



ENGLISH-SPEAKING UNION

Queensland Branch

---

PROMOTING INTERNATIONAL UNDERSTANDING & HUMAN ACHIEVEMENT THROUGH ENGLISH

---

THE ESU ROLY SUSSEX SHORT STORY COMPETITION

2023

First Prize in the Secondary Schools Division

Jacob Gillam

*Resolute's Revenge*

© Creative Commons

Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International (CC BY-NC-ND-4.0)



2023

---

Jacob Gillam

*Resolute's Revenge*

Like an icy glove, the frigidity enveloped him. An arctic wind murmured its freezing breath along the desiccated surface of his salty body, prickling his skin. Placid waves lapped quietly against the ageing wood of the hull, the parched paint slowly sloughing away with each ripple. Against the deep turquoise ocean, a burnt orange cheek kissed the horizon, reflecting an intense glare across the glassy surface. The longer he sat and stared, the more unnerved Lewis became. It had become increasingly apparent that the attempts to find his father's lost ship were futile. He and his crew had seen nothing for days – no ships, no signs of life – yet he couldn't shake the feeling that he was meant to be here. Lewis contemplated the tarnished, weather-worn compass in his hand; it was a gift from his father upon Lewis's promotion to the rank of captain. Something or someone had guided him here – he was sure of it – and he wasn't ready to give up yet. His memories of his father wouldn't let him.

Lewis was fortunate to have a larger-than-life figure as his father, Admiral Benjamin Hill – or “Brave Ben” as he was known in the maritime world. He had a black, neatly trimmed beard that framed an ageing hairline, while a sharp jaw and cheekbones perfectly complemented his piercing sage eyes. With a broad build defined by strong, angular shoulders, he radiated a dominating presence. As a young boy, Lewis idolised his father and spent many hours with him learning the intricate workings of the ship. From trimming the sails to mastering cartography and tying cleat hitches, Lewis absorbed his father's vast knowledge and his passion for the sea.

Being the commander of the renowned HMS *Resolute*, the flagship of the British navy, Lewis's father was a man revered for his indomitable courage and legendary seafaring exploits. With unrivalled fearlessness, he had weathered countless storms and emerged victorious from battles that would have shattered lesser ships, and it was these feats that caught Queen Victoria's attention. Tales of mythical sea creatures and ghost ships had plagued the maritime realm for decades, inciting fear and uncertainty throughout the Royal Navy. Sailors claimed to have witnessed a colossal serpent-like creature, while others believed in the tales of the legendary leviathan – a gargantuan beast

boasting a fearsome array of teeth capable of crushing ships in its massive jaws. Determined to dismiss these stories as mere folklore, the Queen commissioned the admiral and his ship to embark on a daring mission of discovery. After meticulous preparations, the admiral set sail, his heart filled with determination to unveil the truth. But the HMS *Resolute* and its crew never returned. They disappeared into the shadowy depths of the ocean, leaving behind a legacy shrouded in mystery, and whispers of a ghost ship that now haunts the seas.

It seemed fitting that Lewis was chosen to captain the HMS *Assistance* in a quest to unravel the secrets surrounding his father's disappearance and once and for all quash the ancient myths. However, what began as a voyage of unwavering determination was now hopeless, and the answers he had been searching for still eluded him. Despair settled heavily upon him, and his leaden eyelids finally succumbed to the weariness that had plagued him for days.

Snapped awake by the groan of the mast, a gust of wind revived the tattered sails, propelling the ship forward. A suffocating grey pall rapidly rolled in and engulfed the ship, refusing to let it go as Lewis struggled to see more than a few yards ahead. Suddenly, the sails flapped frantically, and the ship violently shuddered as though it had been struck, throwing Lewis to his knees.

As he fought to regain his composure, his seasoned crew leapt into action, angling the sails and regaining their heading. Turbid waters attacked the *Assistance* as the crew scoured the vessel, their eyes scanning for any clue to the source of the chaos. But all they encountered was the same lingering ethereal mist, mocking their desperate search.

Lewis's uneasiness intensified, and his mind reluctantly drifted to the captivating myths and legends shared among sailors in the dingy taverns back in England. Memories of his father's bedtime stories returned – tales of treacherous sea creatures, of volatile gusts of wind diverting ships from their intended paths, and of murky, tumultuous whirlpools hungrily swallowing vessels whole. Once dismissed as mere folklore, these stories were now poisonous vines, insinuating themselves into Lewis's mind and strangling his urge to continue the voyage.

Propelled by a mere whisper of wind at its stern, the ship sliced through the veil of mist, a palpable sense of anticipation hanging in the air. Hushed whispers and the subdued demeanour of the crew mirrored the pervasive unease that coursed through Lewis's veins. Trembling, he reached into his pocket, clutching the cold metal of his father's compass. The cherished heirloom had proven to be the finest, most reliable

compass Lewis had ever owned and it felt reassuring in his hand. An uncharted abyss lay ahead as the ship ventured further; Lewis instinctively turned to his compass in a quest for a semblance of normalcy. Yet, to his astonishment, what he saw only served to tighten the knot in his stomach. "This can't be right," Lewis implored, desperately tapping the glass in a futile effort to terminate the centripetal force sending the needle to whirr in endless circles. True north was lost.

Eerie darkness descended and an unsettling chill swathed Lewis and his crew. Lewis had experienced this before – the calm before a storm – but this was a tempest. Chaos erupted aboard the ship. Spinning uncontrollably, the helm creaked under the intense turmoil. The sails swelled like mystical giants, billowing with wind, the crisp linen forming a stark contrast against the backdrop of the deep cerulean fog. Battling the mighty beast, the ship tilted from port to starboard with barrels rolling across the deck and cannons swaying against their hinges. The captain's cabin door swung open with a menacing creak, revealing a scene of havoc. Lewis's desk was flipped onto its side, sending papers and maps swirling through the air. Resembling a boiling pot, the ocean churned and bubbled, leaving Lewis bewildered. Briskly making his way to the bow as the dense mist gradually dissipated, Lewis snatched his spyglass and desperately scanned the hazy horizon. As the ship swayed relentlessly, Lewis's heart leapt into his throat; he finally discerned a wisp of a mast. Reluctant to divert his gaze from the spyglass, he continued to observe intently, hoping for another glimpse. But there was nothing; the ship had vanished. Then, as though materialising from the very fabric of the horizon, a figure emerged, cloaked in an aura of mystery and allure. Looming grandly, the ship exuded an air of both elegance and power that captivated the entire crew. Its towering masts appeared to defy the heavens, reaching skyward with celestial grace. The sails unfolded like an enchanting painting, showcasing a tapestry of vibrant blues, purples, and silvers, their colours dancing in the breeze, imbued with a life force of their own. Sleek lines and graceful curves caressing the galleon were accentuated by elaborate carvings adorning its bow, evoking images of mythical sea serpents and tales of times long past.

As the ship drew closer, a haunting, melancholic melody drifted through the air, its soft strains enveloping the surroundings in a spell of eerie tranquillity. Under the vessel's hypnotic sway, the HMS *Assistance* fell into step, synchronising its movements with the enigmatic ship; the once tempestuous conditions were now replaced by an ominous stillness. Elation and trepidation mingled within Lewis's heart. His insides churned as he laid eyes upon the bold, commanding letters on the ship's stern – HMS *Resolute*.

Lewis firmly ordered the gangplank to be laid out as the *Assistance* pulled alongside. He tentatively stepped aboard. Groans and creaks threatened the still air, a deep rumble reverberating through the belly of the ship as if it had been awaiting his arrival. Nervously, he pressed on, enveloped by a chorus of whispers and the haunting echoes of his father's voice. A chilling touch on his shoulder made him turn instinctively, and before him stood a mysterious figure. Paralysed with awe, Lewis found himself entranced by glowing sage eyes. Beneath a salt-caked mantle, a long, bedraggled beard danced in the breeze, concealing distinguished admiral stripes.

It was him. Lewis's father. Benjamin Hill. In that moment of elated recognition, a torrent of emotions swirled within Lewis.

Before Lewis could utter a word, his father's face started to transform. Benjamin's once familiar form twisted and contorted, as gills sprouted from his neck and webbing emerged between his fingers. His arms stretched, adopting a sleek and scaled magenta appearance, while his legs merged into a long and powerful tail. Lewis flinched at the unsettling sound of bones cracking as they reformed, elongating his father's spine. Simultaneously excruciating and exquisite, the change seemed as though his father's essence was torn apart and reassembled into something utterly grotesque. With a final surge of energy, his father stood erect, his massive serpentine body spanning the length of the *Resolute*. Transcendent hues blazed within its amber pupils, peering down upon Lewis's crew as if they were mere ants in its presence.

Tentacles, graceful and majestic, reached out to the ship like serpents dancing in the sun. With a resounding thud, the first tentacle coiled itself around the mizzen mast, tightening its grip with otherworldly strength. Scattering across the ship, the crew leapt up onto the fo'c'sle, and the cries of others below decks echoed across the empty expanse of ocean. One by one, other tentacles emerged, wrapping themselves around the hull, its timbers straining as if protesting the intrusion. Each tentacle possessed a life of its own, undulating with hypnotic elegance, conducting a haunting symphony across the Antarctic sea. Every movement revealed an intricate pattern of scales that adorned the tentacles. Lewis stood frozen in his place; the legendary sea captain had become a legendary monster.

Another tortuous tentacle wrapped itself around the mizzen mast, the ship now a fragile toy that splintered in its grip. Piece by piece. Frigid seawater gushed into the ship while it disintegrated like sand under the force of the Leviathan.

Lewis squared his shoulders, determined to return to the Motherland and unfurl the fables as living truths. The savage eyes of his father locked onto Lewis and a battle of wills commenced, each one refusing to yield. Lewis brandished his father's compass skyward, its aged allure captivating the Leviathan. A moment of eerie stillness hung, suspended around them, a celestial energy connecting them. Recognition glimmered in his father's eyes, a half smile beginning to form on his face. But before the smile could properly take shape, rough scales brushed Lewis's arm. Lewis heard the snap of bone followed by a searing pain like knives paring his skin. He was about to die alongside these secrets – trapped in the embrace of the frigid abyss. Purple scales bloomed from the lacerations, crackling as they blossomed in awful beauty along his arms, chest and hands. The compass slipped from his now slimy fingers and another truth dawned. He would not die; he would become a monster for all eternity, preying on other intrepid seafarers who looked to unlock the secrets of the deep.