The Jolly Roger?

(A blood curdling tale for two.)

In the olden days, there were pirates.

And, in the very same olden days, there were privateers.

They both sailed the seas looking for booty.

Pirates captured ships, killed a lot of the sailors and stole booty.

Privateers also captured ships, killed a lot of the sailors and stole booty.

Pirates, though, did it all for the booty, and only for the booty.

Pirates captured any ship which looked as if it might have gold aboard.

Privateers, on the other hand, were allowed to capture ships so long as they were enemy ships – and so long as they sent some of the booty to the king.

This story begins with Captain Kidd (a very famous pirate) and Sir Henry Morgan (A very famous privateer) sitting on a cloud.

They’ve been doing this for about 300 years.

I mean, they’ve been dead for about 300 years.

Now they are waiting for God to make up His mind where to send them.

He’s taking His time.

Maybe it’s because He can’t make His mind up?

What would you do?

If you were God, I mean.

What would you do?

Sir Henry Morgan; I wish He’d hurry up!

*Captain Kidd: You keep saying that…*

Well, it’s been ages!

*What are you complaining about?*

The time we’ve been up here.

*On this cloud?*

A bunch of dead pirates.

*On this cloud?*

Just sitting here.

*This might be the best bit.*

The best bit?

*Yes.*

Sitting on a cloud with a bunch of dead pirates?

*It could be worse!*

Depending, you mean?

*Depending on what He decides.*

I wish He’d hurry up.

*Who, God?*

Yes.

*He’s very busy.*

So you keep telling me.

*There’s a lot of people to see.*

A lot of people seem to get seen before us.

*Well, yes.*

He seems to see a lot of people while we just sit here.

*We’re difficult, though.*

Difficult?

*We’re difficult cases.*

Difficult to decide on, you mean?

*Yes.*

I can’t stand all this waiting.

*I know what you mean.*

Not knowing what He is going to do with us.

*Which way are we going?*

Which way will He send us?

*Up or down, you mean?*

Are we going up?

Or are we going down?

*Up to heaven?*

Or down to hell?

*Well, it’s difficult.*

Mmmm…

*Even for God.*

Heaven or Hell, you mean?

*Yes. Even for God, it must be difficult.*

Whether we’re good guys or bad guys?

*Some pirates were quite good.*

Pirates? Good?

*In parts.*

Well…

*But some of us were quite bad.*

Yes.

*In parts.*

Yes.

*And some of us were really bad.*

Some of us were very bad indeed.

*It’s not that easy.*

No.

*I mean there was a lot of bloodshed.*

Well, yes, there was.

*There was a lot of killing.*

And some of us got very rich.

*Both of us did!*

Yes.

*Both of us got very rich.*

But some of us did it for the King.

*So you say.*

As privateers.

*So you keep saying.*

I was a privateer.

*Yes, but ‘privateer’ is just a fancy name for a pirate, I think.*

A privateer only killed the enemy.

*That makes it alright, does it?*

And shared the booty with the King.

*That makes it OK, does it?*

Some of us were just pirates, though.

*Most of us were.*

Robbed anyone they could, just for the booty.

*That’s what most of us did.*

Yes.

*Me, for example.*

Yes.

*That’s what I did.*

Privateers only killed the enemy.

*So?*

Pirates killed just for the booty.

*It was all killing, though, wasn’t it?*

Well, I suppose so.

*And you can’t capture a ship without bloodshed.*

No.

*We were all quite bad guys, really.*

Bad guys? All of us?

*When we were down there.*

That depends.

*Mmmm?*

On what you mean by “bad”.

*How do you mean?*

I mean if you are fighting the enemy, some bad things are good.

*If you say so.*

Well, I mean killing the enemy.

*If you say so.*

And sending some of the booty to the King.

*But it’s still bloodshed, isn’t it?*

It’s not the same as killing just for the booty.

*Mmmmmm…*

That’s the difference between a privateer and a pirate.

*The difference between you and me.*

Well, yes. I didn’t like to say.

*Mmmm…*

While we’re stuck on this cloud.

*Waiting to hear what He decides.*

Yes.

*Waiting and waiting.*

What will He decide?

*Are we going up or are we going down?*

Heaven or Hell.

*It’s difficult.*

This “good” or “bad” business …

Mmmm?

It’s not so easy, is it?

*You really need to know the whole story.*

Yes.

*You need to know everything.*

And maybe you can’t decide even then.

*And it depends on who tells the story.*

That’s very important.

*Some people only tell stories about the bloodshed.*

Some of that is true, of course.

*There was a lot of bloodshed.*

Well, yes.

*Some of that is true.*

But there was another side to the story.

*Well, sometimes there was.*

There are different sides to every story.

*Mmmm.*

In my case, what would you say?

*Your case?*

Yes.

*The famous Captain Morgan?*

I think of myself as quite a good guy.

*You did a lot of killing.*

Well….

*An awful lot of killing. Much more than me.*

I suppose so.

*You were very bloodthirsty.*

Well, yes.

*Very bloodthirsty indeed.*

But we were at war with Spain.

*So you call yourself a good guy?*

I did it all for the King.

*The King allowed you to rob and kill?*

Yes.

*All that killing, though. It’s still killing, isn’t it?*

All for the King, and for England.

*And a lot of money.*

All for the King.

*No it wasn’t! A lot of the money stuck to your fingers!*

The King got his fair share of it.

*So you say…*

He made me a knight, too.

*He did, didn’t he?*

When I died I was Sir Henry Morgan.

*And you died in your bed!*

Not like you.

*No.*

Hanged.

*Yes.*

Hanged in public.

*Yes.*

And tarred.

*My body was tarred and hung in a cage.*

At Tilbury.

*Yes.*

For three years.

*Famous, I was.*

The famous Captain Kidd.

*Captain Kidd was a big name.*

A celebrity.

*People came from far and wide to see me hang!*

Well, yes.

*It seems a long time, all the same.*

Sitting up here, on our cloud?

*It must be about 300 years since I was hanged.*

When you put it like that it does seem a long time.

*I wish He’d hurry up!*

Mmmm…

*I wish he’d hurry up!*

I remember my last ship.

*The Oxford?*

She was fast.

*Small but fast.*

I used to catch much bigger ships with her.

*The main thing is surprise.*

It is.

*Catch them by surprise.*

Yes.

*You won’t win a battle against a big ship.*

No.

*Not with the big guns they had.*

No.

*Not in the little ships we had.*

No.

*So you had to be fast.*

Our ships were fast.

*Little, but fast.*

Those were the days!

*Exciting.*

Living on your wits.

*And courage.*

Those were the days!

*The trick is to come up behind the big ship.*

Before they know you’re there.

*They don’t have any big guns there.*

No.

*Then you need a couple of good men to jam their rudder.*

It’s easy enough, but you need good men.

*With a wedge and a hammer.*

They hammer the wedge between the ship and the rudder.

*To jam the rudder.*

Exactly.

*Works every time.*

If you can do it.

*Yes.*

They can’t steer their ship any more.

*You’ve got them.*

Get on board quick.

*Before they’ve had time to load their pistols.*

There’s always going to be a fight.

*Of course there is.*

Lots of bloodshed.

*Yes.*

Well, you can’t make an omelette without breaking eggs.

*No.*

And you made a lot of omelettes.

*Well…*

Broke a lot of eggs.

*I used to sink the ships I captured.*

You had to do that.

*If they caught me, I would hang.*

As you did, in the end.

*Thank you for reminding me!*

You took a lot of booty, over the years.

*Well, maybe.*

You were a rich man, by the end.

*They didn’t find much.*

Where is it all, then?

*My booty?*

You must have stashed a lot of it away, here and there.

*Here and there! Here and there!*

Buried treasure on remote islands?

*That would be telling.*

Oh come on!

*No!*

Here we are, sitting on this cloud. All dead now.

*So?*

It doesn’t matter any more.

*I’m not going to tell you where my treasure is buried.*

You must have taken a lot, in your time.

*No more than you!*

At least what I did was allowed by the King.

*The King had no idea what you got up to.*

Well….

*Not really.*

He liked the money I sent, though!

*You treated your men like dogs!*

Well…

*Your men led dogs’ lives.*

Well, I had to be hard on them or they wouldn’t have fought for me.

*On my ship men were free!*

As long as you kept giving them prize money.

*That’s what they sailed with me for!*

And you had to be hard on your men too.

*No harder than you!*

You even marooned some on desert islands!

*Well, it’s no good being soft at sea.*

No.

*It’s funny how people think about us.*

All that romantic stuff?

*People wrote songs and stories about me.*

They did.

*As if I was a hero.*

Yes.

*As if Captain Kidd was a hero.*

Silly nonsense, of course.

*Swashbuckling. That’s what they call me.*

Swashbuckling!

*That’s right.*

Silly, romantic word.

*Well…*

Makes you out to be romantic.

*Maybe I was!*

But you were also a cold hearted killer.

*That’s the pot calling the kettle black!*

The pot calling the kettle black?

*We were just the same, really.*

You and me?

*That’s what I think.*

And that’s the problem, isn’t it?

*That’s the problem.*

That’s why we’re stuck here.

*On this cloud.*

Yes. On this cloud.

*You mean He can’t decide?*

Who is pot and who is kettle?

*Are we to go up?*

Or down?

*It’s difficult.*

It’s very difficult.

*I wish He’d hurry up!*