

S T O R M
W A R R I O R S

J O N N A P P A

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Sample from *Storm Warriors* / ISBN 1-60006-172-9

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NavPress
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Colorado Springs, Colorado 80935

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ISBN-13: 978-1-60006-172-1

ISBN-10: 1-60006-172-9

Cover design by studiogearbox.com

Cover images by Arnulf Husmo/Getty, Underwood & Underwood/Corbis, and Veer

Author photo by Julianne

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Containing excerpts from the nonfiction book *Storm Warriors* by Rev. John Gilmore, MA, Macmillan and Co., London, 1875.

Published in association with the literary agency of Leslie H. Stobbe, 300 Doubleday Road, Tryon, NC, 28782.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Nappa, Jon, 1958-

Storm warriors : a novel / Jon Nappa.

p. cm. -- (Storm warriors series ; bk. 1)

ISBN 978-1-60006-172-1

1. Shipwrecks--Fiction. I. Title.

PS3614.A663S76 2008

813'.6--dc22

2007033174

Printed in the United States of America

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 / 11 10 09 08


Sample from *Storm Warriors* / ISBN 1-60006-172-9

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To Joanne Davis

(1954–2007)

A true friend and genuine Storm Warrior



ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to send many thanks to the fine folks at NavPress for their favor, interest, and commitment to me and *Storm Warriors*. Especial appreciation goes to Kris Wallen for being so kind and supportive. I am indebted to Jeff Gerke, the quintessential editor, and Les Stobbe, my agent, whose wisdom, excellence, and friendship have been invaluable. Deep appreciation goes to Dee Ward, for performing grace while practicing law, and Pat Fiumano, for helping me appreciate great minds from the past.

To Julianne, my Proverbs 31 wife, thank you for your unwavering support and belief. And to my four children, who allowed me to read long passages to them at bedtime and didn't fall asleep, I send bunches of love. Finally, thank you, Mom, for everything.

PART 1

I have acts of daring and determination to relate, done by brave men for which I claim a place amid the records of the bravest, grandest deeds of heroism of the age; a tale to tell which, unless I fail utterly in the telling, must excite sympathy for those in peril. A tale which may well stir, even as a trumpet blast, stout hearts to brave and magnificent deeds.

THE REVEREND JOHN GILMORE

“It’s like doing a jig, wouldn’t you say?”

Lionel was too startled to answer right away. He and his small family were more focused on maintaining balance than making light.

The captain continued without waiting for a reply, “I call it the salty shuffle!”

A sheet of ocean spray hissed as it blasted over the bow. The ship was bounding down the English Channel to Dover. Lionel’s land coach stood lashed upon the main deck, already soaked like a rock on the coast.

His wife, Alicia, and son, Luke, were by his side. The rough action of the sea forced them all to lean and tilt and stutter-step as they watched Captain Horace Beeker whittling a small piece of ivory with a knife that bore his initials. Beeker laughed at his own humor in a voice pitched higher than one would have imagined coming from such a square-shouldered sailor. Although the captain appeared intimidating in size, his voice did much to make him seem friendly.

A few miles away were the headlands of England. They formed a blurred edge upon the horizon as the night advanced. The darkness began to swallow most of the glowing dots of lantern light scattered like flickering stars across the distant land. It was the

cloud-streaked moon that provided the light by which the outline of the coast could be seen at all, though a heavy fog was rising and the clouds increasing.

The gusts whipped up the surface waters and spat them over the rail in blasts of frigid ocean spray. As the ship pitched, Lionel nearly slipped, his shiny black boots not at all designed to grip a soaked deck. He was dressed in a fine suit, now drenched, and an outer coat that flapped in the wind like a loose sail. He was thin and fair-skinned and beginning to feel quite cold. His short, neatly trimmed hair was light-colored and fine but well protected under his new derby, which he struggled to keep pressed down upon his head.

He squeezed his wife and son tighter as they clung to the ship's rail. This was the first sailing trip for any of them. He lowered his hand from his hat to grip his wife's shoulder, and his derby blew off. Lionel growled and looked for it but refused to release his protective embrace.

The ship scudded on, crashing through the rough seas with strained bow and then lifting and tilting as the coursing waves lapped it with foam. The captain pointed with his knife in the direction of the distant shoreline. Lionel strained to peer through the thickening fog. He could see nothing but dark shapes within dark shapes. He shouted above the groaning wind and pelting rain, "What is it?"

"The double light!" the captain said. "I know it well!"

Suddenly, a large roller broke over the side and sprayed the small gathering. Lionel's young son wiped his eyes then clung all the harder to his mother's skirt.

"Fear not, Luke," Lionel said with a smile, trying to shield his family with his body. "It's only salt water."

The captain said, "It's my home, it is."

“The sea?” Lionel asked.

“No, I mean the double light. I know its place between the rolls of the land—when you can see it.”

“It’s where you’re from?” Lionel asked, fighting to maintain his balance.

The captain stepped away to peer up at the foremast, then returned to answer. Lionel marveled at how the captain took no assistance from the many rope rails running fore and aft. He somehow maintained his balance just by leaning and stepping.

“It’s where I anchor,” the captain replied. “When I can. My house is just below it.” He pocketed his knife and cupped his hands around his mouth to shout. “Another reef, lads! Be quick and snappy!” He stepped near to Lionel. “I’m certain me wife and eight urchins are sleeping sound even as we ride the crests.”

“We’re near a reef?” Lionel asked.

“Eight children!” Alicia said.

“And every one as dear as me eight toes!” the captain said with a laugh. Glancing at some crewmen below, he shouted, “Be mindful the coach!” He turned back to Lionel with a wink. “No worry. She’s fixed fine.”

“Are we nearing a reef?” Lionel repeated.

“Eight toes?” Luke asked.

“No, no, I meant not that kind of reef,” the captain said to Lionel. “We also call it a *reef* when we shorten or trim our sails. The wind has freshened, and too much sail is dangerous. True, there are shifting sand reefs in these parts, but we stay clear.”

“Because you know where they are, right?” Lionel asked.

The captain winked again. “I know where they aren’t!”

Lionel and his wife laughed at the captain’s humor. Lionel looked toward the land coach, only now realizing the danger to his latest achievement. If all worked as planned there would soon be

a new line of Lukin coaches traversing not only the city roads but also the country lanes of England.

Luke looked up from the refuge of his mother's skirt. "Eight toes? Don't you have ten?"

The captain laughed and scuffed the boy's hair. "I think you not be wanting to hear that tale, lad."

"But I do," Luke said.

"With your Ma being a nurse and all, you've heard plenty of cutting and mending stories, I'm sure." The captain winked again, more at Lionel and Alicia than their son.

"No! Tell me, sir," Luke pleaded. "Do tell me, please!"

Before the captain could reply, a mountainous wave broke upon the ship, flooding the deck with foam. The wind howled loud and long, suppressing all other sounds. Lionel saw a door on his land coach spring open and slam shut several times. He was certain he could hear the thuds above the storming wind and surf.

A sailor clawed his way along a rope guide to reach the wayward door, every step a struggle to ascend and descend against the pitch and roll of the ship. As he reached the door, a blast of wind blew, and, to Lionel's annoyance, out flew several handbills. One of them plastered itself across the sailor's face. It was a poster depicting the very same coach surrounded by bold black lettering. The word *Lukin* was plainly seen across the bottom. The sailor ripped it off in soaking pieces as more copies swirled about him. He finally reached the land coach and lashed the door shut.

The ship pushed bow first into each wave to bury in the trough then break through with her bowsprit pointing to the stars. The waves washed over her and threatened to carry all away.

The captain appeared to shift into a sober and decisive mind. He yelled commands to sailors, his voice no longer high-pitched but loud and deep. He turned to Lionel and his family and thrust

his chin in the direction of the stairs. “It might be best to ride this out below whilst we do what needs doing.”

Lionel nodded and lifted his son into his arms. He took Alicia’s hand and led them to the main deck below. The wind seemed to be dying down. Lionel felt relieved. He looked aft. Perhaps the captain would ask their return now that the wind had lulled. Lionel made eye contact with him, but Beeker didn’t smile. Instead, he looked away to where he had claimed to have seen the double light. When Lionel followed the captain’s gaze, for an instant, between the mist and shifting fog, he thought he could see some sort of glow, but then it was gone. Whatever it was, the rising sea blotted it from view.

“Prepare to head up!” the captain shouted to his men.

“No, sir! She’ll ride into the Sands then!” James, the first mate, said.

Lionel opened the door to the modified berths below and urged his wife and son to enter. Alicia tugged on his hand but Lionel held back. “I’ll be right along.” They disappeared below while he stayed at the doorway to observe the captain and mate.

“What are you saying, man? We must head up—*away* from the Sands!”

“Look!” The mate pointed to a light rocking back and forth in the distance.

“A ship?” the captain said. “But how?”

Lionel saw a light he hadn’t noticed before. It was near where the captain had been looking and appeared to be a ship a long ways off. It seemed to rock gently and safely.

“In no distress, sir,” the mate said. “She must be standing the same course as we intended. The tide has shifted us.”

“But I just saw the double light of my home, just there!”

“Sir, did you? Or did you *want* to?”

“Oh, James, you cloud the course.” The captain looked again upon the light in motion. “You must be right. Sometimes a man sees only what his heart aches for. All right then, ready to fall off.”

James shouted the order, “Prepare to fall off!”

The captain’s eyes still searched the mist. “Fall off!”

James repeated the command and headed forward.

The helmsman turned the wheel as others pulled hard on the yards. The ship turned downwind and surged forward, its stern charging through the mounting waves.

Lionel was relieved. He didn’t understand sailing, but he knew the captain and mate were in agreement about something important and were taking action. Lionel joined his family below.



The wind surged, harder than before. The captain held fast to the rail. He strained to peer into the darkness and tilted his head to listen for indications of danger. He looked forward and thought he saw the double light. It flickered in and out of view from the rolling seas in the midst of roving strands of fog and grew fainter in the enveloping dark of night. He rushed to the helmsman. “There!” he pointed. “Do you see it?”

The sailor peered hard. “Aye! But look!”

The captain saw a lone lamp-glow shining to the left of the double light—the same light James had discovered earlier. It motioned to and fro and looked like a masthead light from a vessel rocking atop the sea.

“How can this be?” Beeker shouted. “If that be the double light marking the place near my own home, then only cliffs may stand beside her. What madness is this?”

The wind momentarily halted and allowed him to hear a differ-

ent sound—the fury of breakers, dead ahead. The captain stepped forward. “Oh, my God.”

A voice from the bow shouted, “Breakers ahead! Breakers ahead!”

Suddenly, a dozen men were running everywhere, looking over the sides and shouting reports of what they could determine. The mate rushed to the captain, panic upon his face. “The Goodwin!”

“Down with the helm!” the captain shouted. “Round her to!”

It was too late. The ship lifted on a wave and fell hard upon the Goodwin Sands. The crackling sound of splintering timber pierced the night. A quaking tremor shook the vessel from stem to stern.

Amidst shrieking voices muffled by the blowing gale, green seas suddenly rose to wash over the decks and clear all in their way. From atop the quarterdeck, Captain Beeker watched one of his men wash across the main deck in a flood of ocean foam, followed by the Lukin coach breaking up and losing a wheel. It tumbled behind until both the man and the buggy washed clear over the waist into the churning sea.

“Ship aground! Man overboard!”

A sailor yanked a life ring from off the far side of the deck house and threw it toward his flailing mate. The throw missed. He rushed to the other life ring on the deckhouse but never reached it. Another monster wave washed the crewman overboard.



The belly of the ship flooded fast.

Below deck, Lionel and Luke reached the stairs to stay above the flood. Alicia struggled nearby, clinging to a post. She reached out to her husband.

Broken timbers and bales of cargo floated by as Lionel held

Luke with one arm and reached for his wife's hand with the other. Luke clung to his father's neck but cried for his mother. Lionel could scarcely breathe; Luke was clinging so tightly. He leaned from the steps to reach his wife. He clasped her by the wrist and pulled her to him.

"Thank God, we are safe," Alicia said.

They clambered up the steps and stepped out onto the main deck.

Everything was drenched and dark, rising and falling hard. Timber snapped and the ship shuddered. A turbulent wave broke across the ship, shattered an onboard boat, and carried it away.

Lionel and his family clung to each other and the rope rails. The deck was tilted so sharply that Lionel was terrified his wife and son might slip and fall into the sea. He searched for the captain. Beeker would know what to do.

Lionel found him clinging to the stairway rail leading from the stern to the main deck, not far away. He was struggling to stand, this time making much use of the rails and safety lines.

"Tar barrels!" the captain shouted. "With a will, men! Tar barrels!"

Two sailors lashed a barrel to the main mast and stuffed it with rags and grease. James, the mate, set a torch to it, and up went a fiery blaze.

"Up the masts," the captain cried. "The ship's boat is stove and awash!"

"Captain, what do we do?" Lionel yelled, clinging to his frightened family. They clutched the rope rails near the stairs.

The captain's eyes widened. "Climb! Climb fast!"

Lionel set Luke down and helped his wife climb the stairs.

"No!" Beeker said. "Not the ladder!"

Lionel stopped, suddenly feeling sweaty despite the cold. "Where, then?"

“The mast!”

Lionel looked around. Everything was upset. Ropes ran in mazes, waters rushed with frenzy, and the captain’s directions were not specific. *Which mast? How do you climb one?*

He looked at Alicia. She held Luke close as they both clung to Lionel. She lifted her head to look at her husband. Lionel knew she needed him to fix this. He felt ashamed that he had picked this trip to bring them along.

Captain Beeker reappeared. “Quickly! Come with me.” Using the safety lines, he helped them scale the steep deck to the ship’s far side. He led them to the standing rigging that ran from the ship’s side to the high parts of the mainmast. “It’s like climbing a ladder,” he shouted. “Hand over hand, foot over foot. Each square of rigging is like a step. Hurry!”

The weight and bulk of Alicia’s soaked skirts and her obsession with holding Luke made the climb difficult.

Lionel pried his son loose from her and held him. “I’ve got him. I promise.”

The captain climbed up the rigging and reached down for Alicia’s hand.

“Go on,” Lionel said. “Take it.”

Alicia took the captain’s hand and ascended.

Lionel lifted Luke overhead. “Hold the rigging. Hold tight, son.”

“I’ve got it,” Luke said, his voice quivering.

“Don’t let go.”

A massive wave slammed against Lionel’s left side. He felt his breath rush from him, and the rigging scraped his palms as it ripped from his grasp.



Captain Beeker was aghast. The gargantuan wave had washed his passenger away.

“*Daddy!* Where are you?” The boy dangled from the rigging, his tiny hands gripping hard.

“Luke!” the woman cried, halting her climb and turning back.

“Hold tight!” the captain instructed. “Do not let go.”

He climbed down and seized the boy by the wrist. Luke cried for his father, but no answer came except the howling wind. The captain brought the boy to his mother. “Hold on for your lives!”

“Daddy’s gone,” the boy whimpered.

“Lionel!” Alicia shouted. “Lionel! My love!”

Captain Beeker urged them up the rigging, despite their frantic wails for the missing man.

The storm winds strengthened and the frigid seas leapt upon them. Soaked and weeping, the woman struggled to heave her skirts as she climbed. The boy shivered and sobbed. They climbed as high as they could on the narrow rigging.

The captain looked at the crying lad and thought of his own children. He imagined them laughing as they rushed to the pier to see him coming home. It was a pleasant scene, one that had played out many times before but was unlikely to happen again.

He studied the woman as she pressed tight to the ropes, her eyes red and her lips trembling. She had seemed like an intelligent woman and loving person. All three of his passengers had been kind and courteous. He wondered if his own wife sensed the terrible circumstances he was in.

Timber cracked and lines snapped. Iron clanged. The mast creaked. The ship shifted, and waves attacked from every side. His once-beautiful vessel buckled before his eyes.

Below them, the tar barrel burned brilliantly. He thought it

might alert any nearby ships. He doubted any would venture near, but the barrel represented some hope.

The gale increased force and dark clouds settled low. The barrel washed out.

Rain squalls fell harder. Air and sea thickened into one mass of flying, chilling foam. The howling wind spat freezing waters into fits that rose and slapped and dunked the tottering masts. The decks squealed from the pressure.

The boat was half tilted over, its keel battered by fierce waves. The masts tipped sideways until they were only a few feet above the torrent in the midst of high-flying spray. The mighty grip of the sea squeezed and beat the ship against the reef, building tremendous pressure in the hold. The decks ripped at the seams and burst open in random places. Air pock-ets screeched their escape.

Scattered about the rigging upon the two tottering masts, like fish in a net, were the dark shapes of frightened souls. His crew. They were motionless, chilled to the bone and waiting. Their minds feared, he was sure, while their hands and legs clutched and their hearts beat with desperate hope.

With a thunderous roar, the foremast snapped and fell swiftly over the starboard side into a wilderness of waves and tide. His fine crew, who had been clinging to it, fell into the sea and were buried with a mad rush of waves.

James momentarily retained his hold to some broken parts. The captain struggled to keep his grip while he watched James rush along the angled deck and alongside the deckhouse.

“James!” he cried, knowing he could not help. He watched his friend slide past the deckhouse and into the churning sea. “James!”

It was then that the captain spotted the other passenger, the

man named Lionel Lukin. He crouched under the deckhouse, looking right at them, his topcoat flapping crazily.



From his place of temporary shelter, Lionel saw the first mate rush by upon a stew of wreckage as if riding rapids.

“James!” the captain cried.

“Help!” James shouted.

Without thinking, Lionel grabbed a rope hanging from above. He followed its length into the rushing sea to swing out to the drowning man. He failed the attempt, swung backwards, and watched the man wash away.

“Daddy!” Luke cried.

Lionel looked up to see his son drop from his hold on the rigging in a hopeless attempt to reach him.

“No, Luke!”

Alicia cried out and dropped from her hold to go after Luke.

“No!” the captain yelled.

It was too late. Alicia and Luke dropped into the angry seas. The freak action of the waves tossed Alicia to land atop her son. She groped for him.

The sea tossed both of them onto the deck and toward Lionel, and he reached for them, but they were quickly caught in a receding wave that pulled them off the deck and into the sea.

Luke screamed, “Daddy, help me!”

“Alicia! Luke!”

Lionel kicked his feet to swing out toward them, but the line was too short and the wind too strong. The rope spun him in circles. As he twirled, he noticed the remaining life ring on the side of the deckhouse. He exerted every ounce of his strength to swing

toward it. He managed to grab hold of it with his feet while keeping an eye on his wife and son.

They were being repeatedly submerged. Each time they rose, first separated then united, they drifted farther away.

“Help us!”

Lionel held the rope with one arm and used his free hand to claw at the ring. He released his leg lock and swung back over the wild seas. He looked for his family but saw nothing except for the dark outlines of waves in wild motion.

He frantically searched the dark ocean swells. In a flash of lightning, he saw them clinging to each other. They rode high atop the crest of a mighty wave several yards away.

“I’m coming!” Lionel shouted.

He released his hold from the rope and dropped into the sea, the life ring around one arm. He removed his topcoat and waistcoat, careful to keep the ring. Another thunderous crack pierced the night and the mizzenmast snapped and fell upon him.

It grazed his shoulder and forced him under. He lost the life ring.

From beneath the turbulent surface, he saw his topcoat floating like a rag doll with broken arms waving to him.

He saw thrashing legs and realized the captain had fallen with the crashing mainmast. Lionel kicked and lunged.

He blasted through the surface of the spastic seas into a tangled mass of rigging complicated by shredded strips of sail. Nearby, the captain was being bullied by waves. They were both encumbered by lines and cables.

“Alicia! Luke!”

Captain Beeker tried to help untangle Lionel, but they both remained in a confusion of wreckage. The lightning flashed again, revealing Alicia and Luke far above, higher than the masts had ever

stood, atop an enormous wave. Lionel thrashed to free himself but became increasingly entangled.

“They’re in the stream-reach!” the captain yelled.

“What?”

“The stream-reach. No hope. Too powerful—carries everything away. You mustn’t try!”

“I must!” Lionel said. He tried to get free but his movement was limited. He saw the life ring and grabbed it.

In the next flash of lightning, he could see his wife and child much farther away. Alicia waved and shouted, but Lionel couldn’t understand her.

In desperation, he pushed through the tangled rigging, planted his feet on the slanted deck, and tossed the ring toward them with all his might. It disappeared into the night. “My heart! My heart!”

A wave pummeled Lionel and threw him down, away from the deck. The waves were his enemy: chaotic battle formations intent on thwarting his will. When one swell of water retreated to permit a view, it was quickly replaced with another rising up from behind. The sea would not allow him an unblocked line of sight.

Spray and sleet stung his eyes. He struggled vainly to be rid of the lines that entangled him. He fought to see into the storm and find his wife and son. He could not.

The temperature had begun to drop. The freezing rain now became snow. Lionel wailed as he was beaten by the pounding waves. His shirt caught on splintered timber and ripped like strips of paper ribbons.

He flailed, trying to escape the restricting lines. With each kick, his trousers felt like heavy canvas wrapping around his legs. The water felt like ice. His leg muscles started to cramp—wet knots pulling tight—until he was certain they would tear apart. The cramps spread to his arms, his back, and neck. It felt like dozens

of knots, then hundreds, then thousands. His body felt like it was ripping. He howled with rage.

“Alicia! Luke! Where are you?”

There was no answer but howling winds and hostile waters.

The swirling snow mixed with icy foam and stinging spray. Finally, his heart began to feel as though it were cramping, too. There was no strength left in his body. It had no capacity to answer the commands of his brain or the wishes of his heart. Despite his will, he could summon no strength. Ropes snaked around him, coiling around his neck and arms and ribs. The depths sought to swallow him. His precious wife and innocent son had been stolen.

Lionel Lukin closed his eyes and surrendered to the will of the sea.



Captain Beeker struggled to cut himself free with his knife. He looked in the direction of the shore and saw, in the great distance, between the rising and falling of frigid seas, the double light marking his home. He was sure he could see it. This was no trick of his mind.

He fixed his eyes upon the fierce waves around him. Would he truly perish within sight of his home? He remembered his family. The double light marked the place near where they dwelled. They were there, awaiting him.

He hacked at the cords with renewed vigor. He was almost free when another huge wave sent a large crate to smash against his head. He fell back and sank below the surface.

He could feel the blackness pressing him to sleep. He fought it, trying hard to think, to take action, to stay awake. It was so hard. He sank deeper.

He remembered his knife, heavy in his hand. He squeezed the handle. He could feel his legs. He knew where his feet were. Things were starting to make sense again.

With a desperate act of will, the captain kicked his feet and approached the surface. As he rose, he looked up and saw the limp body of the man named Lionel hanging from a length of broken mast, floating just above him. If he could just plant his knife into the mast, he could pull himself up—and maybe this man, too. His knife-wielding hand broke the surface of the sea, and he frantically jammed it into something.

The captain attempted to pull himself up but only barely managed to get his blood- and brine-soaked head from out of the water before his strength emptied; he let go of his knife and fell back into the sea.

As he sank deep into the ocean he looked for the flickering double light of his home but could not find it.



The next morning, the tide had ebbed, and the Goodwin Sands, some four miles away from shore, protruded from the English Channel like a sandy beach. Gentle lapping sounds of peaceful waters replaced the angry war dance from the night before. Except for the lone spar that stuck out like a dead tree, there was no sign of the deadly struggle.

An old man and his horse tramped along the shore of the mainland. Much of the wreckage had washed up there, aided by the southwesterly winds and direction of the tide. Bales of cargo were strewn about. A wagon wheel thudded quietly amidst some rocks, and a twine-fastened bundle of handbills floated in the surf.

Some bottles had found their way to shore, and it was these the

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old man first attended to. He uncorked one and took a nip. He spat it out and threw the bottle back to sea.

He knelt next to a bale and ripped it open with a dagger. Inside he found women's clothes, including a dark blue dress with ruffles and sash. He stuffed the dress into a sack hanging from his horse. He gathered booty into his sacks, rigged crates upon his horse's back, and continued to search the shore.

He saw something that arrested his attention. The body of a man, his hand knifed to a mast, lay awash in the surf. Its only motion came from the action of the waves. The old man looked to see if anyone was near and then pulled the man farther up onto dry sand behind an obstructing boulder so he could rifle through the pockets. He found a pocket watch, coins, and a wallet filled with money. He took them. Then he saw the man's shiny boots. The old man chuckled and yanked them off.