



***THOMAS
A. JANVIER***

IN THE SARGASSO SEA

Thomas A. Janvier

In the Sargasso Sea

A Novel

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Contact: DigiCat@okpublishing.info



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I PAY FOR MY PASSAGE TO LOANGO

Captain Luke Chilton counted over the five-dollar notes with a greater care than I thought was necessary, considering that there were only ten of them; and cautiously examined each separate one, as though he feared that I might be trying to pay for my passage in bad money. His show of distrust set my back up, and I came near to damning him right out for his impudence—until I reflected that a West Coast trader must pretty well divide his time between cheating people and seeing to it that he isn't cheated, and so held my tongue.

Having satisfied himself that the tale was correct and that the notes were genuine, he brought out from the inside pocket of his long-tailed shore-going coat a big canvas pocket-book, into which he stowed them lengthwise; and from the glimpse I had of it I fancied that until my money got there it was about bare. As he put away the pocket-book, he said, and pleasantly enough:

"You see, Mr. Stetworth, it's this way: fifty dollars is dirt cheap for a cast across from New York to the Coast, and that's a fact; but you say that it's an object with you to get your passage low, and I say that even at that price I can make money out of you. The *Golden Hind* has got to call at Loango, anyhow; there's a spare room in her cabin that'll be empty if you don't fill it; and while you're a big man and look

to be rather extra hearty, I reckon you won't eat more'n about twenty dollars' worth of victuals—counting 'em at cost—on the whole run. But the main thing is that I want all the spot cash I can get a-holt of before I start. Fifty dollars' worth of trade laid in now means five hundred dollars for me when I get back here in New York with what I've turned it over for on the Coast. So, you see, if you're suited, I'm suited too. Shake! And now we'll have another drink. This time it's on me."

We shook, and Captain Luke gave me an honest enough grip, just as he had spoken in an honest enough tone. I knew, of course, that in a general way he must be a good deal of a rascal—he couldn't well be a West Coast trader and be anything else; but then his rascality in general didn't matter much so long as his dealings with me were square. He called the waiter and ordered arrack again—it was the most wholesome drink in the world, he said—and we touched glasses, and so brought our deal to an end.

That a cheap passage to Loango was an object to me, as Captain Luke had said, was quite true. It was a very important object. After I got across, of course, and my pay from the palm-oil people began, I would be all right; but until I could touch my salary I had to sail mighty close to the wind. For pretty much all of my capital consisted of my headful of knowledge of the theory and practice of mechanical engineering which had brought me out first of my class at the Stevens Institute—and in that way had got me the offer from the palm-oil people—and because of which I thought that there wasn't anybody quite my equal anywhere as a mechanical engineer. And that was only

natural, I suppose, since my passing first had swelled my head a bit, and I was only three-and-twenty, and more or less of a promiscuously green young fool.

As I looked over Captain Luke's shoulder, while we supped our arrack together—out through the window across the rush and bustle of South Street—and saw a trim steamer of the Maracaibo line lying at her dock, I could not but be sorry that my voyage to Africa would be made under sails. But, on the other hand, I comforted myself by thinking that if the *Golden Hind* were half the clipper her captain made her out to be I should not lose much time—taking into account the roundabout way I should have to go if I went under steam. And I comforted myself still more by thinking what a lot of money I had saved by coming on this chance for a cheap cast across; and I blessed my lucky stars for putting into my head the notion of cruising along South Street that October morning and asking every sailor-like man I met if he knew of a craft bound for the West Coast—and especially for having run me up against Captain Luke Chilton before my cruise had lasted an hour.

The captain looked at his glass so sorrowfully when it was empty that I begged him to have it filled again, and he did. But he took down his arrack this time at a single gulp, and then got up briskly and said that he must be off.

"We don't sail till to-morrow afternoon, on the half flood, Mr. Stetworth," he said, "so you'll have lots of time to get your traps aboard if you'll take a boat off from the Battery about noon. I wouldn't come earlier than that, if I were you. Things are bound to be in a mess aboard the brig to-morrow, and the less you have of it the better. We lie well

down the anchorage, you know, only a little this side of Robbin's Reef. Your boatmen will know the place, and they'll find the brig for you if you'll tell 'em where to look for her and that she's painted green. Well, so long." And then Captain Luke shook hands with me again, and so was off into the South Street crowd.

I hurried away too. My general outfit was bought and packed; but the things lying around my lodgings had to be got together, and I had to buy a few articles in the way of sea-stock for my voyage in a sailing vessel that I should not have needed had I gone by the regular steam lines. So I got some lunch inside of me, and after that I took a cab—a bit of extravagance that my hurry justified—and bustled about from shop to shop and got what I needed inside of an hour; and then I told the man to drive me to my lodgings up-town.

It was while I was driving up Broadway—the first quiet moment for thinking that had come to me since I had met Captain Luke on South Street, and we had gone into the saloon together to settle about the passage he had offered me—that all of a sudden the thought struck me that perhaps I had made the biggest kind of a fool of myself; and it struck so hard that for a minute or two I fairly was dizzy and faint.

What earthly proof had I, beyond Captain Luke's bare word for it, that there was such a brig as the *Golden Hind*? What proof had I even—beyond the general look of him and his canvas pocket-book—that Captain Luke was a sailor? And what proof had I, supposing that there was such a brig and that he was a sailor, that the two had anything to do with each other? I simply had accepted for truth all that he

told me, and on the strength of his mere assertion that he was a ship-master and was about to sail for the West African coast I had paid him my fifty dollars—and had taken by way of receipt for it no more than a clinking of our glasses and a shake of his hand. I said just now that I was only twenty-three years old, and more or less of a promiscuously green young fool. I suppose that I might as well have left that out. There are some things that tell themselves.

For three or four blocks, as I drove along, I was in such a rage with myself that I could not think clearly. Then I began to cool a little, and to hope that I had gone off the handle too suddenly and too far. After all, there were some chances in my favor the other way. Captain Chilton, I remembered, had told me that he was about to sail for West Coast ports before I asked him for a passage; and had mentioned, also, whereabouts on the anchorage the *Golden Hind* was lying. Had he made these statements after he knew what I wanted there would have been some reason for doubting them; but being made on general principles, without knowledge of what I was after, it seemed to me that they very well might be true. And if they were true, why then there was no great cause for my sudden fit of alarm. However, I was so rattled by my fright, and still so uncertain as to how things were coming out for me, that the thought of waiting until the next afternoon to know certainly whether I had or had not been cheated was more than I could bear. The only way that I could see to settle the matter was to go right away down to the anchorage, and so satisfy myself that the *Golden Hind* was a real brig and really was lying there; and it occurred to me that I might kill two birds with one stone, and also have

a reason to give for a visit which otherwise might seem unreasonable, if I were to take down my luggage and put it aboard that very afternoon.



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HOW I BOARDED THE BRIG *GOLDEN HIND*

Having come to this conclusion, I acted on it. I kept the cab at the door while I finished my packing with a rush, and then piled my luggage on it and in it—and what with my two trunks, and my kit of fine tools, and all my bundles, this made tight stowing—and then away I went down-town again as fast as the man could drive with such a load.

We got to the Battery in a little more than an hour, and there I transshipped my cargo to a pair-oared boat and started away for the anchorage. The boatmen comforted me a good deal at the outset by saying that they thought they knew just where the *Golden Hind* was lying, as they were pretty sure they had seen her only that morning while going down the harbor with another fare; and before we were much more than past Bedloe's Island—having pulled well

over to get out of the channel and the danger of being run down by one of the swarm of passing craft—they made my mind quite easy by actually pointing her out to me. But almost in the same moment I was startled again by one of them saying to me: "I don't believe you've much time to spare, captain. There's a lighter just shoved off from her, and she's gettin' her tops'ls loose. I guess she means to slide out on this tide. That tug seems to be headin' for her now."

The men laid to their oars at this, and it was a good thing—or a bad thing, some people might think—that they did; for had we lost five minutes on our pull down from the Battery I never should have got aboard of the *Golden Hind* at all. As it was, the anchor was a-peak, and the lines of the tug made fast, by the time that we rounded under her counter; and the decks were so full of the bustle of starting that it was only a chance that anybody heard our hail. But somebody did hear it, and a man—it was the mate, as I found out afterwards—came to the side.

"Hold on, captain," one of the boatmen sang out, "here's your passenger!"

"Go to hell!" the mate answered, and turned inboard again.

But just then I caught sight of Captain Chilton, coming aft to stand by the wheel, and called out to him by name. He turned in a hurry—and with a look of being scared, I fancied—but it seemed to me a good half-minute before he answered me. In this time the men had shoved the boat alongside and had made fast to the main-chains; and just then the tug began to puff and snort, and the towline lifted,

and the brig slowly began to gather way. I could not understand what they were up to; but the boatmen, who were quick fellows, took the matter into their own hands, and began to pass in my boxes over the gunwale—the brig lying very low in the water—as we moved along. This brought the mate to the side again, with a rattle of curses and orders to stand off. And then Captain Chilton came along himself—having finished whatever he had been doing in the way of thinking—and gave matters a more reasonable turn.

"It's all right, George," he said to the mate. "This gentleman is a friend of mine who's going out with us" (the mate gave him a queer look at that), "and he's got here just in time." And then he turned to me and added: "I'd given you up, Mr. Stetworth, and that's a fact—concluding that the man I sent to your lodgings hadn't found you. We had to sail this afternoon, you see, all in a hurry; and the only thing I could do was to rush a man after you to bring you down. He seems to have overhauled you in time, even if it was a close call—so all's well."

While he was talking the boatmen were passing aboard my boxes and bundles, while the brig went ahead slowly; and when they all were shipped, and I had paid the men, he gave me his hand in a friendly way and helped me up the side. What to make of it all I could not tell. Captain Luke told a straight enough story, and the fact that his messenger had not got to me before I started did not prove that he lied. Moreover, he went on to say that if I had not got down to the brig he had meant to leave my fifty dollars with the palm-oil people at Loango, and that sounded square enough

too. At any rate, if he were lying to me I had no way of proving it against him, and he was entitled to the benefit of the doubt; and so, when he had finished explaining matters—which was short work, as he had the brig to look after—I did not see my way to refusing his suggestion that we should call it all right and shake hands.

For the next three hours or so—until we were clear of the Hook and had sea-room and the tug had cast us off—I was left to my own devices: except that a couple of men were detailed to carry to my state-room what I needed there, while the rest of my boxes were stowed below. Indeed, nobody had time to spare me a single word—the captain standing by the wheel in charge of the brig, and the two mates having their hands full in driving forward the work of finishing the lading, so that the hatches might be on and things in some sort of order before the crew should be needed to make sail.

The decks everywhere were littered with the stuff put aboard from the lighter that left the brig just before I reached her, and the huddle and confusion showed that the transfer must have been made in a tearing hurry. Many of the boxes gave no hint of what was inside of them; but a good deal of the stuff—as the pigs of lead and cans of powder, the many five-gallon kegs of spirits, the boxes of fixed ammunition, the cases of arms, and so on—evidently was regular West Coast "trade." And all of it was jumbled together just as it had been tumbled aboard.

I was surprised by our starting with the brig in such a mess—until it occurred to me that the captain had no choice in the matter if he wanted to save the tide. Very likely the

tide did enter into his calculations; but I was led to believe a little later—and all the more because of his scared look when I hailed him from the boat—that he had run into some tangle on shore that made him want to get away in a hurry before the law-officers should bring him up with a round turn.

What put this notion into my head was a matter that occurred when we were down almost to the Hook, and its conclusion came when we were fairly outside and the tug had cast us off; otherwise my boxes and I assuredly would have gone back on the tug to New York—and I with a flea in my ear, as the saying is, stinging me to more prudence in my dealings with chance-met mariners and their offers of cheap passages on strange craft.

When we were nearly across the lower bay, the nose of a steamer showed in the Narrows; and as she swung out from the land I saw that she flew the revenue flag. Captain Luke, standing aft by the wheel, no doubt made her out before I did; for all of a sudden he let drive a volley of curses at the mates to hurry their stowing below of the stuff with which our decks were cluttered. At first I did not associate the appearance of the cutter with this outbreak; but as she came rattling down the bay in our wake I could not but notice his uneasiness as he kept turning to look at her and then turning forward again to swear at the slowness of the men. But she was a long way astern at first, and by the time that she got close up to us we were fairly outside the Hook and the tug had cast us off—which made a delay in the stowing, as the men had to be called away from it to set enough sail to give us steerage way.

Captain Luke barely gave them time to make fast the sheets before he hurried them back to the hatch again; and by that time the cutter had so walked up to us that we had her close aboard. I could see that he fully expected her to hail us; and I could see also that there seemed to be a feeling of uneasiness among the crew, though they went on briskly with their work of getting what remained of the boxes and barrels below. And then, being close under our stern, the cutter quietly shifted her helm to clear us—and so slid past us, without hailing and with scarcely a look at us, and stood on out to sea.

That the captain and all hands so manifestly should dread being overhauled by a government vessel greatly increased my vague doubts as to the kind of company that I had got into; and at the very moment that the cutter passed us these doubts were so nearly resolved into bad certainties that my thoughts shot around from speculation upon Captain Luke's possible perils into consideration of what seemed to be very real perils of my own.

With the cutter close aboard of us, and with the captain and both the mates swearing at them, I suppose that the men at the hatch—who were swinging the things below with a whip—got rattled a little. At any rate, some of them rigged the sling so carelessly that a box fell out from it, and shot down to the main-deck with such a bang that it burst open. It was a small and strongly made box, that from its shape and evident weight I had fancied might have arms in it. But when it split to bits that way—the noise of the crash drawing me to the hatch to see what had happened—its contents proved to be shackles: and the sight of them, and the flash

of thought which made me realize what they must be there for, gave me a sudden sick feeling in my inside!

In my hurried reading about the West Coast—carried on at odd times since my meeting with the palm-oil people—I had learned enough about the trade carried on there to know that slaving still was a part of it; but so small a part that the matter had not much stuck in my mind. But it was a fact then (as it also is a fact now) that the traders who run along the coast—exchanging such stuff as Captain Luke carried for ivory and coffee and hides and whatever offers—do now and then take the chances and run a cargo of slaves from one or another of the lower ports into Mogador: where the Arab dealers pay such prices for live freight in good condition as to make the venture worth the risk that it involves. This traffic is not so barbarous as the old traffic to America used to be—when shippers regularly counted upon the loss of a third or a half of the cargo in transit, and so charged off the death-rate against profit and loss—for the run is a short one, and slaves are so hard to get and so dangerous to deal in nowadays that it is sound business policy to take enough care of them to keep them alive. But I am safe in saying that the men engaged in the Mogador trade are about the worst brutes afloat in our time—not excepting the island traders of the South Pacific—and for an honest man to get afloat in their company opens to him large possibilities of being murdered off-hand, with side chances of sharing in their punishment if he happens to be with them when they are caught. And so it is not to be wondered at that when I saw the shackles come flying out from that broken box, and so realized the sort of men I had

for shipmates, that a sweating fright seized me which made my stomach go queer. And then, as I thought how I had tumbled myself into this scrape that the least shred of prudence would have kept me out of, I realized for the second time that day that I was very young and very much of a fool.

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I HAVE A SCARE, AND GET OVER IT

I went to the stern of the brig and looked at the tug, far off and almost out of sight in the dusk, and at the loom of the Highlands, above which shone the light-house lamps—and my heart went down into my boots, and for a while stayed there. For a moment the thought came into my head to cut away the buoy lashed to the rail and to take my chances with it overboard—trusting to being picked up by some passing vessel and so set safe ashore. But the night was closing down fast and a lively sea was running, and I had sense enough to perceive that leaving the brig that way would be about the same as getting out of the frying-pan into the fire.

Fortunately, in a little while I began to get wholesomely angry; which always is a good thing, I think, when a man gets into a tight place—if he don't carry it too far—since it rouses the fighting spirit in him and so helps him to pull through. In reason, I ought to have been angry with myself, for the trouble that I was in was all of my own making; but, beyond giving myself a passing kick or two, all my anger was turned upon Captain Luke for taking advantage of my greenness to land me in such a pickle when his gain from it would be so small. I know now that I did Captain Luke injustice. His subsequent conduct showed that he did not want me aboard with him any more than I wanted to be there. Had I not taken matters into my own hands by boarding the brig in such a desperate hurry—just as I had hurried to close with his offer and to clinch it by paying down my passage-money—he would have gone off without me. And very likely he would have thought that the lesson in worldly wisdom he had given me was only fairly paid for by the fifty dollars which had jumped so easily out of my pocket into his.

But that was not the way I looked at the matter then; and in my heart I cursed Captain Luke up hill and down dale for having, as I fancied, lured me aboard the brig and so into peril of my skin. And my anger was so strong that I went by turns hot and cold with it, and itched to get at Captain Luke with my fists and give him a dressing—which I very well could have done, had we come to fighting, for I was a bigger man than he was and a stronger man, too.

It is rather absurd as I look back at it, considering what a taking I was in and how strong was my desire just then to

punch Captain Luke's head for him, that while I was at the top of my rage he came aft to where I was leaning against the rail and put his hand on my shoulder as friendly as possible and asked me to come down into the cabin to supper. I suppose I had a queer pale look, because of my anger, for he said not to mind if I did feel sickish, but to eat all the same and I would feel better for it; and he really was so cordial and so pleasant that for a moment or two I could not answer him. It was upsetting, when I was so full of fight, to have him come at me in that friendly way; and I must say that I felt rather sheepish, and wondered whether I had not been working myself up over a mare's-nest as I followed him below.

We had the mate to supper with us, at a square table in the middle of the cabin, and at breakfast the next morning we had the second mate; and so it went turn and turn with them at meals—except that they had some sort of dog-watch way about the Saturday night and Sunday morning that always gave the mate his Sunday dinner with the captain, as was the due of his rank.

The mate was a surly brute, and when Captain Chilton said, in quite a formal way, "Mr. Roger Stetworth, let me make you acquainted with Mr. George Hinds," he only grunted and gave me a sort of a nod. He did not have much to say while the supper went on, speaking only when the captain spoke to him, and then shortly; but from time to time he snatched a mighty sharp look at me—that I pretended not to notice, but saw well enough out of the tail of my eye. It was plain enough that he was taking my measure, and I even fancied that he would have been better

pleased had I been six inches or so shorter and with less well-made shoulders and arms. When he did speak it was in a growling rumble of a voice, and he swore naturally.

Captain Luke evidently tried to make up for the mate's surliness; and he really was very pleasant indeed—telling me stories about the Coast, and giving me good advice about guarding against sickness there, and showing such an interest in my prospects with the palm-oil people, and in my welfare generally, that I was still more inclined to think that my scare about the shackles was only foolishness from first to last. He seemed to be really pleased when he found that I was not seasick, and interested when I told him how well I knew the sea and the management of small craft from my sailing in the waters about Nantucket every summer for so many years; and then we got to talking about the Coast again and about my outfit for it, which he said was a very good one; and he especially commended me—instead of laughing at me, as I was afraid he would—for having brought along such a lot of quinine. Indeed, the quinine seemed to make a good deal of an impression on him, for he turned to the mate and said: "Do you hear that, George? Mr. Stetworth has with him a whole case of quinine—enough to serve a ship's company through a cruise." And the mate rumbled out, as he got up from the table and started for the deck, that quinine was a damned good thing.

We waited below until the second mate came down, to whom the captain introduced me with his regular formula: "Mr. Roger Stetworth, let me make you acquainted with Mr. Martin Bowers." He was a young fellow, of no more than my own age, and I took a fancy to him at sight—for he not only

shook my hand heartily but he looked me squarely in the eyes, and that is a thing I like a man to do. It seemed to me that my being there was a good deal of a puzzle to him; and he also took my measure, but quite frankly—telling me when he had looked me over that if I knew how to steer I'd be a good man to have at the wheel in a gale.

The captain brought out a bottle of his favorite arrack, and he and I had a glass together—in which, as I thought rather hard, Bowers was not given a chance to join us—and then we went on deck and walked up and down for a while, smoking our pipes and talking about the weather and the prospects for the voyage. And it all went so easily and so pleasantly that I couldn't help laughing a little to myself over my scare.

I turned in early, for I was pretty well tired after so lively a day; but when I got into my bunk I could not get to sleep for a long while—although the bunk was a good one and the easy motion of the brig lulled me—for the excitement I was in because my voyage fairly was begun. I slipped through my mind all that had happened to me that day—from my meeting with Captain Luke in the forenoon until there I was, at nine o'clock at night, fairly out at sea; and I was so pleased with the series of lucky chances which had put me on my way so rapidly that my one mischance—my scare about the shackles—seemed utterly absurd.

It was perfectly reasonable, I reflected, for Captain Luke to carry out a lot of shackles simply as "trade." It was pretty dirty "trade," of course, but so was the vile so-called brandy he was carrying out with him; and so, for that matter, were the arms—which pretty certainly would be used in slaving

forays up from the Coast. And even supposing the very worst—that Captain Luke meant to ship a cargo of slaves himself and had these irons ready for them—that worst would come after I was out of the brig and done with her; the captain having told me that Loango, which was my landing-place, would be his first port of call. When I was well quit of the *Golden Hind* she and her crew and her captain, for all that I cared, might all go to the devil together. It was enough for me that I should be well treated on the voyage over; and from the way that the voyage had begun—unless the surly mate and I might have a bit of a flare-up—it looked as though I were going to be very well treated indeed. And so, having come to this comforting conclusion, I let the soft motion of the brig have its way with me and began to snooze.

A little later I was partly aroused by the sound of steps coming down the companion-way; and then by hearing, in the mate's rumble, these words: "I guess you're right, captain. As you had to run for it to-day before you could buy our quinine, it's a damn good thing he did get aboard, after all!"

I was too nearly asleep to pay much attention to this, but in a drowsy way I felt glad that my stock of quinine had removed the mate's objections to me as a passenger; and I concluded that my purchase of such an absurd lot of it—after getting worked up by my reading about the West Coast fevers—had turned out to be a good thing for me in the long-run.

After that the talk went on in the cabin for a good while, but in such low tones that even had I been wide awake I

could not have followed it. But I kept dozing off, catching only a word or two now and then; and the only whole sentence I heard was in the mate's rumble again: "Well, if we can't square things, there's always room for one more in the sea."

It all was very dream-like—and fitted into a dream that came later, in the light sleep of early morning, I suppose, in which the mate wore the uniform of a street-car conductor, and I was giving him doses of quinine, and he was asking the passengers in a car full of salt-water to move up and make room for me, and was telling them and me that in a sea-car there always was room for one more.

IV

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CAPTAIN LUKE MAKES ME AN OFFER

During the next fortnight or so my life on board the brig was as pleasant as it well could be. On the first day out we got a slant of wind that held by us until it had carried us fairly into the northeast trades—and then away we went on our course, with everything set and drawing steady, and nothing much to do but man the wheel and eat three square meals a day.