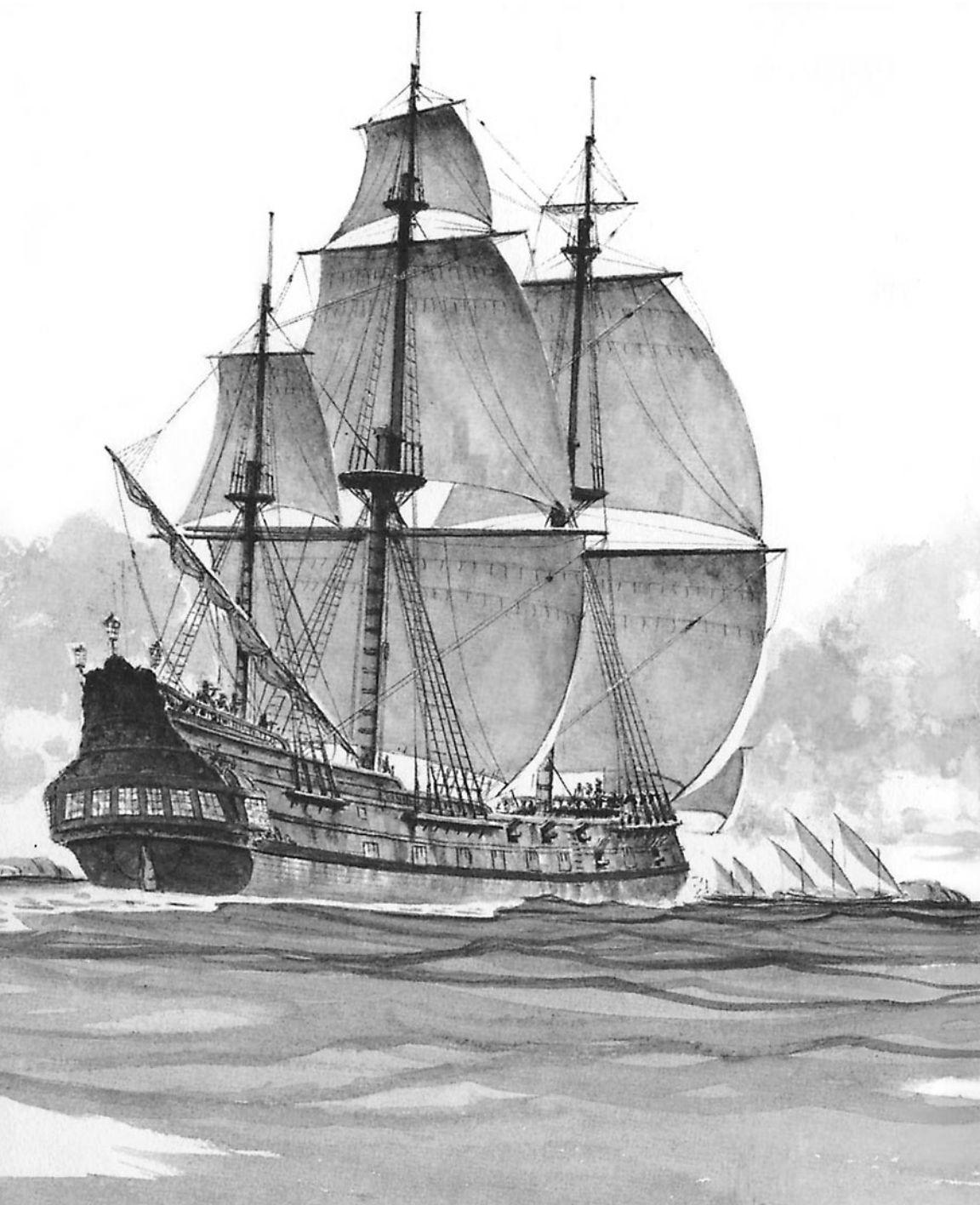


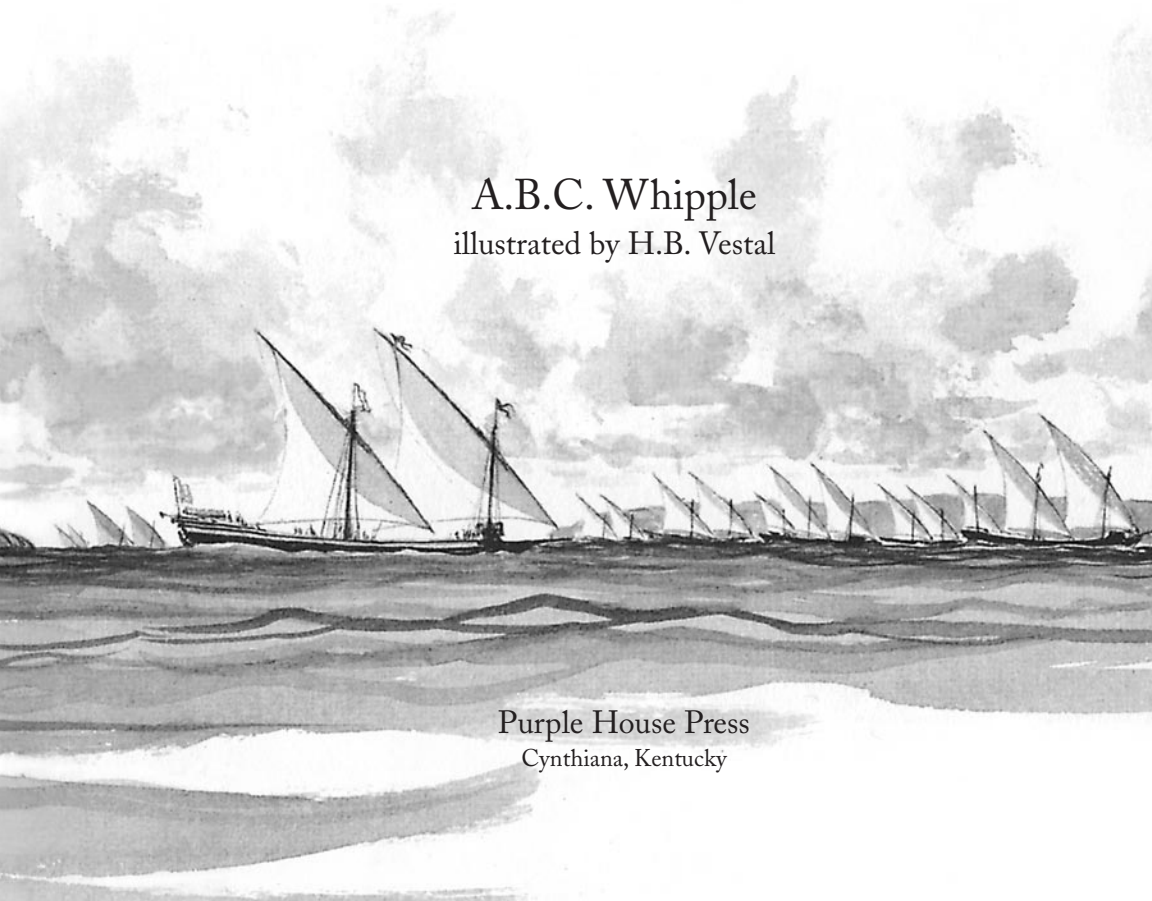
THE  
MYSTERIOUS VOYAGE  
OF  
*Captain Kidd*  
A.B.C. Whipple





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A.B.C. Whipple  
illustrated by H.B. Vestal



Purple House Press  
Cynthiana, Kentucky

This one is for  
Abigail

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# 1



## BEFORE THE SILVER OAR

“William Kidd, hold up thy hand.”

He was a small man. As he stood in the prisoner’s dock, his clothes seemed to hang on him. His face was gray. His mustache and hair were unkempt. His figure was stooped, and he seemed almost too weak to raise his right arm.

He had been in London’s Newgate Jail for more than a year. For the last two days he had tried to defend his name, his honor, and his life in the Admiralty Court. Now he was exhausted and beaten. He faced the six black-robed Admiralty judges and awaited the sentence he knew was to come.

Their faces, under their white wigs, had no expression. In front of them lay the symbol of their authority—the Silver Oar of the Admiralty Court. It was also the symbol of the law of the sea. He had been convicted of breaking that law. So the Silver Oar, Kidd knew, would be carried before him when he was taken to the gallows.

The voice of the chief judge was already pronouncing sentence: “...there you will be hanged by your neck until dead.

“And the Lord have mercy on your soul.”



They say that a man’s whole life passes before his eyes when he knows he is going to die. But as Captain William Kidd was led out of the Admiralty Court to Newgate Jail, he may have thought back for only six years. It had all happened in six swift years. Six years ago Captain Kidd had been a prosperous merchant in New York City, with a wife and a daughter and a legion of friends. Now he was in Newgate Jail in London, convicted of piracy and murder, and sentenced to be hanged by his neck until dead. How, Captain William Kidd must have wondered, could all this have happened to him in only six years?

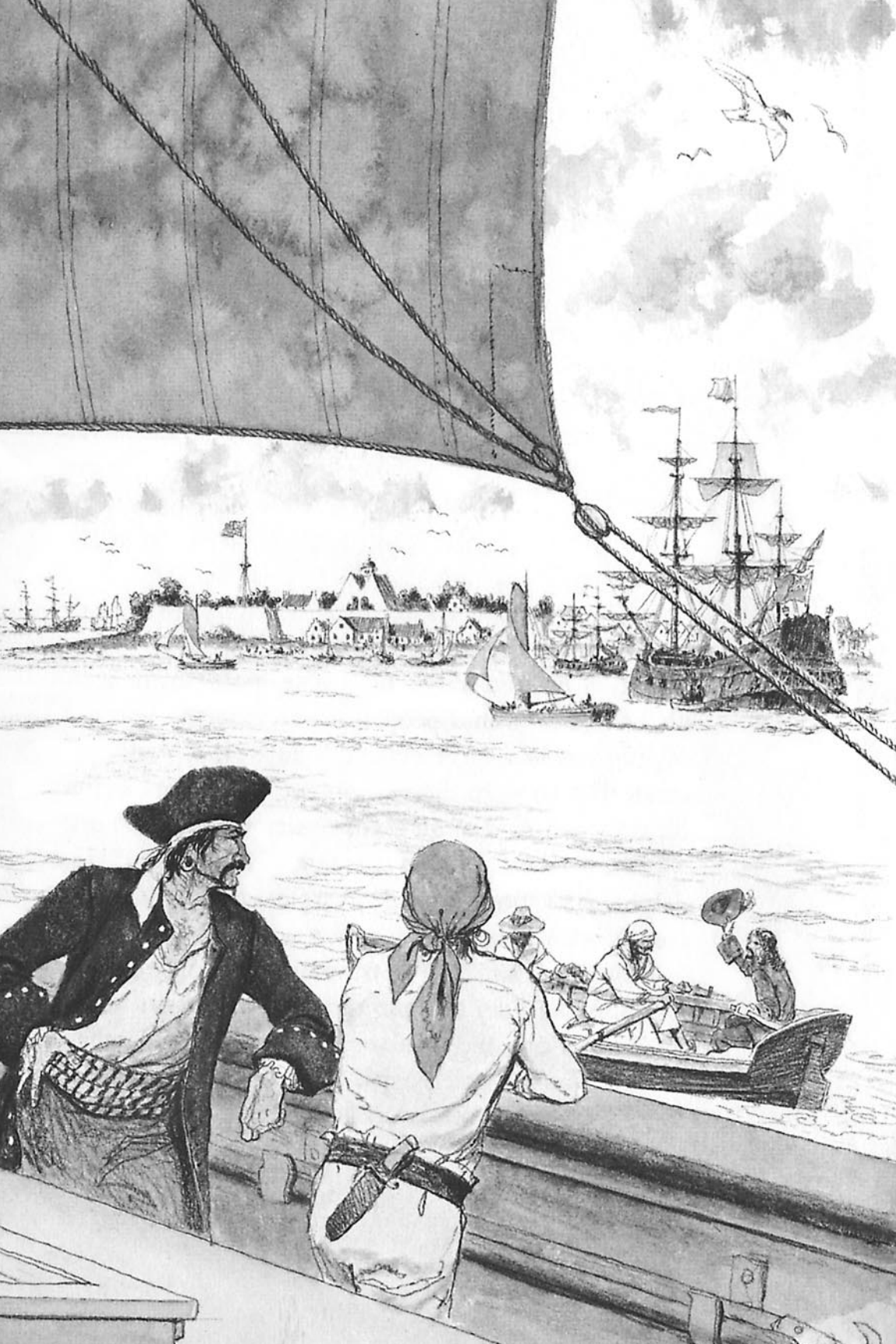
This book is about how it happened.



## A PROSPEROUS MERCHANT

In 1695, over three centuries ago, New York was not even a city. It was a port town with about five thousand people, fewer than the number of students in most medium-sized colleges today. New York was small, but so were the rest of the settlements in the New World. And of all those settlements, New York was the liveliest. Boston was more important. Philadelphia had more prestige. Virginia was older. But New York was where the action was.

New York was full of travelers from all over the world. More than a dozen different languages could be heard along the wharves. There were Dutchmen



in duffels and woolen caps. There were Englishmen in bell-bottomed trousers. There were Spaniards with cutlasses hanging from their wide leather belts. There were West Indians in striped smocks. And there were swaggering sailors of fortune, wearing a single gold earring and sometimes carrying a parrot on a broad shoulder. The sailors' hangouts along Dock Street and Great Queen Street were filled with a colorful gathering from all over the globe.

These were the men who provided the crews for the countless ships that came and went from the port town of New York. The men who owned and captained these ships lived only a block or two away, in their mansions on the tree-lined streets overlooking the waterfront. And one of the most substantial of these homes was that of William Kidd.

It was an impressive brick house with a view of the East River, just north of the Great Dock, the center of activity for New York harbor. From his windows Captain Kidd could see every ship that came into port. And it was only a short walk to the business center of New York, with the Customs House, the warehouses, and the lines of merchant shippers' offices.

Captain Kidd owned other pieces of land, on Pearl Street, on Water Street, on Pine Street, and on Wall Street. The Wall Street house had once belonged to a wealthy New York widow, Mrs. Sarah Oort. When

William Kidd had tried to buy it from her, she had refused to sell it. Evidently Sarah Oort had a better idea, because three years later she became Mrs. William Kidd. Now they had a baby daughter. Her name was Elizabeth.

William Kidd was one of the pillars of the New York community. He had come to the American colonies from Scotland, after shipping out as a young man before the mast. By 1695 he had risen to captain and even had a small fleet of his own. Most of his business was in the West Indies, and Captain Kidd had commanded his own trading vessels on voyages to the islands. Those were the days when the merchants of New York, Philadelphia, and Boston sent their ships down to the Caribbean with flour, timber, and fish, exchanging them for sugar, rum, and molasses from the islands.

It was a popular and profitable business. William Kidd and the other merchant skippers of New York made money and lived elegantly in their big houses, surrounded by luxuries they could afford to bring in from all over the world. In New York the first business was making money, and the second business was enjoying it. New Yorkers raced horses, gambled, played cards, and concentrated on having a good time—unlike those Bostonians and Philadelphians. And New Yorkers, like the people in any colonial center, did their best to imitate the elegant life of London. But then,

from London, came a major threat to the good times of New York.

Those New York merchant skippers had begun to cut into the business of the merchants of London, especially their business in the West Indies. The American colonies were, after all, still part of the British Empire. It would be nearly a century before the American Revolution and the beginnings of the United States of America. The Members of Parliament in London could see no reason why those British colonists across the Atlantic should be competing unfairly against shippers who sailed from London. There ought to be a law against it, they decided. So they passed a number of laws.

In essence the Acts of Trade and Navigation required the shippers of the North American colonies to trade only with England and the other English colonies. Some of the laws, in fact, had been passed as early as 1660, when William Kidd was a young man. The only way a New York merchant could purchase something from the French or Dutch islands of the West Indies was by way of London. In short, the West Indies trading business was to be kept in the family. And the head of the family was in London.

In New York the merchants and the skippers reacted with anger and rebellion. They could not afford to send their little trading sloops across the Atlantic instead of

down to the islands. They could not afford the higher prices they would have to pay in England for goods which they had been buying more cheaply at the source, in the islands. So the New Yorkers and the other colonists broke London's law. They protested against the Acts of Trade and Navigation. But in the meantime, knowing their protests would get them nowhere, they simply ignored the Acts. They did it by smuggling.

Trading sloops sailed silently out at night, slipping past the British coastal patrols and setting the familiar course for the West Indies. Back they came with their cargoes, ghosting into harbor at night. His Majesty's customs officials were bribed to look the other way when the goods were stored in warehouses and sold on the markets, just as they had been sold before the Acts were passed.

And once the New Yorkers discovered that they could get away with breaking one law, they were tempted to break another. If you can be a successful smuggler, why not be an even more successful pirate? So it was that more and more American ships simply sailed out to capture merchant vessels, take their cargo, and bring it into New York—past the same patrols and bribing the same customs officers.

New York became even more prosperous, and even more of an outlaw city. And because of a money shortage



in the colonies, the pirates, with their silver and specie, could not only bribe the lower officials in the customs, but also make life comfortable and luxurious for the highest officers of the city. Benjamin Fletcher, the governor of New York, was soon suspected of dealing with the pirates. So were the governors of the other port towns of the colonies.

Governor Fletcher all but admitted that he had a secret agreement with the pirates. He made friends with them, entertained them at dinner, and drove them around in his carriage. Some New Yorkers claimed that the governor had a flat fee for landing permits: £100 per pirate. And there were rumors that he had a financial interest in several pirate ventures. Certainly the governor lived well on what was supposed to be a modest salary from London. He even bragged about his wife's madras silks which, he said, once belonged to a princess in India. How had they got to New York? The governor declined to say.

Captain Kidd could not have continued to trade among the islands without some smuggling. But he was not a pirate. In fact, he had been commissioned by the colonial authorities to chase pirates off the New England coast. Moreover, down in the West Indies, he had had an encounter that had embittered him against pirates for some years to come.

He had gone ashore on the island of St. Martin for

the night and waked in the morning to find that his ship had been taken from him. The crew had mutinied in his absence and had sailed the ship away. The leader of the mutiny had been a rebellious crew member named Robert Culliford, who had talked the rest of the crew into turning the vessel into a pirate ship. Kidd would cross paths with Robert Culliford again.

Pirates were not the only thing troubling England and the English colonies. Throughout the last part of the seventeenth century England and France were fighting and squabbling with each other. This on-off war would last for over a century. During one of his voyages to the West Indies Captain Kidd had helped a British force drive away a group of six French naval vessels that were besieging a British island. Because of this, when the governor of the Leeward Islands heard that Captain Kidd had lost his ship, he presented Kidd with a new brigantine. In gratitude Captain Kidd named her *Antigua*, after the major island of the group. Then he sailed her back to New York.

And there he made a big mistake.

The rumors and suspicions about New York's Governor Fletcher had begun to worry the authorities in London. Besides, there had been some elections in New York, and London had received complaints that the elections had been managed badly, if not dishonestly,

by the governor. As one of the most respectable merchants of the city, Captain Kidd was asked if he would come to London to testify in an inquest into the election. Partly because he enjoyed sailing his new brigantine *Antigua*, Captain Kidd agreed to go. That was the mistake.

In London that summer was another prominent New Yorker. Colonel Robert Livingston was the sort of person who openly admitted, "I would rather be called Knave Livingston than a poor man." His business dealings in New York had never been proved outrageously dishonest. But he was not the type anyone wanted to trust too far.

Colonel Livingston did have a pleasant personality, and he knew how to use it. He was in London partly because he had heard a rumor that New York's Governor Fletcher might be recalled. When he reached London, he found that he had heard aright. A new governor had been appointed. He was one of the most influential men in King William's government. His name was Richard Coote, but he was generally known by his title: the Earl of Bellomont.

Colonel Livingston wasted no time in arranging to meet and ingratiate himself with the new governor. For his part, Lord Bellomont was pleased by the flattering attention of his visitor from New York. And it happened that before he left to take up his new

position, Lord Bellomont had a piece of business to transact. Colonel Livingston could help him. Did the Colonel know of a reliable New York captain who might be entrusted with a delicate mission? Were there any honest skippers left in New York? If so, how could one be located?

Colonel Livingston replied immediately that he not only knew of one but counted him as a friend. And by a surprising coincidence the man was in London at the moment. Livingston would bring him to meet his lordship. The man's name was William Kidd.

# THE MYSTERIOUS VOYAGE OF *Captain Kidd*

A difficult mission, a mutinous crew, treacherous waters, and merchant ships bearing cargoes of gold, silk, diamonds and rubies...all awaited Captain William Kidd as he found himself caught up in the doomed voyage of the *Adventure Galley*. But did this well respected seaman, familiar to New Yorkers and Londoners alike as a prosperous, honest and experienced skipper, understand exactly what he was to do?

After being chosen by King William's representative to undertake this secret expedition, Captain Kidd meticulously prepared to sail around the Cape of Good Hope never dreaming of the fate awaiting him upon his return.

Adventure abounds—complete with intrigue, pirates, unruly sailors, treasure hunting and double-crossing government officials. Carefully researched, this dramatically recounted story of a ship captain and his mysterious voyage will keep readers captivated to the very end.

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