

# The Flying Dutchman



## By Max Adeler

"AS fur the *Flying Dutchman*," said William Potsherd, the venerable mariner, sitting in the reading-room of the Seamen's Mission after the prayer-meeting, and striking the table with the palm of his hand, "they needn't tell me there ain't none, fur I seen her with me own eyes and sailed on her."

"It was that time I was telling you about, when I was fus' mate of the steamer *Indian King*, and the cyclone capsized her, and I clutched a boat as I came up, and clumb into her. Then I seen Em'ly Smith, the cap'n's coloured stewardess, floating about, and I fished her out, and we found ourselves alone on the boiling sea.

"So we run along fur sixteen hours, me and Em'ly Smith. She was as black as night-before-last—blacker; black and fat. But she was cheerful. She belonged to the Sons and Daughters and Brothers and Sisters

of Aaron, of the Tribe of Levi, of Rising Sun, Philadelphia, and she sung them camp-meeting hymns to keep up my sperrits; and it did keep them up. As I set there a-looking at her, I says to myself: 'If the wust comes to the wust, most likely it's going to be my luck to have to eat you, Em'ly; fur when the choice is between an able seaman, as a useful member of society, and a plain cook, there ain't no choice; and I do believe you'd eat tender.'

"But after a while I seen a queer-looking craft coming towards me with all sails set, and I thought she'd run us down; but I ketched at the stay-chains as she reached me, and, tying the painter of the boat to them, I was on deck in a minute, and then I lifted Em'ly Smith out.

"I dunno how to tell you what that craft looked like. A kind o' dusky red all over her decks and her sails and her bulwarks, and the red a kind o' soft glow like the head of a match in a dark room. I never seen nothing jus' like it afore or

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since, excepting it was punk out in the woods; only that ain't red, and this ship was red and sort o' dim, shiny like frum stem to stern. And she flew through the water faster'n any steamer you ever seen.

"Well, sir, I'm no coward, but I own up I was skeered with the look o' the boat; and not a man in sight on deck, not even at the bellum; the sails jus' a-bulging and the vessel a-whipping over the sea, the same 's if she was a bird.

"So then I seen a light or something a-shining through a crack in the cabin aft, and I now to Em'ly Smith—

"'Now, Em'ly, you just set there on that bucket till I look around and investigate'; and I made my way boldly to the cabin, and went down and shoved the door open and walked right in, ezzactly 's if I was the skipper himself.

"There was two men a-setting at the table in there, the queerest dressed you ever seen, and they was a-playing some kind o' game with cards that was so black they might've been made of charcoal fur all the difference I could see.

"Then one o' the men who set a-facing me looks up just as he was going to play a card; and when he seen me, he says—

"'Well, you *haves* nerve! Where did you come frum? Where's your manners? Don't you know this is private?'

"Then I ups and tells him, and fur a minute he looks at me 's if he'd half a mind to chuck me overboard, and then he says—

"'What's your name?'

"'William Potsherd, mariner,' says I, 'of Tom's River, New Jersey,' and then I explains to him how I happened to drop in on him; but leaving out the particulars about Em'ly Smith.

"'Set down, William,' says he, after reflecting for a little while. 'I'm Cap'n Schmitt, the skipper o' this yer craft, and this is my fus' lieutenant, Vanderwerken.'

"'But the fus' lieutenant seemed sour about something, fur he jus' looks at me and scowls; and when I took a chair, he went over into the corner by the cupboard and scowled wuss and wuss.

"'And so you thought you'd ship with us for the v'yage, did you, William?' says Cap'n Schmitt, with a grim smile on his face—a face all scarred and gashed with wrinkles. Why, when you looked at it, he seemed 's if he might be a thousand years old or more.

"'I dunno,' says I, 'about no v'yage. That depends where you're bound to,' says I.

"'Bound!' he says, half a-larting. 'We're

bound to Tartaroo,' says he, 'if you know where that is, and we're a long time a-gitting there.'

"'Where're you frum,' says I.

"'Where're we frum, Vanderwerken?' says he, a-turning to his fus' lieutenant and larting three-quarters this time.

"'But Vanderwerken jus' scowled and grunted and grunted and scowled and said nothing. Then the Cap'n looks at me ag'in serious, and says—

"'Never you mind, William, where we're frum. It's so long ago I've almost clean forgot.'

"'Don't you keep a log?' says I.

"'Why, dog gone it, William,' says Cap'n Schmitt, 'I've writ and writ till I reckon I've about wore out the alphabet. I've writ all over the cabin walls and the furniture and the poop-deck and the sails! Log! I give her up,' says he, 'more'n a hundred years ago.'

"'And that's a good while, too,' says I, 'jus' to be kind o' sociable.

"'I've been a-sailing yer since 1644,' says he. 'Sometimes it seems to me like a million years, and then ag'in sometimes it seems 's if it begun only last Tuesday a week. My head's got queer over it,' says he, 'so that rally I'm not jus' sure if I'm real or unreal. Would you mind poking me with your finger, Billy, and telling me what you think?'

"'So, jus' to oblige him, I jabs him a couple of times in the cheek and the shoulder, and I says to him—

"'Cap'n Schmitt, in my opinion you're not real real. You're about like tallow or cheese; you give when I poke you.'

"'Half real and half unreal, s'pos'n we say,' says he. 'Maybe so. I'm not flesh and I'm not sperrit. That's my view, too. What d'you think o' that, Vanderwerken?' says he, a-turning once more to his fus' lieutenant. But the fus' lieutenant he snuffles and scowls and looks at the cabin roof and declines to answer.

"'Where did I understand you to say you hail frum, William?' says Cap'n Schmitt.

"'Tom's River,' says I.

"'And where's that?'

"'I told him; and when I mentioned Barnegat Bay, I seen him kind o' flinch, and I knowed why before I left him.

"'That's in the United States, and the United States is the greatest country on this earth,' says I; and then, knowing he hadn't heard any news lately, I went on and told him about General Washington and the Revolution.

"'General Washington?' he says, trying

to remember. 'Was that the man that was left, a little baby, in the balustrades?'

''No, no!' says I. 'He was fust in peace, fust in war, and fust in the hearts of his countrymen. You've got your mind on Moses.'

''Hah!' says he, 'maybe I have. I get mixed on people somehow, nowadays. And how is things, William, amongst the folks on shore? I git to hankering after 'em now

'I seen a film gathering on his eyes as I spoke, and so I went on and told him about my baby grandson and his golden hair and blue eyes, and two lovely white front teeth and his cherry lips, until presently Cap'n Schmitt waves his hand at me and says—

''Stop, William! Stop that! I can't stand it another minute!'

''Then he heaved a deep sigh, and he was about to speak

when he caught sight o' Vanderwerken standing there in the corner. The Cap'n had something on his mind that he wanted to talk to me about private, and so he says—

''Vanderwerken, jus' run up on deck for a few minutes and look at the glass, and see if we're in the Tropic of Capricorn or in Cancer.'

''Vanderwerken said he wouldn't go, and so Cap'n Schmitt flew at him and gripped him, and they had it over and over the cabin floor, until directly Cap'n Schmitt doubled Vanderwerken all up, jus' 's if he was putty, and flung him out and bolted the door. Through the window I seen Vanderwerken a-laying there, gradually coming back to shape ag'in, fust one dent bulging out and then another, jus' like one o' them rubber doll-babies, you know.

''Cap'n Schmitt then sets down ag'in by the table, and he says to me—

''William, I'm a-beginning to git tired o' this kind o' thing. Here I've been a-setting and

playing seven-up with Vanderwerken fur two hundred years, and it's gitting to wear on me—Vanderwerken won't learn to play checkers; and so I'm yearning fur land and sunlight and the comforts o' home, and seeing you makes me want 'em wuss. If I could once git ashore in a new place and begin life over ag'in, I believe I could live down my past. Don't you think I could, William?'

''I dunno,' says I, 'because I dunno nothing about your past.'



''Took off my hat and cursed the thunderstorm.'''

and then. And speaking of babies ah, Billy!' says he to me, a red tear a-rolling over the crinkles on his face, 'what wouldn't I give to see one o' them ag'in? Tell me, William, do they still smile when the angels speaks to 'em in their sleep, and take notice, and all that kind o' thing, jus' thg way they used to?'

''Jus' the same,' says I; 'and shake their rattles and chew their gum-rings, and cry and keep the folks awake at nights. Jus' the very same.'

“Don't you know,” says he, “what's the reason this yer ship keeps a-flying over the seas? Where 've you been, William? It was this way: In 1644, while I was a-trying to take the ship around the Horn, there was an awful thunderstorm that kep' a-driving us back and nearly capized us. It made me so mad that I stood out on the poop-deck and took off my hat and cussed the thunder-storm; and because I did that I was condemned to keep flying over the seas and never to come to port. Tough luck, William, don't you think, jns' fur cussin' at one little thunderstorm?”

“Why don't you repent?” says I.

“Repent, William?” says he. “What's the good of repenting when repenting won't take off the cuss that was put on me? No, sir, if repenting would 've lifted it, it would 've been lifted long ago.”

“And what will lift it?” says I.

“Cap'n Schmitt looked around to see if Vanderwerken was a-listening, and then, very solemn, he says: ‘There's only one thing, William, that'll do the business, and that is for a fair young maiden to marry me. And now look at it, Billy—if I can find a fair young maiden to marry me, the cuss will be removed; but, don't you see, I'm not 'lowed to go ashore to find a fair young maiden and to court her and to ask her—and there you are, blocked at both ends; no chance one way or another. Do you think that's a square deal on me, William? Blamed if I do. So what I want to do is to find that girl somehow and marry her and settle down and make a fresh start. Can you think how you could help me, Billy?’”

“Settling down's all right,” says I, “and starting fresh's all right, too, but I don't know about marrying.” Then I looks him over and says: “Because girls is more particular now than they used to be. You're no longer young, you know. Did you say 1644? Well, Cap'n Schmitt, you're two hundred and fifty if you're a day, and that would seem old to most girls.”

“I know it,” says he, “but I'm not so bad-looking, William, now, am I? And besides” (and then he looked around ag'in to find if Vanderwerken was a-lurking by the door), “I'm jus' a-rolling in wealth.”

“You are?” says I.

“Jus' a-rolling in it.”

“What are you wuth?” says I, fur that very minute it come into my mind like a flash of lightning that him and Em'ly Smith might fix up a match betwixt 'em if there was anything in it fur me.

“What am I wuth?” says Cap'n Schmitt. “Well, maybe I can't put it in straight figures or in fractions, but, Billy, I pledge you my word I have billions of dollars and tons of diamonds and jewellery, to say nothing of fus' mortgages and Government bonds; more'n you can count,” says he.

“Big talk,” I says, “never went fur with me, Cap'n Schmitt. Seeing's believing, and nothing else is. Where is this stuff?”

“It's buried,” says he, “buried good and tight.”

“Buried for good, you mean,” says I, just to draw him on.

“Buried on the beach of Barnegat Bay,” says he, “but buried where you can't find it without the chart; and I've got the chart. Howsomedever,” says he, “the half of it goes to the man who finds the girl that will have me.”

“Do you mean that, Cap'n Schmitt?” says I.

“I'll write it and sign it and seal it,” says he. “Half's enough for me if I have love's young dream along with it.”

“Cap'n Schmitt,” says I, “it comes to my mind that maybe I can help you out. But before we strike a bargain, tell me if you prefer a blonde or a brunette?”

“It don't make no great difference,” says he, a-waving his hand; “but brunettes is my favourites.”

“Dark brunettes, or tollably light brunettes?”

“Rather dark,” says he; “but I don't care fur freckles.”

“I think I know one that'll suit you,” says I.

“I make no p'int about beauty,” says he. “I want her to be soulful. Her soul must look out of her eyes. Her heart must throb in unison with mine—throb for throb. Git me such a wife as that, William, and half the treasure is yourn and welcome.”

“Give me a glance at that chart, jus' for a minute, Cap'n, will you?” says I.

“Cap'n Schmitt turned around to get the chart out of the locker, when suddenly he dropped his hands and said—

“What is that? D'ye hear that?”

“I heard it well enough. Em'ly Smith, out there in the forecastle, had struck up and was singing ‘Swing Low, Sweet Chariot,’ and she sung it fine, too.

“Oh, that's nothing,” says I, fur I wanted to get my hands on the chart and to have the contract signed before I introduced him to Em'ly. “That's Vanderwerken,” says I.

“Vanderwerken's grandmother!” he

says, wild with excitement. 'You have to steady yourself ag'in' something when Vanderwerken sings. That's an angel, or I'm no judge. Let me get out o' that door.'

"'Cap'n Schmitt,' says I, putting myself betwixt him and the door, 'I don't want



"And Vanderwerken set aside of her on another bucket."

no trouble, but you can't pass me till I see that chart.'

"His eyes flamed fire, and he looked like a fiend as he drew his cutlass and made at me. But I picks up a chair, and I says to him: 'Now, steady, steady, my man! Don't try no game o' bluff with me. Hand out that chart.'

"'I'll kill you!' says he, making a pass at me. 'Git out o' my way!' He struck at me, but I ketched the blade on the leg o' the chair.

"'You can't skeer me,' says I. 'What are you, anyway? You're nothing but a sceptre; and if I couldn't whip a sceptre, I'd be ashamed to go home and meet my relations.'

"He seen I meant business, so then he begun to halloa for Vanderwerken.

"'Never mind Vanderwerken,' says I. 'The door's locked; and i. it wasn't, I'm not afear'd o' Vanderwerken.'

"Just then we ketched the sound o' Em'ly Smith's voice ag'in. She was on the eleventh verse of 'Swing Low, Sweet Chariot.' Cap'n Schmitt dropp'd the p'int of his cutlass and listened.

"'Heavenly, ain't it?' says he.

"'Yes,' says I, 'heavenly it is. And that's the girl I had in my mind fur you if you'd only play fair about that Barnegat Bay business. I never see such a fool as you—a-throwing away the only chance you're ever likely to git.'

"Then Cap'n Schmitt begun to quiet down, and he says—

"'She come along with you, did she?'

"'She did,' says I. 'I'm her protector; and I'm a-going to protect her, too.'

"'I'll tell you, William,' says he, 'what I'll do. Give me a look at her; and if I fancy her, half the treasure's yourn.'

"'No,' says I; 'I'm a-taking no chances. Give me the chart or lose Em'ly.'

"'Is that her name?' says he. 'Em'ly! I always thought it lovely. Em'ly what?'

"'Smith,' says I; 'pretty much the

same name as yourn. Hardly any trouble to change it.'

"Cap'n Schmitt begun to think; and while he was setting there thinking, the thirteenth verse come a-floating in the cabin window, and it was clear to me something or other was making Em'ly Smith do her best. She sung like a canary. As her voice died away, Cap'n Schmitt got up and went to the cupboard and takes out the chart and hands it to me and says—

"'Billy, I'll do it! But you'll divide even with me if you get there fust? Give me your hand on it.' And so I shook hands with him, and then we went on deck.

"There was a kind o' half gloom, so's you couldn't see things quite plain. I glanced at the binnacle, and found the compass a-p'inting jus' the way the ship was a-going. It always did that. Then I looked at my watch, and it was jus' midnight. The works was a-going, but the hands never moved frum twelve whilst I was on that ship. Fur away in the forecassle I could see the whites of Em'ly Smith's eyes as we moved towards her.

"There she was, still a-singing, and Vander-

werken set aside of her on another bucket. He had a-holt of her hand, and his eyes was shet, and he was jus' a-drinking in the music, perfectly happy.

"So when we come near, Cap'n Schmitt whispers to me—

"'She's somewhat darker than I expected.'

"'It's the gloom,' I says. 'She shows off better in the daylight.'

"'And I don't see,' says he, 'how we can honestly call her a fair young maiden; and that's the kind, you remember, that I have to have, to lift the cuss.'

"'She's thirty-six,' says I; 'and that's very young compared with two hundred and fifty; and as fur fair, what I think is that she has to be fair in the sense that she'll play fair—jus' be honest, you know; and Em'ly Smith'll do that every time.'

"Em'ly Smith stopped singing jus' then, and Vanderwerken, keeping his eyes shet, says: 'More! more! let's have some more, Em'ly.' So then Em'ly Smith starts in on the fifteenth verse; and as she drawed to the end of it, Cap'n Schmitt stepped over and kicked the bucket frum underneath Vanderwerken, dropping him on the deck.

"Then Cap'n Schmitt says to her—

"'Which verse was that, Em'ly?'

"'The fifteenth,' says she.

"'Now give us the sixteenth,' says he, and so Em'ly begun on the sixteenth.

"When she stopped, Cap'n Schmitt drawed me over to one side, and says he: 'I think maybe we can make a trade, William. Em'ly wouldn't be jus' my fus' choice, but still there's a charm about her, particularly about her singing. I'm a little shy with girls,' says he. 'Would you mind opening out the subject to her fur me?'

"So I sets down alongside of Em'ly, on Vanderwerken's bucket, whilst Cap'n Schmitt goes to the bulwark and looks over; and whilst Em'ly was a good deal set up by Cap'n Schmitt's offer, she felt she was obliged to decline it. She said she was already engaged to Arcturus Williams, the President of the Sons and Daughters and Brothers and Sisters of Aaron, of the Tribe of Levi, of Rising Sun, Philadelphia; and that, anyhow, even if she was willing to throw Arcturus over, she should feel like going a little slow about marrying a man who seemed to her to be half sceptre and half pirate.

"Of course, I daresn't say this to Cap'n Schmitt, or there'd be trouble right off, and the Barnegat Bay treasure would never come my way; so I had to resort to duplicity.

"Calling Cap'n Schmitt over by the fore-castle scuttle, I says to him—

"'Em'ly says she prefers Vanderwerken.'

"He was pretty mad. 'I'll have to keel-haul Vanderwerken yet,' says he.

"'But Em'ly has a kind heart, and she's willing to sacrifice her feelings to lift the cuss frum you; only she must have conditions.'

"'What conditions?' says Cap'n Schmitt.

"'She promised her ma afore she left home that if she ever got married, she wouldn't have any parson to marry her but Brother Wiley of the Brick Church; and if you're willing to wait till she can git him, she's yourn with love and kind regards.'

"'That's not unreasonable,' says Cap'n Schmitt; 'but what I want to know is: How am I and Brother Wiley and Em'ly Smith going to come together?'

"So we talked it over fur a while, and finally Cap'n Schmitt agreed that me and Em'ly should try to git ashore, and hunt up Brother Wiley, and meet Cap'n Schmitt's ship three miles off Barnegat Light on the fifteenth of March, at twelve o'clock mid-night ezzactly.

"Then we shook hands all around, and Cap'n Schmitt tenderly kissed Em'ly good-bye. As I helped her over the side into our boat, I handed the Barnegat Bay chart to Cap'n Schmitt to hold fur a minute; and when all was ready, he put the chart at me and says—

"'Promise me now, William, that you will divide fair; but don't cross your breath to it, fur that won't go here!'

"Well, sir, I don't know what made me do it, but afore I could take the chart out of his hands I crossed my breath, and that very minute there was a loud BANG! and I was whirled round and round in the air and become unconscious.

"When I come to, I found myself laying in one end of the boat, whilst Em'ly Smith set in the other end singing softly to herself the nineteenth verse of 'Swing Low, Sweet Chariot' The sun was jus' a-gitting up, and the flood tide was a-sweeping the boat into Delaware Bay. Well, we run ashore at Cape May, and Em'ly and me come home on the train. But both she and Brother Wiley backed dead out on the fifteenth of March, and on the sixteenth she married President Arcturus Williams, of Rising Sun.

"As for that Barnegat Bay treasure, there it's a-laying and there it'll go on a-laying, whilst William Potsherd, who might've been a millionaire, can't rub two dollars together."