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Opening extract from

Flint

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Chapter 1

Prisoners

It's the stink that gets to me.

Can it be rats?

Maybe it's the foul water all round us. The crew call it *bilge* water. One sniff makes me want to throw up.

I can put up with the darkness. I can put up with the clink of chains when I move. What I can't stand is the smell down here on the bottom deck.

The old officer – they call him the *bosun* – taps my arm. "Open your mouth, Edmund," he says. "And hold your nose. That may help."

"Will it?"

"Try."



And it does help … for a bit. But soon the vile smell is back as strong as ever. It's like a fog hanging in the air.

"When will they set us free, bosun?" I ask.

He gives a snort – a dry, old-man's snort. "These are pirates, son. You can never tell with pirates. Sometimes they treat you like a prince. Sometimes worse than a dog. It all depends on their mood. Also on what they want from us."

"Such as?"

"Help with the ship, maybe. A bit of sail-making, perhaps. Or working one of the guns …"

"So we become pirates too, you mean?"

"For a while, yes. Pirates are a tricky lot, Edmund. You've got to be as tricky as they are if you want to stay alive. We may not have to be pirates for long – just till we get a change of luck."

"I'd rather die, thank you."

The old man sucks on a tooth. “You’re lucky, then. You’ll probably get your wish on this man’s ship.”

“Flint,” I said.

“Cap’n Flint to us. Slit your throat soon as look at you, Flint would. Then wipe his dagger across your shirt by way of a send-off. That’s what I’ve heard, anyways.”

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I’ve heard the stories myself. Even someone new to the sea like me knows all

about Captain Flint. Most ships flee in terror when they see his flag. That's if they don't surrender at once without a shot being fired. Flint doesn't care which it is. "I loves a good chase," he always says. "And I loves an easy kill, too."

Either way, it will be blood-and-guts before nightfall.

Our blood.

And our guts.

So why aren't we dead already, the old bosun and me? Where is Flint taking us? There's something in the wind all right. No wonder I feel as sick as a pig down here in the ship's hold – as if the Devil himself has just farted in my face.