

第三章 逆 转

Chapter 3 Captain Len Guy



导

读

杰奥林在得知兰·盖伊船长的拒绝后陷入了苦恼之中，因为他始终想不明白为何会出现这样的结果，一股怒火在杰奥林的胸中燃烧，将他拉向焦虑的深渊。狂躁的海风又一次袭击着群岛，呼啸着卷走山顶的积雪，仿佛在嘲笑着杰奥林的无能为力。杰奥林待在绿色鸬鹚旅店，等待着兰·盖伊船长的到访，即使他最终无法以乘客的身份登上哈勒布雷那号，他也要将满身的怨气向兰·盖伊船长一吐为快。为了表示自己的不满，杰奥林选择了生硬的语气向试图再次逃避的船长发问。盖伊船长依旧给出了令人恼火的理由，因为双桅船的航线并不固定，它要随着船长的意志而决定它风帆扬起的方向。在说这番话的时候，兰·盖伊船长的目光投射向遥远的南方，仿佛在那看不见的天际隐藏着不可名状的回忆与悲伤。杰奥林依旧不依不挠，他并不在乎哈勒布雷那号将会驶向哪里，他只要求能够尽快回到美国康涅狄格州。这句话犹如化学反应中的催化剂一般点燃了兰·盖伊船长的热情，当他得知杰奥林曾经多次游览过南塔基特岛——就是美国作家爱伦·坡创作的《阿瑟·皮姆历险记》中的主人公出生的地点时，他那如海一般深沉的内心深处泛起了波澜。经过了一番争论后，杰奥林放弃了搭乘哈勒布雷那号的念头，在接下来的几天里，他默默地注视着船员们有条不紊地进行着临航前的准备，同时期待着下一艘进港的船能够早日到来。任何事情不到最后一刻都不能妄下结论，就连一向很具有原则性的

兰·盖伊船长也会改变心思。就在即将起航的最后一个傍晚，船长出人意料地邀请了杰奥林作为哈勒布雷那号的旅客，同意将他送往特里斯坦-达库尼亚群岛^①。面对这一转机即使是阿特金斯也弄不清兰·盖伊船长葫芦里卖的是什么药，不过善良的老板还是衷心地为杰奥林感到高兴。8月15日，哈勒布雷那号在低帆的辅助下驶离了圣诞港，克尔格伦群岛的最高峰注视着这次不寻常的航行，直到它消失在海面升腾的云雾中。

I slept ill. Again and again I “dreamed that I was dreaming.” Now—this is an observation made by Edgar Poe—when one suspects that one is dreaming, the waking comes almost instantly. I woke then, and every time in a very bad humour with Captain Len Guy. The idea of leaving the Kerguelens on the *Halbrane* had full possession of me, and I grew more and more angry with her disobliging captain. In fact, I passed the night in a fever of indignation, and only recovered my temper with daylight. Nevertheless I was determined to have an explanation with Captain Len Guy about his detestable conduct. Perhaps I should fail to get anything out of that human hedgehog, but at least I should have given him a piece of my mind.

I went out at eight o’clock in the morning. The weather was abominable. Rain, mixed with snow, a storm coming over the mountains at the back of the bay from the west, clouds scurrying down from the lower zones, an avalanche of wind and water. It was not likely that Captain Len Guy had come ashore merely to enjoy such a wetting and blowing.

No one on the quay; of course not. As for my getting on’ board the *Halbrane*, that could not be done without hailing one of her boats, and the boatswain would not venture to send it for me.

“Besides,” I reflected, “on his quarter-deck the captain is at home, and neutral ground is better for what I want to say to him, if he persists in his unjustifiable refusal. I will watch him this time, and if his boat touches the quay, he shall not succeed in avoiding me.”

^① Tristan d’Acunha 特里斯坦-达库尼亚群岛，南大西洋的一个火山群岛。

I returned to the Green Cormorant, and took up my post behind the window panes, which were dimmed by the hissing rain. There I waited, nervous, impatient, and in a state of growing irritation. Two hours wore away thus. Then, with the instability of the winds in the Kerguelens, the weather became calm before I did. I opened my window, and at the same moment a sailor stepped into one of the boats of the *Halbrane* and laid hold of a pair of oars, while a second man seated himself in the back, but without taking the tiller ropes. The boat touched the landing, place and Captain Len Guy stepped on shore.

In a few seconds I was out of the inn, and confronted him.

“Sir,” said I in a cold hard tone.

Captain Len Guy looked at me steadily, and I was struck by the sadness of his eyes, which were as black as ink. Then in a very low voice he asked:

“You are a stranger?”

“A stranger at the Kerguelens? Yes.”

“Of English nationality?”

“No. American.”

He saluted me, and I returned the curt gesture.

“Sir,” I resumed, “I believe Mr. Atkins of the Green Cormorant has spoken to you respecting a proposal of mine. That proposal, it seems to me, deserved a favourable reception on the part of a—”

“The proposal to take passage on my ship?” interposed Captain Len Guy.

“Precisely.”

“I regret, sir, I regret that I could not agree to your request.”

“Will you tell me why?”

“Because I am not in the habit of taking passengers. That is the first reason.”

“And the second, captain?”

“Because the route of the *Halbrane* is never settled beforehand. She starts for one port and goes to another, just as I find it to my advantage. You must know that I am not in the service of a shipowner. My share in the schooner is

considerable, and I have no one but myself to consult in respect to her.”

“Then it entirely depends on you to give me a passage?”

“That is so, but I can only answer you by a refusal—to my extreme regret.”

“Perhaps you will change your mind, captain, when you know that I care very little what the destination of your schooner may be. It is not unreasonable to suppose that she will go somewhere—”

“Somewhere indeed.” I fancied that Captain Len Guy threw a long look towards the southern horizon.

“To go here or to go there is almost a matter of indifference to me. What I desired above all was to get away from Kerguelen at the first opportunity that should offer.”

Captain Len Guy made me no answer; he remained in silent thought, but did not endeavour to slip away from me.

“You are doing me the honour to listen to me?” I asked him sharply.

“Yes, sir.”

“I will then add that, if I am not mistaken, and if the route of your ship has not been altered, it was your intention to leave Christmas Harbour for Tristan d’Acunha.”

“Perhaps for Tristan d’Acunha, perhaps for the Cape, perhaps for the Falklands, perhaps for elsewhere.”

“Well, then, Captain Guy, it is precisely elsewhere that I want to go,” I replied ironically, and trying hard to control my irritation.

Then a singular change took place in the demeanour of Captain Len Guy. His voice became more sharp and harsh. In very plain words he made me understand that it was quite useless to insist, that our interview had already lasted too long, that time pressed, and he had business at the port; in short that we had said all that we could have to say to each other.

I had put out my arm to detain him—to seize him would be a more correct term—and the conversation, ill begun, seemed likely to end still more ill, when this odd person turned towards me and said in a milder tone,—

“Pray understand, sir, that I am very sorry to be unable to do what you ask, and to appear disobliging to an American. But I could not act otherwise. In the course of the voyage of the *Halbrane* some unforeseen incident might occur to make the presence of a passenger inconvenient—even one so accommodating as yourself. Thus I might expose myself to the risk of being unable to profit by the chances which I seek.”

“I have told you, captain, and I repeat it, that although my intention is to return to America and to Connecticut, I don’t care whether I get there in three months or in six, or by what route; it’s all the same to me, and even were your schooner to take me to the Antarctic seas—”

“The Antarctic seas!” exclaimed Captain Len Guy with a question in his tone. And his look searched my thoughts with the keenness of a dagger.

“Why do you speak of the Antarctic seas?” he asked, taking my hand.

“Well, just as I might have spoken of the ‘Hyperborean seas’ from whence an Irish poet has made Sebastian Cabot address some lovely verses to his Lady. I spoke of the South Pole as I might have spoken of the North.”

Captain Len Guy did not answer, and I thought I saw tears glisten in his eyes. Then, as though he would escape from some harrowing recollection which my words had evoked, he said,—

“Who would venture to seek the South Pole?”

“It would be difficult to reach, and the experiments would be of no practical use,” I replied. “Nevertheless there are men sufficiently adventurous to embark in such an enterprise.”

“Yes—adventurous is the word!” muttered the captain.

“And now,” I resumed, “the United States is again making an attempt with Wilkes’s fleet, the *Vancouver*, the *Peacock*, the *Flying Fish*, and others.”

“The United States, Mr. Jeorling? Do you mean to say that an expedition has been sent by the Federal Government to the Antarctic seas?”

“The fact is certain, and last year, before I left America, I learned that the vessels had sailed. That was a year ago, and it is very possible that Wilkes has gone farther than any of the preceding explorers.”

Captain Len Guy had relapsed into silence, and came out of his inexplicable musing only to say abruptly—

“You come from Connecticut, sir?”

“From Connecticut.”

“And more specially?”

“From Providence.”

“Do you know Nantucket Island?”

“I have visited it several times.”

“You know, I think,” said the captain, looking straight into my eyes, “that Nantucket Island was the birthplace of Arthur Gordon Pym, the hero of your famous romance-writer Edgar Poe.”

“Yes. I remember that Poe’s romance starts from Nantucket.”

“Romance, you say? That was the word you used?”

“Undoubtedly, captain.”

“Yes, and that is what everybody says! But, pardon me, I cannot stay any longer. I regret that I cannot alter my mind with respect to your proposal. But, at any rate, you will only have a few days to wait. The season is about to open. Trading ships and whalers will put in at Christmas Harbour, and you will be able to make a choice, with the certainty of going to the port you want to reach. I am very sorry, sir, and I salute you.”

With these words Captain Len Guy walked quickly away, and the interview ended differently from what I had expected, that is to say in formal, although polite, fashion.

As there is no use in contending with the impossible, I gave up the hope of a passage on the *Halbrane*, but continued to feel angry with her intractable captain. And why should I not confess that my curiosity was aroused? I felt that there was something mysterious about this sullen mariner, and I should have liked to find out what it was.

That day, Atkins wanted to know whether Captain Len Guy had made himself less disagreeable. I had to acknowledge that I had been no more fortunate in my negotiations than my host himself, and the avowal surprised

him not a little. He could not understand the captain's obstinate refusal. And—a fact which touched him more nearly—the Green Cormorant had not been visited by either Len Guy or his crew since the arrival of the *Halbrane*. The men were evidently acting upon orders. So far as Hurliguerly was concerned, it was easy to understand that after his imprudent advance he did not care to keep up useless relations with me. I knew not whether he had attempted to shake the resolution of his chief; but I was certain of one thing; if he had made any such effort it had failed.

During the three following days, the 10th, 11th, and 12th of August, the work of repairing and re-victualling the schooner went on briskly; but all this was done with regularity, and without such noise and quarrelling as seamen at anchor usually indulge in. The *Halbrane* was evidently well commanded, her crew well kept in hand, discipline strictly maintained.

The schooner was to sail on the 15th of August, and on the eve of that day I had no reason to think that Captain Len Guy had repented him of his categorical refusal. Indeed, I had made up my mind to the disappointment, and had no longer any angry feeling about it. When Captain Len Guy and myself met on the quay, we took no notice of each other; nevertheless, I fancied there was some hesitation in his manner; as though he would have liked to speak to me. He did not do so, however, and I was not disposed to seek a further explanation.

At seven o'clock in the evening of the 14th of August, the island being already wrapped in darkness, I was walking on the port after I had dined, walking briskly too, for it was cold, although dry weather. The sky was studded with stars and the air was very keen. I could not stay out long, and was returning to mine inn, when a man crossed my path, paused, came back, and stopped in front of me. It was the captain of the *Halbrane*.

"Mr. Jeorling," he began, "the *Halbrane* sails to-morrow morning, with the ebb tide."

"What is the good of telling me that," I replied, "since you refuse—"

"Sir, I have thought over it, and if you have not changed your mind, come

on board at seven o'clock."

"Really, captain," I replied, "I did not expect this relenting on your part."

"I repeat that I have thought over it, and I add that the *Halbrane* shall proceed direct to Tristan d'Acunha. That will suit you, I suppose?"

"To perfection, captain. To-morrow morning, at seven o'clock, I shall be on board."

"Your cabin is prepared."

"The cost of the voyage—"

"We can settle that another time," answered the captain, "and to your satisfaction. Until to-morrow, then—"

"Until to-morrow."

I stretched out my arm, to shake hands with him upon our bargain. Perhaps he did not perceive my movement in the darkness, at all events he made no response to it, but walked rapidly away and got into his boat.

I was greatly surprised, and so was Atkins, when I found him in the eating-room of the Green Cormorant and told him what had occurred. His comment upon it was characteristic.

"This queer captain," he said, "is as full of whims as a spoilt child! It is to be hoped he will not change his mind again at the last moment."

The next morning at daybreak I bade adieu to the Green Cormorant, and went down to the port, with my kind-hearted host, who insisted on accompanying me to the ship, partly in order to make his mind easy respecting the sincerity of the captain's repentance, and partly that he might take leave of him, and also of Hurliguerly. A boat was waiting at the quay, and we reached the ship in a few minutes.

The first person whom I met on the deck was Hurliguerly; he gave me a look of triumph, which said as plainly as speech: "Ha! you see now. Our hard-to-manage captain has given in at last. And to whom do you owe this, but to the good boatswain who did his best for you, and did not boast overmuch of his influence?"

Was this the truth? I had strong reasons for doubting it. After all, what did it matter?



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Captain Len Guy came on deck immediately after my arrival; this was not surprising, except for the fact that he did not appear to remark my presence.

Atkins then approached the captain and said in a pleasant tone,—

“We shall meet next year!”

“If it please God, Atkins.”

They shook hands. Then the boatswain took a hearty leave of the innkeeper, and was rowed back to the quay.

Before dark the white summits of Table Mount and Havergal, which rise, the former to two, the other to three thousand feet above the level of the sea, had disappeared from our view.