



Ririro

READ ANYWHERE, ANYTIME

The Clock of the Earth and the Clock of the Sea

Henry Beston

Once upon a time, there was a brave sailor who had sailed the blue waters for many years. He married a captain's daughter and they went to live inland, far from the sea.

When the sailor and his wife lived inland, a sturdy son was born to them whom they named Altair. This little son, when he grew up, had a great desire in his heart to go with the sailors and sail on the sea.

Soon the old sailor called his son and said:

"My dearest Son, as a sailor you were born and a sailor you will always be. Go to the ships, enjoy the life of a sailor and may honor and fortune come to you on the sea."

So young Altair said goodbye to his beloved parents and followed the northern highway to a large city by the sea.

As he walked day after day, the soft blue skies and golden clouds of the inland disappeared behind him. A bright and weak glow of green appeared in the arched sky, and a cold north wind made every northern pine tree shake.

One morning, the young man suddenly heard the endless roar of the surf in the distance and, arriving at a sandy height, he saw the great sea with waves tumbling onto the shore with white foam. And discovering the sea, he shouted for joy. Altair's heart leaped with joy.

On one side were the towers of the city, and on the other side, he saw the masts of the ships. There were sailors with brown faces in the streets, wealthy merchants with velvet hats and dresses, brave pilots and adventurers, and captains who came and went to their ships.

After buying a sturdy jacket, a knitted cap, a blue sailor blouse, and loose pants, Altair wrote his name in the book of a large ship and sailed away, out to sea.

He sailed for seven years, sometimes through the nights of the whispering seas and the skies of the silent stars, and sometimes through storms and howling winds and waves that were blown away white with foam.

Gradually, the blue eyes of the boy got the look of someone who sees in the distance. His body became strong, and he walked like a sailor, with his feet apart and swaying back and forth. He sailed for seven years and then became a captain, and then the captain of his own ship.

When the blue-eyed captain returned from a long and lonely voyage to the Golden Islands, he saw a great multitude of ships sailing together over the sea.

Large ships, stately as oak castles, sailed past his bow. Small ships bobbed courteously on every wave. There were ships with pennants, ships with banners, ships of every rig and color in the world. There was such a great variety of ships that some had already crossed the edge of the sea, while the waving yardarms of others only appeared far on the horizon.

In great wonder at what the gathering could mean, the young captain hailed a passing ship and asked the captain-sailor.

"These are the ships of the whole world, Mr. Captain," replied the captain-sailor. "And we are sailing to the land of the King of the South, for he has called us all. There is great news, they say, that awaits us at the end of the journey, but no one can tell what it may be. But come, Mr. Captain, turn your helm and follow us over the sea."

Altair sailed with the ships of the world to the Kingdom of the South, week after week, through fair and foul weather.

Suddenly, during a beautiful night between midnight and morning, the cry of the men on the masts of the first three ships echoed back from the land. Soon the great blue light of the Kingdom of the South appeared, far away and low on the sea. At sunrise, the ships of the world, following each other in line, sailed through rocky gates into the wide harbor of the King.

The palace of the King was built on a hilltop between the blue mountains and the sea. It was made of golden marble, and a winding marble staircase led to a pavilion and a landing in the bay. The great Bell Tower was a lonely splendor, rising above the ancient trees of the King's garden. Its height reached the pink dawn that hung over the hilltop and the city.

In the hall beneath the arches, the captains of the ships from all over the world were now gathered. Great captains with plumes in their velvet hats and swords adorned with jewels at their sides. Merchant captains in sober blue capes, and humble fishing captains with knitted caps and brightly striped blouses. Then the King of the South came to them, dressed in a scarlet cloak and wearing a crown of yellow gold on his head. He said:

"Captains of the ships from all over the world, I greet you. You are waiting to hear why I have called you from the seas. Listen now to my words. I have built a

bell tower, the most beautiful bell tower under the sun, and I would like to place the most beautiful and noble bell in the world in it. Find this bell for me, O captains of the ships! Go to all parts of the world and swiftly through all the seas. Whoever finds the bell will receive a mighty treasure and will be crowned with glory and honor."

Having said this, the King of the South led the captains of the ships to a great feast he had prepared for them, and they feasted until the end of the day.

When the sun had set and the city, the quiet harbor, and the ships were bathed in a soft golden light, Altair descended the winding marble staircase to the pavilion where the rowboat to his ship lay.

The young captain approached the end of the staircase and saw, by a marble pillar, an old bent fisherwoman standing with a young fishing girl by her side. It seemed as if they did not want to speak to Altair. A little afraid, the young captain remained by the pillar and asked from a distance if any misfortune had befallen them.

"Good Lord captain," the fishing girl replied, "we are fishermen from the Dangerous Islands who would like to return to our homes. In the spring tide of the year, while my mother and I were sitting in our boat among the nets, a storm arose that swept us out to sea.

For two bitter days and nights we fled before the storm, but on the third morning, a great ship happened to come upon us and, saving us from the waves, brought us to this kingdom. We have long sought a way to return to our own land. You find us here in the hope that one of the ships of the world might sail by the islands. But although we have asked those who have succeeded before, there was never anyone who could help us on our way."

And the old fisherwoman shook her head slowly and sadly, while the fishing girl remained standing and said nothing more. The golden light now disappeared from the city, and the quiet harbor and ships grew dark. Even the Bell Tower stood in darkness, the empty bell chamber outlined against the sky. Soon the great blue light at the harbor mouth awoke and set the stately tower in light. A sudden wind brought a small sound of waves in the distance.

"Keep good courage, I will take you to the Dangerous Islands," said the young captain. And with stately courtesy, he put the fishing folk into the rowboat and took them to his ship. Then the sound of ropes and blocks and the filling of the sails was heard, and soon Altair's ship fled away like a bird on the dark sea. There were already lights here and there on the dark waves, the lights of ships searching for the beautiful bell.

After fourteen days of fair winds and fine weather, Altair's ship arrived at the

Dangerous Islands. These islands were big, high, and dark. The reefs full of weeds surrounded them and threw fountains of mist into the air.

Outside the fishing island, the Kings of the world had made a fairway - as sailors call a passage - through the mighty rocks. At the entrance of this passage, a warning bell rose and fell, emerging from the seas.

Now the fisher girl and her mother gratefully bid farewell to young Captain Altair and were rowed ashore to the island. The girl's name was Thyrza. Her eyes were gray, and her hair had a beautiful reddish-gold color. She was so lovely and so honest and straightforward in her gaze that Altair thought he had never seen anything so beautiful in the whole world.

As for Thyrza, she stood on the shore for a long time, watching Altair's ship until it grew smaller and finally disappeared at the edge of the sea and sky.

To the north and south, through the seas of the world, Altair went in search of the bell. He sailed to great cities with golden domes and found silver bells, copper bells, and even glass bells. But never a bell for the Bell Tower. He passed lonely coasts and saw the distant surf break in a white edge between the yellow sand and the vast green of the ocean.

Now he had the fortune that the boatswain of the ship was an old sailor who had sailed with Altair since the days of the young captain's training at sea. And soon this boatswain came to Altair and said to him:

"Good Master, I was born on the islands of the East, and on those islands, the story goes that somewhere in the great sea that flows westward over the world, an island of bells lies. There is a city there, they say, whose citizens are so pleased with the ringing of bells that they are busy with it all day long. Rare metals suitable for noble bells are found in the mountains of the island. And there is a King there who is the gatekeeper of the world. It may be just an idle tale, but I tell it as it was told to me."

"East, north, and to the south, I have searched in vain for the bell," said Altair. "No one has ever sailed the seas of the west. Come, boatswain, turn the helm, we will follow the setting sun. We will seek this hidden island."

Westward in the clear waves and under the great glory of the sun, Altair sailed. The waves grew higher, the sun's rays fell in rays around the bow, and streams of marble foam flowed hissing on either side. A thousand miles and a thousand miles the ship sailed. Soon a calm night of waving ropes, still waters, and stars came, and as the ship glided softly into the night, the golden sound of the bell was heard faint and far over the sea.

The sailors shouted a cry of joy that resounded to the stars and drowned out the voices of the bells. A wind blew, and the sails filled. When morning came, the

mountain island of bells stood before them, lonely as a ship in the wide circle of the sea.

They then went to the city of bells and found bells on every house and tower, and people wearing bells at the edges of their garments. All day long, big bells rang in the towers, peals of bells boomed, and clusters of small bells replied - little bells that sang like children at their play. The old bearded King of the Bells heard the story of Altair's brave journey and his heart grew warm for the sturdy boy with blue eyes. He said to him:

"Good Captain, you shall have the bell you seek, the most beautiful and noble bell in the world. Today the metal will be prepared and melted in the furnace of the mountains. Tomorrow at noon, the metal will be cast in the form of the bell."

The afternoon of the next day arrived, and the King and his people stood with Altair and his sailors beside the fiery pit in which the bell metal boiled, in a froth of green and red and boiling copper-gold. The King took a golden cup filled with earth, threw it into the pit, and said:

"O Bell, with this sign, I bid you to remember the earth!

The earth and its sweet sounds, the song of birds, the rustling of leaves, the murmur of streams, the shriek of the night wind, and the majesty of thunder. Speak of these things to the Sons of Men!"

And after thus speaking, the old King took a golden cup of water from the sea and threw it also into the molten pit, saying:

"O Bell, with this sign, I bid you to remember the sea!

The sea with its voices, the roar of the mighty waves, the thin whisper of the foam, the talk of ripples on the shore of sheltered islands, the tumult of the storm. Speak of these things to the Sons of Men!"

They poured the molten metal into the earthly mold and let it cool. Seven days and seven nights flew by, and soon skilled men came to cut the bell out of the mold. Sculptors came to carve flowers, trees, leaves and birds, waves and cockleshells into it.

And Altair thanked the old King with all his heart and with the bell safely stored in the hold of his ship, he sailed eastward and southward through the sea.

As the return voyage drew to an end, the young captain discovered that his ship was almost empty. He had no more provisions or drink. So, he hastened to the nearest harbor to see what he could buy. It so happened that in the same harbor was another ship returning with a bell. Certainly, a beautiful bell, but not one worth mentioning in comparison to the bell of the brave Altair. The name of the captain of this other ship was Kraken, and he was very curious to see if Altair's

bell was better than his.

Altair's ship was moored at a quay, and strong men with brown faces worked in the hazy sun, rolling barrels of water to the deck and carrying sacks of flour into the hold. Soon Kraken came, sitting in the stern of a red boat rowed by six of his sailors, to pay a visit to Altair.

Then Altair and Kraken stood in the dark hold of the ship, and Altair held up a great light so Kraken could see the splendid bell. Kraken saw how beautiful the bell was and said secretly to himself:

"When Captain Altair returns to the land of the South with this beautiful bell, my bell will never win the King's treasure. I must find a way to destroy this captain and his bell!"

He turned to Altair and said, "Brother Captain, when will you sail away?"

"Tomorrow at noon," Altair replied.

"At noon?" said Kraken, and his jealous eyes suddenly lit up with an evil thought. "Do you dare to sail through the reefs of the Dangerous Islands at night?"

"My ship is fast," replied Altair, "and I will find the floating bell of the channel before the sun sets. Once I have found it, what is there left to fear? The passage it marks is deep and wide. And the bell has a clear encouraging sound."

The next morning, Kraken sailed out of the harbor early. He sailed over the lonely waves of the sea all morning and arrived at the Dangerous Islands at noon. It was a windy day, the hazy sky was sometimes clear, sometimes cloudy. The waves splashed against the reefs here and there with white foam. Seagulls screeched and screamed, and the rough, weed-covered sides of the nearest reefs rose and fell with the waves.

Soon Kraken spotted the floating bell that marked the entrance to the channel of the islands.

The sea bell was made in the fiery iron foundries of the Kingdom of Iron. The round base was made of iron, and a band of iron, decorated with fish and shells and sea flowers, encircled the throwing edge. The warning bell rose from the middle of the shield, and two iron figures, one of a giant, one of a dwarf, struck it day and night with iron hammers.

Kraken laughed and sent his men out to break the hammers from the hands of the iron figures so that the bell would no longer ring. And they did. But the dwarf and the giant continued to lift and lower their empty hands.

Kraken sailed through the channel and continued his course to the Kingdom of the South, quickly disappearing from view.

However, his bad deed had not gone unnoticed. Thyrza, the fisherman's daughter, had seen everything.

The long hours of the afternoon dragged on. Sunset was approaching. Black clouds rose over the edge of the world, the sea grew darker, and the heavy waves turned black and showed foam. A wind began to howl.

Suddenly Thyrza saw the sails of a large ship flying before the storm. The hidden sun was almost down, and the black clouds were barred with rays as red as fire.

"That's Altair's ship!" cried Thyrza. "Night is falling fast, and unless he hears the bell in the dark, Altair will perish on the reefs. I must row to the bell, if I can, and sound the warning."

The brave fisherman's daughter hurried to her small fishing boat and rowed through the darkness and rising storm to the silent bell. She fought a battle at sea with the wind and waves but soon a great gust of wind blew her against the bell.

After finally securing her boat to one of the figures, Thyrza took a round stone, which she used as weight, and began to strike the bell so that it rang. Altair's ship came closer and closer. The fiery rays of the sunset faded from the clouds; the wild dark night closed around the sea.

"Ding Dong! Ding Dong!" rang the bell. The wind howled in the dark, and the waves thundered and broke and pulled back. Suddenly Thyrza saw the lights of Altair's ship close by; the ship safely entered the passage. The ship sailed so close to the bell that Thyrza could have almost touched its oak side.

When the lights of Altair's ship had disappeared in the night, Thyrza untied her boat to row towards the shore. A few fishermen had seen her bell and made a large bonfire on the beach to guide her safely inside. But suddenly, the fisher girl saw the lights of a second ship, searching for the channel and the bell.

Although she was tired and cold, Thyrza rang the bell until this ship too had safely passed the reefs. To the great surprise of the fisher girl, this second ship, however, came to a stop and anchored in the small fishing port of the Dangerous Islands.

Guided by the light of the fire, the brave Thyrza made her way safely to the shore.

As for Altair, he continued on to the Land of the South and received the treasure and crown of glory and honor for bringing the most beautiful and noble bell.

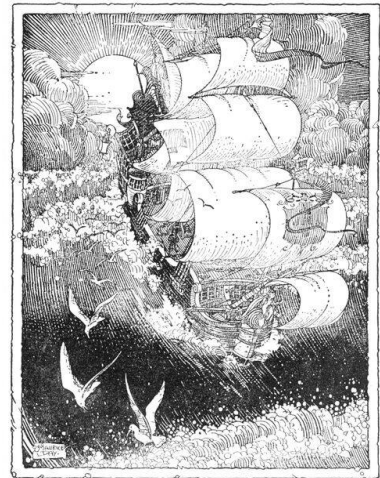
And the Clock of the Earth hung in the Bell Tower, and spoke to the people in the morning and evening about the wonder and mystery of the earth and the changing sea.

Now, the brave young sailor had wealth and honor like a king, but he was restless in his heart, for he thought of the girl Thyrza and wanted to make her his wife. Returning to the sea, he sought out the Dangerous Islands and hurried to the shore to find the fisher girl with the grey eyes.

"You are looking for the fisher girl, Thyrza?" asked the fishermen. "Alas! She is gone, we do not know where. In the month of the low moon, two large ships sailed through the channel of the reefs at the falling of the evening. One ship continued on over the sea, and the other anchored in our bay. We fear this ship may have been a pirate ship, for it sailed away at daybreak, and since that hour, Thyrza has not been seen."

And the fishermen told Altair how Thyrza had saved the ships by ringing the sea bell. Altair remembered the night they spoke of and knew that Thyrza had saved him from the reefs.

East and west and north and south, along the coasts of the world, Altair searched for the fisher girl. But he never found anyone who could tell him anything about her. He sailed for a long year, and soon he came to the Kingdom of the Moon.



He went to the palace to ask for news of Thyrza. But servants came who led him to the Queen who ruled the land. She was very young and dressed in a silver robe and had a silver crown on her head.

Strangely, a heavy silver veil hid her face from everyone.

"Captain, sir," said the Queen, after hearing Altair's story, "you are wasting your days searching for the fisher girl. She is gone; you will never see her again. Stop this hopeless search and take service in my realm. Stay, and I will make you admiral of the Kingdom."

But the brave and faithful Altair shook his head and replied: "No." And although the Queen begged him two and even three times to stay, he remained true to his quest.

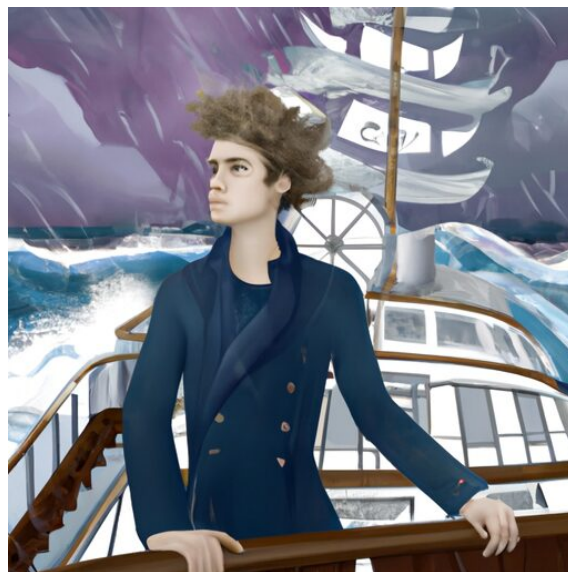
Then the Queen laughed softly and pushed the veil aside. And Altair saw that it was Thyrza who sat on the throne! "Dear Altair," said the Queen, "you will hear everything now. My father was the King of this land, and I was his only child. There was misfortune when we sailed one morning with a ship, and a great storm arose that drove us far into the sea off our course. Soon the ship struck the reefs of the Dangerous Islands and quickly fell into pieces. Of all on board, I was the only one who was saved.

My subjects searched for news of the missing ship for a long time, but in vain. Years passed and soon a fisherman from the Kingdom of the Moon landed by chance on the Dangerous Islands and heard the story of the wreck from the fishermen. He returned with the news, and my people came to fetch me with a great ship to take me back to my land. We hurried away quickly because a dangerous wind was blowing and the captain was a stranger in the area of the reefs. Even now, there is still a ship at sea to bring messages and gifts to the fishermen of the Dangerous Islands.

Then the courtiers and the servants bowed politely and withdrew. Altair and Thyrza walked together to a large window overlooking the sea. And there, the young sailor and the Queen, who was a daughter of the sea, promised each other their faithfulness.

Their wedding was the most splendid wedding ever in the whole world. Altair's good father and mother were there, and Thyrza's foster mother too. And all the sailors blew on horn flutes, danced, and sang old joyful sea shanties.

And... they lived happily ever after!



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