

A HAUNTED SCHOONER

Her name was the Albicore and she hailed from Gloucester, Mass. She was one of the prettiest and sweetest looking schooners that ever crossed harbor bound to the banks for fish or safely weathered a wintry sea. She had lines like a yacht, and many a time I have seen her sail past a gaudy pleasure craft and leave her astern as though she were becalmed. She had an sheer that was delightful to look upon and a saucy rake to her masts that gave her a coquettish appearance.

Her history was remarkable. She had been picked up deserted in the Spanish Main by a Gloucester brig engaged in carrying salt fish to the West Indies. She was rolling in the trough of the sea with only the stump of her mainmast standing. The skipper of the brig lowered a boat and went aboard of her. She was as tight as a bottle, and why her crew should have abandoned her was one of those inexplicable mysteries of the ocean upon which not even a faint light is shed.

There was nothing on board to give any clue to her history or nationality. She had been left in a hurry, as was shown by unmistakable signs, but her commander had taken all his documents with him, as well as his nautical instruments and chronometers. She carried two long brass cannonades, and there was a stack of fifty muskets and the same number of cutlasses in the between decks—all highly suggestive of piracy. The hammocks of the crew were swinging to the beams, and the bags and chests of the sailors were left behind. In her lower hold was a quantity of pig iron used for ballast, but no trace of treasure or cargo was to be found. Her boats were gone and the davit falls were trailing in the water, while two big tackles with which the long boat had been lowered into the sea hung from the wreckage of the rigging.

Old Billy Cuddington, the skipper of the brig, rubbed his horny hands with glee. It wasn't often that he found himself playing in such luck. He took all his crew but two aboard the schooner and all worked with a will and soon rigged jurnymasts. That night he took her in tow and at daybreak next morning all hands got to work again and got her in shipshape order. There was a spare foresail in her sail locker, which was bent as a mainsail, while a storm trysail did duty as a foresail. The bowsprit was uninjured, and after setting up the forestay a small jib was bent to it.

There were casks of salt beef and pork down below, three tanks full of fresh water and any amount of hardtack, flour and rice. The skipper put the mate and four sailors in charge, with orders to keep him in sight and steer for Gloucester, Mass. The brig was in good sailing trim, having a quantity of rum and molasses in her lower hold, while the 'tween decks were full of green cocoanuts.

Captain Cuddington, who was a thrifty New Englander that did not believe in giving anything away, opened his heart on this occasion. He filled a ten gallon keg with rum and broke out 200 or 300 cocoanuts and sent them aboard the schooner, with instructions to the mate to take his nip regularly and always to remember to mix it with cocoanut juice, which had the effect of mellowing it and making it less heady.

There was a lovely whole-sail breeze when the mate and his men made sail on the prize. After they got the foresail, mainsail and jib on her she began to scoot through the water like a steamboat. The mate, seeing what a clipper he had under him, thought he would play a practical joke on old Billy Cuddington. The wind was on the starboard beam and both vessels were heading about N. N. W. The schooner was moving about three feet to the brig's one. Calculating his distance very neatly the mate tacked the schooner and ran down to the brig to leeward of her with lifted sheets and belying sails. Then luffing sharp under her stern he went on the other tack and blanketed her. Then he hailed the brig.

"Goodly, captain," he yelled. "I'll tell the Gloucester girls you're coming. I guess I'll get there three weeks before you. Your durned old hooker can't get out of her own way."

I tell you old Billy Cuddington was madder than a March hare. He always had thought his brig was a hummer, and to see this schooner, with her jury rig and meager sail spread, walk away like a witch was too much for him. He hailed the schooner and ordered the mate to heave to, but that worthy was as full of mischief as a wagon load of monkeys, so he only laughed at the old man. An hour later he set a sort of apology for a spinnaker. It seemed to have the pulling power of several dray horses, and under its influence the schooner forged ahead and by nightfall was out of sight, much to the surprise and disgust of Captain Cuddington, who put no faith in humanity, and was not sure that his mate would not put into some southern port and sell the craft and run away with the money.

That's what Cuddington would have done if he had been in the mate's sea boots, but the mate was constructed on different and fairer lines. The sailors on the brig had a hard time of it the rest of the voyage. It was clew up and hoist up continually. The old mangle boat no rest, but cracked on canvas in the hope of catching up with the schooner, making sail between the squalls with no regard for his scanty crew. The sailors said he was like a Portuguese devil, when he was good he was too good, but when he was bad he was d—d bad.

One night not so very long after Cape Ann light was sighted, and at dawn the brig sailed into Gloucester harbor. The schooner was there moored to a wharf, looking as pretty as a picture. She had arrived ten days before the brig, having been blessed with fair winds all the way, which made her reel off the knots in regular clipper style.

After the brig had been made fast to her dock aboard came the mate and walked aft to where the skipper stood

on the quarter deck. He looked pale as a ghost and sicker than a dog.

"Jack, my hearty, how are you?" exclaimed the captain as he seized hold of the mate's starboard flipper. "Come below and take a nip."

The mate followed the old man into the cabin. He moved in a listless, slipshod sort of way. His former energy and smartness had departed. He looked as limp as a wet swab. Was this the man that had played the skipper the practical joke of sailing around him and making fun of him a few short weeks before?

"Why, what's the matter with you?" asked the old man, pouring himself out half a tumbler of rum and passing the demijohn to the mate.

"I'll tell you what's the matter," replied the mate; "that infernal schooner is haunted. My God, what a time I put in aboard of her!"

"Avast there! Johnny, my lad, softly, softly! There are no such things as ghosts. Besides, if there are, it is no use making a song about those on the schooner. I am going to sell her for a fisherman, and I want no ghostly yarns spread abroad about this craft. So just clap a stopper on your jaw tackle until we get a good price for her. And hark ye, my lad, I'm going to do the handsome thing by you. If you keep your tongue between your teeth this schooner will be a matter of \$200 in your pocket. Take another nip, and when the vessel is disposed of you can spin me the whole yarn."

About a month afterward the schooner was sold to old Eben Fish, who was the owner of a little fleet of fishing vessels. Some of them used to fish on St. George's bank for the Boston market. Others were engaged in the codfisheries on the Newfoundland Great banks, and it was for this industry that the schooner was fitted out. She seemed well adapted for this work, being an excellent sea boat and very fast, as was proved by her remarkable passage to Gloucester under jury rig. She was hauled up on the ways and the necessary alterations were made in her to fit her for her new business. Her hull was constructed of live oak and teak and she was as sound in all respects as the day she was launched. Old Fish struck two beautiful sticks of Oregon pine in her and her new sails had as much trouble taken over them as the canvas of a yacht.

It was a proud day for old Fish when the schooner slid off the ways, and his pretty daughter Polly broke a bottle of wine on her sharp and graceful stern and shouted at the top of her sweet voice, "I christen thee Albicore, and may you be lucky."

An Albicore is a fish of the tunny kind and of remarkable swiftness, and a gilded head of one carved quite artistically adorned the bows of the schooner.

A crew was shipped, about half of them being Portuguese, and under the command of Captain Peter Ogden she started out on her first trip to the Great Banks. I was aboard, having shipped as ordinary seaman. We piled the canvas on her, and with a splendid quartering breeze away she flew on her course like some strong and beautiful bird of the ocean. All hands were delighted with her.

The skipper went into ecstasies over her behavior, especially as she passed every craft she encountered. She made an excellent passage to the banks and let go anchor in a favorite spot of the skipper's, where the codfish always were hungry. The ten dories were put overboard, and the fishermen were soon hauling up their finny prey. We met with so much success that a few of us determined to fish all night. It was a lovely night. The moon shone on the placid water, which was as smooth as a landlocked pool without a ripple. There was a slight haze on the silvery sea, and the stillness and silence were actually oppressive.

The good luck of the fishermen continued. The codfish were biting well. The phosphorescent gleam of the fish as they were hauled from the dark depths of the sea illuminated the water and they could be seen struggling wildly on the hooks many fathoms beneath the surface. There isn't very much sentimentalism in a fisherman, and the fellows in the dories smoked their pipes and spun their yarns in the intervals between bites.

The striking of eight bells on a French fishing vessel anchored a few hundred yards from the Albicore announced the midnight hour. A dago on one of the schooner's dories began singing in a melodious voice the "Hymn to the Virgin." It was either Spanish or Italian, I don't know which (having been educated in the fore-castle, where there was precious little book learning). But this I do know, that the strains were the sweetest and most thrilling I had ever listened to. Of course the somber surroundings made the hymn more impressive.

My dory mate was a Portuguese. Suddenly he clutched my arm. "My God!" he cried. "Look at the schooner!" And I looked. She was about fifty yards off, and in the brilliant moonlight everything was clearly visible. On her quarter deck, which seemed to be enveloped in a luminous mist resembling the halo which encircles the moon and gives warning of the coming tempest, armed men were fighting, clad in picturesque garb, with crimson sashes around their waists and red caps on their heads. We could hear their cutlasses clash and their imprecations ring out on the still air.

"They are Spanish pirates, and they've seized the schooner," said the Portuguese.

Three bodies were thrown overboard from the Albicore. We heard the splash as they struck the water and saw the bubbles rising as they sank. Then suddenly the noise ceased and the midnight assassins vanished into thin air.

Then a cheery voice sang out loud and clear from the Albicore: "Come alongside, boys. I've got a steaming kettle of coffee for you on the galley fire."

It was the voice of the cook, and was the most welcome sound that ever reached my ears. We pulled alongside and climbed aboard. The cook had been

in the galley since 10 o'clock making himself a suit of canvas clothes. He had heard and seen nothing of the mysterious conflict on deck and laughed at us as we described it. After drinking our coffee we turned in, having had enough fishing for that night.

At dawn next morning I had occasion to go aft on the quarter deck, which was raised about three feet from the main deck. At Gloucester the decks, which had become covered with slime while the derelict was wallowing dismasted in the trough of the sea, had been planed smooth. The skipper took great pride in his little quarter deck, and it had been holystoned until it shone like a hound's tooth. No fish were allowed in that part of the ship, and the sailors were made to wipe off their sea boots whenever they took their trick at the tiller or went aft to haul in the mainsheet. Imagine my surprise when I saw a deep crimson circular stain just abaft the cabin skylight. It was about three feet in diameter and it seemed to have been made by a pool of blood that had soaked into the snowy deck planks.

At this moment the skipper came up the companion ladder. The first thing that attracted his attention was the stain on the deck.

"So some of those infernal Portuguese sons of guns have been gutting fish on my quarter deck, have they? By the great horn spoon, I'll teach the yellow bellied lubbers a lesson yet!"

Then I up and told the skipper what I had seen the night before, and convinced him it was no blood of a codfish that had dyed his quarter deck. He was a superstitious man, and turned white as a shroud.

That morning all the crew came aft and told the skipper they would fish no more. The schooner was haunted, they declared, and they insisted on heaving up anchor and putting back to Gloucester.

It is my private opinion that he was glad of the chance to go back. He was an excellent seaman and an expert fisherman, but he came of an old seafaring family and of course a belief in the supernatural was hereditary.

Well, we unmade the windlass, hove up anchor and made sail on the Albicore and pointed her nose for Gloucester.

We made an unusually smart passage and our arrival in the old fishing port created much excitement. (We hadn't been troubled with ghosts during the run back.) Everybody thought we had come back laden with cod. The old owner came aboard as merry and light hearted as a three-year-old. He went ashore in doleful dumps the most disgusted man in Gloucester. We landed what few fish we had and then all hands left her. Mr. Fish tried his hardest to ship another crew, but those dagos had spun such yarns about the schooner that nobody would go to the banks in her. So the sails were unbent and she was laid up.

I kept a logbook in those days. The date of the mysterious apparition was April 13, 1857.

Five years afterward I happened to be in Boston. The sharks and crimps had left me stranded, having got every dollar out of me that I was paid off with from a bark that brought hides and copper ore from Iquique. I was wandering around the docks in search of a chance when I came across the Albicore fitting out for a cruise to the banks. A Boston firm had bought her and had put Captain Bayliss in charge. He was built on different lines from Captain Ogden, caring nothing for man nor devil. I shipped aboard of her, never mentioning anything of my past experience on her. We sailed for the banks, having good luck on our passage. We anchored and began our fishing operations, being fairly successful.

One evening, when putting off in my dory to fish, I happened to remember that the date was April 13, 1862. My dory mate hailed from Canso, Nova Scotia, and had as much intelligence as a clod of clay. We hauled in the codfish hand over fist. About 11 o'clock a thick fog came up suddenly. I didn't mind this a bit, as I had a pocket compass with me and had the Albicore's bearings carefully noted. She wasn't more than 300 yards off anyhow, so we kept on fishing without the slightest alarm. It was within a few minutes of midnight when we heard the blast of a steamer's whistle, hoarse, yet strident. It seemed to penetrate the fog and was certainly quite close. The next thing we heard was a crash of timbers, and an instant afterward an enormous black hull glided by swiftly. Her propeller churned up the water and we heard the throb of her engines.

The Nova Scotian took the oars and I steered the dory to our schooner. When we got aboard we found all hands on deck in a state of terror. The steamer had run into her aft, cutting off a portion of her long overhanging stern. The well was sounded and no water was found. Her stanch construction had saved her. The steamer went on regardless whether she had sunk the schooner or not. Next morning the captain got aboard my dory and I paddled him round under the stern so that he might see what damage had been done. The steamer's cutwater had shaved a clean slice off the stern. Jammed under the transoms we saw a shriveled corpse dressed in a Spanish costume richly adorned with gold lace. We got a stage out over the stern and hauled the body on deck. Imbedded in his left breast was a dagger bearing the inscription, "Guerra al cuchillo, April 13, 1855." He had been carefully planked up and concealed.

There was the same old blood stain on the quarter deck, but it seemed much fainter than of old. I told the captain the whole story. He determined to take the body ashore and give it Christian burial. We nailed two thicknesses of canvas over the shattered stern, staid long enough on the banks to fill up with fish and then set sail for Boston, where we gave the corpse a splendid long-shore funeral. This broke the spell. The Albicore ever after was the luckiest craft that sailed to the banks. I think she is running yet. But I never met anybody who could clear up the mystery of the derelict and her ghostly combatants.—A. J. K. in New York Recorder.

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