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The Wreck of the Gladstone
by Kage Baker

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On the fourteenth of November 1893, the schooner yacht Gladstone encountered a storm in the Catalina channel off the harbor at Los Angeles, California. A northeastern gale capsized her and she sank within sight of the lights of San Pedro. It is a matter of recorded fact that all hands were lost, including the captain.

Nevertheless, the following August he returned to the scene of his death and peered down through the green water, and it seemed to him he could just discern her outline, green and waving, rippling and fading, the lost Gladstone.

Standing at the rail he wondered, miserably, if any of the mortals he had known were still down there with her, the owner with his long moustache, the sea-cook with his canvas apron.

I could tell he was so miserably wondering because of the set of his mouth and wide stare. I've known Kalugin since the summer of 1699 and have learned, in that time, to read his least thought in his countenance. It is indeed a dear countenance, but terribly at odds with itself; the eyes ought to be steel but are vague and frightened. The nose is arrogant as an eagle's beak, the mouth shaped cruel for its hereditary work of ordering serfs to the pillory: yet the sharp features are blunted in the wide pink face. He doesn't really look like one of us at all.

"Come inside, dear." I touched his arm with my gloved hand. "We can't do anything until the morning."

"I shall have bad dreams," he replied. He turned to go with me, and his gaze fell hopefully upon the island off to the west. "Do you suppose any of the crew managed to swim ashore?"

"Certainly they might have." I gave his arm a squeeze. "But they'd have had to have been extraordinary swimmers. And history does record that all hands were lost, after all."

"Including me, my dear," he pointed out, and I was obliged to shrug in concession of his point. It is one of the laws of the time manipulation business that history cannot be changed. It is one of its hazards, and conveniences, that this law can only be observed to apply to recorded history. We arrange matters to our advantage in perfect obedience to the known facts. Kalugin had gone down with his ship, and so conformed to the historical record. The fact that he had risen on the seafoam three days later, like Venus or Christ, was beside the point and out of the history books altogether. That fact that he had failed in his mission on that occasion was of greater consequence, and the reason for our present excursion.

I led him into the saloon of the Chronos, where dinner had just been served. Victor was standing at his place waiting for us, eyeing the repast with approval.

Victor is one of those white men with nearly transparent skin. His hair and beard are a startling red, his eyes pale green, and his features are small and precise as a kitten's. If he were mortal he might decay in time to a certain spare leonine dignity, but as it is he has perpetually the sharp edge of the adolescent cat. Victor was our Facilitator on this mission. He it was who had arranged for our yacht and its crew, and who had produced such papers as we might need to justify our actions to any mortals we might encounter. Other than the servants, of course. We were fortunate to have his assistance, for the customary glacial slowness of the Company in requisitioning such necessities might have produced a delay of years before we attended to our present mission.

"Madame D'Arraignee." He ushered me to my chair. "Captain Kalugin. It appears we're having 'Bounty of the Sea' tonight. Turtle soup, oysters, lobster salad and Tunny a'la Marechale. Just on the chance you don't get enough of the briny deep on the morrow, Kalugin."

Kalugin sighed and held out his glass for champagne. "It's all very well for you to laugh. Three days against the ceiling of that cabin! Do you know, when the storm had subsided enough for my rescue transport, I had J.W. Coffin and Sons, Boston, Massachusetts printed on my cheek? In mirror image, of course. From an inscription on the brasswork."

Victor laughed heartily. I thought what it must have been like, lying in darkness with drowned men, waiting for the storm to subside. I reached for Kalugin's hand under the table and squeezed it. He gave me a grateful look.

"So here's a health to the Infant Hercules!" Victor raised his glass. "Let's hope the little devil is in reasonably good health too, after his sojourn in the bosom of Aphrodite. Have you inspected the Laboratory yet, Nan? Everything to your satisfaction?"

"Yes, thank you." I leaned to the side as a mortal servant bent to ladle the soup into my plate. "They certainly gave me enough sponges. I didn't find the antifungal, however."

"It's down there. An entire drum of that and the other chemical you needed, the solvent, what's its name?"

"Diorox."

"Diorox, to be sure. I saw it loaded. Everything you need to restore the Son of Zeus to his original splendor should be present and accounted for."

"I'm sure that will prove to be the case."

"I really did seal it up quite tightly," said Kalugin. "There may be a little damage from the tacks. I did my best to remove them, but you've no idea -- the rolling of the ship, and the shouting, and then the light had gone, you know, and the claw end of the hammer wasn't the right size."

"You should have used pliers," Victor admonished him briskly. "Though of course the really important thing, Kalugin, was the air-seal. We can only pray it withstood the impact when you dropped it."

"Oh, it must have." He twisted one corner of his napkin. "That's all covered in my report, you see, the cylinder landed in mud. The seal must have held. There shouldn't have been any errors."

"No, I daresay; the equipment scarcely ever malfunctions." Victor tasted his soup with a delicate grimace. Kalugin looked wretched. He turned to me.

"I'm afraid I might have torn one corner of the painting a little," he said apologetically. "I did mention that in my report as well."

"I'm sure it's of no consequence." I smiled at him. "Canvas repair is the simplest of processes. You forget, my dear, the Renaissance work I've done. You ought to see what the Italians do to their paintings! Floods and mud and bird droppings -- "

"If you please!" Victor's spoon halted in its rise to his moustache.

"Pray excuse me." I had a sip of champagne.

"Have you spoken to Masaki?" Victor inquired of Kalugin.

"The diver? Yes, and she seems a knowledgeable sort. Appears to have done a lot of this sort of thing."

"She has. She's the best in her field."

"Might almost be able to handle the recovery operation herself, I imagine, if my nerve were to desert me," said Kalugin casually.

"Though, of course, it shan't." Victor gave him a hard smile across the table.

We talked about the mission until half-past eleven, and Kalugin drank too much champagne. I lay in the bunk across from him and watched as he slept it off. His eyes raced behind pale lids, his breath caught continually, and his soft hands pushed and pushed at something that would not leave him. It is a terrible thing to be immortal and have bad dreams.

At dawn I opened my eyes and the cabin was full of the sublimest clear pink light, the same tender shade one sees only in the winter season. Its delicate beauty was in harsh contrast to the hoarse profanities that resounded on the morning air.

Kalugin sat up and we stared at one another. We heard one of the Technicians approaching Victor's stateroom and saying, quite unnecessarily, "Vessel off our starboard bow, sir. Crew of two mortals. They're hailing us."

Hailing damnation on us, in fact, and worse things too. The voice echoing across the water was nearly incoherent with rage, backed up by the rattling throb of a steam engine, and growing closer with each moment. We heard Victor's door open and heard his rapid footsteps as he went on deck. We dressed hastily and followed him.

They were just coming abreast of us as we emerged. Victor, dignified in his dressing-gown, Turkish slippers and fez was confronting a wiry little man in stained canvas trousers and an old jersey. The mortal was bounding up and down in his fury in the manner of a chimpanzee, which resemblance was furthered by the fact that his arms were muscular and enormous.

The other mortal stood at the tiller, a bedraggled girl in a faded cotton print dress. She was heavily with child, and appeared to be on the verge of tears. Their old fishing boat was in a bad way, even to my untrained eyes: her ironwork had risen like biscuit with flaked rust, and her old wood was pearl-gray. Some attempt had recently been made to make her seaworthy, but her days on the water were numbered, clearly. ELSIE was painted in trailing letters on her bow.

To render what her captain was saying into prose were to produce a stream of invective not grammatical but profound.

"For shame, sir!" cried Victor. "There are ladies present."

The general sense of the mortal's response was that Victor might take himself and his female companions to any other place in the seven seas save this one. Victor's mouth tightened and the points of his moustache stabbed the air.

"I will not, sir. I will conduct salvage operations here, having every legal right to do so," he stated. He might have continued, but Kalugin gave a sudden groan and clutched the rail.

"O God, it's Mackie Hayes!" he said. He didn't say it loudly, but all heads turned to stare at him. The gimlet eye of the vulgar sailor widened. He uttered a word I will not stain paper with and followed it with the cry of "Captain Pomeroy!"

Then, in an act of physical bravado I would not have thought a mortal man capable of performing, he vaulted the span of sea between his craft and ours and landed on the deck beside Kalugin. The girl at the tiller gave a weak scream. Kalugin found his lapels seized in an iron grip and the sailor's stubbled face a bare inch from his own.

"Where were ya?" shouted the sailor. "When the Gladstone was foundering and there was good men going to the bottom, I ask ya? Where were ya when the spars was snapping and the mast broke off clean? Hiding in yer bunk, ya no-good son of a w----!"

Kalugin had gone very white. He moistened his lips with his tongue and said, "You mistake me, sir. Captain Pomeroy was my father."

The sailor drew his head back to stare at him. He saw no grey in Kalugin's hair, he saw

no lines about his eyes, he saw no scar upon his chin. Nor should he, for these things had been cosmetically applied to make Kalugin look like a mortal man and had been removed when no longer needed. The ferocity of his regard diminished somewhat and he released Kalugin's lapels.

"Well, d -- n me if ya ain't the spit and image of Captain Pomeroy. But he was still a lily-livered coward, ya hear me? He was hiding below when the storm done its worst. Even Mister Vandycook the owner, _he_ come up on deck to see what he could do, but not yer old man. So I d -- n ya for the son of a lubber and no true seaman." He swung about to glare at Victor. "And the rest of ya for a pack of thieves. I lay claim to this salvage operation by rights of having survived the wreck of the _Gladstone_!"

There was a poignant silence on deck. We had encountered what we operatives of the Company most dread: an error in the historical record. Such loopholes can have fatal consequences for a mission. Victor considered the sailor.

"The _Gladstone_ was reported lost with all hands, sir."

"Lost she were, but _I_ didn't go down with her. Two days I hung on a barrel, kicking off the sharks, afore I washed up on that island yonder. Most of a year I been marooned there amongst landsmen. Took me better than three months to get that scow there seaworthy, and _I'm_ salvaging the _Gladstone,_ and be d -- ned to you!"

"You are mistaken, sir." Victor smiled. "My firm purchased salvage rights on the wreck from its insurers."

There was a little cry of disappointment from the girl at this announcement. The sailor glanced once in her direction; then he turned back to squint at Victor. "Is that so? Well, they're there and I'm here. I can't make ya clear off, but ya can't make me leave neither, and we'll see who gets down to the _Gladstone_ first!"

With that he hoisted himself up on our rail and sprang nimbly back to his own boat, which received his weight with a hollow crash that did not bode well for the integrity of her timbers. Victor stared after him, twisting one end of his moustache until it threatened to part company with his lip. Then he turned on his heel and stalked within, motioning us to follow.

"Lost with all hands!" he snapped as soon as we were gathered in the saloon.

"It's not my fault." Kalugin sagged into a chair. "I was below when the _Gladstone_ went down. You know that. My orders were to rescue the priceless painting a New York millionaire stupidly kept in the cabin of his yacht. It was not my responsibility to see to it that the crew drowned. When the rescue transport picked me up after the storm they made a clean sweep of the area. They found no survivors. The historical record _says_ there were no survivors."

"Well, now we know otherwise, don't we?" Victor went to the galley door and flung it open. "Coffee!" he shouted, and slammed it again and turned to pace up and down before us. "Who is this miserable little tattooed goat, may I ask?"

"Only one of the hands before the mast."

"Biographical data?"

Kalugin accessed. "Mackie Hayes, able-bodied seaman, age thirty-two, no residence given," he replied. "He was an excellent hand, unless he got liquor. He was a fighting drunk. I recall he nearly killed a man in Honolulu. Trouble with the ladies, too. I should guess his nationality to have been Yankee, despite his oddities of speech, which I believe were due to an old injury resulting in partial paralysis of the facial muscles on the right side."

"You may as well update your entry to present tense," said Victor bitterly. "We know very well he's alive and kicking."

"And salvaging," I added.

There was a knock on the door. Victor opened it to receive the coffee tray, borne not by a mortal servant but by one of our Technicians.

"Sir, it appears the mortals are preparing to dive," he warned Victor. I leaned back to look out a porthole and saw the sailor running about on deck, setting up the air pump. His young lady came struggling up on deck bearing an unwieldy mass that proved to be an old

diving suit. He snatched it from her and said some angry thing. She hurried back below and re-emerged a moment later with a great brass diving helmet in her arms. He was already shrugging into the suit.

"Even as we speak," I confirmed, accepting a cup and saucer from Victor.

"And, sir, we're reading a storm moving in from the southwest," said the Technician. "We expect heavy seas by twenty-three-hundred hours. Shall we put in to the island? The charts show a good harbor with anchorage on the windward side."

"There's a thought." Victor dropped a lump of sugar into his coffee and stirred it. "And perhaps the storm will sink that filthy rust-bucket and save us the trouble."

There followed another poignant silence. The Technician cleared his throat. "Is that one of our options, sir?"

Kalugin rose to his feet.

"Possibly," said Victor at length. "You'll get your orders when we've made a decision. For now, go tell the cook we want breakfast. And I particularly want some cinnamon toast!" he called after the departing Technician.

Now it was Kalugin who paced back and forth, while Victor stood sipping his coffee. We heard a splash and the whirring as a drum of cable unwound.

"What do you think he's after, Kalugin?" inquired Victor.

"Not the painting, he couldn't be," said Kalugin. "Even if he'd known what it was worth, he wouldn't have any reason to expect there to be anything left of it by now."

"What, then?"

"VanderCook's strongbox, I'm sure. Possibly some of the other *_objets d'art_*. There were some ormolu things, I remember, and a statuette. He might think they'd fetch a pretty price."

"And if he sees a shiny silver canister down there?" Victor drained his cup.

Kalugin bit his lip. "He'll probably bring it up."

The door opened. Victor turned, perhaps in expectation of his cinnamon toast, but our Underwater Recovery Specialist entered the room.

"Mme. Masaki." Kalugin bowed.

"Good morning. Victor, are you aware that a monkey in a diving suit just went over the side in the general direction of the *_Gladstone_*?"

"Quite aware. Did you manage to sleep through our little pre-dawn confrontation somehow?" Victor poured a cup of coffee and presented it to her.

"I wear earplugs. Are we aborting our mission, then?"

"Certainly not. Cream? Sugar?"

She shook her head. "We can't conduct a dive while that creature's down there."

"We might try," Kalugin said. She widened her eyes at him.

"Are you mad? That would be contrary to specific Company policy. Can we persuade him to leave, Victor?"

"Not easily." Victor steeped his fingers. "He's determined and rather combative. We may be obliged to hope for an accident."

Mme. Masaki put down her cup and simply looked at him. There was yet a third poignant silence.

"Good God, the woman is with child!" cried Kalugin.

"We needn't touch her," Victor assured him. "Though her mate *_might_* have a nasty accident whilst below. Such dreadful things do happen at sea."

I shook my head. "That would be murder, Victor."

"And it would fall to me to go down and cut his hose, I think," said Mme. Masaki. "I've never killed one of them before; I should prefer not to do it now, if you don't mind."

"You know, it's deuced hard being your Facilitator when you won't permit me to facilitate anything," Victor complained.

"Mr. Hayes won't listen to reason, but perhaps the girl?..." I said.

* * * *

"Ahoy!" I waved a handkerchief at the mortal where she sat by the air pump, waiting for tugs on the line. "May we speak, Mademoiselle? I am so sorry that our gentlemen have had hard words. Please believe we had no intention of upsetting you."

She lifted her timid freckled face and gazed at me in wonder. "I never heard no colored lady talk like you before," she said.

"I am from Algiers, Mademoiselle."

"Oh." She was thinking hard. "Is that in Europe?"

"No; but I have lived in both Paris and Rome."

"My Pa went to Europe once," she told me. "He stayed at a place called France, afore he shipped out again."

"Ah. Is your father a sailor, too?"

"No'm," she replied, and then stopped with the particular mortification caucasians felt, in that day and age, upon accidentally addressing a negro with an honorific. She cleared her throat and tried again. "No, he ain't, not no more. A hawser cut off his leg and now he and my ma has a farm on that island over there. Miss, I got to ask you. That man with the funny hat, do you work for him?"

"I am a guest of his, my dear."

"Well -- do you suppose he will let us go shares with him on this wreck? If Mackie don't get what he's after -- " her eyes filled with tears. "He's near crazy you folks showed up when you did. All he's been talking about since I found him on the beach was getting down to the wreck, the wreck, the wreck, and when we go come out here there your boat is sitting right over it. It's for our baby he wants it. He says it's his big chance," she implored.

"Forgive me, Mrs. Hayes, but it seems to me that if Mr. Hayes truly cared for you and for the child, he would put you ashore and take some fisherman out to assist him instead."

"Ain't nobody will go with him but me." She wiped her eyes. "He's been and had fights with all the neighbors and my Pa won't even talk to him any more."

"But, my dear, a woman in your condition! His behavior seems abominable."

"You might say so, Miss, but what of that?" She looked terribly earnest. "He's my man and the father of my child. I got to stand by him. I know he's meaner than a snake, but it was true love at first sight when I seen him lying there in the sand." She clasped her frail hands above her swollen abdomen. "Beside, Miss, there ain't any other men on the island what ain't married already."

"I see."

"So, Miss, you seem like a real nice girl. Won't you ask your friend about leaving just a little of the wreck for us? Mackie says there was all kinds of gold chairs and all on her. He never got his pay neither. And it's all for the _child's_ sake," she added piteously.

I smiled in my friendliest fashion. "I feel certain that my friend will be happy to compensate Mr. Hayes for his lost wages. Perhaps he even has some right to a share in the proceeds from the salvage. But, my dear, how much simpler things would be if he accepted the sum from us now -- in gold -- and took you home to your island without any further hardship to yourselves! Could you not persuade him to this, for the sake of the child? My friend is a most generous man."

A light of hope was born in her eyes, but just as she parted her lips to speak there came a jerk on the tether line and then another, setting up a thrumming echo in the cable housing.

"Oh! That's Mackie now. I got to bring him up," she said, and leaned into the crank and painfully hauled on the winch. "You'd best go," she gasped. "He'll get mad if he sees you."

I quit the deck gladly, for I could scarcely bear the sight of her efforts in her condition, and there was no way I could assist her. Kalugin was bent to a porthole in the saloon, watching.

"That man is a brute," he said gloomily.

"Yes, but we may hope he is a brute with humane instincts," I said. "Surely, for her sake, he'll accept our proposal."

"Sweet voice of reason." He kissed my hand.

"All the same, Hayes won't agree to it," said Victor where he sat, fists jammed in his trouser pockets.

"Why ever not? I think he must."

"You don't know them the way I do," was all he would say.

Presently we heard the clanking and splashing as Hayes came up, and the girl's little cries of effort as she helped him aboard. She helped him off with his helmet, too, and as soon as his head was free he cried:

"Gimme a hand with the rope!"

Kalugin went to the porthole to watch. He saw them haul in the rope, hand over hand, and then we heard something thumping against the side of the Elsie. "They've brought up Vander-Cook's strongbox," he announced. There followed a dragging crash. "They've got it on deck."

I went to look and just caught sight of Hayes staggering into their cabin with a steel box, closely followed by the girl. A moment later, raucous shouts of merriment rang out across the water.

"Four thousand dollars in gold," explained Kalugin.

"Then he's bound to put into shore," I said. "He must think that was what we wanted. I should think he'll put about with all due haste, shouldn't you?"

Victor simply shook his head. "You don't know them the way I do," he repeated.

And he was correct in his assertion, for they did not leave. The Elsie and the Chronos lay at anchor, side by side, as the day wore on. Hayes did not attempt further salvage efforts. The swell of the sea increased somewhat, and a queer light on the southern horizon was prologue to a wall of cloud that appeared there, grey as a cat, advancing across the sky by inevitable degrees.

As we were sitting down to our luncheon repast we heard the sound of a violent quarrel from our neighbors, and tried our best not to listen, though Kalugin and I burned with silent indignation on behalf of the poor girl. Victor ignored the tumult, his cold composure untroubled.

At about half-past-three a hot wind sprang up, full in our faces, and it bore the perfume of jungle flowers many latitudes distant. It had been pleasant, had not such danger attended upon it. Kalugin lay down and slept, perspiring. Victor stared fixedly across at the Elsie and did not speak.

Sunset flamed with all the hues in the palette of fever, across a steadily rising sea. On the cushions where he reclined, Kalugin clutched his throat and sat up staring. "VanderCook!" he muttered.

"You've been dreaming, dear." I went to him.

His face was haunted. "The ship was going down. Turning as it went down. I was trying to hurry with the painting and he came in. VanderCook."

"Poor dear, you have had a conditioning nightmare," I said. "We all have them when we can't complete a mission. As soon as we recover the painting they'll cease to trouble you."

"I had to kill him." Kalugin's mouth trembled. "He thought I was stealing his things. He took hold of my arm, but I didn't have time! I only hit him with the back of my hand, but he died. All of them died."

"Yet that was their mortal fate." I attempted to console him. "Death swiftly at your hand or some protracted agony of drowning, which would the poor man have preferred? It's not as though anything you did could have saved any of them. You saved the Delacroix, at least. Think of that! Consider, my dear, what you have preserved for the ages."

Kalugin drew a harsh breath. "Do you ever wonder whether we don't destroy as many things as we preserve by our meddling? I saved the painting, but perhaps if the ship had had a competent captain we wouldn't have foundered in the first place. "

"Nonsense," said Victor forcefully. "For God's sake, man, what are you mourning? One self-indulgent millionaire and a handful of sailors like Hayes. And isn't he a prize? Which would you rather consign to the bottom, a work of art or a dirty little creature like Hayes?"

What possible difference can his nasty life make to the world?"

As if on cue, the shout came out of the twilight:

"Ahoy the _Chronos_! Ahoy! Ya think ya can buy me? Ya can't! I say I know what yer up to! And nobody cheats Mackie Hayes, ya hear me? Here I be and here I stay!"

Victor's moustaches swept up like scythe blades.

"I do believe," he said, "that it's time to fix that man's little red wagon." And he rose and strode from the saloon.

I settled back on the cushions with Kalugin and we watched the last pink light fade.

"Remember the DaVinci notebook," I told him.

"True." He passed a hand across his eyes wearily.

"And the cargo of the _Geldermalsen_."

"True." With the other hand he drew out the pins and loosed my long hair.

"And Laperouse's logbook and specimens. All of them lost to the world forever, but for you, dearest."

"True." He closed his eyes. I leaned down to him. Dreamily he gathered up a tress and draped it across his face, making his night blacker still. "Yet sometimes I could wish..."

* * * *

The stars shone briefly and then the advancing cloud cover put them out like candles. The sea was quite rough, now; we were obliged to weigh anchor and stand off from the _Elsie_ some distance, lest we collide with her. Dinner was informal, cold meats and pickles and cheeses; no-one had much appetite owing to the nature of the commotion in the bosom of the deep. How fortunate had we Immortals been, if our creators had thought to make us proof against _mal-de-mer_! I have often mused on this, during a long life of journeys on Company affairs.

At half-past-nine Victor strolled into the saloon looking pleased with himself, and settled down to read the latest issue of the _London Illustrated News_. Kalugin and I played at Piquet, with no great attention to the cards as the rolling of the ship grew more pronounced.

Before Victor had had a chance to lay down the paper and amuse us with the latest antics of the British royal family, however, the door opened and the same Technician who had been reporting to Victor all day put in his head.

"Mme. Masaki has come aboard again, sir."

Victor tossed his paper aside and hurried on deck. We followed and arrived just in time to see the expectant smile dashed from his face by Mme. Masaki's cry of "D -- n you, Victor!"

"I beg your pardon." Victor drew himself up in as stiff an attitude of affront as he could manage on the pitching deck. She was advancing on him in her diving costume, her face pale in the light of the lantern, her eyes blazing with anger.

"Lower the whaleboat!" She swept her wet hair back from her face. "You've got to send someone to rescue the woman. That boat is sinking!"

"You were ordered to punch a few holes in it, not scuttle the infernal thing!" Victor narrowed his eyes.

"I started one plank and a whole seam opened up! It's coming to pieces in the water! D -- n you, will you lower that boat?"

But Kalugin was giving orders for it already. Mme. Masaki braced herself on the rail, drawing deep breaths. "And another thing," she told us. "The woman's alone over there. I was unable to perceive more than one mortal on board."

"Only one?" Victor frowned. "Where could Hayes have got to?"

We were answered by a thump. It was not even a sound, no more than a faint sensation against the soles of our feet, imperceptible I believe to mortal senses; but there, it came again, sharper against our hull and more distinct. Both Victor and Mme. Masaki responded with oaths of the most profane nature. She plunged once more over the side and disappeared in the black water. As she vanished we heard terrified screams from the sole occupant of the cabin of the _Elsie_.

Kalugin and his crew rowed like heroes, but it was a near thing. The doomed craft was turning in the night sea, listing with a stricken motion. I clung to the rail watching, sick at heart lest the rescuers arrive too late.

Judge with what relief I saw Mrs. Hayes lifted from the deck of the doomed Elsie and settled securely in the bottom of the whaleboat. Even as it put about and made back toward us through the waves, Mme. Masaki pulled herself up on the rail with one arm. She had her other arm fast about Hayes, whom she had choked into unconsciousness. "Help me!" she cried.

Victor and I ran to assist her. Hayes lay ghastly pale in the lantern-light, a ridiculous wizened figure in his long undergarments. Victor knelt and I heard a smart click as he applied handcuffs to the oblivious sailor.

"I daresay that settles your hash," said Victor, sneering.

"Our hull is unbroached," said Mme. Masaki. "Though somewhat scored. He was doing his best to sink us with a hammer and chisel. Had he been able to see what he was doing we'd have been in genuine danger. He's remarkably strong, for a mortal."

"What shall we do with him?" I glanced out at the whaleboat, rapidly pulling close. "It would be well to remove him before the girl can see him like this, surely."

"As you wish." Victor seized the connecting chain of the manacles and dragged Hayes' inert form in the direction of the forward hatches. "I shall revive the blackguard and then..."

Even as he got Hayes safely out of sight below, the wind rose to a howl and the waves, previously wild, grew positively violent, dashing the whaleboat against the Chronos. I heard Mrs. Hayes screaming in the darkness, and Kalugin reassuring her; Mme. Masaki and I bent down to help her aboard. As we did so, I looked out across the night and beheld the Elsie swing back over, giving one great drunken lurch before she righted herself, only to slide below the water. One last second her cabin light was visible, eerily sinking down toward eternal darkness; then it had vanished and I knew the rushing water had found it.

I was prevented from dwelling on this horror by the necessity of getting my arms around Mrs. Hayes, just as a cold wave broke over us. She screamed again, and with a final struggle we got her feet on deck and there we three huddled, dripping, as the crew got the whaleboat up.

"We must take her inside," I shouted to Mme. Masaki, who responded with a brusque nod. We started along the rail to the door of the saloon; then Mrs. Hayes stopped abruptly and her thin fingers tightened on my arm. Her poor little face was like an animal's in its terror. She looked down, we followed her gaze, and saw a rush of water and blood. It steamed briefly on the deck before another wave mingled it with sea foam and swept it away.

She began crying, a shrill monotonous piping Oh, Oh, Oh, and we knew there was nothing for it but to take her by the arms and drag her, lest the child drop to the deck like a fish and tumble overboard.

And somehow we did bring her safely inside, half-carrying her to a bunk in one of the cabins, and saw her robed in a dry dressing-gown before we took that opportunity for ourselves; her thin cries grew fainter but did not cease the while.

"Mrs. Hayes, Mrs. Hayes, you must compose yourself." I sat down beside her. "For the child's sake, my dear."

"You don't know," she sobbed. "My Mackie's drowned. He was going over to -- Oh, it's God's judgement, that's what it is! Oh, I'm so ashamed! And now he's lost --"

"Pray do not distress yourself, Mrs. Hayes, your husband is safe. We apprehended him. We have him safe below." I gave her a handkerchief.

"Oh!" Her cries stopped as she took that in. Then the weak line of her mouth trembled. "I tried to tell him what you said, but he got real mad. He said if you was so ready to pay him to let it alone, there must be lots of treasure in the wreck. And when he brought up all that money I said Well let's go home Mackie and not be greedy, but he said Elsie you're a dumb -- he said I was a dumb -- Oh, dear! And now we lost the money!" Her wails broke out

afresh.

"Mrs. Hayes, you mustn't allow yourself to dwell on such things now. Think of your child! When did the pains begin?"

"Only just now." She gasped for breath. "Leastways -- I been having a backache but I thought it was all the hauling I been doing." Her face contorted in the extremity of her discomfort. I gave her my arm to clutch tight, and as I did so made use of my scanning perception to take a reading on herself and her infant. Mortals are quite unable to discern such surreptitious examinations; had she not been already too distracted to notice my preoccupation, she might have supposed I was uttering a silent prayer.

I leaned back and stared at her. I saw again the cabin light of the Elsie, slipping away, slipping away down into the dark. I looked up at Mme. Masaki and transmitted my findings. Her lips drew back from her teeth.

We can't save them in such cases, you see. We mayn't interfere. Even if we could, this poor creature had seen things the Company had never intended a mortal to see. She was a complication. I did not even want to think about Victor down in the hold with the unconscious Hayes. There is a Company drug called Nepentine, very useful in these unfortunate cases but not always entirely beneficial to those to whom it is administered...

"You'll need fresh linen," said Mme. Masaki, and departed. She came back bearing a bundle with something concealed in it, and in one hand she carefully carried a glass of what appeared to be sherry wine.

"You like drink, miss?" She offered it to Mrs. Hayes.

"Oh, I've never touched Spirits -- " she protested.

"But this is for the child's sake," I struck up my refrain again. "You must take it as medicine, my dear."

She allowed herself to be persuaded by this argument and in moments was blissfully unconscious, which permitted us to set up the anticontaminant apparatus. Hayes' child was born shortly thereafter. The wind howled in the rigging, waves broke over us in vain, the timbers of the Chronos creaked unceasing; the feeble cries were barely audible over the tumult of the storm, and did not last long.

Kalugin knew something was wrong when he passed Mme. Masaki in the passageway, her face closed and silent. He put his head round the door.

I sat with the infant in my lap, in a pool of light that moved as the lamp swung on its gimbal. Mrs. Hayes slept sound in her bunk.

"He's a boy, is he?" Kalugin came in and bent over us. The child lay still; it had already discovered that moving took much more strength than it had. Kalugin noticed the cyanosis at once, and scanning he found the heart defect. "Oh, dear," he said. He put a finger in the tiny cold hand, which closed on it without force. The infant worked its face into a squinting grimace that was a perfect parody of its father, but it did not cry. It hadn't enough breath.

Kalugin sat down beside me. I leaned against him and we watched the child fight.

"The mother will do well enough," I said tiredly. "For the present. Although her grief, and her brute of a husband, and her poverty and her disappointment will make her wonder why she should."

"Victor is finishing up with Hayes now," said Kalugin. "Nothing left to do but the post-hypnosis, I expect. As soon as the storm clears we can put them ashore, and well and truly wash our hands of the wretched things."

I nodded. The child made a gurgling sound and all its limbs stiffened. For a terrible moment we waited; but, like a swimmer cresting a wave, it struggled and drew another breath, and kept breathing.

"It's Pity, like the new-born babe, striding the blast," said Kalugin softly. "Here he is, come to visit us. Yes, hello, I know you well, don't I? You've lived in my heart this many a year. One more piece of mortal wreckage I must watch sink."

The rocking of the lamp was growing less; the squall was blowing out. Kalugin went on in his sleepy voice:

"I've gone down with too many ships, Nan. Why couldn't they have made me strong, like Victor? I really ought to get into another line of work."

And we laughed at that, both of us, sadly, for none of us can ever, ever get into another line of work. We are what we are. Kalugin kissed me and took the child in his arms.

"You need to sleep, my love. I'll watch them a while. Go on."

So I went, gratefully, and (to admit my cowardice) readily enough as well, for I knew the child would be gone soon and I would be relieved to avoid any further mortal tragedy. Yet it seemed I was not to be spared that sorrow: for I was awakened from brief dreams by Mrs. Hayes crying out. I drew on my robe and ran to her cabin.

She was alone there, sitting up wild-eyed. "Where's my baby?" she demanded. "What did you do with my baby?"

I took both her hands in my own. "My dear, I know you are strong -- "

"Why, what's all the to-do?" inquired Kalugin, coming in behind me. I whirled about to look at him. He was unshaven and his eyes were puffy with exhaustion, but there was an enormous jauntiness in his whole frame. "Here's the little chap!" And he produced the infant from inside his coat like a conjuror. I snatched the child from him and scanned it hastily.

It was not only still alive but vibrantly alive, its flesh a deep rose color, its tiny heart beating strongly. Not all the radiant health in the world could make it a pretty child, because it was the image of its father: nevertheless it had a certain goblin charm. So much was clear even without benefit of much examination: Kalugin had spirited the little thing off to the ship's dispensary and repaired its heart defect. If that were all!

As I probed deeper, my horrified perceptions made the shocking truth quite plain: the child had not merely been repaired but _modified!_ Made one of Us, in a manner of speaking. Not to the extent of making him an Immortal, of course, for Kalugin had neither the knowledge, tools nor time to do such a dreadful thing: but I read enhanced abilities, certain crude structural improvements, favorable genetic alterations induced ... I began to tremble as I realized the extent of the changes Kalugin had wrought. I attempted to scan a second time to be certain, but Mrs. Hayes was reaching out for him.

I put him in her arms. "It's a little boy, Mrs. Hayes," I told her in a faint voice.

"Oh, Mackie'll be ever so happy!" she said, and fell to examining him with delight. I turned wondering eyes to Kalugin. _Do you understand what you have done?_

_You shan't tell anyone, _he transmitted. _I shan't tell anyone. Who's to know?_

I had no words to respond to him that might suitably express my terror and dismay. To breach Company procedure in such a fashion was to risk far, far more serious consequences than disciplinary counseling. Oh, if he were ever found out!

"What's this, though?" Mrs. Hayes said, touching the thin red scar on the infant's breast.

"A birthmark, I should guess." Kalugin gathered me to him with an arm. I must have seemed in danger of fainting. "Nothing to concern you unduly, Mrs. Hayes. Why, he can have it covered with a tattoo when he grows up -- for I daresay he'll be a sailor, like his father."

"I guess so." She looked wistful. "Though I kind of hope he turns out to be a Christian instead. Mackie don't hold with gospel much." Her face became woebegone as she remembered the predicament her mate was in. Kalugin patted her hand gallantly.

"In view of the happy occasion, we have decided not to press charges against Mr. Hayes," he told her. "Our intention is to set you ashore presently, with some remuneration for Mr. Hayes' services on the _Gladstone_, to which he is after all entitled. We do regret the loss of your boat, but she was scarcely seaworthy. You were lucky to escape with your lives. What a blessing we were standing by when she went down!"

She shed tears of fervent gratitude. I held close to Kalugin, marveling at him.

* * * *

Some little while after I took Mrs. Hayes' things out on deck to dry them. The spiral of the storm was moving away to the north and it had become a fine morning, with strong sunlight and a freshening breeze. Sea-birds circled the _Chronos_, wheeling and mewing; dolphins leapt and sported in the glittering water all around us.

"Yes, all Nature rejoices at our success," said Victor grandly, pausing in a lap of his morning constitutional about the deck. "The loathsome Hayes is safely immured below, happy in his oblivion. He shan't wake until well after he's safely ashore and we've salvaged the _Gladstone_."

"You've persuaded him to discretion?" I spread out a shabby cotton frock in the sunlight.

"Oh, quite. If he ever does speak of us to anyone, it'll be in such a way his hearers will condemn him for a rank liar or a lunatic. Never fear. I gather the unfortunate female pupped, by the way?"

I pursed my lips. "Yes, the poor child had her blessed event early this morning. Need we do anything further? Her lot could scarcely be made more unfortunate. Ought we not err on the side of compassion and set her ashore without further processing?"

"Hm! I suppose so. Some sort of humane gesture might be in order. She's got to live with Hayes, after all! Though I rather think he'll ship out on the first vessel he can hail, now that his prospects for the _Gladstone_ are gone. Didn't strike me as a family man."

This was certainly likely, and for Mrs. Hayes' sake I could not be unhappy at the prospect of her abandonment by such a creature. But in truth there was some quality of ineffable happiness in the morning air, for all the violent and near-tragic events of the night now past, some celestial mirth at some tremendous joke. And the unthinkable joke was on Victor, after all. _So long as he never found out what Kalugin had done..._

* * * *

Toward midday we put in to the island, where Mrs. Hayes directed us to a likely anchorage. The settlement there was no more than a cluster of squatters' shacks, grey and leaning with age, tucked away in the ravines under the looming mountains of the interior. A few goats grazed on the hills; there were a few garden patches where patient industry had coaxed forth a few dry cabbage and spinach plants, and one or two fig trees. Upon this dismal prospect Mrs. Hayes looked with fond anticipation, when she could bear to lift her regard from happy contemplation of the child who slept shaded in her bosom, and allowed herself to be handed down into the whaleboat without a murmur. She did look up with timid concern when Hayes was brought up on deck in a stretcher; she did squeak and flutter in a wifely way as the servants loaded him into the whaleboat; but it was evident that their parting, when it should occur, would be considerably softened by the presence of her boy.

With a merry face Kalugin bent to the oars to take them to land. Mme. Masaki and I waved our handkerchiefs in farewell, Victor beamed on them in his cold way, thumbs in his waistcoat pockets; a band of ragged children came running down to the water's edge to help the passengers ashore. I felt again the sensation of being present at some event of cosmic significance, on that bright day in that remote place; yet I have been present at several significant moments in history without any such mysterious intimations at all.

We put to sea again and returned to the site of the wreck. Once we had blessed _privacy_, it took less than two hours to locate and retrieve the long cylinder containing the lost painting. Kalugin and Mm. Masaki rose to the surface bearing it between them, and when it was safely on board it was borne straight to my laboratory, where, having made all the necessary preparations, I waited to receive it and begin the work of restoration.

When he had bathed and rested from his ordeal, Kalugin stopped in to visit me as I bent over the object of our concern.

"How badly was it damaged?" he inquired.

"Not badly at all, dearest. There are a few little tears. The varnish bloomed, as you see, but really I have seen much worse."

Kalugin leaned close to consider Delacroix's great canvas opened out before us. An outdoor temple was the setting, milk-white columns rising into a sky black and churning with storm clouds. From the upper-right-hand corner, Jupiter looked down on the scene with paternal indulgence and a certain Gallic smirk. Juno his spouse regarded him from the upper-left-hand corner, her stare terrible and direct, holding in her raised hands the serpents with which she intended to avenge herself. Their bright coils and the patterns of her

bracelets formed spiraling patterns of energy echoed in the draperies on Queen Alcmena's couch, down in the center-right of the canvas; she must have had a Celtic needlewoman. The Queen herself lay in a cozy pool of golden light, pale limbs slack with the exhaustion of her labor, lifting sweet vacant features to the midwife. This figure stood half-silhouetted in the left foreground, enigmatic and powerful, holding up the infant demigod; and he was rendered with strong and twisting brushstrokes in smoky red, not an idealized cherub at all but a howling, flailing, bloody newborn.

"Extraordinary painting," said Kalugin. "What contrasts! Sentimental and crude all at once. What can the artist have been thinking of?"

"It's an allegory, dear," I explained, reaching for another scrap of cottonwool. "There was some kind of scandal in Paris society. Someone the artist knew was a co-respondent in a dreadfully public divorce trial, with a question of paternity. The painting was done as a joke, in rather poor taste I think, and was never exhibited for that reason."

"What vile, silly creatures they are." Kalugin shook his head. "And yet, look: out of such a sordid business comes beauty. I am not sorry for what I did."

I set down my materials and turned, taking his hand firmly in my own. "You mustn't speak of that again, my love. Not ever."

"Never again," he agreed. "But if I lay at the bottom of the sea a thousand nights for it, still would I have done the same."

He kissed me and went away to his own duties. Presently the sunlight slanted and moved along the wall: the Chronos was tacking about, taking us home to Europe. I opened another bottle of cleaning solvent and settled in to the rhythms of my work, making fresh and new again the old story of the birth of the Hero.

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