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"I SHOOK MY FIST AT HIM, AND DARED HIM TO JUMP"

(*"The Hairy Devil"*)

The Hairy Devil

By Morgan Robertson

Illustrated by Gordon M. McCouch



LIVERPOOL JIM had been dozing on the main-hatch with others of the watch, and he suddenly began moaning. We who were awake listened a few moments, until the moaning became choked, then a man reached over and kicked him. He wakened, sat up, looked wildly around, and said brokenly: "God bless ye for that! Was I makin' a noise?"

"As though you'd lost your mother," answered one.

"Lemme tell ye," said Jim earnestly. "Whiniver ye hear me make that noise, wake me up. The hairy devil has me again, an' I can't wake mesilf. Wake me up—wid a handspike, if ye like; but wake me, either on deck or below."

We asked about the hairy devil, and there followed Jim's yarn. It is thirty years since I heard that yarn, and Jim, with perhaps every listener who did not, like myself, turn landsman while there was time, is dead. I never knew his last name; he was a happy-go-lucky Irishman, an able seaman from his feet up, who would ship and run, never realizing a pay-day, and unable to remember the names of the craft he had sailed in. He went to jail at the end of that passage for knifing a Dutchman, and passed out of my life; but he left that yarn, which so burned itself into my soul that I can give it, stripped of Jim's vernacular, as though I had heard it yesterday.

THE YARN

"I don't remember much about shipping in that brig. I was shanghai'd, as usual, and woke up in the forecabin next morning with a head like a bucket. I knew she was a Yankee ship by the cracker hash they were mustering around as I looked over the bunkboard; and I remember asking her name

and where she was bound. But I forgot what they said, and never asked again.

"There were six of us 'fore the mast—a dago, two Dutchmen, a Sou'egian, and a nigger, besides myself. There was a Chinee in the galley, and a boy in the cabin. Then there were two mates from down East, and a skipper from Cape Cod. These three were the usual kind, angels ashore and devils afloat, and afflicted more or less with ingrowin' self-respect. They kept peace in that hooker while we were in her; but we were not in her long.

"Nothing happened until we'd shot out of the Gulf Stream, and ran into the light, shifty winds just north of the trades. Then, as I took the wheel one morning at six, we ran into a mess of wreckage—floating boxes that showed signs of fire, with here and there a charred spar or burned boat. The weather had been fine, so we concluded that some craft had burned to the water's edge and sunk. Right in the middle of this stuff was an iron cage, floating on its wooden floor and timbers, and in it was a half-drowned leopard. We passed within a length of it, and the skipper brought up his rifle and emptied it at the poor brute, but didn't hit. It was great fun for the blasted fish-skinner, but when I suggested at the wheel that he save his ammunition for us if we got fat and sassy, he gave me a damning and went below for more. She was a hungry ship, and he was a sensitive man. But he'd wakened all hands with his shooting. Soon we came up to another cage, with some chattering parrots in it. It was better fun shootin' them than the leopard, and when one poor little thing dropped from the bars into the water he was the happiest man I ever saw, and he peppered away while he could see them. We left them behind us and came on to a longboat, dry and tight.

"By this time the skipper's ammunition was gone, and his Yankee instincts were aroused by the sight of that good, tight longboat, nearly new. I steered close, and they hooked on to it with a long pike-pole we carried on deck. Then a man went down and

got the painter, with which we towed the boat alongside. There was no name on it, but it certainly belonged to some Noah's ark bound up from the coast with a cargo of animals, and we could only guess what had happened to the crew if they had taken to it. There were no oars in her, nor water, nor grub; but, crouched in the stern-sheets, too sick or starved to sit up, was a monstrous big monkey.

"The big brute grunted up at us, but seemed harmless, and the skipper decided that he might save not only the boat, but its passenger. Some of the men and the mate protested, saying it was a wild beast, and would make trouble; but the fool skipper was set on his way and overruled them. That animal would bring a tidy sum of money from some zoo, he said. And the boat, though of no use to us, as we had a full complement, was an asset worth considering. It was too big to hoist on deck, but we could tow it astern till we got to port.

"No one wanted to go down and hook on to that brute, so the skipper sent a man to relieve me at the wheel while I did it. The mate had entered up the log at four bells, and he swore he'd make another entry before breakfast stating his objections, so that if anything happened he would not be held responsible. The skipper swore he'd put the mate in the official log as insubordinate; but it all came to nothing, and while they were jabbering I put my knife in my teeth and went down the painter. I didn't get too near that beauty at once. He was thin and emaciated, and seemed almost dead from starvation and thirst; but he had a forearm as big as my leg, and a reach of four feet or more. He had paws big enough to grip a stovepipe, and a mouth, full of yellow teeth, that he opened wide when he saw me coming. You could have jammed a drawbucket into that mouth. I lassoed his head with the bight of a cargo sling, hooked on the tackle they sent down, and when they had partly lifted him I twitched another sling around under his arms, and with this they hoisted him over the rail. When I climbed aboard they had slacked him down so that he rested on his hind feet, and there he stood, waving those long forearms around like two handspikes in a capstan, and growling and spitting in a weak, vindictive way, while his little red eyes snapped at us. They slacked him down a little more, and he only had to lean forward a bit to bring himself on all fours; but he couldn't stand alone, and when they lowered away he fell to the deck.

"He's safe enough," said the skipper. "We'll just make him fast to the windlass, where he can't break away. We'll feed him a little, to keep him alive."

"That's all right, Captain," said the mate. "You're master here, and we'll do what you tell us. Just the same, I'll carry my two pistols from this on. That's no 'rang-outang or chimpanzee; that's a gorilla, and he's promised what he'll do with us."

"And the same here, sir," said the second mate. "I go heeled, and if he breaks loose, I'll shoot; for I'll consider my life in danger."

"Nonsense! You make me sick and tired with your cowardice. Afraid of a sick animal! Here, you men, unhook that tackle and drag him forrard to the windlass. I'll boss this job."

"It took all hands to haul that squealing brute forward. He weighed all of half a ton, starved though he was, and he still had strength to tear a water-cask out of its chocks as he went by it. But we got him to the windlass, and then rigged a kind of harness out of new three-inch rope—something he couldn't untie, and that had no ends that he could reach. I remember there was a strap went round under his arms, another round his belly, and four more around each leg or arm, all of which were connected by swifters hitched in. We tied him hand and foot, and spread-eagled him to get this rigging on him, then we moored him to both windlass bitts. The skipper bossed the job, as he said, and pronounced it good. But he didn't know much about big monkeys.

"We gave him a wash-deck tub half full of fresh water, and he drank it all, holding up the tub like a cup to get the last of it. We gave him a quart of potatoes, and they went into him like marbles down a scupper-hole. Then he got a cabbage that he bolted nearly whole. The skipper was pleased.

"None o' the monkey tribes eat meat," he explained. "They eat vegetable food—cocoanuts, yams, and such. This fellow likes potatoes and cabbage. Steward," he called, "give him potatoes and cabbage once a day—not too much—and what water he can drink."

"Yes, sir," answered the steward, none too pleased with his job.

"We fellows were not pleased, either. We got our whack, not potatoes and cabbage, and we got our three quarts of water, instead of what we could drink. But we said nothing. We made the long-boat fast astern, and the work went on. I took my wheel again, and the skipper went below.

"No one else left the deck that watch. It was the mate's watch below, but he sulked around, and I don't think he went near the log-book. At any rate he had something else to think about before breakfast was ready. A sharp squall hit us about six bells, and for fifteen minutes things whistled aboard that brig. We furled the royals and staysails at the first, and clewed up the topgallantsails, but let them hang in the buntlines. The racket of shortening sail and the discomfort of the wind and spray hitting him excited the brute at the windlass, and he roared and barked and growled through it all. Then the squall passed as suddenly as it had come, the sun came out bright and clear, and it promised to be a fine day. The wind was light again, and we were sliding along on the star-board tack, steering about two points free. I could hear everything that was going on—the rattle of dishes as the cabin-boy set the table, and the voice of the skipper jawing him because he admitted missing his prayers that morning. I've no use for religious skippers at any time; but this one carried a cold wave with him.

"He came up just before seven bells and ordered the rags put on her, knowing well it would delay our breakfast. So the dago went up the fore and the nigger up the main; then seven bells struck, the cabin-boy rang the breakfast-bell, and the skipper called the mate to breakfast, saying the second mate could put the canvas on her, and went down the after-companion. The mate went in the forward companion just as the two men aloft sang out, 'Sheet home when you're ready, sir,' and the Chineese cook came out of the galley to help at the halyards, leaving the men's breakfast on the galley stove. But they didn't get that breakfast, nor even masthead the yard; and the fellows aloft never loosed the royals. I had been listening to the talk at the cabin breakfast. I heard the mate say that he had no appetite, and that a cup of coffee was enough for him; then I heard the scraping of his chair as he pushed back, and his footsteps, going to his room. Then, just as the men gave their first heave on the halyards, I heard a snarling, barking kind of roar from forward, and around the house came that gorilla, with his harness still on him, but with the broken ends trailing behind. We had underrated the recuperative powers of a beast just out of the jungle. He had snapped two parts of new three-inch manila as though it were twine.

"The second mate and the Chineese had

tailed onto the halyards behind the men, and they were all in a bunch near the fore rigging. Naturally they all yelled at the brute, and this disconcerted him a little. He rushed by them on all fours, stepping on the sides of his big hind feet, with his big red mouth wide open, and his little red eyes half closed. The men took to the fore rigging, but the second mate followed him, for he was making straight for the poop. The first one out of the cabin was the mate, with his gun ready; and, to do them justice, these two were game. They were buckoes of the worst kind, but a bucko isn't a bucko without courage; yet they couldn't stop that hairy devil. The first mate fired, but I don't think he hit him. The second mate had no gun, but he made a straight, bodily dash at the beast. It was no use; he danced between the two with his big arms outstretched, and though he hardly seemed to touch them they both went down. Then he stooped over the mate, out of my sight forward of the house, growling like a mad dog. And above the hubbub came the shouts of that fool skipper from the cabin: 'Don't shoot. Don't shoot him. He's worth a thousand dollars.'

"The big beast rose into sight with the mate, dead or unconscious, slung over his shoulder. Straight for the main-rigging he made, and cleared the sheer-pole at a bound. Up he went, three ratlines at a time, to the main-yard. He shinned out this on three legs, holding the mate with the fourth, and when he got to the end he dropped him. I could see the mate's pistol, tightly gripped in his hand, as he sprawled down. Then the skipper appeared with his rifle; he had changed his mind when he saw the brute stooping over the mate.

"'Throw a line to the mate, Cappen,' I yelled, 'or go over after him. I'll hold her up to the wind. Come down out o' that,' I called to the men still up in the fore rigging, 'and clear away a boat.' I jammed the wheel down, and the brig came up, but there wasn't a life-buoy or a plank to throw to the mate, even if he had been in sight, and not a man moved in the rigging. The skipper began pumping away with his rifle, but it didn't go off, and he suddenly said: 'My God! I used up all the cartridges. What'll I do? What'll I do?'

"'Go over after the mate with a line fast to you,' I called. But he ran into the cabin. I dropped the wheel and pulled the long-boat up to a short painter, then stood by the wheel

again, though under her present trim the brig steered herself.

"Down came the brute by the weather leech of the mainsail, and inboard, upside down, by the foot-rope of the sail. Amidships, he flopped to the deck, and arose in a moment with the second mate. He was conscious, and struggled weakly as the beast carried him aloft, and the look on his face was pitiful. He was carried out the yard-arm and dropped, like the first mate; and there was no helping him. I looked for each, but neither rose. Later on, I learned about gorillas and their way of killing. When they fight up in the trees their aim is to push the enemy off and let the fall kill him. That's why he lugged the two mates up after he had 'em conquered. I half guessed this at the time, and as the ugly devil looked down at me, the only man on deck, and then at the dogs in the fore rigging, I sang out to them, knowing I had that boat handy, to shin up to the top and hide, or else come down and fight him with handspikes. The beggars wouldn't budge, and the dago and the nigger kept singing out instructions; but they stayed where they were.

"Having given up the two mates by now, I had thrown the brig off to get steerageway, and just as the brute started down the leech of the mainsail to interview me the canvas filled with a flap, and he scrambled back to the yard. At this moment the Chineese cook must have remembered something in the galley to attend to, for he dropped to the deck and ran into his shop. This decided the gorilla; he forgot about me, shinned in along the yard, and went down the mainstay to the top of the forward house. We all yelled to the Chinaman, but if he heard he was too late. Just as he stuck his nose out of the port door the beast reached down to him and got him by the collar. I'll never forget the screams of that poor heathen as he was lifted up and held tightly against the hairy chest of the monster. But it was soon over; the screams grew fainter and ended before the animal had got halfway up the mainstay. I think he squeezed the cook to death. He went up on one part of that stay, and out the main-yard again, just as a cat goes along on the top of a fence. At the outer gasket he dropped the cook, and that was the end of him.

"Now's your chance,' I called to the three in the fore rigging. 'Come down and get handspikes, and I'll join you. If you don't he'll kill us all, one by one.'

"They never stirred nor answered, and

just then I heard the skipper driving the cabin-boy up the after-companion. 'Get up on deck,' he commanded. 'What are you soldiering down here for?'

"Up came the boy—a whimpering snipe of a lad, who ought to have been home—and the skipper, brave as a lion with two pistols in his hands, but half crazy from the excitement.

"'Where's that ungrateful animal,' he cried, waving his guns, 'that bites the hand that feeds it? Where's my mates?'

"'Over the side, where you ought to be, you damned idiot,' I said to him. 'Give me one of those guns. Perhaps I can do something with it.' But he ran forward along the alley, shouting for the mates, and the boy followed. Down came the gorilla by his old road—the leech and foot-rope of the mainsail—just in time to catch the boy at the main-hatch. The skipper dodged and raced aft again, never offering a shot, and the animal killed the boy with one swipe; at least, he never moved. He wasn't taken aloft and dropped. He was flung over the side like an old bag.

"The men forward began scrambling up the fore rigging, and their motion attracted the beast's attention. Away he went in pursuit, while the crazy skipper, shouting like an auctioneer, climbed to the top of the after-house and began firing one of his guns. I climbed after him, for I saw that he was shooting holes in the air and wasting good lead.

"'Give me one of those guns,' I yelled, and we clinched. He fought me as he might have fought the gorilla, but I was the youngest, and finally got the second pistol away from him. Then, while he raved at me, threatening to shoot my head off, I jumped down, took a careful aim at the beast with my hand steadied on the monkey-rail of the house, and pulled the trigger. It snapped, but that was all; and on investigating I found the pistol empty. I tossed it overboard and took the wheel again, while the lunatic on the house snapped away with an equally empty gun.

"The gorilla was halfway up the fore rigging by this time, and the two Dutchmen had reached the foreyard, while the Sou'egian was going higher. One Dutchman laid out to windward, the other to leeward, and I thought of a plan.

"'Climb aft on the forebrace, each one of you,' I sang out. 'If he follows, I'll let go the brace when you've reached the mainmast.'

"They heard me, and obeyed. Each came aft, hand over hand and leg over leg, under the brace. The gorilla went to leeward, and

followed Wagner, the man on that side. He could beat him and was gaining fast. I ran forward to where the brace led to its pin on the rail, ready to let go on the chance of shaking him overboard; but there was no chance. He caught Wagner halfway along, and though Wagner drew his knife while he hung there under the brace he never used it. The same blow that knocked it out of his hand reached his head, and the poor Dutchman dropped, killed, I think, before he let go. I cast off the brace, however; and then, to give the lower yard a chance to swing, cast off all the lee braces. But it only caused the devil a little trouble; he was jerked forward and aft, holding on to one part or the other, as the brace overhauled, and had almost reached the water before he began to climb. Then he came on, up the standing part to the mainmast-head after Weiss, the other Dutchman.

“Come down by a back stay, Weiss,” I yelled, as I saw the poor devil climbing like mad up the topmast rigging. “Come down and get into the boat.” I had secured two handspikes from the ‘midship rack, and when I got aft flung them into the boat.

“But if Weiss heard he was too rattled to understand. Up he went; and the nigger higher up, who might have come down, did the wrong thing, too. He went down the maintopgallant-stay to the foretopmast-head, and then aloft after the Sou’egian. The gorilla caught Weiss at the topgallant rigging. He gathered him in, and Weiss gave just one screech before his life went out; then he was carried, like the two mates, out the topgallant-yard, and dropped. It was sickening; and all this time that madman on the house was snapping his empty pistol, shouting for his mates, and abusing me at the wheel.

“I saw that there was nothing to do but get into that boat, pay out to a long painter, and trust that the brute would drown himself in the effort to get us. I yelled this to the nigger and the Sou’egian up forward; but they’d got together with the dago on the foretopgallant-yard, and didn’t even answer. Just why the gorilla should have chosen them for his next meat, instead of me and the skipper, I never could understand; for we were making all the noise. But he may have been affected by the sight of the long-boat just under the stern, which reminded him of his late suffering, and avoided it. At any rate, he went down the topgallant-stay after the nigger.

“Come down by the topgallant-backstays, and come aft to the boat,” I yelled, ‘and here,

you,’ I said to the skipper, ‘you get down below and get up some water and grub. Quick, now, for there’s no knowing how long we’ll stay in that boat.’

“He looked at me somewhat sadly, and more sanely than I expected. ‘Yes,’ he said. ‘We must abandon ship. It is the will of God.’

“‘Hurry up,’ I answered. ‘Get some water and grub; and if there’s a chance, get a couple of oars out of the quarter-boat.’

“He went below, and I watched the gorilla. I suppose I might have cleared away the quarter-boat cover and got the oars myself; but I was at the wheel, and you know the habit of years. You must stand by your wheel though the heavens fall.

“I had got so used to the killing of men up aloft that I didn’t care to watch the next performance. I busied myself with yelling at the skipper, and just as he came up I saw the sprawling figure of the nigger come down on the lee side; but I knew he was done for, and just took a look at the Sou’egian and the dago, sliding down the flying-jib stay with the black monster after them. They went out of sight behind the foretopsail, and I thought only of myself. There was the skipper with his chronometer. The fool had brought only his chronometer, when we needed water and oars. He placed it on the taffrail.

“‘Get some water, you fool,’ I yelled in his ear. ‘Quick! He’ll be aft in a minute.’

“‘Get into the boat and take this chronometer,’ he said quietly. ‘I am master. I must be last to leave. I must get the ship’s papers.’

“Down went the lunatic, and I cleared away the painter and got on the taffrail, ready to jump. Then I saw the huge bulk of the gorilla rise up over the knightheads. No doubt he had finished his last two on the head-gear, and had come in to celebrate. He struck an attitude, whirled his long arms like an orator, and roared his challenge to the rest of humanity—a sort of barking, booming, howling sound, with a background of growls. Then he spied me on the taffrail, and down he flopped off the fore-castle deck.

“‘Hurry up, Captain,’ I called. ‘Hurry, for your life.’

“It was a horrible sight to see that beast coming aft. He came on all fours as fast as a horse could run, but he came nearly erect, swaying from side to side like a drunken man trying to walk straight; and his mouth was open, wider and redder than ever, and his

The Hairy Devil

little eyes were almost hidden behind that devilish grin. He had reached the break of the poop before the skipper appeared, tucking some papers into an inside pocket.

"'Jump,' I sang out, and throwing the painter into the boat (for I wouldn't trust that idiot to bring it with him), I sprang after it. When I picked myself up the skipper was on the taffrail, but the gorilla had got him, and the chronometer fell overboard. It was no fight. The skipper spluttered and then shrieked, as the brute gathered him in, and then it was over. The hairy devil used his teeth for the first time. He sank them into the skipper's neck, and there was a crunching sound. Then he pushed the man from him, and he fell, splashing me with water as he struck.

"The boat had sagged back about twenty feet by now, and the brute gathered himself for the leap. He hesitated for a moment, but I was past hoping that he wouldn't take it. What I had seen must have turned my brain, for I grabbed one of the handspikes, shook my fist at him, and dared him to jump.

"'Come on here, if you dare, you murdering son of a thief,' I screamed. 'Come on, you killer of niggers and dagos and Dutchmen and idiots. I'm none of that. I'm an Irishman. Come on, damn you.'

"He came, all arms and legs. He almost fetched the gunwale, but missed by an inch. Down he went, and came up blinking and whimpering, as though asking me to help him into the boat. I helped him, I did. I brought that handspike down on his head with all my strength, again and again, as he came toward me; but I couldn't keep him off, and he got a grip. Then I hammered his arms, hoping to

break the bones; maybe I did, but I didn't stop him. I hammered again on his head, and just as he floundered into the boat I seemed to have damaged him a little; for the last blow I gave sounded like an egg that you've hit with a knife. But that was all; he had me the next moment, and I was helpless to move. He pulled me in, grinning into my face with that big red mouth, and breathing his stinking breath into my nostrils. Then he sank his teeth into my shoulder, and with the pain my senses left me.

"The next I remember was waking in the bottom of the boat with the big, heavy carcass sprawled all over me and its teeth still gripping my shoulder. But they hadn't gone to the bone. My last whack with the handspike was his death-blow, and he had died in the effort to bite. It took me a long time to get him overboard. I took my time at the job, for the brig was a mile away, steering along on her own hook, and there wasn't a sail or a smoke on the horizon. I never saw or heard of her again, but I've wondered many a time what must have been thought if she was picked up abandoned, with nothing wrong but the foreyards adrift, her own boats on the davits, and no sign of blood or fire or water to drive her crew out. And I've wondered many a time, too, why I didn't think to dive down to the second mate's room and get his gun when there was a chance. But I suppose I was half crazy, like the skipper, for I don't remember much of that long-boat. I came to in a hospital at Cadiz, but the ship that picked me up had sailed; so I never knew how long I was out of my head. Wake me up, boys, when I make that noise, for I can't wake myself, and he has his teeth in me."

