

*The Thrilling Adventures of
The 18th Century Club*

*Written by
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Chapter Seven

Dive, Dive, Dive!

Despite my fondness for grog, I was never much of a sailor.

Still, I may not know me mizzen from me bumboat, but I'd read enough C. S. Forester as a schoolboy to recognise a captain's cabin when I saw one. And what a splendid specimen this was. A long polished table set with the finest silver accoutrements and spread with all manner of succulent delicacies dominated an oak panelled chamber of surprisingly large proportions. The walls were bedecked with a superfluity of mounted cutlass's and duelling pieces of every stripe. A profusion of charts and scrolls, held down with compasses, sextants and all manner of brassy items of bewildering nautical complexity, spilled from the surface of one side table, and a most promising selection of bottles and miniature barrels delightfully adorned another. But for all this, it was the two figures, sprawled in evident intoxication on a pair of sturdy shagreen covered armchairs either side of the central piece, who commanded my immediate attention.

To the left, his vestments splattered with mud and a trickle of claret beading its way down his chin from his purpled lips, snored our very dear friend, The Monk. Opposite, face down in a plate of grilled meats that had spilled atop the mahogany from an over-piled trencher, the second figure snored even more loudly, as one large hand, even in sleep, opened and closed convulsively around the handle of an empty tankard.

"Good Lord." I said, turning to the Brigadier. "What do you make of it?"

"Why, sir, they're utterly foxed, damn them." With which he strode forward at once and attempted to revive the Monk by the expedient of a rough shaking of the shoulders and a cry of "Cardinal! On your feet sir!"; to absolutely no avail.

"And who the Devil's this?" I wondered aloud, approaching the second inebriate, albeit with some caution, as he was evidently a husky fellow of imposing stature. His face was obscured by an elaborately plumed headpiece of Oriental ostentation, to the back, and the remnants of his carnivorous exertions to the front. Somewhat tentatively, I gave him a tweak on the lug.

He sprang to his feet immediately, damn near upending me in the process, whilst simultaneously beginning a spirited if truncated approximation of Blake's Jerusalem.

"And did those feet, at closing time...good lord, Shuteye?"

With which he collapsed once more into his chair, gazed once about the room with an expression of incalculable contentment, and began to snore with renewed vigour.

"Sink me," says I, "if it ain't the Viceroy!"

"Well, well," says Lord A. "I didn't even know he was in the country." He strode towards the table that bore the charts and began to peruse them with some concentration, as I gave similar attention to the assorted bottles that adorned the other sidepiece.

Having secured us each a brimming bumper of Bordeaux I made my way back round the main table to the Brigadier. He received his glass with evident satisfaction and downed half the contents at a gulp, without so much as a twitch at the bouquet.

"Well, sir, at the risk of repeating myself, what do you make of it?"

"What? Oh yes, a very decent Chateau Latour. I'll have another."

"No, not the wine. The situation." Still, he was certainly correct in his appraisal, so I brought the bottle over and topped us both up as he continued to study the charts.

With The Arse thus engrossed and my two other companions snorting and braying like a farmyard, I took advantage of the relative calm to consume the entirety of an untouched roast capon that had hitherto languished unmolested amongst the debris of the feast which the Monk and the Viceroy had evidently been enjoying, prior to their mutual collapse. I followed this with a platter of oysters, and plated a selection of sliced fowl, Bavarian hams and the like for the Brigadier, who gobbled and grunted his way through it without once divesting the charts of his attention, glancing up only occasionally to refill his glass.

At length, the bottle empty, he turned back to face me just as I was uncorking a very promising Margaux to accompany my cigar.

"Great Scot, Shuteye, is there no brandy?"

"Seems they've necked the lot. Any joy with the charts?"

"Peculiar. More of a light-horse man myself, as you know, but from what I can gather we're aboard the Viceroy's personal vessel. The charts and logs indicate a protracted voyage from the East, made with some urgency, and a degree of subterfuge. I can only surmise that the Viceroy quit his post in a considerable hurry in order to be here, and has yet to inform the Admiralty. Risky business. Perhaps he knows something we don't?"

"Do you think it's connected? To the letter, I mean?"

"Perhaps, but I ain't one for random speculation. Having said that, I wonder where the dickens Bartington's got to?"

As if in answer to the Brigadier's rhetorical, the cabin suddenly resounded with the most horrendous whooping noise I've ever had the misfortune to endure, followed hotly by the

unmistakeable tones of the Surgeon General, barking down some species of hidden sound-conductor into midst of the very room.

“Dive dive dive! Run silent, run deep! Gentlemen, we are all.....at sea!”

A sickening lurch accompanied this peculiar declaration, and a deplorable rumbling noise sounded from within the bowels of the ship.

The Monk and the Viceroy immediately sprang to attention in unison, as myself and the Brigadier grasped at the rim of the table in search of stability.

“Ah, my Lords!”

‘Twas The Monk who spoke. “So glads you coulds joins us.” he slurred, his bloodshot eyes rolling like pinballs at the tilt. “You boths are acquainteds with his honour, the Viceroy of Kebaba...bababad?”

The so named bowed grandiosely, sweeping his hat almost to the floor, and damn near plummeted to the deck as a result.

“Indeed we are.” says I, regaining my composure as the cabin seemed to right itself somewhat.

“And it would appear that you’re both a trifle tipsy.”

“I may be drunk,” offered the Viceroy,” but you sir, are Shuteye. And tomorrow, I shall be sober.”

With which he collapsed once more into the nurturing arms of his chair.

The Monk at once followed suit.

I turned to Lord A, as is my wont.

He merely returned my gaze with, if anything, a smidgen more bafflement.

I duly glanced at the port holes which lined the cabin wall beyond the table, and saw, to my considerable alarm, a fish.

