

3. 沉 船

Chapter 3 The Wreck



听到蒂克的报告之后，所有的人都来围观。船长判断那是一条沉船，所有人都在猜想着这是一个什么样的船，班尼迪克却认为这是一只大型的海上哺乳动物。蒂克赞成船长的意见，因为可以看到阳光下船身的反射。船长让掌舵手靠近沉船，去一探究竟。漫游者号的水手们满心欢喜，希望能从这次海洋救援中获得一点这次捕捞无果的补偿。

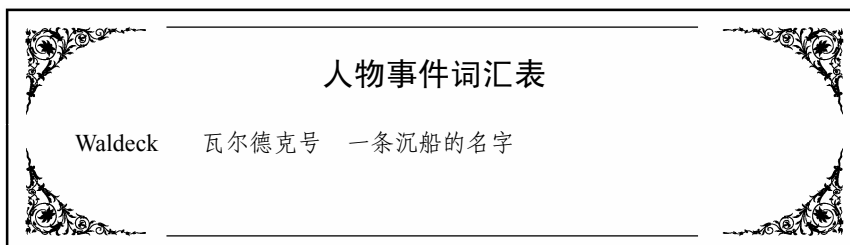
漫游者号距离沉船越来越近，蒂克看清了沉船上的断裂口，推测这只船是被撞沉的。威尔顿夫人开始担心船上的人是不是遇难了，船长决定继续靠近，确认一下是否有幸存者。这时候，蒂克听到了沉船上有狗叫声。沉船越来越近，果然在船上有一条狗不停地叫着。

船长和蒂克下到救生艇中去救援沉船，就在救生艇靠近那条狗的时候，狗却变得狂躁起来，没有人注意到这个时候那条狗只是因为看到了漫游者号上出现的内哥洛，内哥洛也有一些诧异。船长的救生艇到了沉船的另一侧，原来这只船叫瓦尔德克号。船长确认这是美国船，而且在甲板上看不到任何人。

蒂克注意到了狗叫声的不同，知道沉船上还有人，这时沉船上的狗也努力游到了救生艇上。船长和蒂克固定了救生艇，到沉船上查看，狗喝饱了水也跟着上去了。船舱里没有什么货物，也没有找到什么人。这时，狗不停地在甲板上叫着，引导着救援者来到了舰楼，原来有五个昏迷的黑人

躺在里面。

漫游者号很快开始了施救，船长让内哥洛准备一些酒水来救人，可是那条狗听到了内哥洛的名字就变得警觉起来。当内哥洛一出现，狗便扑向了内哥洛，这让船长和蒂克感到非常蹊跷。



Dick Sand's cry brought all the crew to their feet. The men who were not on watch came on deck. Captain Hull, leaving his cabin, went toward the bow.

Mrs. Weldon, Nan, even the indifferent Cousin Benedict himself, came to lean over the starboard rail, so as to see the wreck signaled by the young novice.

Negoro, alone, did not leave the cabin, which served him for a kitchen; and as usual, of all the crew, he was the only one whom the encounter with a wreck did not appear to interest.

Then all regarded attentively the floating object which the waves were rocking, three miles from the "Pilgrim."

"Ah! what can that be?" said a sailor.

"Some abandoned raft," replied another.

"Perhaps there are some unhappy shipwrecked ones on that raft," said Mrs. Weldon.

"We shall find out," replied Captain Hull. "But that wreck is not a raft. It is a hull thrown over on the side."

"Ah! is it not more likely to be some marine animal—some mammifer of great size?" observed Cousin Benedict.

"I do not think so," replied the novice.

"Then what is your idea, Dick?" asked Mrs. Weldon.

"An overturned hull, as the captain has said, Mrs. Weldon. It even seems to me that I see its copper keel glistening in the sun."

"Yes—indeed," replied Captain Hull. Then addressing the helmsman: "Steer to the windward, Bolton. Let her go a quarter, so as to come alongside the wreck."

"Yes, sir," replied the helmsman.

"But," continued Cousin Benedict, "I keep to what I have said. Positively it is an animal."

"Then this would be a whale in copper," replied Captain Hull, "for, positively, also, I see it shine in the sun!"

"At all events, Cousin Benedict," added Mrs. Weldon, "you will agree with us that this whale must be dead, for it is certain that it does not make the least movement."

"Ah! Cousin Weldon," replied Cousin Benedict, who was obstinate, "this would not be the first time that one has met a whale sleeping on the surface of the waves."

"That is a fact," replied Captain Hull; "but to-day, the thing is not a whale, but a ship."

"We shall soon see," replied Cousin Benedict, who, after all, would give all the mammals of the Arctic or Antarctic seas for an insect of a rare species.

"Steer, Bolton, steer!" cried Captain Hull again, "and do not board the wreck. Keep a cable's length. If we cannot do much harm to this hull, it might cause us some damage, and I do not care to hurt the sides of the 'Pilgrim' with it. Tack a little, Bolton, tack!"

The "Pilgrim's" prow, which had been directed toward the wreck, was turned aside by a slight movement of the helm.

The schooner was still a mile from the capsized hull. The sailors were eagerly looking at it. Perhaps it held a valuable cargo, which it would be possible to transfer to the "Pilgrim." We know that, in these salvages, the third

of the value belongs to the rescuers, and, in this case, if the cargo was not damaged, the crew, as they say, would make “a good haul.” This would be a fish of consolation for their incomplete fishing.

A quarter of an hour later the wreck was less than a mile from the “Pilgrim.”

It was indeed a ship, which presented itself on its side, to the starboard. Capsized as far as the nettings, she heeled so much that it would be almost impossible to stand upon her deck. Nothing could be seen beyond her masts. From the port-shrouds were banging only some ends of broken rope, and the chains broken by the cloaks of white-crested waves. On the starboard side opened a large hole between the timbers of the frame-work and the damaged planks.

“This ship has been run into,” cried Dick Sand.

“There is no doubt of that,” replied Captain Hull; “and it is a miracle that she did not sink immediately.”

“If there has been a collision,” observed Mrs. Weldon, “we must hope that the crew of this ship has been picked up by those who struck her.”

“It is to be hoped so, Mrs. Weldon,” replied Captain, Hull, “unless this crew sought refuge in their own boats after the collision, in case the colliding vessel should sail right on—which, alas! sometimes happens.”

“Is it possible? That would be a proof of very great inhumanity, Mr. Hull.”

“Yes, Mrs. Weldon. Yes! and instances are not wanting. As to the crew of this ship, what makes me believe that it is more likely they have left it, is that I do not see a single boat; and, unless the men on board have been picked up, I should be more inclined to think that they have tried to roach the land. But, at this distance from the American continent, or from the islands of Oceanica, it is to be feared that they have not succeeded.”

“Perhaps,” said Mrs. Weldon, “we shall never know the secret of this catastrophe. Meanwhile, it might be possible that some man of the crew is still on board.”

“That is not probable, Mrs. Weldon,” replied Captain Hull. “Our approach

would be already known, and they would make some signals to us. But we shall make sure of it.—Luff a little, Bolton, luff,” cried Captain Hull, while indicating with his hand what course to take.

The “Pilgrim” was now only three cables’ length from the wreck, and they could no longer doubt that this hull had been completely abandoned by all its crew.

But, at that moment, Dick Sand made a gesture which imperiously demanded silence.

“Listen, listen!” said he.

Each listened.

“I hear something like a bark!” cried Dick Sand. In fact, a distant barking resounded from the interior of the hull. Certainly there was a living dog there, imprisoned perhaps, for it was possible that the hatches were hermetically closed. But they could not see it, the deck of the capsized vessel being still invisible.

“If there be only a dog there, Mr. Hull,” said Mrs. “Weldon,” we shall save it.”

“Yes, yes!” cried little Jack, “we shall save it. I shall give it something to eat! It will love us well! Mama, I am going to bring it a piece of sugar!”

“Stay still, my child,” replied Mrs. Weldon smiling. “I believe that the poor animal is dying of hunger, and it will prefer a good mess to your morsel of sugar.”

“Well, then, let it have my soup,” cried little Jack. “I can do without it very well.”

At that moment the barking was more distinctly heard. Three hundred feet, at the most, separated the two ships. Almost immediately a dog of great height appeared on the starboard netting, and clung there, barking more despairingly than ever.

“Howik,” said Captain Hull, turning toward the master of the “Pilgrim’s” crew, “heave to, and lower the small boat.”

“Hold on, my dog, hold on!” cried little Jack to the animal, which seemed



to answer him with a half-stifled bark.

The “Pilgrim’s” sails were rapidly furled, so that the ship should remain almost motionless, less than half a cable’s length from the wreck.

The boat was brought alongside. Captain Hull, Dick Sand and two sailors got into it at once.

The dog barked all the time. It tried to hold on to the netting, but every moment it fell back on the deck. One would say that its barks were no longer addressed to those who were coming to him. Were they then addressed to some sailors or passengers imprisoned in this ship?

“Is there, then, on board some shipwrecked one who has survived?” Mrs. Weldon asked herself.

A few strokes of the oars and the “Pilgrim’s” boat would reach the capsized hull.

But, suddenly, the dog’s manner changed. Furious barks succeeded its first barks inviting the rescuers to come. The most violent anger excited the singular animal.

“What can be the matter with that dog?” said Captain Hull, while the boat was turning the stern of the vessel, so as to come alongside of the part of the deck lying under the water.

What Captain Hull could not then observe, what could not be noticed even on board the “Pilgrim,” was that the dog’s fury manifested itself just at the moment when Negoro, leaving his kitchen, had just come toward the forecastle.

Did the dog then know and recognize the master cook? It was very improbable.

However that may be, after looking at the dog, without showing any surprise, Negoro, who, however, frowned for an instant, returned to the crew’s quarters.

Meanwhile the boat had rounded the stern of the ship. Her aftboard carried this single name: “Waldeck.”

“Waldeck,” and no designation of the port attached. But, by the form of the hull, by certain details which a sailor seizes at the first glance, Captain Hull

had, indeed, discovered that this ship was of American construction. Besides, her name confirmed it. And now, this hull, it was all that remained of a large brig of five hundred tons.

At the “Waldeck’s” prow a large opening indicated the place where the collision had occurred. In consequence of the capsizing of the hull, this opening was then five or six feet above the water—which explained why the brig had not yet foundered.

On the deck, which Captain Hull saw in its whole extent, there was nobody.

The dog, having left the netting, had just let itself slip as far as the central hatch, which was open; and it barked partly toward the interior, partly toward the exterior.

“It is very certain that this animal is not alone on board!” observed Dick Sand.

“No, in truth!” replied Captain Hull.

The boat then skirted the larboard netting, which was half under water. A somewhat strong swell of the sea would certainly submerge the “Waldeck” in a few moments.

The brig’s deck had been swept from one end to the other. There was nothing left except the stumps of the mainmast and of the mizzen-mast, both broken off two feet above the scuttles, and which had fallen in the collision, carrying away shrouds, back-stays, and rigging. Meanwhile, as far as the eye could see, no wreck was visible around the “Waldeck”—which seemed to indicate that the catastrophe was already several days old.

“If some unhappy creatures have survived the collision,” said Captain Hull, “it is probable that either hunger or thirst has finished them, for the water must have gained the store-room. There are only dead bodies on board!”

“No,” cried Dick Sand, “no! The dog would not bark that way. There are living beings on board!”

At that moment the animal, responding to the call of the novice, slid to the sea, and swam painfully toward the boat, for it seemed to be exhausted.

They took it in, and it rushed eagerly, not for a piece of bread that Dick Sand offered it first, but to a half-tub which contained a little fresh water.

“This poor animal is dying of thirst!” cried Dick Sand.

The boat then sought a favorable place to board the “Waldeck” more easily, and for that purpose it drew away a few strokes. The dog evidently thought that its rescuers did not wish to go on board, for he seized Dick Sand by his jacket, and his lamentable barks commenced again with new strength.

They understood it. Its pantomime and its language were as clear as a man’s language could be. The boat was brought immediately as far as the larboard cat-head. There the two sailors moored it firmly, while Captain Hull and Dick Sand, setting foot on the deck at the same time as the dog, raised themselves, not without difficulty, to the hatch which opened between the stumps of the two masts.

By this hatch the two made their way into the hold.

The “Waldeck’s” hold, half full of water, contained no goods. The brig sailed with ballast—a ballast of sand which had slid to larboard and which helped to keep the ship on her side. On that head, then, there was no salvage to effect.

“Nobody here,” said Captain Hull.

“Nobody,” replied the novice, after having gone to the foremost part of the hold.

But the dog, which was on the deck, kept on barking and seemed to call the captain’s attention more imperatively.

“Let us go up again,” said Captain Hull to the novice.

Both appeared again on the deck.

The dog, running to them, sought to draw them to the poop.

They followed it.

There, in the square, five bodies—undoubtedly five corpses—were lying on the floor.

By the daylight which entered in waves by the opening, Captain Hull

discovered the bodies of five negroes.

Dick Sand, going from one to the other, thought he felt that the unfortunates were still breathing.

“On board! on board!” cried Captain Hull.

The two sailors who took care of the boat were called, and helped to carry the shipwrecked men out of the poop.

This was not without difficulty, but two minutes after, the five blacks were laid in the boat, without being at all conscious that any one was trying to save them. A few drops of cordial, then a little fresh water prudently administered, might, perhaps, recall them to life.

The “Pilgrim” remained a half cable’s length from the wreck, and the boat would soon reach her.

A girt-line was let down from the main-yard, and each of the blacks drawn up separately reposed at last on the “Pilgrim’s” deck.

The dog had accompanied them.

“The unhappy creatures!” cried Mrs. Weldon, on perceiving those poor men, who were only inert bodies.

“They are alive, Mrs. Weldon. We shall save them. Yes, we shall save them,” cried Dick Sand.

“What has happened to them?” demanded Cousin Benedict.

“Wait till they can speak,” replied Captain Hull, “and they will tell us their history. But first of all, let us make them drink a little water, in which we shall mix a few drops of rum.” Then, turning round: “Negoro!” he called.

At that name the dog stood up as if it knew the sound, its hair bristling, its mouth open.

Meanwhile, the cook did not appear.

“Negoro!” repeated Captain Hull.

The dog again gave signs of extreme fury.

Negoro left the kitchen.

Hardly had he shown himself on the deck, than the dog sprang on him and

wanted to jump at his throat.

With a blow from the poker with which he was armed, the cook drove away the animal, which some of the sailors succeeded in holding.

“Do you know this dog?” Captain Hull asked the master cook.

“I?” replied Negoro. “I have never seen it.”

“That is singular,” murmured Dick Sand.