

Last of the Mary Ann || Being an Account of How Captain Hopewell Traded Ships at Sea

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CAPTAIN Elisha Hopewell of the brig "Mary Ann" of Salem, had been repairing and repainting and making his craft ready for a voyage to London and return. The year was 1786 and boy and man he had been sailing for over thirty years. Although he had owned and commanded "Mary Ann" for ten years, it was by no means a new craft when he got it. In making repairs he had found many signs of weakness, and as he finished his day's work and started for home his knees were stiff and his back ached. He reached his house to find his wife, Nancy, and supper waiting for him, and as he took his seat at the table he looked at her critically and for the first time noticed that there were gray hairs among the brown on her head.

"Elisha, have you lost your jackknife or heard that your brother was dead?" quietly asked Nancy after awhile.

"No," he answered, and followed the word with a sigh.

"Mebbe ye are comin' down with measles. Your mother says ye never had 'em as a boy."

"Mebbe I am," he gloomily replied. Nancy waited for three minutes to see if he had an explanation, but as none came she briskly said:

"Now look here, Elisha, I know all about it, and I've bin sort o' spectin' this thing would happen any time. You've bin over-haulin' 'Mary Ann' and you've found out the same thing of yourself and you've suddenly seen it in me. It has struck you all in a heap, and you feel glum over it."

"Then by Josh you've hit it!" exclaimed the captain, glad to have an opportunity to talk it over.

"Wall, there ain't no call to cry over it," she continued. "Ever since you got this charter I've made up my mind that it would be our last voyage."

"But how can it be, Nancy?"

"It won't be so hard. We are purty well off fur common folks, Elisha. That is, we've got enough money to start you in shig chandlery, and we own our own house and lot. No fear but what we'll come out all right. We must give up the sea to younger folks."

They talked it over for a couple of hours and it was fully decided that when "Mary Ann" returned to Salem its last voyage under Captain Hopewell would be ended. Perhaps an astrologist might have warned them that there would be no home-coming for the brig which had borne them safely over so many leagues of ocean, but there was no reader of the future at hand. It got to be known over Salem that Captain Hopewell was making his last voyage and when "Mary Ann" cast off from the wharf there was a big crowd at hand to cheer its departure and wish it a safe return. It headed out into the Atlantic on a summer's afternoon and as the Massachusetts shores faded behind them Captain Elisha said to Nancy:

"By Josh, then, Nancy, but it seems as if a piece of that beef we had fur breakfast had got stuck in my throat!"

"It's a sort o' weakness of our feelin's, Elisha," she replied as she turned away to wipe her eyes, "but I guess we've decided fur the best."

For a thousand leagues, headed toward the rising sun, "Mary Ann" was driven as it had never been driven before. There was a pipping breeze and it scarcely varied a point, and a third of the run had been marked off when there fell a flat calm. It was noon when the wind died out and the man sent aloft reported the ocean clear of sail. As sundown came the sea was like glass and it was the same state of affairs at midnight when the watch was changed. The mate went off and the captain came on and he had been only on deck half an hour when Nancy appeared. She declared it to be too hot below to sleep. In a calm in mid-ocean at night there are strange and uncanny sounds from the hold of a ship as it lazily heaves up on the ground swell. Boxes and barrels down in the hold rub each other, bulk-heads creak and timbers groan, and now and then there are shrill squeaks from the fighting rats. Men who sleep during a calm breathe stentoriously and sigh and groan now and then, and the wakeful ones move about uneasily and cast apprehensive glances over the sea.

Nancy walked aimlessly about for a while and then rested her arms on the rail and gazed off into the darkness and let her thoughts wander back home. She had been silent for a quarter of an hour when she gave a sudden start and bent her ear to listen. Captain Elisha happened to note her attitude, and he crossed over to her side and queried:

"Wall, Nancy, d'ye think anybody will steal the woodpile while we're gone on this trip?"

"I'm listenin', Elisha," she replied, as she laid a hand on his arm. "Can't you catch the sound of oarlocks off here to the north?"

"It's some noise in the hold," he answered, after listening a minute.

"No, it's not. There—there—don't you catch it?"

"By Josh, I do! Yes, it sounds like oars

at work, but how on earth can a boat be out there?"

"I dunno, but there is one. Now you get the sounds plainer. It's a boat, I tell you, and it's pulling at least four oars. It must be from a wreck and you'd better light a lantern and lash it in the riggin' to guide 'em."

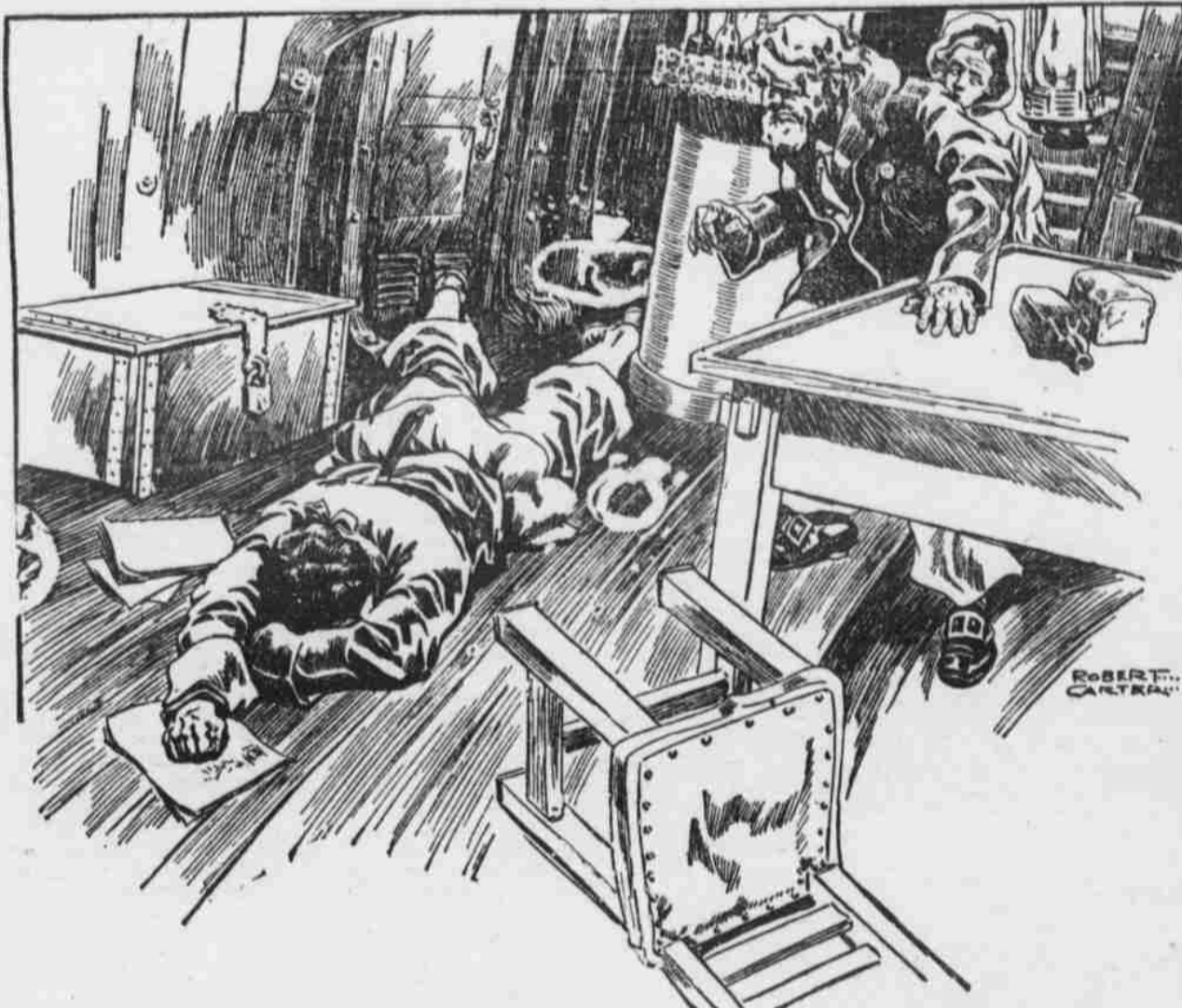
A lantern was procured and placed as suggested, and it had scarcely thrown its light over the waters when there was a hail from half a dozen throats at once. Captain Hopewell answered it, and within five minutes everyone of the crew of the "Mary Ann" was on deck and wide awake with curiosity. The hails were repeated at intervals, the sound of the oars came nearer, and at the end of half an hour a big yawl with twelve men and their ton-

Hopewell called the cook aft to see about preparing breakfast for the extra men. He had his eye on the strangers at the same time, and noted that they had gathered in a bunch and were whispering together. Their yawl was a big clumsy boat, provided with oars and sail, and as there was no room on the deck of the brig to stow it the captain went forward and tried to make the dutch mate understand that the contents should be hoisted aboard and the yawl sent adrift. He made himself clear enough, but as if his words and gestures had been a signal the twelve dutchmen at once sprang upon the crew of "Mary Ann," all of whom were on deck. They were stout, determined men, and the move was so sudden that no resistance was made. Nancy heard the scuffle and ap-

would have killed every one of us but what they'd had the brig, and we ought to thank heaven we got off as well as we did. Don't ye despair, Elisha. We've seen some tight squeaks, but we've allus come out all right. Don't ye remember how a whale once saved us?"

"And the same whale may eat us this time."

All that day the boat ran its course, but as the brig bore into the north and sailed the faster, its topsails were only a speck on the sea when the sun went down. As the breeze did not fall with the sun, the men divided watches, a lantern was run to the head of the mast as a signal, and hour after hour the boat danced over the sea. There were two men in the lookout, but after midnight Nancy roused up



LYING IN THE MAIN CABIN, FULLY DRESSED, WAS THE CORPSE OF THE CAPTAIN.

nage in it drew alongside the "Mary Ann." "By Josh, then, but it's a crew of Dutchmen!" exclaimed Captain Hopewell, as he peered down in the boat.

He was right. They were big and sturdy men who had sailed out of the Texal, and it was quickly discovered that not one of them could speak English. Each one brought his bag of clothing over the rail with him, but water and provisions were left behind. A man who was doubtless the mate of the crew advanced to Captain Hopewell and entered into a long explanation, not one word of which was understood. It was, however, guessed that his ship had sprung a leak and he had been obliged to abandon it. He was made to understand that they were welcome and would be landed in London, and by and by the twelve of them withdrew in a body and stretched themselves on deck and went to sleep. Nancy had looked into the faces of all in a critical way and while the Dutch mate was telling his story her eyes never left his face. When the strangers had withdrawn she descended to the cabin and a few minutes later Captain Elisha followed her and said:

"Nancy, I'm jiggered if this ain't a funny thing. I can't say that things look exactly right to me."

"I'll tell you what, Elisha," she replied in her quiet way. "If a ship had bin on fire or in a sinkin' state them men would never have brought all their clothin' and heaped in the water and provisions they did."

"No, by Josh, they wouldn't, but how do they come to be afloat?"

"Dunno, but there's a mystery about it. There's the hull crew except the captain. How did he come to be left behind? And didn't you notice how the men looked the brig over and kept dodgin' and wh'sperin'? I'm believin' we shall have trouble with 'em, Elisha."

"But they can't be pirates."

"Probably not."

"And there's no war between us."

"No, but we can't make out their story, and I do believe that mate was lyin' all the time. I wish we hadn't shown a light and brought them aboard."

The Dutchmen were tired with their pull at the oars and slept soundly 'till the morin' watch of "Mary Ann" was ready to wash down decks. Then they rose up, yawning and stretching, and the last was hardly on his feet before the breeze came. Sail was made at once, and as "Mary Ann" laid its course Captain

peared on deck to find Captain Elisha and all his men prisoners. They were prisoners, and yet they were not bound. When they made no struggle the Dutch mate took off his cap to Nancy and sought to make it clear to the others that they were to be sent adrift in the yawl.

"Wall, d'ye understand what he's drivin' at?" asked Captain Elisha as he turned to Nancy.

"I do, Elisha," she replied, "and I'm not a bit surprised. They mean to turn us adrift and go sailing away with the brig."

"But, by Josh, how can they do it! It's the same as piracy! Men, let's make a fight fur it!"

"Stop, Elisha!" called Nancy. "There's no show fur us! They'll bent ye to death before you can knock one of 'em down. Don't drive them to murder when there's no call fur it."

"And am I to let 'em have possession of brig and cargo?"

"You'll have to. If you are easy with 'em we'll git away all right, and we may sight a vessel to help us before noon."

"Aye, captain, we've no show agin 'em," called the mate, "but with that big yawl we needn't be afraid if we are at sea fur a month. We are fur the boat."

That settled it. It is due to the strangers to say that they made not the slightest objection when more water and provisions were lowered into the boat, and when the men packed and lowered their bags and Nancy brought up a big bundle of things from the cabin. They had no jeers or insults to sling after those they had sent afloat, but at once made more sail on the brig and headed it on a new course. Nancy had smuggled the chart and a spare compass into her bundle, and as the boat drew away she was forced by the wind to hold a true course for the English channel. There were provisions in plenty, and scarcely a word was uttered before breakfast had been served out. Then Nancy quietly asked:

"Elisha, what ye goin' to do about it?"

"I'm goin' to stand to the eastward fur awhile," he replied after thinking it over. "I'll jest keep track of 'Mary Ann' as long as I can, and it's jest possible that we may be picked up and have a show to git it back. If we don't meet anything by tomorrow, and the wind allows it, I'll head fur home, though I don't see how I'm ever to hold up my head in Boston or Salem agin. They'll say I was a coward not to make a fight fur it."

"Then they'll be fools. The Dutchmen

and spoke to them and found that both of them were asleep. She sat down beside one of them in the bows, wide awake with her thoughts of the sudden change in their fortunes, and a long hour had passed when the sight of a ship suddenly danced before her. It was a craft with all its sails set, and, having been taken aback, it was drifting away stern first, though this fact was not known till later. A cry from the woman roused everybody in an instant, and pointing into the south she chokingly exclaimed:

"There—there—a ship—a ship!"

"By Josh, and there is!" answered Captain Elisha a second later. "Now, men, all together and hail it!"

A great shout went over the water, but it was not answered, and neither was a light displayed. The shout was repeated again and again, and then, after a long look, Captain Elisha cried out:

"Why, I believe she's an abandoned craft and takin' care of itself! We'll run right alongside in five minutes!"

They reached the decks of the stranger to find it a ship a good deal larger than "Mary Ann," and a search of ten minutes proved that not a living soul was aboard. There was a dead man, though.

Lying in the main cabin, fully dressed, was the corpse of the captain, and a sailor's sheath knife was still sticking in his back. Murder had been done before the ship was abandoned. Did you ever read an account of that ocean mystery? The ship "Voorne," Captain Bergen, master, had set out from North Sea ports bound for New York with a valuable cargo. That was the craft Captain Hopewell found adrift in mid-ocean. Its crew, from the mate down, were the men who took forcible possession of "Mary Ann," after killing their captain and abandoning their vessel. What drove them to the deed of blood—why they didn't stand by their ship afterward—where they headed for the stolen brig—these are questions that have never been answered. Perhaps the mate and his chief quarreled, and murder was done in passion. Then fear of the law made the whole crew clamorous to get out of the ship. They took nothing with them which was not their own. They even left over a thousand dollars in gold and silver behind them. If any human eye ever sighted "Mary Ann" after its crew lost sight of it the fact has not been reported to this day. It is easy to guess its fate, however. It either went down in a

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