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A Weird Story About Captain Kidd

Newgate Ghost

By WILLIAM R. HICKEY

MIDNIGHT hung over Newgate. Somewhere about 12 a squall had burst upon the jail, a burst of screaming wind that made the buildings rock, and a copious drift of rain that streamed from the high walls. The downpour increased, beating a regular tattoo upon the gutterways. Then splitting the squares of greater blackness which marked the barred casements of the cells came flash after flash of lightning. As the blinding light died out, came the crash of thunder, harsh and fearsome, more imminently above the jail than ever. Newgate seemed to rock upon its foundations.

Coming as they did, horror and the wrath of heaven together, suddenly, crashingly, black and angry after the fairness of the day, these happenings and their settings must have terrorized the stoutest heart. But Davie

Bartmey stood unconcerned within his cell. He seemed detached, as if set apart, a spectator, for some particular whirl of events. Even when a vague yellow light crept across the floor from the direction of the corridor, and flickered unsteadily through the grille of the iron-studded door, he remained unmoved.

Davie Bartmey, late of Kidd's crew, was sentenced to be hanged at dawn. He realized that the ultimate issue was at hand, but either because he was emotionally exhausted, or for some other reason, the pending climax failed to disturb him.

But now a slightly different sound caused him to move toward the barred grille. Someone, holding a lantern high, had turned into the narrow corridor leading to his cell. The stone walls, slime-covered and dripping, left scant room for the man's broad

shoulders. Mayhap the jailer! So thought Davie as he watched the approaching figure, though he knew it was not yet dawn.

But now, as a forked streak worked its way in from the outside and snaked blindingly down the reeking corridor, Davie gave a gasp of amazement. In the momentary flash he had recognized the tall figure wearing a broad-brimmed hat and a dark cloak thrown over the shoulders. One hand held the lantern aloft while the other clasped the loosened folds of his cloak away from the dampish walls.

"By the pope!" cried Davie, pressing his face tightly against the grille. "'Tis Captain Kidd!"

The heavily cloaked figure stopped without the door and seemed to tense into an attitude of listening. But there came no sound but the trickle of water and the howling of the wind above the jail.

"Aye, Davie! 'Tis Kidd! And a straight road to thy freedom!"

The voice was deep, hollow-toned, the intonation sepulchral. But Davie, in his joy, noted naught amiss.

Came the grating of a rusty key, a grinding of little-used hinges and in the wall an oblong patch of black showed where the iron-studded door had opened into the cell. For a space there was silence. Davie Bartmey could scarce believe his eyes. Captain Kidd . . . notorious buccaneer . . . long sought . . . captured . . . sentenced to hang. . . . This same Kidd was loose in Newgate, and faced him across the cell.

Kidd stood straight, his face lifted and his eyes burning.

"Nay, touch me not, Davie!" he boomed to the lad who would have embraced him, for there was affection between these two, born of memories of glorious days amid the reek of battle.

Kidd let slip the cloak from his shoulders, revealing round his waist a dark red sash and heavy cutlas, this weapon almost concealing his own dress sword. Disengaging the sash,

he threw the cutlas to the younger man. Davie looked at Kidd with a perplexed shake of his head, but with obedience gained by years of experience, fastened the heavy weapon firmly to his waist. The blade glittered dully in the yellow light of the lantern.

"How now, Captain?" cried Davie shortly.

"I fear we must needs hurry!" Kidd spoke in deep and precise tones.

"Ho! Ho!" chuckled Davie as at a subtle jest. "To what end? When Captain Kidd runs amuck in Newgate what need is there to hurry?"

Kidd held up a restraining hand.

"Jest not, Davie," he protested. "'Twas of thee I was thinking. Thou standest in the shadow of the gallows, yet reckest not the scant time till dawn, when thou wilt hang."

"'Tis no disgrace to hang with Kidd," cried the younger man with feeling, "and since they have not hanged thee, what's to do?"

Davie now gave little thought to the fact that Captain Kidd was here armed and unescorted by an overbearing jailer. 'Twas, perchance, strange, but he was willing to accept the situation in silence, content to abide in patience till things were, anon, made plain. 'Twas enough that Kidd was here. He would learn in time the why and wherefore of it; meantime he awaited orders unquestioningly, as always.

Kidd gently rubbed his throat. "'Tis not my plan that thou shalt hang, Davie. 'Tis my hope to get thee well clear of this hole; then is my errand ended. Mayhap we will succeed; yet we must strike hard and quickly; of that I am persuaded. Loosen thy blade and mind the slippery flags." He gathered his cloak closely about him and stepped across the threshold into the corridor.

FOR a space Davie followed the other closely, their cautious footsteps echoing eerily, and their light

throwing ghastly shadows on the rafters overhead. The place was damp and chilly and silent. Aye, thought Davie, Newgate was a vile place.

Finally Kidd paused, and carefully stepping over a twisted figure huddled in a pool of blood, half turned and held the light.

"'Twas necessary, lad," he muttered hoarsely and the younger man nodded understandingly. "Look to the stairs!"

They ascended four steps of rough masonry and stood before a heavy door. Kidd now snuffed the light within the lantern and they were left amid the inky blackness of the passage. As his rescuer slowly pushed the door ajar, Davie started forward with a sense of impending expectation.

The place was as black as the grave; not a glimmer of light shone in the room. Davie, ill-acquainted with the intricate interiors of Newgate, had difficulty in clinging close to Kidd, and in the absolute darkness lost him more than once. Their eery and mysterious position was terrifying in its possibilities. The inequalities of the pavement retarded their progress, while a chasm of denser darkness threatened ambuscades. Davie, bewildered, became certain of one thing. He could hear the labored breathing of men. They were passing through a guardroom.

Kidd, with an uncanny sense of familiarity, gained some notion of the whereabouts of the door, and Davie hoped speedily to find himself well away; but he reckoned without that chapter of accidents which was to make this night memorable above all others in his career.

Reaching the door they listened intently. The rain had ceased, with the rumble of thunder growing fainter and fainter. Aside from the moaning of the wind another sound came from without. Slowly Kidd raised the latch

that secured the door and silently he drew it open. Outside in the huge doorway a lone guard paced sleepily back and forth. 'Twas possible they might have evaded his notice, but unfortunately Davie's foot rolled upon a pebble, he fell against the wall with an ejaculation, and his scabbard clanked noisily on the stone flagging. From the side of the doorway the guard picked up a lantern and slowly advanced toward the source of the disturbance he had heard. His sword unsheathed, Kidd stepped out to confront him.

Verily, never in all his experience had this guard encountered anything which approached in acute and sustained horror this apparition he beheld within the yellow rays of the upheld lantern. With quivering limbs he stared as if at a nightmare, his ashen-gray face and bulging eyes glistening grotesquely in the reflected rays of his light.

Anon he found his voice.

"Kidd!" he screamed. "Captain Kidd!"

The lantern crashed to the flagging and the man was off, his cries for the captain of the guard mingling with the screaming of the wind.

"'Od's blood!" cried Kidd. "The fellow will raise the guard. To the gate, lad!" Davie felt the icy coldness of the hand that clutched his own. "Follow close and fast, Davie, for now we play at bowls with destiny!"

As they hastened after the guard the wind smote them with a mad howl of exultation, a sullen roar of encouragement. Betimes in their flight Davie was concerned with the certain strangeness attached to Kidd, and bethought him of the strange actions of the guard; yet was there no answer to his increasing perplexity. Nor did he trouble to analyze. He was minded foremost with the question of whether or not they would escape.

Against the buffeting wind they

reached the gate. The guard, awakened by the clamor of their fellow, appeared in the sooty gloom of the guardhouse. Two storm lanterns, one on each side of the gate, cast a small circle of illumination around its base. Here the four burly forms of the guards ran about confusedly.

"Through them, Davie, and unbar the gate!" roared Kidd in the youth's ear. "I'll tend this mangy crew!"

"Aye!" cried Davie, leaping forward. He lusted for the clash of steel; for the fierce hand-to-hand struggle that stirred the blood; for the reckless victory that would lift them from this hell-hole and make men of them once more. But Kidd was ahead of him. With sword in hand he had jumped full in the center of their foes. Before he had recovered his balance he parried the slash of a broadsword and pricked an antagonist in the throat. Davie, before he could break through, found himself confronted by a huge fellow, who swung savagely at him with his weapon. Their blades met with a shower of sparks.

Davie, no novice, sliced and parried with his cutlas till he severed his opponent's arm. Kidd, as Davie reached the gate, beat down a leveled pistol, inclined his head to avoid a murderous blow, ran the man through and almost in the same breath stepped a pace to the right to engage the fourth opponent—and all this with the cool precision of a fencing-master, unhurried, a flush of obvious enjoyment on his pallid cheeks.

Davie raised the heavy bar and turned to see the last man fall. As Kidd ran toward him there came sounds of confusion from the jail, and with all haste they pushed wide the gate and were soon without the walls.

"To horse!" cried Kidd, his voice hollow, though not without a ring of triumph. He led the way across the cobbled street to the darkest shadows of some trees. Two horses stamped restlessly, bridled and saddled.

"Thou must make London, lad, and the 'Kerrigan Arms.' Friends await thee there." Kidd's voice was lost amid the shrieking wind.

"And thou?" questioned Davie as he mounted.

"Begone!" cried Kidd. "I follow close!"

In the teeth of the wind Davie rode toward London. Betimes he could hear hoofbeats behind him, but soon the voice of the wind was become a sullen animal roar, riven at intervals by distant crashes of thunder, and as the roar became a howl, a clamor, anon the hoofbeats died away.

DAVIE BARTMEY crossed the sanded floor of the taproom to where two men sat silent and gloomy.

"Bentley! Cotton!" he exclaimed joyfully. The men addressed came out of their revery in a flash and looked into the face of the newcomer.

"Thou!" gasped the one called Bentley. "Alive? We thought thee hanged. How comes it, Davie?"

Cotton stared in silence, unbelieving, his very gaze betokening interrogation.

"With Kidd's assistance I escaped from Newgate this night past."

"Impossible!" retorted Bentley, while Cotton drew askance.

"Nay, 'tis a fact," insisted Davie. "Side by side we hacked our way to freedom. Even now Kidd follows close behind me."

For a time there was silence. Cotton glanced at Bentley as if seeking understanding, but finding none he closed his eyes in bewilderment. Davie noted his friends' strange behavior, but could not guess its purport. At length Bentley, stirring uneasily, lifted his eyes from the floor and turned to Davie.

"Knowest not that Kidd was executed yesterday at dawn?"

"'Tis a lie!" cried Davie.

"Nay," said Bentley firmly. "We saw him hanged!"