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The Sea-Hawk

Rafael Sabatini · *1915 · original English text*

Sir Oliver Tressilian of Cornwall is falsely believed to have killed his betrothed's brother. Kidnapped by his own brother, he is taken by Spaniards and chained to a galley oar, and he renounces his faith. He is freed by Muslim corsairs and becomes the pirate Sakr-el-Bahr, until a return to England and the love of Rosamund bring him to judgment. This is a tale of pride, shame and return, and it is for older readers.

THE CENTRAL QUESTION

What happens to a man who is wronged and who gives up his faith, and can he come back?

Sabatini's answer is that a man can return, though not without cost. Oliver turns from his faith in the galley, and the book does not hide it. His honor, his love for Rosamund and his care for his followers pull him back. The Christian frame matters, because the story shows renunciation as a loss, and the last chapters stage a judgment in which he is cleared and received. Teachers should read the middle chapters with care.

KEY CHARACTERS

Sir Oliver Tressilian
A Cornish gentleman who becomes a corsair.

Lionel Tressilian
Oliver's brother.

Rosamund Godolphin
Oliver's betrothed.

Jasper Leigh
A shipmaster who carries Oliver away.

Asad-ed-Din
The Basha of Algiers.

Marzak-ben-Asad
The Basha's son, Oliver's enemy.

Fenzileh
The Basha's wife.

Sir John Killigrew
Rosamund's guardian and an English sea-captain.

Lord Henry Goade
The Queen's Lieutenant of Cornwall and the chronicler of the tale.

Grades 9–12

Read the full text free at classicslaunch.org.

01

The Quarrel at Penarrow

PART I, CHAPTERS I–V

Oliver is betrothed to Rosamund Godolphin, but her brother Peter forbids the match. Oliver's brother Lionel kills Peter in a night fight, and Oliver hides the deed.

- Oliver Tressilian is a Cornish gentleman of Penarrow.
- Peter Godolphin opposes the match.
- Lionel kills Peter by night.
- Oliver hides his brother's guilt.
- Rosamund believes Oliver the murderer.

02

Trepanned

PART I, CHAPTERS VI–VIII

Lionel pays the shipmaster Jasper Leigh to carry Oliver off. Spaniards take the ship, and Oliver is given to the Inquisition and sent to the galleys.

- Jasper Leigh is paid by Lionel.
- Oliver is carried off in the Swallow.
- Spaniards take the ship.
- He is given to the Inquisition.

03

The Galley

PART II, CHAPTERS I–II

For six months Oliver is chained to an oar, and he turns from his faith. When Muslim corsairs take the galley, he becomes the corsair Sakr-el-Bahr in the service of the Basha of Algiers.

- Oliver is chained to an oar.
- He turns from his faith.
- The corsairs take the galley.
- He becomes Sakr-el-Bahr.

04

The Raid

PART II, CHAPTERS III–IV

Years later, Sakr-el-Bahr meets Jasper Leigh again, learns of events in England and sails for Cornwall. He raids the coast and takes Rosamund and Lionel to Algiers.

- He learns the truth of events at home.
- He sails for Cornwall.
- He raids the coast.
- Rosamund and Lionel are taken to Algiers.

05

Algiers

PART II, CHAPTERS V–XX

Oliver buys Rosamund in the slave market and tells her the truth. Asad-ed-Din wants her, and his wife Fenzileh and son Marzak plot against Oliver. He hides her in a pannier on the Basha's galley, and she is found.

- Oliver buys Rosamund in the slave market.
- He tells her the truth.
- Asad-ed-Din wants Rosamund.
- Fenzileh and Marzak plot against Oliver.
- He hides Rosamund in a pannier, and she is found.

06

The Judgment

PART II, CHAPTERS XXI–XXVI

Oliver surrenders to the English ship Silver Heron to save Rosamund and his followers. Lionel confesses as he dies, and Oliver is received by Lord Henry Goade and Rosamund.

- Oliver gives himself up to the Silver Heron.
- He is judged.
- Lionel confesses as he dies.
- Oliver is cleared and received.

Faith and renunciation | Honor and shame | Love and return | Slavery and freedom | The sea

What to watch for as you read

GRADES 9–12

1. Why Rosamund thinks Oliver killed her brother.
2. How Oliver is changed in the galley.
3. How Oliver acts as Sakr-el-Bahr toward Rosamund.
4. The judgment and what it says of return.

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