

## Introduction

were in the Dark Chamber, likewise the thirteen great diamonds that hung round the neck of the bronze idol? Also have you seen the knife of Spanish steel with the round ruby at its hilt and the two fangs that broke on my hand from the mouth of the Hag of Turret? The captain and seamen of the ship *Queen Marie* have spoken of the hairy man that was a-dying when I was discovered afloat and without food. What I have written is true on my oath and by my hope of entering heaven.

(SIGNED) SILAS FORDRED.

WITNESSED BY

EVAN the Welshman,  
*Town Clerk.*

## Chapter I

ON the third day of June, 1558, Mary that was called Bloody being then our Queen, Thomas Snoad and I set out from Hythe for the great port of Dover, where lay the ship *Brave Luck* that we had jointly purchased to trade with for our own profits and benefaction. Previously, both of us had been in the employ of Deedes, the great London merchant, who hath more ships than I have toes or fingers. We rose early in the morning, so that when we reached Dover the sun was close on midday and we were greatly athirst. Straightway we boarded our ship, in whose cabin was meat and drink in plenty, and, our appetites being stilled, we went into Dover town to prepare for the voyage



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we were about to undertake. That same day we engaged fourteen seamen and three boys, also a black man from beyond the Middle Sea who was reputed to cook exceeding well and without causing an over-great stink.

Our cargo we put aboard: child's things from Chepeside, and horns that would make music; also cloth stuffs for such as wear garments, and good bows and arrows and broadswords for them that love to fight.

At the eleventh hour and before we hove anchor I bethought me of Dick Whittington, that was thrice Lord Mayor of London, and I hied back to the town and bought two cats that were with kitten, also a Tom-cat, exceeding fierce and black, that was sold me by a witch and had eaten man's flesh.

That night we slept on board, greatly tired, for we had been astir since sunrise putting chests and bales in the

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hold, and it was on the second morning after quitting Hythe that we set sail and passed down the Channel on our way to Grand Canary and the Southern Seas.

It were idle to write here what befell during the first two months of our voyage, that in all things greatly resembled other voyages. Fair winds and pleasant trade with good profits were our lot.

The Negro cook was of a merry mood and amused us hugely, for he could dance and sing and make agreeable noises with pieces of wood held in his hands, and his smile was wide as the smile of a crocodile. Nor was he idle at his business, for he could prepare excellent dishes, many of which were new and unknown to us, and therefore the pleasanter.

We touched at the Gold River that runs into the ocean on the West of Africa, and spent some days bartering



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for gold dust, ivory, and palm oil. It was here that our cook, the black knave, played us a scurvy trick. When we set sail once more, that foul Indian was nowhere to be found, and we were without cook. And then I remembered that he had said that his home was in these parts. He had deceived and deserted us, and his soul was black as his skin.

From the Gold River we sailed south along the coast, and went ashore at many places, till we reached a harbour from whence we could see a mountain with a flat top like a table. We had bartered away all our cargo and there was no further cause to prolong our voyage, so here we turned our ship's head and sailed joyfully North.

On the third day of journeying homewards great gales began to blow; for six days and six nights we ran with bare masts before the winds, and only God on high knew in what sea we were,

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and, though we prayed at morn and eve, He told us naught.

On that sixth day methought the world would end, for there were huger seas about us than any I had ever seen before. The hold was full of water, and I wept bitter tears as wave after wave broke over Snoad's ship and mine.

"Beshrew me," said I to Thomas, my partner, "our cargo will suffer damage — the palm-oil runs to waste."

"Aye," said Snoad, "'tis I who feel each drop that spoils, even as thou," and he shook his bare head, and the great tears stood in his eyes, for Snoad was a man of much thrift, though unmarried.

The great cat that had eaten man's flesh was sore afraid, its hair stood erect on its back and its eyes shone like burnished brass. And in the night of that day, as Thomas Snoad and I were praying for light and a smooth sea, for we had neither slept



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nor eaten save upright all the six days, an huger wave than all curled and splintered into a thousand pieces over us, and the water stung our faces like a shower of broken glass, while the ship *Brave Luck* swayed like a man drunk with ale, and its bow rose high into the air above our heads.

"God save us, Snoad!" said I.

"Amen!" said Snoad, and though we shouted, our voices were as a whisper. We could hear the seamen call on Mary that is the Virgin and Jesus who died on the Cross, and some knelt, while others threw their arms above their heads and trembled with the fear of death. There were wild eyes around us, and faces drawn and terrible as the faces of wild beasts that are mad with hunger and evil passion. I saw these things as in a dream, for they moved me not overmuch, and the men about me were not men as I had known them, and nothing was real till the ship fell

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from under us and we were in the waters, Snoad and I, in a valley 'twixt mountains of water, now rising to the crest, now falling deep, like balls of down in an autumn wind. We could see the heads of the others bobbing like black corks, and overhead in the sky we saw the lightning glitter and run, while in our ears the thunder boomed death knells. It was a brave yet awfulsight, and I think that hell can contain nothing more terrible than that black sea, with the black faces bobbing through the darkness, through which the lightning swished like a rapier of cold gold. Over the hold of our ship had been a cover of wood with handles of rope and two yards long and broad. This cover I made out bearing down on me. I reached out a hand, and my arm was fast twisted in the rope ere the next wave could bear me from this raft. Snoad was at my side.



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"Give me your hand, Snoad," I shouted, but he could not hear my voice above the wind and waves that roared like many lions. I reached out my other arm and caught the top of his jerkin—'twas of good stout leather, —and he looked at me (his head was like a painting of John the Baptist's head on a platter) and spat water from his mouth.

"God save thee, Fordred!"

I saw the words on his lips but heard naught.

"Amen!" said I, and we clung together for the dear life for weary minute after minute; and when at last the grey dawn broke, there was land not over far from us, and the waves were bearing us thither at great speed. As we neared the shore we let go of our raft, and, taking what little strength remained to us, we swam on by ourselves till a huge breaker flung us heavily on the beach. We picked ourselves up

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again—it was a joyful feeling, this standing once more upright on our legs —and went inland beyond the sea's reach.

We cast off our dripping garments and knelt naked to pray a thanksgiving, but, we were so tired and exhausted that we fell down close together, our legs refusing their office, and we slept thus in the grey dawn, naked and worn out. The far-off lands are warmer than ours, so we feared not to be sick by thus lying bare under the open sky.

So we fell asleep, a-weary from our toil and watching, and we lay quite still till the noonday sun smote on our eyelids. When we awoke, the sky was deep blue, the winds had ceased to rage, and the sea had grown calm and serene, so that we felt like two that had dreamed an evil dream and were but newly awakened. There was a pinching feeling at our stomachs; we



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had fasted for many hours, and what we had lately eaten was of no great moment. Snoad and I arose and walked inland to where there were trees with strange fruits such as grow in distant lands, and we sat in the branches of one such and ate from a great gourd we had found at its foot. I looked at Snoad and saw that he was naked.

"Friend Snoad," said I, "where be thy garments? for surely thou dost bear thee as Adam when in the Garden of Eden."

"Friend Fordred," cried Snoad, "look to thyself!"

And I looked, and I too was naked! Then I looked up at Snoad, but he was nowhere to be seen; and I looked down at Snoad, and he was fallen from the branch with over-much laughing and lay now a-rolling on his back with a full mouth and great tears on his cheeks.

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"Silas Fordred!" he cried, "wouldst thou choke me?"

And I too laughed till I dropped from my branch on to Thomas Snoad's stomach.

"Nay, we will both choke," I said, and began to laugh anew; but Snoad was silent for he had no wind.

After we had eaten we walked slowly back to the spot where lay our clothes, dry but marvellous small from the water and the hot sun. And then we went down to the sea all smooth and smiling.

"God save us, Fordred!" said Snoad, "where be we?"

"Aye, where be we?" I answered, and we shook our heads and looked around and upwards; and as we looked, what should we see but a huge idol, a great figure, shining and of bronze, such as mariners say are worshipped in the isles beyond Kathay that are called Nipong. We both



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rubbed our eyes, so as to make sure that we saw true. Aye, there was the figure, a great woman with a calm face, and neither shift nor other garment. For eyes there were broad holes, and in and about these hollow sockets flew sea-birds, and they perched on her breasts, on her knees, and about her feet.

“ Good Fordred,” said Snoad, “ if that be god of these parts let us make obeisance, it may be fitting and proper that we should.”

“ Nay,” said I, in a stern voice and loud, “ Thomas Snoad, rather let us cross ourselves and pray to the Blessed Virgin, who hath just saved us from death by drowning!”

“ Thou art right, good Fordred,” he replied; and we repeated the Lord’s Prayer twice, for ’twas the only prayer that we could repeat from memory.

After that we walked closer to the idol with stout hearts and unafraid, and

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we looked into its face, to its great nose, and the holes that were eyes, and to its neck—and on its neck hung stones that sparkled, big stones all white and glistening as I have seen the diamond stones shine in a goldsmith’s shop, only these stones were larger than any that I had ever seen before, and I have been to the Tower of London, and seen the great ruby that was in the crown of King Harry of Agincourt.

“ Those be diamonds,” said Snoad.

“ I will not say ye nay,” I replied.

Then we looked again, up and down, and at the feet of the great figure were human bones, skulls and leg bones, and ribs and arms.

“ See ye those, friend Snoad?” I asked.

“ Yea, I see them; they be human sacrifices. I have heard tell of such among those that be heathens.”

Thomas Snoad was one that always



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had answer and explanation at his tongue's tip, even though he knew nothing of the matter in hand. This was his great weakness—a small thing, for he was as gallant a seaman as ever trod a ship.

We looked once more, and all the skeletons were broken across the middle, and the upper parts lay here and the lower parts lay there.

“See ye that, friend Snoad?” I asked, and my thoughts went back to the bones that are in the crypt of the Hythe Church.

“Yea,” he made reply (as was his wont), “’tis most like to be their manner of offering sacrifice.”

And for a few moments we stood wondering what manner of god this might be, and whose were the bones that lay all white at its feet.

Again our eyes lighted on the great white stones that sparkled more than a woman's eyes.

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“They be for us,” said Snoad. “Wilt climb and take them? ’Tis easy to reach. Mayhap there will come worshippers ere long and ’twill be too late.”

“Be wise, friend Snoad,” said I, “and think thyself of good luck should the worshippers not offer thee up as a sacrifice. The diamonds can wait, and, should we be discovered by the men that inhabit this land, we might have to pay a huge price.”

I led him away, and we walked about all that day without seeing sign of man or human habitation. We ate fruits and berries, and great crabs that came out of the sea and sought to pinch us. These we slew with stones and pieces of rock, breaking their shells, after which they died. It was raw meat, but a hungry man waits not for a cook.

That night we slept under a broad tree, near a brook of running water that we had drank from. The next



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morning when I awoke I was alone, and Thomas Snoad was nowhere to be seen.

"Snoad, Thomas Snoad!" I cried till my throat pained, but there came no reply. At last I bethought me of the diamond stones and the great lust that had shone in Snoad's eyes on the yesterday.

Quick I sprang to my feet, and ran with great speed toward the seashore, where stood the great idol of bronze with the glistening necklet, and, as I approached, I could see Snoad a-climbing from the huge toes onto the knees.

"Get thee down!" I cried. "Get thee down, thou thief, thou sacrilegious thief, there will be mischief in the deed and dire punishment to follow."

So I spake to Thomas Snoad, for God hath given me a honest soul.

He heeded not, and again I cried:

"Get thee down, Thomas Snoad!"

But he heeded not; and now he had one hand on the outstanding breast and

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he stood on the brazen knee, and then, as he swung upward to the neck where sparkled the jewel, the great bronze arms did close—aye, did close I say, and I have sworn it,—did close fast and sharp over Thomas Snoad, and his head and trunk fell one way and his legs and belly another, aye, right to my feet; and, as I crossed myself and fell down on my knees, I saw the arms of that accursed figure swing back wide open and empty as before, and Thomas Snoad lay at my feet in two halves, so that I understood the meaning of the broken skeletons all sundered in the middle, and I shook my fist at the curst idol, and the arms were wide apart and without motion, and the great white jewels sparkled mockingly in that morning's sun.

I knelt some minutes all fearsome and a-trembling, wondering to what devil's land this body o' mine had strayed, and, as I knelt, I could feel



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something soft yet firm a-pressing gently against my thighbone, and at the same time I could hear a low sound such as is made by a cat that is pleased. I looked round to my side and there was the black cat from the ship a-fondling of me, he that had eat man's flesh and had dwelt with a witch. He was very friendly and there was a fond look in his face; but, for all that, I arose hastily, bethinking me of the body of poor Thomas Snoad that lay there dead and in two parts, and meseemed it were well did I arise and bury him ere harm befell. So I searched till I found a sharp stone all broad and flat like a spade, and with it I dug in the soft sand, so that by ten o'clock that day by the sun I had buried Thomas Snoad, all that was mortal of that gallant mariner. As the sand lay thick over him, I did think to say a prayer, and again I prayed to "Our Father which art in Heaven," that being the

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only prayer that I could repeat without book or priest. I was alone now, and as the "Amen" left my lips my solitude and isolation came back to me strong and full, and my heart felt heavy within me and tears of self-pity stood in both my eyes. I was fit to weep, and lay helpless and without hope as is a despairing woman, till, with great effort, I repeated "Silas Fordred, that art a man, be thou a man." This I said thrice, gaining strength with each repetition, and the mist before my eyes vanished, though a tear trickled slow down both the sides of my nose and splashed onto the thirsty sand below. I saw clear once more, and the black cat was before me, gazing piteously into my face as if to share my burden of sorrow. I drew him gently onto my lap, and we both sat lonely and forsaken on the empty strand, pondering over what next we should do in that gruesome land of the brazen idol.