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THE COPPER-SHIP

BY J. OLIVIER CURWOOD

AUTHOR OF "THE CAPTAIN OF THE CHRISTOPHER DUGGAN"

UP out of the pearl-gray mist of the morning came the copper-ship. In her hold was a treasure in red metal from the Michigan mines. Near her wheel lay a dead man. Amidships a group of sailors, armed with knives and pistols, stood half-faltering, facing the captain's cabin. In that cabin kneeled Jimmy Bosworth, and beside him, her face white with fear, was the girl for whom he was risking his life.

Captain Jimmy's face was red with blood. A trail of it led to the barred door, and between his knees a pool of it had gathered. The man's pistol hand trembled weakly as he leveled his blue-steel revolver.

"I guess they ain't coming any farther, Mi—Miss Williams," he faltered. The man was hardly conscious of his terrible wound. He knew that he was losing blood quite freely, and that the objects around him were very slowly fading away. If he had known more, he would not have turned.

The girl's pale face became whiter still as she looked at Captain Jimmy. But the young man failed to notice it.

"You must let me tie up your head, Captain—"

Something choked back the words. If Captain Jimmy could have used his eyes well he would have seen that the girl was crying. But Jimmy was losing himself. He knew that the treasure-mad crew were outside preparing to take his life and hers, and that the girl near him was the owner's daughter. Beyond that he only knew that he must shoot through the door when he heard the sound of feet. He had great reason for keeping this in mind and for battling against the weakness that was overpowering him. From the time they had played together

as little children Captain Jimmy had loved this girl. When he was given his first ship, only a few months before, he had asked her if he might still love her and hope some day to call her his wife. The girl's answer had nearly broken his heart.

Now she was going to Detroit, in his care, and he must take her there safely.

A sudden sound outside brought the wounded man to his senses. Men were approaching. Captain Jimmy could hear their feet and the voice of one of them talking. They came in a clumsy, stumbling way, as though bearing a heavy object, and though the man with the revolver could hardly grasp the true situation, the girl beside him did.

"Jim—Jim—they're going to knock down the door!" she cried.

The captain seemed to hear and comprehend as though just awakening from a sleep. One word burned in his brain, and that was his own name. He knew that the girl had called him Jim, and that, as he leveled his revolver, a supporting arm encircled his shoulder and a warm little hand grasped his own. That encouraged him, and he fired. The girl saw a tiny black spot come like a lightning flash in the panel of the cabin door, and in an instant another bullet bit its way through, a few inches below. From outside there came a cry of pain, then the falling of a heavy object; and Captain Jimmy leaned back against the girl with a faint smile.

"I guess I fixed one of 'em," he said. "O God, how I wish I could see!"

"You must let me bind your head," replied the girl softly. She lowered the man gently to the floor and hurriedly wet a towel in a pail of water. Her beautiful eyes grew big with agony as she

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bathed away the blood. She knew well that Captain Jimmy would never see again. As she tied the towel around the wound the man struggled feebly to a sitting posture and raised his hand protestingly.

"I can't see t' shoot," he pleaded; "please take——"

The girl's hands helped to support him where he sat. "Jim," she whispered, "do you remember how you taught me to shoot with the old horse-pistol when we were children? Well, I'm going to do the shooting now!"

She caught up the big revolver, cocked it, and laid it beside her on the floor. Then she put her arms around Captain Jimmy and gently drew him back against the wall.

"It's a good thing I've got the only big gun aboard," said the captain, as if talking to himself. "If I 'adn't they'd soon get our range through the door."

The ship-owner's daughter picked up the revolver again, and, steadying her arm over the back of a chair, leveled it coolly at the black spots Captain Jimmy had made. Outside there was an ominous quiet. The girl listened for a time; then she said, without taking her glance from the little spots:

"Jim, why didn't you let them kill me? They would not have hurt you; they wanted you to join them."

The blinded man groped out with his hands. The girl heard him move, but did not look behind.

"Mildred, ain't I—ain't I fought for you a hundred times—when we were kids?"

"You bet you did, Jim!"

This time the girl turned and looked down upon the huddled figure against the wall. Her face was wet with tears, but there was a smile upon her lips and a look in her eyes that would have made Captain Jimmy's heart leap with joy could he have seen them.

"You were my hero then—and now."

There came a rap on the door as if some one were tapping it with a long stick. The big revolver wavered for a moment between the two black spots; and then a third came, to the right and a little high. Before the girl could fire again a voice called from the deck.

"Don't shoot ag'in, Cap'n Bosworth

I want t' talk with y'!" Captain Jimmy recognized his mate's voice. "We want t' give y' one more chance, Cap'n. We'll give y' a third of the copper aboard if y'll jine us 'n' give up th' girl."

Mildred felt something touch her arm. It was the captain's hand. He groped blindly for a moment.

"Milly—Milly—please give me th' gun!" he whispered.

"Will y' answer, Cap'n Bosworth?" came the voice from outside. "Th' girl's got t' go down with th' ship. We've got our reckonin', 'n' nobody kin salvage the copper but us. If y' don't jine us, we'll send y' t' hell along o' th' girl——"

"Please—please give me th' gun, Milly!" almost sobbed Captain Jimmy. He reached up, a pathetic figure, swaying weakly on his knees. In place of the revolver, the girl put one of her hands in his and then she fired again through the panel of the door.

There came a yell of rage from outside.

"Curse y'! If that's yer answer, Cap'n Bosworth, we'll send y' t' hell with pleasure!"

The girl smiled. Her white teeth gleamed between her red lips and her bosom rose and fell with excitement. But she was taking courage from Captain Jimmy. She listened for a sound outside that might guide another shot, but in place of that there came a throbbing of the floor under her feet, and, in a sudden spasm, the wounded man almost crushed the little hand he held.

"They're stopping th' engines!" he exclaimed. "Here——" Captain Jimmy held up a box of cartridges. The girl took them and counted out six while her companion broke the breech of the gun. After she had reloaded the weapon, the owner's daughter tiptoed to the door and for a full minute stood with her ear against it. When she came back the captain was figuring on his fingers and his lips were moving. The girl watched him. In the excitement of the last hour her hair had become loosened and now it fell in rich waves around her shoulders. As she leaned quietly over, attempting to catch the murmur from Captain Jimmy's lips, a mass of it tumbled about the man's face and he

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"Milly——" he whispered.

The girl gently drew her hair away.

"What were you doing, Jim?" she asked.

Captain Jimmy sank back on the floor.

"Excuse—me—Miss Mildred," he mumbled. Almost fiercely the girl bent over again so that her hair swept the man's face. But Jimmy did not touch it.

"I was figurin' where we were," he continued. "If you get away, Miss Mildred, tell your father they scuttled th' ship somewhere on a line b'tween Hammond's Bay 'n' Grand Manitoulin Island. I reckon she'll go down in—fifteen fathom——"

In a moment the girl was upon her knees beside him.

"And you, Jim—you—you——"

Captain Jimmy raised a hand to his head.

"I'm burning up!" he gasped. "I shouldn't wonder, Miss Milly——" He slowly wavered and fell back. With a cry of agony the girl caught him in her arms.

"Oh, my God—Jim—Jim, my darling——" She pressed her lips passionately upon the dead-white face against her breast. But Captain Jimmy did not know it. For a few minutes the owner's daughter held it pressed to her, sobbing over it and kissing it and beseeching the man to speak. "I love you, Jim—I love you—I love you——" she repeated again and again. "I love you—I love you—Oh, I love you so!"

Captain Jimmy was dreaming. He dreamed that his boyhood sweetheart had not refused him, and that she had become his wife. It was a long dream, but the same thing over and over again, and so pleasant that he thought he was always smiling. When he awoke again somebody was bathing his head in cold water, and he sighed deeply.

"Are you feeling better, Jim?" asked a voice.

Captain Jimmy came to his senses with a powerful effort.

"I feel better, Miss Mildred—I guess I've been sleeping!" The man straightened. Then he sniffed the air. He seemed to be in a different atmosphere—

hot, stifling. A crackling sound filled his ears, too, and he staggered to his knees, the girl's arm supporting him.

"Milly——" His voice was full of inquiry.

"It's the ship, Jim," she whispered. "She's sinking, and they've set fire to her, too. They left nearly an hour ago. You and I are the only ones aboard, Jim."

The girl spoke in a calm, sweet voice. She brushed back Captain Jimmy's hair and half-bent over as if to kiss him, but caught herself and only smiled into his sightless face.

"I tried to pull you out," she continued, "but I couldn't."

Captain Jimmy staggered to his feet. He was stronger, but his eyes burned terribly.

"You wouldn't leave me, then——"

"No, Jim."

The two made their way slowly to the cabin door, the girl straining to hold up half of the man's weight. Jimmy reached out and drew back the bolt. As the door opened a breath of hot air struck him in the face and his nostrils were filled with smoke. For a moment he stood there and listened. There was no sound of the sea lapping the ship's sides. There was no singing of the wind in the spars overhead. All was lost in a sullen rumbling that seemed to freeze Captain Jimmy's blood.

"She's burning deep down," he said. "The fire ain't more'n amidships in the hold. I don't believe there's any danger—yet." Captain Jimmy lied bravely. The girl knew that he was lying, and looked at him as though she would have liked to take him in her arms again.

"I don't believe there is, either, Jim."

But the girl could see. Away aft, the cook's cabin, and everything behind it, was a mass of flames. Out of the midship hatch poured a cloud of smoke, and now and then a column of fire shot out with it. Even as the two stood there, hand in hand, there came a jarring explosion under their feet.

"Milly, I must see—I must see!" cried the captain. He tried to pull the towel from his eyes, but the ship-owner's daughter stopped him.

"You mustn't take it off, Jim," she

pleaded. "It will blind you if you do. And there's nothing that you can do. The boats are gone. There were only two life-preservers in your cabin and——" The girl caught herself suddenly. Captain Jimmy had not noticed the preserver about his waist, and he began to fumble at it. Again his hands were caught in those of his companion.

"They're on—I mean it's on all right, Jim!"

There was something almost pleading in the girl's voice. The man straightened as if he had been struck a blow. He reached out, but the girl eluded him. Once more he groped and caught her by the arm. With all his strength he pulled her to him.

"You've put them both on me, Milly!" His voice trembled with excitement. "You've put them both on me——"

It seemed as if his old strength had returned to him. He held the girl in a grip that hurt her as he worked one of the life-preservers over his head and then slipped it over the shoulders of the owner's daughter. When it was done he was conscious of a great pain in his head and a sudden weakness.

"Milly—I—I—didn't think y'd play me like that!" he gasped.

There came a detonation from under their feet and a pillar of fire leaped out of the midship hatch. Nothing else in the world sounds like the rumbling of fire in a ship's hold. For a time there is a rolling, muffled roar, punctuated by explosions which become louder as the fire grows hotter. Then the end comes like a powder-flash, and instead of a smoldering hulk a thing hidden in flames rolls upon the sea. It was not the first time that Captain Jimmy had heard that sound under his feet, and he knew that the end was not far away. He measured the throbbing of the deck and could tell that the fire had passed the midship hatches and was burning forward like a furnace. Unperceived by the girl, he drew the towel down from his eyes. There came a stinging, biting pain as the smoke and heat touched his wound—but no sight. He put the towel back, and from deep down in his soul there struggled a faint cry of anguish.

"My God—I—I—wish I could see!"

The girl turned to him again.

"You'll see after a time, but you mustn't lift the bandage, Jim," she said. She took the man by his hand and led him around the end of the cabin. A steady pillar of fire now poured out of the midship hatch, and the owner's daughter held up her skirt to protect Captain Jimmy's face from the heat as she slowly led him into the bow.

"Is the for'rd boat gone, Milly?" he asked.

"It's gone, Jim."

"'N' the rafts?"

"They threw them overboard, Jim."

Captain Jimmy caught hold of the ship's rail as the girl brought him to it and leaned over. He could smell the clouds of smoke that were pouring from somewhere along the water line.

"O God, if I could only see!" he cried again.

"What would you do, Jim—what would you do?" The girl caught him eagerly by the arm. "Be my captain, Jim—and I'll be the crew! I can do anything——"

"Wood and a rope!" cried the man. "Milly, has the fire reached the cabin?"

"Not yet——"

"Then take me back!" almost shouted Captain Jimmy. "We must have th' table—and there's a rope under it!"

"Stay here, Jim, and I'll get them!" In an instant the girl had gone. Captain Jimmy shouted for her to return, then groaned and waited as he received no reply.

Abaft the midship hatch the copper-ship was now wreathed in flames. The muffled thunder under the deck was lost in the crackling, snapping roar of the superstructure, and the heat that came from it almost stifled the girl as she bowed her head and plunged into the smothering clouds of smoke. Almost blindly she felt her way along the side of the cabin until she came to the door. The room was filled with smoke, and in one corner of it lurid tongues of flame were licking their way up the wall from the bursting floor. Almost sobbing for breath, the girl caught up the rope, ran to the door, and flung it forward. She heard a shout from Captain Jimmy—a shout that had in it warning and terror.

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but she hurried back again without losing a gasp of breath in reply. One end of the cabin was spreading into a sheet of flame. The girl could feel her face blistering in its heat, but she tugged at the long table and dragged it foot by foot toward the cabin door. Each moment her strength seemed going. She knew that she was suffocating, almost burning, but still she fought, with the deck crashing in half a dozen yards away and the cabin fire almost at her feet.

Out upon the deck she stumbled and fell. For a moment she felt as though she would like to lie there and rest; then came reason and one more effort to reach Captain Jim. The table dragged like lead. Through the smoke the fire seemed to be gaining upon the panting girl. It shot up until it wrapped the spars in a shrieking mass and the whole end of the ship went in with a thundering explosion. Around the ship the sea was turned into a boiling caldron and clouds of hot steam poured about the fighting girl. Her heart seemed bursting for want of air. One foot—two—three, inch by inch she made them! The girl heard shouts near her, but she could not answer. Then she backed into something, and was conscious that Captain Jimmy was there helping her, and she tugged all the harder—tugged—tugged—until the table slid out into the free air of the bow, and there she turned and put her arms around the man's neck.

"Oh, Jim—Jim——" she whispered in a breaking sob.

Captain Jimmy held her close to him. He would have stood like that until the fire had utterly consumed him, but in a moment the girl took his arms away.

"We must hurry, Jim!" she said.

She caught up the rope from the deck and gave it to the man. With trembling hands Captain Jimmy cut it into three lengths. One of these he fastened around the girl's waist, another round his own, and then he tied the three ends to the table. The free end of the third rope he fastened to the rail of the ship. When this was done he lowered the table over the side, the girl helping bravely.

"You must climb down the rope, Milly," he said. "We're all tied together. We can't lose——"

Another section of the deck crashed in behind them. With it there came another sound—a sound which Captain Jimmy had been straining his ears to catch since he had come to consciousness in the cabin. It was the rush of in-pouring water. Captain Jimmy knew well that the last moments of the ship had arrived.

"Quick—quick!" he cried.

His voice spoke their danger. The running of the water was changing into a hollow roar. In an instant the girl was over the side and her voice came up cheerfully to the man.

"I'm here, Jim."

Captain Jimmy slipped over and swung down the rope. He bit hard on the handle of a knife between his teeth, and, as his partly submerged body rested in the water, he seized the knife in his hand and pressed its blade against the rope.

"Are you right, Milly girl?"

"I'm not only right—I'm comfortable," replied the girl.

The man pressed hard and the rope parted. Then he began working his feet and arms in the water and slowly the table drifted away. Each moment the roaring of the burning ship grew less distinct. Soon the noise of rushing water died away, and Captain Jimmy ceased to paddle. With difficulty he pulled himself half upon the table, and the girl put one of her arms around his shoulder.

"How far, Milly——"

He did not finish. With eyes big with excitement and horror, the girl stared at the ship. The blazing stern shot up into the air, and like a hissing rocket the copper-ship sank into the sea. There went up a spout of milk-white steam, and then there came a rolling of the water under the table. After that there fell a strange quiet in the air, and Captain Jimmy's face was death-like as he turned it toward the sky that he would never see again.

"She's gone, Milly——" A boyish sob almost choked him. "She's gone—I've—lost—my—first—ship——"

"But you've won something else, Jim." The girl tightened her arm around the captain's shoulder. "You've won *me*, dear!"

Captain Jimmy was very quiet. His hands trembled, his lips quivered. "You—you said you didn't love me, Milly."

"I didn't then, but I do *now*, Jim!" The girl reached over until both of her arms were around Captain Jimmy's neck. "Won't you please ask me again, Jim—please—"

The man supported himself with one arm. The other he reached out and slipped about the owner's daughter.

"And when I see again and get another ship, you'll marry me?" he asked.

The girl smiled into his sightless face.

But as she smiled tears ran down her own.

"No, Jim, I'll not wait until then," she said. "I'm going to make you marry me as soon as we get ashore—even before you see a doctor; and then I can be your nurse. Will you promise?"

Captain Jimmy smiled. He felt that the whole world was before him again. He pressed the girl to him, and she met his lips with her own.

In the path of the copper-ship that day there came a freighter. In mid-lake she picked up a man and a woman—both burned, one blind.

THE BEST PROSE EPIGRAMS

BY ARTHUR PENN

FROM THE TIMES OF SHERIDAN AND FOOTE ENGLISH EPIGRAM HAS CONTRIBUTED BRILLIANTLY TO INTELLECTUAL CUT AND THRUST—A FEW EXAMPLES OF THE SMART SAYINGS AND ADROIT REPORTEE OF BRITISH AND AMERICAN WITS

THE English language has adopted the word *epigram* from the Greek, enlarging its meaning. In Greek *epigram* was closely akin to *epigraph* and to *epitaph*; it meant a brief bit of verse in which a single thought was beautifully phrased. In English *epigram* was applied to a very short humorous poem with a sting at the tail of it. And, by a natural extension, it has come to mean a smart saying or a witty retort either in verse or in prose. A mere merry jest is not fairly to be classed as an epigram unless it is an adroit repartee—unless there is in it something of the cut and thrust of the duello.

At its best the epigram in prose has the unexpectedness of the swift counterstroke. It ought to suggest a sudden and unforeseen "checkmate" in answer to the adversary's cry of "check." And therefore the bare pun, unless it is pro-

voked by the immediate occasion and unless it has extraordinary felicity, is not entitled to rank as an epigram. Sometimes, of course, the pun does achieve this effect of unforeseen happiness which almost elevates it to the level of the real epigram. For example, when Mr. Oliver Herford asked a friend who was about to sail for Europe, what ship he was going on, the friend whimsically gave the name of the well-known liner as the Keltic—whereupon the artist instantly returned, "Don't pronounce it like that, or you will have a hard sea all the way over!"

THE PRETTY ANALOGY

On the other hand, the true epigram in prose is not merely a carefully polished phrase, a pretty analogy, like Disraeli's assertion that the hansom cab was "the gondola of London." To this same class

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