



TINKERMAN

Tales

The Tale of Captain Jack

]]BOOKENDS

First Edition published 2011 by
2QT Limited (Publishing)
Dalton Lane, Burton In Kendal
Cumbria LA6 1NJ
www.2qt.co.uk

Excerpt from 'The Tale of Captain Jack' released by Z2 Group
Taken from work by J[Bookends]

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Cover Design by Courtney Web Design

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A CIP catalogue record for the full version of this title will be available
from the British Library
ISBN 978-1-908098-19-1

In 1807, HMS London was in the South Atlantic returning to Britain after eighteen months at sea. A ship was sighted and the London changed course to investigate. As the ship made no attempt to slow down, the chase was on. A few hours later, Captain Jack Edgar gave the order to open fire.

Chapter 1

A Prize

The battle was raging – the smell of acrid gun smoke hung in the air, but the frightening crash of the cannon blast was over. Muskets were fired at will, snipers in the tops sent down their deadly shot. The blood curdling war cry from the boarding party signalled the next phase of the attack as they engaged their enemy in fierce hand-to-hand combat. The screams of the injured and deafening tumult of carnage as the crews joined in their brutal struggle to wrest or repel. The occasional carronade blast sent shot screeching through the air, finding a victim at random or thudding into the ships structure or masts. All this noise reverberated around these two ships locked in combat. As the attack progressed the agony of the wounded and dying mingled with the shouts from the fighting as each private battle added its voice to the scene. This was what these men knew, battle, death and destruction. This was truly a picture of hell on earth.

Captain Jack Edgar was a leader and a fighter. He had led his men into combat many times and had won their respect and trust. But now, a brute of a sailor who fancied his chances stood his ground, challenging Jack and halting the advance. And so another personal contest began, they exchanged blows and Jack knew this man was confident in his strength, but power alone would not be enough. As they fought, Jack sensed his enemy's anger and conned him into a rash thrust. With the man off balance Jack struck with his short stabbing sword causing a wound to the brute's stomach. He

followed up, landing a heavy punch to his head. His enemy fought back, wildly slashing at Jack with his blade. Again, he swung his sword but this time Jack knocked the blow sideways with such force that his adversary's sword was briefly lodged in the mast giving Jack the opportunity he needed; another perfectly timed blow to the head and then a violent knee into the man's groin. As he crumpled, Jack finished him off by stabbing him in the throat. He twisted the handle as he removed it, covered in blood, his opponent crumpled to the ground. The contest over, he turned to prepare for the next engagement and quickly surveyed the battle, one more pocket of resistance remained.

"To Me!" he shouted as he prepared to launch the final attack.

"At your side, Cap'n," his trusty boatswain shouted, and soon there was a pack of bloodied and angry sailors ready to take the final battle to the defenders. His men, empowered by their trust in him, had fought fiercely. The bonds forged over months of hardship brought an unshakeable desire to force their will on the enemy. Seeing this determination, this anger and readiness to fight, the outnumbered and out fought defenders surrendered, their will broken. The enemy captain stepped forwards and offered his sword.

The battle won, the prize was theirs, a smart looking French frigate called Marengo. The victorious crew would all share in the distribution of the prize money from Jack down to the lowest boy sailor. This dubious motivation helped ensure the crew would fight like savages to ensure the day was theirs.

Jack watched as his officers set about organising the post battle clear up. The captured men were secured, and the two ships rafted together. Repairs would need to be effected as soon as possible so the carpenters and midshipmen from both ships were in discussion, using a mix of English, French and sign language. Both ships were now vulnerable and

Jack knew this, they must get under sail quickly or be found and face yet another action, one that neither ship could fight well. With priorities determined and tasks assigned, the men went about their business, they had done this many times and they all knew their duties.

It would be hours before both ships could get moving and days to complete the repairs but with the work underway, Jack had time to reflect and consider the next move.

He went to his quarters bloodied and weary but fired with the afterglow of a battle won. Jack felt the satisfaction of knowing that the crew, his crew, had worked well, from the officers and the midshipmen, to the marines, sailors, carpenters, surgeons, cooks and galley hands, all had played their part. They had fought hard and would be rewarded. But the cost of this action had been high. His ship was damaged and he had lost valuable well-trained men, some he had known for many years. He never got used to the loss of men during an action and he always found his visit to the sick troubling. These were his men and he knew it meant a lot to them to see their captain at this time.

The sick bay was a few decks down, below the water line. He made his way, passing the teams of carpenters, marines and sailors, all doing what their gang leaders had set them to.

It was normally possible to navigate to the sick bay by smell alone, today it was even worse. The air was still and the space was dark and dank. The sounds of men, scared or in pain, haunted him. The cries of agony from the one receiving the surgeon's attention at that moment were particularly unpleasant. These broken men had a deep respect for their leader and none of them wanted to be seen as scared in front of their Captain. He admired their courage.

Five marines and five other men were dead and a further 22 injured to various degrees. They would mend and most would be able to carry out their duties, their shipmates

would see them through.

Jack made his way back to his cabin and closed the door behind him, this sanctuary, this place of quiet and contemplation was his private domain. While the sounds of the ship could be easily heard, once the door was closed he would have the time to himself, his steward knew not to disturb him and to ensure that nobody else did. For now, Jack would have time to reflect and relax.

Today though was different. Jack had been looking forward to the solace of his room but now he was here, he had a powerful sense of presence, something was different, it sent a shiver down his spine - someone was here, in the room, he was alert to it and he bristled with anticipation of attack. He had no fear of the fight, just the unknown. He drew his sword, and listened. After a moment of hearing nothing more than the creaking timbers, and noises of the ship he searched the cabin, moving quietly around, prepared to meet his foe. While he could feel the presence, he couldn't see or hear anything. He checked behind the desk, and then the door leading to his chamber. His senses told him that someone was here. He turned around quickly - nothing. Breathing quietly, he stood still, then suddenly he felt the cold presence pass over him, then it left and all was back to normal.

Perplexed by this he stood contemplating what he had just felt and how, with no physical evidence, he had thought he was about to find someone in his room. It was not a natural 'hunch', it was different, he could feel the presence. It disturbed him but he had work to do. He went to his desk, sat down and put it out of his mind. He had the dispatches to write and two ships to get into working order, there was no time for him to succumb to superstition. He would write, in precise detail, all of the elements of the action against the Marengo, including the sailing during the chase, the broadsides and the action of the crew during the boarding

skirmish. Jack drew out a fresh parchment, sharpened a new quill and started to write.

Several hours later, he stood up, stretched and paced his cabin. Papers in hand, it was done. He had been as brief as he could get away with but he would read it through before they went in the message pouch. He picked up his day coat and went to speak to his number one to find out how the repairs were progressing. Moving towards his cabin door, he saw, out of the corner of his eye, something shiny lying on the top of a cabinet. How strange! A silver locket and chain, an intricate pattern on the front but so smooth on the back, he was sure he had never seen the like of it before. So how did it get in his cabin?

There was a knock at the door - Jack quickly put the locket down and lay some papers over it. He was suspicious of how it had got there but did not want anyone else to see, it would make a nice gift for his wife. The door opened, it was his trusty manservant, a grumpy, surly, bad tempered man, who had a knack of turning up at the right time with just what Jack needed. His ability to get away with backchat, rudeness, smarmy comments and downright insubordination was due to his ability to read and understand Jack's mood perfectly. When Jack needed him, he would be there with just what Jack needed. Most importantly, he had Jack's trust.

On this occasion he had afternoon tea, which for Jack was very welcome, especially after the tedium of writing the dispatches. Jack took his tea and left his cabin.

The damage report was not good, spars on the main mast needed repairs and there were many holes blown in the sides

from the close quarter firing. The officers and carpenters had worked out a priority list and work was under way. On both ships there was industry as the crews worked together to be ready to sail as soon as possible.

He visited the work parties, pausing to speak to crew as he went. Seeing the way they got on with what had to be done filled him with pride, these weary, battle fatigued men, helping with the repairs or just getting the ship back in order. He would consult with his officers and define the 'prize' crew and their sailing orders and when they would set sail. The prisoners from the captured vessel would be shared between the two vessels to act as crew, Jack would send his Number One, Francis Pickman to take command of the prize. This was an honour for Pickman, he deserved it though and it would give him an opportunity to show that he could lead. The promoted captain would still be under Jack's orders, but the priority was to get the prize back to Plymouth. For Pickman, the experience of having his own command, even for a short period, was a valuable addition to his naval record, and not one easily gained.

Jack had made his way around the ship and then returned to his cabin, he updated the ship's log, then reviewed the action, where the attack plan had worked and what elements needed refining. Did all the gun crews work or did some need more practice? For this, Jack would seek the advice of his officers. Some men would have distinguished themselves, others had fallen in the effort, and all this needed to be noted in the log. As the voyage had progressed the log had become a development record of the crew as a team. Most of this team had been together for eighteen months and Jack was proud of his men and the progress they had made. This action showed that they had become a very efficient fighting machine.

Sorting the men from the captured crew into appropriate work gangs was never easy; some spoke a little English,

most spoke none at all. Some would get on with their duties for a different captain while others were belligerent and would need ‘persuading’. Those that were considered a risk would be kept in the brig, but most wanted to work the ship for their captors. Jack would leave this to the officers to sort out. It had been a long day, soon the bell would announce that the officers’ dinner would be served. Jack still had duties that needed attending to in his cabin, but tonight he would dine with the officers in the wardroom and he would let them know who would sail on the Prize.

The wardroom was the officer’s domain and it was customary to occasionally invite the Captain for dinner. Jack had a long-standing invite for today that he was looking forward to. These formal events enabled him to find out how his officers were working and gave a different perspective of events on the lower decks. He evaluated both the competition and the camaraderie between the officers. It was a barometer of the relative strengths of this officer class. He also got to understand more about the lower decks and how they worked. Most importantly, it provided an opportunity for Jack to share his vision with his officers. This was not a common trait among captains but to Jack’s mind, it would enable his officers to do what he wanted, if they knew what he was trying to achieve.

The Marengo had not been long at sea and during the inspection a fine collection of wines had been discovered. Some of this would be sampled this evening, the best bottles being served with the meal.

The loyal toast was followed by the Tuesday toast to ‘Our Men’ and the evening passed with lively conversation ranging from experiences of the engagement with the Marengo to optimistic discussions about prize money. Jack was in good company and was enjoying his meal. He was amongst his officers and it had been a very successful day. He bade his host’s a goodnight and retired to his cabin.

He closed and locked the door behind him. The dispatches were on his desk, ready for the Quartermaster's mail pouch, so to make sure he remembered, he folded them carefully and put them deliberately into his inside coat pocket, then he walked back to the cabinet to uncover the locket he had seen earlier that day. He stood looking at it for a while; even with all the lanterns lit it was difficult to see clearly. He moved closer to the nearest lantern and strained his eyes to see the detail on the case. He had never seen anything made so precisely. It was delicate and intricate, made with care and a precision that Jack didn't think was possible. The chain was finely wrought and flowed through his fingers like liquid; it was made of a gauge that had both strength and beauty that would grace his wife's neck. He could not fathom its origin. He turned his attention to the tiny hinge, so small and precisely machined. After this careful study, he could not see how to open it. He wanted to know what was inside, a miniature painting, a lock of hair or maybe a clue about the owner?

He looked again and closer, but as his inspection continued an increasing tiredness came upon him, soon all he could feel was an overpowering weariness pervading his being. He strained to put it off as he focused on this, the most exquisite locket he had ever seen. It had his full attention, but fighting against the growing wave of exhaustion, he slowly stumbled back to his desk as fatigue drained the energy from his body. He was falling as he walked and each step became a huge effort. Now so close, just one last step, the short distance was made at a shuffle. With his eyes mostly shut, and the locket grasped firmly in his hand, he fell heavily into the chair. In the most fluid of moves, his body slid from the chair and as it came to rest on the floor, his mind entered the most perfect and deepest of sleeps.

In the depths and recesses of a dream, Jack's senses luxuriated in intoxicating sleep, his muscles relaxed, his body given over to the all-consuming slumber that had rendered him unconscious. This was so different to his normal light sleep where the merest change in course would be enough to wake him. After many hours, his body clock had both chimed and been ignored. Daytime called, but the mind, insistent was holding on, not to be drawn away from this most perfect of dreams, refusing to let go, refusing to allow the reality that is daily life to take over. Little by little, Jack became aware that the environment of his dream was slowly translated into his waking reality. The constant motion that is the sea farers companion was gone, the ship's timbers were silent, water did not whisper past the ship's hull; all was silent. The rancid, still air was replaced with air perfumed like that of a forest, sweet smelling with a gentle breeze that was refreshing to the skin, he heard birds singing in the trees. Jack liked this dream and did not want it to end, he did not want to wake, and, as is usual for the dreamer, it felt so real. As he dozed in his half-conscious state, he was aware of the birds singing, 'That is the sound of bird song', he thought, 'There are no birds that sing on the ocean. Jack's conscious mind was starting to wake, he was really on the ocean, many miles from land, but the birds were singing and he was warm and dry. The message that something was wrong was getting louder in his mind and then with a rush of consciousness that spread rapidly through his being he opened his eyes.

Above him, a high mottled canopy of green, wafting gently in the light breeze, above the leaves, clear blue sky with the bright sun betraying the hour of the day, he should have been woken hours ago but where was he? Tall trees stood around him, stretching up to provide the multi-layered ceiling that shielded him from the sun. He lifted his head to find himself in a glade, lying in a sea of bluebells, the grassy

slopes were lush with grass and the birds were singing.

Jack sat up and looking around he saw that three sides led steeply uphill the other side dropped into a thicket.

Was he still in that dream? What had happened? Where was he? All he could see, hear, smell and touch seemed so real but at the same time, it defied logic. He considered for a moment, had he been shot during the battle and this is the shock of being wounded? He got up, looked around the dell, with its carpet of bluebells it was beautiful. He thought, 'Am I dead? If this is death, it could be worse'. The trees all seemed real enough, the ground was firm and dry and leaves rustled in a gentle breeze, 'This could be heaven', he thought.

Jack looked down at himself and noted he was wearing his day uniform, as he had been yesterday. He had not gone to bed because he had been looking at the locket he had found in his cabin, yes! He still had it in his hand. The locket, he remembered would not open last night, he looked at it again for a moment and still, there was no clue about how to open it so he put it safely into his pocket. He checked the dispatches and yes they too were still there. Now to work out where he was and how did he get here and ... Jack's mind raced.

Looking at the sun he estimated it was early morning. He would be hungry soon and by now, he would have heard the chime to call the first sitting to eat. Jack quickly decided on his plan. He had dispatches in his pocket and the first job was to get those delivered to the Admiralty. To do that, he would have to find out where he was. This would be his first task, how he would explain his absence from his ship would be another story. The explanation for that would be so much harder. So many questions in his head but his priorities were practical; where am I, deliver what I have to, answer questions later. His concerns about his ship he could do nothing about, he was nowhere near the sea but the

beauty of his surroundings was breathtaking.

There was no one around and no sign of life. Still perplexed, he set about trying to work out where he was. So many other questions bombarded his mind, none of which he had any idea of how to answer. ‘Answer one and the others would follow’, he hoped. He did not understand how or where or why but the one certainty was that soon he would be hungry. He looked around the wood and set off uphill in search of a path or a view, something to help him work out where he was. He would focus on his tasks, find food, and deliver the dispatches; the rest of his strange circumstances...? He would think about those along the way.

As Jack walked his mind was a blur, trying to work out how he could have possibly got here. The same answers came back each time, ‘I’m dreaming or dead’. There were no other explanations for his plight. He examined each possibility again and again, without answer and was getting more frustrated as his mind circled the same questions that led inexorably to the same answers.

It was a day of contrasts; gone was the motion and grumbling of ship, the sound of wind rustling through the rigging, the stench of humanity living in the wooden box they called home, replaced by the stillness of the ground and the gentle murmur of the breeze and air, so pure and scented. Other contrasts too, from the blind panic about how he got here, to the beauty of the day and this stunning rolling landscape, his heart was lifted by the beauty around him. ‘It’s a lovely day for a walk’, he thought, ‘if I had my horse, it’s a day for a ride and a picnic perhaps’, he told himself with a smile. He tried to accept his impossible situation and trust that whatever had happened would become clear in due course. He just hoped it would be soon. Of course, he told himself, he would wake in his hammock, and maybe, it would be seen that rather too much wine had flowed during

last night's meal in the wardroom.

He thought about his ship, HMS London. Had his colleagues realised he was no longer there? How would they get on without him, Francis Pickmore, his Number One, would have to step up, though it was not a good time to be thrown the Captain's chair. But the men respected him, so he should be all right.

Jack had to trust that the men he had trained over the years would follow Pickmore's lead and look after his ship. The bonds forged over time at sea are not easily broken and never forgotten. They had trusted his judgement many times; some had made the ultimate sacrifice, now he felt he was betraying that trust. Absence from his post would lead Jack to a court martial even though it was not intentional. He would have no answer for the questioning he would get and those on the Court Martial would have a field day. Ever since the day he had become a Post Captain, they had ruthlessly searched for a reason to demote him, and now, there would be no stopping them and in Jack's mind, they would have no choice.

The thought of a court martial sent a shudder down Jack's spine, it was too horrible to consider. There must be an explanation and Jack had to find it, get back to his ship and put matters right. Without any clear plan of how he would do that, he would focus on the practicalities. The only answers that came to his mind as he walked were based in myth and superstition, and Jack was not about to abandon his faith in fact and evidence yet.

He continued his walk with the whirl of questions and possibilities circling his mind. The thought that the Admiralty may just put him in jail as a deserter made the nightmare worse, in which case, he would never get another command again. Competition for a ship to command was intense and captains seemed to go on forever! He must get back to his ship and smartly.

His thoughts turned to his wife and family, it had been eighteen long months since he had been home, and he wasn't expected for another twelve weeks. His arrival would be a great surprise. The prospect of spending some unexpected time at home before returning to sea would be welcome. How would he explain his un-announced arrival? The house would not be ready to receive him, Alice always made sure that he was presented with order and efficiency on his homecoming. His daughters! How they would have changed! And his son, he would be terrorising his sisters. As he thought of home, he realised how much he missed it, the happy return would be in contrast to the reception he would get from the Admiralty. He resolved to focus on the happy scenes that lay ahead, and to work on the practicalities of delivering the dispatches. With his mind focused, he was able to put the thoughts of his reckoning with the Admiralty aside. There were many obstacles to overcome before then and now, he was looking forward to finding some food, all this walking was making him hungry and there wasn't a tavern to be seen!

His walk took him up a steady climb, the trees were thinning and soon he found a defined track that led to the top of the hill. From there he would try to get his bearings and plan a route. It was good exercise for Jack, as life on board ship didn't afford too many opportunities for exertion. The sky was blue and as the sun climbed higher it became warmer. Sweating in the heat of his sea clothes, his boots rubbing, he went steadily on. These were small concerns for him, knowing that soon he would be able to cast his eye around. He desperately wanted to see something he recognised.

The trees made way for bushes and soon he was in the open. The walk to the summit was further than he had initially thought and his unfit frame was labouring. The breeze was now stronger, warmer, but refreshing as he

climbed the last yards to the top. His spirits soared as he beheld the vista of rolling countryside laid out in the glory of the morning. He stopped, stretched his back and gathering his breath he uttered, "A sight to behold to be sure!" as he enjoyed the view. He started to look for features he would recognise, ranging from nearest to furthest detail. He saw villages, occasional cottages, some with smoke rising from chimneys here and there. Further afield, a quarry or some sort of earthworks. He didn't recognise this landscape but it took his breath away. Jack put his worries aside for the moment, relaxed and started to consider his next move. He had no idea where he was, although he guessed he was in England. He would take a moment to rest and think. He sat in the shade of a solitary tree, to consider his options.

From the height of the sun, Jack guessed it was midmorning. The village to the west looked a long way off but to the northwest, there was a cottage a lot closer. He hoped that by going that way he would find out where he was. Then the decision about where he went next would be easy. He considered the strangeness of his predicament and that this might not actually be England. This thought did not last long and was dispatched with a determined conclusion, "No, this is typical English countryside." He would trust his judgement and focus on his priorities, one of which was becoming urgent, as he was now feeling very hungry.

Having decided the direction, he chose a path leading steadily downhill and onto a spur, after some way it dropped into the trees. It seemed to be going in the right direction. The labour of the walk was not without discomfort but he was in good spirits, he would fathom out the conundrum, there would be a logical explanation even if he could not see it yet. The thought of surprising Alice and the children kept his spirits high. 'Such an unexpected pleasure', he told himself. His step was as light as his mood as he tripped down the hill towards the spur path.

He hoped he was close to Portsmouth, that would be his first stop, then home briefly, and then on to London and the reckoning with the Admiralty. He would be home, probably for a very long time after London and then? What then? He would write to Francis Pickmore and his colleagues on HMS London, hopefully, by then, he would have more answers than he had now. His ship should be home in twelve weeks and he would be able to discuss all that had come to pass. Jack mused on this course of events as he followed the path down the hill towards the cottages he had seen from the top.

His route took him onto a farmer's track, firm under his feet. He looked at the ground, stony with flint shards showing through the rough-hewn surface. Here and there the mud was moulded into a curious pattern. Jack studied the path, this track was not made by any sort of farm or carriage wheel he knew about. He walked on, becoming aware of the path and scrutinising the details he saw. Within the hedgerow, a fence, with finely wrought metal strands, he had never seen a wire string! How his property would benefit from that to keep the cows in and the foxes out. He was looking for familiarity but subtle clues were contradictory to the outcome he wanted, the conclusion inexplicable.

The track narrowed and plunged further downhill amongst steep sided banks, trees providing a canopy of shade. Rounding a corner in the track, he became aware of a distant buzzing sound, not unlike that of a bee. As he listened, it was rapidly coming closer and very much louder. This surely could not be a living creature; he had never heard a noise like it. Frantically, he looked around but there was nothing to be seen. He turned trying to see whatever it was that was making the noise. Jack feared the worst as the sound grew to a crescendo, it was very near, and then, as quickly as it came, it was gone. Looking up, Jack had glimpsed a shape as it moved quickly above the trees, but it was gone in a flash before he got a proper look at it. Jack

scrambled up the bank but by the time he had got to the top, he could see nothing. He returned down the bank to the track, his heart racing, he sat down breathing heavily, sweat on his brow. He was shaking.

“Where am I?” he shouted out loud. Nothing made sense, he was in a place he felt that he knew but it was not quite the same. He hoped that this was a dream and he would wake up back on HMS London, in his sea cot so he could get on with his day.

He chided himself. Sitting here would answer nothing. After a moment of further thought he got up and continued on down the track. In his mind he thought about the sound that the thing had made, a constant and loud buzz that got louder and then softer. He didn't get enough of a view as it passed above the trees to know what it was, although he knew it was not a bird. On he went, the track continued to drop. Eventually as he rounded a bend in the lane he saw the cottage that he had seen from the summit. ‘Not too much further to walk’, he thought. Hopefully there would be someone in and he would be able to get a drink and maybe a little breakfast, although he did not have any money with him so whatever he could arrange would have to be begged. Once he'd returned home and got himself organised, it would be easy for him to come back and repay any kindness or debt.

As Jack grew closer to the cottage, he could see that it was a well-maintained and very pretty dwelling in an idyllic setting. A neatly trimmed garden at the front and an arch of honeysuckle framing the front door, the paintwork was fresh and he thought it looked ‘ship shape’. As he opened the gate into the front garden he felt a growing sense of foreboding; what would he find? He walked up the path, conscious that these steps were leading him to meet the first people in this place, would they speak English? He would find out soon enough.

Before he got to the door, he could hear the sounds of a man's voice. He knocked on the door loudly, soon he heard the sound of movement inside, more noises, a dog barking and then the door opened. Her eyes were at the same height as Jack's and she had a friendly face.

"Hello," she said, looking at Jack strangely.

"Hello? Er ..." Jack stuttered, he looked her up and down and her friendly demeanour broke into a generous smile, "Oh My! Are we going to a fancy dress party?" she exclaimed with laughter in her voice, "I didn't know I'd been invited!" and with that she broke into a full throated laugh.

Jack had prepared what he would say but this woman was not showing the respect due a Post Captain of His Majesty's Navy, being the subject of her amusement, he thought, was completely unwarranted. While she composed herself he noticed how she was dressed and that the fashion was strange to Jack. With a scarf around her head she looked odd in strange breeches that had a front bit and braces over her shoulders. These were curious clothes indeed. She was both attractive and confident, and Jack guessed her to be a few years younger than his thirty-nine years. They stood looking at each other for a moment, until the silence became awkward. There were still voices coming from inside the house, they hadn't stopped and she didn't seem to expect them to. In the moments that followed Jack's suspicions that something was very wrong were confirmed. She had said, 'Hello', and so he assumed he was in England, this was good news but there it ended. Jack was by nature a confident man, he knew that his abilities would lead him into and out of any situation and this confidence helped him in times of difficulty. However, this was all too strange and his well-rehearsed words faltered.

Having recovered from her giggling, the woman put on a mock serious voice and said, "I'm sorry to laugh, how can

I help you?"

Relieved by her new composure, Jack recovered, "I am lost and I need to get to Portsmouth," he said.

"Oh, well it's not far, how are you travelling?" she asked.

"I am walking, but if a chaise and four can be arranged I am sure the Admiralty will pay for it. If that is not possible, is there somewhere I could borrow a horse?"

"Well, let me see," she considered, "a chaise and four you say?" she was still smiling, "You may be able to borrow a horse from the manor house about half a mile down the road."

Jack was not sure what she meant by her earlier comment of 'fancy dress'. He persisted, "I have been walking all morning and am thirsty, may I trouble you for a drink?"

"How rude of me, please come in," she said. "You look ... " she paused, apparently not knowing quite how to say what she wanted to say, "you look quite exhausted, do please come in." she said, finding her voice.

Jack made his way uncertainly into the cottage and looked around, it was tidy, clean and as organised inside as it was out. Through the front door was a living room, and for a small room there was so much to see. This was where the voices were coming from but there wasn't anyone in the room. The voices were actually coming from a wooden box on a shelf by the fireplace. Jack looked at it, two round knobs and a horizontal ruler, and above there was a metallic material. The voices were coming from behind the material. Jack was staring at the box, trying to work out if he was going completely mad.

"I got that a couple of years ago, it works well. Would you like something to eat too?" asked his host.

Jack was indeed hungry but he was completely baffled by the talking box and everything in the room. It was all so different to what he had expected. The normal Jack confidence and bravado had deserted him as he silently

regarded the strange objects in front of him.

She seemed to sense his confusion, “Would you,” she hesitated to get his attention, “would you like a glass of water?”

Jack snapped out of his silence and looking at her, he tried to make sense of what he was seeing. Remembering her question he responded, “Yes please,” he said, his normally steady voice had gone. This room was not right, this place was not right. He was near Portsmouth but things were just not right.

The lady left him to get his drink and soon returned to the room with a jug of water, “You must be thirsty, walking around on a day like today, beautiful weather but you look very hot. My name is Lottie Shuddle,” she held out her hand.

“I am Captain Jack Edgar, of His Majesty’s Navy.”

She looked at him and looked like she was about to start laughing again. She seemed about to say something but then stopped.

“May I take your coat? Please sit down, make yourself comfortable, you look tired and road weary, you are quite flushed in the face.”

Jack thanked her for her kindness and sat down, the chair was a different style, actually, it seemed that everything had a different style.

From the furniture to the carpets, the walls and the objects around the fireplace, even the fireplace itself, everything was odd. The walls had a covering on, only very rich houses had wallpaper but here, Lottie Shuddle’s cottage had wall coverings. The furniture was comfortable and was not filled with straw; it must be a very rich household to afford these luxuries.

Lottie looked at him. She thought he was rugged and

handsome even if he was wearing a strange outfit that could only be fancy dress. He had said that he was a Captain and his smart uniform did look like that of a naval captain, but from over a hundred years ago. He didn't seem mad or drunk, in fact, he was the very opposite, he was certainly quite sensible, just very anxious.

Jack had been sitting, looking around the room, noticing everything, the ceramic figurines, the strange box with a round grill and oblong line below, pictures on the mantel piece and the sewing machine in the corner. He could not ignore the facts as they were before him, "Madame," he asked, "What is that?" He pointed at the box.

"Oh," said Lottie Shuddle, "It's a 'Rediffusion', I got it in 1939. I do like radio; it's so useful for keeping in touch, I always try to listen to the BBC Nine o'clock news, I feel like I am in touch with what is happening in the war, even though I live away from it all. I also like to listen to the light programme if I want some music."

Jack couldn't take any more. He didn't understand what 'Rediffusion' was and her reference to 1939 was so obviously wrong. Trying to remain calm he asked. "Do you have a Journal," he enquired his voice shaking as he spoke.

"Do you mean a 'Newspaper'? Yes, I have yesterday's Times. Was there anything in particular you wanted to know, did you hear about the attack on the dams in Germany?" she asked, eager to please but confusing Jack more with everything she said.

"No, I didn't," he said absently, he knew exactly what he wanted to see.

She disappeared out of the room soon returning with a broadsheet newspaper that she handed to Jack, she left him to read.

“Are you alright?” she asked as Jack appeared at the kitchen door, his face ashen. He was holding the paper up and but trying to formulate a question. He had the newspaper in his hand and he was pointing.

“Madame,” he started, his voice shaking, “this paper has a date of Monday May 17th 1943.”

Lottie looked at him not understanding his point, “Yes, that is right and tomorrow will be Wednesday May 19th 1943,” she said carelessly.

Jack seemed to be taking this very seriously. Seeing that the date was the news that he had been looking for and that this was causing his distress, she softened her tone and said, “That’s not what you were expecting is it. Why not sit down again, you really do not look very well,”

He could no sooner sit than he could understand what was going on. He started pacing around like a cornered animal. Jack knew he would have to be very careful about what he said. His suspicion about all the strange objects he had seen had pointed to this conclusion, even though it was impossible for such a thing to happen. All he had ever thought of as reality was gone. He wandered slowly back to the living room and sat down, the blood drained from his face. What could he say without sounding completely mad? He collected his thoughts, slowly regaining control. He needed more information. Lottie followed him with the snack she had made him, although he did not want it.

Jack looked at Lottie, “This is a jest, isn’t it? It’s why you would have been laughing at me when you opened the door,” he said, looking accusingly at her

“No, er, Captain Edgar, it’s not a joke!” said Lottie firmly

“But the date, it’s wrong!” Jack said with as much conviction he could muster, but with a doubt undermining his confidence.

“Captain Edgar,” said Lottie Shuddle firmly, “There is no joke, the year is 1943, King George VI is our King and Winston Churchill is the Prime Minister and as I am sure everyone in the country knows, we are at war!”

For the second time in a few hours, his head was spinning. This was so much worse than he had thought. He must be dead, 1943? He felt alive, he felt very alive. He looked at Lottie and he sat down heavily, he was nervous and very agitated, “Then, perhaps, you could help me by telling me more about these times and where we are because, I fear I am very definitely, all at sea.”

The strange but confident Gentleman who had knocked at her door just twenty minutes ago was gone, now he was a picture of confusion and Lottie could see the pain and conflict in his face. He was very definitely ...all at sea.

To be continued...