

CHAPTER 1

OUT TO SEA

The man who told me this story really should not have done so. We were enjoying a fine wine in his home, and he began to relate an incredible tale. I expressed some doubt early on, after which his pride required him to furnish proof. He produced musty manuscripts and official records of the British Colonial Office to support much of his narrative.

The written records tell us that a certain young English nobleman, John Clayton (titled Lord Greystoke), was instructed to investigate the conditions in a British colony on the west coast of Africa. Another European power was said to be recruiting the local Africans into an armed force, and using them to extort rubber and ivory from the tribes further inland. The remaining natives of the British colony complained that many of their young men were enticed away with promises of reward, but that few ever returned. The local Englishmen supported the natives' complaint, saying that the recruits were held in virtual slavery. Since they could not read the European language

in which their enlistment was written, their officers dishonestly continued to tell them they had several more years to serve.

Clayton typified the best sort of Englishman. He was mentally, morally and physically strong. He was of above average height, with gray eyes and strong, healthy features. He carried himself with dignity. He had begun his career in the army, and had sought a transfer to the Colonial Office out of political ambition. He was elated by this delicate and important work in the Queen's service, and felt that it would further his career.

On the other hand, he had been married to Lady Alice Rutherford for barely three months, and the idea of taking this fair young girl into the dangers of tropical Africa appalled him. For the new Lady Greystoke's sake, he would have refused the appointment, but she would not have it. She insisted that he accept and that she go with him. The opinions of other family members are not recorded.

On a bright May morning in 1888, Lord Greystoke and Lady Alice sailed from Dover for West Africa. A month later they arrived at Freetown and chartered a small sailing vessel named the *Fuwalda* to take them to their final destination.

And here John Clayton, Lord Greystoke, and Lady Alice, his wife, vanished from the eyes and from the knowledge of men.

Two months after they hoisted anchor to leave Freetown, half a dozen British warships began scouring the south Atlantic for traces of them. Very early in the search, on the shores of the island of St. Helena, the Navy found a wrecked vessel. This suggested that the *Fuwalda* had gone down with all hands, and the search ended before it really got started. All the same, hope lingered in the lost couple's loved ones for many years.

The *Fuwalda* was a typical south Atlantic coastal vessel. Most of the crews of such ships were composed of lowly characters, including murderers and cutthroats of every nationality and race. The *Fuwalda* was no exception; her officers were bullies, hating and hated by the crew. The captain was a capable seaman, but brutal to the men. The only arguments he used in dealing with them were the revolver and the belaying pin—a shipboard tool often used as a club—and it is unlikely that the type of men in his crew would have understood any other form of persuasion.

From the second day after leaving Freetown, John Clayton and his young wife witnessed scenes on the deck of the *Fuwalda* that they had believed only happened in fictional sea stories. On that morning, a chain of events began that would lead to the life of a man whose story is like no other—a man who would become known as Tarzan of the Apes.

Two sailors were washing down the decks of

the *Fuwalda*, the first mate was on duty, and the captain had stopped to speak with John Clayton and Lady Alice. The sailors were working backwards toward the little party, who were facing away from them. Closer and closer they came, until one of them was directly behind the captain. In another moment he would have passed by, and this strange narrative would never have been recorded.

But just that instant the captain turned to leave Lord and Lady Greystoke, tripped over the sailor, and went sprawling headlong onto the deck. This overturned the water-pail, and drenched him with its dirty contents. For an instant the scene was humorous, but not for long. The officer swore a volley of awful oaths, and got to his feet in a red-faced, humiliated rage. With a terrific blow, he knocked the sailor to the deck. The poor sailor happened to be small and rather old, but his fellow deckhand was neither. He was a huge, dark-haired bear of a man with a great bull neck, massive shoulders, and a large moustache. He pounced on the captain and crushed him to his knees with one mighty blow.

The officer's face went from scarlet to white, for this was the crime of mutiny, and he knew how to deal with mutineers. Without rising, he whipped a revolver from his pocket and fired point-blank at the great mountain of muscle towering before him. As quick as he was, though, John Clayton was almost as quick, and the young

lord struck down the captain's arm. The bullet intended for the sailor's heart lodged in the massive leg instead.

Clayton and the captain had words, the lord making clear his disgust with the brutality shown to the crew, and saying that he would tolerate nothing further of the kind while he and Lady Greystoke remained passengers. The captain was about to make an angry reply, but thought better of it and stalked away with a scowl. He did not care to annoy an English official, for the Queen's arm wielded an instrument of punishment feared on every sea: the Royal Navy.

The two sailors arose, the older man assisting his wounded comrade to his feet. The big fellow, known among his mates as Black Michael, tried his leg gingerly. It held him, and he turned to Clayton with a word of gruff thanks, then limped away without further discussion.

They did not see Black Michael again for several days, nor did the captain offer them more than a surly grunt. As was the custom with noble passengers, they continued to have their meals in the captain's cabin, but the captain made sure that his duties kept him from joining them for dinner.

The other officers were coarse, illiterate fellows, little better than the villainous crew they bullied. They were glad to avoid social contact with the polished English noble and his lady, so the Claytons were left very much to themselves. They

were glad for peace, but it also kept them unaware of the daily happenings on board, which were leading the craft toward bloody tragedy.

On the second day after the wounding of Black Michael, Clayton came on deck just in time to see the limp body of one of the crew being carried below by four others while the first mate, a heavy belaying pin in his hand, stood glowering at the little group of sullen sailors.

Viewing this scene, Clayton did not need to ask any questions. The following day, as the great lines of a British battleship appeared on the horizon, he pondered demanding that he and Lady Alice be transferred to safety. He increasingly feared that only harm could result from their remaining on the sullen *Fuwalda*.

Toward noon they came within speaking distance of the Navy vessel, but when Clayton had nearly decided to ask the captain to take them aboard, he suddenly realized how ridiculous such a request would seem. What sane reason could he give the captain of Her Majesty's ship for desiring to go back in the direction he had just come? If he complained that two rebellious seamen had been treated roughly by their officers, they would laugh to themselves and think him a coward.

John Clayton did not ask to be transferred to the British man-of-war. Late in the afternoon he saw the last of her shape fade below the far horizon, but not before he learned something that

confirmed his greatest fears and made him curse his pride. As he and his wife watched the warship disappear, the little old sailor worked his way near them while polishing brass. He said to Clayton in an undertone:

“Hell’s to pay, sir, on this here craft, an’ mark my word for it, sir.”

“What do you mean, my good fellow?” asked Clayton.

“Why, hasn’t ye seen wat’s goin’ on? Hasn’t ye heard that devil’s spawn of a captin an’ his mates knockin’ the bloomin’ lights outen half the crew? Two busted heads yeste’day, an’ three today. Black Michael’s as good as new agin an’ he’s not the bully to stand fer it, not he, an’ mark my word for it, sir.”

“You mean, my man, that the crew contemplates mutiny?” asked Clayton.

“Mutiny!” exclaimed the old fellow. “Mutiny? They means murder, sir, an’ mark my word for it, sir.”

“When?”

“I’m not a-sayin’ when, an’ I’ve said too damned much already, but ye was good t’me t’other day an’ I thought it no more’n right to warn ye. But keep a still tongue in yer head, an’ when ye hear shootin’, git below an’ stay there. That’s all, only keep a still tongue in yer head, or they’ll put lead between yer ribs, an’ mark my word for it, sir,” and the old fellow went on with his polishing, which carried him away from where

the Claytons were standing.

“Cheerful outlook, Alice,” said Clayton.

“You should warn the captain at once, John. The trouble may yet be avoided,” she said.

“I suppose I should, but from purely selfish motives I am tempted to ‘keep a still tongue in my head.’ Whatever they do now, they will spare us because I saved this fellow Black Michael, but if they find that I betrayed them, they would show us no mercy.”

“You have but one duty, John, and that is to support lawful authority. If you do not warn the captain, you are as much a party to these events as though you had helped to plot and carry them out.”

“You do not understand, dear,” replied Clayton. “My first duty is to think of you. The captain has brought this condition upon himself. Why should I risk subjecting my wife to unthinkable horrors in a probably futile attempt to save him from his own brutal folly? You have no idea, dear, of what would occur were this pack of cut-throats to gain control of the *Fuwalda*.”

“Duty is duty, John, and no excuses may change it. I would be a poor wife for an English lord were I to cause him to shirk his clear duty. I realize the danger which must follow, but I can face it with you.”

“Have it as you will then, Alice,” he answered, smiling. “Maybe we are borrowing trouble. While

I do not like the looks of things on board this ship, they may not be so bad after all, for it is possible that our friend the 'Ancient Mariner' was thinking wishfully. Mutiny on the high sea was common a hundred years ago, but in this good year 1888 it is the least likely possibility."

He stopped for a moment and looked. "But there goes the captain to his cabin now. If I am going to warn him, I might as well get the beastly job over, for it sickens me to talk with the brute at all."

So saying, he strolled carelessly after the captain, and a moment later was knocking at his door.

"Come in," growled the deep voice of that surly officer.

And when Clayton had entered, and closed the door behind him, "Well?"

"I have come to report a conversation I heard today. While it is possible that nothing may come of it, you should be warned that the men contemplate mutiny and murder."

"It's a lie!" roared the captain. "And if you have been interfering again with the discipline of this ship, or anything else that is none of your affair, you'll take the consequences and be damned, English lord or not! I'm captain of this here ship, and from now on you keep your meddling nose out of my business!"

The captain had worked himself up to a purple-faced frenzy of rage, and he shrieked the

last words at the top of his voice, thumping the table loudly with one huge fist, shaking the other in Clayton's face. Greystoke did not flinch, but stood eyeing the excited man with a level gaze.

"Captain Billings," he drawled finally, "if you will pardon my candor, I might remark that you are something of a fool." The nobleman then turned and left with calm confidence, which was even more infuriating to a man like Billings than any hostile outburst. Had Clayton attempted to placate him, the captain might easily have come to regret his tirade, but he was now too angry for that, and their last chance for cooperation was gone.

"Well, Alice," said Clayton, as he rejoined his wife, "I might have saved my breath. The fellow proved most ungrateful and acted like a mad dog. He and his blasted old ship may hang, for all I care, and until we are safely off, I shall look only after our own welfare. And I rather fancy that I should first go to our cabin and look over my revolvers. I am sorry now that we packed the larger guns and the ammunition with the stuff below."

They found their quarters in disorder. Clothing from their open boxes and bags were strewn around the little apartment, and even their beds had been torn to pieces.

"Evidently someone was more anxious about our belongings than we were," said Clayton. "Let's have a look around, Alice, and see what's

missing." A thorough search revealed that nothing had been taken but Clayton's two revolvers and their small supply of ammunition.

"Those are the very things I most wish they had left us," said Clayton, "and the fact that they only took the weapons is most sinister."

"What are we to do, John?" asked his wife. "Perhaps you were right in that our best chance lies in remaining neutral. If the officers are able to prevent a mutiny, we have nothing to fear, while if the mutineers are victorious, our one slim hope lies in not having attempted to hinder them."

"Right you are, Alice. We'll keep in the middle of the road."

As they started to straighten up their cabin, Clayton and his wife both noticed the corner of a piece of paper protruding beneath the door of their quarters. As Clayton stooped to reach for it, he realized that it was being pushed inward by someone from outside. Quickly and silently he stepped toward the door, but as he prepared to throw it open, his wife grasped his wrist. "No, John," she whispered. "They do not wish to be seen, so we cannot afford to see them. Remember that we are keeping to the middle of the road."

Clayton smiled and dropped his hand to his side. They stood watching the little bit of paper until it finally remained motionless on the floor just inside the door. Then Clayton bent and picked it up. It was a bit of grimy, white paper roughly

folded into a ragged square. Opening it, they found a crude, barely legible message warning them not to report the loss of the revolvers, nor to repeat what the old sailor had told them—on pain of death.

“I rather imagine we’ll do as they say,” said Clayton with a rueful smile. “About all we can do is to sit tight and wait for whatever may come.”