

# *The Captain Protected by the Devil*

Once upon a time, there was a rich man who had two sons. He gave them the best possible education, and, when it was time to choose a career, the eldest said that he wanted to be a seafarer. His father was very angry about his choice and did not consent to it, but he ultimately had to let his son decide. This son, whose name was Pierre, went very quickly to Saint-Malo, and a captain hired him as a novice for a three-year voyage.

After three years of long-distance navigation, the captain returned to Saint-Malo. The novice Pierre disembarked; as he had earned a bit of money on his voyage, he began to study to become a long-distance captain, and when he returned to the sea, he was made one right away.

Three months after having passed his exam, Pierre disembarked on an ocean liner for a two-year voyage, visiting many lands and seas. Then he returned to Marseilles and went to see his parents. But his father, who still held a grudge against him for becoming a seafarer against his wishes, would not see him. In spite of this, when the brother who remained home had said to him that Pierre was made a captain, which was certainly a good thing, he received him with great joy.

Pierre did not remain on land for a long time; he left to find a ship owner to give him a ship to command. The captain formed a crew, loaded some merchandise aboard, and set sail for London, but, as he was about to arrive, a great storm arose and he lost his ship. He saved himself, as well as his entire crew, and returned to his father with great sadness. His father, believing that the shipwreck was his son's fault, would not receive him. The captain began to search for another ship to command, but as soon as he was at sea, there was bad weather once again and he lost his ship.

The poor captain returned to his father's house and told him of his new misfortune. His father went into a rage and forbid him to ever set foot in his house again. But his young son said:

"If you betray my brother, I will go with him and leave you all alone at home."

He left with Captain Pierre, but, as soon as they were *en route*, the good man ran after them and said:

"Return, both of you, but I don't want my elder son to command any more ships. I would rather feed him while he does nothing, like a bird in a cage."

When the captain heard these words, he went to search for another ship, but no one would entrust one to him because of his two shipwrecks, and he could not even embark as a first mate. He returned to his father's house and he was so aggravated about not being allowed to do anything that he vowed to sell himself to the Devil if the occasion presented itself, because he did not know where he might encounter the Devil, but he often thought of him and called on him several times.

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One day while he was walking all alone in his father's garden, daydreaming about those who had the luck to make pacts with the Devil, a tall black man presented himself before him and asked him whether he was ready to sell himself to the Devil.

"Yes," replied the captain, "but on the condition that you give me a fine ship to command, and that I am always fortunate in my navigation."

"You shall have," said the Devil, "a fine ship to command, and you shall always be fortunate in your navigation, but on the condition that your soul shall belong to me upon your return. If you will allow that, we shall sign the pact today."

"I consent to it," responded the captain.

He brought the Devil into his chamber and before sealing the deal, Pierre had him drink wine and liquors of all kinds, but Pierre himself would dump out part on the ground as soon as they clinked glasses, while the Devil drank everything that Pierre served to him, and soon the Devil no longer knew what he was doing.

"Now," said the captain, "we are going to sign, and you shall have what you asked from me."

"And what's that?" asked the Devil, who could no longer think clearly.

"That's to ship a fat dog from London."

The Devil took a sheet of paper from his portfolio and the two of them signed the pact. Then he said to the captain:

"Form your crew and come to Le Havre in eight days. You will find a fine, well-armed ship there, ready to sail."

At the fixed time, the captain went to Le Havre with his crew and the Devil gave him a ship. He began his voyage with weather so beautiful that it seemed to be so, especially for him; he was never so fortunate, and he earned so much money that, as early as his first voyage, he had made a fortune.

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Captain Pierre had heard of an island covered in gold and silver, where a beautiful princess was being held captive by savages. Many ships had left to try to save her and to take the gold and silver, but their crews had all perished and no one had returned.

The captain headed for this island, and, as soon as he drew near, he saw savages come from all sides of the island, like ants from an anthill, and set sail in hollowed-out trunks. They surrounded the ship, and there were so many that he could no longer see the sea. They threw themselves on board and, with long and fat clubs, they tried to kill everyone. The captain, seeing himself lost, called out for the Devil:

“Oh! Father, I need your help!”

He had barely spoken these words when an enormous vessel that was completely black sailed to the side of Captain Pierre’s ship. The small black men on board threw themselves on top of the savages and began to spit-roast them using their pitchforks. In no time, all of the savages were killed, and when not a single one remained, the small black men and the huge, all-black vessel disappeared as if they had vanished.

Captain Pierre and his crew debarked onto the island. They threw their ballast into the sea and put gold and silver in its place, as much as the ship could carry. The captain then went to search for the princess who was very happy to have been rescued, and he took her on board. Then he left the island and set sail for England to purchase the dog that he had promised the Devil.

When he had it, he returned to France, and, as soon as he arrived in Bordeaux and he had unloaded his cargo, he cried out to the Devil:

“Oh! Father, come take your ship. I no longer want to command it.”

The Devil instantly arrived and made the ship disappear, then said to the captain:

“Well! Pierre, I kept my word and you had a happy voyage. Are you willing to give me your soul as you had promised?”

It wasn’t my soul that I had promised you,” he replied. “Look at the pact in your portfolio, and you will see what is written.”

The Devil took the pact from his portfolio and read the paper: “Captain Pierre will ship from London a fat, black dog, as payment for the good fortune that he will have had commanding the Devil’s ship.”

“Here is the dog,” said the captain. “Take him, we are finished.”

The Devil, furious at having been tricked, climbed onto the back of the dog, who was as big as a small donkey. The dog began to run as fast as it could, but, while crossing a river, it drowned, and the Devil drowned with it.

The captain returned home to his father and married the princess whom he had rescued. Because he had made a considerable fortune on this voyage alone, he no longer wished to navigate, and he lived happily ever after with the princess.

Told in 1880 by Eugène Michel, from Saint-Cast, novice, age 18.  
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