

Otis James

# With Porter in the Essex



James Otis

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# James Otis

## With Porter in the Essex / A Story of His Famous Cruise in the Southern Waters During the War of 1812

### PROLOGUE

The manuscript of this story was written by Ezra McKnight, a cousin of that Stephen Decatur McKnight of Hartford, Connecticut, who was captured after the action between the *Essex* and the *Phæbe* and *Cherub*, and with a companion named James Lyman went to Rio de Janeiro as exchanged prisoners of war. From that port, according to Lossing, these two shipped for England in a Swedish vessel, and, although the ship arrived in safety, her captain never gave any account of his prisoners, nor was it known what had become of them. That they were murdered would be the natural inference, since in event of their being treacherously sent to England some record must have been found regarding them.

He who wrote the story of the cruise of the *Essex* which follows here, searched long but vainly for some clew to the fate of his brave cousin; in fact, after leaving the United States Navy it was his lifework to discover the fate of that brave lieutenant who was the only officer uninjured on board the *Essex* after that unequal conquest was cowardly forced upon her by Captain Hillyar of the *Phæbe*, whose vessel and life had once been spared by Captain Porter.

Failing to gain any information concerning the lieutenant, Ezra McKnight set himself down to write the story of that marvellous cruise of the *Essex*, the United States frigate of thirty-two guns, commanded by Captain David Porter who was born in Boston on the first of February, 1780. How this manuscript came into the hands of the editor it is not necessary to state. Suffice it to say that no change has been made in the original arrangement of the tale, nor in any of the details; it is here presented virtually as Ezra McKnight wrote it, with only so much of editing as seemed necessary in order to bring it within the requirements of a story of the present day.

To those who may read that which follows for the purpose of learning somewhat of their country's history, it is well to state a few facts which would not naturally appear in what was originally intended for an account of the adventurous voyage.

The commander of the *Essex* gained his first experience in the navy on board the frigate *Constellation*, which vessel he entered as midshipman in 1798. Concerning him Lossing says that "he was in the action between the *Constellation* and the *L'Insurgente* in February, 1799, when his gallantry was so conspicuous that he was immediately promoted to lieutenant. He accompanied the first United States squadron that ever sailed to the Mediterranean in 1803, and was on board the *Philadelphia* when she struck on the rock in the harbor of Tripoli. There he suffered imprisonment. In 1806 he was appointed to the command of the *Enterprise*, and cruised in the Mediterranean for six years. On his return to the United States he was placed in command of the flotilla station near New Orleans, where he remained until war was declared in 1812, when he was promoted to captain and assigned to the command of the frigate *Essex*, taking with him, on this last cruise, his adopted son, David G. Farragut, who, during the War of the Rebellion, was made an admiral."

Now, in order that the memory of the reader may be refreshed as to the strength of the United States Navy while this cruise was being made, the following extract is taken from Lossing's "War of 1812."

"As we take a survey from a standpoint at mid-autumn, 1813, we observe with astonishment only three American frigates at sea, namely, the *President*, 44; the *Congress*, 38; and the *Essex*, 32. The *Constitution*, 44, was undergoing repairs; the *Constellation*, 38, was blockaded at Norfolk; and the *United States*, 44, and *Macedonian*, 38, were prisoners in the Thames above New London. The *Adams*, 28, was undergoing repairs and alterations, while the *John Adams*, 28, *New York*, 36, and *Boston*, 28, were virtually condemned. All the brigs, excepting the *Enterprise*, had been captured, and she was not to be trusted at sea much longer. The *Essex*, Commodore Porter, was the only government vessel of size which was then sustaining the reputation of the American Navy, and she was in far distant seas, with a track equal to more than a third of the circumference of the globe between her and the home port from which she sailed. She was then making one of the most remarkable cruises on record."

In October, 1812, Captain William Bainbridge was appointed the successor of Captain Hull in the command of the *Constitution*; and, according to Lossing, "a small squadron, consisting of the *Constitution*, 44, *Essex*, 32, and *Hornet*, 18, were placed in his charge. When Bainbridge entered upon his duty in the new sphere of flag officer, the *Constitution* and *Hornet* were lying in Boston harbor, and the *Essex*, Captain Porter, was in the Delaware. Orders were sent to the latter to cruise in the track of the English West Indiamen, and at the specified time to rendezvous at certain ports, when, if he should not fall in with the flagship of the squadron, he would be at liberty to follow the dictates of his own judgment. Such contingency occurred, and the *Essex* sailed on a very long and most eventful cruise in the South Atlantic and Pacific Oceans."

The *Essex* left the Delaware October, 1812, in pursuance with the command received by Captain Porter; and he must have already outlined in his own mind what course to pursue in case he failed to meet the little squadron, for Lossing says, "Captain Porter took with him a larger number of officers and crew than was common for a vessel of that size. Her muster roll contained three hundred and nineteen names; and her supplies were so ample that she sank deep in the water, which greatly impeded her sailing qualities."

On Porter's monument, which stands in Woodlawn Cemetery, Pennsylvania, are the following inscriptions:

"Commodore David Porter, one of the most heroic sons of Pennsylvania, having long represented his country with fidelity as minister resident at Constantinople, died at that city in the patriotic discharge of his duties March 3, 1843."

"In the War of 1812 his merits were exhibited not merely as an intrepid commander, but in exploring new fields of success and glory. A career of brilliant good fortune was crowned by an engagement against superior force and fearful advantages, which history records as an event among the most remarkable in naval warfare."

"His early youth was conspicuous for skill and gallantry in the naval services of the United States when the American arms were exercised with romantic chivalry before the battlements of Tripoli. He was on all occasions among the bravest of the brave; zealous in the performance of every duty; ardent and resolute in the trying hour of calamity; composed and steady in the blaze of victory."

*JAMES OTIS.*

## CHAPTER I INTRODUCING MYSELF

An awkward, raw-boned lad of fourteen was I when an opportunity came to enlist as a boy on board the *Essex*, a United States frigate of thirty-two guns, commanded by Captain David Porter. My desire ever had been to join the navy, in which my cousin, Stephen Decatur McKnight, had already won much of glory and a commission; it was through him that I was finally able to satisfy my longings, which had increased from year to year until it seemed as if I could be content in no other sphere of action than that of serving my country upon the ocean.

War had been declared; once more was it proposed to give England a lesson in good manners; and while that lesson was being taught, I intended to so act my part that when it was finished I might have gained a recognized position among men, even though I was no more than a boy.

Stephen had won his way upward, and why might not I? True, there were times when my heart grew cowardly; but as I figured it to myself at such moments, I was too timorous even to run, and therefore might gain the credit of being a hero, when in reality, had I been a trifle more brave, I might have shown the white feather.

Perhaps it is not well for me to set down all that was in my mind when I went on board the *Essex*, for it can be of no especial interest to those who may chance to read what is written here. It is enough if I say that two days before the *Essex* left the Delaware River, or in other words, on the 28th of October in the year 1812, I was rated on her papers as "boy," and had already begun to make the acquaintance of one Philip Robbins, a lad of about my own age, who held the same rank. If there had been any lower station aboard the frigate, of a truth we two would have been found occupying it, for he knew no more concerning a seaman's duty than did I.

A certain portion of the cruise, which proved to be one of the most adventurous ever made by a vessel of war, must be omitted here for the very good reason that I have little or no knowledge concerning it. During three days after we left the capes of the Delaware it was to Philip Robbins and myself as if we lingered in the very shadow of death, and while so lingering received no word of cheer from those around us because of the fact that we were enduring only that which every lad must endure who sets out to learn the trade of a sailor. Sick? It was to me as if that man who should put an end to my life would have been rendering me a service, for I doubted not but that death must eventually come, and only when it did would I be free from the pangs of that overpowering illness which beset me.

Both Philip and I had vaunted ourselves before the lads of Philadelphia because we could lay claim to being members of the crew of the *Essex*; but from the moment the good ship courtesied to the swell of the Atlantic until we were recovered and could laugh at the past, either of us would willingly have given up all which we prized most dearly in the world for the sake of being set back on shore in the humblest station that might be imagined.

It is enough if I say that we gained the experience which comes to all who venture upon the sea, whether for pleasure or for profit, and once having gained it, were in proper condition ever after to laugh at those who might be learning the same severe and disagreeable lesson.

There was never a man on board the ship who did not know that she was bound for the purpose firstly, of capturing any English vessels that we might be able to cope with, and secondly, to come across the *Constitution* and the *Hornet*, with which ships we would afterward cruise in company.

Among our crew, and there were, counting officers as well as men, three hundred and nineteen all told, were a dozen or more who had fought under Preble at Tripoli; and while we were headed for Port Praya we heard so many yarns concerning the doings of our fleet with the Barbary pirates as

would more than suffice to fill a dozen such books as I count this will make. Therefore it is not well that I attempt to set down any of them, entertaining though the least exciting would prove.

When Philip and I signed our names to the ship's papers, both believed that we should be called upon to take part in sea battles from the time we gained the offing until we were once more in port; but yet there was nothing of bloodshed, save such as could be found in the yarns spun by the men, from the time of sailing until the 27th of November, when we sighted the mountains of St. Jago and entered the harbor of Port Praya, hoping there to gain some news of Commodore Bainbridge.

Nothing was learned, however, as we on the gun-deck soon came to know; for it must be understood that the crew soon have repeated to them every word which is spoken aft. Some old shellback hears a bit now and then, and by piecing the fragments together generally hits upon the truth; while the marines on guard are ever ready to carry forward such scraps of conversation as they have overheard when on duty. It is thus, as I have said, that the ordinary seaman, who is supposed to be in ignorance of everything save the happenings of the moment, is generally possessed within a few hours of all the information gained by his superior officers.

All we got from the Portuguese governor of Port Praya was a bountiful supply of pigs, sheep, poultry, and fruit, and it can well be supposed that our officers were not exerting themselves to let him understand exactly why we had to enter the port. When we set sail again, it was on a seaward course, as if we were bound for an African port; but as soon as we were beyond sight of land the ship was hauled around to the southwest, and on the 11th of December we crossed the equator in longitude 30° west.

Philip and I were in no very comfortable frame of mind as we neared the equator, knowing full well that lads, and for that matter seamen, who have never crossed the imaginary line, are subjected to rough if not absolutely brutal treatment at the hands of every messmate; and we expected, because of certain remarks that had been made, to receive an unusually severe dose.

But fortune favored Captain Porter as well as our humble selves; for just at noon, when the men were making ready to introduce us to King Neptune, a Britisher hove in sight, and there was no longer thought of playing pranks. The enemy had been sighted at last, and even the eldest among us were quivering with excitement, for it was believed that our success or failure in this first enterprise which presented itself would indicate the results of the voyage.

I was burning with a desire to question my cousin McKnight as to what might possibly be the result of losing this craft; but you must understand that a boy on board a frigate is not supposed to speak to his superior officer without permission. Even had the lieutenant been my father, I should have been forced by the rules of the ship to keep at quite as respectful a distance from him as from Captain Porter himself.

Up to this time neither Philip nor I had succeeded in cultivating the acquaintance of the older members of the crew; therefore we stood alone, so to speak, ignorant of what might be the possibilities, but not daring to ask a single question lest we bring the ridicule of the seamen upon us.

If the success of this first venture since we left port had been a true token of the entire voyage, then were Philip Robbins and myself to reap the greatest possible benefit from it; for when the *Essex* was finally come up with the Britisher on the following day, we lads not only aided in the capture of the rich prize, but made ourselves such a friend among the crew as we most needed.

A lad on board a man-of-war sees hard lines if there be not one among the older seamen who stands in a certain degree sponsor for him; otherwise the younger members of the crew will put upon him until his is indeed a slavish life. Now up to this day we boys could call no man our friend, and in this I am not counting my cousin, the lieutenant, for his kindness toward us would count for but little while we were among our shipmates.

However, I am saying overly much of myself, and perchance may be accused of giving undue importance to those members of the ship's company who were looked upon as of no especial consequence.

As I have said, we crossed the equator and sighted a strange sail on the same day. As a matter of course chase was made at once, and before the sun went down we knew beyond a peradventure that at last we had before us one of the enemy's vessels.

There was nothing particularly interesting in the chase as it presented itself to me. During the greater portion of the time Philip and I were kept at work below by one task-master or another, and all we knew regarding our chances of overhauling the stranger was what could be gathered from those who came near where we were. When night fell, and we lads were at liberty to go on deck, there was absolutely nothing to be seen.

In the morning, however, when the first shot was fired, just before daybreak, Philip and I tumbled out of our hammocks, wild with excitement, and at the same time inwardly quaking lest peradventure we were upon the eve of a naval engagement.

I question if any orders, however strict, could have kept us below. We forgot for the moment that one is not allowed to roam over a naval vessel at will, but clambered on deck as if free to follow our every inclination; and well for us, perhaps, was it that both officers and crew were considerably excited at the prospect of finally taking a prize, otherwise we might have been treated to a dose of the rope's end because of having unwittingly ventured so far aft.

The stranger was the British government packet, *Nocton*, carrying ten guns, and had been hove to when our shot went across her bow. There was no attempt made at resistance, and she fell into our hands as a ripe apple falls from the tree, with no particular effort on our part.

Later, and while the prize crew was being told off to take possession of her, we learned that she carried thirty-one men, was bound for Falmouth, and had on board fifty-five thousand dollars in gold and silver coin.

Lieutenant Finch was made prize-master, and a crew of seventeen told off to man the packet; for Captain Porter counted on sending her to the United States, she being a craft that would make a reasonably good addition to our small navy.

These men were transferred from our ship to the prize without delay, and then was begun the work of bringing back the specie, – a task, it is needless to say, in which Philip and I had no share.

The scene was such, however, as to attract the attention of any one, however much experience he might have had in such matters, and we lads watched with breathless eagerness all the manœuvres, as the two vessels rolled lazily upon the long swell, while the small boats plied to and fro like ants. We gazed curiously at the iron-bound boxes which were said to be filled with gold or silver, and in our ignorance it seemed as if already was the cruise a success, since we had taken from the enemy such a vast amount of money.

Among the crews of our boats was a seaman by the name of Hiram Hackett, with whom Philip and I had vainly tried to scrape an acquaintance. A weather-beaten old shellback was he, who had, against his will, served the king, having been made prisoner by one of the press-gangs, and who escaped only a few months before enlisting on board the *Essex*.

His shipmates looked up to him as to a man of great experience, and well they might, for I question if Hiram Hackett had not seen more of the ups and downs of a sailor's life than any among us. He was the only member of the crew who had not made sport of, or imposed upon, us two in some way; but yet never a kindly word had he given us.

Master Hackett was pulling the bow oar of No. 2 boat when she came alongside with a load of stores, for Captain Porter was taking from the prize such provisions as would not be needed during the homeward voyage.

The goods were being hoisted out while the boats lay a few yards off our lee rail; and as this work was being done a cheese incased in a wooden box slipped from the sling, and, falling, struck Master Hackett a glancing blow on the head and shoulder, knocking him senseless into the sea.

The only thought in my mind at the instant, and Philip and I were perched on the brig's rail directly opposite the boat, was that the seaman, having been rendered unconscious by the blow, would be quickly drowned; and without stopping to think of possible danger, I leaped overboard.

Philip was moved by the same impulse at the same instant, and we struck the water side by side.

Looking back upon that attempt at rescue, after so many years of experience, I believe of a verity that not once in twenty times would two lads succeed in the effort; for the chances were that we should come up directly beneath the frigate, or, as we rose to the surface, be dashed against the hull with force sufficient to kill us.

As it was, however, we went down side by side until we came in contact with the man we would save, and him we brought to the surface to windward of the boat, yet so near her that it was only necessary the crew should reach out and pull us on board.

We had done nothing which merited praise, – in fact, should have been blamed for interfering when we might have hampered the movements of those who knew better what ought to be done; and yet Captain Porter was pleased to compliment us when we clambered on board looking like a couple of half-drowned rats, and the sailors clasped us by the hands as if to say that in their opinion we had proved ourselves worthy to be called shipmates.

It was natural that I should be somewhat puffed up by the attention which was paid us; but I little dreamed what an important bearing it would have upon our lives.

The old sailor, still unconscious, was taken below; Philip and I overhung the rail once more, watching the men as they transferred the provisions and specie, for the work had not been interrupted many moments by the mishap, and all was as before, save for that sense of satisfaction and pride within my heart when Master Hackett, looking none the worse for the blow and the ducking, came up behind us.

We were not aware of his presence until he laid his hands on our shoulders, and said in a deep, grave voice, much as if speaking to himself: —

"I don't know whether it was a service or contrariwise that you lads did me, for I'm told that but for your tumblin' over the rail I was like to have lost the number of my mess, bein' knocked out by the blow in such fashion that I went down like a stone, with but little chance of risin'."

I looked around at the old sailor, hardly understanding what he said; and he, gazing to windward as if there he saw something which we could not, continued: —

"An old shellback like me is of but little account; and if he hangs on to life, mayhap it's only to pay off some grudge which them as claim to know say shouldn't be harbored."

I knew from this that he referred to the grudge he owed the Britishers for having pressed him into the king's service, and wondered why he should speak in such a solemn tone when it stood to reason he ought to be rejoicing because of having escaped death.

It was a full minute before the old man went on, and then he spoke more nearly natural, as it seemed to me: —

"We'll set it down that you two lads have done a big service – that you saved my life – an' it isn't much for me to say that I'm obliged to you, 'cause mere words are cheap. Boys aboard a ship stand in need of a friendly hand, an' that's what I'm allowin' to hold out toward you until such time as I've squared off the account begun this day. Whatsoever a sailorman can do for a mate, I'm bound to do for you; an' all hands are to understand that what's sauce for you is certain to be sauce for me, or they'll know the reason why."

Having said this, Master Hackett went aft to where Lieutenant McKnight was standing, tugged at a wisp of hair which hung over his forehead, and at the same time scraped one foot behind him, which answered for a sailor's bow, saying as he did so: —

"I'm ready for duty, sir."

"Your place in the boat has been taken, therefore you are at liberty until we get under way," my cousin said with a smile, whereupon the old man went below, never so much as looking at Philip or me.

It seemed as if his manner was decidedly curt. After having voluntarily acknowledged that we saved his life, it appeared as if he might have said something more, or at least stood near us a few moments to let it be seen that he had indeed taken us under his wing, and I said laughingly to Philip: —

"Master Hackett is proving to us that words are indeed cheap. He has thanked us, and that seems to be all that is necessary."

"And so it is," Philip replied, for he was a better-natured lad than I by far, and ever ready to make excuses where I found fault. "It was really nothing of consequence for us to go overboard where there are so many to lend a helping hand, and when we came on deck again I was trembling with fear lest one of the officers give us a tongue lashing for putting ourselves forward at such a time."

"If we hadn't done so, Master Hackett would likely have gone to the bottom, for I saw no one making ready to go after him."

"You didn't give them time, Ezra McKnight," Philip replied laughingly. "The old man had no more than struck the water before we were on the rail; and yet I am not to be praised for it, because, to tell the truth, I didn't realize what I was about."

That same was true in my case; but there was no reason just then why I should speak overly much regarding it when I was hungering for yet more praise, and I put an end to the conversation by turning my attention once more to the work going on before us.

The task of transferring the provisions and specie to our ship was not a long one, and perhaps no more than three hours elapsed from the time the *Nocton* hove to until the *Essex* was on her course once more, while the prize, with her prisoners below decks, was stretching off for the home port.

Before the sun set on this night, Philip and I had good proof that Master Hackett's gratitude was more than the mere thanks we had received. Every member of the crew treated us in a different fashion – more as if we were in fact shipmates, although I saw no particular change in the old man's behavior.

It is difficult for me to explain the difference in our positions, and yet it was very decided. We were called upon to do quite as much work, to wait upon this one or that one as before, and yet the orders were given in a more friendly tone. There were not so many kicks bestowed upon us, nor did a single man lay a rope's end upon our backs; whereas from the time of leaving port until we leaped overboard for Master Hackett I question if there was a waking hour when we did not receive a blow from some one.

The old man who had declared he would stand our friend no longer wore an air which seemed to forbid our coming nearer him, and yet I cannot say that he spoke any very kindly words; but we understood that, if ever we needed a helping hand, his would be stretched forth.

That night when we were ready to get into our hammocks, Philip said to me with a certain tone of triumph: —

"This has been a lucky day for the *Essex*. She has captured a prize that will bring all hands money with which to tassel our handkerchiefs, if it be so the *Nocton* reaches a home port, and Captain Porter has the credit of gathering in fifty-five thousand dollars from the enemy; but I question if any aboard have been so fortunate since sunrise as you and me, for we have suddenly become shipmates with the one man among all the crew who is able to put us on a better footing with those who have lorded it over us."

## CHAPTER II

### THE COAST OF CHILI

In order to hold a true course to my story, if perchance it should prove to be a story, it is necessary I set down here very much of what is little more than pricking out on a chart the movements of the *Essex*, for many a long, weary day passed before we had opportunity to work harm to shipping belonging to subjects of the English king, whom we were teaching a lesson in good manners.

On the second day after the capture of the *Nocton* we hove into sight the island of Fernando de Noronha; and as our commander had been told at this place we might gain information of Commodore Bainbridge's squadron, we came to anchor, but not before the ship had been disguised as a merchantman.

Then, flying English colors, we let go our ground tackle off the port, and Lieutenant Downes went ashore to ask permission of the governor for us to take on water and such stores as might readily be procured.

The lieutenant came back with a quantity of fruit for the cabin, and information that two alleged British vessels of war had called at the island a week previous, and left there a letter for Sir James Yeo of his Majesty's ship *Southampton*.

It seems, as we of the crew learned later, that these were the names agreed upon between Commodore Bainbridge and our commander, to be used in an unfriendly port. Captain Porter believed that a lie was not a lie when told for the benefit of one's country, therefore he sent the lieutenant back with a present of cheese and ale, and the assurance that a gentleman on board our vessel, a friend of Sir James Yeo's, counted on sailing for England from Brazil, and would take the letter with him.

The governor could do no less than deliver up the missive; and on being brought aboard it was found to be only such a letter as one English commander might send to another, with nothing in it to show that the writer was an American.

Captain Porter had no idea that the commodore would be such a simple as to trust his secret with a Britisher, and therefore set about trying to solve the mystery which he felt confident was contained in the letter.

Finally, by holding the sheet for some time over a lighted candle, it was found that a second message had been written in what is known as sympathetic ink, and this the heat brought out plainly, showing, as was afterward told us on the gun-deck, the following lines: —

"I am bound for St. Salvador, thence off Cape Frio, where I intend to cruise until the 1st of January. Go off Cape Frio, to the northward of Rio Janeiro, and keep a lookout for me."

It surely seemed now as if the course was marked out for us clearly, and that we would soon be in the company of friends; but it was not to come about, else I might not be trying to set down the particulars of that which proved to be a most extraordinary voyage.

Day after day we cruised up and down the Brazilian coast between Cape Frio and St. Catherine, but meeting neither American nor English vessels. The Portuguese craft which we spoke from time to time could give us no information; and from Captain Porter down to Phil Robbins and myself, all hands were most decidedly puzzled to know what would be the outcome of the voyage, when it seemed, despite the luck which attended us in the beginning, that we had cut ourselves off so completely from both friend and foe that it might not be possible to get back.

The old shellbacks told us youngsters that the Brazilian government, being at peace with England, would not allow us to provision the ship at any of their ports, and it was unnecessary we be told that the supplies were growing lower every day. With three hundred men to be fed, even a full cargo of stores soon grows slim.

Finally one of the marines who had been on guard in the cabin, told us that he heard Captain Porter say to some of his officers that it had now come to a choice between capture, a blockade, or starvation.

As a matter of course all the sea lawyers on the gun-deck argued the matter in and out of season, laying down the law in great shape, according to their own ideas; but, so far as Phil or I could see, not suggesting anything which offered the slightest hope of relief.

I might fill many pages with an account of what we two lads thought and said during this time when it appeared as if the *Essex* had got the worst of the voyage, although having captured the only enemy she came across; but it would be of little interest to a stranger if I should make the attempt. It is enough to say that every man of the crew, and the boys, too, for the matter of that, believed we would have a taste of an English prison before many days had passed, when, suddenly, came most startling news from one of the marines who had been on duty aft.

The man declared, and we afterward came to know he spoke no more than the truth, that he had overheard a consultation between Captain Porter and his officers, when it was decided that, having failed to find Commodore Bainbridge, we were to double Cape Horn and strike a blow at the British whaling fleet in the Pacific.

Captain Porter argued, so the tale-bearing marine told us, that among the whalers he stood a good chance of replenishing his naval stores, for the vessels in that trade were always well armed, and it would be possible to provision the ship as often as might be necessary, once we were among the South Sea Islands. He had decided to live on the enemy, and it only remained to be seen whether that might indeed be possible.

Of all who heard the story as told by the marine, none believed it save Master Hackett; and he said, in answer to my question as to whether he thought we might be able to come out of the scrape with whole skins: —

"Ay, that I do, lad; an' it's in my mind that the *Essex* can do British shippin' more harm in the Pacific than would be possible elsewhere. For a time we'll have everything our own way, an' then the king will have a pretty good idee of what the Yankees can do."

"But how will it be possible to get home, Master Hackett?" I asked, thinking more of my own safety than of brave deeds to be accomplished.

"That's somethin' that don't concern us, — leastways, not until the *Essex* has come to the end of her cruise. We've shipped to do all the harm we can to Englishmen, for that's the meanin' of war, lad. After we've done our duty will be time enough to think about ourselves, though I'm allowin' that if we ever see the United States again it'll be after we've had a reasonably long taste of British prisons."

Such talk as that was not calculated to make me very comfortable in mind. As a matter of course I wanted to strike a blow at the king, since we'd shipped for that purpose; but I wasn't well pleased at doing so when it was a foregone conclusion that the task would be concluded only when we were prisoners. We had captured a rich prize already, and I for one would have felt better if it had been decided that we were to take the chances of starvation while working back to the home port. This cutting loose, as it were, did not strike me in a pleasant fashion.

Before many hours had passed, however, the doubters understood that the marine had told no more than the truth.

We were off the harbor of St. Catherine when Captain Porter decided to take chances which would have deterred many another, and next morning, that is to say, on the 26th day of January, 1813, the *Essex* was headed down the coast for Cape Horn.

It seemed strange to me at the time, and even at this late day I am moved to wonderment that such should have been the case — it seemed strange, I say, that almost without exception the members of our crew hailed with delight the captain's determination to push forward rather than turn back. Surely it was a hazardous venture to leave friendly ports behind, and sail away toward that portion of the world where the power of the British was exceeding strong.

Those among the crew who argued in favor of thus trying our fortunes in the Pacific Ocean were forced to admit that we would be treated with but scant courtesy by the small nations, who dared not brave the anger of the English by showing friendship for us. Ours was but a single vessel of thirty-two guns, and should we come upon two or three whalers at the same time, it was reasonable to believe that we might find ourselves opposed by a weight of metal exceeding our own.

We could not depend upon the government of the United States for so much as a spare belaying-pin, and all we might get, whether in the way of stores or ammunition, must come from the enemy. I do not believe any vessel of war was ever sent into such danger of every form, and it is hardly to be wondered at that Phil Robbins and I were filled with apprehension as to the result of the cruise, more particularly since we heard the evils described in most glowing colors during nearly every hour of the day, even by those who were in favor of the enterprise.

"We didn't ship with the agreement that we'd do our best to run into every possible danger when it might be better to shape a course for home," Phil said, in what was very like a mutinous tone. "When it comes to fighting Britishers, then we're bound to risk our lives in the hope of killing them; but sailing around the world with fair chance of starving to death before we can run across a craft of any kind, is a good bit outside of duty."

Phil was not the only member of the crew who spoke in much the same tone, and yet I defy any person to say with truth that we were in the slightest degree mutinous as we faced such a venture as was never known before.

Master Hackett seemed well content on the day when the bow of the *Essex* was turned toward the south pole, and I was resolved he should have no opportunity of believing that Phil and I were afraid of what might lie in our path.

As a matter of course, we two lads discussed the weighty affair in all its aspects, enabled to do so with some degree of fairness because of the opinions which we heard on every side; but we took good care to do so where no one might overhear us.

It was only during the first day of this venturesome cruise, however, that we indulged in what was neither more nor less than mutinous criticism of our officers' plans; for within twenty-four hours after leaving the harbor of St. Catherine the wind increased to a full gale, which for more than eighteen days showed no signs of abatement.

Never before had I believed it possible that a ship could be so tossed and buffeted by the waves without being literally torn to pieces! It was as if our craft had been no larger than a long-boat, and I dare venture to say that many times she actually stood on end.

Phil and I were both sick and frightened, and in about the same degree, which was fortunate for us; for had we been one whit less ill, we might have lost our wits entirely. Whenever the deathly nausea permitted of thought I was firmly convinced we would all go to the bottom before making Cape Horn, and by the time this idea had become firmly fixed in my mind the sickness of the sea overwhelmed me again, bringing in its train partial unconsciousness of my surroundings.

Nor were we lads alarmed without good cause; it was possible to understand by the behavior of the crew, at such times as we were able to understand anything, that every man jack believed the *Essex* would be finally overcome in her struggle with the elements; and once, when the turmoil was at its height, Master Hackett came to where I lay in my hammock for no other apparent purpose than to clasp my hand.

It was much as though he was bidding me good-by, and I wept bitter tears of sorrow because I was not to see my dear mother again in this world.

I could write very much concerning the dreary, painful hours we spent while it seemed as if death stood very near to each of us; but it is not well to allow such personal matters to interfere with the tale of what was accomplished before the good ship *Essex* was destroyed through a British trick and British cowardice.

On the 14th day of February Master Hackett brought word to Phil and me that we were at last off Cape Horn; and to give a faint idea of the situation I will set down the fact that, old seaman though he was, it had become absolutely necessary for him to crawl along the gun-deck like a crab, otherwise he would have been flung fore and aft by the wild movements of the ship.

During that night I fancied we were in smoother water, and within twenty-four hours it was possible for Phil and me to leave our hammocks with some degree of safety.

Almost immediately after rounding the cape the wind shifted to the southwest, blowing with no more force than was needed to keep our canvas full; and from that hour we began to live once more.

We skirted the coasts of Patagonia and Lower Chili for nineteen days, and at the end of that time the glittering peaks of the Andes were seen far, far in the distance, and those who had been most despondent concerning the outcome to the cruise, now began to believe that it would be possible for us to give a good account of ourselves to the people at home before death overtook us.

We now talked of taking rich prizes, even as we previously had discussed the probability of immediate disaster, and speculated as to how we might weather the cape once more when, the work having been accomplished, we would be homeward bound.

It was the 5th day of March when we were off the island of Mocha, on the coast of Araucania, with the prospect of a day to be spent on shore after so many dangers had been encountered and passed.

To us two lads, who were sick with the odor of the salt breeze, the scene was entrancing. The mountain on the island towered a full thousand feet from the sea line, and around it could be seen countless numbers of birds, while in the surf near the shore hundreds upon hundreds of seals played like so many dogs.

For the first time since leaving St. Catherine our ground tackle was let go, and word came from the cabin that on the morrow we were to be given a full day's hunting. This last was become a real necessity, rather than a pleasure, for our stores were sadly in need of being replenished; but we thought not of this last fact, preferring to believe that permission to go ashore had been given solely that we might enjoy ourselves.

And what a day it proved to be! The island had been inhabited by Spaniards before the buccaneers reigned in that region, and the forest was literally teeming with hogs and horses so tame that but little skill was necessary to shoot them down.

From sunrise to sunset we hunted, and before noon had proved to our entire satisfaction that horseflesh was more palatable than pork, therefore we killed no more hogs than persisted in coming within easy range. By nightfall we had fresh meat enough to furnish us with food for many a long day, provided it was salted down before becoming tainted.

The next day was spent in caring for what we had captured, and in filling the ship's water-casks, after which we were in fairly good condition to continue the voyage. The eight-and-forty hours spent on shore had been sufficient to raise the courage of the most timorous, among whom could be counted Phil and myself; and all hands were in the best of spirits as the *Essex* filled away on her course once more, despite the fact that there was no possibility of receiving aid from the friends at home.

As we ran up the coast Captain Porter made preparations for the work which all hoped we should find in plenty. The running rigging of the *Essex* was carefully overhauled; the ship was repainted and otherwise put in as good condition as was possible without going into dock. The boats we carried – seven in all – were strengthened in every manner, and crews told off for each, so that at a moment's notice we might send out a flotilla of small craft against an enemy.

Lieutenant Downes was given command of this little squadron; and from the way in which he looked after the armament, we knew without being told that he was ready for any kind of fighting which might come his way.

It was in a certain sense a relief to Phil and myself when the boats were made ready for independent action; as a matter of course, our strength was not increased one whit by such means, yet

it seemed to us lads that we were in much better trim to meet an enemy than before such preparations had been made.

Greatly to our disappointment we were not told off as members of the boats' crews; and I plucked up sufficient courage to ask Master Hackett concerning what seemed to us an oversight, hoping he might aid us in receiving treatment such as we believed to be our due.

"Frettin' because you haven't been given an independent command, eh?" he said with a laugh, when I had made what was little less than a complaint.

"We are not such fools as to think we can do anything very brave or wonderful; but at the same time it seems much as if we might perform our fair share of work," I replied, considerably nettled because he appeared to treat us as if we were children.

"I'm allowin', lad, that you'll be called on for all the tasks you can do conveniently. It stands to reason that the pick of the crew should be detailed for the boats, seein's how them as put off from the ship under Lieutenant Downes's command will be forced to jump lively, both as to fightin' an' work. Now, it looks to me as if you two would have chances enough, once that fleet of small craft have left us; for the *Essex* will be short-handed, an' you lads'll be asked to do the duty of men."

With this we were content, knowing that Master Hackett would not buoy us up with false hopes; and it began to seem as if we might, within a reasonably short time, show that we were made of such material as warranted our being reckoned among the *men* on board the *Essex*.

From the day of leaving the island of Mocha a watch was kept for the enemy, and each morning we two lads tumbled out of our hammocks firm in the belief that by nightfall we should be in chase of another prize. Then, as the sun set before we had sighted the British flag, we felt quite as positive we should see it when the morning came again.

Thus the time passed in anticipation unfulfilled until the 14th day of March, when, on rounding the Point of Angels, the city of Valparaiso lay full before us like something which had suddenly been thrown up by the sea.

Until this moment we had had a stiff breeze, such as sent the *Essex* along at a full ten knots an hour; but on rounding the point the wind died out suddenly, leaving us becalmed under the guns of a battery, which was hardly to our liking, for we believed Chili was still under the rule of Spain.

Captain Porter, not minded to take any more chances than was absolutely necessary, had hoisted English colors; and as we came into view it gave me a most disagreeable feeling in the region of the heart to see an armed American brig tricing up her ports as she prepared for action, although I could not restrain a sensation of pride that my countrymen should be willing to fight at an instant's notice, and against great odds, to uphold the stars and stripes.

Three Spanish ships were getting under way, and Captain Porter understood that he might miss many a rich prize if he allowed the crews of those vessels to know who we were and why we had come.

Therefore it was that three boats' crews were called away to pull the ship's head around beyond the point, where she might catch so much of a breeze as was stirring outside, and in less than two hours we were beyond sight of the city.

Phil and I mourned the necessity of being forced to leave port so soon, when we might have met countrymen who could give us later news from home than we had; but Master Hackett did much toward consoling us when he said: —

"Take my words for it, lads, we'll be in the harbor of Valparaiso before you're very much older. The captain didn't count on lettin' the Spaniards find out who we are, thus puttin' the Britishers on their guard."

The old man was in the right, as was usually the case, for on the next day we ran into port; and our anchors were hardly down when we heard important news.

Chili had just gained her independence from the Spaniards, and was more than ready to welcome us as friends; but it was reported that the Viceroy of Peru was fitting out armed cruisers to prey upon the American shipping in the Pacific.

Of a verity we had arrived in the nick of time, and there was great rejoicing fore and aft because of such fact. So long as we could keep secret from the British government the fact of our whereabouts, we might work the enemy great damage at the same time we protected Yankee vessels; and even after it was known that we had ventured so far from home, there was fair opportunity of taking many a prize before being overhauled by a British squadron.

Well, the people of Valparaiso gave us a royal welcome. The forts saluted the stars and stripes with twenty-one guns; nine shots were fired by the armed brig, and we replied to them all, as a matter of course, until it was as if everybody was celebrating the Fourth of July.

The American Consul General came down from Santiago to greet us; the Chilians strove to show how friendly they felt toward the United States, and there was a great time, in which the officers gathered most of the fun, for ordinary seamen are not counted in at such affairs.

The commissioned officers must have enjoyed themselves in fine style, however, and we of the crew managed to get a small slice of the welcome which repaid all hands for the long, disagreeable voyage.

Only a portion of our crew were allowed shore leave at a time, and by rare good luck Phil and I were given liberty on the same day when Master Hackett took his furlough; therefore we saw more of the city than would have been possible had we set out alone.

The old gunner was well acquainted in Valparaiso, and before setting out to visit acquaintances, he showed us all the sights. Then, presenting each of us with two silver shillings, he went his way, after cautioning us to be at the shore in time to go aboard before sunset.

It would have pleased both Phil and me had the old man remained with us; but it could not be expected that he would give all his time of liberty to two lads, even though they had gone over the rail to save his life; therefore we made it appear as if we were eager to be by ourselves, and began to explore the chief seaport town of Chili.

Unable to speak the language, we could not expect to make any new acquaintances ashore, nor did we try, although more than one Chilian lad gave token that he was as ready to extend the hospitalities of the port to Yankees as were the dignitaries of the town.

We had wandered here and there as fancy dictated until noontime, and Phil proposed that, since we had had our fill of sight-seeing it would be a good idea to go on ship, or find some of our messmates.

Strolling with a party of sailors whose chief aim would most likely be to take aboard all the liquor they could drink, was not to my liking, and I had just suggested that we go to the rendezvous on the chance of finding a boat putting off for the *Essex*, when we were surprised by a hail in our native tongue.

"Hello, you two lads! Are you from the Yankee ship?"

Wheeling suddenly around, we saw a boy eighteen years of age or thereabouts, who was regarding us with an expression which might equally well have been one of friendship or enmity.

"We're from the *Essex*," Phil replied, and as he spoke the stranger came toward us.

"Can you speak Spanish?" he asked; whereat I replied glibly: —

"Not a word, and more's the pity, else we might have had companions in our sight-seeing."

"If that's all you're wanting, come with me. I'll show you a good time."

"Do you live here?" I asked, fancying that he spoke like one lately from England.

"Yes, for the time being; and since I have nothing better to do, suppose we travel together."

Every person in the town had been so friendly toward us that we had no reason to suspect evil, and even though we had considered the possibility that any one was wickedly disposed, why should harm come to us who were of so little importance?

Phil was so delighted at the idea of making a friend in this place where almost nothing but Spanish was spoken, that he accepted the proposition without delay, and at once we three set off in company.

Oliver Benson was the name of this friendly appearing lad, as we soon learned; and before we had been together half an hour he knew very nearly as much as we ourselves concerning our position and life aboard the *Essex*.

"Boys are not of much account on Yankee ships, according to your story," he said, in a peculiar tone; and Phil replied glibly: —

"It doesn't seem so, except when there's a lot of dirty work to be done. If we never went back to the *Essex*, I reckon there wouldn't be much mourning over our loss."

I insisted that Master Hackett at least would miss us, and declared that my cousin Stephen's heart would be sore with grief if any accident happened to either of us; but Benson laughed me to scorn.

"If you failed to return there isn't one aboard who'd remember your absence after four-and-twenty hours," he said. "An enemy might work his will on you and stand no chance of coming to grief, for I doubt not but that the frigate will sail by to-morrow."

"We have no enemies here," Phil replied with a laugh, "therefore we needn't spend time discussing that question."

I noted a peculiar expression on Benson's face, but gave no great heed to it, for at that instant he had turned down a narrow street and was unlocking the door of a stone dwelling.

"Do you live here?" Phil asked.

"Yes; and I count on showing you two lads what a Chilian dinner is like. It will be something to talk about when you get home."

He held the door open as invitation for us to enter; and although there was absolutely no reason why I should suspect him of having unfriendly designs upon us, I hesitated about going in.

"Go on," Phil said, pushing me forward. "We're fortunate in having run across Benson, for there are not many lads, either here or at home, who would spend their time entertaining strangers."

I could do no less than follow our host, who led us up one flight of stairs, and thence to the rear of the building. Then he opened the door of a room and stepped back a pace, that we might advance in front of him.

At the outer entrance, I led the way, and while Phil followed close at my heels, the door was slammed behind us, the clicking of iron telling that we had been locked in.

For an instant I was so bewildered as to be incapable of speech, and then I heard from the other side of the locked door a mocking voice: —

"I'll keep you two Yankees here till your ship sails, and then find you a berth aboard a British whaler; it will be a paying speculation for me, and you'll have good opportunities for seeing the world."

## CHAPTER III

### OLIVER BENSON'S SCHEME

Phil Robbins and I stood gazing into each other's eyes as if incapable of speech, during at least sixty seconds after the fellow who had trapped us announced the purpose of his scheme. That we two lads, who were of no consequence whatsoever in the sight of the officers of the *Essex*, should have been made the victims of a plot seemed too ridiculous to be true; but yet the locked door was sufficient evidence for the most incredulous.

It was Phil who first found his tongue, and he asked sharply, as if positive I could give him a satisfactory answer: —

"What does the villain mean by locking us in here? He must think we are rare prizes!"

"I'm not making any mistake as to what you're worth," Benson cried from the hallway. "Yankees don't bring any extravagant price in this part of the world; but the demand is so great that I won't be forced to keep you many hours after your tub of a ship leaves port."

My head was so thick that even then I failed to understand his purpose, but had an idea the fellow looked upon us as his personal enemies because England was at war with the United States, and said to Phil, giving no heed to the fact that I spoke sufficiently loud for Benson to hear: —

"The fellow is such a fool as to believe he serves his country by imprisoning us."

"That's where you are making a big mistake, my Yankee cub. Whalers in this portion of the world are not overly particular as to how they ship a crew, and pay a decently good price to whoever delivers them able-bodied hands."

Now I understood what this enterprising Britisher had in mind. I remembered reading, before I left home, a long account of how sailors were trapped in foreign ports by the captains of whaling vessels who had lost members of their crews by death or desertion.

If we could be held prisoners until there was no longer any American vessels in port, Benson might literally sell us to a British whaler; and once on board such a craft, our chances for escape or relief before the voyage had come to an end would be very small.

I was overwhelmed with grief and anger. The knowledge of our helplessness increased my wrath until for a certain length of time I was little better than an insane lad.

I stormed and raved from one end of the small apartment to the other, now and again throwing myself against the stoutly barred door as if by such means I might break it down; and during the paroxysm Phil lay at full length on the floor, giving noisy vent to his sorrow and despair. There was no care in my mind that Benson was most likely listening to all we said or did, and would set us down as chicken-hearted; I only gave heed to our situation, knowing full well how entirely we were in his power.

It was not to be supposed that the *Essex* would remain many days longer in port; in eight-and-forty hours she would most likely get under way, and we two lads who had dreamed of winning honor and promotion would be set down as deserters. Even Master Hackett must believe we had run away, since, by trying to make him think we were not eager to remain in his company, lest he should waste all his time of liberty upon us, we had made it appear as if our greatest desire was to be alone.

Like a flash all the possibilities of the situation came into my mind. I heard the comments of our shipmates, saw the word "deserter" written opposite our names on the ship's register, and imagined the grief of my parents when the *Essex* returned to port with such a disgraceful story concerning us. Meanwhile I could see Phil and myself forced to this or that disagreeable task, and the end of it all, a tardy release in some foreign port from which we would be forced to work our way home as best we might.

It was a most mournful picture, view it in whatever light I might, and the stoutest-hearted could well be excused for growing faint and sick with apprehension.

Whether we spent one hour or three in such useless wailings I am unable to say; it seemed to me much as if we had been a full day in that place before I so far recovered composure of mind as to be able to look at the situation with some degree of common sense, and then my first act was to soothe Phil, who still remained stretched at full length upon the floor, weeping and wailing.

It was not a difficult task to persuade him into something approaching calmness; he had literally exhausted himself by giving way so violently to sorrow, and was, like myself, ready to play a more manly part.

Our first act, after thus coming to our senses, so to speak, was to make a thorough examination of this apartment which served as prison; for of course the thought of escape had been uppermost in our minds, even when our grief was most violent.

The room was not different from what one might have fancied after seeing the exterior of the building. It was, however, twelve feet square, with a ceiling so low that I could touch it by standing on tiptoe. There were two windows, both closely barred with iron, as I had already noticed was usual in Valparaiso, and the view from them was confined to a small plat of ground enclosed by a high wall of stone, the top of which was nearly on a level with one of the windows.

"If we could get out of here, it would not be a difficult task to reach the ground," Phil said, in a certain tone of hopefulness.

"I'd guarantee to bring up on the ground all right, wall or no wall, if it wasn't for the bars."

Then, with one accord, we laid hold of the iron rods, wrenching at them with all our strength, but not moving them by so much as a single hair's breadth, so far as I could see.

That Benson yet remained in the hall outside, and could hear all that was said or done, we knew when he cried mockingly: —

"Keep on pulling at the bars so long as such work pleases you; they have held stronger men than you ever will be, and I'm not afraid of your giving me the slip in that way!"

Thus we knew that the wretch had made a business of trapping strangers to sell them to whalers, and this but served to make our case appear more hopeless; for if he had had experience in such scoundrelly work, it was probable he would be on his guard against anything we might try to do.

By this time I was weary, mentally and bodily, and, not minded to give the villain any more pleasure, — for I doubted not but that he enjoyed hearing his prisoners beat vainly against the bars of their cage, — I whispered to Phil: —

"Don't speak nor move. We'll remain silent until he grows tired of listening and goes away."

My comrade nodded to show that he agreed, and, seating ourselves on the floor where we could look out of the window, even though there was nothing save the small patch of grass to be seen, we held our peace until the shadows of evening began to lengthen.

Now was come the time when our shipmates would be returning to the *Essex* after a day's pleasuring, and as I fancied them standing on the shore, discussing the cause of our absence, it was impossible to restrain my tears.

Not until the night had fully come did we hear anything from the hallway, and then the faint sound of stealthy footsteps told that the villanous Benson, wearied with his fruitless vigil, was descending the stairs.

We listened in vain for some noise betokening that the building had other occupants than our enemy and ourselves; not a sound broke the silence, and it seemed only reasonable that the scoundrel put the dwelling to no other purpose than that of a prison.

It would be useless for me to make any attempt at setting down here all Phil and I said during the hours of the night, for much of our conversation was wild in the extreme, and we repeated the same words again and again, as would any lads in such a situation as we had so suddenly been plunged.

About midnight we fell asleep, still sitting on the floor, for there was no furniture whatsoever in the room; and the day was just breaking when a noise in the yard outside awakened us.

Looking out from between the bars we saw Benson, who was placing a ladder against the building, directly under our window.

"If he'd only come near enough for me to hit one blow!" Phil muttered between his teeth, and I wished we might have so much satisfaction as that, even while knowing he would never give us such an opportunity.

"I'm not counting on starving you Yankees," the villain said with a laugh, "and yet I'm no such fool as to open the door long enough to shove in food. You see I'm running this business alone, for the profits are not large enough to permit of my hiring a clerk, therefore some of my arrangements are not really convenient. I'm going to pass you the end of a rope. Then I can stand on the ground and serve you with food and water to be hauled up."

"I wonder if he thinks we'll indulge him in his monkey shines?" Phil whispered angrily; and I, suddenly realizing that we could only succeed in biting our own noses if we went contrary to Benson's commands, said hurriedly in a low tone: —

"Hold your tongue! We're bound to eat and drink if we count on making any effort at getting away. Take what he gives us, and we may thereby keep up our strength to be used in case an opportunity for escape presents itself."

By this time Benson was nearly at the top of the ladder; but he took good care not to come within reach of our fists.

He passed in to us a half-inch Manila rope, and I seized the end, whereupon the villain descended and bent on a small tin vessel filled with what appeared to be a stew of beans and other vegetables.

"When you've hauled in, let down the rope again and I'll send you up some water," Benson cried; and I obeyed his commands in silence.

When we had thus been served, he said in the tone of one who imparts pleasing information: —

"You'll have to get along without me to-day, for I'm counting on catching two or three more Yankees before sunset."

Phil shook his fist at the scoundrel; but I, without knowing exactly why, felt a certain amount of satisfaction because he reckoned on making more prisoners.

Then the fellow disappeared from view, and Phil said angrily: —

"I hope our messmates will have more sense than we displayed when we agreed to let him show us the town."

"And I'm hoping he'll make a big haul."

Phil gazed at me in anger and astonishment, whereupon I hastened to explain myself.

"There is no doubt but that he can easily do with us as he has proposed, and our officers will make no great effort to find two boys who are believed to have deserted. If that scoundrelly Britisher can capture half a dozen of our crew there'll be a big stir aboard ship, and, in addition, he won't be able to work his will with so many. One or more may succeed in escaping, and then the truth will be known."

Phil's face brightened wonderfully, for he had not looked at the matter in that light before, and without further conversation we set about making a hearty breakfast.

Once our stomachs were filled, hope revived. We were eager that a large number of our men might be entrapped by Benson, and discussed the possibility of his success with as much zest as he might have done.

Then, after two hours or more had elapsed, we began to reflect that it would not be possible for a lad like him to scrape acquaintance with men as easily as he had with us boys, and we grew despondent once more.

Finally I gave up all belief that he could entice any of the crew into his prison, and said with more of hope in my tones than was actually in my heart: —

"Two great hulking lads like ourselves should be able to get out of an ordinary house! If this place had been built for a jail, the situation would be changed; but it is no more than an ordinary dwelling, and I dare say these bars are not set in the wall so solidly but that we can succeed in moving them."

"Tell me how to go about it, and I'll do my best; but I fail to understand how we can accomplish anything."

Phil's despair served to give me what was very like courage; and even though there was but little hope in my heart that we could effect anything, I spoke as if certain of success.

"We have our knives, and with such tools many a man has worked his way toward freedom. The mortar which holds the wall in place can be picked out in time, and Benson won't have a chance to sell us for several days after the *Essex* leaves port."

"It would require a month of hard work to loosen even one of these stones," Phil replied gloomily.

"We shall be better off by making some effort at escape, even though we never succeed. It is almost cowardly to sit here idle, waiting until that villain can entrap our comrades."

Having said this I set myself at work pricking out particles of mortar with the point of my knife; and although the work progressed but slowly, I could soon see some slight results.

Phil watched me listlessly until I had taken out as much as would fill a large spoon, and then he began to see that the task was possible if we had sufficient time.

"It's better than doing nothing," he said, as if the idea was his own, and at once began upon the seam of mortar next that on which I was working.

Occupation of some kind was what we most needed; and as the moments wore on we increased our efforts until, when the sun marked the hour of noon, we had made quite a showing, although at the expense of grinding away our knife-points.

We had worked upon that stone which held the side bar in place, and if it might be removed we would have an aperture not less than eight inches in width. As a matter of course, neither of us could pass through such a narrow space; but if two of the bars were pulled out, then was the way open.

We were both resting from our labors when I was seized by a sudden thought, and cried exultantly: —

"We can escape if no time is wasted!"

"I can't see but that the situation is much the same as when we were first thrust into this place," Phil said gloomily.

"So it is; but since the villanous Benson passed us the rope, I'm of the idea that we can do considerable work."

"How?"

"We have surely done something toward loosening the stones. Now, if we make the rope fast to the lower end of the bar, and also to the handle of the door, one or the other must give way when we get purchase enough."

"Yes, I reckon all that is true; but we're no more likely to get a purchase on it than we are to walk out of here this minute."

"I believe it can be done."

"Then the handle of the door will give way first."

This was rather in the nature of a wet blanket on my hopes; but I would not admit that the plan had any defects which might not be rectified, and set about solving the problem.

Finally I hit upon a plan, — not anything very brilliant, but a makeshift which might possibly serve our purpose.

Doubling the rope, I made one end fast to the bar set into the stone we had been working upon, and the other end I bent on to the corresponding bar in the next window, hauling it taut as possible.

"With our feet against the lower edge of the window we should be able to fetch something away," I said in a hopeful tone; "and even though we fail at first, the plan is sure to succeed after we've picked out a little more of the mortar."

Well, we tugged and strained to the utmost of our strength for ten minutes or more, and then, just as I had said to myself that we never could succeed, one end of the bar started ever so slightly.

"It can be done!" Phil cried exultantly, and would have bent himself once more for a supreme effort but that I stopped him.

"There's little chance we could pull two bars out before sunset, and if the job is but half done when Benson comes back, he'll understand what we're trying to do. A fellow who makes a business of trapping men won't stop at anything, however desperate, in order to prevent his villany from being known to the authorities."

"Well, are we to sit here idle?" Phil asked angrily.

"Not a bit of it! We'll amuse ourselves picking mortar from the next seam, and thus have both stones loosened by nightfall. After dark we can yank two bars out, or I'm mistaken."

Now it seemed as if liberty was near at hand; and after I had cast off the rope that we might be able to lower it from the window in case Benson proposed to give us any more food, we set to work on the difficult task of scraping away the hard mortar.

It must not be supposed that we removed any very great amount during this long day; but we had laid bare a deep seam, and thus accomplished more than I had at first believed would be possible.

When evening had come there was no doubt in my mind but that we could, by aid of the rope, wrench away the bars, and I felt brave as a lion when footsteps on the stairs outside told that the scoundrelly Benson was returning.

"He didn't succeed in trapping any one else!" Phil said jubilantly. "We were the only fools on board the *Essex*."

"Hello in there!" Benson cried out; and I said gruffly: —

"Well, what do you want?"

"It's well to let you know that I'm around. Your ship is ready to leave port in the morning, and forty-eight hours later you two duffers will be getting an idea of whale fishing."

"Which will be better than staying here forced to listen to the voice of a cur like you!" Phil replied.

"That little show of temper will cost you your supper," Benson cried in a rage. "I'll starve you into submission, if you turn rusty, so have a care."

"I reckon you've lost your temper because of not finding any more fools among the crew of the *Essex*!"

"I don't keep all my birds in one cage."

"But you've got all from the *Essex* in this one, and we two make up the list," Phil cried with a laugh, for he was finding considerable sport in thus baiting the villain.

"Better keep a quiet tongue in your head," I whispered, "otherwise he might come inside and see what we've been doing."

"I only wish he would!" and Phil flourished his knife in a manner which told what he would do if our enemy should be so indiscreet as to come within striking distance.

Benson stalked to and fro in the hallway when we ceased to reply to his jibes, and after half an hour or more we heard him descending the stairs again.

Then, by gazing through the bars, we could see that he had gone into the enclosure, — most likely to make certain everything was as he had left it; and we listened to the noise of his movements until all was silent once more.

"He's gone out in the hope of catching such of our men as have overstayed their shore leave," Phil whispered. "Now is our time to begin work with the rope."

I insisted that we wait ten minutes longer, to make it more certain the scoundrel had left the building, and then we began the task which I confidently expected would result in our release.

The rope was made fast as before, and we two laid hold of it with a will; but haul and pull as we would, the bars remained firmly in place. That one which we had started during the afternoon was immovable, and the perspiration was running down our faces in tiny streams before we were ready to admit that the plan was a failure.

"He'll work his will with us," Phil said with a sob as we ceased our efforts and stood facing each other in the darkness. "We can't get out!"

"Don't lose your courage so soon. We can work at the mortar all day to-morrow, and then I'm certain the bars will yield."

"By that time the *Essex* will have left port."

"Other American vessels put in here, and surely we can work our way home without being forced to serve on board a whaler. Besides, the *Essex* is likely to visit this port more than once before her work in the Pacific is concluded."

Phil would not be soothed, and he turned from me impatiently just as I fancied a low whistle sounded outside, near the garden wall.

In an instant I was at the window, pressing my face against the bars until the iron made great ridges on my cheeks; but the silence was profound, and I believed that which I heard was nothing more than the wind.

Turning from the window in disappointment, I was about to speak to Phil, when the whistle sounded again, low and soft, but so distinctly that there could be no mistake.

Phil heard it as I did, and we two sprang to the gratings once more, expecting, hoping, to hear the voices of our messmates.

Everything was silent, and I stood there like a simple fully thirty seconds before gathering sufficient sense to speak. Then I cried softly: —

"*Essex* ahoy!"

"Ahoy in the shanty!" a voice replied, and I sank to my knees in fervent thanksgiving, for I recognized the tones of Master Hackett. Now, even though we might not be released, it would be known aboard ship that we had not deserted.

"Where are you?" the old seaman asked in a loud whisper, after remaining silent a few seconds.

"At a window just above the height of the wall," Phil replied, and then a happy thought came to me.

"We've got a half-inch rope here, Master Hackett, and can let it down if perchance you might be able to use it."

"If an old shellback like me can't use a rope, I'd like to see the man who can. Let it down, lads, an' move lively, for I've had hard work to keep out of the course of a British cub who's been actin' in a way that don't seem honest."

While he spoke I was lowering the rope over the wall, and when Master Hackett sung out that he had it, we belayed the remaining portion to a couple of the bars, knowing full well that the old man would soon appear at the top of the wall unless some one on the street interfered with him.

Nor were we mistaken. Before I could have counted ten he was clutching the bars of our prison, asking how we chanced to be in such a scrape.

In the fewest possible words I explained how we had been trapped and what Benson proposed to do with us; whereupon the old man said half to himself: —

"Now I can see what he was after when he came rubbin' alongside some of us, offerin' to show fine sights if we'd go with him. But instead of standin' here yarnin', I reckon we'd better get you out of the trap."

"Wouldn't it be well to report on board that we've been made prisoners, and ask that a squad of men be sent on shore?" Phil asked timidly. "If Benson should get an inkling of your being here, he'd make more trouble for us in some way; and it won't pay to take any chances."

"I don't count on takin' any more'n is wholesome, an' at the same time ain't willin' to flash up on board with the yarn that I couldn't get the best of one Britisher, an' him in a foreign country."

Then Master Hackett made an examination of the bars, after which he suddenly disappeared from view, and, to my great surprise, I saw that, pulling the rope inside the wall, he had slipped into the enclosure.

Now he was almost as much of a prisoner as were we; and if the Britisher should come back, the old man might find himself in tight quarters, for it was reasonable to suppose that a man engaged in such a villanous business as was Benson always went well armed.

However, it was destined that Master Hackett should not be disturbed; and we could see him faintly in the darkness, moving here and there as if in search of something.

Then he placed the ladder against the wall, and when he had ascended to the level of our window we saw that he had with him a short piece of joist.

Using this as a lever, after we had told him which bars we had been working on, he forced the iron rods from their sockets in short order, thus making for us an open door through which we could pass to the top of the wall.

"You can come out now," the old man said with a chuckle, "an' the next time you're in a strange port I reckon you'll be more careful about followin' them as agree to give a free blow-out."

It can readily be imagined that we lost no time in acting upon the suggestion, and by the aid of the rope we slid down to the ground, exulting in the sense of freedom.

Master Hackett led us into one of the main streets, and while doing so explained that when we failed to return to the ship on time he suspected we had fallen into trouble, although more than one of the men suggested that we had deserted.

"I didn't reckon you were the kind of lads who'd turn around in that fashion, an' so got permission to come ashore for a spell, agreein' to report to-morrow mornin' if I hadn't come across anything that would show why you'd failed to turn up. Then it was I run across that Britisher, an' found he was mighty anxious to give me a free spree. It was that which made me believe he could tell somethin' about you, an' I set about findin' where he lived. It wasn't any easy matter for an old shellback to follow that sneak, who had good reason for thinkin' some of us might want to know where he anchored hisself nights; but I managed the traverse in fair shape, an' here we are."

"Can we go on board the *Essex* to-night?" Phil asked.

"I reckon we might by hirin' a boatman; but there's no reason why we need be in a hurry."

"I'd rather be on the gun-deck than in this town," Phil replied with a shudder, and at that instant, just as we were turning a corner, we came face to face with Oliver Benson, the young Britisher who made a business of selling Yankee seamen to English whalers.

My first impulse was to run away, but before I could so much as move Master Hackett had leaped upon the villain, and then I would not have beat a retreat no matter what might have been the cost of remaining.

I joined the fray, for the Britisher immediately began to fight desperately; and during several moments the three of us had quite as much of a task as we could perform, for Benson was armed with a wicked looking knife, and knew right well how to use it.

But for Phil, the villain would have succeeded in stabbing Master Hackett in the back while the two were locked in each other's embrace; but once his weapon was taken from him, the scoundrel showed signs of submission.

"Don't give him a chance to play us any tricks," the old man said as he unknotted his neckerchief preparatory to binding Benson's hands behind his back; and I wondered greatly why we should

burden ourselves with a prisoner in a town where, for aught we knew, he might have many friends or accomplices.

## CHAPTER IV AMONG THE WHALERS

This taking a prisoner in a friendly port was, as I considered the matter for the moment, a serious affair, and without waiting to reflect I advised Master Hackett to let the fellow go free.

"He can't do us any more harm, and we'll warn others as to his scheme. There's no knowing how much of a row may be kicked up by our depriving him of his liberty."

"That's no more'n he did to you, an' the chances are that many a poor fellow is eatin' his heart out aboard a British whaler because of him. We've got the scoundrel fast, an' I count on keepin' him so, at least until after he's been brought face to face with Captain Porter."

Benson spoke no word; the pallor of his face told that he was afraid, and if we had not known it before, we understood then that at heart he was a thorough coward.

I expected each instant that he would call for help, and there were enough rough characters around Valparaiso to give us no end of trouble in case they espoused his cause.

But Benson remained silent, therefore after a time I came to believe he did not stand on very good terms with the inhabitants of the town, and had good reason for thinking his summons would not be answered by aid. This last surmise of mine was soon found to be very nearly correct, as will presently be seen.

After tying the Britisher's hands behind his back, Master Hackett seized him by the arm and led the way toward the shore, followed closely, as may be supposed, by Phil and me.

It was near to midnight; the peace-loving inhabitants of the town were asleep, and the rougher element must have had a rendezvous at some distance from the water's edge, for we did not meet a single person until after having walked to and fro on the shore half an hour or more shouting for a boatman.

Then a sleepy looking fellow lounged up to Master Hackett, professing his willingness to do whatsoever might be required, providing a sufficient amount of money was forthcoming.

He had no more than given us to understand this much when a moonbeam lighted up Benson's face, and in an instant the boatman was animated.

"Where did you get that fellow?" he asked of Master Hackett in Spanish, and the latter replied in the same language, repeating the conversation to Phil and me after we were on board the *Essex*; but for the time we were completely in the dark so far as understanding the drift of the talk was concerned.

"We picked him up a short distance from here," the old seaman replied. "He had jugged two boys belongin' to our ship, countin' on sellin' 'em to British whalers after the *Essex* left port."

"I know him for a villain, an' have had it in mind that he spent his time shanghaing sailors, but never could bring it home to him. His game doesn't stop at Yankees; for when there are none in port he'll pick up anybody, so it's said."

"Then you have no objections to carryin' him aboard the ship?"

"What will you do with him there?"

"Let the captain settle his hash. We've got good proof of what he's been up to, an' I promise you he won't be treated any too gently."

"I'll carry you an' him out to the ship for nothing, if by so doing we can rid ourselves of the villain."

"I can't say whether the captain will take him out of your way; but you may be certain it'll go hard with him."

Until some time later Phil and I were surprised at seeing the boatman scurrying around as if we had been commissioned officers who promised a big fee; and he it was who tossed Benson on board the small boat with no more ceremony than he would have used in handling a bundle of merchandise.

In a twinkling we were hailed by the sentry on board the *Essex*, so rapidly did the boatman work his oars, and Master Hackett gave such an account of his party as gained us permission to come up the gangway ladder.

Not seeing the old seaman offer to pay the man for having pulled us out to the ship, I took one of the silver shillings from my pocket, offering it to him; but he shook his head as he pointed with a grin to where Master Hackett stood arm in arm with Benson.

The remainder of the night was spent by the Britisher in the prison of the ship, or, as a sailor would put it, "in the brig"; and we two lads, after hearing from the old seaman a literal translation of the conversation he had had with the boatman, tumbled into our hammocks with thankful hearts.

A few hours previous it had seemed certain we would be sent on board a whaler, while our friends believed us deserters, and now we were in our proper stations once more. Surely, Master Hackett had repaid whatsoever of a debt he might have owed us for jumping over the rail to rescue him!

The reception we met with from our messmates next morning was well calculated to make lads feel proud. Every man jack came up with some pleasant word as if we were particular friends with all the crew; and many were the hopes expressed that the Britisher, Benson, would get such sauce as he deserved.

There was never a man on board who did not believe our captain would deal out the most severe punishment in his power, yet it was agreed by the idlers on the gun-deck that if the villain was let off too easily, they would ask for permission to go on shore again and make it their duty to trim him in proper fashion.

The yarn which had been told Phil and me regarding the sailing of the *Essex* was a hoax. She was taking on board provisions for a long cruise, and it was hardly probable could be got under way for two or three days at the earliest.

Half an hour after inspection one of the marines brought the word forward that Phil and I were to go aft for an interview with the captain; and while it was no more than we had been expecting, both of us were considerably excited by the prospect.

We were rigged out in our best bibs and tuckers, Master Hackett himself seeing to it that our hats were properly tilted on "three hairs," and half a dozen of the older men inspecting us gravely to make certain we were togged in shipshape and Bristol fashion.

We found the captain with half a dozen of the officers, among whom was my cousin, Stephen McKnight, seated around a large table in the after cabin, looking grave as owls; and certain it is that I was trembling like a leaf when I bowed and scraped in such fashion as Master Hackett had said was proper.

"Well, lads," the captain said, speaking as if he believed we were as good as himself, "I understand that you had quite an adventure ashore yesterday, and were near coming to grief."

"Yes, sir," I replied, after waiting in vain for Phil to speak, and my voice quivered till it was like a wheezy flute.

"Tell us the whole story from the time you left Hackett, and do not be afraid of making it too long."

Again I waited for Phil; but since he showed no signs of piping up I was obliged to spin the yarn, for it would never have done to keep the captain waiting.

All hands were still as mice while I told of our meeting with Benson; and to make certain they'd believe me, I made Phil pipe up from time to time with his, "That's true, sir," or, "It's all as Ezra says, sir."

When I was at the end of the yarn, – and it was a long one, as you may believe, for I told every little detail from our meeting with Benson until we were on board ship again, – the captain said, as polite as a fiddler: —

"You may go, lads, and send Hackett aft."

Phil came very near tumbling over me as he tried to get out of the cabin in a hurry; and we were hardly more than amidships before we met Master Hackett, togged out within an inch of his life.

"The captain has sent for you, sir," I said with all due respect; and instead of making any reply, the old fellow turned on his heel stiff as a ramrod, walking aft till his bowlegs cut a perfect circle.

Once on the gun-deck again we two lads were forced to tell the idlers all that had occurred; and we were no sooner done with our yarn than Master Hackett appeared, looking much as if he had just been made master of a prize.

With all his fine looks and lordly manner, he could not tell the idlers more than we had already done, and all hands of us were forced to wait in suspense until some long-eared marine should come forward with his budget of news gathered by eavesdropping.

Half an hour later the crew of the cutter was called away to carry Lieutenant Downes ashore; and when that officer came back No. 4 boat was manned, and the prisoner, Benson, put on board.

It was not until the next day that we learned the whole of the story, and then all hands were satisfied that justice would be done by the Chilian authorities in such a fashion that the Britisher would for some time be unable to continue his scheme of catching Yankees.

What we finally learned was much like this: Having inquired into the case thoroughly, as I have already set down, Captain Porter was convinced that a flogging would be too slight punishment for such a villain as Benson, and Mr. Downes made an official report of the case to the authorities of the port. Those officers promised that the enterprising Britisher should be imprisoned with hard labor for a year at the very least; and that this was done, Master Hackett, Phil, and I knew before the *Essex* left port, for we three visited the jail and saw the scoundrel picking oakum under charge of well-armed keepers.

He glanced out of the corner of his eye at us for a single second, and then looked steadily at his work, nor could we provoke him into speaking. I thought at the time, however, and had good reason to remember it afterward, that if the opportunity should ever present itself for him to get one or all three of us into his power, he would not be likely to show us much mercy.

It was on the day we visited the jail that the brig *Jane*, an American whaler, came into port, and from her master Captain Porter learned very much which it was necessary he should know. It was reported that nearly all the British whalers were armed and provided with letters of marque, which really put them on a footing with ships of war; and, unless their plans were speedily nipped in the bud, all the vessels hailing from the United States would be captured. In fact one of them had already been seized, the Britisher having no difficulty in coming alongside because the Yankee craft had been so long at sea that her commander had no idea war had been proclaimed.

Captain Porter did not linger after receiving such information. He had proposed to put additional stores on board; but now decided that he could not afford to spend any more time in port, and immediately signals were hoisted recalling those who were in the town on shore leave.

Master Hackett, Phil, and I were no more than on board before the *Essex* was under way, and I believe of a verity we would have been left behind had we loitered half an hour longer.

We had been at sea two days when we spoke the Yankee whaleship *Charles*, and ran so close alongside that it was possible to hail her, when the skipper was summoned on board to give information.

A more surprised set of men than those who rowed the Nantucket captain over to us, I never saw. They stared at the *Essex* in open-mouthed amaze, and fired volleys of questions at us as we overhung the rail, knowing full well that we could get the same news from these men as was being dealt out in the cabin to our commander.

Not until after we had explained the meaning of our being in the Pacific, however, could we get any information, and then we learned that there was work in plenty before us.

A Peruvian corsair, in company with an armed British brig, had already captured the ships *Walker* and *Barclay* while they were cruising off Coquimbo, and unless we took a hand the entire Yankee fleet would soon be gobbled up.

The Nantucket skipper did not stay in the cabin more than half an hour; and immediately he was over the rail, our ship was being brought around "to take a hand in the fun," as Master Hackett announced, while the *Charles* followed in the wake of the *Essex*.

It can readily be imagined that all hands were in a fine state of excitement by this time, knowing as we did that our work was cut out for us; but we counted on cruising two or three days at the very least before coming up with an enemy.

Our surprise was quite as great as our pleasure, when, not more than three hours later, and while the *Charles* was within two miles of us, we sighted the Peruvian vessel to the northward.

In a twinkling we ran up the British colors to coax her within striking distance; and the captain of the *Charles* showed himself to be quite as shrewd as are Nantucket men in general, for no sooner was our false ensign straightened out than he hoisted the English flag over the stars and stripes, thus making it appear as if he had been captured by us.

The Peruvian fell into the trap at once, and came down upon us in fine style, throwing a shot ahead of the *Essex* when he was about a mile away. It was carrying matters with a high hand; but I reckon Captain Porter wasn't very greatly displeased, since it only made our work more simple.

Orders were at once given to pitch three shots directly over the stranger as a token for him to come nearer, which the Peruvian did, at the same time sending an armed boat to board us.

Every man jack of us, save those at the starboard guns, were on deck when the boat came alongside, a lieutenant in full rig standing in the stern-sheets, and thus it was Phil and I heard all that was said between this fine fellow and our commander.

Captain Porter professed to be in a towering rage; he ordered the lieutenant to go back at once with an order for the Peruvian to run under our lee, and then send an officer on board to apologize for having dared to fire at an English man-of-war.

How that fellow scurried back! He never so much as suspected that we were other than what had been represented, and in the shortest possible space of time another lieutenant, wearing so much gold lace that he looked like a brazen image, came up the gangway ladder grinning and bowing like an ape.

Captain Porter received him on the quarter, but never so much as invited him into the cabin, and Phil and I crowded well aft to hear what we allowed would be a mighty interesting conversation.

The lieutenant reported that his ship was the Peruvian privateer *Nereyda*, armed with fifteen guns, and carrying a full crew. They were cruising for Americans, he said, and had already captured two, – the *Walker* and the *Barclay*; but the British letter of marque *Nimrod*, a whaler, had driven their prize crew from the *Walker* and taken possession of her. The Peruvian had mistaken us for the *Nimrod*

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