

WALLY T. YOUNG

CAPTAIN HERMES



TALE OF A PIRATE

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Prelude: Stolen from Africa

During the dark of night, an African tribe raids the small village of a rival tribe, taking them by surprise they capture most of the young men including a pair of 8-year-old boys. The young boys watch in fear as their captors bind their hands and run a long rough and heavy rope from man to man, tying them together in a line. Scared and confused, the boys and the other men begin the long walk toward the coast where an English captain pays the captors and takes possession of the prisoners.

Along the Atlantic coast the morning light begins to fill the eastern sky as a group of sailors start loading the prisoners into longboats to move them out to an awaiting slave ship. After reaching a dual masted brigantine the prisoners are told to climb the netting attached to the side of the rocking vessel. A couple of the captive men refuse, their new captors make an example of them and toss the men with their hands still bound into the water, where sharks are waiting.

After climbing the side of the ship, the boys, along with the adult men, are led down to a dark lower hold where the ceiling is so low, an adult man cannot stand upright. The entry hatch is locked after every man is pushed down into the hold, and the boys find a corner near the bulkhead to sit.

They have no way to tell the passage of time, as the only light in the cramped chamber is a single oil lantern burning near the entry hatch. As a few day's pass, a couple more groups of captured men are crammed into the tight area. Finally, they feel the ship begin to move, marking the start of their long, stressful journey to the Americas.

The hold is filthy, with seawater leaking in and mixing with the urine and feces of the prisoners and creating a foul stench that burns their eyes. The pair rely on each other to survive the brutal months at sea, as their captors toss a few hard biscuits and rotted vegetables through a ventilation hole and also pouring water into a small barrel every few days, providing just enough to keep them alive.

One of the boys is more aggressive, fearless, and fends off the adults scrambling for the food while the more docile boy grabs the scraps. The boys discover a way to capture the rats that gnaw at their bare feet for food. Many adults refuse to eat the rats and rely on the bread and scraps. Being malnourished, these adults begin to die from scurvy and other illnesses. Little do the boys know that the rats they are eating are keeping them safe by providing the needed vitamins to prevent scurvy.

During this dark voyage, the pair build a strong bond that will last them the rest of their lives.

Chapter One: Bought and Sold

After surviving the brutal journey across the Atlantic, the boys are lucky enough to be purchased by a good-hearted warehouse owner. This new owner gives them Greek names—Zeus and Hermes. Wanting them to be more useful in his warehouse, the owner goes against the general rule of the day and educates the boys. Teaching them to speak English along with how to read, write, and some basic arithmetic.

Because of his unusually long fingers, Zeus gains the nickname “Long Hands.” He has also become very proficient in recordkeeping and interfacing with customers.

Hermes, on the other hand, gravitates toward physical labor, leading him to spend more time on or near the wharfs, bringing him into contact with deckhands, where he learns about their lives at sea.

Hermes and Zeus have remained close friends, more like brothers since their capture, however as they reach their late teens, Hermes becomes free-spirited and a touch defiant. Due to these traits their owner decides to sell Hermes to a French sea captain. This captain is aware of Hermes' desire to sail and is in need of another man so he offered a fair rate to his owner.

Hermes explains to Long Hands that this is for the best. “We both know I don’t belong here. My path is different than yours. You must be strong my brother, and we will meet again.” Long Hands is not happy about this separation, but understands.

Chapter Two: A New Life

After sailing out on a large brigantine merchant vessel, and eager to learn Hermes quickly picks up on the art of sailing. Being given the opportunity he pays close attention and learns to read charts and the basics of navigation. The years pass taking Hermes across the Atlantic from the Americas to Europe along with many other destinations.

In 1713, Hermes is on watch duty in the crow's nest and spots a trio of sloops moving in their direction. Hermes has seen other ships over the years come alongside, but they were normally military or fellow merchants. These ships appear different, giving Hermes an uneasy feeling.

When the three ships raise black flags, Hermes is filled with fear as his mind recalls the horrible stories he has heard about pirates. A sickening sensation wells up in his stomach as he remembers that day when he and Long Hands were dragged from their huts and taken captive.

Hermes watches from his perch as the ships fire cannon shots across the bow of his ship. His captain decides not to fight back and Hermes decides to remain hidden high up in the crow's nest as the pirates board his vessel. Filled with fear as the pirates gather his crewmates on the quarterdeck below him. Then he watches when they separate his captain from the rest of the crew and bind him to the main mast.

Hermes ducks down when the man who appears to be in charge tilts his head, looking up, and shouts: "Don't you think you should bring your scallywag butt down here?" Said more as a statement than a question. Hermes stands but hesitates, so the man shouts again: "Bring yee self to this deck and face me, or me men will use that bucket for target practice."

With a deep breath, Hermes tucks his knife deep into the back of his breeches before climbing from the nest and sliding down a line to the main deck. Landing proudly a few feet from the pirate captain, Hermes grabs the handle of the knife ready to strike.

The pirate smiles with a squint and comments, "Wise move son."

While the pirate captain's crew goes through the ship, Hermes stands like a statue with one hand still behind him, firmly attached to the handle of his hidden knife. Hermes suppresses his desire to lash out and free his captain when his captain eyes him, subtly shaking his head, signaling to do nothing.

After the pirates have taken what they wanted, their captain walks up next to the merchant captain before turning to address the crew, "I be Captain Benjamin Hornigold. Ye captain here was wise not to put up a fight and saved yee worthless lives."

Hornigold walks around the deck until he stops in front of Hermes. Turning his back to Hermes to face the bound captain. "I am disappointed, captain. Ye have a crew of cowards, 'cept for the one. At this very moment one man stands ready to strike and he be

contemplating stabbing me in the back.” Leaning closer to the bound captain. “What I finds surprising is this man is a slave and not one of ye crewmen.”

With this, Hornigold turns, scowling at Hermes as he steps closer to him. Slowly, reaching he grabs the arm behind Hermes back, lifting his hand from his breeches revealing the hidden knife. With a satisfied laugh Hornigold removes the knife from Hermes hand and surprisingly throws it towards the bound captain. The knife cuts through the air until it buries its point deep in the soft wood of the mast, resting just above the bound captain’s head. “Cowards! The only man among ye with any spine be a slave.” he shouts, “I should have every last one of ye tossed to the sharks.”

Hornigold turns again to face Hermes, silently staring him straight in the eye, studying the man. “I can tell ye be a loyal man with a streak of rebellion. Ye were the only man who stood ready to kill me or die trying, for this I give ye a choice.” Placing his hand on Hermes shoulder, “Ye can remain with these worthless sea barnacles as their slave, or I offer ye to join me crew as a free man. What be ye choice sailor?”

Filled with personal pride to have been given such a choice Hermes stands there fighting a mental battle. Still feeling loyalty for his captain who has done so much for him, but this pirate is offering him freedom. Hermes walks over to face his captain as he thinks that it seems the horror stories he has heard about pirates appear overly exaggerated. He looks his captain, owner, and yes a friend in the eye as he makes his choice, “Captain, you have been very good to me and saved me from a boring life ashore; I thank you, but I am still a slave. This man, he is offering me what was taken from me as a young lad, my freedom.” Reaching above the bound man’s head, Hermes looks deep into his captains eyes, and he can tell as he pulls the knife from the wooden mast that he knows and agrees with his choice. Turning to face Hornigold, “I will join you, captain Hornigold.”

Chapter Three: Old Friends

Over the next year, plus a few months, Hermes serves aboard Benjamin Hornigold's ship, the Marianne. Benjamin has seen how Hermes quickly gained the respect and loyalty of the crew and has steadily risen through the ranks. Currently serving as Hornigold's Boatswain, Hermes takes advantage of this position to expand his nautical knowledge and refine his command skills.

While enjoying a tankard of rum in a Nassau tavern, also known as New Providence, Hermes notices a stranger entering the establishment. The man's attire draws Hermes attention, as he is certainly not dressed like a pirate. In fact the man appears to be a Spaniard, and with the Queen Anne's War still raging pitting Spain against Great Britain and the Americas, Hermes thinks this man is extremely bold to so casually enter what is technically still a British settlement.

Adjusting his position to allow him to keep his eye on this man, Hermes watches him walk up to Hornigold's table. Hornigold is seated with a couple of the other captains including Edward Teach and his first mate Isreal Hands. They all stop talking when the unknown Spaniard pulls over a chair and sits down at the table showing no fear. Hermes surprised by this observes as the men have an extended conversation until Hornigold waves for Hermes to join them.

Walking up to the table and with a strong proud tone comments, "Yes captain?"

Hornigold addresses him, "Hermes, gather some extra hands and meet Mr. Martin here at the wharf. He has some supplies to be transferred to the Marianne along with a few other items for the storage yards. I want him treated with respect, savvy?"

Hermes replies with the traditional, "Aye aye, captain," and without another word goes about gathering the men.

When Hermes approaches Mr. Martin's ship, he takes a double take at a man standing near the top of the ships gangway. Surprised but pleased Hermes has found his old friend Zeus, aka Long Hands.

"Ahoy, Long Hands!" shouts Hermes brightly.

Long Hands recognizing the voice quickly turns, spotting Hermes he runs down the gangway and over to greet him. The two men engage in a brief manly hug. Pulling back with a grin displayed on his face, "I never thought to see your face again," comments Long Hands.

Hermes responds with an equal grin, "I told ye we would meet again, my brother. Tells me, what are ye doing on this ship?"

Speaking with a drawn-out accent, Long Hands answers him, “The warehouse and I was sold to Meester Mar-ten, who also runs the harbor and shipping stores in Santo Domingo. Meester Mar-ten liked my abilities and brought me to live with him on Hispaniola.” Then looking around, “I take it yar ship is in harbor—or do you have a new master?”

Hermes steps back slightly as he proudly places a hand on the cutlass hanging at his side, “I be a free man me brother! The only master I have be the mistress of the sea.” Leaning close to Long Hands ear, “Ye can be free again too, if ye wish, brother!”

Long Hands gives Hermes a long deadpan look before responding with a little shock in his tone, “You be a pirate!”

Laughing loudly as he slaps Long Hands on the back, Hermes replies, “Ye be correct, a pirate I be.” Seeing Long Hands isn’t ready to talk about his personal freedom publicly, Hermes changes the topic, “It be good to see ye brother. Me men and I be here for this cargo of yours.”

Chapter Four: The Slave Ship

The months continue to pass and Hermes is now a seasoned seaman, along with becoming a skilled and respected pirate. Captain Hornigold's small fleet of ships is sailing near the Virgin Islands on calm seas with fair winds when a lookout calls out, "Sail ho."

When the other ship comes into view from the aft deck Hornigold pulls out his spyglass to look the distant vessel over. After assessing the vessel he calls out for Hermes. When Hermes reaches the aft deck Hornigold hands him the spyglass. "Tells me Mr. Hermes what ya see."

Hermes studies the ship before responding, "She appears to be a small French sloop captain. From the looks of her, she likely be a slaver."

Hornigold wondering Hermes thoughts and assessment asks, "A slaver ya say, Then tells me Mr. Hermes, does ye think she be worth taking?"

Looking the vessel over again, "Not likely much cargo of value aboard, cept for the slaves, captain," Hermes responds.

"Good call Mr. Hermes, their course tells me they be headed for the America's. This means they've not sold their captured cargo yet. They likely have only standard supplies aboard, but she looks to be a sturdy vessel with likely some fresh crew replacements," Hornigold states, turning to Hermes. "Tell ye what—I'll give ye command of the Marianne. If ye can take that ship, she be yours to command."

Surprised and eager to gain his own vessel, Hermes responds, "I accept that challenge captain."

With this, Hornigold signals his second in command Edward Teach aboard one of the other ships informing him to take command of the fleet and remain on course.

Hermes assumes temporary command of the Marianne and plots out his strategy as they break off from the small fleet. Already sailing under a British flag, Hermes decides to keep their colors in place, as France and England are currently allies. With some gunports already open for ventilation and wanting to keep a casual appearance as they approach their pray, Hermes orders the cannons readied but left in place and not to open any more ports. He also orders personal weapons stowed out of sight near the starboard rail. Hermes keeps his crews appearance normal, going about their deck duties. Hornigold remains relaxed atop the aft castle overlooking the main deck and helmsman, while trying to figure out Hermes plan.

Hermes takes notices when the other vessel opens her gunports, but also notes that he doesn't see any cannons move into place. Going from man to man on the main deck, Hermes orders a group of men to start a fake brawl on deck, but not to actually hurt each

other. As the fight begins, Hornigold steps forward, confused, but decides not to intervene when he sees Hermes calling for the other crewmen to gather around the brawlers.

When the vessels are close enough to view each other, Hornigold realizes Hermes plan is working when he watches the other ships crewmen climbing the ratlines up the riggings to get a better view of the chaos unfolding aboard the Marianne. Drawing closer and closer, Hermes signals the men to slowly let out the sails, slowing the vessel. Once the ship reaches his desired position, Hermes turns to the helmsman and shouts, "Bring her around Iron bones," with this the helmsman spins the wheel! "Raise the colors me harties!"

The Marianne creaks and groans as she makes a hard turn, angling her starboard guns toward the French ship. Once the black flag is raised with the French ship a beam the Marianne's starboard rail, Hermes orders a single cannon shot. After the shot splashes near the French vessels bow, Hermes watches her crew scramble to regroup.

Now close enough to shout to the merchant captain, "Heave-to! Heave-to I say and ye shan't be harmed!" Hermes shouts.

Knowing they are in no position to retaliate, the French merchant captain quickly complies. Hermes brings the Marianne alongside and personally leads the boarding party, which encounters no resistance.

The French captain orders his crew to toe the line on the main deck as Hermes walks up to him. Hermes studies the captain and can tell from his body language that the man wants to lash out at him. Standing face to face with the captain, Hermes orders his crewmen to search the ship. Having learned from observing two masters, Hornigold and Teach, Hermes doesn't say a word to the captain or his men as he paces silently in front of them waiting for his men to report their findings. Hermes now understands why they do this as he can see how the captive crew stands nervously awaiting their fate.

As the time passes Hermes' men finally report finding a small chest containing a few silver coins and gold ingots, barrels of salted pork, sugar, rum, and about thirty slaves shackled in the vessels cramped lower hold. Hermes now filled with rage as he recalls his time captive aboard a slave ship, scowls with clear disgust for the captain. Still not speaking to the captain he orders the slaves brought to the main deck. The men on the deck including Hermes are greeted by a foul stench that precedes the slaves as they are paraded on deck. It is easy to tell by their appearance that these poor souls, both men and women, have been aboard awhile as they are very sickly and malnourished.

Using his native African tongue, Hermes addresses the men, "I was once just as ye, but I was offered a choice by a pirate captain. Now ye see me a free man and I offer ye that same choice. Men you may join with me and regain your freedom, or ye may return to that small dark pit and be shackled with the same animals who enslaved you."

Most understand his language and all agree to join him, as do a couple of the ship's crew who ask to join Hermes and Hornigold. Hermes orders oranges and water for each slave and explains he will give the women safe passage to Nassau where they can find a new life. Then he turns his focus to the French captain and his crew, ordering them shackled in the lower hold.

After everything is completed, Hermes stands on the aft castle with Captain Hornigold, who comments: "Dat was a fine ruse, having that on-deck brawl. The

Frenchmen were completely taken by surprise. I shall have to remember that one. So as promised, the Le Serpent be ye ship now, Captain Hermes.”

“Aye, thank you, captain.” Then he pauses thinking silently before stating, “I think I shall rename her.”

Postlude:

Now a captain, Hermes starts a tradition he will become known for as he maroons the captured captain and crew on a small, isolated island somewhere in the Bahamas. Leaving them with limited supplies as he sails away with his new ship, The Raider.

Hermes continues as a pirate captain serving most of his career as part of Hornigold's fleet. Later under his personal black flag, displaying in red the African symbol for a crocodile, Hermes and his crew of mostly former slaves, continue to plunder and loot sea merchants, with a preference for targeting slave ships. Eventually Hermes takes the King's pardon from Governor Woodes Rogers, and finds honest work. After selling his vessel he reunites with his old friend Long Hands. Through twists of fate Long Hands has become the co-owner of a large merchant ship that Hermes serves aboard. Hermes continues an honorable life, where he and Long Hands—former slaves—spend their lives helping free their enslaved brothers and sisters.

The End

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I want to say thank you, and acknowledge Public Domain Vectors, for the royalty free clip art we used for the image of a pirate.

The content of this story was not created using AI. The only use of an AI program was for Grammer and Spell check using Microsoft Co-Pilot.