

Ye Stirring Adventures of Captain Elisha Hopewell

By CHARLES B. LEWIS

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[Ye captain was ye sole owner of ye brig Mary Ann, and between ye years 1779 and 1786 he sailed out of ye ports of Salem and Boston, generally accompanied by his wife Nancy.]

It was in July of the year 1781. British warships were thick on the American coast, and, though Yankee craft were constantly dodging in and out, each skipper realized that he ran a terrible risk. One day early in the month Captain Elisha Hopewell of the brig Mary Ann of Salem, who had not made a voyage for two months, entered his house to say to his wife:

"Waal, Nancy, I've got a cargo for the brig at last."

"I should think it was about time," replied the wife as she mixed her dough for the usual two loaves of bread without looking up.

"What d'ye think 'tis?" asked the captain as he sat down and pulled off his right boot, which had been chafing his heel.

"Dunno. But I shall be ready when the brig is."

"Nancy, I don't think you'll care about goin' on this voyage. It's a rather peculiar cargo, and I guess you'll sort of decide to stay home and mind the cat and the hollyhocks."

"Now, Elisha Hopewell, don't be silly. What's the cargo and where's the Mary Ann goin'?"

"The cargo is—p-o-w-d-e-r!" whispered the captain.

"Well, what of it?"

"A hundred barrels of powder, a thousand pounds of lead, five barrels of flints and 200 muskets."

"And where ye bound fur, Elisha?"

"Goin' to try to git into Wilmington, North Carolina. The lead and the flints and the muskets is all right, Nancy, but think of a hundred barrels of powder! By Josh, but it gives me cold feet!"

"I'm thinkin' it will give the British cold feet if them North Carolina patriots git hold of it," she grimly replied out without the shadow of a smile.

"When will you be ready?"

"Day after tomorrow."

"So'll I."

"But, Nancy, think of the powder—a hundred barrels of it! Just let a spark touch it, and we'll be blown into a million pieces!"

"I'm a-goin' along to keep the sparks away. Now, Elisha, don't waste any more breath nor make that hole in your stockin' any bigger. I'm goin' along, powder or no powder. The cat can scratch around fur a livin', and it wouldn't be no great harm if the hollyhocks died fur want of water. That's all, and it won't do no good to say another word!"

The captain pulled on his boot and went out and split some wood to bake the bread, and the subject wasn't mentioned again for twenty-four hours.

Then the wife sent a few things down to the brig, shut up the stove, poured all the water out of the teakettle and appeared on board. Next morning the Mary Ann put to sea. The brig had been built for a trader. She was fast, but she mounted no guns. As for fire-arms, there was only one musket aboard, and just who that belonged to nobody seemed to know. While nearly every other merchantman out of New England ports could make more or less of a stout defense if attacked, the Mary Ann depended on her wings alone. In this matter both Elisha and Nancy were agreed.

"Guns and powder and ball cost money," was the way the captain put it, "while wind don't cost nothin'."

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After heading straight out to sea until he believed he was clear of any of the blockaders Captain Elisha laid his southern course. Now and then a distant sail was sighted, but nothing happened to cause alarm until the brig was well down toward Cape Hatteras. Then one evening as fair progress was being made and all was going well, Nancy looked up from her sewing at Elisha as he came sauntering down into the cabin and said:

"Elisha, you know how my feet allus burn at sea when we're goin' to have a

calm? We'll lose the wind before 10 o'clock."

"By Josh, but I don't like it!" he exclaimed, with considerable vigor. "We're slippin' right along to git around the cape by sunup, and we can't have no calms."

"Got to have, Elisha, and it won't do no good to talk about it."

In less than two hours the breeze had fanned down and died out, and the Mary Ann lay tossing on the ground swell. The cargo was one to be got into the hands of the southern patriots without delay, and at least a portion of it was something no skipper cared to have aboard any longer than he could make a port. As the calm came Captain Elisha Hopewell fretted and fumed and wondered if it would be his undoing. The British still held Charleston, and from that port they patrolled the southern coast. Nothing had been in sight when night closed in, but morning and a breeze might find a frigate in his wake or coming up the coast. At the end of an hour and as he was still pacing the deck Nancy joined him and quietly said:

"Elisha, you may git ready fur a thunderstorm."

"N-o-a!" he fairly shouted as he flung up his arms.

"It's comin', Elisha. I can smell a thunderstorm ten miles off, as you very well know."

"But the powder, Nancy—the hundred barrels of powder! We shall be struck by lightning and blown to mince meat!"

"Mebbe we shall, but we can't help ourselves. That's all jest now, Elisha. Better change your clothes and git ready fur the rain."

Five minutes later there came a flash of lightning, followed by the rumble of thunder, and within a quarter of an hour there was a terrific downpour of rain which lasted for a full hour. At every flash of lightning the crew of the brig shivered and trembled, and they were a frightened and humbled lot when the storm finally passed over. The breeze did not come up as the heavens cleared, and then every sailor knew that the calm would hold until sunrise. Midnight came and the captain was just leaving the deck in charge of his mate when Nancy, who had declared her intention of going to bed half an hour before, suddenly appeared on deck and began sniffing and snuffing at the air.

"Is the wind a-comin'?" asked the captain, with considerable interest.

"No wind, Elisha," she answered, "but I'll tell you what's what. I don't know what's become of all your noses that you can't smell a whale close by!"

"A whale!" shouted the captain. "But, by Josh, then, your nose must have got a twist in it! If there was a whale within five miles of us—"

"Whale almost alongside of us, sir!" interrupted a voice from the bows of the brig. And there was a hurrying forward to confirm the announcement.

A whale fully sixty feet long had risen to the surface so quietly that no wash of the sea betrayed his presence. He was lying head and tail with the brig and almost rubbing her starboard side, and every man wondered that the odor of the leviathan had not betrayed his presence long before.

"I said a whale, Elisha," observed Nancy as she looked over the rail upon the great bulk, "and I calkerlate you'll acknowledge I'm right."

"But what we goin' to do with him?" asked the captain in a bewildered way.

"Nothin' 't all. Jest let him be. He's old enough and big enough to take care of himself."

"But if he staves in the brig he'll stave in the powder!"

"Can't be helped. You can't argue with a whale. We'd better all keep still and see if he won't go away."

The suggestion was followed, but the leviathan did not take his departure. He seemed to have come to the surface to take a long nap. Now and then a long drawn sigh escaped from his spout hole, but so far as could be observed by the men, who moved about in their bare feet and peered over the bulwarks at intervals, he never moved a fin. His queer hanging on made everybody nervous, and the result was that nobody slept. Captain Elisha paced up and down on tiptoe, and Nancy got out needle and thread and found a jacket of his which needed mending.

An hour after midnight the captain descended to the cabin to whisper to her: "Nancy, I'm jiggered if I know what's to be done!"

"Now, Elisha, what's the use of all this stavin'?" she asked as she held her needle suspended to look at him. "A calm is a calm and is goin' to continue to be a calm till the wind gits up. 'Pears to me that even Deacon Taylor's oxen could figger that out."

"But it's the whale, Nancy—the whale!" he hoarsely whispered.

"What about the whale? He hain't

nurt nobody yet, and I won't intend to. I'm worryin' more about our cat at home than I am about the whale alongside."

"Jest one flap of his tail would bust in the brig and the barrels of powder, and away we'd go!"

"Waal, I ain't goin' to worry 'bout no flaps, and it won't do you no good to prow around. Better lie down on the locker and git forty winks of sleep."

The hours dragged on, and the calm continued; so did the whale. When dawn came stealing over the sea at last he was rubbing the barnacles off his side against the Mary Ann and taking lots of comfort. The first thing they all looked for was the whale. The next thing was for sight of sail, and Nancy pointed her finger to the east and nudged the captain with her elbow and quietly said:

"Elisha, don't you kind of think that's an English frigate comin' in on the breeze which we hain't got yet?"

"By Josh, and I do!" he shouted after a brief look. "Yes, sir—e-e! That's a British frigate, and the Mary Ann is as good as captured this very munit! Nancy, you might as well begin to pack up your pins and needles."

"I shan't pack nothin', Elisha. She's got a small breeze out there, but it won't hold. It'll die out and then whip around and come off the cape."

"That'll be it, captain," added the mate as he leaped up on the rail to squint at the sky and observe the set of the sea.

"But if it falls calm she'll lower her boats to tackle us," persisted the captain. "I'm tellin' you that the brig is as good as captured right now, and we might jest as well git ready to see the inside of an English prison. By Josh, Nancy, but didn't I tell you to stay home?"

"You did, Elisha, but I'm here all the same. What a man you are to fret! That Britisher is seven miles off yet, and can't you see how the wind's dyin' out? Now, you stop your frettin' and let Providence sort of take hold. Nobody is ever captured till you've got hold of their coat tails, and even then the coat may wriggle off."

The eyes of the crew were on the captain, however, and the wife's stout hearted words did not prevent despondency. The entire crew agreed that the Mary Ann would never enter the port of Salem again, and those who had extra garments began to put them on so as to save being despoiled. Captain and mate sat down on the cabin skylight and sighed and groaned, while Nancy walked the deck and occasionally glanced from the whale to the frigate. When the latter had come up within five miles she lost the last of the breeze. She knew the brig to be a Yankee trader, and her captain would take no chances. Down dropped a boat, and fifteen men followed it, and in a minute more it was headed for the brig.

"Waal, mebbe you can git some comfort out of that," growled Captain Elisha as he rose up and pointed toward the boat.

"That boat hain't boarded us yet," replied Nancy.

"But what's to hinder her?"

"Can't tell, but I somehow feel as if Providence would pull us out of this. Elisha Hopewell, you hain't got half the grit I thought you had, and you've chewed tobacco and eat codfish till you seem to have lost all your faith!"

Even though the frigate was five miles away, a sort of quiver went through the whale as her boat struck the water. It could not be doubted that he heard the sound. When the boat had covered a mile he parted from the brig and slewed himself around almost by inches. Ten minutes more, and there was a cry that he had disappeared. He went as he came, silently and without showing a patch of foam. The boat was pulling steadily on, with the young sun glistening on the bayonets of the armed crew, and Captain Elisha had just fetched another groan of despair when there were shouts of astonishment from forward and aft.

The whale had breached between the boat and the brig. He came up from the sea as if he had 200 pounds of steam on and had forced a good third of his length out of water before he fell on the surface with a mighty crash. He did not rush at the boat, but he

ran in her course and beat the water into acres of foam and rolled this way and that until the seas he kicked up made the Mary Ann dance. The boat came to a sudden stop. It looked as if the whale had a chip on his shoulder and was aching for a row. After ten minutes of delay the boat put about for the frigate.

"By Josh and by Josh!" whispered the captain.

"Have I gone squint eyed, or has the boat put back?" demanded the mate.

"Elisha Hopewell, d'ye see the wind comin'?" asked Nancy as she pointed to the northwest. "Better make good use of it to git out of this."

The sails of the Mary Ann were spread, and she made a good two miles' headway before the frigate felt the first puff. A chase followed, but what was a good sailing breeze for a small brig was a slow pace for a heavy frigate, and by and by the pursuer hauled off and went his way. A few hours later the cargo was landed, and the brave General Greene had the munitions to fight the gallant action of Eutaw Springs. When the last barrel of powder and the last pound of lead were out of the brig Captain Elisha descended to the cabin and kissed his wife with a resounding smack.

"La, now, but what's come over you, Elisha?" she asked in surprise.

"You saved the Mary Ann, and, by Josh, I'll kiss you again!"

"Git out and don't act like a boy! I never saved the brig 't all. All I did was to tell you to hang on and trust in that whale and Providence, and I hope it'll be a lesson to you fur the rest of your days not to holler before you're hurt."



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Mysterious.

"So you have read your daughter's commencement essay?"

"Yes," answered the matter of fact father. "I am dumfounded. I can't understand how anybody who can write so sensibly and profoundly would chew gum and wear high heeled shoes."—Washington Star.

The Woman's Way.

"Many a married man who might make a fortune is handicapped because his wife demands too much of his attention."

"That's right. Just as soon as fortune begins to flirt with him his wife gets jealous."—Philadelphia Press.

All He Found.

"I trust," the new joke contributor wrote, "you may find something to attract you in this batch."

"Huh!" grunted the editor. "I find an error in spelling. The word 'batch' should be 'botch.'"—Philadelphia Ledger.

Evidence.

Nelle—Do they have airships in Europe?

Willie—I guess so. At least I heard Aunt Molly say she was going to take a flying trip through there this summer.—Detroit Free Press.

A Case of Compulsion.

Willie—There's another fellow in the back parlor with sister.

Castleton—What is he doing there? She knew I was coming, didn't she?

Willie—Oh, yes. But she begged him to stay.—Brooklyn Life.

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