Gibbs-style. “See that it doesn’t, mister, or you’ll stand half a dozen extra midnight watches.”

He flashed a lopsided grin. “Aye, sir. Course heading, Captain?”

“Keep her steady on three-one-five, Jim, eighty revolutions for thirteen knots. I’m going to go grab some coffee and doughnuts.”

“Copy that.”

Hungry and thirsty, I pushed past him, exiting through the interior rear hatchway. Descending three floors to the mess level, I negotiated the narrow passageway leading to the galley. The air inside the ship was stale—despite modern ventilation, the atmosphere smelled faintly of paint, antiseptic, and body odor, byproducts of our constant battle with the humid tropical climate. As I drew close to the dining area, I could hear pounding and shouting. Lively debate indeed! Hustling to stop things before it turned violent, I wrenched open the mess hall door. Inside, there were eight officers and ratings (enlisted men) sitting around one of the two large tables, talking loudly, and waving their arms. The din quieted down when I entered the room.

“Evening, Captain,” came a chorus of salutations.

“Evening, gents,” I replied. “Don’t mind me, I’m just here for coffee and doughnuts.”

There was embarrassed silence, then Second Officer Vinnie Tolbert cleared his throat. “Ah, Captain, there might be a problem with that...”

“Then I suggest you fix it, Mr. Tolbert,” I answered sternly. “Immediately.”

Almost as one the men jumped up, scrambling to find something for me to eat and drink. Vinnie hustled to brew fresh java, Matt Samuels and Charlie Ryder searched for doughnuts, while Evan Carmichael, Doug Wolcott, and Gregg Reynolds milled around trying to look busy. It was comical, like watching a *Three Stooges* episode.

Minutes later I had my food and drink. As the men retook their places at the table, I addressed the group. “Coming down here, it

sounded like there was a riot going on. Someone care to fill me in?" I said, taking a sip of steaming coffee.

"Captain, ah, we were having a very civil conversation, you know, and the subject of pirates came up, this being the Caribbean and all," Vinnie said. "We were talking about who the best...er, most successful pirate of all time was, and that started a disagreement, if you know what I mean, sir."

I did know what he meant. Life at sea could be lonely, with long stretches of boredom and monotony. Tempers tended to wear thin between ports of call. I stayed quiet, encouraging him to go on.

"Well, sir, we know you know a lot about them, more than anyone else we know. We were hoping you could settle things for us. I said Blackbeard, Charlie said Black Bart, and Wolcott voted for Captain Kidd. We'd really like your opinion, sir."

"I don't suppose there's any money riding on my opinion, Vinnie?"

He acted like I'd insulted his integrity. "Of course not, Captain! You know we don't allow gambling on board."

"That's good to hear. We can't be having fights due to gambling debts and whatnot."

"I totally agree, sir."

"I'm glad." Taking a bite of pastry, I went on, "Your nominations were quite good, famous pirates one and all. Sam Bellamy is another good one, along with Thomas Tew, Henry Morgan, and Calico Jack Rackham. Why do you suppose they were famous?"

"Well, Captain, I guess because they stole the most treasure?"

"Not a bad guess, Vinnie. Truth is most pirates didn't accumulate much wealth at all. Some barely survived day-to-day, and crews mutinied when a captain couldn't provide even basic necessities for his crew. Successful treasure hoarding was actually pretty rare."

Vinnie looked perplexed, so I took another swig of coffee and continued. “Gents, almost all the notorious pirates were caught, tried, and hung, along with their crews. Pirates like Blackbeard are famous because their behavior became public knowledge, and people became fascinated by them. Over the years we’ve romanticized them, but in real life they were rough, brutal characters.” I paused to finish off my doughnut, wiping my mouth before continuing. “To answer your question, in my opinion the best pirates were the ones who never got caught. Someone like Henry Avery, who made off with a vast fortune.”

“What kind of pirate would you have made, Captain?” Charlie asked.

Tom, our chief engineer, entered the mess for coffee and some grub. He ducked through the door to allow his tall frame to fit under the transom. He joined the fray right away. “Charlie, I’d say Roger Petrie would be closer to Stede Bonnet than anyone.”

Blank stares met his statement. “He was called the ‘Gentleman Pirate’ because he was well-educated and well-mannered. But he was clueless about seamanship. He joined forces with Blackbeard, living on *Queen Anne’s Revenge* for a time, but reports said he spent most days walking the decks in his pajamas, and reading books. That’s why he reminds me of my younger brother.” The crew howled while my face burned with embarrassment.

“Tell you what; if Tom Petrie was in my pirate crew, he’d be the first guy keel-hauled,” I retaliated.

Tom ignored my comment. “Okay, guys, let’s say Roger joined Blackbeard’s crew. How long before his sarcasm would drive Blackbeard to make him walk the plank? A week? Two hours?”, leading to more jeers directed at me. So much for respecting one’s commanding officer.

I was preparing a snide comeback, but my thoughts were interrupted by an abrupt lurch as *Belvedere* heeled violently to port. Another jolt followed, almost feeling like we had hit something. Plates and cups fell to the deck and shattered, while boxes and bags toppled out of cupboards, adding their sounds to the din. Regaining my balance, I sprinted from the mess to the bridge, finding Cable frantically wrestling with the ship's wheel.

"Captain, I've never seen anything like it!" he cried. "We're being hit from every direction! I can't hold her steady, sir!"

Through the windscreen I could see the ocean raging, towering waves indeed moving in several different directions at once, their crests crashing together in great explosions of white foam. *That's impossible—isn't it?*

Gregg Reynolds, a Deck Cadet, arrived on the bridge shortly after me. Turning to him, I barked, "Reynolds, sound the general alarm and get everyone to emergency stations! Secure all hatches, close all watertight doors!"

I winced as the ear-splitting chimes of the alarm commenced, finally shutting off after twenty seconds.

I stood beside Cable at the front console, gripping its brass rail tightly to steady myself. Sheets of rain blew against the windscreen, wind howling as our wipers strained to clear off the immense volume of water. *Belvedere* heaved and pitched sickeningly in the rolling seas, deluges of water crashing over the bow, washing across the forecastle. The sky was colored a putrid green, with intense flashes of lightning splitting the darkness.

In all my years at sea, I had ever experienced anything like this.

My heart skipped a beat when the intercom squawked above my head, "Engineering to bridge, engineering to bridge."

It was Tom, who had dashed back to the engine room the moment the turbulence began.

I toggled a switch. "Captain here, Chief."

His voice was almost overpowered by an earsplitting whine in the background. "Captain, we've got a problem," he began ominously. "Our aftermost tunnel bearing is burning up. If it goes, we could lose the propeller. We need to stop the shaft as soon as possible so I can check it out."

That would be disastrous given current sea conditions. "Tom, we can't lose steerageway here; there are dangerous shoals around. Without the prop, we don't stand a chance of avoiding them."

"Yessir, I know. But if the bearing goes, the propeller shaft could bend or shear, and we can't repair damage of that magnitude. As it is, if we run for much longer, she'll pop the outer seals for sure, which would flood the engine room and after spaces."

That would not be good. "Copy that, Tom. Reduce speed to all ahead slow, and we'll try to find a nice, quiet spot to lay over." A crack of thunder accentuated our plight. Reducing speed in heavy seas exposed the ship to more pitch and yaw action; instead of driving through the seas, we would simply roll around, totally at the mercy of wind and waves.

"I'll try and nurse the engine," he said, "see if we can make anchorage somewhere without totally burning out the bearing."

"Roger that." I snapped off the intercom. This night was getting better and better.

Another barrage of lightning turned night into day. *There!* Off to port was a small island, uncharted, of course, but there were literally hundreds of those strewn all about the Caribbean. Checking our GPS position, I saw that we were east of Barbuda, in the Leeward Islands. If this island held true to form, there would be a horseshoe-shaped cay on the lee side, where we could anchor and ride out this storm.

“Cable, island at ten o’clock, bearing two-four-five! Aim for the lee side!”

“Aye, Captain, I see it!” He immediately steered ten degrees to port, our maneuver aided by the fact that the main trajectory of the wind and waves was to the west.

At dead slow, *Belvedere* wallowed like a drunk sow in the raging seas, making little headway toward the island. Our fathometer showed plenty of water under the keel, so I was not worried about running aground.

What worried me was turning into the cay against the force of the storm.

After a hard sixty minutes, we executed the turn to starboard. As I had hoped, there was a small bay on the lee side of the island. It was small but sported a decent amount of palm trees and conifers, which would prove an adequate refuge against both wind and waves.

“Release the storm anchors, Mr. Reynolds. Advise engineering to effect repairs immediately. Have damage control report on any storm damage we’ve suffered.”

“Aye, Captain.” He flipped a switch and I saw the bow anchor chain rattling overboard, making a cacophonous racket. The large anchor thundered into the water, *Belvedere* shuddering minutes later as it took hold. The fantail trembled as the stern anchor was similarly released.

The waters were calmer here in the protection of the cay. Things slowly returned to normal. Charlie arrived topside moments later, delivering fresh coffee and a plateful of biscuits.

“How are things in the galley, Charlie? They were a real mess a couple of hours ago.”

“There were plenty of guys who helped Matt and I straighten things up, sir,” he said as he handed Jim and I steaming cups of

coffee. “There’s a lot more to do, but we thought you could use a pick-me-up.”

“Excellent thinking, Charlie, thank you,” I said, appreciating the gesture as I sat in the port-side master’s chair, my feet propped on the forward console.

The night’s outlook was improving.

I raised my cup to Cable. “Nice work, Jim. I know it was hairy there for a mom—”

CRACK!!

A brilliant blue bolt of electrical energy struck the jackstaff on *Belvedere’s* bow, nearly blinding me. Fingers of sizzling electricity swept the ship from stem to stern. Both Jim and I dropped our coffee cups, barely registering their shattering on the deck. Through the windscreen I could see a crazy white halo enveloping the entire ship. A wave of nausea washed over me and my vision blurred just as the bridge lights popped and extinguished, plunging the four of us into darkness. Emergency lights snapped on seconds later, affording limited illumination.

I found myself on my knees, my abdomen cramping painfully, my temples throbbing. As my eyes cleared, I saw a trail of blood issuing from Cable’s nose, while Charlie was moaning in pain, holding his stomach.

“Is everyone all right?” I said, painfully pulling myself vertical. Since I was the first one up, I grabbed the wheel.

Everyone nodded tentatively. I activated the ship-wide intercom, grateful but curious that it was still working. “All hands, this is the captain. I need casualty and damage reports ASAP! Report any anomalies to your section officers immediately.”

Reynolds picked himself off the deck. “Holy crap, Captain, what was *that*?”

“That’s what I’d like to know, Gregg. I’m guessing we were struck by lightning.” Straightening my jacket, I started issuing orders as my brains unscrambled. “Send Womack a message about the stern bearing burnout. Jim, get a GPS fix and relay our position to them and the Coast Guard. Also, find out from Doc Loechner if anyone was hurt. We may need medical assistance. That was one heck of a charge we absorbed.”

“Aye, sir!”

The rain lessened considerably, so my view was improving. *Belvedere* appeared to be undamaged, but smoke was rising from every surface. Nothing else on deck seemed amiss.

As I fought down the bile rising in my throat, I wondered how any of us had escaped being electrocuted.



In December 2002 Roger and Tom Petrie were lost at sea, their ship vanished. They were found alive two years later on a deserted island. Roger wants to forget the past, but his new wife wonders—what happened to the brothers the two years they were lost at sea? And can Roger deflect her suspicions without destroying his family?

Plundering the Past

Tide of Times, Volume 1

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