

The Sword and the Dagger

by Brian Cain, 1953–

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For the Irish

Preface

In the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century the British with an array of coalitions fought the Napoleonic wars, directly after the French revolutionary wars, when Napoleon Bonaparte seized power in France. Napoleon Bonaparte attempted to annex Europe, England and Russia with French sovereignty. This was a time of incredible history. In 1803 England became the United Kingdom with the amalgamation of Ireland after years of bitter bloodshed. The *Spanish Inquisition* was under democratic scrutiny and eventually abolished. By 1815 the United Kingdom defeated the French in the war of the seventh coalition with allies Russia, Prussia, Sweden, Austria and the Netherlands defining the borders that are now modern Europe. A major factor in this defeat of the French was the superior strength and experience of the Royal Navy. With huge forests of oak, seasoned ship builders and brilliant seaman Britannia ruled the waves.

In 1807 British Member of Parliament William Wilberforce was successful in introducing a bill The Slave Trade Act outlawing the carrying of slaves on British ships. It would take until 1833 to have The Slavery Abolition Act passed in the House of Lords which abolished slavery in most of the British Empire just prior to the death of Wilberforce. This period in history also saw the formation of the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals and the start of the industrial revolution.

The Irish had struggled through years of war with England and those opposed to British rule as part of the United Kingdom formed the *Society of United Irishmen* collaborating with the French to bring down the British and regain Irish independence. This story begins in Bantry Bay Ireland in 1796 with the disastrous *expedition d'Irlande* by the French in an attempt to land French troops on Irish soil. A young farmer's son Fial McMurrin twelve years old witnesses the mayhem with much of the French fleet destroyed by savage storms in Bantry Bay and along the adjacent coastline of Ireland. His parents are killed by the British but Fial McMurrin survives hidden by his parents and found by friends, he is taken to Cork. He is a natural seaman and learns the ways of the Royal Navy. He becomes a notorious pirate when the time is right exploiting weakness he found in ships of the line and their battle tactics. A chance meeting with William Wilberforce changes his life.

Chapter 1

Voices, was that voices in the wind? Not one but many. The weather had turned and thunder followed a blinding flash in Bantry Bay, Ireland. Twelve year old Fial McMurrin sheltered his eyes with his hands over his brow helping his father gather cattle at first light. He could hardly hear his father's instructions shouted in a rich, Irish accent and carried by the harsh wind, but he could hear voices, screams, far more frightening than the lash of his father's cries.

He crested a grassy slope and the sea came into view; he stood mesmerised at the spectacle. His father again shouted at the top of his voice but Fial did not respond, "Fial son can you not hear me!?" His father became angry, frustrated at the lack of attention from his son with such little time. The wind cried with tears as it swept over the crest of the hill and sleet began to fall, running parallel to the ground and carried along by the relentless storm. His father crested the rise and was about to put his heavy hand on Fial's shoulder when he too got view of the bay; he lowered his hand to his side and beheld the spectacle.

They could hear the yelling of sailors; it was the 25th of December 1796 and the French *Expédition d'Irlande* was in disarray, pounded by giant waves and howling winds. They watched helpless as the French warship *INDOMITABLE*, dragging anchor, collided with the frigate *RESOLUE*. They could just make out the French flag atop the mast of the flagship *IMMORTALITÉ*; Captain Bouvet's orders carried in the wind as she was blown out to sea no more than a mile in front of them.

Their cattle took shelter beneath some trees in a cove to their right where the green grassy slopes met a tidal creek. A longboat from the failing ships had overturned in the heavy surf as it attempted to make land, and one man had made it to the rocky beach. Fial and his father fought the storm, making their way down to the cliff face, sliding down the final rocky ledge to assist the lone soul.

The sailor did not speak English; he was exhausted, pale, and shivering in the cold, unrelenting wind and sleet. His face was thin and gaunt and his hair dark, straggly and matted with seaweed; his red and white clothes clung to him sopping wet. He carried a bag over his shoulder made of leather that was cumbersome and quite heavy. Fial and his father supported him between them and they set off for their farmhouse a mile inland. The Frenchman stumbled occasionally and Fial's father took off his long, black coat, draping it around the Frenchman's shoulders; he shook violently at times with the cold. When they made the farmhouse the Frenchman was nearly unconscious and they laid him in front of the open fire and warmed some potato soup; he fell asleep.

Fial's father Ryan was a member of the outlawed *Society of United Irishmen* and he left the farmhouse to inform his colleagues in nearby Summerhill of his find and to locate someone who understood French.

Fial's mother tended to the Frenchman while Fial, an inquisitive boy who loved the sea, inspected the contents of the Frenchman's bag, the leather wore an embossed ensign of the Royal Navy. There were a number of maps, charts and books wet with seawater. He laid them out flat to dry on the stone floor near the fire's edge. At the bottom of the bag there was a wooden case around twelve inches

square and six inches deep bearing the insignia of the Royal Navy; he carefully opened the case, unlatching the clip. His face lit up when he observed a sextant; Fial had seen pictures of such a thing in school and knew it was used on ships for celestial navigation; to have his hands on one was most exciting. He handled the parts but couldn't work out how to put it together and laid them back in their box recess when his mother chastised him for playing with it. He ran his fingers over the red silk fabric that covered the padding inside the box, the finest silk; he thought it felt like a babies skin. At twelve it was the best toy he had ever seen.

The Frenchman woke after an hour or so and smiled at Fial for the first time. He could muster the words *thank you* well enough for Fial to understand. Fial pointed to one of the books and the Frenchman responded, "Almanach nautique," but Fial didn't understand, fumbling through the pages for pictures.

Ryan returned just after midday with a friend who spoke fluent French. They learned of a journey thwarted by failure. The rescued Frenchman was first mate Louis Belgarde from the Scevola; he had been washed overboard in the storm in the dark of morning.

The fleet had sailed from Brest in France for the *Expédition d'Irlande* on the 15th December direct to Bantry Bay: some 17 ships, 13 frigates and 14 other vessels; they carried nearly twenty thousand soldiers, mariners and sailors. The fleet had not mustered well at Brest and made voyage in groups, the biggest being that following the flagship IMMORTALITÉ under Captain Bouvet that upon leaving the coast of Brest numbered some thirty-three.

They anchored in Bantry Bay on the twenty-first of December and were surprised to find local pilots mistaking the fleet to be British, rowing out to assist them. The British pilots were captured but kept alive and they gave information on the best places to make a landing. It was the pilot's longboat tethered to the stern of the Scevola that Louis was able to use when he was washed overboard in the later storm. In the longboat he found the bag he was carrying abandoned by the pilots when they were captured.

He explained the fleet was not at full strength but senior officers Bouvet and army counterpart General Emmanuel de Grouchy had a meeting and resolved on a plan to continue with the landing. They were poorly equipped for the sudden bad weather, the worst since 1708, the French soldiers and seaman being dressed for a milder climate struggled in the cold. Then on the night preceding the planned morning landing the weather worsened to a major storm and he was washed overboard. By first light the landing was in complete confusion with ships breaking up and dragging anchor, many being blown out to sea. Louis was washed over the stern at first light and landed near the longboat; he was a strong swimmer and pulled himself into the longboat. The SCEVOLA had weighed anchor and his tow line was cast off so he was carried towards the shore of Bantry Bay. The boat overturned in heavy surf and Louis swam the short distance to the rocky beach, being rescued by Fial and his father.

The British response had not been good but Ryan McMurrin knew this would not last. Fial had listened to what had transpired but did not really understand some of it. Plans were made through the *Society of United Irishmen* to have Louis

taken to the port of Cork and await passage back to France to assist in other planned incursions collaborated with the *Society* in the near future.

The very next morning a cart of hay and vegetables arrived pulled by two horses and Louis was hidden in a small wooden recess in the centre of the load. Fial was used atop the load to add a going to market look with Ryan McMurrin driving and his *Society* friend William Maloney next to him with a concealed musket pistol. The British had begun looking for any survivors of the fleet and justice for those who collaborated was swift. The journey to Cork was forty-nine miles, a full day each way with a change of horses half way at a place called Ballineen with *Society* contacts. They made Bunkila on the western side of Cork Harbour well into darkness and Louis had been given a set of clothes more akin to that of the locals; he was shuffled inside a farmhouse overlooking the harbour of Cork.

Fial woke early at first light. It was his first time in a major town and being infatuated by the sea and inquisitive, he stood watching the harbour at the water's edge in front of the farm house. The surrounding fields of green grass and cattle were separated by ditches with sparse hedging of mainly blackberry and something Fial called bread and cheese. To his left he could see the harbour branch into the River Lee and directly in front of him, two miles off, was the island of Haulbowline. Spike Island just to its right really interested him. He could see a British warship anchored on the north eastern edge of Spike Island. He had never been up close to one only because he never had the chance and chance had raised its head.

Fial asked farmer and *Society* member Donal McGuire if with the permission of his father he could see the warship up close. It was a rare occasion that they were in Cork and his father agreed. Donal put Fial in a rowboat with him and they headed directly east towards Haulbowline Island; they supplied vegetables to the British ships that replenished stocks whilst in port. Donal explained they could access the wharf where the ship was at anchor and deliver some supplies scheduled for later in the day; they would have to be careful as the early arrival would cause suspicion. The Druid was anchored away from the wharfs for extra security and could only be accessed by longboats, greatly decreasing the risk of boarding by enemies.

Fial watched the harbour traffic, holding his hand in the water at the stern of the rowboat sitting atop the wide complement of vegetables. Donal explained traffic was down a lot as the attempt at Bantry Bay by the French had put the British on alert and several people had already been taken into custody and held in the prison on Haulbowline Island, a place from whence you did not return.

They passed between Rocky Island and Cobh Point and Donal explained about the ship as they approached her. It was the HMS DRUID, a fifth rate frigate. Donal knew much of the ships as he was previously a seaman with a commercial schooner trading with the Welsh but it was confiscated by the British and used for their own purposes. The DRUID was a Hermione class frigate: Hermione class named after the only daughter of Menelaus and Helen from Greek mythology in the time of Troy. She was seven hundred and seventeen tons with a complement of two hundred and twenty crew, one hundred and twenty-nine feet long and thirty-six feet wide. She boasted forty-two mainly carronade cannon on two decks, twenty-six twelve pounders on the upper deck, four six pounders and eight

twenty-four pounders on the quarterdeck and two six pounders and two twenty-four pounders on the forecastle. Her captain was Richard King.

A warning was shouted to the rowboat as it approached; Donal explained their identity and presence and was allowed to pull alongside the port rope and climb the rigging. Armed British marines watched from the edge of the ship as the vegetable stock was loaded on board. Fial was in awe as he looked up at the ship's tall masts and could smell the black pitch that sealed her hull. The character of the oak planks in her hull bore witness to the craftsmen that had built her; he looked in rapture at a builder of empires. He could see the upper deck cannon poised to strike and touched the ship's hull as if he wanted to become part of her. Fial had found his destiny.

Chapter 2

It was early on Saturday the thirty-first of December 1796, Fial was having breakfast with his mother and father when a pounding on the door of their stone farmhouse was followed by an ominous cry. "In the name of King George the Third we command you open the door!" Ryan McMurrin hastily hid Fial in a hole in the floor under the slate put there for this very purpose adjacent to the wood stove where no one could walk. He gripped his son's hand and smiled before he replaced the slate tiles concealing the cavity. He opened the door and British soldiers burst in. Fial could not see the attack but could hear the conversation. Four soldiers in red tunics carrying flintlock rifles stood around the edges of the small kitchen making way for Lieutenant Bovrington, who, quite outstanding in his gold braid epaulets, ducked as he came in the door to avoid removing his well proportioned triangular black hat. He wore a long curled blonde wig and had a small tufted beard and looked at Ryan.

"You are Ryan McMurrin?"

"I am."

"I am Farnsworth Bovrington of the King's Infantry, Haulbowline Barracks Cork. We have been given information by an Irish prisoner you are a member of the outlawed *Society of United Irishmen*. What do you say to this accusation?"

"Would it be making a difference what I thought?"

"Dammed impertinence man; take him outside and half hang him." Ryan struggled as two soldiers dragged him outside. "Prepare the woman, I will go first, call me when she's ready." Bovrington walked outside and supervised the lynching of Ryan McMurrin on the back of an army horse cart in the yard; they left him till he was nearly unconscious and cut him down. He screamed as a soldier slashed his stomach open to draw his insides out; he could hear his wife screaming as she was stripped of her clothing. Ryan McMurrin died and was thrown on the cart with several other bodies. Bovrington disappeared into the farmhouse kitchen closing the door. Fial could hear his mother moan and scream as she was repeatedly raped by Bovrington and the soldiers. An hour passed and all was quiet as the army cart took Ryan McMurrin's body to Cork for public display. Fial had been in

the floor cavity for what seemed an eternity when he heard a familiar voice calling from outside the farmhouse around the yard.

"Fial boy, are you here? Fial it's me, William Maloney!" The calls got louder and the door opened. "Oh mother of God!" William covered the body of Fial's mother with her clothing; she lay on the kitchen table where her throat had been cut. Fial pushed the tiles with all his might and they made a grating noise. William heard the noise and dragged the tiles from the roof of the cavity, helping Fial from his curled, cramped position, supporting him while he straightened up. William herded him from the kitchen to the yard bringing him some water. Fial told William of what he had heard, sparse but enough for William to stop him from going on.

William left Fial in the barn aside the homestead while he buried Fial's mother in the grounds on a hillside under an oak tree. He covered the shallow grave in rocks and put a makeshift cross of sticks tied together with twine at the head of the grave. He had Fial gather his things. Fial made sure he took the sextant, maps and charts left to him by Louis Belgarde with his few items of clothing. William took him to his mother's grave before they left.

"Your mother is here. Your father's body has been taken to Cork where they will display it to discourage our independence. One day lad you will return to this grave and proudly put your mother's name to it." Fial was numb and stared at the pile of rocks that was once the hub of his life. He said nothing but inside he could hear his mother talking as if she was there.

She had always been scared by what had happened to many young Irish souls in the war and the words she uttered as he left for school every day echoed in his mind as if she was talking from the grave. "You are off to learn the ways of the wise, do what you will but don't waste your life. With wisdom and courage you will find your destiny."

Chapter 3

William Maloney kept Fial for only a short time as he feared the same fate as his father. William had established that Fial wanted to go to sea and command a ship for himself, grand goals for such a tender age. William saw much in the boy and encouraged his energy of want for the ocean.

He passed Fial on to the one person who could teach him what he would need to know: Donal McGuire at Bunkila in Cork Harbour. Fial took Donal's surname and became part of his family. Donal had no children as his wife was unable to conceive and Fial became the apple of their eye.

Fial attended the local church school run by a Methodist priest who was tolerated by the sectarian movements in the area. Martial law had been in place from March 1797 and the British government used the sectarian problems to better their position, especially in the north of Ireland, but Fial was educated and fostered outside of this in the south.

For two years Donal spent his time educating Fial. First he taught him to be a strong swimmer, tethering a rope around his chest to the back of a row boat and towing him for hours around the Cork Harbour. Of a night he would teach and quiz Fial on the location of stars and the use to the sextant left to him by Louis Belgarde. Donal had removed all traces of marks from the Royal Navy, scribing it with his name Fial McGuire. He painstakingly went through the twenty-two calculations needed to plot a position using the nautical almanacs from Belgarde's find and things he had kept himself.

Years passed and Fial could swim Cork Harbour with ease. tow the rowboat used to train him and was familiar with celestial navigation but lacked any experience. He could load and shoot a flintlock with calm, ease and accuracy. He could read and write well and was familiar with algebra and advanced mathematical logarithms. The Methodist priest that schooled Fial had taken a shine to him, seeing he had an open minded approach to most things. Fial also became familiar with the scriptures of the Bible, questioning the validity of miracles but recognising the power of religion. He noticed anyone who followed any religion just believed before anything else; this he could understand, for he believed his father and mother should be avenged by the sword of the cross.

Early in the year 1800 Donal McGuire was taken by the British forces after information from informants in the *Society of United Irishmen* implicated him in several operations against the Crown. He was executed and hung in a cage in the Cork markets; his wife fled to the north with family and Fial was left alone.

He was sixteen years old. He wore a wide lower jaw like his father and deep brown eyes with long black hair to his shoulders. He became a very angry young man but a wise for his age. He was now six foot three with wide shoulders and could easily carry two sacks of potatoes, one under each arm. He knew he could do nothing to confront the might of British power from his humble room of the local church where the priest who had taught him so well had given him refuge.

On the eighteenth of March 1800 Fial packed his things and stowed away whilst delivering potatoes on the HMS DRYAD, a fifth class British war frigate under the command of Captain Mansfield. He knew from leaked information she would be bound for Portsmouth, England, escorting the captured Swedish warship the ULLA FERSON and the French privateer PREMIER CONSUL. He had noted the way of British aristocracy and planned to use elements of their ways to his advantage, he planned to become one.

Ten hours into the journey, whilst passing between the Isle of Scilly and Land's End Fial was found and brought before Captain Mansfield in his cabin below the quarterdeck by the watch quartermaster. The quartermaster Litchfield Boyd claimed he was a spy for the *Society of United Irishmen* and should be thrown in the brig and tried for treason. Captain Mansfield dismissed the claim from behind his desk amid his gold braid and white hair and eccentric British accent; an educated and wise man. "An Irish young man stowing away on a British man of war; a lad that I am actually familiar with. This lad has never failed to be on time with his supplies, always been polite and was educated by a Methodist priest, that much I am sure of. Make sense for God's sake man."

"He has a sextant and charts in his position captain," added Boyd as he placed Fial's bag of possessions on the captain's desk. Captain Mansfield inspected Fial's belongings with great interest.

"This is an early Jones of Holborn scribed with your name, where did you acquire such an instrument and all these charts and almanacs?" asked Mansfield.

"Proof he is a traitor if you asked me," interrupted Boyd.

"I did not ask you Boyd, now stand down I'm sure the lad can answer," insisted Mansfield.

"From my father Donal McGuire sir, he was a mariner and harbour pilot."

"Mmmm I am familiar with this man, we still have his ship in the service of the realm, I could understand why he was objectionable. Why have you stowed aboard here lad?"

"I wish to navigate and captain a British warship sir." Boyd burst out laughing but Mansfield remained calm as he sneered at Boyd.

"At sunrise tomorrow I want you to plot the ship's position and bring the results to me on the quarterdeck. Until then you will remain in the brig and your needs will be tended to. Do we understand Boyd?"

"Yes sir, this boy has no chance of plotting the ship's position, will be a pleasure to witness the attempt."

"Indeed, you are dismissed." Fial was fed and placed in the brig till morning.

The morning sunrise saw Fial on the quarterdeck before first light studying the stars; he prepared his sextant as the sun rose. He made a sight from the sun for longitude and one from the land in view ahead of the bow, the ship tacking North North West. As best he could he made latitude out as the crew would not give him access to the compass heading or time. He consulted his charts using the date to calculate sunrise time and the figures from his almanacs. After five minutes he approached Captain Mansfield.

"Morning Fial, you have our position?" asked Mansfield.

"I do sir." Mansfield raised his head looking down his nose at Fial.

"And?"

"We are fifty degrees thirteen minutes seventeen seconds north by three degrees three minutes forty-three seconds west. I have calculated the latitude by land, sight and air as I have had no access to compass heading and I have no time from the ship's clock sir. I believe the bearing I used to be a place called Blackstone Rock in the county Devon sir. We are making slow progress tacking for the wind is doing only just over four knots. If the wind remains like it is from the North West we have another twenty-nine and a half hours to Portsmouth." Mansfield turned to the boatswain.

"Why was this man given no access to ship's information?"

"I thought Boyd had given it to him before he went off watch at sunrise sir," replied the boatswain. Mansfield turned to his second in command next to the helm Lieutenant Briscoe.

"Have Boyd put on report and sent to me before his next watch."

"Certainly sir," replied Briscoe.

"Boatswain how accurate is McGuire's calculation?" asked Mansfield as he peered over the bow and ordered a heading change to tack south west.

"Sir within five hundred yards of my calculation sir." Mansfield looked amazed.

"Hand me both your calculation sheets." They passed the scribbled note pads to Mansfield who studied them diligently. "My God that is amazing." A lookout yelled from the crow's nest as a muffled pistol shot was heard.

"Man overboard from the ULLA FERSON on the port bow!" The ULLA FERSON tacking to their direct port bow had lost a man as she swung about over the starboard of the quarterdeck. The ships were no more than three hundred yards apart and Fial could see the man floundering in the sea. He removed his shoes and jacket and dived from the side of the DRYAD as she steadied on course. He swam briskly to the man in the heavy sea, holding him above water as he had been struck on the head in the fall, rendering him semi-conscious. Mansfield acted immediately.

"Lieutenant Briscoe; lower a longboat and retrieve the men, lay sail until calm in the water." The DRYAD became a hive of activity as a longboat was lowered from the stern and the sails were dropped to lie calm. The ailing man was helped up the boarding rigging on the starboard side of the DRYAD as she drifted calm for an hour, two miles from the British Devon coast.

The rescued man was a British officer Lieutenant James Hilditch in command of the ULLA FERSON whilst she was in transit to Portsmouth for refit for British service. An English speaking Swedish rating from her crew when captured had been retained to assist with the familiarity of the ship; he had turned on Hilditch whilst the ship's company was busy changing tack. The rating was shot by a crew member but Hilditch had already been pushed over the railing hitting his head. Hilditch recovered and before making Portsmouth had Fial brought before he and Mansfield in Mansfield's cabin. Hilditch was an ageing man of over sixty. The ULLA FERSON was his last command before retiring; he shook Fial's hand before sitting down behind the desk next to Mansfield.

"I have called you Fial to thank you for saving my life. I never thought I would see the day I would thank an Irishman for saving my life. They have been trying to take it from me for more years than I can remember."

"A man is a man sir, we are all equal in the eyes of God," replied Fial.

"A religious man to boot. Mansfield tells me you wish to join the British navy."

"That is correct sir; I plan to have a command of my own."

"Mansfield also tells me you are a first class navigator."

"I put to test what I had been taught by my father sir. I made a few assumptions of my own and got lucky."

"Lucky indeed, you made a fool of one of the best navigators the British navy has to offer. When we land in Portsmouth we will request a meeting with Admiral Nelson and suggest you are inducted into the British Navy as a boatswain initially on the Dryad here with Captain Mansfield. We can bear witness to the events of yesterday, a wiser, braver fellow we will not meet."

"Thank you sir."

"You are dismissed Seaman McGuire," added Mansfield. Fial had a wide smile.

"Captain Mansfield sir, as a member of the ship's crew I am able to challenge any man of the crew under King's Rules would I be correct sir." Mansfield looked puzzled.

"Yes that's correct."

"I would like to challenge Quartermaster Boyd to restore my honour sir." Mansfield and Hilditch looked at each other blankly before Mansfield answered.

"Boyd is in the brig also, drunk last night on duty Fial."

"Sir I'm sure Boyd had the best interest of the ship and crew and heart. In the eyes of all equilibrium can be restored for all to see." Mansfield cracked a smile with an assuring nod.

"Well a young man versed in politics as well as courage, that may indeed work, moral is a weapon of successful war and this is a warship." Mansfield called the first mate on watch outside the cabin door; he entered and stood to attention. "Prepare a jousting ring on the main deck below the quarterdeck and bring Boyd aloft from the brig. Inform him his honour is challenged by Seaman McGuire." The first mate smiled and looked at Fial.

"Immediately sir." The first mate left and all made their way to the main deck, a makeshift square was formed by the ship's crew and Mansfield and Hilditch looked down from the quarterdeck. Fial stood in the middle of the square and removed his tunic and shirt. The ratings looked at each other in envy as the muscle-bound young man stood and waited. Boyd entered the square, rolled up his sleeves. He was a small man in relation to Fial but agile and muscular. They both looked at Captain Mansfield whom nodded approval to proceed. Fial offered his hand to Boyd who looked away and began to prance around the edge of the ring, ducking, weaving and shadow punching the air, looking all of a champion as he had done this many times before.

He lunged towards Fial with a right straight. Fial moved his head to one side and counter punched from the hip directly between Boyd's eyes, sending him sprawling unconscious to the deck. There was complete silence as Boyd came round and was helped to his feet by Fial. Fial offered Boyd his hand and the silence continued; Boyd looked at Fial, smiled, took his hand and shook it firmly. Mansfield spoke.

"We still have the matter of Quartermaster Boyd drunk on watch. He will be given ten lashes in front of the crew." Fial interrupted.

"Sir if I may speak." Mansfield looked down at Fial, thought for a few seconds and looked at Hilditch whom nodded in puzzlement rather than approval.

"Permission to speak granted," said Mansfield.

"Sir it is I that should take the lashes, if I had not stowed away on the ship Quartermaster Boyd would not have felt so strongly and drunk too much. I hold myself responsible sir." Mansfield whispered on Hilditch's shoulder before replying.

"My God this boy is a born leader." He looked at Fial. "You wish to take Boyd's punishment for your irresponsibility of stowing away; I have never heard such a thing. Boyd wanted you thrown in the brig."

"I would have reacted in the same way to protect my ship and men sir." Mansfield thought for a while; he felt he was losing face, belittled by an Irish statesman.

"Tie Seaman McGuire to the main mast, administer ten lashes." The ship lay in complete silence as Fial was strapped to the mast when a rating stepped forwards and shouted out.

"I wish to take Seaman McGuire's punishment sir!" Then another.

"I too sir!" The ship echoed in voices demanding the same thing and Mansfield demanded order.

"Silence!" Mansfield looked at the deck sternly, then at Hilditch, he smiled and lay his head to one side. Mansfield looked out to sea thinking for a while and the ship was silent, watching his face. "The crew of this ship is one of the most dedicated I have ever sailed with. Our record speaks for itself. A member of our crew's honour was threatened and a new man restored it. Welcome Seaman Fial McGuire to our ranks. Everyone prepare to enter Portsmouth Harbour: to your posts. McGuire assist Litchfield Boyd with his duties." The crew began to disperse and as they did they shook Fial's hand one by one; a smiling Litchfield Boyd was last and they made sail into Portsmouth.

Chapter 4

Monday the 24th of March 1800. Fial had found it a lot easier settling into barrack quarters at Portsmouth with a British naval uniform on. Admiral Nelson had requested to see Fial when given the information of his conduct by Mansfield and Hilditch. Hilditch was a long time friend of Admiral Nelson.

Nelson had an office in the Portsmouth round tower. Fial awaited his call from inside the bland fortification. His meeting was brief, with Nelson decorating Fial for his bravery in the rescue of Hilditch. Nelson signed the paperwork for Fial's appointment to HMS DRYAD as boatswain with a few training runs on a smaller craft before the DRYAD left for Cork in mid April. Nelson directed that he be given a tour of the dry dock, the oldest in the world where a ship was currently being worked on. Fial said nothing except, "Sir," saluted and left.

Fial was taken to the dry dock; he was captivated by the spectacle of the VICTORY, flagship of the Royal Navy as she lay in dry dock for refit. A 104 gun first rate ship of the line; three thousand five hundred tonnes, one hundred and eighty-six feet long, Fial had never seen such a work of art. He walked the upper deck and inspected the view from the quarterdeck. He handled a grappling iron hanging from racks along the ship's balustrade, knowing it was used to snare opponents and build a nation. Below the middle deck was rank with cannon some twenty-eight twenty-four pounders; he could smell the black powder burn etched into the oak framework. He could feel the power within the structure that had fought and built an empire; the experience became part of him. As he walked away from the most powerful ship afloat, he pondered the difficulties of running such a vessel, a sailing sword held by many to deliver a slashing blow to an adversary. He had read of Sir Francis Drake and the GOLDEN HIND, a smaller ship that could break loose of the battle line so entrenched in British naval warfare, and with speed strike a fleeting blow then withdraw to strike again. As a mighty sword the Victory was imperial, a warning as well as a grand slashing sword born of many. The British naval aristocracy had ignored Drakes advice on battle tactics used in the line of ships approach, but Fial had not, a fleeting hidden dagger could be a menace, especially if they believed they held the mightiest sword.

Fial commenced two weeks of manoeuvres aboard HMS BOUDACIA, a ship of similar construction to the DRYAD and commanded by Captain Richard Keats. During manoeuvres off the coast of the Isle of Wight with other ships of the Portsmouth fleet Fial gained valuable knowledge of group ship warfare, wind and sail placement, cannon load and range ability. He noticed a ship pass their midst with great speed and manoeuvrability; this ship also had a different sail arrangement than a normal frigate. He was informed it was a brigantine, lighter with more sail area, the rear mast sail being on a parallel beam that could be swung from side to side with the foremast square rigged for downwind. Triangular foresails could also be raised in front of the front mast giving greater speed downwind and in tack.

Fial watched the ship whisper past at what looked to Fial to be a speed of at least fifteen knots, the fastest ship he had ever seen. He was informed the Royal Navy did not use these as the hull was generally too slim to carry sufficient guns, another reason for her speed and manoeuvrability, plus the placement of soldiers and sufficient crew was also considered. An advantage of the brigantine was she required far less crew and a brigantine the size of the Boudacia would require less than half the crew members to sail her, in fact with skilled seaman a skeleton crew could man a brigantine. Fial saw a slim target requiring more accuracy to hit with cannon shot that could strike at the waterline of a larger vessel and be gone before a larger, better armed vessel could respond, if targeting the right spot the little ship could strike and be gone without coming under the muzzle of main cannon.

In Portsmouth Harbour Fial found himself a well kept example of a brigantine, she was dressed in pure white, one hundred and twenty feet long, twenty-one feet wide, weighing only one hundred and twenty tons. He introduced himself to the captain, an American from Norfolk, Virginia trading in animal furs and was shown around the ship. Fial paid careful attention to the procedures used to swing the rear gaff and boom sail and noticed its ease of use and wide swing of some one hundred and eighty degrees on this particular ship. The American explained his ship was not armed and was rigged to outmanoeuvre and outrun any ship that put her under attack. Fial figured this must work as the ship was returning to Norfolk with a load of precious stones traded for his furs in Ras al-Khainah in the Persian Gulf and had avoided several attempts by pirates to attack him, he listened with great interest to the opinion of an experienced man on the handling of a fully laden brigantine.

Fial also saw something on the brigantine that he had not seen before, a man with black skin. The American captain introduced Fial to three members of his crew who were African slaves he had purchased in Ras al-Khainah. Fial listened with interest as the captain explained the slave trade from the African countries, something that Fial was shocked to hear of. They were sold and transported in massive numbers and used on sugar, coffee, cotton and tobacco plantations from Brazil to America.

Fial could not communicate with the blacks who were from the Congo and could not speak English; he noted they looked sad and blank with hardly any grip when they shook hands; something they were obviously not used to. The American

captain stated they were incredibly strong but poorly educated, good for manual deck work with incredible stamina. Fial was impressed with the ship and saddened by his encounter with the blacks. He thanked the captain and went on his way.

Fial had always been taught even horses and dogs were part of the family. Seeing people treated like a commodity with less regard than animals played on his mind. All are created equal in the eyes of God he thought; why would these people be subject to so much persecution and suffering, were they also enemies of the realm? He would seek more information on this.

Fial had become interested in *The Daily Universal Register*, a newspaper available on the streets of Portsmouth every day; with his navy wage he was getting used to buying things. The very day after his encounter with the black slaves he read a letter to the editor by a British citizen in *The Daily Universal Register*, a gentleman called William Wilberforce. The letter was about the unruly behavior he had witnessed whilst watching a House of Commons debate with a friend William Pitt from the gallery of the Houses of Parliament in London. Wilberforce stated the need for independent views to be expressed and the need to discuss the abolition of the trading of persons in slavery. Wilberforce further mentioned he was considering running for a parliamentary seat himself as an independent for the area of Kingston upon Hull. He further stated the need for laws to deal with the protection of animals, stating a country can be judged by how it treats its animals. Fial related to these things immediately and thought deeply about them as he went about his duties on HMS Dryad operating from the port of Cork over the next months.

Chapter 5

Sunday August the 3rd 1800; it was a sunny afternoon at the King's Head tavern in the Cork port suburb of Ringaskiddy and Fial was celebrating his seventeenth birthday with a few friends. This was unusual for Fial as he generally kept to himself. Fial was not a drinking man as he had been sworn off it by his father. He tried the poor quality whisky available but it made him feel sick so he tried beer; this had a similar effect so he drank water.

Fial would never forget this day, not for his celebration of tasting of liquor but for the sighting of tavern wench Angelina Donnelly. A fairer maiden he had never seen; at nineteen her long, blonde, curly locks fell over her shoulders as she served beer from her tray to the table. Her blue eyes pierced his face and got inside him, her ample bosom flowing out over the top of her tight corset; their eyes met and she stood looking at him for a few seconds, smiled and continued on. She was the reason most men attended the King's Head, just to look upon her. Fial's heart began to react and he found himself hopelessly attracted to Angelina as if she was the fairest white ship afloat. She stared at Fial every time she passed and eventually sat down next to him, he became limp and frail as she spoke to him.

"You are Fial McGuire from HMS DRYAD?" asked Angelina.

"I am," replied Fial.

"They say you are a brave lad of Irish blood."

"Is that what they have been saying? I had not heard."

"My Father a clergyman of Ringaskiddy church has spoken of you. He objects to me working here but the money is good and we are struggling at home."

"Your father is clergy but has a wife and daughter."

"The social times have been hard for all with the war and all. My father works for all to encourage unity. Defining boundaries has not been a luxury he lived by. My father is a live man of god not a dead martyr. Some call him father some call him pastor he's there for all."

Fial thought for a while with a look of concentration. "That would take a lot of courage perhaps more than I could muster, I would like to meet this man. You would be the fairest maiden in the land, I too would object to you being in such a place as the Kings Head. You need not have all these brigands putting their hands upon your fair form. Something has happened inside me from my first look at you, if you were a ship I would sail the seven seas with you for all to see. I ask you take my hand and leave, I wish to get to know you." A heavy hand came down on Angelina's shoulder and she was lifted under the arm to stand, public house owner Evan McTaggart shouted in Angelina's face.

"You are not paid to sit and cohort with the British Navy. Get to work and serve liquor," shouted McTaggart. Fial shot to his feet, pushing the table over in front of him and looking straight at McTaggart, a giant of a man. The tavern went quiet.

"Unhand her!" demanded Fial. McTaggart looked puzzled.

"You are Irish."

"I am."

"In the uniform of the King's navy—what kind of an Irishman would you be?"

"One who has fallen in love with the woman you have your hand on, let her go." A regular patron to the tavern yelled out to McTaggart.

"That be Fial McGuire of HMS DRYAD." McTaggart looked at the patron who shook his head at him, he then looked back at Fial with hesitation.

"I have heard of you," said McTaggart. "I thought you would be bigger than you are. They say you have the heart of a lion. If its Angelina you are wanting then take her." McTaggart let her go. Fial led her through the silent crowd towards the door, stopping at the patron who had shouted at McTaggart, a young man in his twenties.

"Who might you be?" asked Fial.

"Dan Evans," replied the young man.

"A Welshman by the sounds."

"Oh yes Fial."

"Are you a seaman?"

"I am a merchant rating."

"I'll remember your name, I may need you one day." Dan smiled.

"For that time I'll be waiting." Fial shook his hand and took his prize into the street. They walked along the dock shore talking and laughing until Fial could wait no longer; he took Angelina in his arms and kissed her. They eventually came to the rectory gate where Angelina lived and Fial accompanied her to the door of the

modest rectory adjacent to the church. The door opened and Donnelly stood in the doorway. Fial spoke to him.

"Father Donnelly sir, I am Fial McGuire. I have come to ask that I be permitted to court your daughter Angelina."

"Fial McGuire," replied Donnelly. "Well bless my soul, come in man." Fial was led into the rectory kitchen and sat down at the bare wooden table on the stone floor. "Angelina this is sudden, what do you say of this?"

"I wish to get to know Fial for I have felt for no man before but today I have."

"Fial I ask one thing of you," said Donnelly. "Please don't break my daughter's heart, this is the will of God and so is your way." Fial thought for a while then took Donnelly's hand across the table.

"One day a ship called the GHOST OF MCMURRIN will sail the seas. It will be the scourge of the British navy, and if I have my way, the slave trading business as well. This thing I can no more stop than my love for your fair daughter. For if I fail or leave unfinished business, my son may not."

"These are bold and dangerous words Fial. I dreamed of a fine family man taking Angelina's hand, not a man stalking to be a legend. But this place is full of seafaring people, if the life of a sailor's wife is what Angelina wants then so be it; she never fails to get what she wants. You have my permission to court Angelina and may God be with you both."

Chapter 6

Time passed and indeed Fial began to become what legends are made of. He married his fairest in the land one year later and nine months after the wedding she bore him a son, William Ryan McGuire in April 1802. In 1804 he became captain of HMS DRYAD, Captain Mansfield moving to Portsmouth for a desk commission with his family. Admiral Nelson had taken command of HMS VICTORY in May 1803; Napoleon was causing the British problems in Europe and the threat of defeat in the Napoleonic wars was ever present.

Fial was summoned to Portsmouth and asked to bring his family. The DRYAD left Cork in July 1804 bound for Portsmouth. It was the last time Fial would sail in her. Upon settling his family in Portsmouth Fial received his orders direct from Admiral Nelson; he was to be commissioned to HMS VICTORY as first Lieutenant for Nelson. Nelson had studied the career of Fial and noted that his random tactics outside normal accepted practice had won many a conflict for the DRYAD and he could navigate by the moon, stars and sun with uncanny accuracy, making the necessary calculations in his head. Nelson intended to initiate some unorthodox tactics himself, one being having a young man with uncanny seamanship and a flair for the use of unorthodox methods when under fire. He took his position on HMS VICTORY and became involved in the naval blockade of France. At the age of twenty Fial stood on the quarterdeck of the most powerful British warship afloat.

On the twenty-first of October 1805 Nelson's fleet was off the coast of Cadiz in south western Spain. His fleet of 27 ships of the line had been specially painted in

a chequered pattern round the gunports in black and yellow to make them easily distinguishable from the enemy in the mêlée.

Nelson instructed his captains, over two dinners aboard the VICTORY, on his plan for the approaching battle. The order of sailing, in which the fleet was arranged when the enemy was first sighted, was to be the order of ensuing battle, so that no time would be wasted in forming a precise line, the ship of the line was to be abandoned. The attack was to be made in two bodies. One led by his second in command, Collingwood, was to throw itself on the rear of the enemy, while the other, led by Nelson, was to take care of the centre and vanguard. In preparation for the battle, this tactic was well outside the normal, single line approach that made signaling via flags easy between ships.

The combined French and Spanish fleet had 33 ships and was under the command of Admiral Villeneuve who was under threat of losing his command due to political pressures. He sailed from Cadiz on the 21st October heading for the Mediterranean but turned north towards the British fleet starting the Battle of Trafalgar. At 11.45 am the two fleets were in view of each other and the famous flag signal was given by Nelson from the VICTORY: *ENGLAND EXPECTS THAT EVERY MAN WILL DO HIS DUTY*.

The Franco-Spanish fleet had formed a long curve like a half moon and were in disarray due mainly to poor wind conditions. The British, attacking in two lines perpendicular to the foe, broke through the centre of the opposition's lines but with painstaking progress also due to bad wind conditions. VICTORY broke the line between the French BUCENTAURE and REDOUTABLE delivering destructive broadsides and breaking the opposition fleet into several groups.

At 1.45 pm a musket bullet fired from the mizzen top of the REDOUTABLE struck Nelson in the left shoulder, passed through his spine at the sixth and seventh thoracic vertebrae, and lodged two inches below his right scapula in the muscles of his back. Nelson exclaimed, "They finally succeeded—I am dead." He was carried below decks.

The battle was the most decisive British naval victory of the war. Twenty-seven British ships of the line led by Nelson aboard the VICTORY defeated thirty-three French and Spanish ships of the line under French Admiral Villeneuve off the south-west coast of Spain, just west of Cape Trafalgar. The Franco-Spanish fleet lost twenty-two ships, without a single British vessel being lost. Nelson's unorthodox approach yielded decisive results.

Cannon fire had caused devastation on the quarterdeck of the VICTORY and made her susceptible to attack and the infantry corps of the French REDOUTABLE attempted to board the VICTORY. Fial gallantly held them off until the 98 gun HMS TEMERAIRE delivered a devastating broadside to REDOUTABLE from which she never recovered. Fial had been involved in the battle that turned the table on the Napoleonic Wars and the French and Spanish navy never recovered. Fial returned to Portsmouth after a long absence at the blockade directly after the Battle of Trafalgar to devastating news; his wife Angelina had contracted tuberculosis and had passed away.

Chapter 7

It was mid January 1806 before Fial could drag himself to the light of day. The loss of Angelina had gutted his sense of belonging. His son William held him together and he thought of a plan in his head. He had become rich with the share bartering system operated by the British navy, taking a percentage of the captured loot of Spanish and French ships. He walked the wintry morning dockside in Portsmouth with his son who was now walking and talking.

Fial taught him of the different ships in the harbour and that's when Fial first saw her, the PACIFIC STAR. One hundred and thirteen feet long and twenty-one feet wide, a brigantine; she was a trader working with an American owner captain. She was undergoing some maintenance and had been at sea for months leaving her looking a little unloved.

Fial introduced himself to the captain who explained they had come under attack from pirates off the coast of Morocco on the return journey from West Africa. They had left their run too late, nearly being taken by the pirate ship and coming under fire, damaging sections of the ship's rigging. Once under full sail with the wind the PACIFIC STAR easily outran the attacking French frigate.

Fial inspected the ship with importance. The lower decks were laden with coffee, tobacco and nut oil. The owner captain was selling some of the cargo to pay for the ship's repair. Fial offered the captain a modest sum for the ship; just over five thousand pounds. The ageing captain agreed after some bargaining that really was influential as he had been injured in the attack on the ship and was in poor health.

The PACIFIC STAR changed hands and Fial became the proud owner of a brigantine. In the deal Fial acquired eleven black slave deckhands, one of whom could speak broken English. All the European crew went their own way. Fial offered the African slaves their freedom but they refused saying they would rather work on the ship and were concerned where they would end up if released and recaptured; there was no law to give a slave his freedom. Fial kept them on teaching them how to run parts of the ship through the broken English of one of them; this was slow and required much patience.

Fial sold the rest of the cargo and put the ship in dry dock, re-rigging the mast and modifying the swing of the rear sail boom to go square to the mast. He also rigged a massive round foresail for downwind forward of the front mast, an idea he thought may work. He designed it on paper and increased the main forward square sail mast with more sail area, and the masts were reinforced to take the modifications. He intended never to carry cargo and cut out four cannon portholes on the lower deck, either side of the ship, and staggered them so when they recoiled they did not interfere with the opposite cannon. Four twelve pounder short carronades were fitted either side with recoil chains connected to steel plates around the gunports. A steel cover was erected over the helm quarterdeck and another on the foredeck big enough to shelter several men from musket and light cannon fire from above. The British navy gladly assisted on the premise that the ship would be a privateer for the British navy.

A keel some six feet deep and nine feet long was bolted to the ship's lower hull, again worked out on paper to take the extra stress of the rear sail boom swinging to ninety degrees of the ship's hull. It was calculated the ship would still sit higher in the water with full crew and supplies than if fully laden with cargo.

On a fine day with a brisk breeze in May 1806 the PACIFIC STAR put to sea for a test run from Portsmouth, with only the African crew Fial had spent many hours training. He put the ship through its paces, heading downwind two miles off the coast of the Isle of Wight and launched the foresail that took the breeze and with full sail. The ship left a commanding wake at over nineteen knots; the first ship he had ever known to achieve such speed in the healthy wind of the day. He put the ship into a number of tack manoeuvres into the wind and cross wind with the results he had hoped for.

The rigging ropes and rings allowed the crew to drop or raise the forward square sail rigging in three minutes, a credit to the strength of the African crew, and turn about in a few lengths of the ship. Fial's mods had worked; he had the fastest ship he had ever seen. Cannon were loaded and test fired, the crew did not question one order given by Fial. In a few days of manoeuvres he had the most disciplined and clockwork crew he had ever worked with. He trained the English speaking crew member, whom he named Bongo, to take the helm and gave the rest of the crew numbers one to ten which they remembered with ease. Work on the ship continued as the crew suggested modifications to make operation easier with such a sparse crew, it worked.

Now to test the ship in action. In July information was received by naval command that a pair of French frigates were attacking individual ships five miles off the coast of the Isle of Wight. Fial put to sea mid morning as soon as the alarm was raised, easily outrunning two second class ships of the line sent to respond from Portsmouth.

Fial spotted the French frigates directly south of the Isle of Wight lying calm to encourage engagement. Fial thought this was probably a trap to attract ships then more ships of the French fleet would attack from beyond the horizon. With the speed of the PACIFIC STAR this did not concern Fial; he laid sail to the east into the wind, tacking so he could approach the ships from the east with the wind under full speed. The French frigates did not respond to Fial's actions, as they did not regard a single brigantine to be of any significant danger. They had concluded that the ship was tacking to avoid them and watched the horizon to the north.

When the frigates were directly down wind of Fial some three miles he turned east and laid full sail. All cannon of the PACIFIC STAR were loaded and aimed no more than a few feet above the waterline at point blank range. Fial raised the black flag indicating that the ship was about to engage but would give quarter to the French if they surrendered. He was about to find out if a combination of his and Drake's ideas would work.

Before the French could lay sail the STAR was upon them; he drew the foresail to the deck and dropped the foremast sails. When he got to within a hundred yards of the first frigate heading straight for her he made a turn to port below her stern. The deck crew took cover under the metal shields on the PACIFIC STAR deck as the French crew flurried around attempting to make sail and opening fire with muskets. The STAR came under her stern port side within a few yards,

narrowly missing the frigate and opening fire with four cannon as she passed the closest point, hitting the French frigate just above the water line with all shots at near point blank range. Two huge holes appeared in the frigate's waterline and she began taking water at a torrid rate.

Musket shots and cannon fire from the upper deck did nothing to the STAR or her crew. The cannon fire was inaccurate and as she made a direct turn south east away from the frigate, the STAR was in a blind spot inaccessible to the main gunners on the French ship. The French frigate PARIS DE GRANDE went into panic mode as she took on water through the waterline damage and began to list to port. The second French frigate made sail and Fial turned the STAR when up wind of her, tacking across the stern of the frigate once more some half mile upwind.

A further problem appeared on the horizon for the French frigates: two second class British navy ships of the line. The French captain on the undamaged frigate looked at the STAR through his long glass; Captain Bonnet of the SERPENTINE noted the black flag atop the main mast of the STAR. He shouted at his lieutenant on the quarterdeck of the French warship.

"Le PACIFIQUE JOUE le rôle principal, c'est le bateau le plus rapide que j'ai jamais vu. Les noirs dans l'équipage. Elle vient à nous!" *The PACIFIC STAR is playing the main role, it is the fastest ship I have ever seen. Black men in the crew. She is coming at us!*

A cry from the crow's nest of the SERPENTINE, "Les Britanniques naviguent sur l'horizon de tribord. Deux hommes britannique de guerre!" *British sails on the starboard horizon; two British man of war!* Captain Bonnet turned his long glass on the approaching ships on his starboard side.

"We have a problem, two what looks to be second class British warships. Make sail for the rest of the fleet for cover. Signal our intentions to the PARIS DE GRANDE." Bonnet's lieutenant second in command spoke to Bonnet as he studied the approaching British ships with concern.

"The PARIS DE GRANDE signals she is sinking captain Bonnet, and the brigantine has gone up wind out of range and is turning back on us. The brigantine has changed her black flag to red." Bonnet swung back over the stern of the SERPENTINE with his telescope in time to see the STAR turn and head directly for them.

"Damn cheek of this man whoever he is. He insults us with a red flag that he will take no prisoners. Continue to get under way and man the quarterdeck light railing cannon. Prepare all deck hands with muskets to engage her before she turns. He looks to be attempting to do what he did to the PARIS DE GRANDE."

"As you wish captain," replied the lieutenant.

British captain Henry Fairfield in the leading second class ship of the line the Westminster spoke with dismay to the quarterdeck staff as he observed the STAR through his long glass come down on the SERPENTINE. "Good God, that looks like the PACIFIC STAR attacking the French frigates alone. The thing that McGuire has been messing around with." He watched as the STAR passed under the stern of the SERPENTINE at point blank range under fire from the frigate's quarterdeck and delivered a precise cannon volley to the waterline of the SERPENTINE's port stern, then turned directly away into the wind avoiding her main guns. "I don't

believe that, the PARIS LE GRANDE is listing. He must have already struck at her and I think it's the SERPENTINE that has just been damaged by the STAR; he turned directly into the wind after the volley and avoided her guns." He lowered his sight glass and looked at the rest of the quarterdeck staff. "Prepare to attack the French as soon as we are in range. We will take the PARIS DE GRANDE. Signal the Fallow to engage the SERPENTINE."

Fial continued south east out to sea for two miles then turned north for the coastline. He turned east when half a mile from the coast and slipped into Portsmouth, gathered his son and personal effects and made sail for Cork Harbour, Ireland heading directly east around the Isle of Wight in full sail with the wind. He left Portsmouth well before the WESTMINSTER and the FALLOW returned after finishing off the PARIS DE GRANDE and the SERPENTINE. Both French ships had sunk and the British took only the officers prisoner.

Admiral Claremont upon hearing of the exploits of Fial McGuire and the PACIFIC STAR gave orders she be considered a British privateer and be given free range in British waters.

Chapter 8

Sunday 8th June 1806. Fial had anchored the PACIFIC STAR in Ireland's Cork Harbour, choosing deep water between Haulbowline and Ringaskiddy. This kept the black crew away from prying eyes and allowed Fial to further modify his ship without too much attention. Fial traversed back and forth via longboat to Ringaskiddy and King's Head Tavern. He found it difficult; bringing back memories of the past. The Harbour, the town, the smell and atmosphere played on Fial's mind as a childhood of horror came back to haunt him.

The *Society of United Irishmen* was active but hard to find. King's Head Tavern publican Evan McTaggart was confided in an effort to find Donal McGuire, a merchant seaman he had heard of who was related to his step father, but progress was slow. Then one balmy summer's afternoon in August while dining at the Tavern, in walked Donal McGuire with two other seamen. Fial had not been recognised as he was sporting a new beard so he approached Donal.

"You would be Donal McGuire would you not?" asked Fial of Donal as he stood at the bar. Donal looked closely at Fial.

"Well bless my soul; it's the very man himself. I have heard you are looking for me. I see your ship in the harbour; a fine vessel. We have heard of the PACIFIC STAR and her escapades off the coast of Portsmouth." Donal embraced Fial and slapped him on the back. "These men here are the finest sailors I have served with; they are staunch to the cause, They are grand friends of Dan Evans whom you have meet right here in the tavern." Donal, a short, fit, young sailor with shoulder length, blonde hair turned and put his hand on the shoulder of the man next to him. "Fial meet Hainan McGee." McGee was a massive man; over six feet. He looked like a barrel with arms and no neck; the same diameter all the way down. Fial and McGee exchanged greetings. Donal then introduced Ronan

Cameron; a tall, slim, very pale man, middle-aged; the sea had etched its waves into his face and Fial shook his hand, noticing his strong grip.

"We are united in a cause no doubt for we have a thing in common. The British have taken our families and continue to disrupt our lives at will. The time has come to talk." Donal did not continue the conference; his wife came in and dragged him away by the ear. Cameron and McGee were shocked and looked on in silence. Fial warmed to the event; the McGuire family had suffered enough sacrifice to the cause. Fial, Cameron and McGee sat outside in the tavern beer garden out of earshot of all and Fial disclosed his plan.

"I am sure as long as I live that the death of my family will be avenged. The British continue to assist in the preparation of a ship that will become the scourge of ships of the line. She can attack and sink a man of war and be gone. I intend to lay waste as many ships of the line as I see fit. I will show you the fine black men I have on my ship; the British, French and Spanish are all involved in transporting and selling these people. They see them as nothing but wealth to build their empires, looking down upon them as they do to us.

Compared to their mighty sword we are only a fleeting dagger but the dagger can be hidden and brought to bear with great speed and consequence. Gentlemen I ask you to join me in trust that the dagger will be called the GHOST OF MCMURRIN and sail from this port in the next few days to plunder the ships of the line. We will have a few weeks grace before we are declared enemies of the realm so we need to make good use of the time and the good weather of the months of summer. All the ships we attack must go to the bottom of the sea and carry no information on the tactics of the GHOST or her location; their ships will just vanish, as did my family. Raise a toast with me men to the GHOST OF MCMURRIN." They clanked their wooden tankards together and drank to the bottom.

Through records held by the British on Haulbowline Island prison Fial found reference to McGee and Cameron having been imprisoned for suspected activities within the *Society of United Irishmen* but being released to serve as gunners on ships of the line, a probable death sentence anyway, but they survived and were on leave. McGee and Cameron were both orphans from an early age and did not know their parents other than that the British were involved in their demise.

They had become very good friends in prison, working together on a British man of war with initial experience on merchant shipping lines running from the northern port of Belfast. They were quiet men, different to Fial in as much as they paid not much mind to ethics or politics, they just wanted to take revenge on the British. Fial made it clear he was the captain of his ship and orders were to be followed even if crew members did not agree with them. Fial carried a multi-barrelled short silver musket pistol always loaded and stated mutiny or disrespect for the ship would bring swift justice. All agreed that for a ship to function correctly trust must be held by all for the captain and Fial was a man they would follow to the end of the earth.

With a full moon on Sunday the 7th of July 1806 the name on the bow of the STAR was changed to GHOST OF MCMURRIN, gold lettering on a black background. A figurehead of a long thin dagger, also gold and black, was bolted to

the bow; the sculpture was over six feet long and was carved by a member of the *Society*. The GHOST flew a pure green tapered flag from the rear of her bow that trailed out long behind the ship nearly touching the water should there be no wind. The GHOST cut a wide wake as she went to full sail in the westerly wind heading for the twenty-five mile stretch of water between the Isle of Scilly and Land's End, England.

Chapter 9

Fial studied the sea's horizon to the east; the GHOST had anchored just off the edge of the final small rock island to the south east of the Isle of Scilly. The sun had started to rise and would strike the sail of any ship on the horizon and it was not long before a big ship was spotted well to the south east. Fial studied the full sails as the monster man of war headed towards them, tacking into the wind from the west making slow progress on her journey westward. Fial anticipated she would change tack two miles from them and head north east so he had the crew weigh anchor and prepare to make sail. They would head directly east; he would adjust his speed to cross her stern mid way between the Isle of Scilly and Land's End.

Cameron and McGee crossed themselves, muttering a prayer as they put to work trying to keep up with the African crew. The giant man of war turned as Fial had predicted and Fial got a clear look at her flags. The CORNISH QUEEN, a second class man of war ship of the line. Over two thousand tons of pure oak; two decks of carronade cannon and over fifteen hundred crew. He had met her captain during the battle of Trafalgar and deducted immediately that captain Milton would not see any threat from the brigantine bearing down on him.

"Small ship off the port bow!" was the cry from the crow's nest of the CORNISH QUEEN one hundred and fifty feet above her deck. Captain Milton studied the ship with his long glass. He had a second look as the sail configuration was irregular and she made noticeable speed. He handed the long glass to his Lieutenant.

"That's a fine little ship, what do you make of her?" His lieutenant studied the ship now bearing down on their stern. He steadied his long glass on the railing to get a clearer look.

"Can't see much of her. She's heading straight for us; correct regarding the rigging, very different. She's flying no flag on her mast. The only ship I know of rigged in such a way is that thing McGuire put together; wait; I see two of her crew; they're black. She keeps coming like that she will barely miss our stern. She's no more than five hundred yards away. Ah she's raising a flag; sir she's raised the red flag." Milton grabbed the long glass and studied the little ship now bearing down on them from the port corner of the quarterdeck.

"If it's McGuire he's just probably passing by to say hello. Yes he'll pass right under our stern. I can just see her name, GHOST OF MCMURRIN... She's opened her gun ports, she's attacking us! She's flying the Irish colours on her stern! Call

to battle stations, brace for cannon fire." The sleeping giant became a flurry of activity as the GHOST passed under her stern and delivered a fatal blow on the waterline as the cannon balls ripped through her oak shell.

The GHOST swung her rear sail boom around in a flash and turned away from the stern of the QUEEN to avoid her starboard cannon. Fial waited until he had gone far enough then turned directly south, made enough ground then turned to the North West to pass the ailing ship and access her bow. When far enough west he planned to turn directly on her, bow to bow, decimating both ends of the ship's waterline.

The QUEEN opened her gun ports and the railing cannon were manned; a line of marines with muskets prepared to engage along the bow railings. Milton received information from his first mate that the ship had been irreparably damaged and was sinking but they may be able to make land or shallow water before she sank. Milton watched the GHOST before he spoke. "We have been outwitted, outmanoeuvred and betrayed. Prepare a longboat just in case; if that is McGuire he'll bear down on our bow and hit our waterline. We can turn port or starboard on his approach but we just cannot outrun or outmanoeuvre this little ship. Prepare to engage her at point blank range and hold course. I will let McGuire choose his tactic."

The GHOST turned and went to full sail from the North West, now a mile clear of the QUEEN, heading straight for her bow. Fial had no idea if Milton would turn his ship in an attempt to engage them in a broadside and felt it made no difference with the tactics he was about to apply. Both port and starboard cannon on the GHOST were readied, and the deck crew took cover under the steel roofing as she slipped under the bow of the QUEEN just slightly to port. She exited to the starboard and turned north to avoid her cannon after delivering a direct hit to the waterline of the bow on the QUEEN.

The GHOST sustained superficial damage from small foredeck cannon and musket fire but no casualties. The QUEEN began to wallow as she took on water. Fial circled the sinking ship until longboats were launched for the captain; in less than an hour the CORNISH QUEEN slipped beneath the waves, leaving men drowning or clinging to anything that would float. Fial turned on the longboats with the bow of the GHOST, splitting them in two amid screams and wails of dying men, he only remembered his mother and father amid the merciless carnage.

He set course for the east coast of England following the coast, keeping it just in sight through the English Channel. They ambushed two more frigates, one in the channel off the coast of Portsmouth and the other when turning north past London on the entry to the Thames. It was too easy and he began to question his ethics; would his tactics work without the element of surprise, he had well and truly gone past the point of no return. Fial did not like how he was going about things; it did not sit with his character.

Seven days into the voyage on the 14th of July off the coast of Hull Fial found a line of six British men of war heading south, exiting the Humber estuary. Fial engaged the leading ship head on, causing much surprise, and it began to sink; the other five ships of the line dispersed and went in all directions. Amid the men of war was a schooner; she broke away and went to full sail, heading out to sea.

She flew the King's colours and Fial made chase. The schooner headed south east with the wind to gain speed. Two warships of the line pursued but soon lost sight of the two little ships, with Fial gaining on the schooner by three knots. The schooner had only light defence. The GHOST drew alongside the schooner at two hundred metres and Fial could see she was called the CITY OF HULL. He raised the black flag and prepared to cut across her bow but she began to draw sail and lose speed, raising a white flag. Fial gave them an hour at the most before the pursuing the frigates.

Chapter 10

Fial flew the black flag signalling he would show quarter if the ship surrendered; he brought the GHOST to within a few yards of the CITY OF HULL on the GHOST's port side and could see the captain and crew on her rear deck. They grapple-hooked the ship and tied up alongside it, being of equal stature and deck height.

"I would be Fial McMurrin, captain of this ship; any attempt at hostility and you will be sunk. Your captain's name please!" shouted Fial. A tall man in the uniform of the royal navy stepped forward to the side of the schooner.

"That is I, Captain Mallory. You look familiar, like Fial McGuire."

"True, I have no time to discuss that; who is aboard this ship to warrant such an escort?"

"This ship is in the service of the King transporting members of government!"

"I have no time for your petty statements about the realm. Who do you have on board!?"

A well dressed man stepped forward to the side of the ship next to Mallory. He had a rather large, bulbous nose, a slit chin and collar length, white hair. His high collar, black jacket, cream waistcoat and white, round neck shirt were perfectly tailored. He put his hand on Captain Mallory and beckoned him to step back. Mallory took a couple of steps back from the railing, standing behind the man.

"I am William Wilberforce, Member of Parliament for Yorkshire, on my way to London."

Fial wore a slight smile. "William Wilberforce! You would be the Wilberforce pushing for laws to protect the likes of these fine black men I have on board my ship?"

"Yes, you are well informed!"

"I have read of you often, ever since you first wrote letters to newspapers; this is indeed an honour. You are a fine man Mr Wilberforce. I invite you to come aboard my ship." Mallory grabbed Wilberforce from behind but Wilberforce put his hand down, smiled and shook his head.

"I accept. I don't know what kind of a man you are Mr McMurrin but any man who takes on a line of British warships with a ship the size of yours is a man of great substance. I have never seen a crew of black men before; I wish to know what you stand for Mr McMurrin. I have never seen such bravery or open mindedness!"

"This man fought at the battle of Trafalgar sir, on the quarterdeck of the VICTORY with Nelson. His name is Fial McGuire," added Mallory.

"Forgive me if I am not familiar with the ranks of the navy Mr McMurrin but I am a politician!"

"Come aboard Mr Wilberforce, Number Seven help the man aboard." A black deck hand came forward to the railing and extended his hand to Wilberforce. He took his hand and scaled the railing onto the deck of the GHOST.

"Thank you my friend," said Wilberforce. The black deck hand looked puzzled.

"Tell Seven what the man said Bongo," instructed Fial. Bongo spoke the tongue of the Congo. The black deck hand went to his knees and kissed Wilberforce's feet. Wilberforce was extremely moved and helped the man to his feet. "Cast off the grapples, make full sail. We go with the wind!" ordered Fial.

Mallory shouted from the railing of the schooner as the Ghost broke loose, "You will be hunted down McGuire, we will show no quarter you scoundrel!"

"When my armies have murdered and raped the families of your crew, only then will we talk on an even footing. I vow now to never show the black flag to a British ship again. I vow the flag will be red!" shouted Fial. Cameron shouted to Fial from the stern.

"Two frigates on the horizon to the north Fial, do we continue to head south?"

"No turn to engage them. Set a course directly for the bow of the lead ship." The GHOST turned and headed towards the warships. Wilberforce watched in amazement from the helm next to Cameron as the black crew prepared the ship to fight. The GHOST was well south of the schooner now breaking full sail but turned north toward the men of war.

Fial knew the schooner would signal the frigates that Wilberforce had been taken; he had not expected this and would use it to his advantage, knowing the ships would not fire on him if he had Wilberforce on board. He made distance on the schooner, still some three knots faster than it, and drew across her bow then continued north past it. The GHOST was now only half a mile away from the leading ship; she turned to port but was slow, allowing the GHOST to pass under her starboard bow, delivering a volley to the waterline from her short light carronades and puncturing the ship's hull.

The GHOST turned away heading south west away from her cannon in a near about turn. Wilberforce took cover under the steel roofing as musket balls whizzed around them; the frigate began to take on water and the GHOST went after the schooner heading north.

The schooner headed north for an hour then turned directly with the wind hoping to out speed the GHOST. The GHOST went to full sail, raising her foresail and easily overtaking the schooner and coming back on her, crossing her bow at full speed and delivering a volley from four cannon. The schooner's hull cracked as the balls entered the ships hull and she caught fire.

The GHOST then made a heading south for the frigates. The second frigate was busy taking on crew from the sinking lead ship and had laid sail, calm in the water. The GHOST appeared in a flash over the horizon from the north east, slightly off course from Fial's calculation by half a mile. He corrected and headed for the frigates under full sail.

The captain of the second frigate the CORSICAN heard the cry from the crow's nest and used his long glass to see the GHOST bearing down on them under full sail. He ordered the ship to make sail but the GHOST was cutting with a stiff wind under full speed and all that could be done was to make preparations to engage her while the CORSICAN was still calm.

The GHOST suffered a volley of deck cannon and musket fire from the CORSICAN as she flashed past her stern firing back and turning away to the North West, rendering the CORSICAN badly damaged and taking on water.

The GHOST raised the red flag and turned on them again, this time coming at the CORSICAN from the south below her bow. The first frigate was some three hundred metres to the west of the CORSICAN, listing to port with the gunwales of the lower deck just going below water line.

The GHOST slipped under the CORSICAN's bow, delivering a final blow then turning North West and making for the coast. A railing-mounted light cannon on the CORSICAN backfired, setting fire to the quarterdeck. The ship was in complete confusion. Conflicting orders on whether to open fire on the GHOST or not due to the presence of Wilberforce also hampered proceedings for the frigates. The GHOST made full sail south east, just keeping the coast in sight.

Chapter 11

The GHOST continued south toward London while Fial, in the confines of his cabin, talked at length with Wilberforce, finding him to be a man after his own heart. Information lines were slow and the GHOST passed patrolling ships of the line without incident. Fial found that Wilberforce was pushing the issue of the slave trade in parliament, foreseeing that a bill to outlaw the trade would take some time to gain support; some members of parliament rejected the proposal as they had their fingers in the pie.

Wilberforce explained how deep the British were in the slave trade with one in every four ships from England having something to do with the trade, be it direct or indirect. England had built great wealth from the use of slaves on the plantations and halting the practice would take time, with other forms of trade needed to create revenue for the realm. Wilberforce was aware of these things and the true need to have alternatives before anything solid could be agreed upon and passed into law.

Wilberforce mentioned an industrial revolution based on steam and coal, developing and providing the power for industry to move forward, would reduce the use of manual labour. Wilberforce spoke of people such as Francois Isaac de Rivaz, known to be experimenting with small engines not powered by steam but hydrogen and oxygen and others such as Nicephore Niepce testing engines running on coal dust. Wilberforce saw these things as the way of the future and a way to reduce the need for manual labor, helping give way to the abolition of the slave trade. He felt the dynasty that developed these things would rule the earth,

telling of the Montgolfier brothers in France who had flown in the air in a giant balloon filled with hot air, far above the ground.

The British government was very interested in such development and was investing a lot of money in research with such people as Henry Cavendish, who had discovered hydrogen, which was suitable for elevating large objects into the sky when enclosed in a balloon. It was these things that Wilberforce believed would help stop slavery. The fact that a country could be judged on how it treated its animals was also a factor and he felt the nation had a good record of such things.

Fial had never heard of or considered these things and apologised to Wilberforce for his actions. He then told Wilberforce of his past and why he had such rebellious hatred of the British. Wilberforce apologised for his army's actions, knowing no such orders were issued on the decimation of Irish families.

Wilberforce understood why Fial was at war with the British; it was a fight within himself. Even so he warned Fial that the solution was not to join forces with Britain's enemies, as the country was too close to England to allow collaboration with her enemies and time would not solve this. Wilberforce believed France and Spain would turn on Ireland should the British lose the Napoleonic Wars. Although the French had attempted to assist the Irish against the British, should the British be defeated things could change quickly as Napoleon appeared to be a man who could not be trusted.

The British had been at war with France and Spain for decades and though Spain had recently become an ally, the scars still cut deep. With the British defeated what would stop the French pushing on to the Americas? Wilberforce asked he consider this in his plans, saying that the issue of Irish sovereignty and rule would go on as long as time itself.

Fial told Wilberforce he would deliver him to the steps of Parliament himself so he could continue his quest for the abolition of slavery. The two men became jovial and deeply respectful of each other. Fial took Wilberforce on deck, proudly demonstrating the speed and agility of the GHOST. Wilberforce was aware of the pulleys used in his rope systems as they came from a new factory in Portsmouth. It was the first one of its kind in the world, mass producing wooden pulleys for the British navy. Fial gave orders the GHOST was to enter the Thames estuary and go up river towards London.

Navigating the Thames would be tricky; from the entry of the river estuary to Westminster was some thirty-five miles along a snaking river which was sometimes only three hundred metres wide. Heavy fortification dotted the banks of the Thames from Northfleet to Westminster with cannon that could easily sink the GHOST.

The GHOST entered the Thames at nightfall on the 16th of July, passing Northfleet Battery in darkness without incident. Wilberforce had asked he be put ashore without venturing into the Thames considering it madness in the dark but Fial was determined to show the British how vulnerable their defences could be, and with slow communication word had not yet reached Admiralty in London on the losses off the coast of Portsmouth and the taking of Wilberforce. The GHOST flying British colours would not come under suspicion.

The GHOST was driven by a stiff south westerly wind, and tacking in some sections of the river made progress slow. She passed several ships of the realm tied up at Thamesmead and Woolwich. McGee and Cameron yelled depths and headings to Bongo at the helm, with Fial by his side controlling tack manoeuvres and yelling orders to the numbered crew members. Wilberforce was in awe as the crew of black men worked the ship's ropes and pulleys for over six hours.

Fial turned the ship about at Westminster, hugging the Westminster dock with his port side and barely missing the dock. Wilberforce was assisted in jumping to the dock, falling as he landed but quickly gaining his feet on the wooden planks. He waved to the ship's crew, all bidding him farewell as the GHOST slipped into the night as silently as she had come. It would be daylight and another six hours before she made full sail in the Thames estuary off the coast of Essex and Sussex.

Wilberforce had appeared out of nowhere but said nothing of his ordeal until he was sure the GHOST was clear of the river.

Chapter 12

It was a fine summer's day, Monday the 18th of August 1806, as Lord Claremont of the Admiralty awaited the pleasure of the King and his court. George William Frederick, King George III had summoned Claremont to Windsor Castle upon hearing the testimony of William Wilberforce and the massive losses inflicted on the navy by thirteen men aboard a small ship.

Lord Claremont's trip to Berkshire from Portsmouth by road had not been without discomfort and he felt tired and short-tempered when led into a grand room decorative beyond sanity. The King was seated at the head of a long table which was able to take twenty-four ridiculously majestic chairs bound in gold and silk upon oak, while four members of his direct court sat either side of him. Claremont, a ground up man, had never been impressed with pompous splendor. However he appreciated the fact that some of his proposed, unorthodox tactics, carried on from Nelson on navy structure and tactics, may get an airing. Claremont stood to one side of the table on the King's right between the king and the first member of his court. It was unusual but King George spoke directly to Claremont.

"Can you confirm that a small ship, a brigantine as described to me, with less than twenty crew and eight carronade cannon sank four of our warships of the line, And that a schooner in the service of the King was also attacked and a member of our governing body, namely William Wilberforce, was taken prisoner?"

"I can confirm all you have said my King."

King George dropped the paper he had in his hand to the table looking sideways at Claremont. "Do you see any reason why I should not stand you down or even have you thrown in chains?"

"I have for many years stated the tactics of the navy and her fleet must change with the times. The French are testing ships with steam engines and steel hulls impregnable to cannon fire."

King George rose to his feet glaring at Claremont. "Damned impertinence man! How dare you address me in that manner?"

"I am Admiral of the British fleet and loyal to king and country. To pander to petty egos is not my position. Our fleet has been challenged by a tactic even Nelson aspired to. Sir Francis Drake was pushing this with Queen Elizabeth as far back as fifteen eighty. If you wish not to listen I remind you we are at war with the French and Spanish. If throwing your Admiral of the Fleet in chains is the tactic you prefer God help us."

King George walked to the end door of the great hall and slammed the door behind as he left. His right hand man Lord Dreyfus spoke quietly after the room was silent for a while.

"Sit down please." Claremont sat at the head of the table where the king had been sitting. "The King wished to see the character of the man leading our navy. The King had the utmost respect for Nelson. I'm sure when you speak again he will respect you as much. The King would now be sure that the Admiral of our navy is no whimpering fool but a man with vision and courage. Any man who speaks to a king in that manner has courage. We have lost four mighty warships and a ship in the service of the king. Fial McGuire and a ship called the GHOST OF MCMURRIN... this man was one of our most respected seamen. What happened?"

"From the stories from Wilberforce his family was decimated by British soldiers. His real name is Fial McMurrin and he is a very angry man. His crew are mainly black slaves and he has two other Irish patriots aboard, also very capable seamen and loyal to *Society of United Irishmen*."

"This man was a highly decorated member of the British navy. He fought alongside Nelson at Trafalgar. When on the DRYAD he took more booty than any other captain we have known. The King is declaring him a pirate and putting a price on his head."

"We will not catch this man by force; he has spent years preparing himself to attack us. He sailed right up to Westminster in the middle of the night and delivered a member of the government and sailed right out to sea again. Do you realize how much seamanship and courage that requires? A crew of black slaves... we are a laughing stock. His ship has the figurehead of a dagger; I understand what he means. A sword is always powerful and in sight; a dagger I cannot see and its wound is fatal. You will only catch this man by being smarter than he for we have no one with as much courage. They say his ship is faster than the wind, and he uses tactics he knows we cannot foil. He exploits every weak point of our warships."

"What do you suggest we do?"

"We need this man with us not against us. Declare him a pirate and he may consider us an enemy forever. If you declare him a pirate, then catch him alive and if he will not change his ways be rid of him."

"He has a son in Cork, Ireland we have been informed and visits him occasionally."

Claremont warmed to the news. "A weakness he cannot run from. I will make the necessary plans to wait for his attendance in Cork. We may have to wait for a while but this is the best chance we have. A man will not desert his son."

"We need to bolster the home fleet to discourage any more of his antics."

"The more ships you bring home the more targets you give him. This man will not be swayed by the power or might of the sword. It is something else that drives him; we need to find out what and see if we can harness it for our own devices."

"The King has made it clear this man must hang from our mightiest ship to make an example to his kind. The realm is becoming less tolerant of pirates and Corsairs. Your ideas of smaller, faster vessels will be discussed at court level and some assistance for those who are building new ships of steel powered by steam will be seriously considered. The court is in favor of a twenty year plan to include these things."

"This pirate as you describe him has already convinced the court of more than the entire Admiralty has over the past twenty years." Claremont stood and put on his hat. "I'll catch this man but I doubt executing him will be successful, especially for us." He walked towards the great hall entrance and before he got out of earshot he turned to the members of the court. "As I slide down the banister of life gentlemen I will always remember the GHOST OF MCMURRIN as a splinter up my arse"

Chapter 13

Supplies on the GHOST were getting low and Bantry Bay on the west coast of Ireland was a pleasant place in late August. Fial anchored the GHOST close to where he had tended cattle with his father along the rocky, green slopes. Contact was made with the local Society members and supplies of meat, vegetables, potatoes, water, black powder and cannon ball trickled to the longboat on a daily basis. The bay was patrolled by British men of war but Fial did not worry about being found there; the cumbersome ships of the line would be sitting ducks in the tight bay only three miles across.

Fishing vessels and horses and wagons with sight-seers came regularly to the bay to see the now infamous GHOST OF MCMURRIN and her dagger figurehead. Fial knew it was only a matter of time before information on his location was leaked to the loyalists. Officially declared a pirate he had a price on his head of five thousand pounds. This would have privateers and Corsairs from all directions after the bounty and the ship that was faster than the wind. Fial awaited the first privateer to confront him and did not have to wait long. Early on Sunday the thirty-first of August the Dutch privateer AUGUSTINE, a class five frigate under Captain Valentine, was spotted. Valentine was a Dutch defector from the Dutch navy who had nothing to lose and everything to gain. He had sailed from Cork after hearing the GHOST was in the bay, paying well for the information.

Fial had anchored the GHOST in deep water just off the rocky shoreline of the south western tip of Whiddy Island in the middle of the bay, opposite Bantry town. No ship could get to her starboard side as there was not enough room between the GHOST and the rock island shoreline. The port side of the ship was exposed to the bay and with a strong south easterly wind the GHOST could take flight in a jiff to the north toward Glengariff Harbour inlet, a tight area only good for ships that

could manoeuvre easily. However on summing up the situation Fial planned to take the AUGUSTINE without firing a shot.

He observed the AUGUSTINE as she entered the harbour struggling from the west in the south easterly wind; her cannon ports were open and she was heading well south along the shore as close as she could to turn with the wind and deliver a broadside to the GHOST. She had the black flag raised. Fial and the crew went over the starboard side armed with knives and daggers, waiting submerged and out of sight. The longboat was taken from the stern and hidden on the edge of the island yards to the starboard of the ship, which was left looking like it was not manned. The AUGUSTINE sported one hundred and twenty men so they would have to get it right.

Fial was counting on Captain Valentine wanting to board the GHOST with a raiding party once they found the ship was abandoned, hopefully laying the AUGUSTINE calm next to the GHOST and dropping anchor. They were too close to the island for the AUGUSTINE to grapple hook the GHOST as they may drift into the rocks, so she would have to drop anchor. He also knew that to get the five thousand pounds Fial would have to be alive when delivered to the British, plus they would not be keen on sinking a ship they could take as booty. Fial and his crew waited.

Captain Valentine scanned the deck of the GHOST with his long glass but could see no one and the gun ports were shut. No flags flew on the GHOST but he could at last see her name and figurehead. "Wij hebben gevangen hen van bewaak mijn vrienden, zondag morgen zij zijn vermoedelijk in kerk. Bocht over te zetten wanneer in bereik en druppelzeil en vijftig yards van haar havenzijde wij te ankeren zullen haar logeren. Schiet aan haar niet tenzij geschoten op onszelf". *"We have caught them off guard my friends, Sunday morning they are probably in church. Turn to port when in range and drop sail and anchor fifty yards from her port side; we will board her. Do not fire on her unless fired on ourselves."*

Fial and the crew heard the anchor hit the water and they began their long swim underwater to the port side of the AUGUSTINE while Captain Valentine was busy lowering a longboat and organising a boarding party of twenty of the best of his crew. Fial and his crew were on the way up the side of the AUGUSTINE's port boarding rigging when Captain Valentine was half way to the GHOST. Fial peered over the railing of the AUGUSTINE and saw all the crew lined up along the starboard side looking towards the GHOST, the lookout in the crow's nest also studying the progress of his captain. Fial and his crew quietly boarded the deck of the AUGUSTINE taking charge of the port side railing cannon and muskets leaning up against the quarterdeck; they trained them on the crew of the AUGUSTINE and opened fire. The railing cannon were scatter guns loaded with shot and the crew was decimated from behind, many falling wounded or dead. Some jumped over the side into the sea and the few that stayed were looking down the barrel of muskets.

Fial shouted at the top of his voice to those still on the ship. "I am Fial McMurrin, captain of the GHOST OF MCMURRIN and you are all my prisoners!" The black seamen of the GHOST put the fear of the devil into the crew of the

AUGUSTINE as they were painted with white lines on their faces and body signifying the marks of warriors of their homeland.

A shot rang out from the crow's nest barely missing Number Five. Fial signalled with a nod of his head and the warrior started climbing the main mast to the crow's nest. The lookout fumbled trying to reload his musket but he was too late, his throat being slit by the powerful African after which he fell to his death on the deck in front of his crewmen.

The crew were herded onto the quarterdeck and Fial used the small rail mounted scatter cannon on the port side of the ship to lay waste some of the crew floundering in the sea. Four of the African seamen went below and lined up the longboat with one of the AUGUSTINE's cannon, falling just short of the longboat now heading back to the AUGUSTINE but tipping the small vessel over. They then used two adjacent cannon to decimate the landing party in the sea. The water around the AUGUSTINE flowed red.

Fial shot the captain dead in the sea with a musket below the AUGUSTINE as he floundered, attempting to reboard the ship and yelling for mercy but none was shown. The remaining members of the crew were tied up on the quarterdeck, and the AUGUSTINE was put to sail and her anchor was drawn. Fial and the crew abandoned the ship after setting fire to her; the AUGUSTINE began to make speed heading north as Fial and his crew swam back to the GHOST. They retrieved the longboat and after hiding a small, black chest in a cave on Whiddy Island, they made sail leaving the bay just as the AUGUSTINE struck rocks on the north side of the bay and began to break up in the surf. A few crewmen would survive to tell the tale.

Chapter 14

Monday morning the 1st of September 1906. Cork Harbour was bustling with vessels going about their business. Fial anchored the GHOST boldly off Ringaskiddy determined to visit his young son but facing the fact he may have to fight to achieve this. Things are never as they seem and he talked to his crew in detail about counter measures should he be captured. As he pushed off on the longboat and headed for Ringaskiddy church the GHOST fell deathly silent with no movement; nothing stirred on her; even the larder mouse slept quietly in his bulkhead nest. The gunwales were shut, the sails were rolled up and the green flag at her stern dangled straight down for lack of breeze. The inhabitants of Cork came to view the legend as she lay cocooned in the port that had spurned her very existence. A British man of war was tied up at Haulbowline Island no more than half a mile from the Ghost. The crew looked her up and down with a long glass.

Fial tied up adjacent to the King's Head tavern and looked in to see Evan McTaggart. He warned Fial that British soldiers had been in the area over the last few days and his tavern had been deserted as they questioned everyone in the area. Evan was sure that his son had been taken inland by Angelina's parents who now cared for the child. Fial bid him good day and walked on to the Ringaskiddy

rectory and hammered on the door. He did this several times, then looked in the windows but the dwelling was deserted. He decided to access members of the *Society* to find out where his son had been taken. His allegiance to his son had dulled his faculties and he found himself surrounded by British soldiers, muskets poised at his head. Farnsworth Bovrington stepped forward. He was now a general.

"Fial McMurrin or McGuire, whichever you prefer I arrest you in the King's name for treason and piracy!"

"I remember your voice," whispered Fial. "You were at my home many years back and took my father!"

"I hope you don't moan as much as your mother when they string you from a yardarm." Fial drew his musket pistol and shot Bovrington in the head at near point blank range. The general fell to the floor dead. He then turned the pistol on the soldier nearest to him cocking the second barrel hammer. The six soldiers accompanying Bovrington looked shocked, stepped back a couple of paces and raised their weapons to eye level.

"Who is the one to be the one to die!" shouted Fial. A quick thinking lieutenant next in command among the soldiers lowered his musket and shot Fial in the leg bringing him down; Fial's second barrel failed to fire and they set upon him and tied him up.

Fial was taken to the British man of war sitting at Haulbowline Island, the UNICORN and presented to Captain Briscoe on the quarterdeck. Briscoe did not want to look at Fial as he had been on the DRYAD as lieutenant when Fial stowed away and he had the greatest respect for him. He eventually had to raise his eyes to look at Fial. Fial now sported a beard down to his upper chest.

"Fial McGuire these are the last circumstances I expected to confront you in. Your crew has abandoned your ship and fled; no one can be located. I will be taking you to Portsmouth where you will be hung from the yardarm of the VICTORY off the coast where no one can interfere with your execution. The King himself has ordered this be done in the quickest possible time. Admiral Claremont will supervise the execution himself... a terrible waste of what could have been a good man."

"And you are without sin are you Briscoe? I go to my maker with no qualms about what I have done with my life. I just shot the man that killed my father and mother. For me this is a good day. When you go to your maker I hope you feel as I." Briscoe looked down at the deck and then across to the GHOST.

"You have made your mark and your point Fial and for what? Could you have fought for independence with the pen instead of the sword? You are a wise and respected man—people would have listened to you. You have wasted yourself; dead legends are of use to no one."

"When you respond to our views and requests we will have a place in life, until then the dagger is all you understand. I tell you now that daggers are invisible until needed. Never underestimate those who come unannounced."

"Your days of coming unannounced or any other way are over Fial. Take him below and chain him up." Fial was dragged away to the brig and locked in chains. The UNICORN made immediate sail for Portsmouth. A group of twenty seamen

with a lieutenant were sent to the GHOST and put her to sail behind the UNICORN.

Lieutenant Walker was enjoying pacing the GHOST and was putting the crew through drills, tacking and weaving at speed to stay behind the UNICORN a day into the voyage, just off the coast of Plymouth. Unbeknown to the crew busy on deck, a floor board in the bottom deck sealing the lower hull moved and a long black finger forced the boards apart, lifting one out of the way, then the next and the next until through the hole climbed an African sailor. Soon ten were below deck helping McGee and Cameron out last. They stood and stretched for a while cramped after being confined for so long. They retrieved muskets, pistols and knives from under the floor and made their way up to the main deck, killing the cook and cabin boy in silence on the way.

Captain Briscoe looked behind him to see how the GHOST was travelling, as he enjoyed watching the lightning fast ship swish past the stern occasionally. The ship was nowhere to be seen. He scanned the horizon all around but still no ship; the crow's nest was asked to check for the GHOST but still no ship. Walker thought the ship may have gone into Plymouth as that is where Walker came from and he may have wanted to show the booty off to his friends and female companions and still make Portsmouth with them, with the speed of the little ship. Whatever he thought Walker must have had a good reason to break formation.

The UNICORN made Portsmouth by sundown Thursday the fourth of September and Fial was thrown in a room in the round tower. Early on Friday morning he was put in front of an excited Admiral Claremont. Fial stood in chains in front of the Admiral in his bland fortified office and looked straight ahead taking no notice of Claremont.

"Well, well, my hunch was right: blood is thicker than water. You have been outsmarted McMurrin or McGuire or whatever your damn name is. I have signed orders here direct from the King himself that you will be hung from the yardarm of the VICTORY just off the coast here within sight of land to avoid any problems. A lot of people round here would like to see you go free but they will see you paraded like a dog then strung up, quartered and put on display in the market place. I think your run was pure luck. And you can go to hell. Not so smart now, anything to say Mc whoever?"

"It would appear not, let's get on with it—you love the sound of your own voice. Careful it doesn't go up a few octaves before the day's out."

"What do you mean you scoundrel, murderer, enemy of the realm, traitor to the King?"

"Where is this damn ship you want to hang me from?"

"How moving; take him away!"

The streets were silent as Fial was paraded in chains on the back of a horse and cart down to the dock and there she was, the Victory in all her splendour. Fial smiled as he saw her and even as he was dragged up the boarding planks and tied to the main mast in full view of the quarterdeck where Claremont ordered the ship underway. It took an hour for the ship to drop anchor two and a half miles from Portsmouth and around the same distance from Ryde on the Isle of Wight.

She had been at anchor for over an hour while sail was stowed and preparations were then made in the rigging for the execution. Fial was unchained and his hands tied behind his back; he was taken aloft up the centre mast to the mid mast platform. Claremont spoke while a rope was put around Fial's neck.

"We are here in the name of the King and by the order of the King to execute pirate Fial McGuire. Never in the history of the King's navy has there been such a traitor from its ranks. His body will hang in the market until the flesh rots from his bones as a warning to his kind. No man is above the scrutiny of the King and his realm. I ask there be no mercy on this man's soul for he..." Claremont's speech was interrupted by a shout from the crow's nest.

"Ship off the stern under full sail bearing down on us!" was the shout. The VICTORY was sitting north south with the stern to the south in line with the strong southerly wind. Claremont took a long glass, rushed to the stern of the Victory and studied the bow of the ship heading straight for them. There was only one ship afloat with a dagger as a figurehead and a speed of over nineteen knots: the GHOST OF MCMURRIN. The GHOST was in full sail with the southerly wind and would be upon them in less than ten minutes; nowhere near enough time to prepare for engagement. Claremont shouted orders to man the stern of the ship and prepare to fire upon the GHOST with rail cannon and muskets as she came in range. Fial shouted from the rampart above the main deck to Claremont and his crew.

"You are a fool Claremont, how else would I get the flagship of the British navy in a spot that the dagger could strike beneath her ribs?!" Claremont's eyes glowed with fire as he looked up at Fial. "Now we will see who is shown mercy, for look upon the red flag above the mast of the GHOST!"

Fial pushed the three men guarding him from the platform as their attention was drawn to the approaching foe; they fell to the deck lifeless. Claremont ordered the marines to fire upon Fial on the platform but he withdrew, standing with his back to the mast, and the musket balls could not penetrate the thick platform floor. Four marines began to scale the main mast toward Fial but he had been able to shed the rope from around his neck as it had not been pulled tight, and he kicked rigging and boxes over the edge of the platform hitting the men.

The crew of the GHOST had been told exactly what spot on the VICTORY to strike: where the stern and bow waterlines meet; the two foot thick oak planks were jointed at the corner. With the GHOST no more than two hundred yards away the quarterdeck gunners of the VICTORY opened fire on her, all missing the small target area. She turned to port just before hitting the stern of the VICTORY and delivered a volley to the waterline whilst under immense musket and scatter gun fire from the ship's marines above. She then turned directly away from the VICTORY with a hundred degree swing, narrowly avoiding the port side cannons, and made speed south west.

The crew came from under the steel covers when out of range. They were now badly dented and embedded with musket fire but all the crew were unscathed.

The VICTORY slowly came to life, pulling anchor and dropping sail slowly, gaining speed and heading with the wind towards Portsmouth Harbour, leaking water though a gaping hole in the port stern waterline. The GHOST disappeared from the horizon and attention was again focused on the main mast platform. Six

men were sent aloft, gingerly accessing the platform with no resistance from Fial. On reaching the platform they found out why; the platform was covered in blood and he had gone.

The VICTORY docked in Portsmouth for repairs and when night set in the GHOST revisited the exact spot where she had engaged the VICTORY. She circled while McGee and Cameron shouted Fial's name through the darkness; within a few minutes there was a faint reply. Fial had floated face up with serious hand injuries from fraying the ropes from his wrists. His leg was also injured. Though the shot when first taken by the British had missed his bones infection had set in; he had also suffered a shoulder injury from a musket ball fired from the foresail platform just before he jumped into the sea.

Bongo had seen him jump just after they had struck at the Victory and he had clung to the stern of the VICTORY out of sight until she made sail for Portsmouth. He then stayed under water only coming up for air until the ship was out of sight; he then waited in hope. His friends retrieved him and the GHOST vanished into the night.

Chapter 15

During the autumn of 1806 a general election was held in England and slavery became an election issue. William Wilberforce was re-elected and finished his letter of presentation, some four hundred pages which formed a book for the final leg of his campaign. British ships were flying American flags and carrying slaves to countries at war with England. The Union movement was stirring among the populace and things were changing, heralding the start of an industrial revolution. Wilberforce opposed unionism and suffered in some regions for his views but his relentless struggle for the abolition of slavery bore fruit in the House of Commons when his bill was passed on the 23rd February 1807, carried by 283 votes to 16. The Slave Trade Act received Royal Assent on 25th March 1807, putting a stop to the carrying of people on British ships to be sold as slaves.

In the preceding six months a disturbing trend had begun to emerge between Portugal and the Persian Gulf. Britain, France and Spain and indeed other slave traders had been decimated by pirates. Escort warships were sunk and the slave trading ships taken to land and the slaves released; the admiralty had no clue as to the origin of the attacks which were at night in pitch darkness. A dull, drab, black ship, thought to be a brigantine from those who had survived to tell the tale, struck without warning.

The crew could only be seen by the white marks painted on their black bodies. Once the armed escort ships were sunk the unarmed slave ships were taken, booty stowed and the ships run aground with the slaves being released. The ship had come to be known as the *Ghost of the Night*; her crew were expert seamen and fearless fighters. The long-bearded captain had a distinct Irish accent. The ship was often accompanied by other pirate ships that moved in after the escorts were sunk to assist in taking supplies and treasure; these ships were Persian. The most

alarming story was of the black *Ghost of the Night*; she had some kind of metal tube on her railing from which came a tail of fire through the night which exploded and set fire to whatever it hit. The only thing that was ever prominent on the Ghost was the pure red flag flying from her main mast. She never took prisoners.

Admiral Claremont had spoken to many eye witnesses and read a host of reports; he had grave fears of the ship's origin. A crisis meeting in the round tower in Portsmouth had the entire Admiralty looking at the problem and it was also attended by a member of the King's court. This however was not the topic of the meeting. The representative of the King's court, Lord Dreyfus, had delivered a letter from the King instructing all British ships to stop carrying persons who were to be sold as slaves, then left without attending the meeting. Claremont opened with a statement.

"There is a grave change in our midst, we are at war with France and can now turn many of our ships to the war effort. We need to win this war for providence has taken a large slice of England's income." Claremont held up a letter. "I have here a letter from the King ordering that all British ships cease carrying any person to be sold as a slave. In the last six months we have lost seventeen warships, over forty merchant traders and over four thousand slaves who have been released on the coast of Africa. It could be divine providence that has delivered us this change.

"I am sure you are aware of the black ship they call the *Ghost of the Night*. I feel she had another name: the GHOST OF MCMURRIN. Fial McGuire was seen to fall to his death from the mast of the VICTORY but now I fear he did not die. This ship attacks only slave escorts. The French and Spanish traders have also been laid waste by this party of villains. It comes out of the night with speed, breathing fire then with point blank accuracy delivers a waterline blow. Sound familiar? A ransom will be again put on the head of this pirate of ten thousand pounds. This pirate will be referred to as the GHOST OF THE NIGHT. Using the name McGuire or McMurrin will do us no good. Ten thousand pounds to the privateer who delivers the GHOST OF THE NIGHT alive here to Portsmouth."

Briscoe, now a member of the Admiralty, interrupted. "A small navy already follows this pirate who I am sure is McMurrin. The booty from raids on slave convoys totals many thousands of pounds. With this kind of return privateers are liable to join rather than attack him. He attacks the slave convoys because it is his quest. Send word of the new laws and he will turn on the French and Spanish and leave us alone. This could work to our advantage; I would rather fight next to McGuire than any other seaman."

Claremont began to nod his head. "You speak my mind, if the French and Spanish pour more power into the slave trade to fill the hole left by us they will come under the scrutiny of this remarkable seaman. We announce the ransom for political reasons. The last attacks off the coast of the Congo put his armada at over ten ships; they claimed a king's ransom from the haul. The ship they call the Ghost has never been seen in daylight and is always gone after sinking the armed ships. I cannot work this out. We need to capture a ship of his 'fleet' if I may use the term loosely; I want to know how and where this ship operates from."

"That is not important. The direction his power is channelled in should be a priority," stated Briscoe. "Bringing his quest closer to France and Spain would

greatly assist our cause in the war; his tactics can be used where we are failing close to the coast. Pressure these operations too much and it could hinder his attacks on the French."

"I agree," replied Claremont. "I would like to know more about this man's operations if we are to use him as a tool all the same. Have two frigates tail these last slave convoys and see if they can capture one of the fleet to gather information."

Chapter 16

Since the encounter with the VICTORY, the GHOST had undergone a voyage along the African coast and spent time on the island of Madagascar while Fial recuperated. The natives had powerful potions to fight infections which assisted in Fial's rehabilitation.

Naval sea power could be encountered from all directions, some not known to Fial, so they began to move around at night using Fial's inbuilt celestial navigation skills. The closer to the Persian Gulf the GHOST went the stranger the ships were that they encountered. Persia was at war with Russia and warships from Persia found solace with the Qawasim clan in Ras al-Khaimah, a port at the entrance to the Persian Gulf located at the Gulf of Oman in the Arab Emirates.

The GHOST made port in Ras al-Khaimah after an incident with a Chinese pirate ship. The ship had attempted to attack the GHOST and had been quickly sunk. Fial found the ship strange; it was about the same length as the GHOST with one large sail from a centre mast and multiple oarsmen along each side with only one level. The bow and stern of the ship incorporated figureheads in the shape of a dragon. The ship was slow and overloaded, and it was made of some kind of wooden tubing, useless against the agility and firepower of the GHOST.

The ship had fired some kind of projectile out of a wooden tube, creating tails of fire through the air. Fial retrieved two floundering seamen from the ship but only one was Chinese. The Chinese man was small, skinny and sat without expression or movement. The palms of his hands were covered in calluses from using an oar and his shoulder and arm muscles well developed compared to the rest of his body. Bongo understood some of the words spoken by the other dark, olive-skinned man dressed in a fine, silk tunic and baggy pants. His shoes pointed up at the toe curling round. Bongo through a series of some words and hand signals worked out he was an Arab of the Qawasim tribe from the port of Ras al-Khaimah. His merchant ship had been sunk by the Chinese and he pleaded to go home. This incident had occurred in the Arabian Sea off the coast of Oman. Fial had planned to head east to India but he set a course through the Gulf of Oman to Ras al-Khaimah port as he was interested in finding out more about the place he had heard was a den of pirates.

The GHOST lay at anchor half a mile from the coast near the harbour of Ras al-Khaimah. Fial did not enter the main harbour, choosing to sit in deeper water with

the gunwales open and the crew armed. The Arab man, now thought to be called Zella, took the longboat into the harbour inlet with two crewmen rowing for him.

They returned some hours later with an English-speaking Arab called Yasin. He explained that Zella was a rich merchant and brother to a warlord in the port; they were most grateful for his return and Fial's ship was invited into Ras al-Khaimah Harbour as a guest of the warlord. The area was in turmoil with warring factions battling for control. Fial made the trip into the harbour with the longboat with the two African oarsmen and left the rest of the crew to guard the ship.

Fial was surprised to see privateers and pirate vessels from varied factions anchored and tied up in the sprawling harbour. He learned this was commonplace as the British, French and Spanish did not venture into the waters of the area, with the Qawasim gradually gaining control and considered by the British Crown to be pirates. He was received well by the warlords of the area as saving a brother of the clan leaders was considered an act of mutuality. Fial explained he was Irish and was at war with the British, French and Spanish, not liking the trade of slaves. People were not treated much better in Ras al-Khaimah but Fial was careful not to upset the local law as he was not familiar with the peoples' background or beliefs.

The warlords wanted the Chinese man from the ship that had taken Zella. Fial had no use for him so he handed him over. The Qawasim immediately tortured and put him to death; Fial was not to forget this.

They stayed for several days and Fial was told of a French galleon captained by a Corsair plundering the Gulf merchant shipping. It was known to be north in the Persian Gulf; the captain had vowed to return demanding supplies and had bombarded the coast of the port in demonstration, threatening far worse should he not be given what he needed. The ship was described as having three big masts and two row decks of cannon, forty on each side of the ship; a first class warship.

No pirate or privateer in port was game enough to confront the ship and it was expected back within the next few days. The local dhows or bhagalas were totally inadequate for the situation even in large numbers. If Fial could defeat the ship he would be given free range of the port by the warlords.

The GHOST had been moving around at night with great success, the Africans had well above average night vision and cloudy nights were rare in the Middle East, allowing Fial to navigate by sight of the stars with ease. Provisions and supplies of powder and shot were given to Fial and his larder and magazine were once again full. He planned to wait for the ship's arrival and make sail away from the port, waiting for the Corsair to drop anchor; he would then strike her in the hours of darkness. This was something he had wanted to try since he saw his crew operate at night time after time. The French giant would be full of booty from its voyage of plunder and Fial planned to buy himself a navy.

It was a week before the French giant appeared. Fial recognised her: the VALENCIA, a first class French man of war that was damaged at Trafalgar but got away. She was sold in a poor condition to the current Corsair Victor Dubois, a man who had spent much time with famous French Corsair Robert Surcoaf as his first mate and who then became second in command. He grew tired of taking orders and decided to buy his own vessel with a Letter of Marque from the French

navy recognising him as a legitimate combatant for the French navy, and entitled to a large portion of any booty seized.

Fial pulled anchor and made sail toward the Gulf of Oman away from the approaching giant, giving the impression of fleeing the area. Dubois sighted the ship in his long glass but could not recognise her, seeing only the stern of a brigantine heading out to sea. He paid it no further mind.

The warlords were furious as the GHOST slipped out of sight and the VALENCIA dropped anchor in deep water adjacent to the harbour inlet, able to fire on any ship that came out or went in to the harbour. It was late evening and the VALENCIA fell silent as the night came in, with only a four man watch. The ship's hourly bell chime was all that could be heard; the captain and crew of two hundred and fifty slept to ready themselves for the morning's deadline that had been delivered to the Qawasim on arrival.

At three thirty in the morning the GHOST came out of the night and delivered a silent blow to the bow of the VALENCIA. By the time the captain and crew made deck she had decimated the stern, turning directly across the side of the ship's closed gun ports. The men of the watch fired muskets and railing scatter cannon at the GHOST but she slipped away. She returned from out of the darkness some minutes later, delivering a final blow to the bow waterline, turning and disappearing into the darkness. The GHOST circled and waited for first light.

The sun began to come up and the VALENCIA had listed to stern, her first row of cannon only just above the water. Dubois studied the GHOST, lowering his long glass slowly and pushing it together with a crack. "Le Fantôme de McMurrin, j'ai pensé que était mort. Fichu nous sommes condamnés. Abandonner le bateau, abaisser des bateaux longs combattent pour vos vies. Cet homme est un meurtrier impitoyable!" *The GHOST OF MCMURRIN, I thought he was dead. Damn we are doomed. Abandon ship, lower longboats fight for your lives. This man is a ruthless killer, every man for himself!*

Fial waited until the ship touched the bottom, leaving only the quarterdeck and masts above the water. The GHOST raised the red flag and turned on her. He passed at speed, forty yards from her port to port discharging her cannon across the quarterdeck and slicing a longboat in two on the way. He turned and passed starboard to starboard, decimating the foredeck. The GHOST's crew broke barrels of lantern oil onto the water around the Valencia then threw torches onto the water setting it ablaze; the screams of the men in the water could be heard by the warlords looking on from the shore.

Two longboats had broken away and the GHOST hunted them down, ignoring musket fire and splitting them apart with the bow, the figurehead dagger taking the brunt of any musket fire. The sea fell silent and the VALENCIA burned to the waterline. The warlords of the Qawasim named the ship the GHOST OF THE NIGHT, a further feather in her legendary cap.

Divers retrieved the booty from the sunken VALENCIA. Valuable treasures were given to the Qawasim warlords and other booty purchased supplies for some of the privateers and pirates in port who had been stuck with no funds.

Fial spent the next two months in Ras al-Khaimah Harbour; night manoeuvres were so successful that the GHOST only ventured out at night, eliminating any

threats to the port of Ras al-Khaimah. The Chinese stopped venturing into the Gulf of Oman, terrified of the Ghost of the Night.

Fial had equipped the GHOST with a Chinese weapon found on their ships. Powder in thick paper tubes a yard long and six inches wide ignited as one end with a pointed nose shot through the air like a cannon ball, exploding and often setting fire to a wood target. Fial improved the delivery tubes made of wood by making them of metal and he mounted them on the GHOST railings at regular points on the bow to the stern. The ship was painted in dull, black pitch rendering her near invisible at night, her previous paint having a satin finish that in some instances could be reflective. The sails were dyed black using pigments from Arab silk makers.

Fial's was gradually joined in his ventures by privateers from Persia, America, India, Russia and England as the word spread; all had been declared pirates by the respective governments when no longer required. They took a share of the booty from the now regular raids along the coast of Africa and India; this gradually spread to as far as Portugal, Fial getting the slaver ships and crashing them to shore, releasing the slaves to whatever country they landed on.

Fial found it difficult to get his associates to work together. Some had been enemies all their lives so he developed the tactic of striking in the night close to morning and the fleet coming in at first light to finish the job. This worked well but he knew it would not last. As ships made their fortune sailors returned to their families; he could understand this.

Putting black slaves ashore as free men in countries far from their homeland had also caused some problems. Some had been captured or set upon and killed; more thought was required on his quest. Ras al-Khaimah had become his home and the Qawasim tribesmen had become his friends, especially Yasin who had become a crew member of the GHOST, expanding the languages that could be used.

News came to Fial of the law instigated by William Wilberforce outlawing the carrying of any person to be sold as a slave on British ships. This did not change his tactics and he continued to plunder all slaver convoys. The French stopped sailing at night, putting to anchor in coves or harbour inlets; this just made it easier for the GHOST and her rag tag fleet, giving them static targets in shallow water. The Spanish and Dutch increased their escort power to the cost of the Napoleonic Wars; the GHOST sinking two first class warships in as many days off the coast of the Congo.

In August 1807 Fial's fleet now numbered twenty-two ships. He had just returned from an ambush of a British merchant escort off the coast of Oman just east of the Island of Masirah. The fastest ship in Fial's fleet, an armed American schooner called the COLUMBUS, made port only two hours after the GHOST. They reported that at first light they were attacked by two British frigates lying off the convoy. They had taken the slowest ship, a Persian gun ship SHIRAZ, captive. For the first time in many months the GHOST made full sail in daylight towards the Arabian Sea, hugging the coast of Oman towards Masirah Island.

Chapter 17

It was a late summer's evening on Friday August 28th 1807. The GHOST caught a glimpse of masts on the south western end of Masirah Island off the coast of Oman. There were three ships, two at anchor and one in sail. As Fial studied the ships with his long glass he identified the SHIRAZ as one of the ships at anchor. The other two ships were ships of the line; seldom did they venture this Far East.

The SHIRAZ was a Spanish fifth class frigate till captured by Persian pirates in the Gulf of Aden some years before. Other ships of Fial's fleet sat well clear of the British warships, Fial realising that one was in sail to discourage approach. Fial got closer and identified the British warships: both class two frigates, the BANSHEE and the OCTAVIA. The OCTAVIA was at anchor and alongside was the SHIRAZ. The BANSHEE circled menacingly, but not menacingly enough to discourage the GHOST.

Captain Wainwright on the quarterdeck of the BANSHEE studied the bow of the approaching sail in the evening light. The wind was from the north east, with the GHOST, and Fial ordered full sail, opened her gun ports and raised the red flag; he made straight for the BANSHEE. Wainwright could not identify the approaching ship but made a calculated guess when he saw the red flag as he studied her bearing down on them.

"Good God this trip to find information on the GHOST OF THE NIGHT is now futile! She's bearing down on us with the wind; head south east, draw her away from the OCTAVIA while she has time to pull anchor and set sail!" cried Wainwright. "Battle stations! Man and open all gun ports; marines man the railing cannon and load muskets!"

An eight pound cannon had been mounted on the centre mast crow's nest platform on the OCTAVIA and BANSHEE to counter the tactics of the GHOST. Fial knew attacking from the stern would give little chance for the gunner to open fire through the rigging so he continued on toward the BANSHEE. The BANSHEE was now half a mile clear of the OCTAVIA with the GHOST in full view of the OCTAVIA on her starboard bow, some four hundred metres away to the north. In a flash Fial changed course toward the OCTAVIA heading for her bow anchored pointing east west. The OCTAVIA was caught with no cannon loaded or men on her lower decks and was a sitting duck; her crew attempting to pull anchor and drop her sails. The captain had been interrogating members of the SHIRAZ crew on the location of the GHOST, now they knew.

Wainwright watched with his long glass as the GHOST slipped under the OCTAVIA's bow putting four holes in her waterline. The remnants of Fial's fleet followed the GHOST toward the OCTAVIA and Wainwright ordered the BANSHEE to go to full sail and take flight. His decision was to return a ship to fight another day. This however did not deter the GHOST who swung from under the bow of the OCTAVIA and made full sail heading for the BANSHEE. With the wind the GHOST would be on her in two hours in darkness. As the light faded Fial had the flag changed to black, stating he wanted to send the ship home in flames with a strong message: get bigger guns and more of them or stay away.

Wainwright noticed the change of flag and didn't like his chances of taking the GHOST on at night as he could completely lose sight of her, so with the sun going down he swung the OCTAVIA around to the south, dropped sail and lost speed and prepared to engage. The ship under full sail listed to one side in the brisk wind bearing the guns into the water and leaving that side of the ship poorly defended. Dropping sail decreased the influence of the wind causing the list and levelled the ship up leaving both sides of the ship covered by her carronade cannon. The GHOST swung south at four hundred yards well outside the range of the BANSHEE guns. Wainwright watched through his long glass as plumes of sparks shot from the side of the GHOST dropping a few yards short of the BANSHEE port side. The next volley of sparks did not; something exploded in the sail rigging as the plumes of spark hit the deck and rigging of the BANSHEE setting fire to all around it. A further volley of sparks reached the BANSHEE and she was well alight in the rigging and deck. The GHOST vanished into the night.

Chapter 18

Since Napoleon had declared France an empire in May 1804 and crowned himself Emperor at Notre-Dame in December of the same year, the fight to contain an antichrist was inevitable. The Napoleonic Wars had been a series of coalitions; the war of the fourth coalition was now in progress. August 1807 and Napoleon had mustered the small states of the Rhineland including Saxony and Bavaria. England formed a coalition with Prussia, Russia and Sweden and a gunboat war ensued.

Britannia ruled the waves but not without sacrifice. Her naval power had stopped France expanding her empire and would be a deciding factor in the defeat of the French. Denmark and Norway declared themselves neutral in the Napoleonic Wars and established a large navy and traded with both sides. British naval authorities looked upon the Danish-Norwegian fleet as a threat if bolstered by the French. The British had amassed an armada of more than fifty ships in the Sound north of Scotland to attack the city of Copenhagen should Denmark not agree to a treaty of protection and alliance. Negotiations were fruitless and the fleet was poised to attack Copenhagen in late August, finally numbering 126 ships off the coast of Copenhagen.

The BANSHEE had returned to England with the information on the loss of the OCTAVIA and the use of rockets by the GHOST with success. The *Congreve Rocket* designed by William Congreve had been tested since 1805 as part of the royal arsenal and a trial of the rocket in battle was given the go ahead by Admiralty on several ships in the fleet assigned to bombard Copenhagen. The weapon had been sourced from the Kingdom of Mysore in India during the wars fought by the British East India Company in 1801 and was thought to have originated in the Far East.

The British were keen to set Fial and his ships against the French along the coast of France and had planted informants in the crews of the BANSHEE and

OCTAVIA. They hoped they may be able to speak with Fial or if captured to express the possible free hand that would be given to the GHOST and its party if attacks were directed to the French and Spanish fleets in the English Channel. The Copenhagen assault was leaving the navy stretched and they were attempting to muster all the help they could get.

The first mate of the OCTAVIA was brought before Fial close to death in Ras al-Khaimah, a few days after she was sunk by the captain of the Shiraz which was now back in action. A dying man whispered the facts to Fial; a fleet bearing down on Copenhagen, the French conveying slaves, no longer with any opposition from the British. There was a lack of British ships to contain the French expansion of the slave trade. The seaman died not long after talking with Fial. He was now in deep thought about his next move.

Fial's armada left Ras al-Khaimah in early September during the battle of Copenhagen and headed for the British Channel, a voyage that would take them past Madagascar, round the most southern tip of Africa and north along the African west coast, with plans to engage French and Spanish shipping from Portugal to the Netherlands.

Fial had resigned himself to the fact that if the British did not assist with resupplying his ships he would take what he needed by capturing merchantmen. He calculated his voyage would bring his fleet to Portugal in mid-December and he planned stops in the African ports to restock in South Africa and the Congo. Fial had set his sights on Portuguese ports to operate from as Napoleon's armies were putting the Portuguese under attack, and if the British were to be true to their word he would be an asset to the British in the area.

Viana do Castelo, a port on the north coast of Portugal near the Spanish border was a place that Fial saw that he could easily withdraw south from should he need to, plus be a constant menace to the French; and it was a chance to eat food he was remotely fond of so he found it appealing. Years of salted meat, stale bread, potatoes and rotting fruit gave way to the thought of small comforts other than camel and legumes, of which Fial had developed a special dislike. With the new British approach to the movement of slaves Fial's quest was changing tack, even at times to him becoming futile.

Chapter 19

During the course of years of contact with the west, the black crew of the GHOST had become more familiar with the English language. Bongo could now talk fluent English and was a most valued member of the crew; he spent all his spare time teaching his numbered crew friends. It was his ability to communicate with the African people that were saved from the slave ships that really made a difference.

Bongo was a BaKongo tribesman from the inland region of the Congo delta and had worked in a slave factory at the port of Soyo, learning some English language there. He became more valuable because of his ability to learn languages. This had

come about as he was from the royal family of his tribe, and had been attacked by warring factions of the Kings of Dahomy and enslaved. This provided him with his first opportunity to encounter different languages.

The more slaves a tribe had the wealthier they became. Bongo was eventually purchased by the captain of the GHOST when it was the PACIFIC STAR with ten other black slaves as crew after the PACIFIC STAR's crew went missing in Soyo on a night out, never to be seen again. Buying slaves was relatively easy: the STAR had put into Soyo by necessity after being damaged by a bad storm and the captain had traded some weapons he carried with the slave factory to acquire his crew.

The GHOST put into Soyo, accompanied by twenty-two other pirate ships that made up the fleet in mid-October. The GHOST was known by the slavers, as saved slaves had returned with stories of the GHOST and its quest; this was not well received by the powers at hand but Fial's fleet manpower numbered nearly three thousand seamen with frigates and galleons that could easily lay the town to waste. Fial made it clear through Bongo that any problems or non-cooperation would be met with dire consequences. Only a small contingent of sailors went ashore at any one time leaving the ships well manned for attack.

Fial informed the Portuguese members of the colony who had turned the area to Christianity many years before of his intention to base his fleet in Viana do Castelo, Portugal to plunder the French merchant shipping as far up as the English Channel. This produced mixed reactions as the French were putting Portugal under attack along a big inland border front and the port's operations and power were the deciding factors that would make it difficult for Napoleon to take Portugal. Those with homeland factors at heart applauded the idea but those with fingers in the slavery pie were not so quick to condone the pirate fleet. Politics prevailed as the price by the British on Fial's head had been dropped and the alliance with the British was a powerful factor in proceedings with the Portuguese; England and Portugal had been allies for a long time.

Fial's fleet was restocked without incidence, Fial using gold and silver recovered from the VALENCIA to pay for the exchange. Fial was able to inspect the slave trade chain first hand, visiting the slave factory where Bongo had once worked. The scale of the operation and the conditions in which people were processed shocked the most hardened fighting seamen in Fial's fleet. Dealing in booty of gold, silver precious gems and weapons they condoned; no one approved of the sights they encountered. The slave trade had gone on for many centuries in the area and local people were oblivious to the process even after being converted to Christianity.

Fial inspected at close quarters a slave carrying ship and was distressed to find it was built in the British port of Plymouth. People were chained in rows on two decks with barely room to move and no toilet facilities. It was carrying up to six hundred slaves; the stench of death was embedded in the ship's timber.

Fial had not seen a slaver in one piece as they had always been wrecked on the shoreline prior to his previous inspections. The scale of things became apparent to Fial with nearly ten thousand slaves being processed in the factory. This was only part of the organisation's dealing in slaves and a large extent of the problem seemed to be with Africa's own people. These things made a strong influence on

Fial, changing the concept of his vision. As he walked the streets with members of his crew he became angry as deals were offered to acquire the English-speaking Africans. Two were taken at gunpoint at the dock. Fial refused to part with them stating they were valued members of his crew and also friends.

Fial ordered a bombardment of the city fortifications and the Castela. A ninety gun man of war captured from the Spanish by a British dissident opened up on the coastline, destroying the guard towers and wall footings above the harbour's river tip fortification. Before the fleet's three first class ships of the line with over one hundred cannon each could position themselves to attack, the two members of Fial's crew were found and hastily returned. Fial McMurrin, a simple farmer's lad from Bantry Bay, Ireland and a born leader, had become a major force in anyone's reckoning.

Fial was furious and demanded an audience with the Portuguese consulate. He vowed he would free all who sailed from the port as slaves and sink any ship with allegiance to the French or Spanish. Fial had tolerated the presence of two Corsican frigates in Soyo port that had been ousted by the French for acts against the state and were now involved in slave escorts to the Americas. He demanded they be barred from the port immediately so that the GHOST could sink them.

An audience was arranged with the Corsican captains, Fial finding they had a quest and wished to join his fleet. Their quest was the defeat of Napoleon who had taken their land and killed their families; when they retaliated they were declared pirates and a price put on their head. The Ricard brothers from Corsica were known to Fial as valued captains of the French navy and survivors of many French gunboat battles, one being the battle of Trafalgar.

Pierre Ricard, captain of the MERCURY, an eighty cannon French frigate, and his younger brother Didier Ricard, captain of the sixty-five gun captured British frigate the INVINCIBLE, became the twenty-third and twenty-fourth members of Fial's fleet. One week after they had dropped anchor in Soyo the fleet set sail for Viana do Castelo, Portugal. A twenty-fifth ship sailed with them at the head of the fleet: the Portuguese man of war EVELYN, given to the Portuguese ruling House of Braganza by King George the third as a token of goodwill between the rulers of the countries. She had fled the port of Lisbon with a member of the House of Braganza aboard and with Fial's fleet in tow was going to return to Lisbon pick up further members of the House of Braganza and make a break for Brazil, a powerful, safe colony of Portugal in the South Americas. Moves were afoot to place a British army in Portugal under the command of Arthur Wellesley in 1808 to counter the French invasion of its ally and the British were attempting to convince the Portuguese royalty to flee to England until it was safe for their return.

The Ricard brothers had a young, African cabin boy who played a banjo, a common instrument in Africa. Fial disapproved of his treatment amongst the crew of the MERCURY captained by Pierre Ricard. He was given to Fial with his instrument with information that his name was Berry. Cameron, in charge of lower deck on the Ghost, did not know where to house the young lad; Fial suggested to chuck him in with Bongo. In an error of the written word his name became Chuck Berry; he became synonymous with beating out a strange rhythm on his banjo to the rocking and rolling of the ship's passage across the waves. Fial

seemed to think what the lad was doing may amount to something one day should it be fostered through time.

Chapter 20

Mid-December 1807 the EVELYN broke from the fleet and sailed into Lisbon port. Fial had sailed on ahead of his main fleet and dropped anchor in the mouth of the river Limia at Viana do Castelo a day ahead of the main fleet. He made his way to the bustling harbour, some half a mile, rowing in a longboat and climbing the well worn wooden ladder to the dock deck.

A British frigate, the MARS, was tied up at the dock and Fial paid no mind to the men in pompous uniforms as they looked down upon him from the quarterdeck. Captain Mallory was in charge of the MARS. He knew the GHOST only too well as Fial had sunk his schooner whilst in the service of the King off the coast of Hull taking William Wilberforce from the sea. King George's right hand man Lord Dreyfus was aboard the MARS. He had been to Lisbon to try to convince the ruling House of Braganza family to take refuge in England whilst the planned assault by the Duke of Wellington was put into action, but without success. Fial was dressed in black leather long boots, black, satin pants and black, satin shirt, baggy around the waist and arms. This was to help conceal the array of weapons he carried. A white frill around his neck stuck out some six inches. Fial's beard formed the same shape as it ran over it and down his chest. His hair was now long and tied bag in a tail running down his back to just above his heavy leather, black belt. Mallory discussed McMurrin with Dreyfus as he walked below them on the dock.

"He sails into harbour and walks among us like nothing has happened. If a price was still on his head I would cut him down where he stands," stated Mallory.

Dreyfus looked sideways at Mallory. "The fleet he has amassed is one day behind him. Without him the fleet will continue into the English Channel causing mayhem. He is the only man who can control these people. Harming him in any way would be the act of a fool."

"His drab, black ship an eyesore; if you don't mind me saying it's in range of our guns, I could end this now."

"If McMurrin put his ship there he had a good reason. No doubt should his fleet arrive and see his ship sunk the war for us will be over. Best console your anger Mallory."

"This man has killed many of my friends; I will one day avenge them."

"This man could sink half the French navy, hold your tongue or you may be better suited to a land position where you would become more familiar with political tactics."

"Look at the state of the man, poor grooming, wearing an outfit more akin to a prison inmate. This is extremely difficult to accept Dreyfus."

Dreyfus looked at the GHOST anchored nearby. "Continuing and expanding the slave trade may be the biggest blunder the French aspire to. What's totally

refreshing is that they don't realise what is about to happen. McMurrin will now avenge the death of his parents among the French." Mallory looked puzzled.

"The death of his parents?"

"We have done a lot of prying on why McMurrin would turn on us like he did. His parents and foster parents were murdered in gruesome circumstances by the army in Ireland when he was a young boy. He is a wise and brave man and should not be underestimated. He waited a long time for his revenge but he has a quest, the welfare of others not as fortunate as he, especially the African nations from where his crew is derived. There is far more to this man than being a murdering pirate as stated by the Crown. William Wilberforce speaks highly of him. There is talk of a pardon should he be successful in fighting the French."

"I was unaware of any of that. The French killed my family and I will go to the end of the earth to avenge them. This part of the man I understand; I can see the point now. I have seen this man in action, God help the French navy."

"He will take it to the Spanish as well. With Napoleon moving troops through Spain the arrival of this fleet has been condoned by the ruling House of Braganza. He's on his way to see officials to have his fleet restocked I imagine. We sail in the morning to take news of this to Portsmouth."

Fial was given an audience with Portuguese political officials and members of the navy elite. He informed them the EVELYN had returned to Lisbon and his fleet of twenty-four ships would arrive in the morning, requiring extensive restocking of food and water. Fial planned to sail his fleet into the Bay of Biscay, attacking the Spanish port of San Sebastian near the French border and any other ships to be found on the way. Speed was imperative to Fial as he wished to strike before any information of his presence was known, plus they did not know what he planned to do. He would continue to the French coast attacking Brest then into an English port to restock supplies and conduct repairs. Upon achieving this he would then plan his next move.

When the fleet arrived the next morning the MARS made its way through the throng of ships, dropping anchor at the mouth of the river Limia. Arrangements had been made to dock ships of the fleet three at a time as facilities could not load the required supplies any faster. Sail makers at the local shipyard were kept busy making flags for each of the fleet ships. The fleet flag was designed by Fial to be flown on the mainmast, clearly identifying a privateer fleet rather than allegiance to any one country. The British signalling system of flags for the royal navy, devised by Sir Home Popham in 1801, Fial found to be of no use his fleet which was diverse in origin, and many of his captains spoke poor English.

The first meeting of all his fleet's captains was on the deck of the Corsican Didier Ricard's ship Invincible. It was large enough to take the gathering, anchored in the mouth of the Limia River. It took two days to map out the tactics of war; section commanders were assigned six ships. The standard flag was black with white crossed daggers below a skull. Each section flag had a different color stripe on the vertical tail edge of the flag taking up around a third of the flag's area; the colors were bright yellow, red, green and blue.

Section leaders were the Corsican Ricard brothers, ousted Lord Smithers of the British Admiralty, captain of the CASTELA and CONQUISTADOR Louis Zachariah. Zachariah was wanted by the Spanish for stealing and pirating his ship, which

was once the flagship of the Spanish navy, the CONQUISTADOR. Fial did not expect the sections to work as set groups but when attacking fleets or fortifications simple signal flags in daylight, or one to four lights shown to a section at night would indicate the attack direction for each section based on wind strength and direction.

The French navy employed the single file line tactic when engaging enemies; Fial having the only ship to fly a black flag with no stripe would use the GHOST to break the line up in early morning before daybreak, attacking the lead ship and making the following ships break formation. Only when the GHOST hoisted the red flag would sections attack parts of the formations, taking warships first then capturing slavers or merchants and dividing the booty evenly among crews. In the case of anchored fleets on the coast or in harbors the GHOST would attack at night, disabling or sinking any warships before the fleet would attack in daylight; at no time would the entire fleet be committed to battle more than two sections at the most.

The private navy had to unload all booty currently aboard ships in Viana do Castelo port to make room for larger supplies of food and ammunition and up to date weapons from the British army and navy armoury. Portugal had an abundance of dried fruit as summer came to an end, some of which filled the holds of the now organised-looking fleet. Winter was upon the northern hemisphere and from out of the darkness of the longer nights would come a silent GHOST, manned by men with the eyes of a cat.

Chapter 21

For some time Fial's black ship and his cohorts had been referred to as a rag tag fleet of pirates, but when the fleet sailed from Viana do Castelo on Saturday December 26th 1807 it was as organised as any fleet put to sail. Sailing over Christmas Fial planned to attack the Spanish port of San Sebastian near the French border on New Year's Eve, hoping to catch ships of the French fleet off guard. He was aware slavers anchored in the port to resupply and barter with the Spanish.

They passed groups of British merchants and men of war, heading for Portugal with the initial supplies and soldiers for the planned assault by the Duke of Wellington, without incident. His fleet was well organised and the coloured groups all formed separate lines as they made progress abreast of each other; a formidable foe for any power to confront.

The quartermaster on Fial's first ship of the line, the DRYAD, was on the quarterdeck of an escort frigate, the RUBY MAY. Litchfield Boyd had progressed to second lieutenant since his last encounter with Fial and recognised the black ship they called the GHOST as she slipped by well ahead of the main fleet on the horizon. The RUBY MAY struggled into the south wind of the coast of Fisterra, Spain as the GHOST quickly headed north past them with the wind some half mile to their seaward side.

The three British escort ships of the line in the convoy held their course, flanking the merchant men carrying soldiers and supplies. Boyd lowered the long glass from his eye and handed it to his captain. "Yes that's McGuire alright and that's his fleet bearing down on us from the south. I heard Captain John Mansfield once say he was a born leader when McGuire was just fifteen; a truer word I have never heard. He saved my face once on the DRYAD, I wish him Godspeed."

The Captain of the Ruby looked blank. "Twenty four ships manned with some of the biggest cut throats on the sea. Privateers we are informed. I await the day we can turn on them," answered the captain.

"You have not met this man, nor seen what he can do. I suggest you think twice sir before attempting to engage a ship that has eluded every attempt at defeat; mainly due to the fact that he always attacks. I await the outcome of where he is taking this fleet."

The CONQUISTADOR came into sight leading her line no more than half a mile to seaward side of the Ruby; the captain of the Ruby could not believe his eyes. "My God that was the flagship of the Spanish navy not so long ago." The black flag with skull and cross daggers flew boldly from her mast. He could just see the Corsican ships, the MERCURY and the INVINCIBLE leading their lines, he lowered his sight glass slowly. "The Ricard brothers; this is as powerful a fleet as I have ever seen. Now we know where these ships have been for the last few years. They all fly the same flag, are in perfect formation; some kind of coloured tip on each line's flag the same. You're right Boyd, I would think twice about how to confront this fleet."

"The fleet is a distraction. It's the GHOST that will do the damage, then this lot will clean up the mess. I predict that McGuire will cut the French navy to pieces."

"I thought Claremont was a fool, I'm not so sure now."

"I'd say he's headed for San Sebastian."

The captain looked at Boyd sternly. "Only a madman would attack San Sebastian, the place is a fortress protected by a large fleet of French warships anchored near the mouth of the bay under the fortress cannon."

"A madman or a wise man captain. The fortress cannon are useless while their own ships are in range. No one's ever tried it before but McGuire knows there are many African slaves in transit there. He can disable most of the fleet in the dark and the rest would be sitting ducks at first light. You would care to have a small wager against my predictions captain? They will have no idea or time until it is too late. We have seen this tactic perfected by this man but still fail to capitalise on the tactics of his success. He will change the face of gunship warfare within the next two years."

"Bold words Boyd, but I would not be game enough to predict what this fleet can achieve. None of the captains in his fleet can be trusted or controlled."

"They trust McGuire and fly his flag. Non-allegiance would lead to dire consequences. McGuire is judge, jury and executioner all in the same day. They understand and trust this man. Do you trust Claremont, Captain?"

The captain put his sight glass under his arm while staring at Boyd and walked to the helm, fixing his gaze on the open sea ahead.

San Sebastian Bay has the island of Santa Clara in the centre of its access from the ocean. It is about a mile in circumference and shaped like an egg. It is a perfect spot to have a port as ships can be anchored in the bay, protected by fortress and cannon either side of the inlets and Santa Clara Island atop rocky undulating cliffs.

The Napoleonic Wars had made the port a strategic place for the French moving troops through Spain and supplying warships and trade. The bay's entrance pointed north and was protected by a fleet of French warships anchored outside the bay some half a mile just before the water became too deep to anchor a ship.

On New Year's morning of 1808 at four am the weather was blowing from the north and a heavy swell rocked the warships as they lay at anchor. Crews were minimal as most were in San Sebastian with a fleet of over twenty French warships, plus a myriad of traders and slave ships celebrating the New Year anchored in the bay. A healthy swell left longboats unable to put to sea and change the watch of tired sailors. Lights burned on the nine French men of war, clearly visible to the fortress lookouts also with minimal watch manning, most being involved in New Year celebrations with soldiers in transit to Portugal, well deserving some rest. San Sebastian had been a safe haven for those who docked there, enemy shipping never coming near the place nestled in the corner of the Bay of Biscay. The French knew only a madman would chance an attack.

At 5.00 am New Year's Day 1808 out of the black windswept night, cutting the swell apart like a knife, the GHOST homed in on the lights of the westernmost French warship the MELINA, passing below her bow, pointed into the wind from the north. The first the ship's crew or lookouts knew of the attack was the four cannon shots that took out the waterline of the French giant.

The GHOST turned back past the unmanned guns of the MELINA to the next ship the PASCAL. Even if the guns were manned they could not use them as the ship's guns all pointed at other ship's bows, pointing into the wind no more than two hundred yards apart and would fire on each other unless they could put to sail and change direction. Forty minutes later the waterline of all nine ships had been damaged, some irreparably. The GHOST headed out to sea as the light began to crest the horizon, and raised a red flag signalling his fleet, now visibly approaching the coast.

The CONQUISTADOR broke from her line and headed well west of the inlet, turned and Captain Louis Zachariah commenced a bombardment of the fortress on the west side of the bay with heavy cannon. The rest the two lines of six ships from Fial's fleet turned from the west end of the French warships, delivering broadsides to the bows as they passed the line. They were now floundering with poor manning and most taking on water. By the time the CONQUISTADOR had sailed past the French fleet four were in flames and two had sunk below the lower deck. Fial's two groups re-formed heading north. It was slow going into the wind, joining the two groups already heading north that had not been involved in the attack.

Full light revealed the magnitude of the two hour assault; none of the nine French ships protecting the bay were serviceable, two were in flames, two had sunk and one had pulled anchor ending up wrecked on the rocks of Santa Clara Island. The attacking fleet was heading out of sight to the north; the French first

class warship the THEODORE had put to sail from the bay, mustering enough hands to sail, and was out to sea a mile from the decimated harbor entrance. She was attempting to pursue the attackers as other ships began to sail from the harbor. From the north horizon a black ship at speed with the wind was spotted by the crow's nest and identified as the GHOST. The THEODORE turned and just made the harbor entrance before the GHOST turned north and sailed out of sight.

It was midday and General Louis René, one of Napoleon's top brass in charge of military operations at San Sebastian, surveyed the decimated fleet restricting access to the harbor. He could see well the devastated ships below the fortress on the west hilltop. He lowered his long glass and spoke to Admiral LeMonde, chief naval officer for the French San Sebastian fleet. "Nous sommes stupides. Napoleon sera furieux. Ce qui fait vous proposez que nous fassions Amiral." *We are stupid. Napoleon will be furious. What do you propose we do Admiral?*

"Withdraw all ships to the bay, send a messenger to Brest. If this madman attacks San Sebastian he will attack Brest. We have a large fleet of mainly merchants off the coast there; if we cannot get them word he can do the same thing. You can see what the CONQUISTADOR has done to this fortress. This piss ant ship they call the GHOST manned by a mad Irishman has rockets aboard similar to those used by the British."

"You see this and you call it a piss ant ship. I would say the captain of the GHOST no matter from where he comes is a fearless genius. I want all the information we have on what happened here. You would be best advised to have most of your navy operate like this man if this is what he can do. Find a man who knows how to build ships like his then find men who can fight like him; or we will lose this war."

"Horsemen will not make Brest before this fleet."

"Brest is three hundred and fifty miles, at the worst possible outcome if the wind stays from the north they will make Brest in four days if the wind turns two. Have messengers ride day and night. They must warn Brest of what is coming. I will make a full report to Napoleon myself so if you don't see me anymore remember you are next Admiral."

"I thought this Fial McMurrin or whatever they call him was hung by the British on board the VICTORY. He must have passed convoys of British men of war on his way here indeed if it is him."

"The lookout on the MELINA has seen this man before and confirms it is him. The crew of his ship are black Africans. His ship is black and called the GHOST OF MCMURRIN. He just attacked a flotilla of our warships and laid them waste. He has another twenty-four warships with him, some the most powerful on the sea as you can see by the hole I am looking through in this solid stone wall. How much more confirmation would you like admiral?"

"Lieutenant!" A young naval Lieutenant hastily attended the Admiral's side at attention. *"Have messengers ride day and night to Brest along the supply line changing horses every ten miles. Inform them a privateer fleet of over twenty ships attacked San Sebastian and is now heading for Brest. Expect attack in early morning by single brigantine ship called the Ghost. Be sure to mention that the Conquistador, the Castela, the Mercury, and the Invincible are among the fleet that*

will attack at first light. Be sure to mention it is believed the fleet are privateers condoned by the British." The naval rating hastily left to carry out his instructions.

"A blow on Brest like this and our only hope will be taking Russia. I envisage this fleet has been condoned as the British are busy in Copenhagen. This is totally unexpected. Build those ships Admiral and train the crews or perish."

"Fial McMurrin is a master seaman and can navigate by instinct. Men like him you can count on your fingers and toes. Even if we are ready at Brest things will change. He will then head for England for supplies. God knows what will happen then."

"You can chase him from here with a small fleet."

"I think not, the British may be in the area. If they know about this attack it would leave us open to invasion. Even if we did they could turn on us if spotted. I think it would be a poor move."

"Agreed, we rely on the messengers then. "

Chapter 22

The horses ran, slowed by the night and pulling up lame over poor ground. The wind turned and blew from the south, whipping up high seas across the Bay of Biscay. The GHOST flew across the top of the waves passing her fleet, heading for Brest. The French bay and harbour network of Brest was well protected by the Isle de Sein to the south, some four miles from the coast and the Isle de Molene some two miles from the coast. The mouth of the bay is just over seventeen miles wide with the islands jutting out from its most westerly points.

The port of Brest is impregnable; the inlet access to the port being only just over a mile wide in the far north eastern corner of the bay. The coastline opens up to a bustling hive of activity some six miles north south by ten miles east west at the furthest points. A fleet capable of attacking Brest would be seen easily for some days before as it approached the harbour day or night. A small, black ship in the dead of night would not have even been considered a threat by French defences.

The attack on San Sebastian was on Friday the first of January 1808. On Monday the fourth of January 1808 at three am in the midst of a raging winter storm an exhausted lone horseman rode steadily along the cliff top of the southern peninsula at Le Gourest. His French army uniform was dripping wet through to his skin, his horse was fresh and knew the way. He was carefully negotiating the northern edge of the peninsula and could look down on the lights of the city of Brest on the other side the harbour inlet just over a mile away. He had been careful not to let the message pouch get wet and affect the message. The fortress on the end of the peninsula overlooking the inlet was just over a mile away where he could deliver the news.

He was startled to hear cannon fire directly below and stopped his horse with a jump in the saddle. He could see nothing but he could hear shouting from a French warship anchored in the inlet just off the dock; it had caught fire. The wind from the north carried the cries of the crew as they fought the flames and

screamed at each other. He was just about to continue when he saw flashes in the dark that seemed to be from nowhere alongside another ship anchored close to the one on fire. He climbed from his horse and watched intently but could see nothing moving, other than the lights of ships bobbing on the waves whipped up by the rain storm. He heard more cannon fire closer to the inlet next to other ships anchored about. This went on for nearly an hour. The cannon fire then seemed to head out towards the open bay west of the inlet.

By this time a lot of activity could be seen at Le Gourest fortress as he entered the courtyard; the final destination for his message. He found the commanding officer and delivered the message but he seemed uninterested; he was studying the bay with a long glass trying to work out what was happening. Cannon fire could only just be heard in the wind and rain now but fires aboard ships anchored in the bay beyond the harbour inlet could be seen. Lookouts at the Îlot des Capucins, a small rocky outcrop overlooking the bay on the westernmost tip of Roscanvel on the southern side of the bay, could see flashes in the dark of night but could not make out a ship through the driving rain and wind. So much attention was paid to the bay that no one noticed a fleet of ships well into the centre of the bay between Sein and Molene islands.

By first light the damage could be seen clearly and the unmistakable thunder of the guns of the CONQUISTADOR opened up on the small fortification of Phare de la Pointe south of the bay as the MARS and the INVINCIBLE opened up on La Mer on the north side of the bay. Rain hampered the gunners at the fortifications but some fire was returned, falling well short then fading to nothing as the fortifications suffered bombardment well on target. Single broadsides were delivered to ships in the bay attempting to head into the cover of the harbor but many had been damaged by the GHOST and had become stationary targets.

The second wave of Fial's fleet swept into the bay staying out of range of any land fortification; ships attempting to exit the harbor to defend the bay found the passage too slim due to two burning men of war damaged by the GHOST's night attack on the harbor. The exit access was now only a half mile and covered by ships of Fial's fleet. The CASTELA captained by Lord Smithers was going into harm's way to block access to French ships; any ship leaving the port would have to come under her guns.

By midday the fleet put back to sea, some damaged but well intact. Five French merchant ships anchored in the abating storm had been taken. The French had lost twelve warships and some of the land fortifications resembled Swiss cheese. Two French slave galleys had been taken with over four hundred slaves aboard each.

The following morning François Dupré, general in charge of military operations in Brest, opened a message satchel on his table brought over from Le Gourest fortress on the south side of the harbour. He had just returned from inspecting the damage from the previous night. He read the handwritten message sealed with wax and bearing the crest of the French navy.

Urgent message from Admiral LeMonde chief naval officer for the French San Sebastian fleet. San Sebastian attacked, nine ships destroyed.

Fleet of enemy warships heading for Brest. Expect attack in early morning darkness by single brigantine ship called the GHOST. The CONQUISTADOR, the CASTELA, the Mercury and the INVINCIBLE are among the fleet that will attack at first light. Believed to be a private fleet of twenty-four ships commanded by Irish pirate Fial McMurrin. It is believed the fleet are privateers condoned by the British.

Dupré called an aid and asked him to take a message for Admiral LeMonde, San Sebastian fleet.

Urgent message from Admiral Dupré, chief naval officer for the French Brest fleet. *Surprise attack on Brest by fleet of pirate privateers in hours of darkness in heavy storm, still estimating losses currently at twelve warships, two slave galleys and several merchant ships. Losses bad but not serious. We need to improve communication or lose this war.*

Naval rating Louis Belgarde was brought before Dupré, being the only one who had seen the GHOST in the harbor. Belgarde explained how he had been saved in Bantry Bay Ireland some years before by McMurrin and was sure it was him aboard the black brigantine. He verified the crew was black as well, catching a glimpse of them in the faint lights of his ship as it blew holes in the waterline. Dupré took these things on board as the French navy had nothing like the tactics or tools used by McMurrin but was convinced they were worth looking into.

Chapter 23

It took two days to reach Plymouth. The fleet anchored just inside the sheltered bay off Kingsand and Cowsand on the evening on the sixth of January. Storms were coming in from the North West bringing sleet and snow and the bay area was well sheltered. Contact was made with the British navy to arrange a meeting after the fleet had paid their respects to the dead and tended to the wounded.

A meeting of fleet captains aboard the CONQUISTADOR brought home to Fial the damage done to gun crew by heavy artillery cannon aboard the ship. The CONQUISTADOR had ten 32 pounder long guns used for artillery bombardment of coastal fortifications and during the assault on Brest one had broken its recoil chains in the heavy sea as the fuse was lit and the gun's muzzle came inside the hull. The muzzle blast was flashed back to surrounding crew members as it fired and killed six men around the gun. Their bodies looked fine but blood vessels in eyes and ears were shattered and they were killed instantly as their lungs deflated and choked them. Some crew members beyond the gun were badly wounded by the muzzle blast but survived with horrific eye, ear and brain damage. Men of war ships of the time often used kidnapped men or prisoners to man heavy cannon as accidents like this were common. These men were not kidnapped or prisoners and the service for the fallen reflected this aboard the ship.

Fial hatched a plan with his fleet to present to the British government before they had time to muster enough power to Plymouth to control the fleet. They felt if they did not receive pardons they would put to sea and return to Ras al-Khaimah in the Persian Gulf. The messages they had received were only rumours and required official written approval, although no British ships had attempted to attack the fleet. Many ships of the fleet had suffered damage; death and injuries leaving Fial with a clear mandate on an agreement with the British navy.

Fial attended a meeting with Claremont and Lord Dreyfus at the dockside at a tavern; a place Fial stated to be neutral ground. Claremont had wanted a meeting on board the GHOST but Fial would not let them near the ship which was undergoing repairs with the rest of his fleet. Lord Dreyfus had correctly predicted the port Fial's fleet would lay anchor at based on the fact that no fleet could do what they had done without requiring repair and supplies quickly. They had placed themselves there to see if the fleet materialised and to bolster the chance of quick dialogue with Fial.

Dreyfus was only half right; a ship in each section of the fleet carried only supplies and Fial assured them they could attack at full strength any time if required. The meeting was tense and some of the members of Fial's fleet had been wanted by the British for years. The Corsican ships of the Ricard brothers, the CONQUISTADOR captained by Louis Zachariah and the CASTELA captained by Lord Smithers had immense political power. If these ships became part of the British fleet officially it would send a clear message to the French that the British were gaining support in areas previously believed to be supportive of the French. Fial demanded the paperwork be in place within a week and his fleet be given supplies and assistance with repairs. Any build up of ships in the port or nearby would be seen as a threat and they would put to sea.

Fial waited a day and was about to order to put to sea when a longboat approached the GHOST with Claremont aboard. Fial launched a longboat and met them in the harbour in bitter cold. Fog had reduced visibility to less than half a mile. Fial read the paperwork. Claremont wished to attend to the signing of the documents on land but Fial took them to the CASTELA, taking some hours before the group had visited every ship to exchange signatures. Fial finally signed his document of appointment last as a privateer to the British navy in his own blood, drawn from a cut he made near his wrist. He warned Claremont that if they should renege on the agreement he would return for his blood himself. Fial took the quill pen he had used and put it through his coat lapel. Claremont found the negotiations an ordeal and he did not fully approve but could not deny the weight carried by the flamboyant Irishman.

Fial's fleet was assisted with supplies and repairs. The crews went ashore in groups made up of a few members of each ship, making big enough packs to avoid any trouble but leaving the ships well manned should they not return. The British were busy with the final stages of Copenhagen and preparing the Duke of Wellington's assault on Portugal. It soon became news that Fial's fleet was in a British port causing concern amongst the French ranks as the tales of San Sebastian and Brest became known. The plan was working for all involved with the exception of Fial.

Chapter 24

Fial McMurrin was becoming a changed man. For two months the fleet sat in Cowsand, Plymouth during the worst of the winter weather. The crews were busy with repairs and maintenance, leaving the fleet looking like part of the British navy it was supposed to be. The GHOST was painted a deeper black and her sails were replaced with jet black canvas. She flew the Irish Blue Ensign. No French ships had ventured into the English Channel since the fleet had put into an English port and British fleets concentrated on pounding the French where they could put to sea during the bad winter. The Battle of Trafalgar had turned the tide on the French navy and Fial was sealing its fate.

Fial's African crew could now speak fluent English. He had avenged the death of his family to such a point he felt he had gone too far and his life was being wasted. Attacking anyone with the GHOST, unless he was threatened, made no sense to him anymore. The more he talked to his crew about where they came from the more he knew that the key to helping was in changing the attitude and ways of the African nations that encouraged slavery.

He was reunited with William Wilberforce aboard the GHOST on the first sunny day of March 1808. His like-minded alliance of the British Quakers and the Anglicans in the Society for Effecting the Abolition of the Slave Trade was becoming ever more powerful, now including factions of the Whigs. Wilberforce had assisted in the pardon of Fial, giving evidence on his previous encounters to Parliament when Fial's fleet was discovered off the coast of the Congo.

Wilberforce pressed the fact to Fial and Bongo that his efforts would not contain French or Middle Eastern efforts in progressing with the slave trade. Wilberforce was also a supporter of the evangelical wing of the Church of England and believed that individual Christian observance would lead to a harmonious and moral society. The meeting would change Fial's life.

Wilberforce informed Fial of William Carey, an English Baptist missionary who was doing successful work in India. Other attempts at the time had been thwarted by the perils of Africa. French privateers had taken ships with missionary expeditions and simply sold the booty on, often killing the crews and missionaries. Some had made it to the Congo, never to be heard of again. There were rumours of cannibalistic behaviour and sickness beyond comprehension brought back by those in the slave trade. Wilberforce commented that to enter such areas one would need respect derived from power before ideals could be reconstituted. It was Wilberforce's parting statements that cemented the plan Fial and his crew had been forming.

As Wilberforce boarded a longboat alongside the Ghost they made their farewells. "It is people like you that give me faith to go on with the drawn-out task of slavery abolition. I am bolstered by our meeting and will continue with renewed vigour. I am reminded also of the legend of Spartacus from Roman history of 73 AD; a slave who became a warrior leading a slave army against Roman legions. It is written he said that once we lived for our masters, tomorrow we die for

ourselves. You come within this creed of commoners fighting for a better life. If you take your skills to Africa you may become a present-day Spartacus. It is this the establishment fears for we are of Rome ourselves. You control the coliseum mob of our time, it is the origin of warriors," said Wilberforce.

"I will be looking at coming at things from the other end. I have the resources to make inroads. I have had my fill of revenge and need to focus on something I feel is fulfilling in my life," replied Fial.

"You need to move before this war breaks. It may be some time yet but do not trust the armed forces; they can be a rule unto themselves. Plenty of people in their ranks will come back at you should the time be right. If you are a big enough threat to be considered an ally in war you will no doubt be considered a threat in peace."

Fial shook Wilberforce's hand as he boarded the longboat. "I am well aware of the conduct of the British armed forces. My destiny will be long known by the time they finish with Napoleon. For now we are allies: I would draw the line at saying we are friends. If a present-day Spartacus will assist in our freedom then so be it."

Wilberforce's longboat pushed off with him smiling. "Good luck my friend and should we meet again may it be in far peaceful circumstances where outcomes are assured." Wilberforce's boat began to go beyond earshot as he yelled. "May God be with you and your crew!"

Fial and Wilberforce were indeed correct. Claremont had met with the King and his court and it was made clear that McMurrin must be contained once he was of no use. He was in control of the mob and spoken of more highly on the streets than the King.

As the weather improved so did other things for Fial. The French had chased a British warship off the south coast of Ireland near Cape Clear. The British ship reported a flotilla of at least four French warships. The weather was improving with several sightings of sails on the horizon around the south coast of Ireland. It was suspected the French were again attempting to unite Irish rebel factions, now few and far between but known of. Fial took advantage of the news.

Fial had not seen his son in a long time. He met with the crew captains and without consulting the British authorities put his fleet to sail at first light on March 12th 1808 before dawn under a full moon. The entire fleet was clear of the bay by sun up and Claremont was in Portsmouth. The fleet was headed for Cork Harbour, Ireland.

Chapter 25

The fleet maintained the techniques they had previously used as they had served them well. Fial was a man of his word and was now hunting enemy ships of the realm. They assumed formation in line abreast of each other, the six ships of each group staying in line and sight of other groups on the horizon. This gave them a search area covering around fifteen miles port and starboard of their

heading. Each flagship had been armed with Congreve Rockets, not only for attack but signalling should they encounter a sighting.

As the fleet approached the gap between Land's End and the Isle of Scilly the westernmost line was headed by the CONQUISTADOR. Captain Louis Zachariah, two miles off the coast of Scilly, put up a rocket signal spotting sails to the western horizon on the seaward side of the island. The fleet had been tackling a head wind and the going was slow. Fial could just see the rocket crest the sky from his position north of the fleet and scanned the western horizon, spotting the top of a mast with his long glass. The ship appeared to be also heading north on the western side of the Isle of Scilly, some miles to their west. Fial put about as darkness began to close in to investigate picking up speed in full sail with the wind. The fleet maintained heading awaiting the results of Fial's interception.

Light was fading but Fial could make out the American flag at the bow of the lead ship. They were four merchant ships, one being armed, flying the American flag. Fial was aware that America had fought the Quasi-War with France until 1800 and was now an unofficial ally of the British. He also had knowledge of civil unrest in America and unrest with the south confederate states and Mexico. He had little to do with American sea power as it was so limited but he was keen to find out where so many African slaves were being shipped to. He tagged the ships until dawn.

By dawn Fial's fleet was clearly visible to the American ships and the flagship's captain had a British navigator aboard. Captain Clinton Adams had the navigator identify the GHOST and its fleet; Adams was owner of the ships which were part of his import export business operating from Washington. Adams had heard of McMurrin and had his ships lay sail at first light, slowing to a crawl. Having no intention of engaging him he raised a flag of truce.

Fial observed the ships conduct and shot passed the bow of the lead ship the PHILADELPHIA QUEEN to check on its status. The crew on her quarterdeck remained at ease waving as he went passed. Fial was impressed, not only by the air of ease but the lines of the ship which were unlike those of the British fleet and more like the lines of the GHOST. He turned and drew along her starboard bow, his guns poised to strike, requesting a meeting with the captain. The captain accepted and hooks and lines were exchanged bringing the ships together. Fial and Bongo climbed aboard the PHILADELPHIA and he shook hands with Adams. Adams had hidden his black deck hands fearing Fial would confuse them as slaves and was aghast at the armaments Fial carried on his person.

"Fial McMurrin of the Irish navy sir," said Fial. Adams has difficulty with Fial's Irish accent. "I am impressed by your fine ship, thin lines, deep keel and wide sail. She must be fast."

"Clinton Adams, Washington Import company, captain and owner of these ships. Thank you for your kind words. She is from the same yard as your ship. I can outrun the French privateers with relative ease. I have heard of the legend, now I meet one, truly inspiring. The GHOST, I never thought I would lay my own eyes on her."

"And what have you heard of us?"

"Scourge of all you confront, enemy to all and friend to none. The most feared pirate that sails the sea. Supporter of the black slave, enemy of all who would

enslave a person. Admiral of the most powerful fleet of privateers that has ever been mustered. Tell me did you really attack San Sebastian and Brest?"

Fial cracked a big smile. "A man with no fear who makes things plain, that I can deal with. Yes we did attack the French ports you mention but just the once. I don't think I will get away with it again."

Adams smiled. "A man of my own heart. It is said you were at the Battle of Trafalgar aboard the VICTORY next to Nelson."

"Yes."

"What kind of man was Nelson?"

"A fine seaman, a brave man, and a man the British should have listened to before they lost so much. However he had little heart for the normal working men. He looked upon them all as slaves but I still would have given my life for him."

Adams walked to a table on the quarterdeck and waved his hand above a seat. "Please be seated, bring food and drink for our visitors." They sat down as black women brought a tray of bread and wine from the galley.

"You have black crew?" asked Fial.

"Yes. I have been concerned at what you would think."

"I have black crew myself, the best you could wish for."

"I agree, some of my best deck men are black African."

"How long have you had these men?" asked Bongo.

Adams was surprised at how well Bongo spoke English. "A few years now," replied Adams. "An educated African is rare."

"All my crew speak English well because they were given the chance to. Allow your crew to learn and it will happen. I can also speak their tongue. It will be of great value should I deal with their kind," said Fial.

"Where are you headed?" asked Adams.

"The south Irish coast; we hear of French warships in the area."

"I saw four frigates two days ago fifty miles off the coast of Brest, they were heading this direction. I chose to clip the coast of England and Ireland, more chance of help should we run into trouble and it was a good thing I did. They were west of me avoiding the coast, conduct of a calculated naval manoeuvre."

"They could be ships of the line or traders like you."

"They were French men of war and made no attempt to give chase. Seems they were pre-occupied. We're carrying palm oil, silk, silver, gold, wine, grain and animal furs to name just some. If they're heading for America they must be mad."

"No they are not mad, they are not aware we have sailed. The British navy did not know we sailed."

"Then there's something far more important in Ireland than French ships."

Fial nodded. "Indeed there is." Berry the cabin boy had ventured onto the deck of the GHOST and sat playing his banjo. The black woman tending the galley on the PHILADELPHIA dropped her tray and ran to the railing, shouting out.

"Can you tell what she is saying?" asked Adams.

Fial stood up. "Yes, she says the boy is her son." Berry ran to the Ghost railing, holding out his hands and yelling. "The boy is calling her mother. Where did you get her?"

"From one of the Corsican Ricard brothers. She was a cook on his ship, she's been with me for some years now. Ricard wanted a French captive I had and it was a good trade, she is an excellent hand."

Fial beckoned Berry onto the ship and once aboard he ran to the woman and they embraced. Bongo spoke to the woman, then to Fial.

"It is her son. He could play a banjo by the time he was two. It was how they stayed alive in a slave factory, playing and cooking and being picked up by passing ships as crew members. Voodoo follows them; black magic brings them back together."

Adams looked puzzled. "Black magic, voodoo... I have heard of these things. I cannot believe it has anything to do with that, just chance."

Fial looked at Adams pessimistically. "I asked a priest who taught me at school what I had to do to be a Christian. He said all you have to do is believe. I believed I could attack the French ports of San Sebastian and Brest, the French didn't."

"That's a damn good point, I have no answer."

"I have been with these people for some time now. I am convinced we have something around us, an invisible force or spirit. We don't know what to do with it but they do."

Adams squinted his eyes. "I have seen them survive terrible hardship and say nothing, just keep going. I have to think about this."

"Where are you taking the woman?" asked Fial.

"I have farms in St Louis Missouri and Mississippi. They'll work on the plantations there in supplied quarters making their own lives as well as working. I always check the ability and allegiance of my workers before I grant them this status. She'll be cooking for field workers along the Mississippi river plantations. Our plantations are going well, they have developed a language to be able to communicate with each other no matter where they're from. They call it Gullah."

"This interests me, even in a foreign land we adapt. This is the first I have heard of successful relocation of these people, you are a wise man. If I give you the boy would you make sure he is all right? He plays that banjo like I have never heard before. In years to come it may go somewhere."

"I heard him playing earlier, sort of a strange rocking and rolling with the waves."

"Yes he is a fine boy, never stops playing or working. He sings too. I heard him yesterday singing about a woman, Madeline or something. He may rub off on his family should he have one and go somewhere, who knows."

"What's his name?"

"Ah bit of a mix up. His name was Berry but we chucked him in with Bongo as we had little room so he got to be called Chuck Berry."

"What a stupid name, can't see that going anywhere; he needs to change it. Yeah I will take him on and make sure he's fine."

"His mother will be forever your most loyal servant now."

"I was thinking the same thing."

Fial looked to the sky. "The weather is turning, best we part company before the coming storm damages the ships." He grabbed Berry and shook him with a wide smile. "Go west young man and prosper, something looks over you my boy." Berry smiled, clutching his mother with one hand and his banjo with the other. Fial

turned to Adams. "Something brought us together, now something is parting us, so be it."

Bongo and Fial climbed aboard the GHOST, cast off and the ships made sail.

Chapter 26

Fial had plenty of information, not only on the direction life would take in the near future but the probability of French warships being in the area of Bantry Bay. Four French frigates to the south on a heading for Bantry and a British ship being chased from the Bantry area in the preceding weeks seemed a little coincidental. British patrols of the south of Ireland were scarce in the winter months due to big seas. Fial was sure if he were a French captain he could find solace in the Bantry area, a place synonymous with *The Society of United Irishmen*.

Fial did not try to ask why, other than it would not be expected after such a failure in 1798 that he had witnessed himself; this could cloak the move, the British not expecting such a suicidal tactic from the French. Ireland was supplying food and manpower to the British at ever increasing rates and a strike on the supply line on a sunny spring day just may work for the French. A strike like this would not only affect the British but would take many Irish lives.

Fial met with the fleet captains just in sight of Cape Clear, south west Irish coast, aboard the GHOST while the seas were subdued. They agreed to split the fleet with the Ricard brothers taking their ships to Cork while Fial, accompanied by CONQUISTADOR with Louis Zachariah and the CASTELA with Lord Smithers would check the south west coast to Bantry before making for Cork. McGee and Cameron had never doubted Fial's instinct but to Fial's dismay they questioned the move, however Fial listened.

"Laying ships up in Bantry or any bays along the coast of Kerry makes no sense Fial no matter what the time of year. They need all the firepower they can get along the coast of Europe," claimed McGee.

Fial thought for a while before he answered. "Do you believe in voodoo, Hainan?"

McGee looked at Bongo surrounded by crew members 1 to 10 before he answered. "I have known these people for some years now. When I first met them I would have said no."

"Then ask them yourself and I will change my mind if they say I am wrong."

McGee looked at Bongo who was wearing a wide smile, his teeth looked striking like the white keys of a new piano. "Well?" asked McGee.

Bongo shrugged his head at Number Three. "You tell him," said Bongo.

"Bwana Fial knows what we don't," answered Number Three, using the Creole term for a white man in charge. "If Bwana Fial takes me to the end of the earth then I go. We will not sink the ships there, they will be ours. Legba guides him at the crossroads."

There was silence for a while. "Then we make sail for Bantry Bay," said McGee.

Number Three continued. "There is a man who owes his life to Bwana Fial, he will not waste it like a fool." They had entered the open sea off the coast of Mizen

Head and the full brunt of the weather was felt and all hands became pre-occupied. A south westerly storm whipped up the sea and progress was slow.

On the morning of Tuesday the 22nd of March 1808 Fial caught sight of the Bantry inlet. His fleet trailed him just off the horizon and the weather had eased but occasional fog drifted past. It was seventeen miles into Bantry Cove to Bantry Island nestled in the bay opposite the village and Fial thought if French ships were there they would be anchored in a sheltered area out of sight of daily life.

Using the broken fog as cover in the breaking light the GHOST entered the bay mouth spanning some three miles wide. Eight miles in beneath the high rocky hills of the northern side of the bay below the settlement of Rooska was a small cove. It was deep, sheltered and out of sight. Fial had rowed there many times with his father fishing; it was the perfect place to anchor a ship, this spot was also the first place he had seen a large vessel whilst in a row boat fishing. He scanned the water's surface through the patchy fog as they slipped silently up the centre of the bay and just below Rooska in that very cove he spotted the head of a mast, then another. He could then hear the yell of the French lookout in the crow's nest.

"Une voile dans la baie au sud-ouest!" Sail in the bay to the south west!

Two French frigates lay at anchor in the cove and the closest to the inlet was the frigate the Leopard. The captain rushed to the rail and scanned the water surface for the reported ship, just making out the black sails of the Ghost as she approached. He studied her until he could see the port side of the Ghost then called his quartermaster. He handed Louis Belgarde his long glass. *"Tell me if I am wrong but I believe we have been found by the ship they call the GHOST."*

Belgarde studied the GHOST, spotting black deck hands and noting the gun ports being opened. She was frantically dropping sail. She then dropped anchor directly out from the cove about three miles. *"Yes, she is as black as the night and the heart of her captain,"* said Belgarde.

"You met this man when he was a small boy did you not?" asked the captain.

"I did, and I was in Brest when he devastated the fleet at night. His fleet will be behind him. He has dropped anchor, he has us cornered."

"Rubbish, we will make sail and attack him. Between us we will cut him to pieces one ship to port the other to starboard, he will not stand a chance," added the captain.

Belgarde studied the bay entrance through the drifting fog patches and then handed the long glass back to the captain. *"Look upon one of the mightiest ships afloat captain, the CONQUISTADOR, she is followed by many sails. She can sit off out of range and sink us without coming under fire herself. They fly the Irish ensign. McMurrin would not drop anchor without many cards up his sleeve captain. Decide if you wish to be a dead hero or a wise prisoner."*

The captain swept the bay with his long glass and lowered it slowly. *"I can see seven ships and they are still coming. I confirm the CONQUISTADOR leading the line. How did this man know we were here?"*

"Does it make any difference captain? This man wants these ships or they will sink us. I volunteer to negotiate captain."

"No I will not have anyone do my dirty work. You may accompany me." Their attention was taken by the shrill whistle of a cannon ball as it dropped well short

of the cove fired from the long guns of the CONQUISTADOR. *"Raise a white flag and prepare a longboat, the message is clear."*

"The shot will be heard by the PLUTON and RAPIER further up the bay. Should they put to sail? They will be in grave danger," said Belgarde.

"Man the longboat immediately, we must avert confrontation under such poor odds. We need to find a way to fight another day." The rest of the fleet began to drop anchor short of the GHOST in the calmer waters of the bay. The fog was burning off and the fleet could clearly see the two French men of war in the cove.

The last time Louis Belgarde had seen Fial on the rocky shore of Bantry he was only a child but Fial recognised him immediately. Belgarde had learnt to speak English since their last encounter and offered his hand to Fial as they boarded the GHOST.

He bowed his head as he spoke barely distinguishable English with his outrageous French accent. "Fial McMurrin I thank you for my life, I am Louis Bel."

"I know who you are. You are the first real seaman I ever touched."

"As you can see I do not throw my life away after you and your family sacrificed so much to save me."

Belgarde's captain boarded the GHOST and presented himself to Fial, offering his sword by the handle. He spoke English well. "Monsieur McMurrin, I am Captain Pierre DuPont, my sword, my ship the LEOPARD and her crew are your prisoners. I beg your mercy for my crew. Do as you wish with me."

Fial was speechless for a few seconds, he took the sword and slid it slowly back into the sheath on DuPont's belt. "A brave man of honour, keep your sword and your ship. Your days with the French navy are over. You have a family Pierre?"

"Yes, in Paris."

"If you want to see them again you will do as I ask." McGee and Cameron looked on with stern concern as they tried to fathom the direction of their captain.

"I will consider your requests when I hear them," said DuPont.

"How many more of you are in this bay and other bays along the coast here?"

"Four class four frigates in the bay here and four due here in the next week."

"The four you are expecting will not arrive, the CASTELA sighted them yesterday, they turned back or they are fools."

"If they sighted this fleet they will be more interested in conveying the information to our Admiralty."

"Exactly what I thought, so the French know where we are. Good they will leave my people alone. The other ships here are further down the bay?"

"Yes."

"You and Belgarde take a longboat and convince them to surrender or we will be forced to lay them waste."

DuPont looked up the bay toward Bantry. "Where will you take us?"

"Cork, where the other half of our fleet is anchored."

"The British will execute us and take our ships."

"No! There will be no killing, you have my word. If they try you can join me and my deal with the British will be finished."

DuPont nodded and smiled. "I believe you. There is a small cove sheltered by a rocky outcrop three miles down the bay from here below the farming town of

Garnish. The other ships are there, the PLUTON and the RAPIER. I will deliver your ultimatum to the captains and report back within two hours."

"In three hours I wish to be heading for Cork, it is up to you to organise your ships. You will be with us or at the bottom of the bay."

DuPont looked at the deck and drew a big breath. "Then I should not waste any time." They pushed off the longboat and the French oarsman made speed up the bay towards Garnish cove. The fog had lifted and the sun had struck the north western rock faces along the bay; the first fine day in weeks. Fial drew anchor and the GHOST stirred up the bay within sight of the PLUTON and the RAPIER. DuPont attended the ships from his longboat for a short meeting, then returned to the Ghost.

"I have a problem, the captain of the RAPIER wishes to fight his way out."

"Who is he?" asked Fial.

"Victor LeBeau."

"Take me to him," said Fial as he boarded the longboat. They came alongside the RAPIER with captain LeBeau looking down his nose at Fial as he came on to the quarterdeck. LeBeau stood, legs apart and arms folded next to the helm. "You speak English captain?"

"Of course, I am an educated man," replied LeBeau.

Fial looked around at his armed crew, impeccably dressed in uniform pointing loaded muskets at him. "Fine men yet you choose to waste them needlessly."

"We are in service of Napoleon Bonaparte, not England nor Ireland. You will allow us to leave or we will attack."

"Which of the thirteen ships here were you thinking of sinking first?"

LeBeau hesitated before he answered. His cap feathers were blown in his face by a gust of wind so he removed his hat holding it under his arm. His perfectly presented uniform reflected the sun's rays off the polished gold buttons across Fial's face. "You do not frighten me McMurrin."

"No that I can see, but can you not see the horror on your crew's face. They look like fine men to me, well presented, willing. I am in need of men like this myself. Sorry Captain but I am out of time." Fial began to walk from the quarterdeck towards the lower deck.

LeBeau shouted at him. "Stand where you are or I will have you shot!"

In a flash Fial turned, pulling a musket from his belt and firing at LeBeau sending him crashing to the deck moaning in pain from the chest shot, his blood colouring the deck.

DuPont shouted to the crew. "Ne tirez pas, déposez vos armes et éventaire facile." *Don't shoot, lower your weapons and stand easy.* There was an uneasy response as Fial walked up to the dying LeBeau. He picked him up, put him over his shoulder, walked to the stern of the ship and threw him overboard.

He looked over the stern at LeBeau's body as it floated away. "These men's parents did not raise them to be wasted by petty egos and pompous shows of patriotism, enough of this!" he shouted. "The needs of the many outweigh the selfishness of one!"

Fial walked up to Louis Belgarde standing next to DuPont. "You will sail in a line between our two formations. I am bequeathing you trust *Captain* Belgarde. I hope you don't let me down."

"I wish to serve with you Admiral McMurrin. If I am Captain the LEOPARD is at your service."

Fial pointed to the ships anchored in the bay seaward of them. "For years now I have had an agreement with all the people who sail with this fleet." He lowered his arm putting his hand on his hip. "We used to sell our booty to the highest bidder wherever we were. Now we have a deal with the British; they will buy all we take. Every man in the fleet receives a share, they are free men and can leave whenever they please, even the men aboard the ships that did not play a part in this will be paid. I am a man of my word and these ships will go to the British. I get the crews. You are free men and can go where you please, France if you wish and I can arrange passage. If you wish to join us then do so, we have many Frenchmen in our midst, the only man I had a grievance with was LeBeau. He was as big a fool as Napoleon."

"Pardon me Captain," said DuPont. "Napoleon Bonaparte is a brave, courageous man. He fights for his people."

"Brave and courageous yes, but I doubt if he has met many of his people. Napoleon is a Corsican, talk to the Ricard brothers for another Corsican's opinion of him. He commands the biggest population in Europe, soon to be the smallest if he keeps using them like an expendable resource. If I had not had the hearts of my men with me I would have surely hung from the yard arm of the VICTORY. It will be French mothers, fathers, sisters and brothers who will be his downfall."

"He has achieved much for France Admiral, the French people owe him much," added DuPont.

"There was a time when I would have agreed with you but it has passed. He is intoxicated with power and is ignoring his people. Now the reality is you are here with me and we are sailing for Cork."

Cameron and McGee watched the longboat returning to the GHOST. Fial was changing as a person and they were confused. "These are the first people I have ever met that we have hunted. Seems a bit different, bit of an anticlimax. I would like to have met some of the others now I've seen this," said McGee.

"Not much chance of that, we killed most of them," replied Cameron.

"Do you think God will punish us for what we have done?"

McGee thought for a while rubbing his chin. "I prayed for God to protect us before every battle we have ever fought. Surely if I was wrong I would be smitten."

"Father Maloney taught from the Bible that we should smite those who would smite us."

"I remember that. I don't think he meant we should kick every body's arse around the place with gay abandon. Fial must be thinking like us. I'm a bit addicted to the fight, I get all riled up inside, start feeling real good. I think I've made better of my time than sitting around the King's Head in Ringaskiddy getting drunk."

"Fial's starting to talk a lot before doing things, just like that Wilberforce fella. He told me they sit in that big room in Westminster and talk all day about things and nothing happens."

"Well he has helped Bongo and One to Ten with the slave thing but it takes a long time."

"I like the idea of you know... you vote for that Wilberforce fella in a ballot if he lives in your street and he goes there and tells them what you want."

"Do you think you would be good at that if someone voted for you and you were in Westminster?"

McGee shook his head and lowered the edges of his mouth. "No I don't think I'd be real good at that. I'd be building a big house, living in there and drinking a lot of whiskey with plenty of women. I don't have the patience or love of the English people to be one of them Wilberforce fellas. I'd rather be voted the King so you could just order things be done straight away."

"You don't vote for Kings, it's passed on by divine right."

"Now it comes back to me there was that King Arthur years back who was given a sword by some woman, she was all wet far as I can remember."

"It was Excalibur and it was the lady of the lake. It's said a Welshman came up with all this not the British."

"I don't remember much of it as I found it a bit hard to believe. If I went to Fial insisting I was in charge because Neptune had handed me a sword from the water below the GHOST he'd put me in the brig or one of those institution places for people who aren't quite right ya know."

"I'm not so sure Bongo's mob dance around in trances putting spells on people and predicting the future. I've seen this with my own eyes."

"Yeah, Fial's here. One thing's for sure, if we don't pull anchor and head for Cork running the gauntlet for the CONQUISTADOR and her fleet in five minutes Fial will kick our arse all round the bay."

"Aye!"

Chapter 27

The weather had been good, Fial stood at the bow of the GHOST in the crisp morning air as he caught the first sight of Cork harbour. Cameron and McGee stood beside him. The sight of home initiated memories of familiar smells inside them although they were not present. At last they were close enough to touch their own land.

"And what now Fial?" asked Cameron.

"I have turned into a man; I was an angry lad for a while. We will not be wasting our lives for the glory of the British Empire. I feel a bit too much like Arthur Wellesley, a British puppet. I think he is chosen to fight in Portugal. They speak of him in Plymouth like he is some kind of god. He has forgotten where he came from; I have not. He was born of affluence and education. I was born of hardship and horror. He helps build an empire yet I feel I must fulfil a calling. The land war is not going so well but the navy has won some decisive battles on the French coast. We have made a difference."

"You are a legend Fial. They will speak of you forever," said McGee.

"I was an angry young man who demanded respect by death and destruction. I have changed. I will be judged on what I do with my life, not how many people

have died at my hand. I read of that Genghis Khan of the Mongol empire and they talk of him in Ras al-Khaimah. I don't like what he did. The people there are descendents of him and brought what I have learnt of him to life. If I am to be remembered like that I need to change. My mother would kick my arse all round the kitchen if she knew what I had been up to, God rest her soul."

"If we had not fought Fial, we would be dead," remarked McGee.

"Everyone who died at my hand I attacked. This is the first time I ever negotiated an outcome instead of confrontation."

"They had to negotiate; you have a reputation," said Cameron.

"True enough, the time had come to use it more wisely."

"You have been."

"Ronan, I love you for more reasons than I can mention. Two days ago you questioned my direction and we had a debate."

"We asked Bongo about hocus pocus and he palmed it off on Number Three," said McGee.

"Welcome to the parliamentary process. Nevertheless things were questioned and the outcome was successful. Empires are built on this process where everyone has a voice. What if we took this to a place where Bongo and his kind have never known anything but war? What if we show them who's boss before we sow the process. If we can do that we have achieved something. We will always be considered pawns here; the process already exists and they will not let us in. The Congo has the biggest resource of all people. I have been thinking of this for a while now."

"That we have noticed and we spoke of this at Bantry while you were negotiating terms with the French."

"I have a quest that one day people will be judged by the content of their character not their creed or color. What we have here is not much but it's a start." The GHOST sailed quietly into the harbor. "Look at this, the Ricard brothers have dropped anchor all over the place, there will be hardly any room for the rest of the fleet. Looks like they have done this to have guns bearing on all areas of the harbor but avoiding each other. We will have to choose our layout wisely with the rest of the fleet to achieve the same. Any of our ships must be able to open fire without affecting another ship of the fleet. Look at the British, six ships of the line all next to each other at Haulbowline Island. Nelson spoke of this practice. They are sitting ducks should the port come under attack. Lay anchor at Ringaskiddy. I could do with a drink."

Chapter 28

Fial McMurrin, Hainan McGee and Ronan Cameron were treated like royalty at the King's Head. Publican Evan McTaggart put drinks on the house while a mass of locals chatted to the people mentioned in stories and legends. Bongo was also present and could chat openly with locals as if part of the furniture. People ran

into Bongo on purpose and touched his skin to make sure he was real. No local had ever heard a black man speak English.

Stories were exchanged and exaggerations corrected. Fial heard his African crew had summoned a sea dragon and set fire to a ship sent back to England in flames that could be seen but did not burn. The story-tellers were disappointed to find the ship was set alight with Chinese fireworks and allowed to limp home. Fial was also surprised to find he had sunk over one hundred ships in Brest Harbour killing a thousand men and it hadn't even got light yet. This story came from a French horseman who actually saw it happen. Cameron and McGee wondered if they were in the same place the lady of the lake story came from.

Fial had more pressing things on his mind, such as visiting his son. He was disappointed to find the same people in the same seats, drinking the same brew, saying the same things about what they were going to do but they had done nothing. He revelled to some degree in the status quo that now existed as it showed things had settled to some length and his people could go about life with open discussion.

Finding his son proved to be a more difficult task than he had predicted. His father and mother-in-law had moved from the Ringaskiddy rectory during the period Fial was declared a pirate by the British, as they looked for his son as bargaining power. He found no one at the rectory and went to the church removing his well worn, black, triangular hat before entering. His black, baggy pants, high, leather, black boots and silk, black tunic with white trim were dirty and smelt of the well worn corridors of the GHOST. His beard had become trouser belt length and his hair was well past his shoulders.

As he stood in the aisle looking towards the altar he felt overdressed with daggers and muskets hidden about his person. The church was small, and to the left of the modest altar was a confession box; an old lady scuffled from the box passing Fial with her head down and face hidden closing the door silently as she left. He approached the box door and went to knock but hesitated. He knocked opened the door and found he had to stoop down to avoid hitting his head on the top door beam; he wrestled to sit on the bare wooden seat on one side of the box built many years before when people were much smaller. He filled the box with his person and could only just close the door. The church smell brought back memories of his childhood as he thought of what he would say.

Father Maloney heard the thumping in the box adjoining the side of the rectory office as he made notes in the church diary. He put on his neck drape, picked up his wooden cross that he had only just put down and entered the box, opening the small hatch between the two cubicles and sat down in the darkness. "Why do you come to this place?" he asked softly.

Fial recognised the voice. "Forgive me Father because I think I have sinned."

"You are not sure?"

"No."

"What is it you think you have done my son?"

"I have killed and have the blood of many on my hands."

Father Maloney was silent and stared upward into the darkness. "Who have you killed and why?"

"Most I do not know, others I do. They are many, I am ashamed in the face of God."

Father Maloney thought in silence. "Would you be a sailor my son?"

"Yes Father."

"There is a fleet of ships in our harbour. You come to me from one of them?"

"Yes."

"Which ship?"

Fial waited for a long time. "The GHOST OF MCMURRIN."

"Would you be the captain of that ship?"

Fial slowly began to open the box door but light burst in so he had to close it again. Fial had hesitated long enough. "Yes father, I am the captain of the GHOST."

The box door opened and Father Maloney looked upon Fial for the first time in many years. He had removed his drape and briskly walked out of the rectory to the other side of the box in the church where Fial was seated. Fial's eyes met with Father Maloney's face and he lurched out of the box hugging him in tears, he fell to his knees, picked up Father Maloney's flowing, brown gown, burying his face in it.

His raised voice was muffled by the gown. "Father what have I done! I hate who I am! The devil has taken my heart!"

Father Maloney looked down on the sobbing legend and placed his hand on his head. "What have they done to you my son?" Fial dropped his head to the floor with his face in his hands sobbing. "Rise Fial McMurrin, you are forgiven, the lord denies salvation to no one."

A young woman entered the church and walked to Father Maloney, seeing Fial sobbing on the floor in front of him she was puzzled. "Who is this poor man Father?"

Father Maloney knelt and put his arm around Fial as he looked up at the neatly-dressed young maiden. "This is Fial McMurrin, a messenger of God; he has returned to us this day to acquit his past and plan his future. He is a good man, think of him here should you consider being a legend for legends are often just stories to bolster the meek."

The young maiden looked happy and smiled as she knelt beside Fial. "Fial McMurrin the pure, I don't believe it. May I touch him Father?"

"Of course, he is just a man not a spirit or story, he is real and has suffered for us."

The maiden put her hand on Fial and he stopped crying, lifting his head and looking at the maiden's face. "I see the stories of his life etched in the lines of his face. I must go home Father and tell my family I have touched him. I don't know what to say except thank you Fial McMurrin." She rose and ran from the church shouting. "I'm blessed, I touched him I touched him."

Father Maloney helped Fial to his feet, he looked pale and blank. He sat on the front row congregation bench with Maloney next to him. "Now you see the other side of what you have done Fial. She is like a thousand young maidens, mothers, fathers, sisters and brothers of Ireland who yearn to touch the legend of the GHOST. Once a young, angry boy with nothing left, now a respected man with the world at his feet. There is a difference between sin and sacrifice. You have not

sinned Fial, you sacrificed your life for us all. Would there be another persecuted boy of Ireland who would do what you have done? I think not. The Lord works in mysterious ways."

Fial gathered himself. "And what now Father."

"I'm sure Fial McMurrin knows exactly what he is going to do, he always has."

"And what of the war Father."

"The alliance will win the war with or without your assistance. You have done enough."

"My son, Father."

"Your son is fine, come we will see him."

Like father like son, William Ryan McGuire, now nearly seven, had watched his father in Bantry Bay from the hilltop above Sheep's Head on the south side of the bay opposite Rooska. Hidden in the hills of Sheep's Head with Fial's in-laws, the Donnelly family, William had been told of his father's adventures and witnessed the taking of the Leopard, hearing of the sighting of the GHOST and its fleet from local farmers. He waited for his father's arrival.

Chapter 29

William Ryan McGuire started the most exciting day of his life. He waited atop the rolling rocky hills of Foilakilly looking out towards the Bantry Bay sea mouth. He was looking for a black ship; he had only heard stories, now he would touch the very timbers that formed her soul. Father Donnelly stood back watching his grandson dance and skip among the spring grass. A messenger had told them to wait for a Ghost from the past on this very morning. A fine morning, the wind was brisk from the west and the sun had risen far enough to quell the morning chill. The hill tops began to be dotted with small groups of people, families excited by the prospect of an encounter with inspiration.

First a black mast tip, then a black sail, then the bow of the most feared ship afloat cut the rolling morning waters, spraying salt mist into the air and tingling the senses as it entered the nostrils of the GHOST's crew. Fial stood at the bow, cleanly shaven, his hair cut to collar-length and his hand on the black hilt of the dagger figurehead. They drew sail just below Doonour and Fial searched the rolling hilltops with his long glass. Half a mile to starboard he looked upon his son, dancing with his hands high in the clean morning air. He called his crew to the deck.

"We cannot live forever, the future of our land is in our sons and daughters. The first time I touched a warship the destiny of my country flowed from my fingertips. My son will never forget this day and if we have achieved anything beyond death and destruction it will be fused to this boy's soul. When this day is done we will sail to the Congo and find your sons and daughters, sowing the seed of the future. We are just a small ship considered insignificant by power. We have a crew looked upon as nothing but a disposable resource, yet we have become the most feared ship afloat. Fear is not enough on the staircase to freedom. Our sons and

daughters will carry the reputation of this ship and its crew to places that we cannot go; our part is done. Look upon the hill you will see the next William Wilberforce or Arthur Wellesley. Let him never forget this day and carry it in his heart so he never drops the dagger against the might of the sword. Blank load the cannon for our arrival fire as we drop anchor. Let him feel the power of the GHOST."

The crew were deeply moved, wiping tears from their cheeks as they had done before when addressed by their saviour. Life had grabbed a new meaning as new levels of adrenalin drove their limbs in a show of perfect discipline below a young boy who watched in awe. The anchor hit the water and Will McMurrin could feel the splashing spray and smell its seasoned salt. He was mesmerised by the cannon flashes, then felt the numbing of the shock waves as they thundered up the hillside. The Irish ensign waved in the wind above her mast and a king was born.

From the moment Will fell into this father's arms he held or touched him. As the longboat circled the GHOST he sat between his father's legs, Fial holding him tight. Fial explained as they went; Will asked few questions as he was in complete wonder and listened carefully to his father. Once Will had walked the lower decks and put his hands on her cannon he was shown the helm and talked to One to Ten. They spent a few short hours on the GHOST then boarded the longboat and as they headed back to shore the GHOST again let fly with her cannon.

Fial felt this was the time to give Will direction. "Son I want you to do something for me."

"Yes father."

"I want you to read all you can of William Wilberforce and the parliamentary system of Westminster in London. Read of Arthur Wellesley from our own land."

"Why?"

"I cannot take the GHOST to these places of power but you can take her legacy with knowledge and wisdom. I learnt the power of the British navy and in so doing found their weakness. Win a place in Westminster and you will win a battle I cannot even begin to fight."

Will looked up at his father. "I read well."

"In time you will learn to read between the lines."

"I think I know what you mean. Are you leaving now father?"

"Yes son. To take me from the sea would be as taking a fish from the water, I would surely wither and perish. I will return and always be with you. When you hear the whistling wind behold the GHOST for that very wind has driven her sails."

"I touched her and smelt her timber and pitch. I could smell the flour stored in her hull. The fresh bread baked on her deck. You could hardly see her crew moving around on the black deck."

"Beware son for the GHOST is the bringer of death. She is an invisible dagger flashing below the sword of might. We can always carry a dagger hidden from the sword. I long for the day we no longer need to pull it in anger."

Fial handed the boy to Donnelly at a rocky beach below the Foilakilly hillside. He spoke to his father-in-law briefly.

"I still see his mother's face every day, I can never love another woman," said Fial.

"You are leaving the boy with us?" asked Donnelly.

"I did not come to take him, I came to send him."

Donnelly put his hands on the boy's shoulders. "Praise the Lord."

"I want books about a man called William Wilberforce please grandfather," asked Will.

Fial groped around inside his tunic, smiling as he found what he was looking for amongst his pistols. He handed Donnelly an envelope sealed with wax. "In the next few days open this, read it then destroy it. Make sure you are the only one who ever knows its contents."

Donnelly smiled at Fial, his gaunt cheeks lifting towards his happy, brown eyes. "You are wiser than you are brave Fial McMurrin. I will pray for you and may God himself drive the wind of your ship."

Fial shouted back as they cast off his longboat. "I was thinking that had already been done. Remember the sound of the wind my son, I will return."

Donnelly and Will climbed the rocky hillside and watched the GHOST whisk away the crew, waving to them and the small, gathered families of farmers dotted along the hillside. Will shed no tears; he just beamed with contentment.

A seventy year old farmer and his wife watched from the hilltop above the high cliffs of the bay as it entered the open sea; they had lived there all their lives. Both of their sons had perished fighting the British army years before. His wife wondered, "Do you think he has his son with him?"

"Oh no," replied the farmer.

"Then how will he fight on when he gets old like us?"

"He lost his father as we lost our sons. And what can we do now we are old? McMurrin does not have much but he uses it wisely. He would not risk his son to continue his legacy, he's smarter than that. We can keep them in meat and vegetables for as long as we can, that's what we can do woman. Now come, we need tend the flock, the fight has just begun."

Chapter 30

The British navy gloated over the four French ships delivered to them in Cork, however there was an argument about the crews. The British claimed the ratings belonged to Fial but the officers should be prisoners of the British navy. Fial was furious at the attempt to take advantage of fine print and stowed the crews on one French ship, the LEOPARD anchored under the guns of the CONQUISTADOR.

The British navy paid handsomely for the ships and using a meeting to distribute payment of the money Fial addressed them regarding his next move. The British had asked that the fleet head north around the cape of Scotland, past the Orkney Islands, across the North Sea to Denmark and down the coast of the Netherlands, Belgium and France where they would be re-stocked at Plymouth and paid for any booty and captured shipping.

Fial had a completely different idea. He and his fleet had seen the port of Soyo in the Congo and witnessed the slave factory there. The slave ports of Benguela to the south of Soyo on the coast of Angola and Elmina to the north of Soyo on the coast of Ghana were far bigger than Soyo. He saw the reason being they were easier to access from the land mass of semi-arid desert with an abundance of tribes to pick on. Transporting across arid open land was relatively easy. Soyo at the mouth of the Congo River was surrounded by dense, impenetrable jungle swamps and could be controlled with sea power from its sheltered port and backwaters. If he took Soyo he could dominate the area and penetrate inland by using the river through the jungle. From here he planned to educate the natives and encourage the persecuted from the source itself.

It took some time to explain and debate the plan at a meeting with the captains of his fleet. Fial persevered, wanting to take advantage of an immediate move unexpected from any quarter, and pushed the fact the fleet's power had been shown when last in Soyo. The relatively better standing in life for the fleet of the victimised, declared pirates, was in some ways due to the native crew of the GHOST. They had risked their lives at the forefront of every battle to the advantage of all and this was a dignified factor in a unilateral backing of the plan: it was now time to free the black members of the fleet.

A factor of concern was the Soyo port slave trade was controlled by the Portuguese. They traded with everyone, but now British ships could no longer carry slaves. Entering the port with the Irish ensign and demanding control would cause a few political problems but solve others.

They were unanimous in the belief that they could take the port by force if necessary, should verbal negotiation fail. Bongo and One to Ten had assisted in the drawing of a map, showing the layout of the backwaters and villages within the Soyo district for tactical discussion. No matter what obstacle was thrown in the ring Fial worked on a solution. Fial gave the first destination as Viana do Castelo port on the north coast of Portugal; he planned to re-stock there. They would still attack French shipping on the way, trading the booty for supplies. He also planned to talk to high-ranking members of the Portuguese church to see if he could raise support for his quest. This would steer the decision on whether the fleet entered Soyo under an Irish ensign or a black flag. By the end of the day the captains returned to their ships and prepared to make sail the next morning; they told no one.

The LEOPARD, badly overloaded with the French crews, was ordered to put to sail with the rest of the fleet and would be given its freedom when in range of Brest. Some of the French crews were operating on the captured French ships against their will and of sundry origin. They joined the fleet, being distributed amongst ships in need of their individual talents.

On the 15th of April 1808, Good Friday, the fleet put to sail from Cork. In the early hours of darkness the GHOST silently lead the exodus, the final ships leaving by first light. The British assumed they were heading north to Scotland.

Chapter 31

Two days into the journey the LEOPARD left the protection of the fleet and headed east, direct for Brest. Captain DuPont watched the fleet fade from the horizon; his crew would carry far different stories of the Irish legend and his rag tag fleet than others they had encountered. Louis Belgarde had become a crew member aboard the Ghost wishing to serve with Fial for saving his life. Yasin the Arab crew member acquired from Ras al-Khaimah felt an immediate bond with Belgarde. He was not Irish or African but a minor ethnicity like himself amongst the more populous. Fial noted this behaviour and worked hard on managing segregation rather than trying to eradicate it.

The LEOPARD successfully made the one hundred and thirty miles to Brest alone. The facts of the story when conveyed to the French Admiralty confused those in command. The French expected that the GHOST would come from the north around Scotland and follow the European coast south, steps had already been taken counting on this move. Several French warships had been sent south from Brest along the coast of Spain to attack the British supply line to Portugal, expecting limited resistance. Those not hidden out of sight along the coast fell easy prey to the GHOST and were taken after limited confrontation.

The morning of the 24th of April 1808 the fleet dropped anchor in the shallow waters of the mouth of the port of Viana do Castelo Portugal. The GHOST entered the river mouth and tied up at the dock as close as could be found to where he had docked on his previous visit. The port was bristling with activity. The British army under Arthur Wellesley was mobilising and heading inland to confront Napoleon's army which had been victorious in Spain.

The British navy operations in Viana do Castelo were headed by Douglas Morecombe, a product of political influence put in place to coordinate the army and navy which were sometimes at odds with bitter rivalry. He met Fial at the dock shocked by his arrival. The GHOST had drawn a crowd and soldiers were brought in to scatter the gathering. Morecombe was accompanied by Captain Milton; his ship the CORNISH QUEEN had been mercilessly sunk by the GHOST off the coast of the Isle of Scilly, England some years before. Milton had only just survived when the longboat he had taken refuge in had been rammed by the GHOST. Milton did not approve of his privateer status with the British nor approve of his presence and pushed Morecombe to have what he had referred to as the pirate leave. Morecombe greeted Fial as he stepped from the GHOST.

"Fial McMurrin I presume, allow me to introduce myself. Douglas Morecombe, in charge of operations here." He extended his hand and Fial shook it. Morecombe was mortified by the strength of the Irishman's grip. He was unshaven and smelt of the death etched into the timber of the GHOST. "May I present Captain Milton, unfortunately you have met before under far less convenient circumstances. He was the captain of the CORNISH QUEEN."

Milton interrupted. "You murdering scoundrel, I will have you hang for what you have done."

Fial moved toward Milton well within his space with a smile and not a grimace of anger. "A murdering scoundrel, I have never referred to the men who killed my father, raped and killed my mother and hung and paraded my stepfather as murdering scoundrels. Opportunists bolstered by poor discipline and scant morals perhaps. You see the fleet anchored in this bay. Not one man has ever killed another by our own hand, differences of opinion are settled by other means. My father and mother could do nothing about what was to befall them. We can do whatever we see fit to handle our destiny. Times have changed. If you wish to continue with vengeance then consider the cost, lay a hand on me or any one in the fleet and the consequences are predictable."

"He is a little overcome at meeting the man who killed his crew," added Morecombe.

Fial stayed in Morecombe's face. "Agreed. I have two French warships captured on the way here, under my agreement as a privateer with the British I hand them over and seek payment and supplies for my fleet."

"Absolutely," said Morecombe. "Milton can you arrange handover while I arrange payment."

Milton was puzzled. "Where did you capture these ships?"

"Along the coast of Spain. There were others anchored only just in sight in bays along the coast. We did not bother with them as they did not put to sail. These ships were in our way."

"I wish to interrogate the crew," said Milton.

"The crews are mine. You will not harm them. You can ask questions but if they do not wish to answer they will still be set free. March them to the French lines and free them."

"Ridiculous, I will do no such thing," said Milton.

Fial was adamant. "We have an unwritten law on the sea that a first class ship of the line will not fire on a lesser ship such as a frigate unless fired on first, is that not right?"

"Yes, most of the time," replied Milton.

"This is not one of those occasions you would see as not most of the time," replied Fial. "The guns of the CONQUISTADOR are in range of your fortifications, if one of those guns has to fire on you it is because you have violated our agreement as privateers."

"You would hold a gun to our head?" said Milton.

"Seems to be the only thing you understand," replied Fial.

Morecombe raised his voice. "Milton you will stand down, I will have someone more befitting to arrange transfer of the ships. You were given a chance."

Fial interrupted. "Let him get on with it. I don't think he's much good at his job anyway but we shall see."

There was an uneasy silence then Milton spoke. "You are indeed a scoundrel McMurrin but a wise one. Who am I dealing with?"

"Louis Belgarde standing behind me here. He speaks for the welfare of all the French amongst us."

Milton became agitated. "Louis Belgarde I know as a French naval rating, I recognise him. He was once captured and escaped back to France."

"Well now he is a member of my crew by choice. Mutiny amongst us is unheard of. During the handover you may learn something from him and he may learn something from you. Tell him about our African friends and voodoo Louis, should give him something to think about." Belgarde and Bongo stood next to each other amused by the conversation.

"The black man understands English?" enquired Milton.

"Bongo and his ten friends speak English well. If you want to find out how a black slave feels about what you have done to them ask my crew. You may want to think about how the hell you will confront that in the future as one day it will be upon you sooner than you think."

They went about their business and Fial wished to talk with the religious leaders in the area. Portugal had penetrated the Congo with missionaries for years before to recent times but little was known of the outcomes as it appeared most had never returned. The main religious faith in Portugal was Catholic, dating back to Roman establishment and later driven by the Spanish inquisition. Anti-church sentiment was gaining strength in Portugal but Fial had no contact with the real direction of church institutions outside of the Irish mixed faiths he had been educated and brought up with.

Study had found that neither religion nor armies had achieved much in the Congo due to its inhospitable climate and terrain. Bongo and One to Ten had helped him build a picture of what lay ahead to assist their people. He intended to take a navy, an army and educated locals in at one time, but should he go as a missionary under the Irish ensign in the name of God or a tyrant in the name of change. What he found in a Portuguese church would set his direction.

Chapter 32

Fial, Bongo and Belgarde walked through the bustling streets of Viana do Castelo looking for a church. The streets were busy and many British soldiers were in street taverns drinking. Street markets laden with fresh produce with stall holders bartering with all. Fial had brought Belgarde along as he could speak Spanish, a language he was poor at. The street vendors were poorly-dressed, looked tired and generally gave the impression of bad health.

The smells changed dramatically as they passed different areas of the town. Taverns wafted the smell of rum through the air, something Fial had learnt to detest as it was given to sailors prior to going into battle and he associated the smell with horrific bloodshed and loss of life. He had long banned the use of the beverage on his vessel after finding sugar produced by black slave workers was used in the making of rum. Rum drinking however was common on the rest of his fleet.

They passed many beggars in ragged clothing, some children, signs he thought of the onslaught of war; hands outstretched for a copper to acquire sustenance for the day. He gave generously at first but the throngs of poor kept coming wherever

they went. Portuguese and British soldiers looked at them sideways, especially at Bongo. Fial realised they had probably never seen an armed black walking the streets before with muskets in full view on his body.

He had found no church and got Belgarde to ask a fruit stall holder where he could find the clergy. After a lengthy conversation that Fial did not understand Belgarde informed him there was a church some half a mile ahead on the outskirts of town. He had been told they would find no clergy there as they lived in the big mansions above the church overlooking the town. The stall holder's father once owned the land but he was tried by the local officials of the Spanish Inquisition and accused of being a heretic some years ago and burnt to death. All his father's property was seized by the church and the stall holder was permitted to work the land, having to give over half his income to the church for the privilege.

Fial became aware of the power of the church under such circumstances by asking further questions. The more he heard the more agitated he became. Although the practice of the inquisitions was under siege the war had disrupted stable government in the area and advantage was being taken of the situation. Napoleon was also opposed to the practices of the inquisitions and moved to outlaw them in France, but the war was blocking any unilateral move regarding the practice. Fial headed for the church to see things for himself.

The architecture of the town differed a lot but Fial was familiar with the new Palladian buildings seen in England, this however did not help a feeling of unease among the Roman stone and Spanish colonial terraces. His vision of a church was completely distorted as he looked up the tall spires of what he would call a monster cathedral. As they approached the building there was a distinct lack of people bartering, begging or doing anything else. They were stopped in the lavish entrance way between the colossal fortified doors by what appeared to be members of the clergy wearing long red and white gowns. They ordered Fial to remove himself from the building. Fial did not understand the conversation with Belgarde but Fial could see it had turned into a confrontation by the raised voices.

Belgarde told Fial they were not permitted in the church, especially with a black man and they would need permission from the bishop. Fial had enough and pushed his way passed them, one falling to the floor as he entered the main hall. Fial had not seen such a building apart from the major cathedrals in London. Rows and rows of solid oak benches either side of the wide aisle lead up to the raised altar on three different levels but he could not see the detail as he was so far away. It was obvious that the hardware and fittings were gold. There was a table to his left upon which were several goblets. He picked one up looking beneath the base, seeing the hallmark of Spanish goldsmiths. He smashed the utensil back on the table and burst outside. The two clergy had run off in the direction of the grandiose mansions above the church. Fial walked among the graves in the grounds, reading the headstones. He could not find one person who appeared to be a common member of the town's population.

The two clergy returned with another in a pure white flowing robe and tall hat with flowing tail. His robe and headdress was encrusted with gold embroidery. He was flanked by two soldiers wearing armour. Fial did not recognise the uniforms

and drew his pistols holding them by his side. The clergyman spoke English with a broad Spanish accent and spoke to Fial when in earshot.

"Who are you and why do you desecrate this holy place with weapons?"

"I am Fial McMurrin, Irish seaman. Who are you if you don't mind me asking?"

The cleric had difficulty understanding Fial's accent and hesitated. "I am Bishop Alfonso Raul, head of the Catholic diocese in this city." He hesitated again. "You are the captain of the ship they call the GHOST?"

"I am."

"You have knocked one of my flock down in anger yet I heard you were a man of God."

"Men of God in my land are the poorest amongst us including bishops. They are too busy helping their flocks to be gathering wealth themselves. I see none of this here. If you are a man of God your people in town would not be begging for a meal."

"They are not people of our faith."

"How long has this church worked in this area?"

"For all time, as long as can be remembered. We have a similar enemies. The British are flexing their muscles here, something you despise I hear."

"The British have a place called Westminster, they are way ahead of you in my eyes and I would not call them friends of mine. They are empire builders but they don't hide behind the cloak of a church, they openly admit it."

"How dare you!"

"I saw a man who had his father killed and his land taken in the street here. Can you tell me what his father had done?"

"We have taken the land off several heretics in this area, saving the people from the influence of those with evil intent."

"To save the people in this town you need to give them food and a place to live, work to do, giving meaning and fostering families."

"We look after those of our diocese."

"I have seen enough here. The port of Soyo in the Congo; I have seen this place. I hear you have worked in this area for many years. What can you tell me of it? Bear in mind that my dark friend here is from there and can understand every word you say."

"A black man who speaks English."

"Yes. I have another ten in my crew who can."

Raul thought for a few seconds. "We control the trade in the area, much of our income is sourced from there. Work in the area is slow; the place is ridden with disease. It is the centre of black magic or voodoo. A religion of savages."

"I'm surprised you have not called them pagans. Enough work has been done on the word to vilify anyone who will not comply with what you want."

"What an impertinent and offensive person you are monsieur. I will have to summon the guard to incarcerate you as a heretic."

"Well I was wondering when someone was going to call me something new. How's that Bongo I've made it to a heretic." Bongo smiled and nodded, infuriating Raul. "Most call me a lunatic. I came here with questions to things that I was not sure of. They have been clearly answered. I hope your guard had a big gun for in the bay amongst my fleet is a ship bearing cannon that can easily reach your

church and homes from the river. Put one hand on any of us and you will be laid waste."

"You would fire upon the church of God."

"No but I'd fight the face of tyranny no matter what cloak it hides beneath. I will be in Soyo long before you can send any message of this. Bongo will get his land back and in the realms of time Westminster will level the playing field for many. I won't live to see that but my son may." Raul stood back and waved to his guards, they lunged forwards with their long lances. Fial raised his muskets, shooting them in the face followed by a rally from Belgarde standing behind Fial. They fell to the ground screaming in pain holding their wounds; their ornate armour had failed to stop the projectiles.

Fial walked right up to Raul's face. "These men are soldiers, poor ones. Decide if you wish to be a soldier or a man of God. If I return and you insist on being a soldier in the robes of a man of God, then I will treat you like a soldier. I will enter Soyo with a white flag and discuss cooperation. Should this fail I will enter with a black flag and show quarter should they surrender. If this doesn't work I will take the port with a red flag. If you do not understand these flags best you find out; as a soldier will need to know."

Fial stared at the white, frozen face of Raul for a few seconds, looked at his other clergy; they avoided his gaze. He walked from the church grounds to the offices of Douglas Morecombe on the banks of the docks. He received payment for the French ships and returned to his fleet supervising the last of the re-stock of larders and magazines into the night. By dawn the next morning the fleet had gone.

Chapter 33

It was midday and Fial checked his position with his sextant. This was unusual for he seldom needed it but wanted to make sure he was right as he was at what he believed to be a crossroads. Two degrees two minutes and forty-seven seconds north by nine degrees twenty-six minutes and fifty-seven seconds west was his calculation. He checked his chart and found he was right on the edge of the Gulf of Guinea as he thought. He could continue south east to Soyo or turn north east to Elmina along the Ivory Coast. The booty from Elmina, a major slave trading port would be substantial but he knew little of the port and it would do nothing for Bongo and One to Ten. It would also make him just another pirate and no doubt endanger his son. He had stood at the helm alone for most of the journey, occasionally looking back at the fleet, trying to fathom the change within him. He was sure his plan would benefit all and held course for Soyo.

In Foilakilly, Ireland overlooking Bantry Bay, it had been some days since Fial had left and Father Donnelly finally found a moment alone. He had been tutoring Will one on one since before the boy was old enough to attend school and was seldom away from him. He carefully opened the wax seal and pulled out a

parchment letter. He recognised Fial's distinctive flowing handwriting, somewhat distorted in places, written aboard the Ghost in poor weather. It told of a place which when necessary would yield the wealth needed to put Will through school and university. Donnelly memorised the map drawn on the back of the letter. He read the letter several times and studied the map until he could summon any detail of it.

A point was marked on the south western end of Whiddy Island in Bantry Bay. He was faced with a dilemma: if he was the only one who knew of this place it could be forgotten in time should anything happen to him. Will was a young boy and would live well past his time. He made the decision to take Will with him to find whatever it was his father had left for them.

It was a fine day, cold but settled and it would take an hour and a half to row to Whiddy Island. He took Will down to the row boat hidden in a cave in the face of solid rock below Foilakilly under the guise of a fishing excursion, leaving his wife at ease. They rowed steadily along the bay edge towards Whiddy Island, taking one and a half hours and going ashore in a small cove on the south western end of the island. The cove was below the settlement of Reenoknock, the only residents being a farming family a mile inland.

From the top of a rock face about fifteen feet high on the northern edge of the cove was a sinkhole, ten feet wide and only accessible by lowering yourself into the hole by rope when the sea was reasonably calm, as waves could break over the crumbling seaward side only a few feet wide. If the water level in the hole was affected by the waves it took a few seconds for the level to wane and leak back into the sea through the broken rock. Donnelly found a heavy hemp rope, with knots about a yard apart, hung within the trunk of a hollow of a dead tree a few yards from the edge of the hole exactly as stated in the letter. He knew he was in the right place.

He threw the rope down the hole, the end being tethered inside the hollow of the tree it was hung in. It reached the bottom of the hole exactly. He first assisted Will to climb down the rope some fifteen feet to the bottom of the hole then followed himself. The darkness of a cave under the rock face was illuminated by a candle lit with flint and tinder, also hidden within the hollow tree. The cave was tall enough to walk through and they ventured into the cave some fifty feet to the end. Donnelly began to move a pile of rocks one at a time from one corner of the rock face. He rested when the pile he moved grew taller than Will in the middle of the cave blocking their exit. Will took over, moving a small rock. An area of black timber could be seen. Donnelly got his second wind and scrambled to expose what they had found. A few more minutes revealed a black timber chest with heavy steel edges and corners, Will attributed its smell to what he could remember of the galleys of the Ghost. A heavy steel clasp held the chest closed but with no lock attached. Donnelly went to move the chest out but it was too heavy, this he thought surprising as it was not big by any means—about two feet square. He had to move all the rocks around the chest before he could open the lid; its hinges squeaked in protest as he forced the lid back.

He passed the candle across the surface of the contents and they stared in disbelief. The chest was full of gold coins and gold bars.

"My God Will, this would be a king's ransom, never in my life would I have thought my own eyes would see such a thing. Your father has left this here for your schooling, we take enough to last a while then return when need be."

"Can we not take it all now?" asked Will.

"No my boy, we need plan how to use this wisely and not be creating any attention to ourselves. While it lies here only we know. When the time comes we can use some of this to buy the rich and put you on a path to Westminster. It is your father's dream you fight for us with the power of the pen and not the sword; this is my dream as well Will."

They took a few coins, enough to last months, and climbed from the cave carefully replacing the chest, rocks, rope and candle. They rowed home in the failing light with new hope.

Chapter 34

Soyo on the southern side of the Congo River mouth on the Angola side was not a large port but was nearly impregnable unless attacked from the sea. Fortifications were superficial and little work had been done to them since their last visit as the site had no military significance, with only a small belt of land adjacent with the coast to the south free of tidal swamp land in which to move armies in or out. All traffic to inland western Congo was along the river. Fial noted during his last visit that to effectively take and contain the port you would need a small navy and Fial just happened to have one.

Slaves from the port factory were well sought after as they were better nourished than desert dwellers from the rich proteins of the river, forest and swamps. Fial had hatched a plan using Bongo and One to Ten to turn the powerful warrior natives in the slave factories loose on their captors. Patrolling warships in the region had all avoided contact, turning and fleeing once identifying the fleet no matter what genre they were. They would carry news of the fleet's location with them. Fial figured he had two weeks' grace before any moves, if any at all, were taken to contain him.

It was early in the morning on a fine May day in 1880 that the fleet was in view of Soyo. The crew of the GHOST gathered at the bow looking toward the approaching land mass and Bongo and his troop were full of excitement. McGee and Cameron stood either side of Fial. "Do you think they'll put up a fight?" asked McGee.

"No they're aware of our ability from our last visit," replied Fial.

"We can easily take the port—we lay it to waste with the CONQUISTADOR, CASTELA, MERCURY and INVINCIBLE. It would be a deserted ruin. We could walk in," added Cameron.

"Indeed, from where would we get our stocks of powder shoot and food? Look at the ships around here, all merchant men. They come and go every day with a supply of whatever is needed. If we destroy the reason they come they will go elsewhere and it'll take ages to get them back."

"How, they only seem to understand the use of a bigger sword than theirs," added McGee.

"Aye," said Fial. "The GHOST was once a dagger but now is the tip of a mighty sword. Whoever controls this place is used to negotiating with those from many lands; we have that from our last visit. If they see a bigger sword they will need to have it on their side or it may take their head. With us in port with them they can take the ports north and south of here and expand their income."

"But we came here to free Bongo's people and educate them," questioned McGee.

"Indeed, we just don't tell them that just yet. We must gain control in a few days before any news of us here reaches England or France. They will treat us like pirates as we enter port so we will act like pirates. They don't know we are coming and they sure as hell don't know what we are up to. We negotiate on what's in it for us and say nothing of our plans."

"There may be British or Portuguese warships here, what will we do then?" asked McGee.

"Send them home," replied Fial.

"What if they won't go home and want to fight?" asked Cameron.

"What would you do as captain of a small fleet here? Take on the GHOST and the CONQUISTADOR or go home? The British are empire builders, they can't build empires without ships or men to sail them," replied Fial.

"I would follow you into battle against the entire British navy," said McGee.

Fial smiled and put his hand on his friend's shoulder. "And what if we did beat them? It would then be the French or the Dutch. Then India, Persia, we would run out of sons and daughters. We need to negotiate with neighbours. They may not be our friends but they can be our allies. If I was to waste this fleet my son and your son and their sons will suffer. A story in a tavern bar of bravery and heroism bears no weight in the corridors of Westminster. I do not wish to be just another William Wallace or Napoleon Bonaparte who I feel will fall because he uses his people with stupidity." "We've worked hard and risked our lives for this Fial. We have a chance to get our own land. We know we can take this place. We have held it ransom before and won," replied Cameron.

"Remember the Ricard brothers joined us here on our last visit. We found some common ground when we talked to them. We have our own land, Ireland. It will be our sons who have it given back. We have our sword, sheath it, then use it wisely or its edge will lose its cut. Raise the Irish ensign for all to see that we have not come alone. We'll soon see if our Portuguese allies stand with us. Somewhere amongst them someone won't like what's going on; we just need to find them."

"I'm wondering what's going on Fial, are we taking this place or not?" asked McGee.

"Yes."

"We'll be shooting at them then straight away?"

"No, we may not be shooting at them at all."

"Then why have we loaded all our guns?"

"Have you not listened Hainan? A loaded gun may be enough; we have already fired a gun here."

"Since when have you not gone in somewhere and shot someone to make a point?"

"Tyrants and the enemies I remember shooting but others I can't."

"I have trouble telling them apart so I just shoot them anyway."

Fial put his arm around McGee and shook him affectionately. "Well today we'll be learning something new. Don't shoot anyone unless they would be shooting us."

"Right. I like the sound of it and I'll give it a try. I have my doubts, mind."

At the mouth of the Congo River the port of Soyo is in a cove on the Angola side. The fleet dropped anchor on the edge where the shallow water meets the deep, just sheltered from the direct sea by the northernmost tip of a skinny peninsula. The GHOST dropped anchor adjacent to the port dock bustling with merchants and next to a Portuguese warship looking the worse for wear under repair. A British frigate was also anchored in the port, the Maidstone. Without provocation or warning she put to sail and left, heading north.

Fial took a longboat to shore with Bongo, Cameron and Belgarde. They eventually found the Portuguese official in charge of the town and gained an audience. At times communication was difficult but Belgarde could understand enough to get by. Bongo spoke with the black officials of the Kings of Dahomy, suppliers of slaves to the factory. They became agitated on learning that Bongo was of BaKongo royal descent, having returned and walking around armed to the teeth.

Since their last visit to Soyo a great deal of political ground had been gained and Fial was given immediate audience with the Portuguese consulate. It was not the same person they had dealt with on their last visit; he had been infected by disease and passed away. The new consulate was familiar with McMurrin and his fleet and had a direct line of authority from the House of Braganza—Portugal's ruling elite. He was also aware of the escort of the Evelyn from Soyo to Lisbon by the fleet assisting in its voyage to the safety of Brazil. Pascoal Amelio Sanchez spoke English well with a broad Spanish-flavoured accent. He greeted Fial upon receiving his party in his humble residence close to the harbour dock, shaking Fial's hand firmly.

"Señor McMurrin, I am surprised but honoured to have you visit. To what do we owe this pleasure?"

"It may or may not be a pleasure. I wish to base my fleet here to enforce the British law of slave transit," replied Fial.

"The church and the black ruling tribes here rely on the slave trade for their income. It would be difficult, if not impossible to impose this. The Kings of Dahomy and the church would fiercely protect their industry."

"Things are changing or I would not be here."

"We have had no information on your arrival or intent. We heard the British had suggested the coast of France to you."

"I take neither orders nor suggestions from the British Admiralty."

"The church here is wealthy and powerful with influence. They will not take to demands."

"With us here you can control the ports to the north and south."

Pascoal thought for a few seconds. "Mmm... Interesting."

"I will take any enemy ship in the area. You get half of the booty; I get the crews and slaves."

"Half you say."

"Yes."

"We would lose our slave trade in a short time."

"It will be gone in a few years anyway. You will need to find other income to survive. I have seen the trade that passes through here from the Middle East, you have no idea of what is in the hold of ships that dock here. Some trade in wealth beyond your wildest dreams. In twenty years the slave trade will be no more than a trickle. The British dominate the sea in the wars, we could be the next power in the area protecting or decimating trade as we please."

"The British will turn their efforts on us."

"While we are sinking enemy ships we will be left alone. When the war ends we can adapt, we are allies not friends. I hear plans of ships with no sail made of steel that can withstand cannon or fire. These things will be upon us as surely as a black man can have his freedom."

"Should we disagree what is the alternative?"

"There is no alternative, you think I came all this way with a plan I thought up yesterday?"

Pascoal walked to the window overlooking the port to gain a three dimensional aspect of the situation. The view was ominous. "Can you give me an hour?"

"We will return in an hour and negotiate on how we will work. I will not tolerate interference from the church under the guise of the inquisition. Our last stop was Viana do Castelo, the church there accused me of being a heretic. The church should concentrate on spreading the Word of God. If they pose themselves as an army or navy then they will enter the realm of my fleet not the church. My fleet is a sword to strike at tyranny and enemies of my land. Should I need to make things clearer so be it, heretic or lunatic makes no difference to me."

Fial left, returning to the GHOST, and sent word to the fleet for certain talents to bolster their effort. They arrived in longboats and a short meeting bore fruit of a plan to instigate a coup. While the meeting was in progress with Pascoal Amelio Sanchez and his court the fortifications would be overrun and the slave factory infiltrated. The CONQUISTADOR, MERCURY, INVINCIBLE and CASTELA would position themselves within range of the town. Six of the fleet would put to sail patrolling the river and port access from the sea. Any enemy ship of war would be attacked and enemy merchant ships would be held in port. Three frigates would anchor in the river just east of the town so any river traffic would have to pass beneath their guns. By the morning of the next day Fial wanted to be in control with the support of whoever backed him within local governing bodies.

Fial was late, an hour in fact. Sanchez had discussed the situation with his court of representatives from the African powers and the church. The preparations could be easily seen from the window of the meeting place as ships positioned themselves in the port confines. The small Portuguese garrison was empty. The soldiers originally posted there against their will for crimes against the church had flown into the surrounding swamp land. They would later integrate into the privateer fleet. The story of armed black members of the BaKongo tribe lead by a

prince returned from exile spread through the superstitious members of the black African ruling Dahomy. Bongo and One to Ten knew just what to say to instigate panic among the voodoo priests. The court of Pascoal Amelio Sanchez agreed that if anyone could bring them more wealth than they already had regardless of the slave trade it would be McMurrin. The temptation of unheralded wealth won the day. One member of the clergy among the court prayed his thanks quietly for the coming deliverance of justice to the African slaves.

The meeting with the delegation of Soyo representatives was short. Fial presented gold, silver and precious stones from a French merchant ship unluckily tied up at the Soyo dock, demonstrating his word. This easily covered the cost plus a handsome profit greater than if the slaves have been sold to the French trader by the port slave factory. This saved the first load of slaves from leaving the port in effect Fial had bought and released them. All booty other than slaves would be allowed to leave port aboard accepted trading ships, British, Portuguese and American but French ships would be captured or sunk. Fial was given a place on the court with the Ricard brothers, Louis Zachariah and Lord Smithers. A meeting was arranged for the following morning including all involved.

Fial headed back to the GHOST, there was much to do: promotions for crew members to fill the holes left by the Ricard brothers, Zachariah and Smithers while they were on other duties and plans for the rules of engagement and enforcement of a blockade.

Cameron was puzzled and spoke to Fial as they rowed back to the GHOST. "Those fellas have plenty of money, they want more, more, more. Why? Some of them are clergy and all. I don't have much but it's more than enough. I would gladly give it to someone worse off than me. I don't understand them."

"Some of them need it to feed the many, others to feed their greed. Either way we just took this place with a king's ransom and you didn't have to fire a shot. We will soon find the needy and the greedy," replied Fial.

"I can't wait to tell McGee this; he was insisting I should shoot someone."

"Well it will be coming from one who has seen it with his own eyes so he can't be denying it, and I can back you up," added Fial.

"Aye, and it's the first time I've been winning a bet with him for months now. He bet I would be killing more than one before the day was over."

Fial laughed aloud. "The day is not over yet Ronan."

Chapter 35

January 1809. The weather had been surprisingly mild in Europe. The British had entered a new phase of the Napoleonic Wars with the fifth coalition: the United Kingdom and Austria against France. Russian Emperor Alexander the first objected to the British attack on Copenhagen and declared war on the United Kingdom. The face of Europe changed with the growing tide of armies used like pawns to map the landscape.

Napoleon continued his expansion of French territories, declaring war on whoever questioned his authority but the United Kingdom ruled the waves. The Royal Navy had a succession of successful engagements of French ports using guerrilla tactics of hit and run with small ships followed by cannon bombardment of infrastructure. Land bombardment and sea landings of British troops in conjunction with British allied guerrilla forces often failed due to the lack of manpower on behalf of allied forces. Economic warfare continued with the blockade of French supply by sea but land supply of the continental system went practically unchecked with illicit trade from British smugglers filling the gaps. Solid information on the port of Soyo in the Congo had reached British Admiralty and in the confines of his Portsmouth office Admiral Claremont discussed war and politics with Lord Dreyfus of the King's court.

"So the stories from the Congo are true," asked Dreyfus.

"Yes," replied Claremont. "McMurrin is in control of the port of Soyo. I have spoken with several captains who spoke with McMurrin in person, they recently returned from the area. He has made the place impregnable and influences the Portuguese governors there. They have enforced the slave embargo on British ships, halting the trade in the port and plundering enemy merchant shipping to replace the income. The African slaves have become an army for their own land and the balance of power is changing in a civil war."

"We have received complaints from the church of his conduct. He killed two personal guards of a leading bishop in Portugal on his way to Congo."

"They complain to us yet the Portuguese governors endorse his presence. The Irish ensign flies on all the ships of his fleet. If we are indeed portraying ourselves as a United Kingdom then McMurrin is the Irish Navy."

Dreyfus gathered his thoughts. "Some of these things are unpopular in some circles of Westminster. We are experiencing problems with sugar production and some powerful people are unhappy."

"McMurrin's fleet has gained control of the waters as far north of Soyo as Point Noire and as far south as Luanda. He is sinking and taking ships quicker than the French and their allies can build them, they dare not sail the area. Soyo is now the busiest port on the African coast and our ships can pass through surrounding waters with ease. Do we win a war or cater to a few rich and wealthy who can't get their own way?"

"Careful Claremont, we are dealing with politics. Having a healthy respect for a brigand like McMurrin is dangerous. Sounds like you like him."

Claremont shot to his feet knocking his heavy chair over behind him. "Like him! I detest the man. But yes, I have respect for him. What has he ever asked for other than the freedom of those not fortunate enough to be born to it? The man himself is as poor as a church mouse. He has wealth in the hearts of all who follow him. Give me a navy like that and I will give you an empire bigger than you ever dreamed." Claremont sat down and calmed.

Dreyfus felt the moment. "I apologise, I did not come here to argue or squabble about things. I can explain things clearer to the King now. The King is opposed to the dealings of the inquisition. The church will have to confine themselves to the teachings of Christianity."

Claremont looked down at his desk and spoke softly. "I have something far graver for conveyance to those who run the church. McMurrin has executed all the Portuguese members of the clergy in Soyo bar one."

Dreyfus was silent for a few seconds. "What, did I hear you correctly?"

"The court was convened by the Portuguese officials in Soyo. Evidence was produced by McMurrin and others of grave injustices to the church and the Crown. Support in the area from the church for McMurrin is growing."

"The local government officials sentenced their own clergy to death?"

"Yes, they were executed with several British smugglers for supplying the French with weapons and food. What's left of their bodies still hangs along the port dock. It seems McMurrin has learned more from us than how to run a navy."

"These circumstances will make it difficult for the King to support McMurrin."

"We estimate his fleet to be now over thirty warships. The first merchant ships operating from Soyo taken by McMurrin from the French are currently here in Portsmouth. If he was to return to Ireland with his fleet we could not stop him. He has learnt the art of negotiation whilst holding a sharp sword."

"The King will not warm to this Claremont."

"My opinion is we are too busy to do anything about McMurrin, besides he is an ally and damn good at what he does. I would fall short of decorating him for his conduct but he would be the first I would send into battle. May I suggest if you wish to maintain the heart of this man, place the future of Ireland forefront in any dealings."

Chapter 36

The war dragged on. In 1812 the formerly neutral United States declared war on the United Kingdom. The diversion of supplies and funds to defend Canada helped Napoleon in his efforts in Europe. An understanding was signed in December 1814 between the United States and United Kingdom, the status quo ante bellum. Spasmodic fighting took place for a few months after the treaty, including the Battle of New Orleans and the burning of Washington, but peace eventually prevailed.

In 1815 the war of the seventh coalition in Europe raised the United Kingdom, Russia, Prussia, Sweden, Netherlands and German states against France. Napoleon engaged in a war against Russia, badly weakening his armies in the process. Declared neutral countries seized the opportunity to finish Napoleon. The French armies failed to keep the British, under Arthur Wellesley first Duke of Wellington, and the coalition forces apart at Waterloo in Belgium on the 18th of June 1815, forcing a retreat back to France. Politics and public outcry forced Napoleon to abdicate on the 22nd of June and a ceasefire was signed on the 4th of July. On the 15th of July Napoleon surrendered to the British at Rochefort near Brussels. The United Kingdom and its allies exiled Napoleon to St Helena Island in the South Atlantic where he died in May 1821.

At the time of Napoleon's death a brilliant engineering student, William Ryan McGuire, attending Cambridge University, England had recently celebrated his nineteenth birthday. He returned to his home in Bantry Bay, Ireland every Christmas holiday, spending time with his mother's parents who had raised him from a child.

The reputation of his father had followed him everywhere and every Christmas he spent time next to an old hollow tree on Whiddy Island in Bantry Cove. It was this time that was the hardest for Will. He thought of his father and could see the GHOST firing her cannon in the bay and felt the power of the shock waves as he sat above the crashing waves that had carried his father far from him. This had always given him the strength to go on but inside he had always missed his father.

Not much had been heard of Fial McMurrin, some said he was deep in the Congo jungle, others said he was dead. Ships of his fleet had joined the naval assault on France during the later years of the Napoleonic Wars bringing news of his father but he had been able to find out nothing in the last year, immersing himself in work to occupy his mind. Attempts to find him in Soyo were met with stiff resistance from strong African factions controlling the port and river Congo.

William Ryan McGuire obtained a pass in mechanical arts and engineering in 1823 from Cambridge, opening an engineering shop in Cork, Ireland catering for the shipping and mining industry with high pressure steam engines. The first steam rail system was being built in Ireland and steam had started to replace sail in the shipping industry. He was asked by the church and locals to run for a seat in parliament but declined as he felt he had no heart for such a venture, preferring to help people at a grass roots level.

Whilst on a visit to London he had a chance meeting with politician William Wilberforce. This rallied his resolve to find what had happened to his father as he was told of his father's quest for the freedom of the common man and equality for all. Will searched for information on his father in library archives in London but found his name mentioned nowhere, including the Battle of Trafalgar.

In 1832 Will read of an uprising by slaves in Jamaica. Organised and determined they had taken control of their environment. It was rumoured the skills used by the slaves to organise the uprising had originated from the Congo. He had read much of William Wilberforce legislating for the abolition of the slave trade and became as interested and supportive of the man as his father had been after hearing he had set up an organisation called the *Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals*, animals being close to Will's heart.

Will was distressed to hear of the death of Wilberforce on the 29th July 1833. One month later he read of the passing of the Slavery Abolition Act, August 1833, officially abolishing slavery in the British Empire. Will was a businessman and used to reading fine print in supply contracts for the government. He acquired a copy of the act and did not like what he read. The act was two steps forward and one step back.

At the age of thirty-one he decided to find his father, for he felt in his father he would find guidance.

Chapter 37

It had been twenty-six years since Will last touched his father. The longing within him had become too much and interfered with his daily life and he found it necessary to delegate responsibility to efficiently run his business. Will was now thirty-two and he could think of nothing else. Leaving the helm of his operation to those he trusted he began the task of finding his father, and found it settled the ache within his heart. He visited the King's Head at Ringaskiddy in Cork Harbour but publican Evan McTaggart had passed away leaving a dead end. All that remained was the stories and the legend of the GHOST.

However the new publican spoke of a French captain named Louis who often visited Plymouth and had claimed to have seen his father recently. The Frenchman captained a fine merchant ship working from the port of Soyo in the Congo; the ship's name was the ANGELINA. The ship was manned by a crew of black African seamen and they traded in precious stones, nut oil, tobacco and gold.

The information had been recently carried to the tavern by merchant sailors bringing supplies from Portsmouth and Plymouth to the Royal Navy yards in Cork on Spike Island. The ship was pure white but her sails were jet black; she had been known to do twenty knots when the wind prevailed. Although unarmed, for some reason the ship was feared by all who looked upon her. It was said she was once the bringer of death.

Will gained an audience with John Mansfield who was in charge of operations for the Royal Navy in Cork and was once the captain of the DRYAD, his father's first posting on a ship. He found the story of the ship to be true, the ANGELINA a most beautiful, graceful merchant ship, visited the port of Plymouth regularly, trading from the Congo.

The ANGELINA was easily recognised; someone had spent many hours making her a stunning beauty. Her golden-haired angel figurehead was outstanding. The ship never seemed to age no matter how long she spent at sea. Mansfield would not be drawn on the point that the ship was once the bringer of death, saying sailors were superstitious and loved stories and legends.

Will did not tell Mansfield who he was; he thanked him and went to leave. Before he left Mansfield asked why he should be so interested in a brigantine merchant ship from the Congo. Will used the guise of selling steam engines to industry in Africa and that he wanted to use the ship as a contact for a business plan in the area. Mansfield did look at him and think for a while. When Will gave his name as McGuire he finally made the comment that the Irish often looked alike.

Will quickly found himself on a British man of war heading for Plymouth as an honoured guest. Steam interested the navy and Mansfield was quick to encourage the corridor of trade. Will stood at the bow of the massive building of oak, rope and canvass as she pounded through the waves toward England. The veins in his neck blew up as the adrenaline raced within his bloodstream. He watched the crew race around the deck to the yell of the captain's voice, akin to the heartbeat of a lion.

He held the handrail of the mighty structure, feeling the timber grain through his fingertips while his nostrils flared with salt spray. It was all foreign to him but he finally understood why his father could never leave the sea.

Plymouth was bustling with merchant shipping, the odd man of war lay at anchor and Will searched diligently every day for the ANGELINA. He heard stories in the taverns of the Napoleonic Wars, victory over the French and now and then of an Irish ship, the Ghost. Will found sailors to be a breed of their own and looked between the lines for answers but he could not find the ANGELINA. He had been away from home for two months and decided to secure passage to the Congo on a merchant ship. He was told you do not go to the port of Soyo without good reason. He put forward the opportunity of steam to many a captain but was continually rewarded with silence or a flat refusal to carry a stranger into the port of Soyo. He prepared to return to Cork and ask Mansfield for further assistance, boarding a British merchant ship leaving that day.

Will watched the bustling harbour from the ship's seaward side. He looked into the water watching small fish flurry around scraps thrown from the galley by a cabin hand to his left, looking back towards the inner harbour. Will noticed the boy had frozen, watching something over Will's shoulder in awe. He turned to see what had the boy's attention and would never forget the first time he saw the ANGELINA. She whispered past right under his nose; the figurehead was a perfect double of what he could remember of his mother. Pure white hull and decking, not a mark on her anywhere. The black crew members stood out on her deck but those who stowed the black sails at times were hard to see. The activity on the British ship stopped as the crew hugged the railing watching her head up harbour.

Will spoke to a crew member standing next to him, "Is that the ANGELINA?" he asked.

The sailor drew his eyes from her and looked at him, speaking with a broad London accent. "If you don't know the ANGELINA you are not a seaman."

"No you're right, I make steam engines."

"Well bless my soul, I'm hoping to get on one of the new steam-powered ships just to see what it's like. They have made some of steel, but they will never match the beauty of the ANGELINA. They look like terraced houses with windmill stream wheels on."

Will smiled and laughed. "You know I do believe you're right. Where will I find her docked?"

The seaman looked blank and concerned. "No one boards the ANGELINA, she will be in and out in a flash." He looked around to make sure he was out of earshot of other crew members. "They call it Constitution Dock next to the Ghost tavern." The seaman leaned to Will's ear and whispered. "They say she was the bringer of death, anyone who tries to harm her will be cursed. Voodoo flows through her timbers from her black crew and the blood of hundreds of dead."

Will smiled at the seaman as he walked away. "Thanks for your help." Will gathered his bag and walked down the loading plank, heading inland toward Constitution Dock. The ANGELINA had tied up when he walked along the dock edge and noticed the sign of the tavern called the Ghost swinging in the mild breeze on its rusted squeaky hinges. The insignia was of a black silhouette of a

ship, the shape of the ANGELINA, in a raging sea storm. Black crew members from the Angelina were busy securing the loading ramp to the dock.

Will approached them and spoke when in earshot, "Pardon me can I see your captain?" he asked.

An ageing Number Four with his back to Will turned and looked in his face, he froze and started to shake his head violently, then ran up the gang plank he had just secured onto the deck of the Angelina screaming, "Vodun Legba, ahhhh." He fell to the deck floor, writhing around and continuing to shout the same thing over and over again.

Louis Belgarde, captain of the ANGELINA, came on deck from below to investigate. He shouted at Number One, "What is he saying, what is wrong with him?" Number One knelt beside him and they shouted at each other in their own tongue.

"He says he has seen vodun spirit Legba." Number One rose and looked over the railing to the dock below into Will's face. He pointed at Will. "Look for yourself Bwana, Fial double spirit returns young in someone else's body, Vodun medicine."

Belgarde raced to the railing looking down at Will and whispered to himself nodding with a smile. "Dieu de mai être mon témoin, cela doit être" *May God be my witness, this must be.*

He shouted at Will, "What is your name Monsieur!?"

Will recognised Belgarde. "William Ryan McGuire!"

Belgarde thought in silence for a while, sailors along the dock watched in disbelief, you could hear a pin drop. "No Monsieur, your name is William Ryan McMurrin and you can come aboard this ship, named by your father after your mother."

Will cautiously picked up his bag and boarded the ANGELINA, as Belgarde embraced him the black crew fell at his feet. Sailors scurried into the tavern eager to be the first bringer of news. Will looked at the black crew below him, "Is this really happening? I feel a bit overwhelmed."

"So do they, to them your father is a god and you are the image of him. You are about to go where few men have ever been."

"Is my father still alive?"

"Ah oui Monsieur, very much alive."

Will had time to write a letter to his business manager and one to his ageing grandfather telling them of his adventure and that he would return. The ANGELINA completed her trade in a few hours and put to sea: destination Soyo.

Chapter 38

Will had inherited his father's sea legs. He helped the crew as much as he could but blisters formed on his palms and fingers as they were not used to heavy work. He quickly gained a healthy respect for the African members of the crew. Of the fifteen crew aboard four were African and two were from the GHOST, either one or the other never left Will's side. The African crew chanted and sang, rhythms of

their homeland resonated around the deck and the galleys below. Will did not understand them but could listen all day to the beautiful harmonies. Belgarde told Will if you can hear the chant of the black man as he works all is well, if you hear the beat of his drum prepare for war and beware of Vodun if they are silent.

The crew came from far and wide. There was an Arab called Yasin, an American who spoke of a ship called the PHILADELPHIA QUEEN, Hainan McGee an Irish patriot and a British seaman with one eye and a scarred face whose name was Litchfield Boyd. They all worked together speaking many languages, the ANGELINA pressed on and the waves seemed to part as she cut the water's surface. Will noticed no calculations were made with instruments of navigation. The crew would occasionally study the stars and land with a long glass and everything seemed to be part of everything else. Should the wind change then the direction of the ANGELINA changed but her speed never waned. They occasionally passed other ships at close quarters and the African crew were joined in song as they worked, raising the volume so it could be heard across the water, the passing ships' crews lining the railings watching and listening as the ANGELINA whisked by.

Will had already worked out a stark difference between the ANGELINA and the GHOST. The GHOST smelt of black powder pitch and death. She demanded respect for in her hull and on her deck was a fleeting dagger and she was followed by a mighty sword. The ANGELINA was serene, beautiful, an overpowering sight, a beauty that could be looked upon but not touched. She was a king's queen, she bore an aroma of sweet fragrances and exotic foods.

Will's first sight of Soyo was one of might and power, a line of warships anchored across the mouth of the river entrance. The ANGELINA raised the Irish ensign and a shot rang out from the ageing giant the CONQUISTADOR. Belgarde informed Will it was a sign all was well and the ANGELINA had been welcomed home. Warships in the harbour were sparse but merchant ships littered the water awaiting trade.

Fial had established a blockade with ships of the fleet on the western cape of South Africa in 1815 preventing ships from the powerful Quwasem tribe of Ras al-Khaimah in the Persian Gulf from affecting trade in African ports. Fial had not forgotten what he had experienced there and the Quwasem had not forgotten the GHOST. This had assisted the British to sign a maritime treaty with Sheikh Sultan bin Saqr al-Qasimi in 1821. Its position en route to India had made it important enough to be recognised. Ships from Soyo still patrolled the area and trade had improved.

The ANGELINA tied up at dock, work to extend the dockside structures was in progress and a throng of African workers chanted as they progressed. A gradual silence enthralled them as they saw Will. Number Four shouted a few words Will did not understand and they gradually returned to work. Belgarde hammered on a dockside door amid the humble buildings, a hatch was opened at eye level then the door latch clanked as it was released. Belgarde went inside and the door was closed. A few seconds saw the door burst open, Louis Zachariah and Lord Smithers came outside.

Zachariah looked closely at Will. "Welcome to Soyo Monsieur, you are an image of your father if indeed you are his son."

Number Four came between them and glared at Louis Zachariah then withdrew. "I understand Number Four. Pardon me Monsieur McMurrin but we have many enemies and I must be sure your father stays safe."

"He is here?"

"Yes but not right here. Welcome to a different world, this is the land of the black man. Here the black slave is free and your father is a helper of their one God. They have priests just like us called Mama, elder women of the village tribe. Do not underestimate or show disrespect to their religion. They are a warring people, nomadic with no land boundaries, they write nothing down but they have stories told as time goes on. We have set the people here free and in doing so caused a civil war. Here the BaKongo rule but beyond the river swamps it is every man for himself."

"Does my father know of the *Slavery Abolition Act* and the end of the Spanish Inquisition?"

"No."

"Then he need be told; these things are important to him."

"To see your father you will place your life in the hands of the BaKongo. I have never even seen where he is."

"Who do I deal with?"

"Number Four will take you to the old slave factory. Bongo is the king here. He is from the crew of the GHOST as is Number Four. Good luck Monsieur."

Will followed Number Four through thick swamp jungle crossing a tidal tributary across a sturdy rope and wooden bridge, he could see a settlement amongst the undergrowth and children swam in the river below the bridge. It was hot and steamy and Will saw insects and animals unfamiliar to him. He had a strange feeling of both of excitement and fear but knew his father must have crossed this bridge many times.

Will found Bongo an anticlimax for his first view of a king. Bongo was dressed in nothing but a loin cloth, a massive powerful man with jet black skin, sparkling eyes and a wide nose. His short, black, wiry hair was tinted with grey. He was flanked by natives of equal stature. A feature of the modern world was musket pistols in holsters hung from either side of their loin cloths. They appeared shocked to see Will and after speaking with Number Four they dropped to the ground and Bongo kissed Will's shoes. He did not speak until back on his feet.

"Welcome son of Bwana Fial." Bongo offered Will his hand and Will shook its firm grip.

"My name is Will. Can you take me to my father?"

"First we see Mama Queen; she may think you are an evil spirit. She does not speak in white tongues." Will remembered the advice of Zachariah and followed Bongo through the settlement. Women were making things amongst the neat wood and thatch huts, children ran and played everywhere and Will could smell food cooking, strange but appealing to his palate.

An old woman sitting outside a hut was spoken to by Bongo. She was wearing an ornate, floral dress, distinctly western and in stark contrast to the rest of the surroundings. She looked at Will glumly with no changing emotion. This lasted for a while then her face brightened. She spoke briefly to Bongo who translated for

Will. "Mama Queen says you are crossroad spirit from Legba, good medicine, we take you to Bwana Fial."

Will smiled with relief, the old lady rose from her seat, placed a necklace of shells from her neck around his and put both hands on Will, one on each shoulder; she muttered some words then entered her hut.

"She asks the river spirit to protect you from evil, big medicine. We eat then go," added Bongo.

Will sat in a circle with his legs crossed with Bongo and his guards. The women served them white meat. Will did not know what it was but it had a strong flavor and was rather like rabbit. This was followed by a tacky, white pap, very sweet with the texture of a banana but a distinctly different flavor; Will couldn't match it with anything, it was unique. Will was hungry and had his fair share, washing it down with a sweet, clear fluid offered to him which was not much thicker than water. He gradually felt a euphoria he attributed to the liquid and as they made their way through the jungle to the river he agreed with himself that he could take on the world. Bongo did not say much and Will asked about the distinct lack of men in the camp, Bongo said only one word, "War".

He was helped aboard a longboat, the oars manned by powerful, expressionless natives who thrust the boat up river at an alarming rate. The boat was familiar, as if it had come from a British ship, but the oars were short, used without oar restraints along the edge of the boat as Will had read about in African lands. One thing was standard, they were all armed with musket pistols.

The boat followed the edge of the river and veered off into one of the many tributaries amongst the jungle under the guns of an anchored man of war. The overhanging trees were filled with birds and animals such as small monkeys. Will found the sights and sounds unfamiliar but exciting. A small monkey, startled by the boat's presence, fell into the water and was immediately taken by a crocodile as they passed. Will shook his head as he looked up from the disappearing monkey.

"Evil river spirit, here yesterday, here today, here tomorrow," said Bongo. The boat twisted and turned among the tidal water and Will, sitting at the bow of the ship, could see the tip of a black mast above the jungle growth. He lost sight of it as they rounded a curve, clipping the corner of the jungle's edge. The backwater opened up into a clearing about three hundred yards round and there before him, anchored in the centre as if asleep, was the GHOST. The oarsmen began to chant in song and as they neared the port side of the GHOST. A man dressed in black with frilled, white cuffs and collar came to the railing; he studied the white face as it approached him until when he had reached just below where he stood. He knew it could be no other. As Will climbed the boarding-net draped over the edge of the GHOST's railing with Bongo and his guard, then stood on the deck, Fial McMurrin fell to his knees, head in hands, and wept.

Chapter 39

Bongo, his guards and oarsmen looked on; the blank and puzzled faces had only questions that they could not answer within themselves. They had never seen Fial cry and believed it was an emotion that did not dwell in a helper of their god. What power from the crossroad of life had brought this upon their idol and crushed his spirit to that of the vanquished?

Bongo, familiar with the way of the white man, gave Fial a life line in front of his flock. He spoke softly amid the silence and muffled sobbing. "Bwana Fial. We bring your son. He wears mojo of Mama Queen."

Fial, sobbing in a curled mess on the deck, raised his head from between his hands, looking up at his son but saying nothing. He rose as he gathered himself, stood and embraced his son. He held one arm around his son's waist and led Will to the door and steps leading to the lower deck of the GHOST.

He gestured with his hand for Will to go below deck and spoke to Bongo. "Bongo my man, thank you, we will be back shortly." They went below deck to Fial's cabin where he sat Will down in front of him and finally spoke to him. "William my boy, you have grown into a fine man. I am lost for words here."

"Grandfather told me all he heard of you since we last met. He made the news into stories before I went to sleep. When I went to study in England, I would bring the stories back to him. Grandmother passed away two years ago. He lives alone in Bantry Bay."

Fial stared at the plain timber wall. "I can see her now, she was a fine woman." He looked back at Will. "You studied in England, what have you become?"

"An engineer; I build steam engines."

"Bless my soul boy."

"The chest is still there. We have used only a pittance of what is in it. Thank you father."

"I asked your grandfather not to tell you."

"Grandfather is a wise man. Too much of your life had been spent getting us the chest. It would all be lost with his passing. I needed to know or all could be lost."

Fial lowered his voice to a whisper. "Lost, the dead men I took it from are all lost."

Will became agitated and raised his voice, "The money was won over the dead bodies of my grandparents, the farmers and seamen of Ireland. It is the spoils of war, the war is over but the fight has just begun."

The room fell silent but inside Fial smiled. "Well behold, my son, a man after my own heart."

"I have come to take you home."

Silence again prevailed. "Home. I have no home. Home is where the GHOST is anchored."

"You have a home father, same as the black men here now have a home. Did you know slavery has been abolished in the British Empire? Wilberforce is dead father but one month after his passing Westminster passed the *Slavery Abolition Act*. Your black friends are free."

Fial stood but sat down again. "Why have I not been told of this?"

"The inquisition is finished; the clergy have been stripped of their judicial power."

"Why have I not been told of these things?"

"The people here love you as I do father, your safety is important to them. Two years back there was a rebellion of slaves in Jamaica. It turned the tide of public opinion and the outcry was so loud Wilberforce grasped the power of the people. It was the straw that broke the camel's back."

"The organisers of that uprising were educated here. Are you telling me we made a difference?"

"A difference? All the difference."

Fial wore a look of disbelief. "At times I thought I had failed, even to this moment. Can I go and tell Bongo he's a free man?"

"You can. We still have work to do. I have read this act. They have become legalised workers with limited rights."

"While I have been here boy I have found a people and land so far removed from us I fear it will be crushed by those in power."

"Then if the fight is to continue it must be fought in the corridors of Westminster."

"Do you remember the first time you saw the GHOST boy?"

"Aye, etched into the mind of my heart."

"Her guns have been silent for years son, but she is kept ready should we need her. She grows old and the methods of her sword grow old. We need a new sword boy."

"You are done here father. I need you at home, with you at home I can marry. I will need a grandfather to tend my son for if I am to fight like Wilberforce he too may be without me for most of his life."

Fial stood up and walked to the door. "Come boy, time is short and the ways of negotiation long."

"Father wait." There were a few seconds of anticipation before Will spoke. "I came on the ANGELINA; I learnt of her through tavern stories."

Fial put his hands on Will's shoulders and shook him with a wide smile on his face. "Your mother was from a tavern boy, she gave you to me and she's brought you back. Is she not the grandest thing you have ever seen?"

Chapter 40

Soyo was always a bustling hive of activity, but today many came to see a spectacle never before observed. The GHOST sat next to the ANGELINA at the loading dock in Soyo. Their appearance was as far apart as the lives of the people who had inspired them yet their silhouettes were the same. Bongo prepared the GHOST for sea with all available crew from her original voyages. Many of One to Ten were missing, presumed lost in their quest of taking freedom to the lands of the slave. But Fial McMurrin had been missing for some time presumed lost in his quest, so one could not be sure.

Will and his father had visited the Mama Queen and Will thanked her for his protection while finding his father. Fial spoke to Mama Queen in her own tongue

and she passed a small bag to Fial. Will noticed his father was deeply moved as he clutched it in the palm of his hand.

They left and whilst crossing the rope bridge Fial stopped and looked down at the children playing in the river. His face saddened; a young boy no more than ten years old played a strange instrument in a muddy pool next to the river, blowing and sucking the wooden object in his hands. Will's way was blocked by his father.

"Dad are you okay?" asked Will.

Fial stared at the boy in the muddy pool. "That boy has suffered more than you would imagine. He was brought in by a war party from deep in the river jungle, they told a story of him I could not picture. There are so many like him I am sad to leave."

Will looked and listened to the boy. "What is that thing he is playing? I never heard music like that."

"The sheng, many found their way here from Chinese pirate ships taken in battle. Blow air into one and it makes a sound."

"Sounds sad."

"Muddy Waters we call him. Must come from inside him. When a China man plays one of those things it sounds different, nothing like the feeling inside young Muddy."

Will saw sadness and despair in his father's face. "Take him with us dad."

Fial looked at his son, then back at Muddy. "It would be hard for Muddy to live in another world—he's used to being dressed as he is."

"Dressed in red?"

"His tribe lived in the red clay areas next to the river, their warriors covered themselves in the clay so they could not be seen when attacking their enemies. They were helping us to catch some slave traders working way up river in the red lands."

"What happened?"

"Heavy rain boy, washed them clean, we lost them all. They found their village and wiped them out. We got there a few hours too late. Muddy was the only one left hiding in a puddle of muddy water. He saw it all. At least I was spared that outcome when my tribe was lost."

Will shouted to the boy and beckoned with his hand. "Muddy!"

The boy stopped playing and looked up; Fial also beckoned the boy with a hand gesture. They took the boy with them and discussed his future with Bongo. Bongo was reluctant to part with the boy and needed time to think about it as they made final preparations for the GHOST to sail.

As the loading plank was about to be stowed and the mooring ropes untied providence prevailed. Into Soyo harbour sailed the PHILADELPHIA QUEEN, a regular trader with the port. An American crew member from the ANGELINA was Captain Lance Talbot, formerly a crew member of the PHILADELPHIA QUEEN, employee of Clinton Adams who was the owner of the PHILADELPHIA QUEEN and the Washington Import company. The PHILADELPHIA QUEEN had taken cabin boy Berry from the GHOST years before while Talbot served on the ship. Early reports of the boy had indicated he had done well, being a hard-working lad. It was some years since they had news of Berry so departure was delayed to acquire information to help Bongo make a decision.

Not all the information was good as a gathering of the GHOST crew members heard of Berry, now a young man. The PHILADELPHIA QUEEN had just come from New Orleans where it was known Berry had been sent to a farming operation in St Louis Missouri owned by the Washington Import company. Tavern stories from blacks working on river barges along the Mississippi river told of Berry's mother's cooking being popular in St Louis to the point she cooked for boss men in stately homes and the workers missed her culinary talents. Berry had married a girl that worked with his mother as a kitchen hand. He played music in taverns around St Louis and had a family. Although Berry had found a calling it was thwarted by conflict brought on by alcohol addiction, with fights and bloodshed being commonplace where the infectious music of Berry's banjo band played. This was developing as a culture of its own with the music spreading along river communities with womanising and alcohol abuse.

McGee and Cameron, summoned to again man the GHOST, listened with interest. McGee whispered to Cameron alongside him after processing the statements. "Would you believe that? They have towns like Dublin and Belfast in America?"

"I was thinking the same thing myself," whispered Cameron.

Fial and Bongo discussed the boy. It was decided regardless of the mentioned setbacks common in the British Empire Berry had survived and multiplied, setting foundations for future. A God-given talent guided his path; this could just happen to Muddy. Songs of sadness may just be a colour of the future when carried across the deep, blue sea. Fial agreed to write a letter to Clinton Adams asking that Muddy go to the same area as Berry. Lance Talbot agreed to take the letter to Adams and escort Muddy to the Mississippi area, giving his God-given talent a chance. Muddy was passed to Talbot to find his future; he clutched his reeded instrument in his hand. Fial knelt next to him and handed him the small bag the Mama Queen had given him, Muddy grasped it with his free hand, smiling and lowering his head.

"What is that you gave him?" asked Will.

"A mojo, most powerful vodun magic. It protects whoever holds it from evil spirits. Mama Queen gave it to me just now and told me to use it wisely. I think Muddy needs it more than me. He knows what it is and won't waste it."

Rumours and stories crept through Soyo and a crowd began to gather at the dock. Emotions were high and the gathered were silent as the GHOST put to sail captained by Bongo. Fial looked at the Angelina as she faded from sight; he had aged but his memories of Angelina had not.

The GHOST had not long been dry-docked and her hull lined with polished copper plate to protect her from the sea worm attacking her hull as she sat idle. She put to full sail and passed by the menacing giant the CONQUISTADOR, towering above them, the symbol of power that patrolled the river mouth. Her crew lined the ramparts and railings, the Irish ensign was raised to her highest point above the crow's nest and every cannon of all the warships of the fleet in harbour thundered across the water shrouding the port in smoke.

After the cannon rally the crowd was deadly silent. Fial looked back from the stern of the GHOST as she flew across the waves. Will, standing next to his father again, saw the pain in his father's face.

"Have I done something we will regret?" asked Will.

Fial looked into the swirling water behind the GHOST. "No boy, I gave an order some years ago that the cannon on the fleet would never be fired again unless negotiation was beyond salvation. I know these people well; every gun has been fired in defiance of my leaving. It's out of their control by negotiation. I humbly acknowledge their love."

"You won father; they will be free. I promise what you have started will be finished."

"The war is over son, the fight has just started. Now, tell me about these new-fangled steam engines. I hear they have the power of all the winds."

"Horses dad, they are rated in horses."

"Horses on the sea, bless my soul I live to see it."

"I have plans, a steel ship like the GHOST powered by steam boiled with coal. Twenty-five knots day or night, wind or no wind."

"Twenty-five knots boy, shiver my timbers. If she is steel how does she not sink with all the weight?"

"Bulkheads dad."

"Bulkheads?"

"Aye, parts of the hull full of air, watertight, keeping her afloat."

"How far could she go?"

"You draw your water from the sea for the steam engines. I have calculated that with a full hold of coal we could make the coast of America from Cork."

Fial looked blank. "Is this a story son?"

Will chuckled. "No, dad."

"Have you tried one of these things?"

"No I was needing to talk to you about some things first, I need your mind. You can tell me things that will minimise the risk of failure. Building this ship will be very expensive."

"Have we enough money in the chest? For I have what you see me dressed in here."

Will laughed. "The British navy want to be paying for it dad... and I've met this lady I was needing to talk to you about."

"A lady, indeed, we'll get to that, now the bit about the British navy paying."

"Aye, Mansfield sent me to see a man called Claremont. We met while I was looking for the ANGELINA in Plymouth. I showed him some plans; we have sold some engines to the navy. A lot of people are working on this kind of thing and Claremont liked what he heard. They would pay for a prototype to test and give us a contract to build if we are successful."

"Mmm. Now boy, I'll help with the ship but while we build it we need find someone who can make a gun that will sink it beyond the range of any other gun."

"Why, no one has a gun to sink a ship like that. Cannon cannot penetrate steel as thick as we need to build the ship."

"Wilberforce spoke of things like this. An industrial revolution he called it. If we can build ships like this then so can our enemy. If we have a gun that can sink them before they sail and mount it on our ship we have a mighty sword. I would not wish it upon anyone to fight with a dagger as I first did."

"You have solved a problem before it's a risk. That's what I was talking about. I need your mind for things I can't see."

"I attacked the British with their own ideas. Francis Drake wrote down his plans but the stupid, pompous idiots in charge refused to acknowledge them. I saw for myself he was right."

"Drake, I read about him. Now as I remember the stories of you I hear have an echo."

"The steel covers were my idea, without it we would have failed. I would have been dead long ago, shot from above like Nelson at Trafalgar. This all makes sense. Come below boy I want to hear more, especially the bit about the British paying the bills. That I like." They walked toward the galley of the GHOST arm in arm. "This woman you speak of, tell me more."

"Oh Jasmine, the fairest maiden I have ever seen. Jet-black hair way down her back; her eyes are two colours. She's buxom; taunts me with her cleavage then turns, tossing her hair in my face. She likes cats, dogs, pigs and cows. I love her dad but I don't know if she loves me."

"Have you not told her how you feel and asked her yourself?"

Will hesitated as they reached the top of the stairs, thinking with a blank look. "No I haven't, you are full of good advice. I knew I'd get direction from you dad. Hey, I can introduce my father to her. I can see it now. Jasmine, I'd like you to meet my father, Fial McMurrin direct from the GHOST."

Fial raised his eyebrows. "Does she know I'm your father?"

"No, I've not mentioned it. I was keeping it as a surprise if I could find you."

"Good because she's in love with you, not me."

"You think so."

"I know so."

"I'm not sure if she has child-bearing hips, I think that's important from what I've been reading."

Fial looked wide-eyed and shook his head briefly. "From what you've told me of her son she'll have child bearing hips in a very short space of time."

"I can't tell, I'm not a doctor."

Fial looked blank and was silent for a while. "Can we talk about this later in private son?"

"Yes dad."

"Now get below we have a lot to talk about. Can I hear that bit about the British paying again please? I like that."

Cameron and McGee had been in earshot at the stern of the ship next to Bongo at the helm when Fial and Will had discussed steel ships and guns. They had stood in silence, with Bongo between them looking over the stern at the horizon but the strain became too much for McGee.

"When Fial had that shaking fever years back Bongo do you think it damaged his brain?" asked McGee.

Bongo frowned looking at McGee. "Mama Queen fix shaking fever. Bwana Fial okay."

"Ronan you heard with your own ears he was wanting to sink a steel ship before it was even launched."

"Will makes engines with the strength of loads of horses, maybe he can make a ship of steel float. I heard him say about bulkheads full of air. I'm not sure what he's on about but I think you can. I dropped a big metal pot from a Chinese ship once because it was so heavy three men could not hold it up to put it on the GHOST. It floated away way into the distance; it never sank," replied Cameron.

"Chinese—they're damn clever ya know, wouldn't surprise me if they were growing metal trees that could float," said McGee.

Bongo raised his eyebrows looking at Cameron who rubbed his face in his hands and shook his head. "Will you be going back to Kerry when ya get home Hainan?" asked Cameron.

"I will, home is where the heart is and a Kerry man I will always be."

"Will ya be testing that ship for Fial when it's ready?"

"What the steel one?"

"Aye."

McGee thought for a while. "I'd like to see it floating before I got on it."

"I know Fial McMurrin and I bet you a gold guinea that steel ship floats and has a gun that can sink one of its kind."

"You haven't paid me from the last bet we had about not killing more than one man when we first came to Soyo years back."

"I can't find anyone who was with you all day, when I have the evidence I'll be paying ya."

"I have not killed a man on that day nor any day since, won't you take my word for it as the Lord is my witness?"

The GHOST pounded on as they stood in silence for a while. "We'll buy each other the finest Irish whisky in Cork and forget about it," said Cameron.

"Done," said McGee.

Chapter 41

Epitaph

Time outlasts all living things and it outlasted Fial McMurrin, for legends live in stories. Some leave historical writings of their lives, some good and others bad. To this very day we can read of Napoleon Bonaparte, Lord Nelson and the first Duke of Wellington. We can reflect on the prophecy of William Wilberforce as indeed there was an industrial revolution and the black man of Africa was freed. But we read nothing of the life of Fial McMurrin. The steel ship with a big gun did float and become the most powerful symbol of the modern world, stopping more wars than it was forced to fight. People learnt to fly so well and in such great numbers they could hear the stories of Fial McMurrin from the sailors of Ireland themselves.

Should you visit the fair land of Ireland in the corner of a tavern you may be told of the legend of the Leprechaun, causing mischief, making shoes and counting his gold.

Or you may just hear of the last pirate to sail the seas, an Irish patriot, fearless and determined. Stricken but healed by time, life and destiny. You may hear of a black ship sailed by African slaves who delivered a god back to the shores of his home as he had delivered them back to theirs. Some claim to have seen a black ship in the misty backwaters of the Congo River; the natives call her the GHOST. They tell a story of a ship of death left to the jungle that rotted into the waters and mud of the land and is now part of all that lives there. The voodoo priestess can summon her mojo; she is the bringer of death and disease to all who threaten her resting place. You may be told of the wind in Bantry Bay carrying the sound of a gunfire that could pierce steel fired from an unsinkable ship manned by an old pirate and his son as it returned from America. You may be told of an Irish politician from Cork busy fighting for freedom and building ships to preserve it. You may hear of an elderly man found by his grandsons when he failed to return from a fishing trip next to an old hollow tree above the rocks near the crashing waves of Whiddy Island, Bantry Bay. It is rumoured his buried treasure still remains, untouched, for his wealth was love. He had a smile on his face under his long beard; they say he died of happiness. You may hear his body was placed on a beautiful, white ship that came from the east with the name of an angel and burnt in the open waters of the bay while a chosen few watched in silence. Sailors say if you listen hard enough you can hear the wind sing through her sails.

We cannot be sure if the actions of Fial McMurrin were directly responsible for establishing and preserving the bloodline of blues or rock and roll. Was it he who had fleeting encounters with the past relatives of world champions setting the path of their destiny? Maybe his efforts supported the one slave persecuted beyond redemption whose family rose to the highest office in the world and said yes we can. Maybe it's the luck of the Irish that made his story an unwritten legend, or maybe it's just the power of dreams and the Irish spirit.

