

BLUE BOOK

OF FICTION AND ADVENTURE

AUGUST

15¢

AUGUST 1939

THE BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE

VOL. 69 No. 4

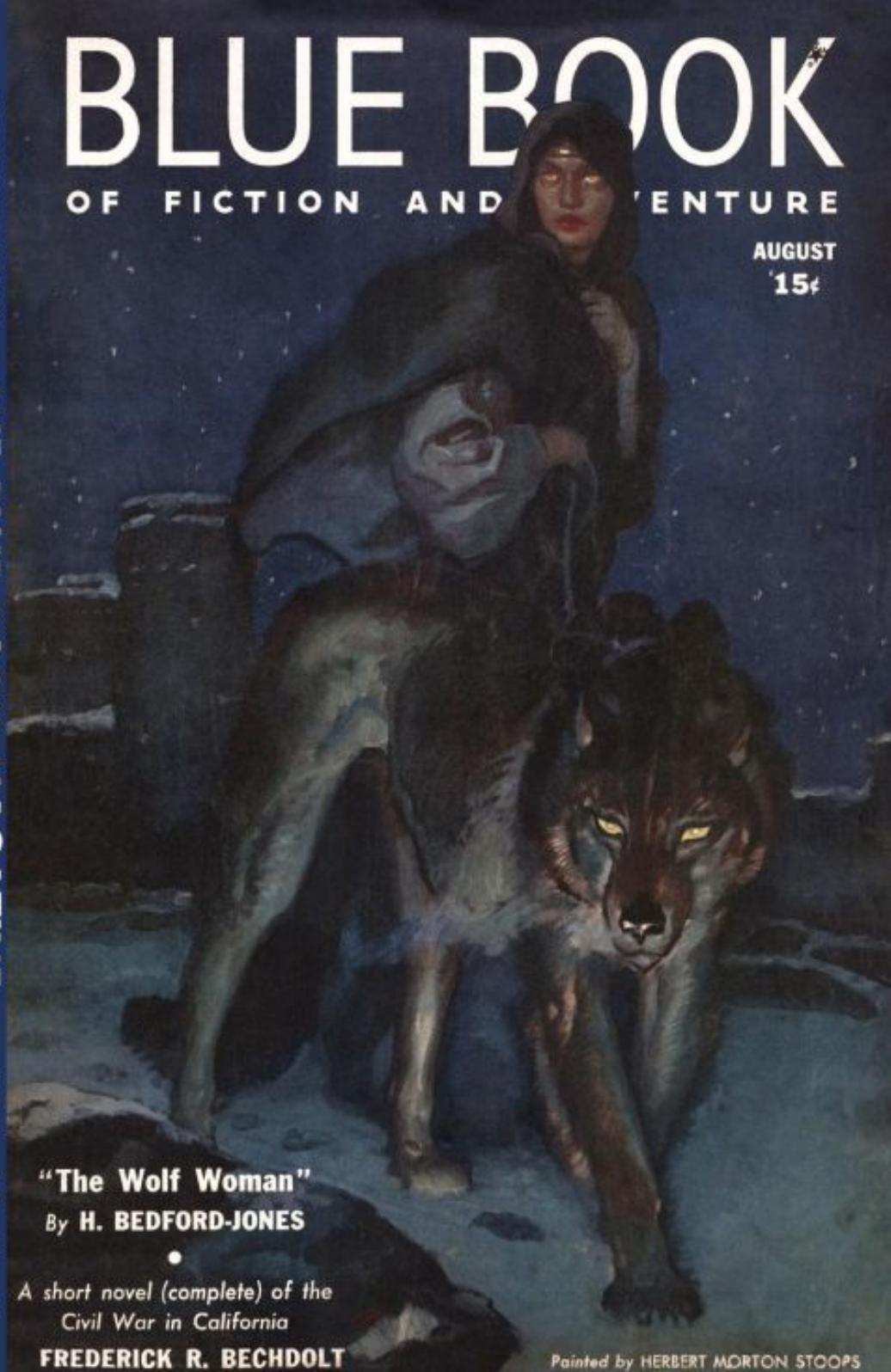
"The Wolf Woman"

By H. BEDFORD-JONES

A short novel (complete) of the
Civil War in California

FREDERICK R. BECHDOLT

Painted by HERBERT MORTON STOOPS



*** A Distributed Proofreaders Canada eBook ***

This eBook is made available at no cost and with very few restrictions. These restrictions apply only if (1) you make a change in the eBook (other than alteration for different display devices), or (2) you are making commercial use of the eBook. If either of these conditions applies, please contact a <https://www.fadedpage.com> administrator before proceeding. Thousands more FREE eBooks are available at <https://www.fadedpage.com>.

This work is in the Canadian public domain, but may be under copyright in some countries. If you live outside Canada, check your country's copyright laws. IF THE BOOK IS UNDER COPYRIGHT IN YOUR COUNTRY, DO NOT DOWNLOAD OR REDISTRIBUTE THIS FILE.

Title: The Yellow Ship

Date of first publication: 1939

Author: Henry Bedford-Jones (1887-1949)

Date first posted: Dec. 29, 2021

Date last updated: Dec. 29, 2021

Faded Page eBook #20211270

This eBook was produced by: Alex White & the online Distributed Proofreaders Canada team at <https://www.pgdpCanada.net>

This file was produced from images generously made available by Internet Archive.

The Yellow Ship

By H. BEDFORD-JONES

and CAPTAIN L. B. WILLIAMS

Captain L. B. Williams is a pseudonym of Henry Bedford-Jones.

Illustrated by Frederic Anderson

First published *Blue Book*, August 1939.

The grim story of an old-time convict ship—the thirty-second story of the “Ships and Men” series.



We had been talking of queer ships; rattan ships, concrete ships, and some one even mentioned the old Chinese Navy *guardo* built of red brick, that used to be moored off the Shanghai Bund.

“Queerest of all was the Yellow Ship,” said the Professor; he had thick lenses, a shock of rope-yarn hair, and a positive way of speech. “That is, if you look at what’s inside of a ship, not outside. There’s a great yarn in her last voyage.”

“Never heard of her,” grunted Cap’n Fitzmaurice, the hydrographer.

“It’s not a nice story, some ways,” the Professor said, hesitating. He drew an old, tattered book from his pocket and thumbed

it. “All dead true, but strong. A bit too strong, I expect.”

Cap’n Dahl, the local steamboat inspector, who had commanded his own brig at twenty-one, let out a booming laugh.

“What d’ye think we are, Professor? Kids in school?”

The Professor frowned, screwing up his face and thumbing his bit of a book.

“Well, not that. It’s the sort of thing people shrink from facing, nowadays; they like to say it never existed.” He glanced at Cap’n Birchwood, the big Britisher. “I’m talking about convict ships, which had a definite place in sea history; but I don’t want to offend anybody, and—”

“Yoicks! Don’t mind me!” bawled out the husky Birchwood. “You Yanks still have your chain-gangs, not to mention sweat-boxes where you burn prisoners alive. Strong stuff, is it?”

Then let's have it! Yellow ship and the broad arrow, I suppose. Eh? If you can get any worth-while yarn out of a convict ship, you have my leave!"

"You can get a worth-while story out of anything," said the Professor, holding up the old book. "It's all here, printed in 1827, set down by James Conroy; but I warn you, it's—well, it's a thing to shy at, if you're afraid of the truth. It's none of your la-de-da yarns about nice people and perfumed ladies and polished gentlemen."

"Thank God for that!" exclaimed Cap'n Dahl fervently. "If it's the real stuff I'll cry amen! I'm mortal sick of the sort of tripe that uses cusswords just to make an impression, like some men I know."

The Professor smiled. "All right, you asked for it. It's real, too; all eyewitness stuff. We're dealing with criminals, remember. Felons. None of your hero-falsely-accused lemonade, but honest rum with a kick to it."

"One o' the best men I know," said Cap'n Fitzmaurice, "is in Sing Sing today, and deserves to be there. Heave ahead! Where do we start?"

"At Spithead, year not specified, but around 1800," the Professor rejoined. "The *Phoenix* sailed in convoy with four other convict ships. She was Moulmein built, of solid teak; like the others, she was painted a bright yellow and blazingly marked with the mark of Crown property, the broad arrow. Being the largest and best equipped of the whole felon fleet, she was designated as a women's ship; that is, given over to female prisoners alone. You'll have to understand conditions—"

Hard enough in all conscience—for felons were not human but mere beasts, so far as treatment went. Crowds of wretched females, all ages from twelve years to sixty, were jammed into the narrow cells, with no ventilation and only occasional supervision by the convict guards. One may well shrink from the facts.

Captain Ronson, in command, was a gross hulk whose life had been spent in the meanest of all ships, the coasting colliers. His mate was one Ned Wolf; his second, a furtive gallows-bird named Spink. Captain Halter, officer of the hangdog soldiers who served as convict guards, had graduated from the prison docks at Portsmouth. No worse, or better, scoundrels could have been chosen by the contractors whose wolfish greed crowded the vessels to slave-ship capacity. The contractors received sixpence per day for each convict's food; the longer the voyage, the more they received from the Government. . . .

With all hands drunk or recovering from shore debauches the first few days out, little heed was paid the prisoners. Then Ronson sobered up, to find the ship bowling along on a fair wind and all well. He sent the cabin-boy for the mate, poured himself a round of grog with shaking fingers, and downed it.

Taking a long clay pipe from the rack, he filled and lit it, and eased himself into the big chair under the stern-window of the cabin. He was a coarse, bloated hulk, with a vile fury of temper when crossed, and at sea was a tyrant dreaded by men and officers alike. Hanging under the window, close to his hand, was a sling that carried two brass pistols. As he waited, he primed them afresh, then let them be and went on smoking. Another drop of rum, and he felt quite himself once more. He had been in a drunken stupor since yesterday.

Ned Wolf appeared, a lean, powerful man with boldly aggressive eye and truculent mien. The skipper surveyed him without love, and sneered at sight of a fresh bruise on the mate's upper cheek.

“So ye’ve been at the lasses already, Ned? And got something for your pains. Serves ye right for a scurvy rogue! Well, I suppose we got to sea without the smith and armorer we lacked?”

“We did not,” said Ned Wolf without respect. “You signed him on yourself, with Blowsy Fanny on one knee and her holding the quill.”

“Say ye so?” Ronson chuckled. “Is the fellow good?”

“Too blasted good,” growled Wolf. “A damned impudent rascal who needs a flogging. His name’s Connell. He knows his business, though.”

“Then all’s easy.” The skipper laid aside his churchwarden. “Come! Out wi’ the prisoner list, and God help you if you’ve laid a finger on one of ’em!”

Glowering, the surly mate produced a sheaf of papers. Ronson took them and scanned them quickly, and a contented chuckle shook him.

“Four hundred and thirty-one!” he exclaimed. “Happen there’ll be a few pearls among hell’s sweepings; there always are. Eh? Speak up, speak up!”

“Aye.” The mate grinned faintly, but his eyes remained dark and evil and alert.

Ronson grunted and poured another drop of rum into his mug.

“Fetch ’em in for inspection. And mind this, ye blackguard! Any cheating, and I’ll have ye triced up and given three dozen of the cat! That’s a promise.”

Wolf shot him one hard glance of bitter fury and disappeared.

Presently he was back, and Spink with him, and they ushered in six young girls, transported for offenses as monstrous as filching a comb from Madam’s dressing-table or mayhap stealing a loaf to avoid earning it less honestly. Half-clad, bedraggled and dirty and seasick, all six were weeping bitterly.

Before any could speak, however, a new sound came through the quarterdeck passage, a sound of thin wild cries and screaming.

“Zounds!” A bellowing oath escaped Ronson, and his empty mug slammed down on the table. “Spink! Find Halter and get below—jump! Any man who touches a lass now gets a dozen of the cat. Below, ye rogue! See to it!”

Spink darted away. Ronson sat back, muttering about the impudence of the rascals. His eyes scanned the six girls, and settled on one of them.

“Ha! You by the door—what’s your name?”

The one addressed, a pretty country chit of fourteen, could only stare at him, speechless, frightened, shivering.

“Speak up, speak up, lass!” said Ronson. “Passage aft, good bunks, good food, and naught to be afeared of, besides a chance of reaching Botany Bay alive and hearty, which is more than all those below can hope for. What’s your name?”

The girl burst into violent sobs. Ronson came to his feet, but at this moment came quick, heavy steps in the passage, and the door swung open. From the mate broke one low and vicious oath of rage.

Spink, now returned, was ushering in, with his crafty grin, a young woman and a tall, muscled figure of a man.

“This is one on the list but not below, Cap’n,” he exclaimed. “And here’s the smith and armorer likewise, who’ll have a word with ye.”

The skipper looked at the powerful features of the armorer, uncomprehending; then at the young woman.

No country girl, this, no sorry scum of the London streets, but a tall, darkly handsome lass who stood the deck like a seaman, and met his questing look with an eye of scorn. Well clad, brown of cheek, capable and alert, she was beautiful by any standard.

“Cap’n, this is Nell Bently of Devon,” said Spink, a malicious glitter in his eye as he caught the furious look of Ned Wolf. “Took for a smuggler and transported. Cap’n Nell, she’s called, having her own ketch and being a good seaman by all accounts. You’ll find her on the list all shipshape, but I found her locked in the mate’s cabin and fetched her along. All’s quiet down below for the present, Cap’n.”

The armorer, Connell, stood with arms folded across his chest, appraising the men and the scene before him. He had direct, unflinching eyes beneath straight black brows.

“So that’s it, is it?” mouthed Cap’n Ronson, fastening a deadly stare on the mate. “Holding out on the cap’n again! What, Ned, you’d cheat the master as loves you?”

His voice was deadly as his eye. Wolf rolled out a curse.

“Nothing of the sort! I tell you—”

“And she gave you that bruise on the cheek, Ned?” went on the master.

“I tell you, you don’t understand!” rasped Ned Wolf furiously. “Why, damme if I so much as knew she was aboard—”

“Belay,” came a new voice. Connell had suddenly broken silence, his tones ringing and vibrant with angry scorn. “No lies, no lies! Everyone knows Cap’n Nell was convicted and sent to the *Phœnix*. And she paid the mate well to keep her out o’ the cells and put her in peace.”

“Aye, aye,” spoke up the second officer craftily, a viciousness in his manner. He hated the mate bitterly. “It was her as give ’un the mark, Cap’n. He wanted her for hisself, but I fetched her aft. ’Twas me duty and no more.”

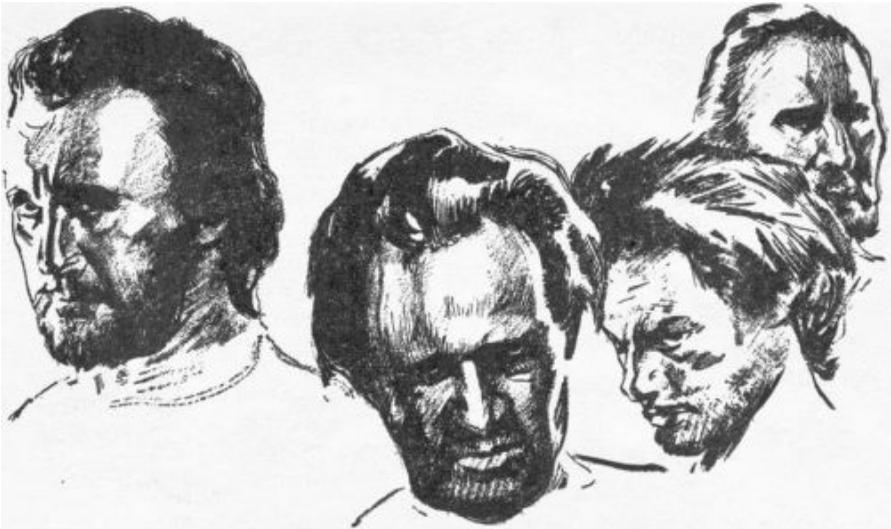
Ronson, finally comprehending things, was glaring at the mate, a purplish flush stealing into his gross features. He gently tucked one hand behind him to the sling hanging on the wall.

“Remember what I promised you, Ned,” said he. “You damned double-dealing rogue! Triced up to a grating at sunset, and three dozen of the cat criss-crossing your back, and a dose o’ salt rubbed in for good measure. I’ll learn ye to hold out on the ship’s master— ’Ware, you fool! Hand away from that knife—”

“Damn you, ’ware yourself!” screamed Wolf, shrilly, suddenly, and his hand flickered up and down. With that sudden scream, all hell was loosed.

The skipper’s hand leaped into sight, the brass pistol roared; the women shrieked wildly and powder-smoke rolled through the cabin. That heavy ball went true. With the blue mark of it between his eyes, the mate lay in a huddle. Ronson let fall the pistol and plucked at his fat throat with both hands. Ned Wolf’s knife had likewise driven true. Ronson plucked it out with a rush of blood, fell back against the wall, and slid down out of sight behind the table. He groaned once, then was still forever.

The girls were clinging to one another as the smoke cleared. Spink had retreated to the door; he stood against it, with a small pistol in either hand, his crafty, high-boned features alert and excited. Nell Bently was standing now within the arm of Connell, who craned over for a glance at the skipper, and then straightened up and met the gaze of the second mate. The women calmed down.



“Well,” said Connell curtly, “you’re in command.”

“Done, is he? Good riddance,” shrilled Spink. “And now what, Cap’n?”

“Eh?” Connell frowned, and the other laughed harshly.

“Oh, I twigged you the minute ye come aboard! Cap’n Connell, Cap’n Tom Connell o’ the *Devon Maid*! The shrewdest, boldest smuggler ’twixt Tilbury and Penzance, shipping as armorer aboard a yellow ship—ha-ha! The reason’s plain to see, in the bend of your arm.”

Connell’s eyes flashed cold and challenging. He abandoned all pretense.

“Aye, Cap’n Nell and I hang together,” he said curtly. “Do you turn back and ship other officers, or do you play out the game yourself?”

The excitement deepened in the pinched, bony features.

“Aye, that’s it!” Spink said quickly. “Cap’n, is it? Master of the ship, by God! A rare stroke of luck, and I’d be a fool to miss it. And yet—”

Connell’s laugh rang out sardonically.

“It’d make your reputation! Aye, Master Spink! To navigate the ship to Botany Bay would be the makin’s of you for life—if you knew how to do it! But your duty is to signal the convoy and take a master aboard.”

“Damn the convoy!” cried Spink. “I get what you’re driving at. You’re a captain and a famous one—the greatest blackguard on all the south coast to boot, and a reward on your head. King’s money for your capture. Ha! You risked a lot for the sake of a lass, you fool! Do we talk proper, or not?”

“Why not?” said Connell, relaxing. “Clear out these women and the two bodies, and then we’ll talk—you and I and Cap’n Nell.”

“Right,” said Spink, and cocked an eye at the window. “Sunset coming, and the night ahead—right! Stay here, the both of you. We’ll talk, over a bit o’ supper.”

So they did, and came finally to agreement on a basis of mutual understanding. Nell Bently said little, but used her eyes; she was used to dealing with men, and knew a bad one when she saw him.

Not that Spink seemed overtly a bad one. Connell read him for a cunning and cowardly rat—and was dead right. However, the man was affable, friendly, driven by a sudden ambition to

seize destiny by the forelock; he demanded that Connell teach him navigation and other duties of a master, stand behind him and coach him, and when needful fight for him.

To all of which Connell readily agreed, being himself eager to seize the great chance offered him. He was to become first officer, and Cap'n Nell would perforce share his cabin, space being cramped aboard. The women were not to be molested, and those in irons were to be loosed, confirmed criminals or not.

Spink protested, but gave in.

"You're asking for trouble," he said. "It's custom for the men; full half the crowd are criminals or worse, anyhow. Well, have it your own way! There'll be ructions in the morning."

Connell bared his teeth, a way he had.

"Back me up with pistols, and I'll handle these scum alone. We'll give 'em no time to think of women, after tomorrow! There's work enough to keep all hands slaving. And before we sight Botany Bay, you'll set me and Cap'n Nell ashore."



Spink promised readily. "What about taking a few more with you?" he said, laughing. "There's half a hundred would follow at your word, and you might set yourself up like a Grand Turk."

“I can’t save ’em all from hell,” said Connell, “though there’s many of ’em might be worth the effort. Now, we’re faster than the other ships. Stay you with them?”

“Damme if I will!” exclaimed Spink. “I’ll crack on all sail tonight, and they’ll be under the horizon with morning. Agreed, then! And here’s my hand on it.”



“I shipped aboard here in hopes to save ye from hell, lass. We’ll share the future. Content?”

Later, alone together, Connell took Cap’n Nell by the shoulders and met her brave steady eyes, gravely.

“Lass, from the day ye gave me your love, I’ve looked at no other woman, nor ever will. I shipped aboard here in hopes to save ye from hell; belike, it’s done. And for me, a new life and a new name, somewhere in a new country. We’ll share the future. Content?”

She laughed softly, richly. "My dear, I've been content from the day I first met you! But have a care. Don't take too much for granted. Spink is cunning, crafty, playing for his own hand. He'll stab you in the back if he gets a chance."

"You watch my back; I'll answer for the front," said Connell. "Besides, he's tied to us, now."

"He's not one to let the women alone," said she bluntly.

Connell nodded. "Like enough. None shall be forced, at least; there's plenty of them to consent willingly, and we'll let it go at that. But the young lasses sha'n't be molested. And there's Cap'n Halter to be reckoned with, too, with his sojers; but he's dead drunk now, and won't sober up till sometime tomorrow, so time enough to think of him."

Morning, he knew, would bring crisis, and he was ready to meet it with brutal efficiency. It was stay on top or go under, and he had no notion of going under. Luckily, Spink must stand or fall with him; he would have needed support here.

By morning, indeed, the ship was in ferment, for the convoy was out of sight, and it was known that captain and mate were dead. Connell was privately picked out the best man in the crew, one Jem Hanaker, to act as second mate. A husky giant, approved by Spink, Hanaker moved aft and could be relied upon for backing. Also, Captain Halter remained in a drunken stupor, which was lucky, for there was trouble in the man.

The men trooped aft to the quarter-rail where Spink and his new officers stood, to the shrill of the bosun's pipe. They had arms, open or concealed; but they also had an innate, panicky fear of authority, as Connell well knew. Navy deserters, off-scourings of waterfront jails, short-term felons, they were an evil lot, and they meant trouble.

Spink, with a ruffling swagger, pointed to the shrouded forms of Ronson and Ned Wolf, announced their decease, announced the new officers.

There was a surly growl, and one of the hands let out a shout.

"How about the wenches?"

"No," said Connell, at the ladder. "Not now nor later, you scum! That's all ended."

A yell went up, a surge forward; threats and imprecations and fury filled the air, and they went at the ladder.

Connell, with one leap, was down among them, sending two men sprawling. Then the heavy teak belaying-pin in his hand began to crack out mercilessly. For thirty seconds they fought him viciously, but his silent, grim ferocity overawed them; he lashed, clubbed, kicked with all the power of his two hundred pounds.

Then Jem Hanaker joined in; and Spink, his brass pistols glinting in the sun, stood at the rail above. The throng broke, with wild cries. One man, drawing aside, whipped out a pistol, but Connell saw the weapon in time. His bloody belaying-pin shot through the air like a bullet, with perfect aim; the fellow dropped with his skull crushed in, and the fight was over.

"All hands! Line up, line up," commanded Connell. "Come along, Cap'n Spink. They want to turn over all weapons to you."

A shrewd move, he thought, to gratify Spink's new authority, but Spink was the shrewd man here. While the two mates stood off, he moved among the cowed and bloody crew, taking a weapon here and another there, but not all. Those knocked out and agroan on deck were disarmed. The dead man was ordered flung over, and the two former officers with him.

"There ye be," said Spink, with a spiteful disdain as he eyed the fifty-odd men. "Not a weapon left among the lot, as is proper. And any man who growls at orders from aft, gets a

dozen lashes. I should give most of you rogues a touch of the cat now, but bein' a humane and kind-hearted master, I'll give the warning instead. And any man complained against by one o' the women below, gets three dozen on the spot. Mind that! Get to your quarters. Mr. Hanaker, keep your watch on the run, clean up these decks, get started on the brasses. You dogs will work from now on."

Cap'n Nell spoke with Connell later.

"Spink has friends amongst 'em," she said briefly. "Three or four he passed up, with a wink and a look, when he was searching."

Connell shrugged. "Let be, lass; the main thing is that we're on top, and Spink has need of us. Besides, we've got Halter to reckon with yet."

This reckoning came at noon, when Connell was making his observations on the poop. In his capacity of armorer, he had gone the rounds below, freeing the poor shackled women from their irons, and had heard that the guard captain was up and stirring. Now he saw Halter approaching in a fury, two pistols protruding from his belt.

A loose-lipped hulk of a man, all in disarray from his carouse, Halter was typical of the bullying, brutal convict guards. As he came, he hailed Connell in accents redolent of Bow Bells.

"I sye, you! What the bloody 'ell d'ye mean by tykin' the basils off my prisoners? I'll 'ave ye triced up for it!"

Connell set down his octant on the cabin scuttle and picked up the belaying-pin placed for ready use. He regarded Captain Halter with assumed surprise, and the other came close with beefy fist shaking.

"Speak up, ye dog!" he roared. "I'll 'ave the flesh off your back for this! Let my prisoners loose? S'elp me, I'll 'ave your bloody life—"

Silently, Connell smashed him fair between the eyes with the cruel teak, and Halter went to the deck. Before he had done quivering, Connell leaned over him and took away the pistols, then returned to his observation.

Presently Halter shambled and stumbled to his feet, gripped a backstay, and wiped away the blood. Connell turned:

"I took the irons off the prisoners because they're not needed. And you'll not need pistols to bully women prisoners. You have iron gratings over the hatches, and that's enough to keep the poor wretches in their pig-sty."

"I'll be the judge o' that," fumed the other. "Who the bloody 'ell are you?"

Connell laughed thinly. "I'm the man who'll have you triced up and given three dozen of the cat you talk so much about, if you lay hand on one of the women below. Now get back to your duties, ye rogue, and be thankful I don't have ye stripped and flung below amongst the prisoners."

Halter let out a bellow at the half-deck, where a number of his soldiers were lounging.

"Lay aft 'ere! Guards! Up 'ere and clap this blackguard in irons!"

The men snickered among themselves and remained deaf to his commands. He fell silent, wiped the blood from his eyes again, and fear took hold of him, as he met the gaze of Connell.

"Stay off this deck, officer or not, unless you're bid," the latter said coldly. "Now get for'ard among the other swine where you belong. Get!"

He took one step. Captain Halter turned and hastily decamped.



“Get for’ard among the other swine, where you belong,” said Connell. “Get!”

A hard eye, a hard fist, and merciless punishment was what these men understood best; and they got it in plenty. The cat-o’-nine tails was bloody more than once thereafter; the men were hazed and slaved and driven like dogs, and Captain Spink made them like it.

Spink, somewhat to the surprise of Connell, pursued his ambition hard, drank not at all, worked long and steadily at navigation lessons, and took a crafty, gleeful pride in the rôle of ship’s master, and in enforcing Connell’s advice. Also, he remained affable and friendly, and it was settled that after rounding the Cape, Cap’n Nell and Connell should be set ashore at St. Mary’s of Madagascar.

“But I distrust him,” said Cap’n Nell, a glint in her dark eyes. “Mark my words, Tom, he’ll cheat us yet!”

“If he does, I’ll kill him; and he knows it,” Connell said grimly. “I doubt if he’ll risk it.”

He forgot that Spink was learning, more fully with each day, the duties and the responsibility of a master, and was building a new and glorious future on the outcome of this voyage.

A month ran on, two months, well into the third; the *Phœnix* was making good time and a speedy run. She was across the Line well ahead of schedule, with never another glimpse of her consorts. Other sail were sighted, but the yellow sides and the broad arrows blossoming on the canvas made her shunned like the plague.

At last they drew in at the old watering-place of the East Indiamen, Saldanha Bay, north of the bleak Cape. Here they found no other vessel, and remained for three days, all hands and prisoners taking trips ashore and stretching legs on land, or bartering with the fierce blacks who brought down wild cattle, and filling water-casks anew for the long voyage ahead.

“Why not leave her here?” demanded Cap’n Nell, as she and Connell walked ashore. “We may never get another chance. Here’s our time, Tom!”

Connell laughed harshly, as he pointed to the black warriors and their spears.

“Aye, time to die quickly! I’ve heard tales o’ this end of creation. To jump ship here, means sudden death amongst the blacks, or what’s worse, slow death. Nowhere to go here; huge deserts, barren uplands, black savages who kill anyone—”

“Is that worse than prison and slavery?” she demanded.

“It is,” said he. “For at worst, one has hope. Here there’s none. At St. Mary’s of Madagascar, we’ll be among friendly, pleasant natives who like whites.”

“And if we don’t get put ashore there, Tom?”

“Why, then, make the best of it and fight on!” said he, smiling. For he did not share her distrust of Cap’n Spink—at least, did not share it sufficiently.

Off again, rewatered and refreshed, and around the Cape with a tall wind—not halting there, for the yellow ship got scant welcome. Connell was in high spirits, with only another day or two before freedom; but now fate closed in. . . .

“I’ll not do it,” said Cap’n Spink bluntly. His shifty eyes went from Connell to Cap’n Nell.

“You’ll not set us ashore?” gasped Nell Bently. “But you promised!”

“Aye, and I’ll do it later.” Spink leaned forward. “Look’ee, Connell! I don’t dare, and that’s the truth, my davy on it! Think o’ the thousands of miles ahead, and me alone! I need ye, man; I have need of your navigation.”

“Yours is good now,” snapped Connell.

“Not good enough.” Spink wagged his head doubtfully. “Not for what’s facing us. The chart puts fright into me.”

“You damned coward!”

“Aye, like enough,” admitted Spink. “Once across the Indian Ocean, there’s time and places enough. I’ll need you till then.”

Connell assented, not with good grace, but helpless. And two mornings later he found the brace of brass pistols clean vanished from the cabin.

“I told you so!” exclaimed Cap’n Nell.

“Aye,” said Connell, his oaths done. “You were right,” he added bitterly. “And there’s not a man of all aboard who’ll lend me a hand. Not Hanaker; he’s turned surly. The rest hate me.”

“They don’t hate me,” said Cap’n Nell frowningly. “Put a good face on it, see it through; and where would ye land if all went well?”

“Melville Island,” replied Connell. “What’s in your mind?”

“A boat, and men to lower it,” said she. “I can manage that, never fear. That is, if he still refuses then.”

So Connell put a good face on it, and spoke Cap’n Spink fair. All this while, Spink touched no liquor; he aimed to sail into Botany Bay as master.

“Not that anybody except Connell stands in the way,” said Jem Hanaker darkly.

“I’ll take no chances,” snapped Spink. “A carouse, and I might well lose the ship, for he’d have to be killed first. Cap’n Halter’s getting out of hand too; you bid him wait till the time’s ripe.”

Connell found, as the long days wore drearily, that he was being watched—watched everywhere and in everything he did. Four of the crew proved ever more friendly with Spink, backed up his orders, served as his spies and men forward—the same four who had not been disarmed at the start. Bullies, they were, and proper bullies. They watched, and the soldiers watched, and Jem Hanaker watched. Cap’n Spink, affable and friendly, did no watching at all, but the crafty glint in his eyes got ever deeper.

And for lack of pistols, Connell had to temporize. Nor could he get any, as the ship sped down across the Indian Ocean; he was watched at all times, as Cap’n Nell was watched; and the men she thought to bribe could get her nothing. They did promise, however, about the boat—because they also wanted to skip the ship. So there was hope.

The misery of the sweltering holds brought many a death below. Then came the hurricane which swept and battered the ship for six days, with only the superb handling of Connell pulling her through at all. When the battened hatches were lifted at last, even the callous Captain Halter could not bear the sight below. They sent over fifty bodies of women to feed the sharks that day.

On through the Arafura Sea, on to Melville Island, Cap’n Nell scheming well with the two men forward. Every detail was set and ready for the next night. But in the morning, topsails were sighted. Spink ran up a signal; for once, the other craft did not run from the yellow ship, but stood straight for them.

And upon Connell grew the awful realization. A sloop of war, the Union Jack, and the end of hope. She drew in close, luffed, and hailed. She would convoy them to Botany Bay. Haul away and remain in company!

He went down to his own cabin and found Cap’n Nell shaken with sobs. She turned to him fiercely.

“And now what’s the end of it all? Botany Bay, and me a felon, and you with a price on your head, a wanted man, as Spink well knows! He’ll turn you in. They’ll laugh at the marriage he performed as captain, though it’s legal enough.”

“Aye,” said Spink, opening the door quietly and stepping in. Outside were two soldiers with muskets.

“Aye, like enough,” Spink went on, as the two of them stared at him. He grinned faintly. “No more need of your navigation now, Connell, with a King’s ship to guide and stand by us. And me being master, every female on the books will count. You go in as a felon, Nell, and your man gets turned in. The reward’s fat.”

A whiff of rum came from him. Connell started up, but Spink whipped out a pistol, one of the fine brass pistols that had vanished.

“Stay you here, and break out if you want,” said he, backing through the open doorway. “There’s loaded guns and heavy butts, if you want to show fight; if not, stay you here, and the door’s barred.”

Barred it was, and full welcome. For all restraint was off now, rum was broken out, and with only a guard at Connell’s cabin and a man to tend the helm and keep the ship within sight of the sloop of war, all hell was let loose on the yellow ship.

The days passed in a riot, as the two vessels crossed the Bay of Carpenteria and passed Cape York. Spink played his rôle of master with a brave swagger when sober, with crafty brutality when drunk. A true hell-ship now, the *Phœnix* bore on, with Connell and Cap’n Nell prisoners and desperately guarded in the cabin, and with her convoy sloop stood well off the coast to avoid the Great Barrier and other reef-perils.

Then excitement thrilled through the decks, with the word that next morning would see them safe anchored in Botany Bay and the voyage ended. Spink made a maudlin effort to get his ship straightened up and his men sober. Just at sunset, the two ships altered course and land was raised. Spink went aloft with the glass, and sighted the high bluish bluffs that marked the entrance to Botany Bay. He sent down a jubilant shout to announce the news—and with its accustomed lack of warning, the dread south-easterly “buster” of the South Austral waters leaped down from a clear sky.

The hurricane-squall struck from dead astern. By the time Spink regained the deck, the topsails had been ripped from the bolt-ropes. The huge fore-courser, which had been sharp-braced on the larboard tack, held the wind, and the ship lay almost on her beam ends.

The entire deck was plunged into chaos, with shrieking women fighting to get up from the holds, and men running frantically to clap the hatches shut. Spink, in an access of terror, caught hold of Captain Halter.

“Get Connell! Get that damned Connell before we’re sunk!”

Himself in a frenzy of fear, the guard captain went below on the run.

Connell came on deck to find men milling around the fife- and pin-rails in a tangle of buntlines, reef-tackles, down-hauls and other gear. He leaped among them, and the confusion subsided.

“All hands shorten sail! Larboard watch for’ard, sta’board at the main!”

The men took stations, frenziedly readying the gear, while Spink clutched a back stay on the poop. Obeying Connell’s roar, the man at the wheel got the helm down, two more men came to aid him, and the ship headed away before the gale.

For the moment, safe; but whole water was slopping over the bulwarks, and the following seas rocketed spray over the high poop. Gaining power every moment, the buster harped through the rigging until its wild howls drowned the wailing shrieks from the battened cell-holds below.

Connell swung on a weather stay and peered into the storm-wrack. Darkness had come full down; the land was completely blotted from sight; there was no mark, no light by which to con the ship to safety. He found Hanaker at his side, as the ship rolled high on a towering wave.

“Come along! All hands at it—must get that foresail reefed. Can ye do it?”

“Aye,” responded Hanaker, and they clawed forward together, driving the men cruelly. Connell saw to the passing of the lazy tack and the casting adrift of the chain fore-tack, belayed to the capstan where it had been hove down before.

“Furl the weather and loose the lee!” lifted his roar through the speaking-trumpet Spink had shoved into his hand. “Stand by weather clew-garnet—man weather gear—”

Hanaker eased off the tack as the men took a strain, then let it fly; and with thundering claps the great canvas was snugged to the yard.

“Lee gear, stand by!” Up went the lee-side, and the thunder aloft subsided. Every man was working like a frenzied fiend now. “Up and reef it!”

Hanaker led the way. The men clambered up and laid out on the jolting yard. Reef cringles were picked up, reef-earrings passed; the reef-bands stretched along the iron jacksays; the reef-points were knotted—the job was done.

“Down with ye! Down and set it!”

The lee-sheet was dragged home, the tack bowsed down; the reduced sail took the wind, and with fiercely exultant relief, Connell found the ship steadying. Aft, now, to get the yards squared, and he loomed up before the men straining at the huge double wheel.

“Keep her before it!” he shouted. “If she jibes, you drown, you dogs!”

A wind-torn figure came to him in the obscurity, staggering through the spray and clutching at him. It was Cap’n Nell, and he drew her to the rail, placing her arms around the backstay.

“We’ll weather it!” he shouted to her.

“What for? To rot in a prison ashore?” She put her face close to his, in the wet roaring darkness. “No, no! Why save the ship, Tom? Let her sink! Let’s go with her!”

Connell held her close, and her words stabbed into his brain. A cold hand gripped at his heart. Save the yellow ship—why? For whom? Better die with the ship, as Nell said, than save it and be plunged into living hell ashore! Die with it, go down with one roaring whirlwind of death and destruction—aye, why not? Die, with Nell in his arms, die and end it all happily, fearlessly!

Hanaker came clawing along the rail.

“We aint far off’n the Heads!” he shouted. “We’d better wear, unless we want to pile up!”

A hoarse, wild laugh burst from Connell. Save a reeking hell-ship so she might carry more wretches to a living death? He stared into the swirling blackness, the instinct to live numbed in him.

A sudden glare of lightning leaped white across the sky and was gone. Connell’s trumpet lifted; he sent a roar down the deck, to the lookouts.

“Watch sharp for North Head! Next flash!”

Cap’n Nell cried again, despairingly: “Let her go, Tom! We’ll go together—”

“Aye, but not to hell,” he cried. Temptation was done. “I’ll not have the blood of all hands on my head, and you in my arms before God! Let be, lass!”

Another crashing blare of fire across the sky. A terror-stricken shriek from the men forward.

“*Breakers! Breakers ahead!*”

Connell had glimpsed them for himself, the dull white loom of thunderous waters beating on a lee shore. His trumpet came up. If that were South Head—

“At the helm! Larboard! Hard larboard!” He turned. “Hanaker! Larboard the fore braces!”

Hanaker's voice responded. Men were buffeted about the decks, but the yards jolted forward. The ship reeled.

"Keep her hard down!" shouted Connell. "Sta'board main braces—let 'em run!"

Moments, endless moments, dragging at eternity. Then, as Connell's arm held Cap'n Nell close, lightning crackled and crashed anew; a gasp broke from him. A maelstrom of tossing, foaming waters, dashing against towering cliffs close at hand. No salvation now; nothing would avail, nothing!

She struck; and so passed the *Phœnix*, within sight of the bay called Botany.

The voice of the Professor ceased. His story was ended. As though in emphatic confirmation came the voice of a tug with a freighter in tow, whistling across the harbor for the drawbridge.

"Well," said somebody, with a sigh, "I suppose it's the proper ending for a yarn of that kind—all hands perished."

The Professor smiled, and thumbed his old book lovingly.

"In that case," he said, "who wrote this eyewitness account—some twenty years later—of what happened aboard the *Phœnix*?"

"Fiddlesticks and fisheyes!" snorted Cap'n Dahl. "No living thing could've got ashore. I've been in Sydney many a time. I've seen the bones of good ships on North Head, where the worst man-eating sharks in the world—"

"Belay!" roared out Cap'n Birchwood suddenly. "Ever hear o' the *Duncan Dunbar*? She was wrecked off North Head, and able seaman Johnstone survived. A matter of record, me lad!"

"Now, hold on, hold on," intervened the Professor gently, "I didn't say the story was ended. I didn't say a man wrote this book. As a matter of fact, a woman wrote it—a woman who lived in old Hobart Town, with a raft of kids fathered by a sealing-skipper whose rightful name might have been Connell instead of Conroy. Satisfied, gentlemen?"

The question was needless.

[The end of *The Yellow Ship* by Henry Bedford-Jones]