

Nicholas Spark Walks on Water

“ . . . AND THEN, ONE BY ONE, EACH SLAVE AND EACH member of the crew went blind,” Purvis related, “and the Captain and the officers hid in their quarters for fear they would catch the horrible disease. But they ran short of food and water and were forced out. Then the First Mate went blind, and one by one, the officers lost their sight. Blind, they roamed the decks. Blind, they found no drink or food. The Captain determined to escape the ship in the small boat. But he was so desperate, he broke his arm trying to disengage the boat and lower it to the water. And so he was alone with the dead and the dying beneath the blazing sun. And the ship was loose upon the sea, flung here and there as the sea wished, and no one has seen it to this day.”

“But how is it known that the Captain broke his arm?” I asked.

“Ah . . .” sighed Seth Smith, “we just know.” The weak light from the oil lamp cast shadows shaped like spoons on the faces of the men. Gardere had shut his eyes tight as though blinded by Purvis’ story.

“Other ships passed it by before it disappeared,” Purvis said to me in that tone of absolute conviction I’d heard before in the men’s voices when they’d told tales that were more invention than truth. “And a certain Captain swore he saw the small boat hanging at such an angle from its davits that it was clear the Master of that ship had made an unsuccessful attempt to lower it and harmed himself.”

I could not follow Purvis’ reasoning at all, yet there was a sense of truth about the story, at least about the horror of it.

“Is there no cure for such a disease?” I asked.

“None,” replied Ned. “No more than there’s a cure for man himself.” I stared at him, still wondering why he’d given me such a blow when I’d cried out at the sight of the dead child. I hoped he’d been trying to protect me. I knew now how the crew responded to any sign of my distress at the plight of the blacks.

“Never mind that, Ned,” said Gardere sulkily, opening his eyes wide. “You’re not a saint, you know.” Gardere’s

voice was thick as though his throat was full of honey, and his words were faintly slurred. All the men had been drinking heavily ever since Gardere and Purvis had come off watch. Even though it was so late, they had not, as was their habit, flung themselves instantly into their hammocks.

We had weighed anchor and sailed that evening so the slaves would not see the shore of their homeland disappearing, and a fresh land wind was bearing us along smoothly. But the men were not eased by our progress; their mood was restless and shadowed by gloom. All day, they'd been telling each other stories of lost ships although none so dreadful as the one I'd just heard.

But the stories did not drown out the sounds from the holds. Not all the gabble of the sailors, the sustained flow of the wind that drove us on, could mask the keening of the slaves as they twisted and turned on the water casks, or struggled to find an edge of one of a handful of straw pallets upon which to rest their shackled ankles. I dozed. I woke. Never to silence. Would it go on this way to the end of our voyage? Sharkey claimed they would settle down. Settle down to what?

It seemed that Benjamin Stout was to be in charge of the slaves. Next day, he raced from one task to another. Although I had grown to dislike the slowness of his walk and gesture,

I found his energy even more repulsive. He saw to the water rations, to Curry's activities with the huge cauldron. Frequently, he hung over the holds, shouting down a few words of the African language. I asked Ned if he, too, could speak African. He told me there were as many languages in Africa as there were tribes but since none of them were Christian he would not corrupt his tongue by learning a single word from any of them. Did he know, I asked him, what people we carried on our ship? Ashantis, he'd replied with disgust, probably captured in tribal wars with the Yoruba.

"But the children don't battle, do they?" I asked.

"The chiefs kidnap the children," he replied. "The slavers give good trade goods for them because they fetch such high prices in the West Indies." He looked contemptuously toward the now distant shore, more like a low-lying cloud than land. "The African was tempted and then became depraved by a desire for the material things offered him by debased traders. It's all the Devil's work."

I looked at him curiously. "But you're a slaver, ain't you, Ned?"

"My heart's not in it," he said flatly. I wondered about his heart, imagining it to be something like one of the raisins Curry used to slip into the duff.

We hadn't had such a good thing to eat as duff in many

weeks. Being on a ship and eating from its stores was like a man burning down his house to keep warm.

I had not yet been seriously afflicted with the thing called sea-sickness. But early the next morning, we hit a strange turbulence in the sea so that *The Moonlight* pitched forward, then rolled sideways in such rapid alternation that my stomach did likewise. I took only a swallow of water. I felt that if I didn't keep my mouth tightly closed, I should be turned inside out like a garment that was to be laundered.

If the ship's wild pitching made me ill, it drove the blacks below into frenzies of terror. Howls and cries rose out of the holds unceasingly. The ship herself seemed to protest the violence of the water, whining and creaking more loudly than I'd ever heard her.

Ben Stout, the Captain and Spark appeared untouched by the suffering of our cargo. I can't say the rest of the crew took pity on the miserable creatures in their dark places below the deck, but the men were silent, and avoided the holds as much as they could.

The Captain had had his chair lashed close to the wheel and did not leave it until we were free of this convulsion of the sea. Spark had joined Stout near the holds, wearing his pistol and carrying the same tarred rope with which Purvis had been flogged. Spark never looked down no matter what

sounds issued from below. Then I forgot my sick stomach, forgot everything.

As he left his chair, the Captain shouted, "Tell Bollweevil to get his pipe." Gardere glanced briefly at me from his position at the helm. I could not read his expression.

With a small smile, Stout said, "Get ready to play your music, lad," then reached out his hand to pat my shoulder. I moved back quickly as though a cotton-mouth had struck in my direction. I saw, as clearly as I could see the cat-o'-nine-tails in his other hand, those fleshy fingers gripped around the ankle of the dead little girl.

I went below and got my fife, but stood unmoving in the dark until I heard them shouting for me.

The slaves from one of the holds were being hoisted one by one to the deck. Only the women and the youngest children were unshackled.

In just a few days, they had become so battered, so bowed by the fears that must have tormented them, that they could barely stand up. They blinked in the bright white light of the growing day. Then they sank to the deck, the women clutching weakly at the children, their shoulders bent over as though to receive the blows of death.

All hands were present; even Ned was ordered to leave his workbench and stand to attention.

The slaves were given their water rations and fed rice with a sauce of pepper and oil. When they saw the food and water, sighs rose from them like small puffs of wind, one following so close on the other that in the end, it seemed one great exhalation of air.

"Some of them think we eat them," whispered Purvis to me. "They think that first meal was only to fool them. When they see we intend to keep on feeding them, they grow quite cheerful."

I saw no cheer. The adults are mournfully, the food dribbling from their lips as though their spirits were too low to keep their jaws firm. The children spoke among themselves. Sometimes a woman held a child's head as though she feared its voice might draw down punishment upon it, and rice from the child's mouth would spill across her arm.

When they had finished their meal, the Captain said to Stout, "Tell them to stand up. And tell them we have a musician for them and that they are to dance for me."

"I can't tell them all that, Sir," Stout replied. "I don't know their words for dancing or for music."

"Then tell them *something* to get them to their feet!" cried the Captain angrily as he flourished his pistol.

Stout began to speak to the slaves. They did not look at him. Some stared up at the tarpaulin as though there were

a picture painted on it; others looked down at their feet.

We had formed a circle around them, dressed, shod, most of us armed. Many of them were naked; a few had ragged bits of cloth around their waists. I glanced at the sailors. Ned's eyes were turned upward toward heaven. I supposed he was reporting to God on the folly of everyone else but himself. But the rest were staring fixedly at the slaves. I felt fevered and agitated. I sensed, I saw, how beyond the advantage we had of weapons, their nakedness made them helpless. Even if we had not been armed, our clothes and boots alone would have given us power.

There was something else that held the attention of the men—and my own. It was the unguarded difference between the bodies of the men and women.

I had told no living soul that on some of my late walks through the old quarter at home, I had dared the chance of hell fire by glancing through the windows of certain houses where I had seen women undressing, and undressed. I can only say that I didn't *linger* at those windows. Sometimes, after my peeking, I had been ashamed. Other times, I had rolled on the ground with laughter. Why I was chagrined in one instance and hilarious in another, I don't know.

But what I felt now, now that I could gaze without

restraint at the helpless and revealed forms of these slaves, was a mortification beyond any I had ever imagined.

At the increasingly harsh shouts of Ben Stout, some of the black men had risen, swaying, to their feet. Then others stood. But several remained squatting. Stout began to lay about him with the cat-o'-nine, slapping the deck, flicking its fangs toward the feet of those who had not responded to his cries with even a twitch. At last, he whipped them to their feet. The women had risen at the first word, clutching the small children to their breasts.

"Bollweevil!" called the Captain.

Ned suddenly lit up his pipe.

I blew. A broken squeak came out of my fife.

"Tie him to the topmost crossrees!" screamed Caw-thorne. Stout, smiling, started toward me. I blew again. This time I managed a thin note, then some semblance of a tune.

The cat-o'-nine slapped the deck. Spark clapped his hands without a trace of rhythm. The Captain waved his arms about as though he'd been attacked by a horde of flies. A black man drooped toward the deck until Spark brought his heel down on his thin bare foot.

I played on against the wind, the movement of the ship and my own self-disgust, and finally the slaves began to lift their feet, the chains attached to the shackles around their

ankles forming an iron dirge, below the trills of my tune. The women, being unshackled, moved more freely, but they continued to hold the children close. From no more than a barely audible moan or two, their voices began to gain strength until the song they were singing, or the words they were chanting, or the story they were telling overwhelmed the small sound of my playing.

All at once, as abrupt as the fall of an axe, it came to a stop. Ben Stout snatched the fife from my hands. The slaves grew silent. The dust they had raised slowly settled around them.

That morning, I danced three groups of slaves. In the last, I saw the boy who I thought had looked at me when I cried out at Stout's heaving the child overboard. He wouldn't stand up. Spark dealt him a mighty blow with the tarred rope which left its tooth on the boy's back, a red channel in the tight brown flesh. He stood then, moving his feet as though they didn't belong to him.

It was to perform this service every other morning that I had been kidnapped and carried across the ocean.

I dreaded the coming of daylight. I listened without interest to rumors—that two of the slaves had fever, that the ship we had seen to windward was an American cruiser in pursuit of *The Moonlight*, that Spark had suddenly taken to

drink, that Stout was the Captain's spy among us, that a black child had the pox.

In the harbor of São Tomé, in the sickly haze of a morning when I'd been relieved of all my duties save that of emptying the latrine buckets, I wondered if I dared leap overboard and take my chances on reaching the shore. But what would I find there? Other men who might use me worse than I was being used? Or a captain who tortured his own crew? God knows, I had heard of such things!

Now the slaves were fighting among themselves. The immediate cause was the latrine buckets. Many of them could not reach them quickly enough across the bodies of the others, for there was not a spare inch of space. Most of them had what Purvis called the bloody flux, an agonizing affliction of their bowels that not only doubled them up with cramps but made the buckets entirely inadequate.

One night as we lay at anchor, waiting for the morning when fresh supplies would be loaded on the ship, I heard a scream of inhuman force, of intolerable misery. I began to weep helplessly myself, covering my mouth with an old cap of Stout's for fear one of the crew would hear me.

We sailed from the island shortly, with no regrets on my part. It was as though I was trying to swallow the long days ahead, to stuff them down my throat, to make them pass with

a gulp, thinking of that hour, that minute, when I would be let off this ship.

When we were two days out on our westward course, I heard once again that cry from one of the holds, a woman's scream, hair-raising, heart-squeezing. I had been dancing a group of slaves, and at that terrible sound, Spark signaled me to stop my tune. Stout ran to the hold from which the cry had issued. He disappeared down it. Not a minute later, a black woman was tossed upon the deck like a doll of rags.

"Over!" said the Captain. Spark and Stout lifted the woman, who was alive, carried her to the rail and swung her up and over. We didn't hear the splash she must have made when she hit the water, but then we were making speed before a fair breeze.

"She had the fever," Stout said to me as he passed, "and was dying and would have infected the rest of them." He was not trying to excuse himself. No, it was only his usual trick. He knew I thought he was evil, but he liked to suggest that beneath that I held another opinion of him, that, in fact, I admired him. It was a complicated insult.

The slaves were all looking at the place where the woman had been thrown overboard. Sick and stooped, half-starved by now, and soiled from the rarely cleaned holds, they stared hopelessly at the empty horizon.

I found a dreadful thing in my mind.

I hated the slaves! I hated their shuffling, their howling, their very suffering! I hated the way they spat out their food upon the deck, the overflowing buckets, the emptying of which tried all my strength. I hated the foul stench that came from the holds no matter which way the wind blew, as though the ship itself were soaked with human excrement. I would have snatched the rope from Spark's hand and beaten them myself! Oh, God! I wished them all dead! Not to hear them! Not to smell them! Not to know of their existence!

I dropped my fife on the deck and fled to my hammock.

I would stay there until I was forcibly removed.

Which I was, soon enough.

They sent Seth Smith to get me.

"Get down!"

"Damn you all!" I said.

"If I have to carry you, it'll go hard for you."

I gripped the edges of my hammock. He turned it over with one movement of his hand, then caught me round the waist and took me to the deck.

The slaves had been returned to the hold. Captain Cawthorne was holding my fife in his hand, turning it idly. Standing next to him was Ben Strout. The fife reflected bright bits of sunlight.

"We won't have none of that," the Captain remarked. I recalled Purvis' mad song to himself about some of this and some of that. Purvis was nowhere to be seen. Ned was bent over his bench, a piece of chain in his carpenter's vise. I only noticed now that he was extremely thin, and that he looked ill.

"You're not so young you don't know what an order is," the Captain said. He shoved the fife at my chest and poked about with it as though trying to discover what I had concealed beneath my shirt.

"Stand to the rail," he ordered.

I did. The sea was blue today.

"Five," said the Captain.

Five times, Strout brought the rope down on my back. I had been determined not to cry out. But I did. It hurt more than I could have imagined. But I was not ashamed of my cries, for each time the rope fell, I thought of the slaves, of the violent hatred I had felt for them that had so frightened me that I had defied Master and crew. My eyes flooded with tears. The taste of salt was in my mouth. But as the blows fell, I became myself again. That self had gone through such transformations, I could not claim to be altogether familiar with it. But one thing was clear. I was a thirteen-year-old male, not as tall though somewhat heavier than a boy close to my own age, now doubled up

in the dark below, not a dozen yards from where I was being beaten.

Seth Smith did not look at me as he carried me back to my hammock. Through the red haze which at the moment afflicted my vision I saw a stupid determination in his face like that I had observed on the features of drunken men who fight at any excuse.

Later, Ned came to tend my back, and Purvis showed up, scratching himself and snorting and making every effort to appear at ease.

"Don't feel too bad, Jessie," he said. "There's not a sailor living who's not felt the lash."

"Don't tell him such nonsense," protested Ned. "Don't make out it's an honor to be beaten. It's all because of greed and its festering excuses."

They bickered back and forth but they spoke in whispers, perhaps to spare me their noise. I paid no attention for my emotions were changing from second to second, and I had no interest in anything else as my rage against Ben Stout gave way to hopelessness at the thought of the weeks ahead, and hopelessness in its turn was vanquished by the intense pain that spread out from my back until my very toes throbbled with it.

They left me to myself at last, but not before Purvis had offered me beer, saying it would cure me entirely—which it

didn't. It was only then my brain steeled. I think it must have steeled, for I felt an extraordinary sad tranquility, that same sad and empty calm the sea had on certain cool mornings when you knew it would look the same if you weren't there to see it.

I knew Stout would come creeping about with some explanation, so that when he did, I was not surprised.

"I laid the rope lightly on you, Jessie," he said. "You know, don't you, I could have done much worse? Well—I can see that you're angry with me—and I would be the same if it had been you—"

"I don't want to hear you speak," I said as coldly as I could. "Not now, never again."

"I wouldn't be so impertinent if I was you, lad," he remarked softly. "I have the Captain's good will, and there's none else on this ship that has!"

"Who else *would* he fancy except you?" I replied. He could do me no worse than he had done, and right now I didn't care if he tossed me into the sea.

He sighed and shook his head, then smiled down at his own hand as though only he and it could comprehend my backwardness.

My wounds healed. But the ship and its crew, among whom I once imagined I had taken root, learning each man

like a new language, and even developing some skill in small tasks about the ship, had become as remote from my understanding as were the lands that lay beneath the ocean. I became cautious. I observed the sailors with as little pity as they observed the blacks. As for them, I shuddered at the barousness of chance which had brought each of them to our holds, although, as I had good reason to know, chance often wore a suit of clothes, and sometimes chewed tobacco, and carried a pistol.

Except for Ned, who held all living men in low esteem, I saw the others regarded the slaves as less than animals, although having a greater value in gold. But except for Stout and Spark and the Captain, the men were not especially cruel save in their shared and unshakable conviction that the least of them was better than any black alive. Gardere and Purvis and Cooley even played with the small black children who now roamed the deck with relative freedom, the sailors allowing themselves to be chased about if the Captain and Spark were not watching, giving the children extra water from their own slim rations and fashioning rough toys of wood to amuse them.

As for Spark, I concluded he was entirely brainless and evil only in the way that certain plants are poisonous. The Captain was dangerous, driven to hateful actions by his pas-

sion for what he described as "business." But Stout was like no one else. He could not be shamed; he would not show anger. And I could not help watching him, though I iched with irritation, and wearied my brain devising plots to catch him out in the open.

To relieve my feelings, I spoke of them to Purvis.

He listened soberly for once, and said, "I suppose you're right, Jessie. He's a bad one. You know he was tormenting that female we dropped overboard, don't you? Did you know it was him that drove the poor creature mad?"

I was astonished to hear him use the word *poor*, and it confused my sense of what he was saying.

Seeing by my expression that I was baffled, although not guessing the cause, he exclaimed impatiently, "The nigger woman, the nigger woman!"

"But what did he do to her?" I asked.

"I didn't see it, but Isaac told me he had her up on deck during his watch. He was speaking to her in that language of theirs, and she was weeping and wailing, then Stout would strike her across the face, then speak some more until she fell on the deck in a fit. God knows what stories he was telling her! It's a curse for the blacks he speaks their tongue. You can be sure he addles their minds with his tales."

"But why didn't the Captain interfere?"

“The Captain! He cares nothing for what’s done to them as long as they can still draw breath. And he doesn’t know about Stout and the nigger woman. Why, I believe he’d have the dead ones stuffed if he thought he could sell them so! And when he loses a few, he still has the insurance. He can always say he jettisoned the sick ones to save the healthy. And he’ll collect! He always has. And if they’re *all* sickly when we get where we’re going, there’s many a trick for hiding their condition. Anyhow, the planter’s will buy them no matter what, for if they drop dead in the fields, there’s an endless supply of them.”

We hit a spell of bad weather. There were fitful winds, and days with no wind when the sea lay around us like a brazen platter. The fights among the crew were louder than those among the slaves. Our rations were minimal. The ship echoed with a noise such as crows make battling for tree space. Between the wet and wind of squalls, and the heat and haze of windless days, there was not a moment of ease.

My stomach rebelled. I was ill all the time. Barely able to stand, I danced the slaves, seeing how the men’s ankles had been gnawed at by their shackles as though the metal things were vicious and alive. They could hardly move to my tunes. Often, only Stout and myself attended the grim ceremony in the morning. I hated what I did. I tried to comfort myself

with the thought that, at least, it gave them time out of the hold. But what was the point of that or of anything else?

The Moonlight had long since lost her sleek look—the deck was filthy, the ship stank to the heavens, the men dressed themselves in what lay closest to hand, the drinking started again, and the drunkenness spewed itself out in anger and bewilderment.

I remembered one of the seamen telling me one could get used to anything. There was a half truth in that—if you were on a ship and there was no way off it save to drown. But I found a kind of freedom in my mind. I found out how to be in another place. You simply imagined it. I recalled every object in our room on Pirate’s Alley. Each day brought with it the memory of something else until I think I could have counted the floorboards, traced upon the air the cracks in the walls, counted the spools of thread in the basket by the window. Then I would step outside and see the houses across the way, the cobblestones of the street, the faces of neighbors.

When I was thus occupied, winning liberty from the ship, I boiled with rage if someone spoke to me. I could no longer trust my tongue, but though I feared I might, all unknowing, snap at Cawthorne himself, I could not relinquish my dream of home.

Then, one morning, it began to penetrate through my

fog of recollection that the young black boy was paying me heed. Aware of his eyes, I tried to move out of their range. Next time, he seemed as he lifted his feet to be moving close to me. I saw that Stout's attention, for the moment, was directed toward Ned who was half lying across his bench. I can't think what impulse moved me, but I took the fife from my lips and whispered my name to the boy. Only that. "*Yes-
sire!*" And as I whispered, I pointed at myself. I began to play at once. The boy's eyes never left my face that morning.

There were days when one might have thought all was peaceful, when the wind was steady, the sun shone warmly from a cloudless sky, when the small black children tumbled and ran about and even laughed among themselves, when the holds had been cleaned, and the slaves sat quietly beneath the tarpaulin while the seamen gazed pensively across the rolling fields of the sea. It was a piece of magic, and for an hour or two I forgot the heat and smell and pain and had no cause to trouble myself with pictures of home. It never lasted long, and was itself like a dream.

Before we began our turn toward Cape Verde, several events occurred which affected the rest of our voyage. The first was the death of Louis Gardere on one of those dead calm mornings that filled us all with despair.

He had been at the wheel, the Captain at his side.

Suddenly Gardere's face seemed to move off its bones; one shoulder twisted and turned as though it were not part of him. Then he dropped to the deck, his body twitching. Ned, clearly sick himself by this time, examined Gardere. He died an hour later, clutching his chest with his powerful hands and mumbling words we could not make out.

Purvis spoke of it all night, reviewing each moment, telling Ned it could not have been a heart seizure but was undoubtedly some fever Gardere had caught from the blacks.

As though to confirm Purvis, six blacks died that night. Ned, held up by Sharkey and Isaac Porter, examined their bodies.

"Fever," he said through pale dry lips, and fainted dead away. He was taken below where after a few minutes, he regained consciousness. He watched us with unblinking eyes. I felt the fear of the men, and my own fear. It was like the smell of the ship—it ran into every crack and cranny of my mind.

The crew sobered up. The ship made headway for several days and the men grew more cheerful. But Ned became thinner as though his substance was leaking away through his hammock. He would drink water now and then, or hold a bit of a biscuit soaked in wine in his mouth.

"What do you have, Ned?" I asked him.

"A touch of death," he whispered. I spilled the cup

I had been holding to his lips. A faint grin stretched his mouth.

"Haven't you heard of the wages of sin?" he asked in a quavering voice. "Did you think they were gold?"

The day we changed our course for the northwest, Nicholas Spark took leave of whatever senses he had.

That morning, he'd indulged in one of his savageries, bringing his heel down on the feet of a black man who'd spat out his food. Before my eyes could take it in, the man leaped at Spark and gripped his throat in such a way the Mate could not get at his pistol. If it had not been for the intervention of Stout, Spark would have been strangled.

The black man was flogged until he was unconscious. At the first stroke of the whip, I'd gone to the galley and found Curry picking worms out of a piece of crusted beef. I shuddered in the greasy dark as his parrot fingers plucked and squeezed at the horrible white things. When, no longer able to bear Curry's hunting, I returned to the deck, I saw the beaten man hanging against the ropes that bound him to the mast. The blood was leaking from his back in dark streams. Stout, the whip in his hand, was speaking to the Captain, and Purvis was at the helm.

I had started toward our quarters when I caught sight of Spark staggering from the stern, his pistol held straight out

in his hand. He fired at the black man whose back burst into fragments of flesh. Cawthorne spun to face the Mate, his face red with fury.

I don't know whether Spark was still dazed from his near escape from strangulation, or whether he really meant to point his pistol at the Master of the ship. But the Master had no such doubts.

In not much more time than it takes to tell it, Nicholas Spark was bound with a rope and pushed to the rail and there dropped over. Just before he disappeared beneath the water, I swear he took three steps.

I ran to hide beneath Ned's hammock. In the silence, I listened to his labored breathing.

Finally, I spoke. "Ned," I whispered. "The Captain's had the Mate thrown overboard."

"I ain't surprised," said Ned.

Then Purvis joined us and told Ned the whole story. Ned said nothing, but I said I'd never seen a man so angry at another man as the Captain had been at Spark.

"I should say so!" exclaimed Purvis. "Why he dared to shoot that black!"

"But I thought it was because he pointed his pistol at Cawthorne," I said.

"Oh, not at all, lad," replied Purvis. "Old Cawthorne's

been through mutinies before. He never lost a hair! But Cawthorne knew the black would recover—they can survive floggings that would kill a white man a hundred times over—and Spark killed him. Don't you see? *There went the profit!*"

I heard a strange sound in our seabound cave, a sound like wind rustling dead leaves. It was Ned, laughing.

The Spaniard

"HAVE YOU EVER WATCHED A COCKFIGHT, JESSIE? You'd never guess a fowl had so much life in it till you saw one with murder in its eye. It moves so fast you can only tell where the beak struck when the blood spurts! It's the finest sight in the world! I'd like to have my own fighting cocks someday. I've devised a plan to make the viewing better. There's always some who can't see the pit over the heads of the others, but here's how I would do it—"

"Cooley, leave off with your birds!" Sam Wick interrupted. "It's only savages who'd take pleasure in such a spectacle. We've outlawed it in Massachusetts. As for owning anything, you'll be fortunate if you end your days with something over your head to keep off the rain."

"They've outlawed everything in Massachusetts," retorted Cooley without much fire. The two sailors fell silent. Both