

Pirated Project: *The Wreck of the Revenge*, after, *The Lottery Ticket*, by Anton Chekhov

CAPTAIN IVAN KHUZDAN, a pirate who lived with his wilted conscience on an income of death and plundered goods and was very well satisfied with his lot, stood at the windy helm of his brigantine and began swigging a bottle of stolen wine.

“I looked at that map today, the one I found,” his cabin boy said to him as he mopped the filthy deck nearby. “I looked to see if the wreck of the *Revenge* is marked on it. I thought perchance it might lead to the hoard of John Gow. There was a tiny seal of some sort...”

“The wreck is there,” growled Ivan Khuzdan mockingly, picturing its frigid, dark resting place, “but have you learned nothing in these six months?”

“I took the coordinates on Tuesday,” said the boy, pulling the old yellowed document from his trousers and thrusting it towards his captain.

“Coordinates!? Shall I call you John Harrison now, cabin boy?” said the captain, chuckling.

“Fifty-nine North, Two West.”

“All right... useless, but I will look... Fifty-nine North, Two West.”

Ivan Khuzdan had no faith in science, and would not, as a rule, have consented to look, but now, as he had nothing else to do and as the old map was before his eyes, he passed his finger northeast along the Scottish coast. And immediately, as though in mockery of his own skepticism, no further than the Isles of Orkney, his gaze was caught by the mark of John Gow! Unable to believe his eyes, he hurriedly dropped the map to his side without looking to confirm its authorship, and, just as though someone had given him a douche of cold, salty water, he felt an agreeable chill in the pit of his stomach; tingling and terrible and sweet.

“Boy, the mark of Gow is there!”

His cabin boy looked at his astonished and greed-stricken face, and could not tell if he was joking.

“At Fifty-Nine, Two?” the cabin boy asked, turning pink and dropping the decrepit mop on the deck.

“Yes, yes... it really is there!”

“And the name of the island?”

“Oh, yes! There’s the island too. But stay... wait! No, I say! Anyway, the mark is there! Patience, you understand...!”

Looking at his cabin boy, Ivan Khuzdan gave a broad, senseless smile, like a baby when a bright object is shown it. The boy smiled too; it was pleasant to him that Ivan simply mentioned Gow's distinct inscription. He did not inquire about the name of the island. To be tormented and tantalized with hopes of possible fortune is so sweet, so thrilling!

"It is his, I know it," said Ivan Khuzdan, after a long silence. "So there is a probability that we may find the hoard of the Revenge. It's only a probability, but there it is."

"Will we go!?"

"Patience, my boy. We have plenty of time to be disappointed. The ship held seventy-five thousand bars of Spanish gold, which Gow buried in a coastal grotto. The Revenge sank as they set sail from the spot in a violent storm. Gow survived, but was captured and hanged. His hoard was never found, but stories of a map... That kind of gold is not money, but power, capital! And in a fortnight we shall look upon it. It must be his map, and there, where his mark is set, lies a treasure beyond comprehension."

The pirate and boy began laughing and staring at one another in silence. The possibility of finding it bewildered the boy; he could not have said, could not have dreamed, what he needed that gold for, what he would buy. What does a cabin boy ever buy? Where does he ever go, but to the hold for more spirits, gunpowder? He thought only of the figures fifty-nine, two, and seventy-five thousand and pictured them in his imagination, while somehow he could not think of the fame and happiness itself, which was so possible.

Ivan Khuzdan, holding the map in his fist, walked several times back and forth across the bridge, and only when his calloused heart made no attempt to stop him, began dreaming a little.

"And if we have found it," he said—"why, it will be a new life, it will be a transformation! The treasure is ours, and I should, first of all, of course, spend a bit of the fortune on real property in the shape of an estate; a fair sum on immediate expenses, paying debts, and so on.

"A vast estate..." said the cabin boy wistfully, sitting down, dropping his hands into his lap, and gazing toward the setting sun.

"Somewhere in New Spain or Cuba... In the first place, being betrothed to the sea I shouldn't need a plantation, but it would always bring an income in sugar and coffee... on top of my pirating endeavors, of course," said Captain Ivan Khuzdan, glancing at the boy and taking a long drink off his bottle.

Now real pictures came crowding on his quickened imagination, each more gracious and poetical than the last. And, strangely, in all these pictures he saw himself well fed, serene, healthy, felt-warm, even hot! Here, after eating a bland soup, cold as ice, he lay on his back on the burning sand close to a stream or in the garden under a lime tree... It is hot...

his little boy and girl are crawling about near him, digging in the sand or catching ladybirds in the grass. He dozes sweetly, thinking of nothing, and feeling all over that he need not murder, or steal, or destroy today, or tomorrow, or the day after. Or, tired of lying still, he goes to the cane fields, or to a grove for mushrooms, or watches the bronze natives catching fish with spears. When the sun sets he takes a towel and soap and saunters to the bathing-shed, where he undresses at his leisure, slowly rubs his hairy, scarred chest with his hands, and goes into the water. And in the warm water, near the opaque soapy circles, little fish flit to and fro and green water weeds nod their heads. After bathing there is strong coffee with cream and sugar... in the evening a walk or chat with the neighbors.

“Yes, it would be nice to live on an estate,” said the boy, also dreaming, and from his face it was evident that he was enchanted by his own thoughts.

Ivan Khuzdan pictured to himself winter in the New World with its mild days, its crisp evenings, and its bright sun. At that season he would have to take longer walks about the garden and beside the river, and then enjoy a pipe of fresh tobacco, drink a large glass of rum and eat a turkey or a tortoise, and then—drink another... the children would come running from the kitchen garden, bringing a carrot and a radish smelling of fresh earth... And then, he would lie stretched full length on the sofa, and in leisurely fashion turn over the pages of *The Merry Men and Other Tales and Fables*, or, covering his face with it and unbuttoning his coat, giving himself up to slumber.

The pirate’s summer is followed by stormy, gloomy weather. It rains day and night, the waves threaten, the wind is fierce and cold. The sails, the planks, the men—all are wet, depressed, downcast. There is nowhere to walk; one can’t go above for days together; one has to pace up and down the cabin, looking despondently out a shrinking white porthole at the vast grey sea. It is dreary.

The Dread Pirate Ivan Khuzdan stopped and looked at his boy.

“You should go to the mainland, you know, boy,” he said. “The pirate’s life is no life for a boy.”

And he began thinking how he, as a boy, dreamed of how nice it would be in late autumn to travel abroad somewhere—to America... to Boston... to New York!

“I should certainly do it,” the boy exclaimed! “But do you think the gold is really there!?”

“Wait, wait!...”

He walked across the bridge to starboard, the blackness of the eastern expanse swallowing any distinction between sky and sea. He went on thinking: What if the boy really did desire to go ashore? It is not always pleasant to sail in the society of rowdy, careless men who live in the present, and not such as think, and talk all the journey about nothing but their mutilations, laugh, and murder without hesitation over every insult. Ivan

Khuzdan imagined the boy on a train with a multitude of people, commotion, and luggage; he would be marveling as boys do that the train made such effortless speed, and that the floor felt so firm, so solid... At the stations he would continually be drinking beers, eating lamb and warm bread and butter. Or perhaps he wouldn't have dinner at all because of its being spoiled by too many dazzling confections.

"He would begrudge me every moment on this floating prison," he thought, with a glance at the boy. "He sees the map as his, not mine! Besides, what is the use of him going ashore? What does he want out there? He would die a miserable old man on the floor of a pub. I know... He should die honorably at sea."

And for the first time in his life Ivan Khuzdan's mind dwelt on the fact that his life had grown ancient and numb, and that he was saturated through and through with the smell of the sea. While he was still young, fresh, and healthy he might well have made an honorable life on the continent.

"Of course that is all nonsense," he thought; "but... why should the boy go? What would he make of it? And yet he would go, of course... I can fancy... In reality it is all plain to him, whether it is Naples or Vienna. He would only be in his own way, and should I be dependent upon him? I can fancy how, like any regular boy, he will squander the wealth as soon as he gets it... He will try to hide it from me... then he will run for the pleasures of the land and never look back.

Ivan Khuzdan thought of the boy's familiar, God-forsaken home. All those wretched brothers and sisters and aunts and uncles would come crawling about as soon as they heard of the Revenge's hoard; would begin groveling like beggars, and fawning upon him with oily, hypocritical smiles. Wretched, detestable people! If they were given anything, they would ask for more; while if they were refused they would swear at him, slander him, and wish him every kind of misfortune—as if his life at sea were wont for it.

Ivan Khuzdan remembered his own relations, and their faces, at which he had looked impartially in the past, struck him now as impartial and hateful.

"They are such reptiles!" he thought. "Crawl upon your cursed, soil-loving bellies!"

And now the boy's face, too, struck him as repulsive and hateful. Anger surged up in his heart against him, and he thought malignantly: "He knows nothing of a life spent on the sea. To him it is still adventure, and if we found the fortune he would agree to all that I demand and put the rest to use in resurrecting his miserable life."

And now he looked at the boy, not with a smile, but with hatred. The cabin boy glanced at him too, with suspicion. He had found the map, after all. He had his own daydreams, his own plans, his own reflections; he understood perfectly well what his captain's regrets were. He knew who would be the first to try and grab the spoils of John Gow.

“It’s very nice making daydreams at a powder monkey’s expense!” is what his eyes expressed. “No, don’t you dare!”

Captain Ivan Khuzdan understood his look; hatred stirred in his breast, and in order to crush the boy he stared long at the map and declared indignantly: “This is not Gow’s mark, but a forgery!” He crumpled the map, and nonchalantly tossed it into the blackness beyond the ship’s rail. And rising slowly to his full height he approached the seated boy, avoiding his terrified eyes, and methodically drove his dagger into his chest, the hilt making a dull thud as it struck the sternum with a shock of crimson.

Hatred and hope both disappeared at once, and it began to seem to Ivan Khuzdan that his ship was smaller, and colder, and soiled more entirely with the blackened residue of spilled blood; that the supper he had been eating was not doing him good, but lying heavy on his stomach, that the evening was long and wearisome...

“What the devil’s the meaning of it?” said Ivan Khuzdan, beginning to be ill humored. Wherever one steps there are bits of flesh under one’s feet, bones, husks. The deck is never clean! One is simply forced to despair. Damnation take my soul entirely! I shall go and walk the bloody plank of my own making!”