

MILES WALLINGFORD

By JAMES FINIMORE COOPER

CHAPTER XV

"And as for those ransom we have set, it is our pleasure, one of them depart: Therefore come you with us, and let him go."

King Henry VI.

By such simple means, and without resistance, as it might be, did I recover the possession of my ship, the Dawn. But now that the good vessel was in my power, it was by no means an easy thing to say what was to be done with her. We were just on the verge of the ground occupied by the Channel cruisers, and it was preposterous to think of running the gauntlet among so many craft with the expectation of escaping. It is true, we might fall in with twenty English man-of-war vessels before we met with another Speedy, to seize and order us into Plymouth, had everything been in order and in the usual state, but no cruiser would or could board us, and not demand the reason why so large a ship should be navigated by so small a crew. It was over matters like these that Marble and I now consulted, no one being on the quarter-deck but the mate, who stood at the wheel, and myself. The cook was keeping a lookout on the forecastle. The Englishman had lain down, in full view, by the side of the foot of the mainmast, while Neo, ever ready to sleep when not on duty, was catching a nap on the booms.

"We have got the ship, Moses," I commenced, "and the question next arises, what are we to do with her?"

"Carry her to port of destination, Captain Wallingford, to be sure. What else can we do with her, sir?"

"Ay, that is well enough, if it can be done. But in addition to the difficulty of four men's taking care of a craft of five hundred tons, we have a sea before us that is covered with English cruisers."

"As for the four men, you may safely set us down as eight. I'll engage we do as much in a blow, as eight such fellows as are picked up nowadays' long shore. The men of the present time are mere children to those one met in my youth, Miles!"

"Neither Neo, nor the cook, nor I, am a man of other times, but are all men of to-day; so you must call us but three, after all. I know we can do much; but a gale may come that would teach us our insignificance. As it is, we are barely able to furl the main-topgallant-sail in a squall, leaving one hand at the wheel, and another to let go rigging. No, no, Moses; we must admit we are rather short-handed, putting the best face on the matter."

"If you generalize in that mode, Miles, my dear boy, I must allow that we are. We can go up Channel, and ten chances to one but we fall in with some Yankee, who will lead us a hard two."

"We shall be twice as likely to meet with King George's ship, who will overhaul our articles, and want to know what has become of those crew of deserters."

"Then we'll tell 'em that the rest of the crew has been pressed; that they know their own tricks too well, not to see the reasonableness of such an idea."

"No officer would leave a vessel of this size with only her master, mate, cook, and one man to take care of her, even had he found a crew of deserters from his own ship in her. In such a case, and admitting a right to impress from a foreigner at all, it would be his duty to send a party to carry the craft into port. No, no, Moses, we must give all the English a wide berth, now, or they will walk us into Plymouth, ye."

"Blasphemous!—Bordeaux for instance, during the revolt, and never want to see its face again. They've got what they call the Mill Prison there, and it's a mill that does grinding less to my taste than the thing you're at Clawbonny. Why not go north-about, Miles? There must be few cruisers up that way."

"The road is too long, the weather is apt to be too thick, and the coast is too dangerous for us, Moses. We have but two expedients to choose between: to turn our heads to the westward, and try to get home, trusting to luck to bring us up with some American who will help us, or steer due east and run for a French port—Bordeaux for instance—where we might either dispose of the cargo, or ship a new crew, and sail for our port of destination."

"Then try the last, by all means. With this wind we might have the ship in with the land in the course of two or three days, and go clear of everything. I like the idea, and think it can be carried out, if the rest of the crew of Americans, and there must be men enough to be had for the asking, knocking about the quays."

After a little further conversation, we determined on this plan, and set about carrying it into execution on the spot. In rounding-to, the ship had been brought by the wind on the larboard tack, and was standing to the northward and westward, instead of to the eastward, the course we now wished to steer. It was necessary, therefore, to wear round and get the ship's head in the right direction. This was not a difficult manoeuvre at all, and the Englishman helping us with seeming good will, it was soon successfully executed. When this was accomplished, I sent the English sailor into the cabin to keep Diggins company, and we set a watch on deck of two and two, Marble and myself taking charge four hours and four hours, in the old mode.

I acknowledge that I slept little that night. Two or three times we detected Sennit attempting to haul close up under the ship's stern, out of all question with a view to surprise us, but as often would he drop to the length of his tow-ropes, as he saw Marble's head and mine, watching him above the taffrail. When the day dawned I was called, and was up and on the lookout as our horizon enlarged and brightened round ship. The great object was to ascertain, as early as possible, what vessel might be in our neighborhood.

But a solitary sail was visible. She appeared to be a ship of size, close-hauled, heading to the southward and eastward; by steering on our proper course, or certainly by diverging a little to the northward, it would be an easy matter to speak her. As I could plainly

see she was not a ship-of-war, my plan was formed in a moment. On commencing it to Marble, it met with his entire approbation. Measures were taken, accordingly, to carry it into immediate execution.

In the first place, I ordered Sennit, who was awake, and had been, I believe, the whole night, to haul the boat up and to lay hold of one of the boat tackles. This he did willingly enough, no doubt expecting that it was to be recoupled into the ship, under a treaty. I stood on the lookout to prevent an attack, one man being abundantly able to keep at bay a dozen who could approach only by ascending a rope hand over hand, while Marble went below to look after the two worthies who had been snoring all night in the cabin. In a minute my mate roused up, leading up the seamen, who were still more asleep than awake. This man was directed to lay hold of the tackle and slide down into the boat. There being no remedy, and descending being far easier than ascending, this exploit was soon performed, and we were well rid of one of our enemies. Sennit now began to remonstrate, and to point out the danger there was of being towed under, the ship going through the water the whole time at the rate of five or six knots. I knew, however, that the English were too skillful to run the risk of being drowned unnecessarily, and that they would let go of the tackle before they would suffer the boat to be swamped. It was ticklish work, I allow, but they succeeded surprisingly well in taking care of themselves.

We had more difficulty with Diggins. This fellow had been so beastly drunk that he scarce knew what he was about when awake; and Marble rather dragged him on deck, and sat to the taffrail that assisted him to walk. There we began to remonstrate, and to point out the danger there was of being towed under, the ship going through the water the whole time at the rate of five or six knots. I knew, however, that the English were too skillful to run the risk of being drowned unnecessarily, and that they would let go of the tackle before they would suffer the boat to be swamped. It was ticklish work, I allow, but they succeeded surprisingly well in taking care of themselves.

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vessel is a running West Indiaman; she may take us all the way to Jamaica."

"Well, then, you will have an opportunity of returning at your leisure. You wished to take me almost as much out of my course; or, if not absolutely out of my course, quite as much out of my time. I have as little relish for Plymouth as you seem to have for Jamaica."

"But the stranger may be a Frenchman; now I look at him, he has a French look."

"If he should be French, he will treat you well. It will be exchanging beef for soup-maigre for a week or two. These Frenchmen eat and drink, as well as you English."

"But, Captain Wallingford, their prisons! This fellow Bonaparte exchanges nobody this way, and if I get into France I am a ruined man."

"And if I had gone into Plymouth, I fear I should have been a ruined man, too."

"Remember we are of the same blood, after all—people of the same stock—just as much countrymen as the natives of Kent and Suffolk. Old Saxon blood, both of us."

"Thank you, sir. I shall not deny the relationship, since it is your pleasure to claim it. I marvel, however, you did not let your cousin's ship pass without detaining her."

"How could I help it, my dear Wallingford? Lord Harry is a nobleman, and a captain, and what could a poor devil of a lieutenant, whose commission is not yet a year old, do against such odds? No, no, there should be more feeling and good fellowship between chaps like you and me, who have their way to make in the world, than to be meddling with the tackle. So stupid and enervated was the master's mate, however, that he let go his hold, and went into the ocean. The scound did him good, I make no doubt; and his life was saved by his friends, one of the sailors catching him by the collar, and raising him into the boat."

Sennit availed himself of this accident, to make further remonstrance on the subject of having any more men put in the boat. It was easy to see, it was as much his policy to get everybody out of that little conveyance, as it was mine to get all the English into her.

"For God's sake, Captain Wallingford, knock off with this, if you please," cried the lieutenant, with a most impudent sort of civility of manner. "You see how it is; you are barely keeping raw, but we have in her; and a dozen times during the night I thought the ship would drag her under. Nothing can be easier than for you to secure us all, if you will let us come on board, one at a time."

"I do not wish to see you in irons, Mr. Sennit; and this will remove any necessity for restoring to an expedition so unexpedient. Hold on upon the subject, as I shall feel obliged to cast you off entirely, unless you obey orders."

This threat had the desired effect. One by one, the men were let up out of the forecastle, and sent into the boat. Cooked meat, bread, rum, and water, were supplied to the English; and, to lower them a compass and Sennit's quadrant. We did the last at his own earnest request, for he seemed to suspect we intended sending him adrift, as indeed was my plan at the proper moment.

Although the boat had now twelve men in it, it was in no danger, being buoyant, six-footed yawl, that might have held twenty on an emergency. The weather looked promising, too—the wind being just a good top-gallant breeze for a ship steering full by. The only thing about which I had any qualms, was the circumstance that southwest winds were apt to bring mist, and that the boat might thus be lost. The emergency, nevertheless, was one that justified more risks, and I pursued my plan steadily.

As soon as all the English were in the boat, and well provided with necessities, we felt at more liberty to move about the ship, and exert ourselves in taking care of her. The man at the wheel could keep an eye on the enemy—the Dawn steering like a pilot-boat. Neo was sent aloft to do certain necessary duty, and the topgallant-sails being loose, the claw-lines were overhauled, and the sails set. I did this more to prevent the English ship from suspecting something wrong, at seeing a vessel run off before the wind, than from any short canvas, than from any desire to get ahead, since we were already going so fast as to render it probable we should pass the other vessel, unless we altered our course to meet her.

Diggins Billings, the cook, had now a little leisure to serve us a warm break-fast. If Mr. Sennit were living, I think he would do us the justice to say he was not forgotten. We sent the people in the boat some good hot coffee, well sweetened, and they had a fair share of the other comfortable eatables of which we partook ourselves. We also got out and sent them the masts and regular sails of the boat, which was fitted to carry two spinnakers.

By this time the stranger ship was within two leagues of us, and it became necessary to act. I sent Marble aloft to examine the horizon, and he came down to report nothing else was in sight. This boded well. I proceeded at once to the taffrail, where I hailed the boat, desiring Sennit to haul her up within comfortable conversing distance. This was done immediately.

"Mr. Sennit," I commenced, "it is necessary for us to part here. The ship in sight is English, and will take you up. I intend to speak her, and will take care she knows where you are. By standing due east you will easily get her off, and there cannot be a doubt of her picking you up."

"For heaven's sake, consider a moment, Captain Wallingford," Sennit exclaimed, "before you abandon us out here, a 1000 miles from land."

"You are just 326 miles from Scilly, and not much more from the Land's End, Mr. Sennit, with a wind blowing dead before that. Then your own countrymen will pick you up, of a certainty, and carry you safe into port."

"Ay, into one of the West India islands; if an Englishman at all, yonder

long! As long as the wind remains in this quarter, we shall do well enough; should we suddenly get in safety, I shall not regret the delay, the credit of having done so good a thing, and of having done it so well, being worth as much to me as any interest on capital, or wear and tear of gear can possibly be. As for Mr. Sennit, I fancy he is some sixty miles off here at the southward and westward, and we've done with him for the voyage."

"Suppose he should fall in with the Speedy, and report what has happened, Miles?" returned the mate. "I have been calculating that chance. The stranger was standing directly for the frigate's cruising ground, and he may meet her. We will not halloo, till we're out of the woods."

"That risk is so remote, I shall not let it give me any trouble. It is my intention to run in for the land at our fastest rate of sailing, and then profit by the best wind that offers, to get into the nearest haven. If you can suggest a better scheme, Moses, I invite you to speak."

Marble assented, though I perceived he was not entirely free from the apprehension he had named until the next morning arrived, bringing with it no change, and still leaving us a clear sea. That day and the succeeding night, too, we made no capital run, and at midnight of the third day after the recapture of the Dawn, I calculated our position to be just one hundred and four miles to the southward and eastward of Ushant. The wind had shifted, however, and it had just come out light northeast. We went to work, all hands of us, to get in the standing-sails, and to bray up and haul aft; an operation that consumed nearly two hours. We were so busily employed, indeed, as to have little or no time to look about us, and my surprise was less, therefore, when the cook called out "Sail ho!" I was busy trimming the main yard, when the announcement was made and looking up, I saw a lugger standing toward us, already within long gunshot. I afterward ascertained that perceiving us to be approaching her, this craft had lain like a snake in the grass, under bare poles, until she thought us sufficiently near, when she made sail in chase. I saw at a glance, several important facts: In the first place, the lugger was a French vessel, and in the second, she was cruiser, public or private; in the third, escape from her, under any circumstances, was highly improbable. But why should we endeavor to escape from this vessel? The countries were at peace; we had just bought Louisiana from France, and paid fifteen millions of dollars for it, thereby not only getting the country ourselves, but keeping it out of the hands of John Bull, and we were said to be excellent friends, again. Then the Dawn had extricated herself from English clutches, only a day or two before; no doubt the lugger would give us all the aid we could require.

She is French, for a thousand dollars, Moses!" I cried, lowering my glasses from the first good look of the stranger; "and keeping away two points, we shall speak her in fifteen minutes."

"Ay, French," rejoined the mate, "but, blast 'em all round, I'd much rather have nothing to do with any of the rogues. As you know it, Miles, these are immoralizing times, and the sea is getting to be sprinkled with so many Van Tassels, that I'm afeared you and I'll be just that dear, good old soul, my mother, and little Kitty, to be frightened, or, if not exactly frightened, to be wronged out of our just rights."

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long consultation in private, after the closest scrutiny could detect no flaw in the papers. Then Monsieur Gallois approached and renewed the discourse.

"Vy you have no boat, sir?" he asked.

"I lost my boat three days since, about a hundred leagues to the southward and westward."

"It is not well, I say, that I should be no more marins in your sheep's—"

I saw it would be best to tell the whole truth, at once, for, were I to get any aid from this lugger, the facts, sooner or later, must be made known. Accordingly, I gave the Frenchman, and his English-looking companion, a full account of what had occurred between us and the Speedy. After this narrative, there was another long conference between Monsieur Gallois and his friend.

Then the boat was again manned, and the captain of the lugger, accompanied by his private counsellor and myself, went on board the Dawn. Here, a very cursory examination satisfied my visitors of the truth of my story.

Somehow, I expected some commendation from a Frenchman, when he heard the ready manner in which we had got our vessel out of the hands of the Philistines. No such thing; an expressive "Bon" had escaped Monsieur Gallois, and his English-looking companion, a full account of what had occurred between us and the Speedy. After this narrative, there was another long conference between Monsieur Gallois and his friend.

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The young girl had been listening with intense interest. Her heart had been beating strongly with an appeal, and not in vain. "Doctor," she said, "I have just graduated as a trained nurse from the Mercy Hospital, Pittsburgh, after years of study, for the course is very thorough. I came here for a little vacation trip to see my brother, who resides here, and for a little relaxation before I began work. Now, this will be my first case! Will you take me to this family?"

"Why, Laura!" interrupted the brother, "this is your vacation!" and he frowned. "You can't begin work so soon, you need rest!"