

QUICK READS

The Kraken

A short story by Cooper Baltis



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Part One

‘The Kraken. Not many men see the terrible monster and live to talk about it... but I did... and I’m happy to tell you the story... for a glass of rum, of course.’

‘I don’t have any money,’ I said, moving away from the old man sitting at the bar. His eyes were small, and his beard went down to his stomach. He was sitting in a strange way, like he was hiding something.

‘What? You come to the finest pub in all of New England without any money?’

‘I’m looking for a friend,’ I said. ‘He owes me money. We agreed to meet here.’

‘Well, it looks like your friend isn’t coming,’ the old man said, looking around. The Yarmouth Tavern was full of people. In the corner, a group of men were singing and playing guitars and violins. Across from them, two men were arm-wrestling while other men cheered and clapped.

‘My friend is just late,’ I said.

‘I’ll tell you what,’ the old man said, spitting on the floor. ‘I’ll tell you my tale for free. How does that sound?’

‘Thanks, old man, but I’m not interested.’

‘Not interested?’ His face turned white. ‘Listen here, friend, and listen closely. I saw the monster with my own two eyes. I saw the Kraken!’

‘Tell your story to someone else,’ I said, waving goodbye.

‘Now, wait a minute,’ he said, grabbing my arm with something cold. I looked down and saw a large metal hook... his hand was missing.

‘Be careful, old man! I don’t want to hurt you,’ I said, reaching for my knife.

‘Put the knife away, boy! I’ve got a story as frightening as it is true,’ he whispered in my ear.

‘All right, I’ll listen. But when my friend comes, I will have to go,’ I said. He removed his hook from my arm, and I sat down on the stool next to him.

‘Oh goody! A bottle of rum!’ the old man said to the barman. ‘And be quick!’

‘It was not so long ago,’ the old man said. ‘I was the gunner on a pirate ship called the *White Ghost*. Our captain, Tobias Cutlass, was a greedy and dangerous man, a man who loved Spanish gold and fighting. Now, Captain Cutlass loved Spanish gold... did I tell you that?’

‘Yes,’ I said, looking at my watch.

‘Everyone knew about my captain’s love of Spanish gold. He was famous across the seven seas. We stole Spanish gold from ships sailing from Spain to Mexico and from Mexico to South America. Do you want to see some Spanish gold?’

‘Not really,’ I said, looking around for my friend. I don’t enjoy pirate stories. They are always the same, about stealing, fighting, killing and lying.

The old man reached into his shirt pocket. He dropped a gold coin on the bar. ‘What do you think of this?’ he asked.

Part Two

‘It looks like gold to me,’ I said.

‘This is real gold,’ he said, putting the piece of gold in his mouth and biting it. ‘Want to try it? It’s soft and delicious.’

‘Not really,’ I said, getting bored of the old man’s story.

‘Listen to me, boy. What was I telling you about? I forgot,’ the old man asked, scratching his head with his hook.

‘The Kraken,’ I said, looking around for my friend to rescue me from this crazy old man.

‘Ah, yes! The ocean devil! The eater of men! So, I was on the ship with Captain Cutlass. I told you about him, right?’

‘Yes.’

‘So, we heard about a Spanish ship called the *Santo Domingo* sailing from the Gulf of Mexico. The ship had enough gold on it to buy the city of Paris! It wasn’t hard to find Spanish ships because they always sailed along the same routes. Soon, we found the ship and planned to attack it and steal the gold that night. I told you what my job on Captain Cutlass’s ship was, right?’

‘Yes, you were the gunner,’ I replied.

‘That’s right; I was the gunner on the *White Ghost*, the best pirate ship in the world. I told my men to point the cannons at the Spanish ship, and waited for Captain Cutlass to tell me to fire. We approached the Spanish ship from behind. It was after midnight and the sea was calm. All the Spanish sailors were sleeping. We fired on the ship. They tried to fight back, but we had more guns than them, and soon, we captured their ship.’

‘I thought this story was about the Kraken, not Spanish gold,’ I said.

‘I’m getting to the Kraken, matey. I told you about Captain Cutlass, right?’

‘Yes, twice,’ I replied.

‘Well, there’s one thing I didn’t tell you about Captain Cutlass,’ he said, leaning forward.

‘What’s that?’ I asked.

‘He was a nice man,’ he said.

‘Wait a minute!’ I said. ‘I thought he was a mean pirate.’

‘He was mean, but he didn’t like killing people. So, we never killed anyone. That’s why I said he was nice,’ said the old man, drinking some rum.

‘So you just stole the gold?’ I asked.

‘That’s it, matey. We left the Spanish crew on their ship, and after we took the gold, we sailed away. We sailed for about two days, heading for some islands in the Caribbean. One night, there was some noise on deck.’

The navigator was shouting about something ahead... something that looked like giant tentacles.'

Part Three

'Tentacles?' I asked.

'You know... tentacles... the arms of an octopus. They have suction cups, but they don't have any fingers,' said the old man, showing me the five good fingers he had.

'Yes, I know what a tentacle is,' I said, 'but how could the navigator see a tentacle from so far away?'

'Are you listening to my story, matey? It's a story about the Kraken! The Kraken has large tentacles, tentacles nearly as long as our ship. Don't interrupt me again!'

'Sorry,' I said, shaking my head, but getting more interested.

'So, as the gunner... I told you I was the gunner, right?'

I smiled at the old man.

'Good! You didn't interrupt me this time. You're learning. Well, as the gunner, I told my men to point our cannons at the tentacles. Whatever it was, I thought, we will shoot it. So our cannonballs started hitting the big tentacles and seconds later, the tentacles disappeared. The water was very calm, very still. I was looking out at the ocean, trying to see if we had killed the Kraken or not.'

‘Did you kill it?’ I asked.

‘Stop interrupting! Well, I was looking out at the sea and the ship started shaking. The men were scared now. They were running around the ship like chickens. Not Captain Cutlass, though, he had his gun in his hand and was telling me to prepare my cannon. As he said this, a giant tentacle hit the deck of the ship. The tentacle looped around the legs of a man, poor old Bart, and pulled him into the water.’

‘Really?’ I asked, moving closer.

‘Yes! Then two more giant tentacles came out of the water. They beat against the ship, and took men by their legs. Some of the pirates fired their guns at the Kraken’s tentacles. One of the pirates, a big Arab called Mustafa, had a large sword. He tried to cut one of the tentacles. Another tentacle wrapped around his neck and pulled him into the sea.’

‘And what were you doing?’ I asked. I saw my friend enter the Yarmouth Tavern. I turned away from him for a moment to listen to the old man’s story.

‘I was firing my cannon at the Kraken, and that was when it got me by the leg and dragged me into the ocean. Then I felt it... a sharp bite on my leg.’

The old man turned towards me. He was missing his right leg. Instead of a leg, he had a long piece of wood.

‘The last thing I remember seeing,’ the old man said, ‘was Captain Cutlass diving at the giant yellow eye of the Kraken with his sword in his hand.’

‘Did Captain Cutlass kill the Kraken?’ I asked. My friend tapped me on the shoulder, but I ignored him.

‘I don’t know. I woke up hours later, floating on a piece of wood from our ship. My leg was missing, and I was all alone in the ocean. I saw the Spanish ship, the same ship we stole the gold from, and they rescued me. That’s how I survived the Kraken.’

‘Wow,’ I said. ‘Thanks for telling me that.’

‘It was a pleasure, matey,’ he said, smiling a toothless grin.

‘Well, I need to go because my friend is here now,’ I said, standing up and greeting my friend.

The old man didn’t say anything; he just turned to a man sitting on the other side of him. ‘The Kraken,’ he said to the man. ‘Not many men see the terrible monster and live to talk about it. But I did. And I’m happy to tell you the story... for a glass of rum, of course.’