Divided We Fall, United We Stand

by Sharpiefan

Summary

The events of Mutiny and Retribution as seen by the Marines

Notes

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Author's Note: This is turning out to be rather longer than I had anticipated, so I have decided to split it up into shorter posts. The rest will go up as and when; I don't anticipate there being more than four parts to this in total. As seems to be my habit lately, this is from the perspective of a Marine, this time one of the detachment aboard HMS Renown under the command of Captain Sawyer. The story was originally inspired by Lokei's Hornblower Alphabet Soup challenge back in January 2010, where I drew the letters D and U. Unbeta'd - any mistakes are solely my own.

I made a mistake when posting it, and two chapters didn't go up properly. Everything should be all there now - sorry for any inconvenience I've inadvertently caused. That's what happens when you try to post somewhere new!
Sailing Into Stormy Weather

Oh, hello there. Of course you can sit down – that there chair's free. What'll you have – the ale here ain't so bad? Rum? Oh, I don't drink so much rum any more. Kind of lost the taste for it... What's that? A sailor who doesn't drink rum?

*chuckles*

Oh, that's a long story. And I ain't a sailor. I'm a Marine, me. Yeah, sure, it's smoky and dark in here. You have just come in from out in the sun, after all. No, I've been a Marine for... must be twenty years now. No, I haven't really drunk any rum since my first ship. Exchange the tot for favours. You know how it is.

You want the story? Sure thing. You sit back and get yourself comfy, then.

Name's Sam Miller, by the way, Sar'nt Miller, though me friends call me Dusty. I was just a Private then, new an' green. She was a fine ship, was Renown, a fine ship, with some damn fine officers.

Oh, you've heard of her. I see. Wasn't Admiral Hornblower on her, you say. Aye, he was. Jus' a Lieutenant then, of course, and the finest officer of the lot...

* * *

Thing hadn't gone right since the storm, in Private Miller's opinion. They were sailing to the Caribbean, to join Commodore Pellew's squadron at Kingston – or at least, that was the rumour below decks, borne out by the sunny weather and the strange deep blue of the sparkling sea.

“Miller! Get on with what you're s'posed to be doin', and stop daydreamin' like some lovesick dairymaid!”

Sergeant Whiting's sudden bellow made Miller jump and he blinked, guiltily looking down at the musket lock he was holding. He'd never seen a sea of this shade of blue before, and he was finding it difficult to concentrate on the task in hand. He sighed and rubbed again at the lock-plate with a little of the brick-dust he was sharing with Cullen.

On the surface of it, it all seemed so... peaceful. But he'd heard some of the older Marines muttering darkly about things, though never loud enough for it to reach the Sergeant's ears. It wasn't mutiny... Well, Miller didn't think it was mutiny, anyway, not that he had any real understanding of what it was like to be on a mutinous ship.

It was only five years ago that the Channel Fleet had mutinied, with ships at both Spithead and the Nore openly refusing to obey their officers. Miller had some idea that the ships at the Nore had turned their officers ashore. And both Pearce and Lakey had related horror stories of what they'd heard had happened aboard HMS Hermione “... in these very waters. Stabbed the captain and threw him overboard, aye, and all the other officers, too. 'cludin' the poor ol' Marine l'tenant, who'd bin in his cot, sick, and was only waitin' to die.”

“Aye, that's as mebbe, but what he ain't tellin' you, lads, is that Captain Pigot was as mean a bastard as ever trod a quarterdeck. Had the cat out near every day, an' that from jus' lookin' at him
wrong."

“And how d'you come to know all that then, David Lakey?”

“I was out here when they caught some of the mutineers an' brought 'em to trial, wasn't I? Hanged 'em, they done, and all.”

“Serves 'em right, though, that.” There were murmurs of agreement from all sides, and then Simms spoke up. “So... what 'bout here, then? Cap'n Sawyer ain't so bad all that, from what I seen.”

“Ain't so bad?” Cullen sounded incredulous. “Mebbe not, with regards to the cat... but have you ever seen a cap'n so set agin his own officers? I was on sentry outside his cabin 'other day an' he come out, a-spyin' on 'em and sayin' they was plottin' mutiny, when all Mister Hornblower an' Mister Bush was doin' was preparin' to take their noon sights, like any l'tenants would be, comin' up to eight bells o' the forenoon watch.”

It had been Bob Dickin who had finally brought the debate to an end. “If you'd heard as much 'bout Cap'n Sawyer as I have, y'wouldn't be so quick to criticise him, like. He was in a 36-gun frigate what took two Frenchies in high seas, back in the last war, when he weren't but a squeaker, just made post.” There were several muttered 'Ayes' from around the Marines' messes, and then Sergeant Whiting had chased them up on deck, to clean their kit on the foc'sle, where he could keep an eye on them while watching Corporal Buckley drilling his squad.

There was yelling from one of the officers aft, and Miller glanced towards the quarterdeck. There seemed to be something wrong with one of the sails – he could see young Mister Wellard clinging to the main shrouds, yelling something down to whoever was officer of the watch, though Miller couldn't hear what was being said.

The next thing was that all hand were called aft to listen to some pointless (well, it was, in Miller's opinion, anyway) speech about loyalty. “I know where loyalty is to be found! I've seen it – I see it now. I see your loyal hearts!” That bit made Miller bite his tongue to keep a straight face. “I watch your unremitting labours! As I watch everything that goes on in this ship.” Miller couldn't answer for that bit, of course. “Traitors meet their just desserts!”

Well, that was only good and proper, but who'd said anything about traitors, ever? Miller thought suddenly of the ringleaders of the Nore mutiny, hanged from the yard-arms of the guard-ship, HMS Sandwich. He'd heard stories that the ringleader, Richard Parker, had requested a last glass of wine. He'd been given it and when he'd finished it, he'd stuck his hands in his pockets, with the noose around his neck, and jumped, to spare his messmates the ordeal of having to hang him. It might even be true that. The captain's voice brought him back to the present. “And loyal hearts get their rewards. We'll splice the mainbrace!”

There was a cheer at that. “A tot of rum to every man! And to every boy!” There was further cheering, and the grog barrel was brought up, with a queue forming even before they were ready to serve from it.

The next thing Miller was sure of was that the bosun, Matthews, was ordered aft to report to the Captain. The Marines never learned exactly what happened next, but they saw Matthews coming for'ard again, looking more downcast than was usual with him. Styles, his mate, seemed more dispirited than usual as well, and poor Mister Wellard seemed to be moving in considerable discomfort.

Finally, they could escape below, though they were more subdued than ever, despite the issue of an extra tot of grog. Poor Mister Wellard hadn't done anything to deserve the punishment the
Captain had handed out to him – though of course the Captain had the authority to punish and reward as he chose. Miller's heart leaped into his throat as Whiting stopped him. “You'm on duty outside the Great Cabin. Get your things together – and for God's sake, make sure you've wiped that crossbelt plate of yourn clean. It was a damn disgrace last time, covered in brickdust.”

“Aye, aye, Sergeant,” he said, giving the offending item a quick rub on the tail of his jacket once he was sure Whiting was no longer looking at him.

Standing outside the Captain's cabin was bad enough anyway, but with this captain, it was about a million times worse. How could Dickin not realise that he wasn't all there any more? He didn't doubt that Dickin was right, he'd been a fine officer in his day, but that day had past years ago, and now he was... well, ought to be in Bedlam. Not that you could ever say that about an officer, any officer, of course. But especially you couldn't say it about this one.

He nodded to Joyse as he took over, settling himself in the shade cast by the poop deck that formed the ceiling and roof of the Captain's cabin, with the wheel nearby. It was all right on smaller ships, like frigates; you had a separate sentry for the wheel there. Not here, though, and he didn't much like the double duty of protecting the Captain and the helmsmen.

He hadn't been there that long when Mister Wellard came aft, looking as though every step was agony, and Mister Kennedy set him to running the 30-second glass against the half-hour glass. He'd only been doing that for a minute or so when the Captain came over and started talking, sounding, in Miller's opinion, as though he was completely off his head. Though there was no way Miller was going to say that – to anybody. That would lay him open to a charge of mutiny, after all.

He winced as Mister Wellard was ordered below again, and Matthews was summoned aft. The poor young middy hadn't done anything wrong, and didn't deserve to have the Captain after him, not his first voyage. He hadn't any way of defending himself against the captain – nobody did, after all. But for a midshipman, things had to be even worse. At least the sailors and the Marines were far enough removed that, individually, they didn't come to the officers’ attention.

Miller was glad that, despite his red jacket, he was ignored by the officers. He just wanted to get his watch over and done with and escape below, away from the madness, to the sanity of his mess.

There was a cry from aloft: “Sail ho!” and Mister Bush turned to see before sending Mister Kennedy aloft to see, before yelling down that the sail was a French frigate – two frigates! Why don't they beat to Quarters? Miller wondered, gripping his musket a little tighter.

Mister Hornblower ran down to report to the Captain, who hastened up on deck, took one look at them and gave the order to beat to Quarters. Miller was reassured by the sound of the drum-roll and the shrilling of the bosun's calls. He didn't go anywhere – being on duty meant he was carrying a full cartouche of rounds, and he'd only get in the way if he moved now. According to Sergeant Whiting, the sentry on duty outside the Captain's cabin was marked down as a small-arms man, no matter what the man's actual station in the quarter-bill. The captain turned to shout something at the gunner, Mister Hobbs. Miller frowned. How could they respond with their usual alacrity after having a tot of rum apiece, after all? Even he wasn't feeling quite as sober as usual, though he was sober enough to go on duty, at least in Sergeant Whiting's opinion.

It seemed an age before the first of Renown's guns opened fire, and it sounded wrong, somehow, more like a saluting gun than what Miller was used to hearing in battle. It was only afterwards that he found out why.

“Fired without the shot in it, didn't he, that Mister Hornblower,” Dickin said, tapping his biscuit on
his plate to dislodge the weevils.

“How d'you know that, then, mate?” Miller wanted to know, and received an eyeroll from the other Marine. “I was at the other stern-chaser, warn't I? Saw it all. Don't think anyone could believe it. I mean, who opens fire without havin' a shot in the gun, unless it's for a salute?”

“Made 'em Frogs think twice, though, didn't it?” Brice said, licking his fingers. “Who knows what would've happened if he hadn't. Them Frogs would've opened fire on us without us bein' able to do a thing about it, an' we'd've taken a proper poundin' afore we had a gun ready. Would've raked us prop'ly, coming acrost our stern the way they done.”

There were murmurs of assent from the other Marines at the table. They fell silent as they noticed a figure in the dark blue, white and gold of an officer's uniform standing in the shadows, watching them. There was a sudden rustle of movement as they realised they were under the scrutiny of the Captain, and hastily scrambled to their feet. More than one bench was knocked over in the rush, but the Captain said nothing, moving aft to the wardroom, where he brushed past the suddenly ramrod straight figure of Cullen, who was on sentry there.

They slowly sat down again, looking at each other worriedly. How much had he heard, and what did he make of it? Whatever he thought, they probably hadn't heard the end of it all.

Mister Wellard was ordered aft for another whipping, the one he'd missed receiving earlier, and the Marines still off-duty sent him sympathetic looks as he passed them, looking very pale, and followed by Matthews and one of the bosun's mates.

They couldn't bear to listen to what was going on and busied themselves with cleaning kit and repairing clothes – anything to distract themselves from what was happening behind the closed door of the wardroom, which was only thin. They were rather glad when it stopped, though very shaken when Styles emerged, carrying the senseless form of the young midshipman and followed by Doctor Clive.
Sunday dawned bright and fair and the ship's crew lined up under a blue sky for the weekly inspection. Sergeant Whiting paced the ranks with Captain Seafort, scowling every time the Marine officer noticed something not quite right. Two men got pulled up for their brasswork not being bright enough and one man for not polishing his shoes well enough. One man was advised that his tynamate had left spiders' ends of hair showing and was told to get it sorted or find another tynamate. Everyone else managed to pass the inspection, much to their relief.

Renown was entitled to carry a chaplain, but none had applied to join her complement, which meant that devotions were led by Captain Sawyer. Today, though, he brought the slim volume of the Articles of War out with him, which didn't surprise anyone. He was required by Admiralty orders to read the Articles out to the assembled ship's company at least once a month, and like many officers, found that they made a good substitute for a sermon that would have bored the men rigid. Not that the Articles were exactly entertaining, but the men knew them more or less and could tune out till the captain was finished.

“Article Nineteen! If any person in or belonging to the fleet shall make or endeavour to make any mutinous assembly upon any pretence whatsoever, every person offending herein, and being convicted thereof by the sentence of the court martial, shall suffer death: and if any person in or belonging to the fleet shall utter any words of sedition or mutiny, he shall suffer death, or such other punishment as a court martial shall deem him to deserve: and if any officer, mariner, or soldier on or belonging to the fleet, shall behave himself with contempt to his superior officer, being in the execution of his office, he shall be punished according to the nature of his offence by the judgement of a court martial.”

Miller couldn't quite stifle a yawn, though he tried to. Standing there under the scrutiny of the officers below on the quarterdeck and with his Corporal and Sergeant nearby, yawning was not a good idea. The way the Captain was reading the Articles out didn't bode too well, either; he was dwelling horribly on the penalties for mutiny. He was practically barking the word 'death' every time it occurred.

Finally he reached Article Thirty-Six, known among the crew as the Captain's Cloak because it covered anything and everything not specifically mentioned in the previous articles: “All other crimes not capital committed by any person or persons in the fleet, which are not mentioned in this act, or for which no punishment is hereby directed to be inflicted, shall be punished by the laws and customs in such cases used at sea.” There was a pause. “And I will have you know that these
articles apply to my officers as much as to anyone else!”

He slammed the slim volume closed, leaving Miller and the other Marines puzzled and a little shaken. How could he say that? How could he suspect his officers of anything – everyone knew that any problems generally arose among the men, against the officers.

“Carry on Mister Buckland!”

“Division officers! Dismiss your divisions!”

Captain Seafort and Lieutenant Jansen turned to dismiss their men. As the Marines filed down the ladder from the poop, there was a cheer from for’rard. He couldn't help glancing across to see what was going on. A double rum issue? That didn't sound like the same captain who'd practically accused his officers of plotting mutiny.

Miller was thankful to be able to get out of the sun, though the air belowdecks was just as bad, close and foetid. He had to pause at the bottom of the companion ladder for his eyes to adjust to the dimness of the lower gun-deck.

“Ain't right. Really, it ain't right,” Matt Cullen was saying. “Did you see the way he looked at Mister Hornblower when he was readin' the bit about mutinous words?”

“And what was all that about these words apply as much to me officers as anyone else?” Lakey put in, pulling his cross-belts off.

“Extra rum all round ain't so bad, though,” Dickin pointed out.

“Extra rum for us an' the Tars, harsh words f'r the 'Tenants. I never heared the like afore, I ain't,” Miller said, rummaging in his sea-chest for his off-duty forage hat.

“He ain't right in the head, he ain't. Can't be – reckon the heat's got to 'im,” Cullen said, shrugging his own off-duty jacket on. “An' you make sure you put that there chest to right afore you go anywheres, Dusty. The way you lef' it last time, I was surprised you got everythin' back in it!”

Miller paused in the act of cramming everything back in any-old-how and looked up resentfully at Cullen. “If you didn't toss me spare trousers all over the place, I wouldn't've bin in such a mad rush!” He began pulling things out to stow properly, annoyed at the extra delay before he could sit down to his dinner.

“Where's that boy with the scran, then?” Joyse wanted to know, looking for'rard to see where the drummer had got to with the mess-kids.

One of the lieutenants appeared from the wardroom aft and headed up topside, leaving the Marines looking at each other in bewilderment. “What's he doin', goin' up there? Ain't he bin on duty this forenoon?” Lakey wanted to know.

Pearce rolled his eyes. “He's bin put on continuous watch for the next thirty-six hours. Well, thirty-two, now.”

He was practically pounced on. “What d'you mean?” Miller, said, finally closing the lid of the sea-chest and sitting on it. It was at that point that Quilliam arrived with the food and his question was forgotten in the confusion of serving it out.

“What d'you mean, on continuous watch?” he asked again once everyone was settled.

“Means 'zackly what you think it does, mate,” Dickin said. “He's on watch all the time till eight
bells of the forenoon watch day after termorrer. Dinner time. Well, no. He's already bin on watch for... four bells, so it'd be till four bells of the mornin' watch.”

Lakey rolled his eyes. “Whatever. The 'zact time don't matter. What does matter is that he ain't goin’ to get a wink of shut-eye till then – you know what the Articles says 'bout anyone caught sleepin' on duty.”

There were nods and murmurs of agreement all round. The Marines knew exactly what they said, and how it felt to be on watch in the middle of the night with nobody around to keep you alert.

The rest of the day passed without further incident apart from a few Marines having to present themselves to Corporal Kinsley because their uniforms hadn't been up to standard for Divisions that morning.

There was a scuffle from for'rard as the show parade drew to a close, bringing it to an abrupt end as Kinsley grabbed three men of the corporal's guard – those Marines who would be on duty to cover the various sentry posts overnight – to head for'rard to break it up without waiting for the Master at Arms or one of the bosun's mates. What they found was not so shocking in its simple brutality as who was on the receiving end of it.

Two sailors had Styles, one of the bosun's mates, pinioned by the arms, and Randall, a hard-horse able seaman, was laying into him with a will.

“Break it up there!” Kinsley yelled, backed up immediately by Mister Hornblower and the bosun. “Stop that, damn you!” the officer said forcefully, stepping around the small party of Marines to grab at Randall. “By God, you'll pay for this!” He thrust the unresisting sailor at Dickin, who grabbed his arm instinctively. “Put him in irons!”

He paused to look down at the bosun who was kneeling by the half-dazed bosun's mate, lying sprawled on the deck. He mumbled something and Matthews had to stoop to hear what he said. He looked up at Mister Hornblower. “Said, he was winnin', sir.”

Miller almost couldn't believe it when the officer ducked round to Styles' other side to help the bosun haul him to his feet. “Take him to the sickbay,” he said to the Corporal, who stepped forward with a bare “Aye, aye, sir. Miller?” Miller stirred himself to take the man's other arm and between them, they hurried him away as fast as he could shuffle. They didn't stay to help the surgeon – he had a loblolly boy there, anyway – but they didn't manage to escape before Wilson cut Styles' shirt off him, showing the livid marks that were starting to show, even under the dull glow of the pusser's dip in the lanthorn.

It was Mattie Briggs who told them, at breakfast the next morning, that the Captain had been prowling around on deck for a good part of the night, and had caught Mister Hornblower napping. It was hardly surprising that the officer had closed his eyes for a moment, but he hadn't actually been asleep – or not as deeply as all that, from the way he'd straightened up as the Captain approached.

It was almost as though he'd wanted to catch Mister Hornblower out, from the punishment he'd given him, to the way he'd been wandering around. Briggs hadn't heard the words that had passed between the two officers, but from what he'd seen, it hadn't been too good. And for some reason, Doctor Clive had been up on deck, too, though at that time of night there was no reason for him to have been anywhere apart from his cot.

Sergeant Whiting paused by the mess-table. “You're to relieve Lakey on sentry at the bilboes, Cullen. The Captain wants to see Randall at four bells – Miller, you'd best go with him in case there's any more trouble.” The two Marines glanced at each other. If there was trouble, it would
take more than just the two of them to subdue Randall – he was pretty powerfully built, after all.

The Great Cabin was holy ground – holier even than the quarterdeck, because it was the Captain’s own living quarters, with glass windows that stretched the whole width of the ship, letting in glorious daylight. The Captain himself was sitting on the far side of his table, flanked by the Surgeon and Lieutenant Buckland, the First Luff.

Mister Hornblower was there, because Styles was from his division, and Mister Kennedy was there, because he was Randall's divisional officer.

“So I ordered Randall to be placed in irons. Styles had been kicked almost to death,” Mister Hornblower was saying, by the time Miller had managed to drag his attention away from the view out of the stern windows – there was nothing but sea and sky visible anyway – back down to the three officers sitting behind the table.

“You do exaggerate, Mister Hornblower,” the Captain replied. “There he stands as large as life! You're too squeamish, I've noticed that before.” He got up and the two Marines froze even stiffer as he approached, though he seemed to be more intent on stalking Mister Hornblower. “Your squeamishness does not bode well for your conduct under fire.” There was a pause. “Mister Hornblower?”

“With respect, sir...”

“With respect? What do you know of respect?”

In front of two hands and two Marines... there was something definitely not right in the Captain's head, that he would be saying things like that to an officer, things that should be said in private if they had to be said at all. Maybe Cullen was right – the Captain wasn't right in the head. Though he certainly didn't look mad, if anyone could look mad. It was just there, in his words and how he said them. Miller couldn't help the sudden shiver that ran down his back, despite the oppressive heat.

He ignored the evidence of the beating, as Styles pulled his shirt up to show the officers the bruises he'd received. “You come before me with these men, whose boisterous high spirits led them to knock each other about a bit, and you expect me to punish them.” A shrug. “I like high spirits in my men What I do not like are weak-kneed officers who do not know how to keep order!”

It had been a bit more than mere high spirits – Miller was sure Randall and his cronies had been doing their best to kill Styles. And what officer went anywhere near the mess-decks when the men were off-duty, anyway? That was unheard of – it wasn't as if they had any real privacy anyway. The officers kept to themselves, and so did the men, off-duty.

Randall ought to get at least a dozen at the grating for what he'd done – and to a bosun's mate, a petty officer, too.

Most Captains would clap him in irons to await a court-martial and a hanging, for that.

“The charge is dismissed,” the Captain said, turning away, leaving the two Marines to open the door and usher the sailors out.

They followed them, passing Mister Hobbes, the gunner, as they headed down to the arms locker to check their muskets back in. “Now do you believe me?” Cullen said, as he waited for Sergeant Kinsley to find the key and unlock the door.

“I think I believed you earlier, mate. It's a rum do, though.”
“Rum do! You dunno the half of it – bein' about as green as a sour apple.”

Miller rolled his eyes. Just because he was new to the Corps – newer than most of the others, anyway – didn't mean that he hadn't heard stories, or that he lacked common sense. “Bet even Lakey'd say it's a rum do,” he argued. Cullen clapped him on the shoulder. “Belike he would, an' all. An' he's seen a bit, too. There's rumours he went out with the first lot of convicts to Bot'ny Bay, though I dunno about all that. He'd've had to have been in for... more'n twenty years, if he had bin.”

“He's a Jonah, that's what he is,” Pearce was saying, when they returned to the companionship of the mess-deck.

“Ain't a Jonah. Jonahs are bad luck for the ship by bein' aboard, not by doin' stuff.”

“Doin' stuff? What's happened now?” Miller asked, sliding into his place at the mess-table, his eyes wide.

“He's put Mister Hornblower on continuous watch -” “I know that!” “- for another thirty-six hours, with all the Lieutenants reportin' to him every hour, on the hour, for the whole time he's on duty!”

Miller shiveried. “A body can't go that long without sleep! He'll be dead afore he's done, he will.”

“Else he'll do summat stupid an' run the ship aground,” Simms chimed in.

“You was sayin' he ain't that bad, not so long ago. I heared you meself!”

“Well, that was afore alla this started, weren't it, Mattie Briggs?”

The other Marine shrugged. “Mebbe so. But there ain't no land out here to go runnin' aground on.”

“Thank God for small mercies, that's what I say!” Cullen said, rapping his knuckles on the solid deal planking of the table.

“'Nough of that grousin'. You's like a lot of old women, you are.” Briggs rolled his eyes. “Do cheer up – they's tunin' a fiddle up for'rard. Be a good bit o' fun goin' on up there in a bit. It'll take your mind off everythin' you's worritin' about.” He looked around.

“Don't tell me I's the only one headin' up for'rard to see the fun?”

Miller pushed his plate away, thankful he wasn't on mess duty this week. “No, I'm comin', too, Mattie. A bit of a skylarkin's allus fun, after all.”

The two Marines pushed their way for'rard, glad of something to do to take their mind off what was brewing aboard His Majesty's Ship Renown.
Weathering the Gale

Chapter Summary

Mutiny is a nasty word. And a nasty accusation.

Chapter Notes

I make no profit from writing in fandom and all characters are returned to their boxes when I have finished with them. Apart from the Marines, who are mine anyway. This chapter brought to you by the letters D, U, the colour black and the things that go bump in the night.

Miller couldn't help feeling a little uneasy at being among so many sailors. He and Briggs stood out in their off-watch jackets and forage hats, among the crew in their shirts and trousers. There was a copious amount of grog flowing, and some of the tars even tried to press mugs of it on the two Marines, who smiled and made excuses about being on duty the next watch.

“So’re we, mate. Ain’t any bastard goin’ to stop us havin’ a good time while we can, though.”

“Mebbe not, mate, but you ain’t got a hard-horse sergeant like we have,” Briggs replied, and Miller nodded.

One of the lieutenants passed them and they straightened up, feeling self-conscious, but he said nothing, merely nodding and continuing on his way.

There was just something wrong about it all. He couldn't stop thinking about that, and eventually Briggs and Miller glanced at each other and retreated. It was all wrong. The tars didn't seem to care that they were being favoured above the officers and that the Captain thought the Lieutenants were plotting mutiny among themselves.

Though, not all the tars seemed to think the same way. There were several sitting at one of the mess-tables, doing the usual off-watch sort of things: one was whittling at a piece of wood, another was mending his shirt.

“Here, Mattie,” Miller said in a low voice, catching his mate's sleeve to get his attention. “Weren't that Mister Hornblower?”

Briggs shrugged. “So what if it was?”

“He's s'posed to be on duty, ain't he?”

Briggs paused and turned. “I never knowed anyone to be able to go thirty-six hours without needin' to use the heads at least once – and he's on watch fer twice that, ain't he?”

“But...” Miller's voice trailed off. He was still new here, relatively, Renown being his first ship. But he was sure Mister Hornblower had been heading in the wrong direction to be going to the
officer's privy.

He shrugged without saying it, and then the fiddle music broke off abruptly. Both Marines looked at each other and turned for'rard again. There was raucous laughter and then the fiddle resumed playing. Miller looked at his mate. “What happened there?” he asked, only to be answered by a perplexed shrug. “No idea, Dusty. No idea.”

The bell rang out from for'rard and Miller hastily shifted into his red coat, scrabbling to fasten the buttons and find his hat. Mister Bush passed them, his hat tucked under his arm to show they should ignore him. Miller paused, holding his own hat, as Bush passed them again, heading for'rard, a slightly puzzled look on his face.

“What's goin' on with 'em?” Cullen wanted to know, and cursed as his stock clasp refused to fasten.

“They's gettin' pissed off that the captain thinks they's plottin' summat,” Simms said, trying to straighten the plume on his own hat.

“Don't explain what's goin' on, though,” Pearce interjected.

“Don't it. Not much it don't.” Lakey was already in his duty uniform, and Miller sighed. Over twenty years' experience, Lakey had, and it showed. Though nobody knew why he'd never taken the shoulder-knot of an NCO. He had enough experience to be a sergeant, even, by now.

“What d'you mean?” Cullen asked. Lakey refused to be drawn and merely headed to collect his musket.

“Well, if that don't beat all!”

“Button it, Briggsy.” The marines turned, startled, at the sound of Sergeant Whiting's voice. “You're supposed to be gettin' ready to go on watch, not gossipin' like a bunch of old women!”

There was a panicked scramble to finish kitting up, ready to relieve the various sentries and the Corporal's guard. It did occur to Miller to wonder why Mister Bush had gone for'rard – why Mister Hornblower had, for that matter, but his thoughts were lost in the confusion of getting ready to go on duty.

Mister Hobbs, the gunner, pushed past the bustling Marines, ignoring the sentry on the wardroom door as he went into the wardroom.

The empty wardroom.

How had none of the others noticed that there were no officers in there? Miller shook himself. Of course there were officers in there – just because Mister Bush had gone in and come back out didn't mean that Mister Kennedy wasn't there, or the First Luff. And of course the Marine officers were both there: Captain Seafort was probably reading a novel and Mister Jansen would be writing more of his long letter home.

Hobbs came out again, quickly. Too quickly, and wearing a look of... something Miller couldn't name. He headed straight up the aft companion ladder.

Five minutes later, there was a bellow from the Captain's cabin: “Call out the guard!”

Whiting blinked. “Sir?”

Grabbing hats and muskets, the Marines looked at each other, wondering what the hell was going
“You heard me, Sergeant! There's mutiny brewing! Black, bloody mutiny!”

Whiting turned to bellow at the assembled Marines. “The relief, with me!”

Mutiny?

The word rang through the assembled Marines like a death knell as the Captain came running down the ladder, erupting into the Marines' mess like a blue and white hurricane.

“If you find two or more of these gentlemen together, you will tell them to stay exactly where they are!”

No officer in his right mind would listen to a Marine Private giving such an order... but if there was mutiny afoot, nobody would be in their right minds.

“But there isn't any such thing,” Miller said to himself.

“Silence, there! You ain't paid to think!” Corporal Kinsley said, hastily passing out muskets among the relieving Marines and those currently on duty as the Corporal's guard.

“The hold, Mister Hobbs!” The Captain was still shouting orders. “The hold amidships!”

“Aye, aye, sir!” Hobbs hurried down the nearest ladder.

“Flush them out, the verminous scum!” Was the Captain mad? It was impossible to tell. He was reacting just the way any captain would if his ship was threatened by mutineers. Though Miller had no experience of mutiny, of course, but the Captain was acting the way he thought a sane man would.

“You and you, with me!” Whiting said, pointing at Miller and Cullen. “Corporal Kinsley, take Briggs and Pearce down the midships hatch with Mister Hobbs. Corporal Buckley, take Dickin and Brice down the aft hatch. The rest of you, groups of three and scour the orlop!”

The Sergeant grabbed the nearest lanthorn. The light was both reassuring and threatening: they could see by it, just, but it would also pinpoint their position to anyone who had weapons. The Captain hadn't waited and was already ahead by the time Whiting, Miller and Cullen were ready, leading the way to the various small store-rooms located aft on the orlop deck..

Miller's heart was pounding even as the Captain urged them on. Their footsteps sounded loud on the wooden decking, a sure way to give themselves away to anybody lurking below. The Captain had a light too – where had he got that from?

There was a clatter from aft, between their position and the midships hatch, and Miller jumped. It could be no more than the rats, of course, but somehow it didn't seem the sort of noise the rats made.

“Who's there?” the Captain demanded, sounding slightly panicked. Maybe that clatter had startled him, too? Miller tightened his grip on his musket, feeling his palms damp. His heart was still racing

“It's just me. Hobbs, sir.” The gunner sounded a little out of breath, to Miller's ears.

“Where are they?” the Captain demanded.
“They’re round here somewhere.”

Somewhere. In the bowels of a 74, they could be anywhere. There were so many hidey-holes and so little light, even with the lanthorns the Captain, the gunner and Sergeant Whiting were carrying. It would be almost a miracle if they caught anyone. If, in fact, there was anyone down here to be caught. Miller was beginning to think that the whole thing was nothing more than a figment of the Captain’s over-active imagination. Though there was no way he, a Private, could say that.

He jumped as there was another noise, almost like a grating being replaced. *That* wasn’t a rat. Maybe there really were mutineers down here, then?

“Over there,” Hobbs said decisively.

“Down there,” the Captain said, indicating the ladder down to the hold. “After them!”

That noise hadn’t come from down there... had it? There was no gainsaying the Captain though, not unless he wanted to swing for it.

“Hurry! *Hurry!*”

They were already moving, with Sergeant Whiting in the lead. Miller slipped his arm through the sling of his musket, allowing it to hang from his shoulder and stepped onto the ladder leading to the grim darkness of the hold. There was a creaking behind him, but he thought no more of it, because that was where the Captain was standing.

He wished there was more than one lanthorn. It cast such a small pool of golden light, and the darkness down here was almost thick enough to taste. He unslung his musket, porting it across his body, and moved cautiously after Sergeant Whiting, almost afraid to get too far from that comforting circle of light.

There was a panicked yell from above. “Stay where you are!” A few minutes later, there was another yell, this one a wordless shout, and the sound almost of something falling. Then the sound of a pistol firing.

Whiting turned. “Wait a moment. What was that?” He looked between Miller and Cullen, almost as though one of them had fired. They both shook their heads. It had sounded wrong for one of them, anyway, more muffled than if either of their muskets had gone off. “Come on.”

He led the way back to where they had come from; the aft hatchway to the orlop deck. There was a figure lying on his back on the deck, clutching a pair of pistols. It was Captain Sawyer.

Lieutenant Hornblower was standing looking down on them with a horrified look on his face, but the Marines had no time for that. Sergeant Whiting knelt by the Captain. “Not dead. Miller, leave your musket and run for the surgeon. Quick, now!”

Leave his...? Miller hastily thrust his musket at Cullen, who took it wordlessly, and hurried up the ladder, barely even touching his hat to Mister Hornblower – and Mister Kennedy, who was there as well, though Heaven only knew where he’d come from.

He hurried up to the sickbay, hammering on the door of the surgeon’s tiny cabin. “Doctor!”

“What is it man? And kindly stop trying to break my door down!”

“The Captain, sir! He’s... he’s fallen down a hatchway, into the hold!”
“What?” Thankfully Doctor Clive didn't seem inclined to question the Marine, but merely gathered some things, and followed Miller back down to where the Captain lay senseless.

“Thought there was a mutiny brewin', sir. Had us all turned out to look for the mutineers an' must've taken a wrong step or summat. Fell down the hatchway.”

“You did the right thing,” the Doctor said shortly, stepping onto the ladder to get to his patient. Not knowing quite what else to do, and a little over-awed by the officers gathering around, Miller followed him. He felt a little better with Cullen and Sergeant Whiting.

He stepped aside as the Sergeant headed for the ladder, apparently intending to speak with one of the officers. “Sir? The Captain was talkin' about mutiny, sir. Got to catch the mutineers, he says.”

“Did he give you any indication as to the identity of these mutineers?” Only an officer would phrase it like that!

“No, sir. But Mister Hobbs was with him – might've confided in him, sir.”

“Yes, thank you. Dismissed.”

Miller ignored the officers' conversation; it didn't concern him anyway, of course, and waited to hear what he should do next, jumping a little as Mister Midshipman Wellard descended the ladder to take the Captain's pistols. One of them had been fired, Miller saw. So that was the cause of the shot they'd heard. What had the Captain fired at, though?

“We need to sway him up,” the doctor said, looking up at the officers above them.

Mister Buckland sounded taken aback. “Yes, very well. Mister Bush, get a tackle rigged.”

“Aye, aye, sir. Mister Hornblower, Mister Kennedy!”

“Come on, Miller and stop daydreaming.” Sergeant Whiting's voice cut through his thoughts. “We'll only be in the way.”

There was a group of sailors heading towards them, with a block and tackle and what looked like a hatch cover or something, which Miller belatedly realised was to sway the Captain up with.

He absently took his musket back from Cullen and followed the other two back towards the Marines' messdeck, passing Corporal Kinsley's search party on the way. “Been an accident. Captain's fallen down a hatch and knocked himself out. Didn't see any sign of any mutineers, so we're stood down,” Whiting said.

“Aye, aye, Sergeant.”

“What was that all about?” Brice wanted to know. “Sayin' there was mutiny afoot, but not sayin' who he thought was plottin' on it.”

“We knows who he thinks was plottin' it, don't we?” Cullen retorted. “Same folks he's allus thought was plottin' it. The officers.”

“Seems to me nobody was thinkin' of anythin' of the sort till he kept all-on sayin' they was,” Dickin put in. “Bein' suspicious of folks an' accusin' 'em of doin' summat. It's enough to drive 'em to want to do it for real.”

“Ain't right in the head, that's what,” Pearce said, and was practically jumped on.
“You can’t go sayin' that about the Captain!”

“If any of the officers hear you sayin' things like that, you'll be up at the gratin' at least. More likely to be turned off for... for 'mutinous words'.”

“The Captain's out of it. Fell down a hatch an' knocked hisself out. An' if he was thinkin' there was mutiny, why didn't he say who was plottin' it? Sent us all off on a wild goose chase, he done.” Cullen was firm on that point.

Lakey sighed. “Reckon he was seein' things and ended up makin' it real, that's what. Too much sun does that to a feller. I know – seen it afore.”

“Pipe down, do!” Corporal Kinsley said. “Mister Buckland's in charge now and things will get back to normal.”

“Normal for this barky, or normal for the rest of the Navy?” Cullen muttered.

“Any more words like that an' you'll find yourself doin' double duty,” Kinsley said warningly. “The captain thought there was mutiny plotted, and had an accident, that's all there is to it. Now settle down and stop grousin' over it. Those goin' on duty report to Sergeant Whiting. Now.”

They scattered, waiting to see what the next day would bring.
Caught on a Lee Shore

Chapter Summary

Madness is only a state of mind...

Chapter Notes

I make no profit from writing in fandom and all characters are returned to their boxes when I have finished with them. Apart from the Marines, who are mine anyway. This fic brought to you by the letters D, U, the colour blue and the madness of King George.

Standing sentry on the Captain's cabin was not Miller's favourite post ever. There was something eerie about the job now, even in the bright sunlight of broad day. Behind that door, the captain lay silent and still.

He shivered a little, despite the heat, at the memory of seeing Captain Sawyer swayed up from the hold, lashed to a grating, exactly as a hogshead of water or a cask of beef would be hauled up. He had been still and silent, a far cry from the fury who had turned them out to hunt for mutineers.

Doctor Clive was approaching, and Miller came to attention, almost knocking on the cabin door to announce his presence before remembering. He turned his attention instead to the officers slightly for'rard, by the fife rail.

Mutineers, the Captain had said, giving his orders last night. “If you find two or more of these gentlemen together, you will tell them to stay exactly where they are!” Well, there were three gentlemen together right there, but anything less like a mutinous assembly was hard to imagine.

A Jonah, Pearce had called Captain Sawyer, the other day, and Miller suddenly wondered if his fellow Marine was in the right of it. Though hadn't Dickin said he'd been something of a hero in the last war? Something about taking two French ships, when he'd only just been given command of a frigate, Miller thought.

Mister Bush clattered down the ladder into the waist and Mister Kennedy turned aft. Miller straightened, hoping that the officer couldn't see what he'd been thinking, but the Lieutenant's gaze skipped right over him.

Mister Buckland came aft and hesitated by the captain's door, looking enquiringly at Miller. “Surgeon's with him, sir,” he said, and bit his lip. You didn't volunteer information like that, thought, thankfully, the officer didn't seem inclined to correct him, merely turning the door-handle to let himself in.

A few minutes later, he put his head out to ask Mister Wellard to convey a message to the other Lieutenants. The young midshipman still looked wan and pale, his freckles standing out vividly from his white skin. Poor lad, not to have any friends in the ship, Miller thought, even as the lad
hurried off.

The three Lieutenants came aft and passed into the cabin. Miller tried to hear what was being said, but they were speaking too quietly for him to catch any words. There were raised voices, to be sure, but they were too muffled for Miller to be able to catch any words. The four Lieutenants left the cabin, looking... he couldn't describe how they looked. Angry, worried, frustrated, maybe. Doctor Clive seemed to be swaying more than the slight swell would necessitate and Miller was almost sure he could smell alcohol on his breath as he turned his head. Maybe that was what had the officers so... put out?

They beat to Quarters after dinner, which they hadn't done properly since leaving the Channel. The smell of powder and sound of the guns firing did a lot to cheer the Marines up, even though they weren't all employed as gun crew. Beside the usual sentries, there were Marines stationed by each companionway, as was usual in action to prevent men trying to run below and hide.

Lieutenants Bush and Hornblower seemed happy enough, with the exercise, which was something. What happened after that made a story the like of which the Marines had never heard of.

“So there he is,” Dickin was saying. “Says as he's well enough – Mister Buckland thinkin' he looks unwell, like, only he's got a bit of a request.”

“How d'you know this?” Cullen wanted to know, reasonably enough.

“Was on sentry by the main companionway, warn't I, an' we hadn't bin stood down yet when they headed back up on deck.” He took a swig of his grog. “So, anyhow, he says as how he wants the washdeck pump rigged. An' by this time, I'd bin relieved so's I could go up an' see fer meself what was goin' on. And there he is, strippin' off till he's naked as a jay-bird, and he tells 'em to pump 'cause he needs a wash.”

“Well, if that don't beat all,” Lakey said, sliding onto the bench beside Miller. “I never heared the like afore.”

“It's true, though. I could hear the cheerin' an all from where I was stood sentry by th'quarterdeck steps,” Brice put in, not to be out-done.

“So there they are, pumpin' away as though the barky's a-fire, when who should chance to come along but the Cap'n his very own self.”

“Bet he was in a right takin' over it all,” Cullen interjected.

“Too right he was. Jus' about pitched a fit. I slipped off outta sight when he come in view, I don't mind tellin' you.”

Brice shrugged. “Me an' Mattie Briggs saw pretty much what-all happened after that, though. See, he'd heared the yellin' and cheerin' from the cabin, an' come out, grabbin' us, on the way, mutterin' summat 'bout mutineers, the way he does. Sent for Sar'nt Whitin' and the Corp'ral's guard an' all – you've must've heared that? So we're stood be'ind him, muskets at the port-arms, an' the pumpin' stops, everyone goin' all quiet-like. And Mister Hornblower turns round to see the Captain glarin' down at him in that way he has. O' course, he don't go for any of the Tars – he knows they was just followin' orders, like. But he all but stamps his foot. *This is my ship! Not a public bath-house!* he says – shouts, near enough."

He took a pull from his own can of grog.

“What happened then?” Dickin wanted to know.
“Well, he turns to Mister Buckland an' tells him to arrest Mister Bush, Mister Hornblower and Mister Kennedy – even though Mister Bush and Mister Kennedy had about as much to do with it as any of us. Pulls out his pistol an' waves it around. 'Arrest 'em,' he says, 'less'n you'd care to join 'em.' Talking to Mister Buckland like, though his pistol was waving around, sorta pointin' at Mister Hornblower, like.”

“Fair frit me, that did,” Briggs put in. “See, I'd gone down there along of Joyse, an' that there pistol was wavin' around all over the place. One point, if he'd've pulled the trigger, I'd be wearin' white an' playin' me harp now, so I would.”

He received an elbow in the ribs, among good-natured laughter. “Playin' a harp, me foot, mate. You'd go straight down to the hot place, you would!”

“Whatsoever, Dickin, whatsoever. I wouldn't be here now, talkin' with you lot an' that's plain.”

“So what happened then?” Pearce put in, trying to get back to the story.

Brice shrugged, looking more sober. “Well, Mister Buckland turned to Sar'nt Whitin', an' he ain't got no choice, has he? Not with it bein' a d'rect order an' all. So he comes down to the washdeck, tryin' to ignore that Mister Hornblower is naked as the day he was borned, an' the Captain yells out to clap 'em in irons, like the mutinous dogs they are!”

There was a shocked silence at this. It had only been a bit of fun, after all, and the officers had been doing their duty the best way they knew how.

Lakey was the first one to recover himself. “So... so where are they now?”

“In the hold, under guard. That was about as much as the Sar’nt could stomach. He war’nt goin' to have no officer in the bilboes on the upper gundeck, not him.”

* * *

It was late the next day that the lookout called down “Land ho!” from his perch up at the mainmast crosstrees. He had a far wider field of vision up there and land wasn't visible from deck until the next morning, when a sailor was stationed in the main-chains with a lead. It looked barren and rocky, with a fortress perched on the cliff-top, and Miller wondered what they were doing here.

There were two Marines stationed outside the Great Cabin now, with muskets at the port arms, rather than ordered as was usual. Miller couldn't help thinking that the Captain was jumping at his own shadow, but of course he couldn't say anything.

He listened to the leadsman's chant, growing nervous as the numbers revealed the sea-bed was shoaling. And the Captain seemed unconcerned, pacing the quarterdeck with his hands clasped behind his back.

A group of seamen were grouped around one of the guns, moving it around and trying the elevation. “It's no good, sir!” one of them called. “We'll never bring the guns to bear! The fort's too high up!”

Was that why they were here, then? To attack that fortress? Miller looked at it with renewed interest. High on its cliff, it looked impregnable, and there were cannon embrasures all along the wall overlooking the bay.
Mister Buckland approached the Captain. “Sir. I beg you, we are standing into terrible danger!”

Captain Sawyer batted at him as though he was no more than an irritating fly. “Get away, get away!”

There was more than a trace of panic in the leadsman's voice now. “By the mark, three!”

“There are only a few feet of water under us, sir. We must turn now before it's too late!” Mister Buckland said

“What? No, I don't want to. I want to fight them!” The Captain's words made Miller's heart skip a beat.

Surely it didn't matter what the Captain wanted? What mattered was whether they were able to fight... which they weren't. Both the gun captain and the leadsman's chant added up to Renown being unable to fire on the fort. Besides, if they got any closer, the guns would have to point even higher, and they couldn't come to bear even now, let alone if they managed to get any closer.

Even Miller knew that. It stood to reason, after all. The closer you were to something, the higher you had to point your musket.

Buckland was not going to give up. “Well, at least let me release the other lieutenants. Without them there will be no-one to command the guns!”

The Captain turned and Miller swallowed. What was he going to do now?

“Oh no you don't, Mister Buckland. I know what you want. They'll stay just where they are.” The Captain spoke in a quiet, controlled voice and Miller wondered suddenly just how controlled he was. When would the madness show itself for real? He was far too reasonable-sounding, a far cry from the poor wretches incarcerated in Bedlam where the public could pay their pennies to gawk at the insane.

Suddenly the fort's guns started firing. Miller noticed the gouts of white powder-smoke before the sound carried across the water. And then the balls came over, thankfully landing in the sea, sending up spurts of water. And they couldn't return fire – the fort was too high for their guns to reach much higher than half-way up the cliff-face.

They found the range quickly, too quickly, and Miller saw a gun hit. The force upset the gun and the ball ricocheted with a dull clang, striking a Marine. He couldn't see who it was who'd been hit, but the red-coated figure lay ominously still.

“That's it! That's more like it!” the Captain shouted, though there was no way Renown could return fire, not with any hope of hitting anything. He seemed neither to notice that, or to care. “Return fire, Mister Buckland.”

“We cannot elevate the guns enough, sir!”

Not good – in his current mental state the Captain was likely to hear any negative words spoken by an officer as mutinous talk.

“Return fire! Or by God, I will!” He raised his pistol and pulled the trigger, the tiny ball falling into the sea with a near-invisible splash only yards from the ship's side. He dropped it and pulled out his second pistol, swinging it around to point directly at the First Luff. “Engage the enemy Mister Buckland!”
Buckland shook his head, uncomprehending. “Sir...”

“And a quarter less three!” the leadsman called from the chains, the worry in his voice very apparent now.

Captain Sawyer swung his pistol around to point it at Mister Wellard. “This is my ship!” he said, and there was a catch in his voice. He looked between Mister Wellard and Lieutenant Buckland, who swallowed and glanced at the crew of the nearest gun.

“Fire,” he said, in a dull, almost hopeless voice.

“Fire!” the gun captain shouted and the men beside it ducked down, cupping their hands over their ears. The gun fired and then the whole ship juddered and shook, nearly jerking Miller off his feet. He put his hand out to steady himself, wondering what had gone wrong.

Something had hit Mister Buckland in the head, opening a cut on his forehead that was streaming blood. “We’re aground, God help us!”

Another round-shot came over, striking the bulwark. The enemy had the range and would pound Renown to matchwood.

Mister Wellard and Captain Sawyer were both flat on the deck and scrabbling for the Captain’s pistol. Buckland saw the struggle and threw himself into it. The pistol discharged harmlessly, sending the ball thudding into the mizzenmast.

Then the Captain was up, running aft, to his cabin. Miller stood aside, confused and uncertain. Nothing in his training had ever prepared him for a situation like this.

The deck jolted beneath his feet again as another shot struck her. Wellard was running for’rard, obviously sent on some errand by Mister Buckland, who was nursing what looked like a deep cut that must have been caused by a flying splinter.

And then Lieutenant Bush came racing on deck, soaked through and followed by Mister Kennedy and Mister Hornblower.

“Where is the Captain?” Mister Kennedy asked, having to shout to be heard above the sounds of battle.

“Gone to earth somewhere. I’ve sent young Wellard to look for the doctor,” Mister Buckland said, and held his handkerchief up to his head again. He looked the very picture of despair. “Where the hell is he?”

That, of course, was something Miller didn’t know. Nor did he know exactly where the Captain had gone – he hadn’t gone through the door into his cabin, which was where the Marine would have expected him to have gone.

The three junior lieutenants were discussing something among themselves and turned to launch a boat. Miller hoped they were going to get the Renown afloat again; it felt horrible to be stuck here, under the guns of the cliff-top fort, being pounded helplessly by enemy guns without being able to return fire.
Aground. Aground under the guns of an enemy fort. The realisation seemed a death knell. There was a lot of bustle around the boats and Miller saw that they were hoisting out the blue cutter and the launch. He wondered what they were doing and nearly yelled for the Sergeant, who was up on the poop with the small-arms men, before he realised that Mister Hornblower was directing them. Well, they couldn't be planning on deserting if they had a lieutenant with them. That wouldn't make sense.

There was some sort of kerfuffle going on up towards the larboard cathead, where the second bower anchor was stowed, as the launch pulled around towards the bows, with Mister Bush sitting in the sternsheets.

Miller wondered what they were planning, and recalled one of the other Marines talking about how they'd run aground on a sandbank. They'd dropped an anchor astern and then used the capstan to haul themselves off, exactly the same way as any anchor was raised when putting out to sea, apart from the fact that they were hauling the ship backwards instead of forwards, because of the way they'd gone aground.

The cutter had already moved aft, out of Miller's view, but the launch was already being rowed around with the anchor aboard, moving sluggishly as it would with such a great weight of iron pressing it down.

The guns from the fort were still firing and Miller saw a plume of water shoot up near the launch. The boat appeared to be untouched, luckily, though, before passing out of his sight aft, with the heavy anchor resting athwartships on the gunwales, pressing it down. How long could even the launch, the biggest of the ship's boats, remain afloat with several hundredweight of iron aboard it?

He had no idea, but anything, even such a desperate attempt, was better than nothing, and staying to just get shot to pieces without being able to do anything about it. There were better ways of dying, after all. Although he had no plans on dying here, now, if he could avoid it, of course. There just seemed precious little he could do to stop it – and he was not going to go running below like a young powder monkey on his first time under fire.

There was a jolt, and he thought at first that another ball had hit Renown somewhere. Mister Bush came aboard, soaked through and Miller blinked, wondering what on earth had happened to him.
Surely he hadn't fallen in, not a Lieutenant as experienced as he was? Mister Hornblower followed him and they both came running aft, and would have run into Miller if he hadn't stepped aside sharpish.

A sudden voice made him jump. “They pushed me, that's what they did! Pushed me!” There was nothing Miller could do to help with the efforts to free Renown and it wasn't deserting his post to see who had spoken, was it? It sounded like the Captain, but if it was him, where was he?

There he was, under the poop-deck steps. What he was doing down there, Miller couldn't say, but he wasn't the only one to have seen the officer. He was shouldered aside by the gunner, Mister Hobbs, who crouched down next to the Captain, leaving Miller to turn back to attend to his own duty.

There was another shot and a couple of powder monkeys ran past, clutching the yard-long 'nippers' that were used to seize the anchor cable to the never-ending messenger that actually wrapped around the drum of the capstan. Another ball ploughed into the rail, throwing up a cloud of splinters and the doctor came aft, covered in blood. “Where is he?” he demanded of Mister Buckland.

The lieutenant still seemed dazed. “He's over there somewhere.”

“Mister Wellard!” the lieutenant called, addressing the midshipman. “Find Sergeant Whiting and bring him here with four of his men! Quickly now!”

“Aye, aye, sir!” The midshipman replied, and ran off towards the poop. Doctor Clive noticed Mister Hobbs and crossed over to him, crouching down to say something to the Captain.

There was a slight shudder under his feet as Renown's guns fired back, even though they could do nothing against the fort. Mister Hornblower came topside a moment later and spoke to Mister Buckland, even as Doctor Clive brought the Captain out of hiding.

“Here's one of them. Mutineers, all of them.”

Miller came properly to attention as Sergeant Whiting clattered down the steps a few minutes later, accompanied by Cullen and Joyse. He glanced around and called Miller and Brice over, from where they had ostensibly been standing sentry, even though there was nothing for them to do where they were.

“You're under arrest for mutiny and treason! Sergeant Whiting, do your duty!”

The Sergeant looked at Mister Buckland, who raised a hand, turning to Mister Hornblower. “The priority is to refloat the ship, sir,” he said, sounding impatient.

Whiting glanced behind him.

“What?” Mister Buckland said, and controlled himself. “So we should. Yes.”

Hornblower turned to the midshipman. “Wellard, my respects to Mister Bush, tell him to carry on.”

Wellard darted past the Marines, heading for the companionway, only to be halted by the Captain's querulous voice. “Stay there, you puppy!” He looked around. “I give the orders here!”

Mister Hornblower looked at Wellard, and when he spoke, it was in an entirely reasonable tone. “Mister Wellard, please.”
“Aye, aye, sir.” He darted below, probably glad to get away.

“Do your duty, Sergeant,” the Captain said. “Do your duty, or by God, I will.” He was waving his pistols around again.

Mister Hornblower stepped forward, into the captain's line of fire. “Doctor Clive, is the captain fit to command this vessel?”

“You know it's not as simple as that!” the doctor responded, though Miller couldn't see how much simpler it could possibly be. They'd run aground following the captain's orders – orders he never would have given if he'd been completely in command of himself.

“Arrest him!” the Captain demanded, pointing at Mister Hornblower.

Another shot from the fort rocked the ship and Mister Hornblower seemed to lose patience with the surgeon.

“Doctor Clive, if you continue to prevaricate, we shall all die here!”

“I'll count to three...” Captain Sawyer said, approaching the Third Lieutenant until his pistol was pressing into him.

“Doctor Clive!”

“One... Two...”

“You're endangering the ship, sir! Doctor Clive!”

“All right, yes.”

“Three!” Miller heard the click as the Captain pulled the trigger and the flint fell, sparking on an empty pan.

The Captain had fired both pistols earlier. Had the officers realised that or not? He couldn't believe that Mister Hornblower would have let himself be threatened in that way by a madman with a loaded weapon, so he must have known.

And then it sounded as though all of Renown's guns fired at once, though Miller couldn't see how that would help anything, not with the fort's high it was out of their range. She shuddered a little, even as the Captain looked at his pistol in bewilderment. “What happened?”

“Sergeant Whiting, the Captain has been declared unfit for command. Relieve him of command and escort him below.”

Sergeant Whiting moved forward and took one of the Captain's arms, as gently as he knew how, only to be shaken off.

Mister Kennedy came running up. “What's going on?” he asked, looking from where Sergeant Whiting was standing with the Captain, to Mister Hornblower, and back again.

“Doctor Clive has finally declared the captain unfit for command.”

“It was under duress,” the surgeon said.

Miller almost expected Mister Hornblower to stamp his foot, but of course he didn't. “Did you or did you not declare the Captain unfit for command?”
“You were being threatened with a pistol, for God's sake!”

“By whom?” Mister Kennedy interjected.

“By the Captain.” Mister Bush's words were dry, hiding the fact that if the Captain was threatening anyone with a pistol then of course he wasn't fit to command a ship.

“Come on, sir,” Sergeant Whiting said, again taking the Captain's arm. Captain Sawyer gathered what remained of his wits and his dignity and allowed himself to be guided into his cabin.

Miller felt the change under his feet as the Renown slipped free of the mudbank, or whatever it was that had held her firm, and gathered speed, heading out of the bay and to a safe distance from that fort and its guns.

“All right, lads, you're dismissed,” Whiting said, even as he guided the Captain to a chair. “I'll take this watch.”

Miller blinked and looked at Joyse, who shrugged. The Marines slipped out of the cabin, heading down to their messes.

“He was holdin' a pistol on Mister Hornblower, can you credit it?” Miller said, still unable to quite believe it himself. “He'd fired both his pistols earlier, though I don't think any of the officers knew that. Well, Mister Buckland might've, but I don't think the doctor or the Third Luff did.”

“So you's sayin' he risked his own life, or as good as, just to get Doctor Clive to say 'ficially summat we've all knowed for... weeks?” Brice put in. “Why wouldn't he say it afore? The doctor, I mean?”

“Sailed with the Captain for years, he has. Like Mister Hobbs has, too.” Joyse said. “Least, that's what I've heared. Whether it's true or not, I wouldn't like to say.”

Corporal Kinsley barred their way. “Where d'you think you're off to, then?”

“Bin relieved, Corp'ral. Sar'nt Whitin' says as how he's goin' to take this watch.” Brice looked a little nervous, though it was nothing more than the truth.

Corporal Kinsley looked at them. “That's as maybe. Sam Cresswell got it in the first five minutes, an' I need a couple of you to find his hammock an' start makin' ready to give him a decent send-off.”

Cresswell. He wasn't one of the Marines that Miller knew very well, thankfully, but he must have hesitated a little too long because the Corporal looked straight at him. “Glad you volunteered, Dusty. Maybe Cullen will join you in that?”

Cullen opened his mouth and closed it again. Corporal Kinsley was known for 'volunteering' men if they didn't look to. “C'mon, mate, s'pose we'd better,” he said, and turned to head topside again, to prepare the fallen Marine for burial.

* * *

The crew of Renown gathered later that afternoon to hear the burial service read over their dead crewmates, Captain Seafort doing so for the three dead Marines, one of whom had died of his wounds even as the Renown had shaken herself free of the sandbank. The short service came to an end, and Miller noticed one of the seamen pausing beside Mister Hobbs for a moment, but thought no more about it as the Marines were dismissed to head below and get their heavy woollen coats off.
Supper passed quietly enough and then hammocks were piped down. It seemed only moments later that the bosun’s cry of “Out or down!” echoed through the berth deck. Miller tuned it out, not being on duty now, and turned over, pulling his thin pillow over his head.

He was startled by a hand shaking his hammock violently. “Turn out! All Marines, turn out!”

“Wh... what?” he mumbled, rolling to the deck sleepily and fumbling for his trousers. “On deck! Report to Captain Seafort on the poop deck! All Marines on deck!”

Whoever it was who had so summarily woken him moved away, waking Marines as he went.

Miller scrambled into his trousers and fumbled for the rest of his kit, wondering what the hell was going on even as he followed the other Marines topside.

Sergeant Whiting was counting them as they passed him. “All Marines accounted for sir, apart from the sentries,” he said, reporting to Captain Seafort.

“Very well. Have Corporal Kinsley take two men and check them, too.”

“Aye, aye, sir,” he said, and turned to Corporal Kinsley. “Take Brice and Simms and go round the sentries, Corporal,” he said. “Those who have muskets, to the rail. Raise the alarm if you see anything out of place!”

“Aye, aye, Sar’nt,” Kinsley replied, beckoning to the two Marines, who were both part of the Corporal's guard tonight and so were more awake than the others and were correctly attired.

They returned ten minutes later, dragging Briggs and Pearce with them and shaking their heads. “Davies got it, bad. Stabbed several times. An’ the arms locker was raided, too.”

Miller blinked, trying not to yawn, even as he pieced together what was going on. Run... a whole bunch of seamen had run, knocking two of the sentries out and killing a third. And now the Marines on duty were being told to shoot any sailor who so much as looked in the wrong place.

Desertion... After all that had happened so far, Miller wasn't sure he blamed those who had gone. After all, who knew what was going to happen when they reached Kingston... Everyone knew that in cases of mutiny, the whole crew was tried – they were still hunting for the mutineers of Hermione after all, and those that were caught were hanged. Though, from what Lakey said, that had been a particularly blood-thirsty mutiny.

Still, they'd killed one Marine, and the other two didn't look much better off. It was possible that the deserters had thought they'd killed them, too, and hadn't waited around to make sure of it. Miller shivered a little, and it wasn't wholly because of the chill of the night air.

Whatever was going to happen, he couldn't run and desert his mates. Not like some people... He wondered again where the deserters were and what they thought awaited them ashore.

The Lieutenants held a muttered discussion on the quarterdeck below. Whatever was going on, Miller wished they'd hurry up and dismiss them so he could get back to his hammock.

It was not to be.

Mister Buckland straightened his shoulders. “We attack the fort!”

There was a full-throated huzzahing from the sailors, but even half-awake, the Marines didn't let themselves go.
“Right, all those not correctly dressed will go below and dress and equip themselves. Report back here when you have done so,” Captain Seafort said. “Dismiss!”

Fully awake now, Miller and the others hurried below, scrambling into their uniform coats, wondering what sort of attack this was going to be – the night was already half-over, and nobody set out on a shore attack at this sort of time. If you were going to commit to a night attack, you did it when it was getting dark so as to have as much secrecy as possible before the enemy knew you were there.
Sometimes doing the job you're paid to do can be good.

I make no profit from writing in fandom and all characters are returned to their boxes when I have finished with them. Apart from the Marines, who are mine anyway. Opinions stated within are not necessarily those of the author. This part brought to you by the letters D, U, the colour orange and the call of the wild.

This chapter has a second part, told from the POV of recurring character Charley Brice.

What it'd be, Miller thought, trying to find his other gaiter in the hot darkness of the Marines' messdeck, is nice to do a proper bit of fightin' or somesuch, rather'n tryin' to put up with a Captain who's mad as...as... He failed to find an appropriate simile, but did come up with his other gaiter, which he hastily buttoned on, snatching up crossbelts and scrambling into them even as he joined the queue at the arms locker to collect his musket.

“It's a deal too late to be doin' this,” Lakey muttered, glancing up at the sky. There was an ominous paleness to the sky now, and Miller was positive it was easier to see the older Marine's face than it had been. “Best time to be doin' this sort of thing is when it's getting' dark, so as to land when it is dark. Had a proper good night for it an' all – no moon to show us up.”

“All right, pipe down there!” Corporal Kinsley called. “Into the boats, no talkin', c'mon. Move!”

“Stick with me, lad, I'll see you right,” Lakey said in a hushed voice as they went back on deck.

Miller found himself in the blue cutter, along with several other Marines, including the others from his mess, and Mister Hornblower. He hadn't appreciated before that it was crowded in a ship's boat, and that there would be so much spray. He kept his musket upright, glad suddenly for the cork that had been issued along with it to stop the muzzle. He hunched his shoulders a bit, thinking that it was probably worse for the few Marines who'd ended up in the jolly boat.

There was the slight crunching sound of sand under the keel and the sailors in the bows were out, splashing through shallow water to drag the boats further up. There was a tap on Miller's shoulder. “C'mon then,” Lakey said, and Miller scrambled up to follow the older Marine. He'd practised a boat landing once, but that was back at home on a shingle beach on the Isle of Sheppey, before Renown left the Medway properly. They hadn't had a chance since to do anything like this, and Miller felt his inexperience keenly.

It was hard work running up the beach on soft, shifting sand. Even the few yards Miller had to go to fall in made him appreciate the firm wooden planking of Renown's decks, though it was
probably simply because he was so used to that that the sand felt so bad. He was thankful for his gaiters, which kept the soft gritty stuff out of his shoes.

The sky was definitely lightening now, though. He was almost sure he could see a tinge of red in the coat of the man next to him, and wondered how much of that was his imagination. Probably not much, judging by the look on Joyse's face as he snatched a quick glance at him.

The officers led the way up the beach, seemingly disregarding the difficulty of walking in the soft sand above the high tide line. The back of the beach was marked by scattered rocks, and Miller's breath caught as the officers suddenly ducked down. The Marines crouched too, despite not knowing what it was that the officers had seen. The beach suddenly felt open and exposed, especially with daylight creeping up on them.

He expected to hear shots fired as one of the officers suddenly stood up and pulled his hat off. Miller's heart almost stopped.

Nothing. No shots. Silence, apart from the sea lapping at the shore behind them.

“Randall and the deserters, sir.” It was Mister Hornblower, then. “Nothing to fear, sir.” His voice carried on the still air, and Miller found himself able to breathe again. Though... If there was nothing to fear, were they asleep? No, couldn't be, not with the officer talking in a normal tone of voice like that.

Somehow, they were dead. But how? And who had done the deed? Not the Spanish, or they'd have come under fire already, wouldn't they – if they'd even been able to land.

Sprawled, dead. All of them with their throats cut

“Least it was quick,” someone muttered from behind him. Miller wasn't so sure. One of them had his trousers around his ankles and was sprawled face down. Had he died here, or elsewhere and been dragged here?

“Cover him up,” Hornblower said, pointing at the half-naked seaman. Someone stooped to pull the man's trousers back up. “Are they all here?”

“Only one way to be sure,” Bush said dryly. “Lay 'em all out and count 'em.”

Miller wished he hadn't said that, though as it turned out, they got the sailors to do the work while the Marines fanned out, keeping a watchful eye on the rocks and shallow cliffs surrounding the small bay.

“You think this the work of the Spaniards?” Mister Hornblower was asking. “No gunfire, no sign of a struggle. It looks as though they were taken in their sleep.”

There was no time to bury them, not if they wanted to reach that fort. Remembering the way they had treated Davies, Miller thought it was no more than they deserved, anyway. Though, to be fair, they hadn't all actually done the deed, after all.

Brice had been cursing his luck at getting left behind, as part of the Corporal's guard. Sentry posts
still needed to be covered while the main body of the *Renown*'s Marines were ashore after all. He sighed, trying not to lean too obviously on his musket. The water was sparkling in the sun and he squinted at it. Something was moving across the glitter. He blinked, unable to believe his eyes when one of their boats approached, full of men. Two were their own sailors and the others... He didn't recognise them, but they were all black.

“Sergeant!” he called, glancing away to scan the deck for Sergeant Whiting. “Sergeant!”

“What is it?” Whiting took the boat in at a glance. “Good lad.” He went aft to find the First Lieutenant.

Mister Buckland came up on deck and Brice glanced at him, shifting over so he could see better. There were more footsteps behind him and Brice glanced back to see that Whiting had obviously turned out the guard as well, before joining the Lieutenant – and the Doctor was here too, though Brice had no idea why.

One of the black men had his arm around the sailor and a pistol to his head.

“That's my boat!” Mister Buckland said, sounding somewhat surprised. Brice rolled his eyes, glad nobody could see his face. “What in God's name?” He closed his telescope as one of the black men shouted something, then waved his hat. It looked as though he was wearing some sort of uniform, though Brice didn't recognise it. His English was heavily accented, but the Marine understood him to say something about 'the Free Army of Santo Domingo' or something.

“I say to you, sir, this is not your fight!”

“Jumped up slaves!” seemed to be the surgeon's opinion.

“What are they doing with my boat? And with my own men, God damn it!”

“Do I give the order to fire, sir?” Sergeant Whiting wanted to know. Brice and the other Marines hefted their muskets, though the chance of hitting the sailor was at least as great as that of hitting anyone else.

“You will do no such thing! N... Not... Not until I...”

“Sir! Get us out of here, sir!” the sailor called, sounding a little panicked – and well he might.

“You will return my men at once!” Mister Buckland called. Quite how he was intending to make them do that, Brice couldn't say. “Or I will open fire!”

“Make ready,” Sergeant Whiting growled, and the Marines brought their muskets upright, dragging back the flints against the heavy pressure of the springs.

The black man in the uniform was still shouting, but the doctor cut across his words. “Could try holding talks?”

“With a slave?” Buckland was incredulous. “How would it look?”

“In range, sir,” Sergeant Whiting said. Brice was still fairly sure they'd hit the sailor as well as the black men, but it wasn't his place to say anything. “We can take him now, sir.”

“No! I... said no.” He didn't sound very convinced, in Brice's opinion. If he'd been allowed to express an opinion, anyway.

“Recall your men and there will be no more bloodshed!” the black man was saying.
“Sir!” The black holding the sailor jabbed the pistol into his cheek, making him flinch away from it.

“What bloodshed?”

“Randall and the other deserters, sir!” the sailor called.

“We believed they were Spanish, but we have no quarrel with you. Recall the rest of your men, and no harm will come to these two.”

“Mister Buckland,” the surgeon pressed.

“One moment,” the Lieutenant replied.

The sailor obviously heard that, as the Marines had. Unlike the majority of sailors – and Marines, including Brice himself – he could swim. He struck out blindly for Renown, obviously not wanting the implied threat to be carried out. The black man who had been threatening him went into the water too and they began struggling. Another aimed a musket at them.

“Release my men at once! I said, release... my... men!”

The trouble was, Buckland had no real way of making the black man do anything of the sort, and they all knew it.

“Front rank, present!” Whiting growled. Brice's hands were clammy, but he brought the heavy musket up into his shoulder. The black man seemed to be trying to drown the sailor, holding his head under the water.

“Do we fire, sir?” Whiting wanted to know.

“Fire...?” The way it was said, it sounded like an order, and a musket went off. Brice was never sure afterwards whether he'd pulled the trigger first or if someone else had and he'd just followed suit. He wasn't the only one, though.

At least one of the bare-chested blacks in the boat went into the water.

“No! I said, no!” Buckland waved a hand around, ineffectually trying to wave the white powder smoke aside.

“Cease fire!” Sergeant Whiting did not look happy. “Reload!”

Scattered musket shots came from the boat.

“I gave no order to fire!” Buckland was furious with what had just happened, and the consequences of it. The sailor in the water took a shot to the chest and stopped struggling as the water around him tinged pink.

“You will regret this!” the black man yelled, even as Mister Buckland and the surgeon pushed past the Marines to cross to the other side of the ship.

~ ~ ~

The fort was the usual low-profile sort of thing, with a glacis, ditches, ravelins, musket loops, defensive outworks and other things. It looked downright nasty, in Miller's opinion. The one thing of interest was a round tower made of stone, that looked like a bigger version of the stout Martello towers that had been built to defend the coast, back at home. That looked just as nasty, in its own
way.

How the officers expected to get inside without cannon and siegeworks, Miller couldn't tell. This was the sort of job for the Army – though Marines were better than soldiers any day. They didn't have the sort of numbers the Army had, even counting the sailors.

Two of the officers had gone ahead to reconnoitre. Miller wasn't sure he believed his eyes. There seemed to be a couple on the top of the tower, kissing.

*Lucky thing*, he thought.

Sudden musket fire attracted their attention. It sounded as though it was coming from where *Renown* lay at anchor.

The gunfire had obviously attracted someone else's attention, too. A bell began jangling wildly, its sound carrying tinnily over the few hundred yards between the tower and the waiting Renowns.

Mister Bush shrugged and looked at the waiting seamen and Marines. “Charge...!” he bellowed.

They needed no further urging, running pell-mell over the rough ground towards the fort, yelling.

There was dead ground between them and the fort and suddenly white-coated soldiers rose up, seeming to appear out of the ground, with levelled muskets. Some shots told; Miller heard someone go down behind him, but he kept on going, trying to see the dark blue coats of the officers in the sudden powder-smoke.

“Marines!” The suddenness of Captain Seafort's shout brought Miller up sharp. “Form on me!”

The foreign soldiers retreated and the sailors followed, pouring over the hot white stone of the fire-step into the broad ditch in front of the fort. It was made of the same white stone and Miller was suddenly strangely glad it was only very soon after sunrise, though already the stone was getting hot.

The Marines had formed up at the top of the ditch's boundary, muskets upright.

“Make ready!”

He dragged the flint back, the click echoed by those of the other Marines' muskets.

“Present!”

“Fire!”
Chapter Summary

Dry land is possibly better than being at sea. Until you get stuck in a tight spot.

Chapter Notes

. I make no profit from writing in fandom and all characters are returned to their boxes when I have finished with them. Apart from the Marines, who are mine anyway. This chapter brought to you by the letters D, U, the colour white and the Rock of Gibraltar.

The sailors were pouring over the stone firestep, intent on taking the fort. It was likely to be more complicated than that, but Miller had no time to think about it. He dragged a cartridge from his pouch and bit the end off, inadvertently getting some of the powder in his mouth. He spat the paper out, priming the musket pan, hardly aware of the shouts of the sailors in front of him.

The sailors had disappeared around a corner of the ditch – this was a regular fortress, designed in the European style – and there was nothing for the Marines to do now but reload their muskets in peace. They could still hear firing, though, and looked to Captain Seafort.

There was a shout from ahead, taken up by the sailors: “Marines!”

“Come on,” Captain Seafort called, leading them into the ditch to find what was needed from them.

Miller's mouth was dry and not just from the powder. He'd never been in a situation like this, ever, and it was exhilarating and terrifying all at the same time.

For some reason, there were two officers heading the other way as the Marines ran along the paved floor of the ditch. Miller was so used to the movement of a ship at sea that the ground felt dead under his feet and he came close to stumbling more than once because he was expecting the normal movement of a ship in the water.

There was a large group of seamen crouching down for some reason as they ran up. There was a series of musket loops in the wall above them, and they came up, randomly putting their musket muzzles through and pulling the triggers, in the vain hope that they might hit someone, before ducking down to reload again, Marine-fashion.

This was not quite like fighting aboard ship, where you could see the enemy and had a chance to get him before he could get you. This was more like shooting rats in a barrel... though Miller didn't want to think who the rats were, or which side of this musket loop was the barrel.

There was a clatter above his head and he glanced up from reloading to see that a sailor had managed to swing a grapnel up, which had caught on the sill of a window above them. Whoever had done that, he was a plucky lad. The tar pushed through the ranks of the Marines and Miller...
saw that it was Styles, one of the bosun's mates – the man who'd had that falling-out with Randall a few weeks back. He took a firm grip on the rope and began using it to climb the wall, something that Miller knew he could never do. Sailors were used to going aloft in all sorts of weather, though. Quite what he expected to do once he got up there, Miller didn't know – and never found out. There was a brief pause, and then a dull clang and Miller found himself flat on his back, along with several others, the wind knocked out of them by the dead weight of Styles, whose rope had been cut away so that he had ended up falling to the ground, to have his fall broken by the unsuspecting Marines.

That hurt! Miller lay there for a moment, staring up at the blue sky and wondering if he'd ever be able to breathe again. He sucked in a lungful of air, feeling as though he'd taken a fist to the solar plexus and had all the air knocked out of him.

“Get up, there – this is no time to be lazing around!” He didn't see who the speaker was, but felt blindly for his hat and musket, hoping that neither of them had been damaged by the fall. The ground was hard and he was going to be bruised all over come tomorrow. Heaven only knew how Styles had survived, and not taken a musket ball or landed on someone's bayonet.

Suddenly there were shots from behind them. Miller flinched as a bullet whistled past his ear, to flatten itself against the stonework of the wall in front of him. He turned, along with the others, and standing with their backs against the wall, fired a ragged volley into the Spanish soldiers who had appeared unexpectedly behind them.

“Come on!” Captain Seafort shouted, pointing along the ditch with his sword. They ran, muskets empty, trying to keep their heads low, and ended up with their backs against a blank stone wall, trying to reload as quickly as possible without spilling powder or overfilling the pan, or any of half a hundred other things that could happen when hurrying the loading procedure. None of them wanted to look like raw recruits, after all.

Mister Bush ended up next to Miller and fired his pistol at the Spanish even as Miller replaced his ramrod in the brass pipes under the barrel of his musket. On Bush's other side, Styles was dusting himself off, still looking a little shaken.

Somehow, Captain Seafort organised the Marines into two ranks, with the seamen behind them – which made sense as most of the sailors only had cutlasses or pistols to defend themselves with. It was turning into a sort of pitched battle, which couldn't end well – a fort like this would be able to replace the soldiers who fell and they would simply end up overwhelming the Renowns by sheer weight of numbers.

He shivered a little, despite the growing heat – it was starting to feel like the inside of an oven now, and that wasn't helped by the woollen jacket he was wearing, even though it was a lighter version than the one issued to Marines in home waters.

“It's hopeless, sir!” Styles said, and Bush replied something that Miller didn't hear. He was too busy listening for Captain Seafort's orders, after all.

There was a lull in the fighting suddenly. Miller finished loading, breathing hard, still not fully recovered from having Styles land on him – though he hadn't taken the full brunt of the man's fall. The Marines and the Spaniards glared at each other over levelled muskets.

“You must surrender,” one of the Dons said.

“When you see Mister Hornblower, tell him...” Mister Bush said, and paused. “Nothing.”

“You must surrender!” The speaker was not much older than Miller himself, and was wearing a
“Tell him he'll hang from the yardarm.” Bush's words were quiet, spoken without rancour.

There was an explosion between the Marines and the Spanish that shook the ground under Miller's feet and made him turn his head away from the sudden dust and flying chips of stone that resulted. He couldn't see and blinked away tears caused by the dust and smoke, to see that there had been a solid wooden door in the wall, which had been blown to shreds. Mister Hornblower, Mister Kennedy, the young Mister Wellard and the bosun, Matthews, appeared through the dust, looking almost ghost-like.

“Glad to see you safe, Mister Bush,” was Mister Hornblower's only comment. Miller wondered how he could talk; his own mouth was as dry as the dust that was making him cough.

“Likewise, Mister Hornblower.” Bush turned. “Renowns, to me!” He led the way into the tunnel, and Miller followed. Thankfully the air was clearer in here, although it was much darker after the bright sunlight. It was also a lot cooler.

There were soldiers inside, but not half as many as there had been outside, and the Renowns now had the advantage of numbers. They were yelling and cheering, hoarse from the dust and determined not to be backed into a corner again.

They came out of the tunnel into daylight again to find a broad stone slope that led God knew where, with Spanish skirmishers kneeling, spread out, in several lines, ready to fire and fall back. Miller saw someone in a red jacket go down, but couldn't spare him a glance to see who it was.

Somehow the Marines formed up in two ragged ranks – Miller himself was grabbed and pulled into place, and he wasn't the only one – and Captain Seafort yelled, “Front rank, kneel!” The order was repeated by Corporal Kinsley and Miller dropped to his knee without thinking about it.

“Marines! Present!” Bush yelled and their muskets came up into the shoulder, though Miller didn't know how many of them were loaded. He knew that his musket was, and suddenly hoped that his wasn't the only one. Although, if they were told to fire now, Mister Bush would be a casualty himself, as well as several of Renown's seamen. He licked dry lips, hoping that they would not need to fire on their own shipmates.

“Now will you surrender?” Bush asked. It was almost a let-down as the man he was opposing drew his sword and reversed it in defeat.

“Sir!” There was no answer.

“Sir!”

The bellow made Miller jump and he looked over to see that Matthews and Styles were standing by the parapet, obviously having seen something of importance.

“Right, let's see if we can't find somewhere to stow these Dons,” Captain Seafort said, drawing Miller's attention away.

“There's some sort of storeroom or something, sir. It's empty and there's a decent strong door to it,” Corporal Kinsley reported.

“Right, we'll put them there, then.”

Miller found himself relieving the Spanish of their weapons and helping the others get them into the store-room. It was a decent size, built of solid stone, with only the one door. It might almost
have been designed to be a cell, he thought, glad that they hadn't had to surrender, in which case the Renowns might well have ended up in this same bare room.

Half-an-hour or so later, he discovered what that yell had been about. There were three Spanish vessels in the bay below, making for the open sea.

“Heated shot.”

“What?”

“'Parently, Mister Hornblower wants to use heated shot on 'em – like they used on us. Means we heat each shot up till it's red-hot, then fire it. Takes ages to cool 'em down – a bucket or two of water won't make no diff'rence, they'll still be hot enough to set the ships on fire.”

“Oh.” Miller bowed to Lakey's superior knowledge.

“We work the guns like usual, only 'stead of usin' normal-size balls, we got to use smaller ones. They'll be heated in a furnace, an' brung up in a special contraption. Can't use 'em at sea 'cause of the risk of settin' your own ship afire, see.”

“Ah.”

“Get a move on, you two! You're helpin' crew this gun here!” Kinsley shouted, pointing at one of the guns overlooking the bay.

Miller followed the example of Lakey and Dickin, and left his musket with theirs, 'piled' in a triangle in a method which was apparently common with the Army.

It was a nerve-wracking experience, using a ball so hot that it was actually glowing. The first shot, from one of the other guns, splashed harmlessly into the water. Something was wrong, though. There was no time to lay the match to the touchhole before Miller saw smoke coming from the cannon.

“Stop! Leave the gun!” Miller turned to see Mister Bush and Mister Hornblower run up. He frowned, not understanding.

“She's going to blow!” That sounded like Mister Hobbes' voice. Miller frowned in confusion.

“Leave the gun! Run!”

Without even thinking about it, Miller obeyed the order, jumping down from his perch and running away, past Mister Bush.

The gun blew up, sending chunks of metal and bits of the heavy wooden gun-truck in all directions. The force of the explosion knocked Miller off his feet. He lay there on the ground, winded. What on earth had happened?

“You all right, there?” He looked up, to see Simms standing there, offering him a hand, which he took gratefully.

“What happened?” he said, getting to his feet and accepting his hat which Joyse held out to him.

“Think the shot was too hot an' it was left too long – needs to be fired off almost at once, when usin' heated shot,” Joyse answered.

“How d'you know that?” Simms asked, frankly astonished. It was impossible to use such a thing
at sea, after all.

“Used it when I was in Gib, a few years back,” Joyse answered with a shrug.

Miller looked distrustfully at the glowing iron ball that was being hauled up a few yards away. “Bloody dangerous, if you ask me,” he muttered.

“I didn't ask you. Now, get on with what you're supposed to be doin’.” Corporal Kinsley's voice made him jump.

“No, no, that's all right, Corporal.” Mister Hornblower approached and the Marines stiffened to attention. “Right, then. Miller, isn't it?”

Miller blinked and wet suddenly dry lips. How did the officer know his name? “Yes, sir,” he said, though his voice sounded little more than a dry croak.

“You think you can help me with the next shot?”

“Help... you, sir?” Was the officer mad? Not like Captain Sawyer's sort of mad, but there were different sorts, weren't there? He swallowed. There was only one answer to give when an officer asked a question like that. “Aye, aye, sir.” It had, after all, been an order rather than a question, no matter how it was phrased. He rubbed suddenly damp palms against his dusty white trousers.

“You'll be on the tackle,” Mister Hornblower said briskly, and went to round up other members of the shattered gun’s crew, leaving Miller gaping until a poke from Simms recalled him to his duty. He reluctantly headed towards the cannon Mister Hornblower had indicated, feeling rather as he thought a condemned man must feel on his way to the gallows.

They loaded the gun without any problems, though Miller couldn't help feeling slightly queasy as he watched the glowing ball roll into the muzzle of the gun. “Run her out!”

He hauled on the tackle, helped by Joyse, with two sailors on the other side. The ponderous weight of the gun ran up to the embrasure.

Miller was poised to jump clear, and then a voice shouted, “Fire!” The gun fired, recoiling to be brought up short by the tackle, and the Marine was surprised to see the ball hit the gaff of one of the ships, bringing down the big main gaff-sail of the leading Spanish vessel.

Another gun fired. “Another hit?” Mister Hornblower asked.

“No, better than that,” Mister Bush replied, looking through the telescope.

“It's the Renown, sir,” Mister Wellard said, a grin spreading across his face.

Miller and the others let out a cheer. They hadn't been forgotten after all.
Lieutenant Buckland came ashore with Sergeant Whiting and some of Renown's remaining Marines, who looked fresh as anything compared to how Miller felt. Thankfully the Sergeant didn't say anything about the state they were in.

“I take it the fort is ours!” Mister Buckland said, sounding cheerful.

“Thank you, sir,” the others replied.

Buckland looked as though he was going to say more, but was interrupted by Sergeant Whiting's brisk, no-nonsense voice. “Sir! Spanish boat approaching under flag of truce.”

“May be the Spanish commanding officer, sir,” Mister Hornblower said. Mister Buckland leaned forward to say something privately to him, before turning to greet the Dago, who took his hat off and bowed in a way Miller thought was possibly the most ridiculous thing he had ever seen.

Mister Buckland removed his own hat, though he inclined his head instead of bowing. “Captain Buckland, of His Majesty's Ship Renown.”

Acting Captain, Miller thought fiercely, though with the state their actual captain was in, he couldn't blame the officer. He took a slightly firmer grip on his musket.

“Shall we go out to my ship, where we can talk in more comfort?” Mister Buckland offered.

“There is a room here where we can talk,” the Spanish officer said.

Miller couldn't think of anything he'd rather do right now than get back to the familiarity of Renown's messdeck, change his shirt and – hopefully – get his head down. It seemed it was not to be, however. Lakey and Miller were detailed to accompany the officers in case anything happened. After all, everyone knew the Spanish couldn't be trusted.
It appeared that the Dagoes wanted to give up the island, fort, everything, provided they could sail away in their own ships, taking the womenfolk and children with them. There was something fishy about that, but maybe it had something to do with what Cullen had said had happened aboard Renown earlier. Well, maybe not aboard, but certainly in the water near her. With a bunch of blacks threatening – and killing – a couple of sailors, maybe there was a reason for the officers to wonder why the Dagoes were giving in so easily. Well, the officers had an hour to think it over, anyway, which gave the Marines an hour to relax and cool off, hopefully. Although, that was probably a faint hope now that Sergeant Whiting was ashore, too.

And no. Corporal Kinsley had brought a relief for them, and grabbed them nearly as soon as they were dismissed, to inform them that Sergeant Whiting wanted to inspect them and see how much ammunition they had left. Which meant that they would be standing out in the blazing sunshine, with oven-heat bouncing off the white stone of the fort to try to cook them. Great.

“Where are the store-rooms, Corporal?” Mister Buckland wanted to know, seeing the three Marines pass.

Kinsley blinked and pulled himself together. “Over yonder, sir,” he replied, pointing. “There's a couple of Marines on guard outside – you can't miss 'em.”

“Thank you.”

“Not that there's much in 'em worth guardin,'” Kinsley muttered once the officers were out of ear-shot.

“How's that, Corp'ral?”

“There ain't enough in 'em to feed a church mouse, hardly, that's what.”

Miller and Lakey exchanged glances. So... That's why the Spanish were so eager to leave. They hadn't any reason to stay.

Miller wasn't surprised to see the officers leave the stores in a very short while, but was a little more surprised that they returned to the ship, along with several of the sailors and Matthews, the bosun, as well as Sergeant Whiting.

“Stop your daydreaming, Miller!” Captain Seafort's voice made him swallow. Getting on the wrong side of an officer was never a good idea. “There'll be a fresh issue of cartridges – see Corporal Kinsley. You've done well, lads. Keep it up. To your duties... fall out!”

Finally. It was about time they could fall out, relax a bit, hopefully find some cold water or something so they could cool off. Those on sentry had come over from Renown and were all relatively fresh, but Miller knew that they would end up being relieved at some point.

The off-duty Marines had been allowed to pull off their crossbelts, hats and coats, which were placed neatly in the shade while their owners queued up by the well for a dipper or two of water. Miller poured half a dipper over his head and felt much better.

It seemed an age before the Renown's boats returned, with the three lieutenants, the gunner, a cannon and several fathoms of cordage. The Marines scrambled back into their jackets, pulling on crossbelts and grabbing hats, tugging their coats straight as the first of the cutters came up to the beach and its crew tossed oars.

Miller and the others looked at each other blankly as Mister Hornblower outlined a plan to haul a cannon up the cliff to cover the three Spanish vessels in the other harbour, using a couple of spare spars for sheer-legs.
“Right, you Marines, pile your muskets and tail on to the rope,” Mister Hornblower said, looking at the assembled redcoats.

*That's just typical,* he thought in disgust. *We got to do the hard work of haulin', an' in our thick jackets, too. Bloody wonderful, that. Least it ain't a twenty-four pounder, I s'pose.*

“Mister Wellard!” Lieutenant Hornblower was yelling over the cliff-edge to the young midshipman on the beach below. “We need someone to fend the gun off the cliff!”

Great. So not only did they have to haul up a gun, but a fairly solid middy with it. Miller was somewhat relieved to see that the arrangement of blocks used a double and a triple block, which would make their task a bit easier.

“Ready, all!”

“Ready, sir.”

Mister Bush turned from looking over the edge of the cliff. “Haul away!”

“Two, six, *heave!*”

It wasn’t like the smooth operation of haling on the braces, but more like the hard, jerky work of heaving on a halyard to pull the heavy spar up the mast to get the sail taut so it would draw. Not that Marines really did much heaving aboard ship apart from in those two situations, of course – and even then, they only touched the braces very rarely.

“Handsomely, now!” someone called, but the Marines only really had ears for Corporal Kinsley’s chant of “Two, six, *heave!* Two, six, *heave!*” which gave rhythm to the work and allowed them to work together.

The rope they were using was new hemp, tared but still rough, and if this job was going to take much longer, Miller was certain that his hands would have some new blisters by the end of the day. His hat kept the sun off, but he wished he could discard his coat and work in shirt-sleeves the way the Marines did aboard ship when doing this sort of heavy hauling. He could feel the sweat breaking out already and his shirt was sticking to him all over again.

“Keep it moving, keep it moving!” Mister Hornblower called, as though they weren’t doing just that.

“Vast hauling there!” That was Mister Kennedy's voice and the Marines paused, hanging onto the rope for dear life, wondering what had gone wrong.

Miller tightened his grip, trying not to think about the heat that prickled down his back or the weight of the sun's rays that beat down on them. Was it anything like dinner time yet, he thought. Captains generally tried not to have men away from the ship during the hour that was religiously given to the men to eat dinner, socialise and generally spend as they wished.

The bosun looked down, asked a question and darted off. Miller wished he knew what was happening, though there wasn’t anything he could do to help. He glanced over at Matthews and Styles. The bosun's mate appeared to be doing something with the end of another piece of rope, and Miller's eyes widened. “There's somethin' wrong with one of the strops, looks like,” he muttered to Pearce, who was next behind him on the rope.

He glanced back to the group of Lieutenants, surprised to see Mister Hornblower pulling off his coat and let it drop to the dusty grass at his feet.
He grinned as Styles held up the end of the rope he was working on, which had been fashioned into a hangman's noose. “It's a good knot for the job, sir,” he protested as the officer reached to take the length of rope.

Mister Hornblower stepped to the edge, and turned, looking a little nervous. Mister Kennedy raised his voice, allowing the Marines to hear his words. “I remember when you used to be scared of heights, Mister Hornblower!”

That made the Marines grin, though they clung on for dear life to the rope they'd been hauling on. It seemed to be forever before Mister Kennedy turned back to them. “Haul away, there!”

Corporal Kinsley took up the chant again. “Two, six, heave. Two, six, heave!”

Matthews and Styles and a couple of other sailors tailed on as well, which was just as well now that they had Mister Hornblower's weight in addition.

Finally, the gun was up and lying innocuously on the grass. The Marines studied their hands ruefully. Miller had a tender spot in both palms and winced as Briggs grinned mirthlessly at him. “Ain't over yet, mate, not by a long shot. There's the truck to come up here yet. Reckon the shot'll be piss-easy after that.”

“Jackets off, lads,” Kinsley said. “Take a drink of water – not too much, Briggs, I saw that! You got to make it last, 'cause I won't let any of the others do theirselves out of a drink jus' for you, later on.”

Briggs hastily shoved the cork back into the wooden canteen, dropping it on the ground by his coat and crossbelts. Miller peeled his coat off and stretched, before wetting his mouth from his own canteen. He hadn't seen the point of having them issued earlier, but was very thankful now that they had been – and that he'd been able to fill it with fresh, cold water from the well.

It was another half-bell of hard work before the truck was hauled up, the cannon-barrel lifted onto it and the cap-squares fitted into place to keep it there. Some planking had been laid and logs built up to approximate a ship's gunport, giving them somewhere to fasten the breeching ropes so that the gun could be run out after the recoil of each shot.

Miller examined his hands again. Hot, and there were definite blisters beginning to form now. His hands weren't tough like the sailors yet, but much more of this and they soon would be. He sighed as he realised that he had to get his jacket and equipment back on.

“Jackson, Brown, Harris, Davy, remain here. Corporal, choose three of your men to stay here. The rest of you, back to the boats and bring them round to the landing place at the fort. The Marines to go straight to the fort.”

“Right, Miller, Briggs, Simms, stay with me. The rest of you, back to the fort.”

“Are you ready, Mister Hobbs?”

“Aye, aye, sir!” He looked around for the two sailors nearest, and directed them to load the gun. “Half-charge, I think,” he said, passing them a flannel cartridge that was about half the sized of that usually used in a twelve-pound gun. “The extra height should help, sir,” he said, noticing Mister Bush's quizzical look.

“Ball. Wadding. Ram down... Stand aside.” He took the lanyard himself, cocking the gun and standing aside to let it recoil past him.
“Fire!” Mister Hornblower said, and Mister Hobbs pulled the lanyard. The gun fired and a few seconds later, Mister Bush shook his head. “Fifty yards short, Mister Hornblower.”

“Full charge, Mister Hobbs.”

“Full charge it is!” Mister Hobbs said, making some adjustments to the amount of powder. The gun was run out again and fired. Miller thought the plume of water was closer to the Spanish ship that earlier, but he didn't have a telescope – or a lookout's eyesight – and couldn't be sure.

“Heard that second shot an' they Dagoes went running out on deck to see what the fuss was about,” Cullen said afterwards, over a mug of grog. “Mister Buckland gave 'em the choice of surrenderin’ to us or having their ships blowed out of the water – which is pretty much what they'd tried to do us, after all. So he surrendered.”

Miller saw the yellow and red flag come fluttering down from the mainmast head. “They're striking their colours!” Mister Kennedy said, in confirmation. He had his telescope trained on the largest of the three Spanish ships. You didn't need a telescope to see a flag of that size, he thought, but cheered with the rest, though he couldn't help wondering what was going to happen now.

The question was answered sooner than he'd expected. A musket ball ricocheted off the cannon barrel with a strangely dull thud as the lead ball flattened into a misshapen disc that landed in the grass somewhere to Miller's front. Everyone ducked instinctively, although the musket ball hadn't had much force behind it by that point and would probably just have bounced off even the woollen jackets of the Marines.

“Look!” Matthews pointed up at the hills. There was someone there, all right; Miller saw the long grass move, and then someone stood up, silhouetted against the skyline. He was wearing an athwartships bicorne, but it was hard to make out any more details than that; the sky was too bright.

Several more figures appeared on the skyline of the hill, looking like an army arrayed against them. Miller swallowed and wiped suddenly damp palms against his grubby white trousers. This did not bode well.

A group of men jogged forward and Miller swallowed as he realised they were armed with muskets. How good they were with them, he didn't dare guess – one of them had hit a cannon from several yards away, which was exceptional shooting with a smoothbore musket.

“Marines!” Corporal Kinsley called and instinctively Miller looked over to him. “With me!”

He ran over, half-bent to present a smaller target, and crouched behind the officers. “Any orders for us, sir?” he asked, making Miller's mouth go dry at the thought of fighting. He wasn't a coward, but it was only a fool – or a madman – who didn't feel some fear at the thought of fighting.

“I'm not going to give up without a fight,” Mister Bush said.

“Sir, I believe a retreat might be more prudent – we're only twenty men,” Mister Hornblower said, quietly, yet forcefully.

A musket ball caught one of the sailors in the chest and he fell back with a startled groan.

“Not quite twenty,” Mister Kennedy said.

Mister Bush looked around. “Very well, fall back. Hobbs, spike the gun!”
It was a long way back to the fort, but it was all downhill from the clifftop, which was one small mercy. They ducked in through the small sally-port, hot, tired, dusty, but still in good order. The officers were ahead of them, and Miller glanced around in confusion for the Corporal and the other Marines, stepping hastily to the side as Briggs cannoned into him from behind.

“Matthews! Get me the Captain of Marines here, let's organise a defence!” Mister Bush said and Miller tightened his grip on his musket. Staying here... He was almost doubled over, gasping for air.

“Stand up straight, man, we've got to get people to the boats!” Corporal Kinsley sounded as though he'd merely taken a stroll round the deck.

Miller managed to slow his breathing down, and the pain in his side began to diminish a little. He glanced over toward the boats bobbing at the landing place. How they were going to get away, with the Spanish civilians as well, before the blacks got to the fort, Miller had no idea.
Corporal Kinsley arranged the Marines in two files to guide everyone down to the boats. Miller could hear cannon fire, but it sounded different to cannon fire at sea. He realised that was because the balls were hitting solid stone rather than the wooden sides of a ship of the line.

There were several women, running with their skirts held high, all chattering excitedly in Spanish. Some had kids too. Even the white-coated soldiers seemed nervous, as well they might; they'd had their weapons taken away, which meant that the only men with muskets were the redcoated Marines from Renown.

He could see Mister Buckland being helped ashore, but couldn't hear what the officers were saying, although he did catch something about 'Marines' and 'retreat', spoken by Mister Bush. He reached to steady a woman who'd slipped on a loose pebble, and missed whatever else was said.

He was surprised to see Mister Hornblower turn and run back the way they had just come, grasping his sword to keep it from tangling his legs. What on earth was he going back for? It didn't make sense!

"Miller!" Corporal Kinsley sounded annoyed, and he realised that the Corporal had called his name more than once.

"Corp'ral?"

"You're in the first boat with Cullen! Get a move on!"

"Aye, aye, Corp'ral!" He darted down the steps, finding space in the first boat, though he had to push aside a woman who seemed determined to take up more space than was necessary. He was rewarded by a mouthful of Spanish invective, which was easy enough to shrug off because he didn't know the words.

There was some delay getting them up Renown's side, even with the 74's tumblehome that made it
as easy as climbing a ladder. One of the sailors had to go first to show them how it was done, and
the other sailors and the two Marines found themselves almost pushing the reluctant women up the
side.

"Get those prisoners below!" Mister Buckland called from the quarterdeck above. Miller hadn't
realised that he'd come back to the ship as well, but of course he had; only he would have come
aboard from the starboard side, being an officer.

Miller exchanged a wry glance with Brice, who'd remained aboard while the majority of the other
Marines has gone with the shore party. How they were going to fit all these Dagoes in, he didn't
know, but they'd manage somehow. "Don't forget there's the prize crews goin' aboard the Dago
vessels," Brice whispered to him, only to be snapped at by Sergeant Whiting.

"Don't stand there gossiping like a couple of old women. There's work to be done that your
tongues ain't going to help with!"

Miller hadn't missed the Sergeant's caustic tongue at all, but somehow hearing it was rather
welcoming.

"Let's have some more order here!" Mister Buckland said, plaintively, coming down the
quarterdeck steps to the ship's waist. Miller straightened apprehensively.

"Beg pardon, sir," Matthews said, coming into view. "'Bout Mister Hornblower, sir?"

"What about him?"

"Me an' Styles an' some of the lads. We thought we could row back, take him off, sir."

"No, I can't spare you. I've lost enough men as it is!"

Miller managed not to roll his eyes, but it was a close call. He'd rather lose Mister Hornblower,
one of the best Lieutenants in the Navy by a long way – if Lakey could be believed – that even try
to go back for him? He didn't have much in the way of guts, did he, Mister Buckland?

Styles tried to protest too, but was overruled. "No, I said no! You're needed here!" The Lieutenant
headed back up to the quarterdeck. "Where is Mister Kennedy? Mister Bush?"

Miller saw the look that passed between Styles and the bosun. They obviously felt the need to go
back, to try to get Mister Hornblower if possible. Weren't they old shipmates?

They finally had the prisoners stowed below, and headed up on deck, leaving Joyse and Mallory
in charge of the prisoners. They found the foc'sle crowded with men staring at the fort, and pushed
in till they could see as well. Even Captain Seafort was there, the bright scarlet of his superfine
coat in stark contrast to the shirtsleeves of the sailors, and the dull brick-red of the Marine privates'
jackets. Even Mister Buckland and the surgeon were there.

Three lieutenants, the best the Navy had to offer, had stayed behind to blow the place up. How
Renown would be able to run without them, Miller couldn't say – with them gone, that left only
two officers capable of taking a watch: Mister Buckland and the master.

There was an explosion ashore, and Miller bit his lip. That didn't sound as though it was big
enough to do any real damage. Then there was a bigger explosion, with clouds of smoke and dust
thrown several yards into the air.

The gunner, Hobbs, muttered something to Matthews before there was a third big explosion,
much closer this time.
"He'll be back," Matthews said.

"'Course he will," Styles agreed, as though suggesting that any man who disagreed was a fool and was asking for a thrashing.

"Your victory is now complete, sir," the surgeon said to Mister Buckland, who nodded. "Yes, yes it is. Mister Matthews! We sail for Kingston!"

"Aye, aye, sir," Matthews said, sighing. He turned away to begin the preparations for raising anchor.

Styles touched his forehead to Mister Buckland as the officer turned to head aft, daring to lay a hand on the officer's arm. Mister Buckland jerked away and Miller closed his eyes for a moment. They didn't need Styles up on a charge of striking an officer, not now, not after everything that had happened.

"What?"

"The cliff-top, sir," Styles said, moving to the rail. Miller opened his eyes and peered across the sparkling sea, trying to see what it was that had caught the sailor's eye.

There was another explosion at the fort and then movement at the cliff-top. Something seemed to be falling, but Miller couldn't work out what. Something? Three somethings that hit the water and vanished. Probably only blocks of stone from that last explosion, though he couldn't help thinking, hoping...

Styles turned, grabbed a telescope from Matthews, who grabbed it back. There was a short tussle over the instrument, and then Matthews scowled. "Privilege of rank, Styles!" The bosun's mate gave in and let Matthews train the telescope towards the land.

"They're up!"

A cheer broke out, and Miller even found himself pounding Captain Seafort's back in his relief and excitement. It didn't matter, though, because the Captain turned around and gave him a celebratory hug in turn. Mister Hobbs muttered something else, turning and pushing his way aft through the watching men. Miller pegged the man as a sore loser.

Buckland allowed the jolly-boat to be lowered to collect the three officers, who were bobbing in the water with Mister Bush in the middle, being held up by the two junior lieutenants. They came aboard not half a bell later, soaked. Mister Hornblower and Mister Kennedy had both sacrificed their coats and swords, which were abandoned on the cliff-top. Mistress Bush had apparently been bullied into jumping and still had his sword and coat, which the wardroom steward took away, muttering to himself as he went away to do the best he could with them.

Matthews seemed as though he didn't quite know what to say and looked as though he could have hugged Mister Hornblower as though the officer was a long-lost nephew or something. He shook Styles' hand, and Miller wondered what history there was there. It wasn't unknown to meet up with men you'd served with years before, according to Lakey, who'd been around long enough to know these things.

"Come on, men, back to your duties and don't stand gawpin' all day," Sergeant Whiting said. He looked immaculate next to those who had been involved up at the fort. Miller and the other Marines moved along, glad to finally get below to their mess where they could get out of their sweat-soaked jackets and shirts and find something a bit fresher to wear before reporting to the capstan for weighing anchor.
"Never seen anythin' like it, I ain't," Briggs was saying as he dropped his shirt into his sea-chest, pulling on a clean checked shirt, part of his working rig. "Never though to see that, neither. Three officers jumpin' off a cliff into the sea, cool as you like!"

"Mister Bush wasn't so cool about it," Dickin said, pulling his braces up over his own clean shirt. It wasn't Thursday or Sunday, but after the exertions they had gone through up at the fort and hauling that gun and its carriage up the cliff, they needed to change their shirts.

It felt good to have the smooth wooden planking of Renown's decks underfoot, and the lively lift and dip of the ship as she moved through the water. Not as fast or as lively as a frigate, according to those who knew things like that, but much more lively than the dead feeling of dry land that didn't move when you expected it to, which meant that folks who'd been at sea for months ended up walking like drunk men.

Mister Hornblower was sent to the biggest of the Spanish vessels with a prize crew, and men were sent to each of the other two Spanish ships as well, to sail them to Kingston in company with Renown. The Marines remained aboard the 74, however; the prizes were deemed too small to warrant sending Marines aboard. Beside, what good could Marines do there, when the Spanish were held prisoner aboard Renown?

The wind freshened, promising them fair weather to the Caribbean. Miller, for one, was glad of it, despite the threat the Spanish posed. They were locked up securely, and Sergeant Whiting had detailed extra men for the Corporal's guard, knowing that the Marines now had to find extra sentries to stand guard over the prisoners.

Simms got the first watch over the women in the hold, the duty the other Marines wanted. Joyse and Green scowled as they were detailed to stand guard on the arms locker, and none of the others looked particularly happy at their own posts, either.

"Though it ain't like he can get up to much of anythin'," Lakey said. "They's locked up, and they's stayin' that way. Won't thank you if you try havin' your way with 'em, neither, they won't."

Simms merely shrugged and slipped his cross-belts on, tugging them straight before turning to go and relieve Dickin, who was currently on duty.

"The strangest thing," Beech said, slipping off his accoutrements and unbuttoning his jacket as he sat down, having just been relieved from duty on the main hanging magazine. "Mister Hobbs was down there with the Captain. Askin' him what he could see in the hold."

"What?" Cullen said, pausing in brushing the day's dust from his hat.

"Never seen or heard the like. Mister Hobbs had him there, an' pointed down into the hold, y'know, through the hatch he fell down t'other day. An' he axed him what he could see down there."

"So what'd he say?" Pearce wanted to know, lowering his mug of rum and wiping his mouth with the the back of his hand. "That he could see gold an' silver an' all the gems of Araby?"

"No, said he could see Spanish ladies, which ain't no more'n the truth. Then he said they was all gone - which they wasn't - an' then young Mister Wellard come along, told him he was mistaken. An' then Mister Kennedy comes along, dunno hat he was doin' there. An' the Captain points to him, says as he knows him."

"Blinkin' ought to, seein' as Mister Kennedy's one of his officers," Miller put in. "We know him, after all, an' he ain't anythin' to do with us."
"True 'nough, that." Beech shrugged his jacket off and laid it aside before stretching, and chuckled. "Though he said as he was Admiral de Bruys – that Mister Kennedy was, I mean."

"We know he ain't right in the head, man," Cullen said. "Knowed that for weeks, ain't we?"

"Anyhow, Mister Kennedy told Mister Hobbs to take the Captain aft again, which Mister Hobbs said as he would, only he'd bring him down again once he'd rested. Said it almost like a threat, he done."

"Threat? What d'you mean, a threat?" Miller wanted to know.

"Well, we know the Captain fell down the hatchway – you ought to, you was there right after. What if he didn't fall? What if he was pushed?"

That stopped all chatter, all motion in fact, as the Marines turned to gape at Beech.

"Pushed? Pushed by who?" Cullen wanted to know.

"Dunno. But there was only three folks down there that I know of at the time. Mister Wellard, Mister Kennedy and Mister Hornblower." Miller spoke slowly, thoughtfully. Lakey's voice cut across them. "Ain't healthy, suggestin' that. You'll have yourself up in front of a court martial, anyone hears you." He swung round, catching each Marine's eye in turn. "Goes for the rest of you, as well. He wasn't pushed, he fell, and we all know it. An' don't anyone suggest anythin' diff'rent, understand?"

There were subdued murmurs of assent, and then hammocks were piped down and the mood was broken as everyone went running topside to collect their hammocks. It had been a long day, and they were all bone-tired. Miller wanted to think about the day's events, but couldn't stay awake for long once he'd wrapped himself in his blanket.
Entering Safe Harbour

Chapter Summary

Sometimes it's best not to ask what happens in the dark.

Chapter Notes

I make no profit from writing in fandom and all characters are returned to their boxes when I have finished with them. Apart from the Marines, who are mine anyway. Opinions stated within are not necessarily those of the author. This fic brought to you by the letters D, U, the colour burgundy and that eleven o'clock in the morning feeling.

This is the final chapter! Thanks to wayward_shadows on Dreamwidth for answering my medical questions. And thanks to all of you, my loyal readers, without whom I would never have got my first multi-part story completed. Not bad, considering I thought it was going to be a two-part story, back before I began writing it. Please comment - I do like to know people enjoy my work. I am a comment whore, after all... :D

When it happened, Miller was so tired he didn't register it at first and thought the confused noises, shouts and yells were part of his dream. They sounds seemed to grow closer and he jerked awake, blinking up at the deckhead in confusion before tumbling out of his hammock.

Footsteps. That's what had woken him. But nobody ought to be moving about at this hour – it was half-way through the watch. He wasn't sure how he knew that, but he knew it. He reached out and shook the hammock of the Marine next to him. Cullen's sleepy voice muttered something uncomplimentary, and he shook the hammock again, harder. "Cullen, get up, for God's sake an' get the others up. We've got a problem on our hands." He turned to pull his trousers on hastily before ducking under the swaying hammocks of his comrades to find Sergeant Whiting.

The Sergeant's hammock was empty and he paused for a moment in confusion. Of course; the Sergeant was on duty, doing his rounds right now. Which meant that either he knew about it already or... Miller couldn't follow that thought through to its logical conclusion, and turned to find Corporal Kinsley instead.

The Corporal sat up, blinked, and rolled out of his hammock. "Side arms. Anyone who has a musket and ammunition, to load their muskets. Quietly!"

Wherever the intruders – Spanish prisoners – were, they had neatly avoided the Marines' berthdeck. Miller could hear feet overhead, a sound he wasn't used to because the sailors nearly always went barefoot and the Marines didn't run like that. And if they did, he was usually one of the ones making the noise.

And if they could hear footsteps above them, that meant that the Spanish were already in the
wardroom above. Damn. Who was on watch? Mister Hornblower was away with the prizes... which left Mister Kennedy and Mister Bush. Mister Buckland... Miller dismissed him out of hand. He was as indecisive as they came. Probably not a good thing to think about any of your officers, but Miller wasn't about to actually say it to anyone, was he?

He had another thought. If they were in the wardroom, what had they done to Captain Seafort?

“They're going to be armed – we've got to assume they've got into the arms locker,” the Corporal was saying. “And that means we've got to be a bit clever. Get round behind 'em and knock 'em out. You get one down, get the musket and cartridges off him – an’ pay no mind that it ain't your musket.” There was a grim chuckle at that.

A shot - two shots. "We're taken!" That sounded like Mister Bush's voice. There was a third shot from somewhere for'ard. "All hands! All hands!"

"Come on!" the corporal called and led the way on deck at the run, with the rest of the Marines following him, screaming like banshees in fury at the indignity of having had their ship taken under their noses.

The fighting on deck was confused and messy and Miller ran one man through with his bayonet before stopping to strip the man of musket and cartridge pouch, hastily slinging the whitened leather strap over his shoulder and fixing the bloodied bayonet to the musket. He didn't know if the musket was loaded or not but put it into his shoulder and pulled the trigger, cursing the fact that most of the Marines were in their shirtsleeves and the Spanish wore white uniforms, though their pale blue facings helped – as did the fact that the Marines were mostly wearing checked or striped sailor's shirts. More than one Marine had run to the masts and helped themselves to the boarding pikes stored around them. They didn't have the solid heft of a musket, but it was the same sort of thrust to use them.

He reloaded and fired again, not knowing how many cartridges were in the pouch he'd got, but he didn't care. Once he'd run out of cartridges, it didn't matter - he still had his bayonet and the musket butt. He blinked as a figure in a blue checked shirt ran past. That looked awfully like Styles, one of the bosun's mates, who'd gone with Mister Hornblower as part of the prize crew to the Spanish vessels. Hadn't he?

"Marines!" That sounded like Mister Bush, or someone, and Miller hastened aft, finding himself feeling out of place among the Corporal's guard who were, of course, all wearing their red coats. He shrugged. He still had a musket and bayonet, as they did.

The fight was confused, messy and desperate. The Renowns were furious that the Spanish had somehow got free and were doing their damnedest to take Renown, killing anyone who got in their way.

No, the one who'd called them was Captain Seafort, who hastily organised a defence of the ship's wheel, earning a grateful look from the helmsman.

There was a scrape and grinding sound that jerked Miller forward, nearly throwing him to the deck, and a new voice calling "Renowns to me!" Miller spared a glance before reaching for another cartridge. Mister Hornblower. Now, how had he known? There was confused fighting behind him, too, at the door to the Great Cabin. There was the sound of smashing glass and he decked the Dago who was threatening him, giving him space to glance over just in time to see Brice almost on the deck on top of another Spaniard. Mister Hobbs had been there a moment before, but had ended up being pushed aside, allowing another Dago to smash the glass of the door in and force his way inside.
Another white-coated Spaniard distracted him and it was a moment before he could deal with the man, by which point at least half a dozen men had gone into the Great Cabin. There was a single shot and then two more shots.

Mister Hobbs fought past him and went in. Miller clubbed his opponent to the deck and followed the gunner in. There was nothing for him to do in there and he turned, heading back out to the confusion on the quarterdeck. Mister Bush was lying on the deck, his shirt covered in blood, though he managed to raise his pistol and shoot another Spaniard.

"Marines!"

That was Captain Seafort's voice, for sure, coming from the fife rail. Miller scrambled up the short ladder, joining the end of the mostly red-coated line.

"Marines! Present!"

Miller brought his musket up into the present – the threat would be enough, even though his own weapon was empty. The early morning sun glinted red off the drying blood on the bayonet fixed to the muzzle.

Mister Hornblower was standing with his sword obviously aimed at someone's chest, though because the other man was standing at the break of the poop-deck, Miller couldn't see who it was.

"Throw down your weapons," the Lieutenant said, addressing the unseen man. There was a short reply in Spanish and the Dagos sullenly let their stolen weapons clatter to the deck. And suddenly the Spanish were being hustled below again by Renowns furious that they had come so close to losing their ship.

Miller's legs felt weak, as though they were made from wet string and he lowered his musket, leaning on it to try to hide the sudden shakes.

"Does anyone know where Sergeant Whiting is?" Captain Seafort asked, ignoring the men's lax discipline. It was obvious to any onlooker that they were feeling relieved that they had survived, and angry that they had just had to fight boarders trying to take their ship.

"He was inspectin' the sentries, sir," Brice said, coming up the ladder to join them.

"Corporal Kinsley. Detail two men to help get the prisoners below. And I want a butcher's bill as soon as possible."

"Aye, aye, sir," the corporal replied, saluting. "Brice and Lakey, you're on sentry. Get the prisoners below and stand sentry. I'll see you're relieved at the change of the watch. Miller, with me. The rest of you are dismissed."

There was a chorus of acknowledgements and Miller knuckled his forehead as the Marine officer strode past. He felt strangely undressed without a hat on. He followed the corporal below, passing Styles who was kneeling over Mister Bush, and hoped that the officer would be all right. He had a rough tongue at times, but he was a good officer.

They found Simms on his back outside the cell where the women had been. Miller bent to see if he was all right, and recoiled; he was stiff. "Dead, Corporal."

"We'll get him up on deck in a bit, give him a proper burial. Now, where's Sergeant Whiting?"

"He was doin' his rounds when it started, Corp, so Brice was sayin'." He shrugged. "Reckon the best way to find him is by seein' where he went."
"Arms locker," the corporal decided. "We'll start there. Those Dagoes was usin' our muskets, after all."

Outside the arms locker, Miller was shocked to see three Marines on the deck. The cold horror was quickly replaced by relief as they began to groan, and one of them fumbled a hand up to his head. "Sar'nt? You all right there?"

"Head's ringin' like a damn bell," he said, his voice hoarse. "Must've walked into a beam."

"No, Sar'nt. Them Dagoes got out an' clouted you acrost the head. We sorted 'em, though. Got Brice an' Lakey on sentry – they ain't getting' out again." Kinsley offered his hand to the Sergeant, who sat up with a groan.

"Wait till I get me hands on Simms, that's what. Must've bin him - on sentry over them prisoners."

Miller looked up from seeing to Joyse. "He's dead, Sar'nt," he said, his voice bleak.

"We'll get a burial party sorted for him. I should never've have left him on his own with them women. Askin' for trouble, that was."

Whiting passed a hand over his face. "Anythin' else?"

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The funeral service was a melancholy affair. Mister Buckland took the service, reading from a well-worn Prayer Book. The loss of three Marines, Simms, Reece and Brewer, cast a shadow over the remaining Marines, but the loss of Captain Sawyer threw the whole ship.

"He was... He was a good man," Cullen said. "I just wish... Wish things hadn't turned out the way they done for him, this voyage."

"I ever tell you 'bout the time he took two French frigates in one fight?" Dickin asked. The others shrugged.

"Aye. Wish we could've seen that side of him for ourselves, though," Cullen said.

"Don't go speakin' ill of the dead. It ain't... It ain't right, that. Talk about summat else instead, do." Lakey sounded tired and the Marines went back to their various activities, subdued.

"You know, there's got to be a court-martial over it all," Cullen said hesitantly, looking up from cleaning his bayonet.

That brought everyone up sharp.

"What?"

"Well, there was a mutiny, even though things worked out all right. You 'member that night, don't you, Dusty? With the Captain shoutin' mutiny - the night that he was pushed down the hold."

"He fell," Miller said. "An' yeah, I 'member." He shrugged. "Ain't nothin' we can do about it. I don't reckon they'll even ask any of us about that night - it'll be the officers who catch it. Shame. That Mister Hornblower, he's a good officer, him." He went back to half-heartedly blacking his shoes. It was a crying shame, that three good officers were going to hang for a mutiny that had probably been necessary, and wouldn't have been, had the same situation occurred in any other ship.
"Here, you ain't heared what happened to Mister Buckland, Dusty," Cullen said, looking up from his bayonet as if he'd only just remembered.

"What?" Miller replied, all thoughts of mutiny and death pushed aside.

"You was below with the Corp'ral when we went into the wardroom. Well, Mister Hornblower an' Mister Bush went in - I was with 'em in case there was any more of them Dago bastards around. Which there wasn't." He shrugged. "Anyhow, we had to kick the door in – it'd bin locked, see. And there was Mister Buckland in his nightshirt, in his cot, all trussed up with that... that strait-jacket I heared they'd put the Captain in. He was spittin' feathers almost, he was so mad."

There were a few chuckles at that. "Caught 'im nappin', did they?" Dickin sounded amused.

"Didn't have any trouble - never knowed him to be alert, not like the others."

"Don't go sayin' things like that, mate," Lakey advised. "Ain't healthy. 'Specially with a court-martial hangin' over us heads. Even if we ain't the ones goin' to be tried."

"Mister Kennedy's caught it bad," Grattan said, clattering down the companionway. "He's with the surgeon now."

There was an instant, shocked silence, finally broken by Dickin. "Mister Kennedy? But he seemed fine when we all come below."

"Must've copped a bullet. His shirt was all over blood when Mister Hornblower opened his coat up," Grattan said. "He just sat down next to him an' must've seed summat wrong, 'cause he tore his coat open an' there's blood everywhere."

"We'd best get to Kingston quick, then," someone muttered. "Doctor Clive's goin' to need all the help he can get, if there's a ball in him."

A voyage with a court-martial at the end of it and a possibly dying officer aboard...

* * *

Sounds cheerful, you say.

*shrugs*

Oh, it weren't at all. We hadn't any idea what to expect. Though you'll know the story by now, o' course. You must do – it was all round the Navy by the end of six months. You know what rumour's like. So how'd Mister Hornblower get out of it?

*smiles*

The rummest do, that. Seems Mister Kennedy took the blame for it, knowin' he was dyin' hisself. I never heared the like, but then, that Mister Hornblower... He does inspire loyalty, the Admiral.

For the mutiny, you say? Well, seems there warn't no proper court-martial over the mutiny.

So what was it over? 'Member I said as how there was this big thing about the Captain fallin' into the hold? Seems someone up an' said as how he was pushed.

No, I ain't sayin' who. Don't need to, now, do I? Never went to sea again and drank hisself to death.
What do I think happened?

*smiles*

I think that the Captain, not bein' right in the head, an' thinkin' as all his officers was against him, was steppin' back'ards and took a header over the hatch coamin'. One of 'em reached his hand out to try to grab him, an' didn't make it. That's what I think happened. But me, I'm only a Sergeant now, an' was only a Private back then.

Most folks don't listen to the likes of me, an' see what they want to see. Though that Admiral Hornblower, he's a fine officer, an' I ain't goin' to say anythin' against him.

Thanks for your time - an' your very good health.

Aye, an' the Admiral's, too.

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