

The Life Of A Ship

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Freeditorial 

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Chapter One

The Life of a Ship from the Launch to the Wreck.

Song of the Sailor Boy.

Oh! I love the great blue ocean,

I love the whistling breeze,

When the gallant ship sweeps lightly

Across the surging seas.

I watched my first ship building;

I saw her timbers rise,

Until her masts were towering

Up in the bright blue skies.

I heard the cheers ascending,

I saw her kiss the foam,

When first her hull went plunging

Into her ocean home.
Her flags were gaily streaming,
And her sails were full and round,
When the shout from shore came ringing,
“Hurrah! for the Outward-bound!”

But, alas! ere long a tempest
Came down with awful roar
And dashed our ship in pieces
Upon a foreign shore.
But He who holds the waters
In His almighty hand,
Brought all the sailors safely
Back to their native land.

Davy was a fisher boy; and Davy was a very active little boy; and Davy wanted to go to sea. His father was a fisherman, his grandfather had been a fisherman, and his great-grandfather had been a fisherman: so we need not wonder much that little Davy took to the salt water like a fish. When he was very little he used to wade in it, and catch crabs in it, and gather shells on the shore, or build castles on the sands. Sometimes, too, he fell into the water neck and heels, and ran home to his mother, who used to whip him and set him to dry before the fire; but, as he grew older, he went with his father in the boat to fish, and from that time forward he began to wish to go to sea in one of the large ships that were constantly sailing away from the harbour near his father's cottage.

One day Davy sat on a rock beside the sea, leaning on his father's boathook, and gazing with longing eyes out upon the clear calm ocean, on which several ships and boats were floating idly, for there was not a breath of wind to fill their sails.

“Oh, how I wish my father would let me go to sea!” said Davy, with a deep sigh. “I wonder if I shall ever sail away beyond that line yonder, far, far away,

where the sky seems to sink into the sea!” The line that he spoke of was the horizon.

Davy heaved another sigh, and smiled; for, just at that moment, his eyes fell on a small crab that stood before him with its claws up as if it were listening to what he said.

“Oh, crab, crab,” cried the little boy, “you’re a happy beast!”

At that moment he moved the boathook, and the crab ran away in such a desperate hurry that Davy opened his eyes wide and said, “Humph! maybe ye’re not a happy beast after all!” While he sat thus, a stout fisherman came up and asked him what he was thinking about. On being told, he said, “Will you come with me, boy, to the building-yard, and I’ll show you a ship on the ‘stocks.’ I’m goin’ as one of her crew when she’s ready for sea, and perhaps by that time your father will let you go too.” You may be sure that Davy did not refuse such a good offer; so the man and the boy went hand in hand to the yard where ships were built. Davy had never been there before, and great was his surprise when he saw a huge thing standing on dry land, with great pieces of wood of all shapes sticking round it, like the skeleton of a whale; but greater still was his surprise when the fisherman said, “There, lad, that’s the ship.”

“Well,” exclaimed Davy, opening his large eyes to their widest, “it don’t look like one just now!”

The fisherman laughed. “That’s true, lad; but come I’ll explain;” and taking Davy by the hand, he led him nearer to the “skeleton” of the ship, and began to explain the names and uses of the different parts.

“You see that long thick timber,” he said, “that runs from this end, which is the ‘stern,’ to that end, which is the ‘bow,’ well, that is the ‘keel.’ This post or beam that rises out of it here is the ‘stern-post,’ and that one that rises up at the far end yonder is the ‘stem’ or ‘cutwater.’ These are the principal timbers of the vessel, and upon their strength the safety of a ship chiefly depends. The sticks that you see branching out from the keel like deers’ horns are called ‘ribs;’ they are very strong, and the timbers that fasten them together at the top are called ‘beams.’ Of course these pieces of wood are some of them far larger than any trees that you have ever seen; but if you examine them you will find that each timber and rib is made up of two or three separate pieces of wood, fastened very strongly together. When all the beams are fixed they will begin to nail the planks on to the ribs; iron bolts are used for this purpose, but by far the greater number of the nails are made of wood. After this is done the seams between the planks will be filled with oakum and the whole ship covered over with pitch and tar, just in the same way as your father does to his boat when

she lets in water. Then the bottom of the ship will be entirely covered with sheets of copper, to prevent the wood worms from destroying it. These little rascals would eat through a ship's bottom and very soon sink it, but for the copper. Next, the deck is laid down, and the ship will be ready for 'launching.' A ship's masts and rigging are always put in after she is launched. Now, lad, what d'ye think of it?" said the fisherman as he walked home again with Davy. "The ship's to be a 'three-master' full-rigged, and is to go by the name o' the Fair Nancy."

As he said this he smiled, patted the little boy on the head and left him. But Davy replied not a word to his friend's remarks. His curly head was stuffed quite full with the keel, timbers, ribs, beams, stern-post, planks, and cutwater of the Fair Nancy; he could not speak, he found it difficult even to think, so he thrust his hands deep into his pockets, sat down on the shank of an anchor, and stared out to sea. In half an hour he heaved a very deep sigh indeed, and said, "Oh! dear me, I wonder if I shall ever go to sea in the Fair Nancy!"

Time flew on, and little Davy fished with his father, and worked for his mother, and paid many a visit to the building-yard, to watch the progress of the ship his ship, as he called it. He begged very hard, too, to be allowed to go in her when she should be ready for sea. At first neither father nor mother would hear of it, but at last they began to think that Davy would make a very good sailor, for certainly he was an active obedient boy; so, although they did not say Yes, they were not nearly so determined as they used to be in saying No.

The day of the launch was a great day at the seaport where Davy lived. The launch of a large ship is always a very interesting and wonderful sight indeed; so that thousands and thousands of people flock from all directions to see it. Whichever way Davy looked he saw crowds of people, some on foot, some on horses, some on donkeys, and some in carriages, all streaming towards the one great point the ship-builder's yard. It seemed quite like a holiday or a fair, and was such a bright, warm, sunny day that people's hearts felt far lighter than usual. Davy saw all this at a glance the moment he left home; and, throwing his red nightcap into the air, he gave one long loud hurrah! and ran away as fast as his heavy fishing-boots would let him.

The ship was very different now from what it had been when he first saw it. There were four little masts put up in it, on which were hoisted gay and gaudy flags. Her "hull," or body, was now coppered and neatly painted, while all the rubbish of the building-yard was cleared away, so that everything looked neat and clean. The stocks, or framework on which she had been built, sloped towards the water, so that when the props were knocked away from the ship, she would slide by her own weight into the sea. Ships are always built on

sloping stocks near to the water's edge; for you can fancy how difficult it would be to drag such a great thing into the water by main force. In order to make her slip more easily, the "ways," down which she slides, are covered with grease.

Very soon the crowds of people stood in silence, expecting the great event of the day; and, as the moment drew nigh, the band, which had been playing all morning, suddenly stopped. Davy became very anxious, because he was so little that he could not see in the crowd; but, observing a post near at hand, he struggled towards it and climbed to the top of it. Here he saw famously. The workmen had begun to knock away the props; there was just one remaining. At this moment a lady stepped forward with a bottle of wine in her hand to christen the ship. This she did by breaking the bottle against the cutwater; just at that instant she began to move. Another second and the Fair Nancy rushed down the incline, plunged heavily into the water like some awful sea-monster, and floated out upon her ocean home amid the deafening cheers of the people, especially of little Davy, who sat on the top of the post waving his red cap and shouting with delight.

After the launch Davy and all the people returned home, and the Fair Nancy was towed to the "shear-hulk" to have her masts put in. The shear-hulk is a large ship in which is placed machinery for lifting masts into other ships. Every one who has looked at the thick masts of a large vessel, must see at a glance that they could never be put there by any number of men. Machinery is used to do it, and the shear-hulk contains that machinery; so that when a ship has to get her masts put up she is dragged alongside of this vessel. In the meantime Davy renewed his prayer to his father to let him go to sea, and at last the old man consented. His mother cried a good deal at first, and hoped that Davy would not think of it; but his father said that it would do him good, and if he became tired of it after the first voyage he could give it up. Davy was overjoyed at this, and went immediately to his friend the fisherman, Ben Block, who was very much delighted too, and took him to a shop to buy clothes and a sea-chest for the voyage.

"You see, lad," said Ben, "the ship is bound for Quebec with a mixed cargo, and is to come back loaded with timber; and as the season is coming on, you'll need to get ready quick."

"That I shall," replied Davy, as they entered a shop. "Ho! shopman, give me a straw hat, and a blue jacket, and a pair o' duck trousers, and"

"Stop! stop!" cried Ben, "you're sailing too fast. Take in a reef, my lad." Ben meant by this that he was to proceed a little slower. "You'll want a 'sou'-wester,'" (an oilskin hat), "and a 'dread-nought,'" (a thick, heavy coat), "and

things o' that sort."

After Davy had bought all he wanted, and ordered a sea-chest, he went home to his mother, who was very sad at the thought of parting with him. When the day of departure came she gave him a great deal of good advice, which Davy promised, with tears in his eyes, to remember. Then she gave him a little Bible and a kiss, and sent him away. His father took him to the beach, where the ship's boat was waiting for him; and, as the old man took off his cap, and raising his eyes to heaven, prayed for a blessing on his little son, Davy, with watery eyes, looked around at the big ships floating on the water, and, for the first time, wished that he was not going to sea.

In a few minutes he was on board the "outward-bound" ship. This is what we say of ships when they are going out to sea; when they return from a voyage we say that they are "homeward-bound." The Fair Nancy was a noble ship, and as she hoisted her snow-white sails to a strong wind, (a stiff breeze, as Ben Block called it), she looked like a white cloud. The cloud seemed to grow smaller and smaller as Davy's father and mother watched it from the shore; then it became like a little white spot on the faraway sea; then it passed over the line where the water meets the sky, and they saw it no more!

After Davy had cried a great deal, and wished very often that he had not been so determined to leave home, he dried his eyes and began to take great interest in the curious things he saw around him. What surprised him most of all was, that although he actually was at sea, he could not see the sea at all! This was because the sides of the ship, which are called "bulwarks," were so high that they quite prevented the little boy from seeing overboard. Davy soon found an opening in the bulwarks, however, which his friend Ben called the "gang-way," through which he could see the water and the ships and boats that were sailing there. And when he mounted the high part of the deck in front of the ship, which is called the "forecastle," or when he went upon the high deck at the stern of the ship, which is called the "poop," then he could see all round. And what a wonderful and new sight it was to Davy! His cottage was gone! The beach, and the pier where the nets used to hang, were gone. The trees and fields were all gone, and there was nothing but sea, sea, sea, all round, so that the Fair Nancy seemed the only solid thing in the whole wide world! But poor Davy did not look or wonder long at this, for the breeze freshened, and the waves rose, and the ship plunged, and Davy felt very queer about the stomach! There is a man in every ship called the "steward," and everybody loves that man, because he goes about from morning till night trying to do people good and to make them happy. He looks after breakfasts, dinners, teas, and suppers. He answers every one who calls, and gets for everybody anything that they want. He is never ill, never in a hurry, never in a bad temper; in fact, he is a

very charming man.

Now, when the steward saw Davy with a pale face, and red eyes, and awfully seasick, he went up to him with a smile, and said, "Sick, my lad? you'll soon get used to it. Always sick when you first go to sea. Come below and I'll give you summat to do you good, and tumble you into your hammock." By going below the good steward meant going below the deck into the cabin. A ship is just like a large house, divided into a number of rooms some of which are sitting rooms, some store and provision rooms, some kitchens and pantries, closets and cupboards; and there are two or three flats in some ships, so that you can go up or down stairs at your pleasure. When Davy went down the ladder or stair, which is called the "companion," and followed the steward through many rooms full of all kinds of things that seemed to be all in confusion, and saw the sailors sitting, and smoking, and laughing, and talking on chests and tables, he almost believed that he was in a house on shore; but then he remembered that houses on shore don't dance about and roll, first on one side and then on the other, and plunge forwards and then backwards; so he sighed and put his hands to his breast, which felt very uncomfortable.

"Here's your hammock," said the steward; "all the sailors sleep in these things, and this one is yours." So saying, he lifted Davy from the ground and tossed him into bed. The "hammock" is a long piece of canvas drawn in round an iron ring at each end. To this ring a number of cords are attached, and the hammock is slung by them to the beams of the ship. In the bed thus formed the blankets are put; and a very snug bed it is, as it swings about with the ship. Davy soon fell asleep, but he was quickly wakened again by the horrible noises on deck. Ropes were thrown about, men's feet were stamping, pieces of wood were falling, doors were banging, masts were creaking, the wind was howling; in short, Davy thought it must be a terrible storm and that they should all be lost. But the steward said to him, in passing, "It's only a stiff breeze, youngster;" so he turned round and went to sleep again. For two days and two nights did Davy lie there very sick! On the morning of the third day he awoke much refreshed, and felt strongly inclined to eat his blankets! As he lay wondering how he was to get down out of his hammock without breaking his neck, he heard his friend Ben Block conversing with a man in another hammock who had never been to sea before and was very, very sick.

"Oh! dear me," sighed the sick man, "where are we now?"

"Don't know," answered Ben; "we've been drove pretty far out of our course to the nor'ard, I guess. It's a dead calm."

"A dead what?" said the sick man faintly.

“Why, a dead calm,” replied Ben. “When there’s no wind it’s a calm, and when there’s no motion at all, either in the air or in the water, except the swell o’ the sea, it’s a dead calm. D’ye understand?”

“Is it fine weather, Ben?” cried Davy cheerfully.

“Yes, lad, it is,” replied the sailor.

On hearing this Davy sprang, or, as the sailors call it, tumbled out of bed. He tried to get out of it; but not being used to hammocks, he was awkward and fell plump on the floor! However, he was not hurt; and throwing on his jacket, he ran up on deck.

Well might Davy’s heart leap and his voice shout at the beautiful sight that met his gaze when he reached the forecabin. The sea was like one wide beautiful mirror, in which all the clouds were clearly reflected. The sun shone brightly and glittered on the swell on which the ship rolled slowly; and the only sound that could be heard was the gentle flapping of the loose sails, now and then, against the masts.

“Have you had breakfast, youngster?” inquired the captain of the ship, laying his hand on Davy’s head.

“No, sir, not yet,” answered the boy.

“Run below, then, and get it, and after you’ve done come to me. We must put you to work now, lad, and make a sailor of you.”

The steward soon gave Davy as much food as he could eat; then he sprang up the companion ladder, and, running to the poop where the captain was, touched his cap, saying

“I’m ready, sir.”

“Very good, my lad,” said the captain, sitting down on the skylight, or window on the deck, which gives light to the cabin below. “Do you see that little thing on top of the mainmast like a button?”

“Do you mean the truck?” said Davy.

“Oh, you know its name, do you? well, do you think you could climb up to it?”

“I’ll try,” cried Davy, springing towards the mast.

“Stay!” shouted the captain; “not so fast, boy. You’d tumble down and break your neck if you tried to climb to the truck the first time you ever went up the

mast. But you may go to the ‘maintop.’ That’s where you see the lower mast joined to the top mast. Climb up by those rope laddersthe ‘shrouds,’ we call them.” Away went Davy, and was soon halfway up the shrouds; but he went too fast, and had to stop for breath. Then he came to the mass of woodwork and ropes at the head of the lower mast. Here he had great difficulty in getting on; but, being a fearless boy, he soon succeeded. The captain then called to him to go out to the end of the “yardarm.”

Yards are the huge cross beams fastened to the masts to which the sails are fixed. The “main-yard” is the largest. The mainsail is attached to it.

Davy soon crept out nearly to the end, but when he got there the yard became so small and the ropes upon it were so few and slack, that the poor boy’s courage began to fail. He looked down at the water, which seemed to be terribly far below him. At that moment the ship made a lurch or plunge, Davy lost his hold, and with a loud cry fell headlong from the yard into the sea. In a moment Ben Block, who had been watching him, jumped overboard; a boat was lowered, and in less than ten minutes Ben was picked up with Davy clinging to him.

Not long after this they drew near the Gulf of Saint Lawrence, and were beginning to think of the end of their voyage. But one night while Davy lay sound asleep in his warm hammock, he was startled by a cry on deck, which was followed by a loud order for “all hands” to tumble up and shorten sail. The sailors are usually called “hands” at sea. In a moment Davy was on deck, with only his trousers and shirt on. But he could not see anything, the night was so dark, and he could scarcely hear anything except the howling of the wind.

“Take in all sail!” roared the captain. The men rushed to obey, and Davy was so well accustomed to the work that he too climbed to his usual place on the main topsail yard and began to haul in the sail. He could barely see the man next to him, and it was with difficulty he kept his hold of the yard, while the ship tossed and plunged in the waves. When nearly all sail was taken in the ship went easier, and the men assembled on the deck to await further orders. The gale increased, and suddenly the small bit of the fore-topsail that was hoisted burst into shreds with a clap like thunder, and carried away the fore-topmast with all its yards and rigging, part of the bowsprit, and the top of the mainmast. “Clear away the wreck!” shouted the captain. Some of the men ran for axes, and began to cut the ropes that fastened the broken masts to the ship, for there was a danger of the ship striking against them and knocking a hole in her side while she plunged. Still the gale increased, and the mizzen topmast went overboard. The “mizzen” is the mast nearest to the stern. It is the smallest of the three. The lightning now began to flash, and the thunder to

roar, while the crew of the Fair Nancy stood on her deck clinging to the bulwarks, lest they should be washed overboard! Little Davy looked at the man next him, and saw that it was Ben Block. "Oh, Ben!" said he, "what an awful night it is! Do you think we shall be lost?"

Ben shook his head. "I don't know, lad; but the Lord can save us, if it be His will. Pray to Him, boy."

"My poor mother!" murmured Davy, as the tears rose to his eyes, while he prayed to God in his heart that he might be spared to see her again. At that moment there came a wave so big and black that Davy thought the sea was going to turn upside down. It came on like a great dark mountain, high above the ship. "Hold on for your lives!" cried some of the men, as the wave fell with a fearful crash and turned the ship over on her side or on her "beam-ends," as sailors call it. They were in awful danger now, as the sea began to pour down into the cabins, and the masts and sails being in the water the ship could not "right," or become straight again. "Cut away the masts!" roared the captain. The deck was now standing up like a wall, so that the men could not walk on it, but they managed with great difficulty to reach the mizzenmast, which a few strokes of the axe sent overboard. Still the ship lay on her beam-ends. "Cut away the mainmast!" cried the captain. The order was obeyed, and with a loud report, like a cannon shot, it went overboard too. Immediately after the fall of the mainmast there came another wave, from which they never expected to rise again. It dashed down on the stern and drove in the cabin windows; but the worst of it was, that it swept away all the boats belonging to the ship. They had been securely fastened to the deck; but this wave carried them all away, so that now, if the ship sank, their only chance of escape was gone. The same wave snapped the foremast across near the deck. This was fortunate, because it enabled the ship to "right" herself, and once more the men were able to stand on the deck. The storm continued to rage still, however, and some of the men were sent to work the pumps, for there was a great deal of water in the ship now; so much, indeed, that she could hardly float. Another party were ordered to fit up a small mast, which they tied to the stump of the foremast. This new one was called a "jury-mast;" and as they could not sail without a mast of some kind or other, they were very glad when they saw it up and a sail hoisted on it. During the night, however, another heavy wave broke this mast away also; so they were again left to toss like a log on the stormy waters.

All this time the men were working hard at the pumps, but, although they worked for many hours without stopping, the water continued to increase in the hold, and they saw that the ship had sprung "a leak;" that is to say, some of the planks had started, or the seams had opened, and the water was pouring

into it so fast that it was evident she would soon sink. This was very awful indeed. Some of the men began to cry to God for mercy, others tore their hair and ran about like madmen, while some sat down and silently prepared to die!

The morning light came at last. But what a sad sight it rose upon. The once noble ship now lay a wreck upon the water, with the masts and sails gone and her shattered hull ready to sink. The captain, who seemed to have lost all hope when the jury-mast broke, was standing on the poop, looking anxiously round the horizon in hopes of seeing a sail but in vain. Davy stood beside him, and looking up in his face, said, "Please, sir, could we not make a raft?"

"Right, boy, right," replied the captain; "you're the best 'man' amongst us. We're no better than girls to be giving way to despair in this way. Hallo! lads, rouse up there; get all the spare yards and spars you can, and make a raft. Look sharp now!"

The captain said this in such a quick, commanding tone that all the sailors jumped to obey him, and in five minutes they were busily at work on the raft. First, they collected all the broken yards and bits of masts that were still floating alongside, dragging by the ropes that fastened them to the sides of the ship. These they arranged side by side, and tied them firmly together with ropes. Then they collected all the spare timbers that were in the ship, and putting these above the others, fastened them with ropes too. After that they tore off some of the planks from the decks and bulwarks, with which they made a kind of floor to the raft. All this, although it takes a short time to tell, took a long, long time to do; for it was hard work moving such heavy timbers, and the poor men were very tired, having been up in the storm all night. Besides this, although the wind had ceased, the waves were still high and would not let them work quietly. However, they finished it at last, and after it was done, they put a number of barrels of biscuit and some casks of water and wine on board. Then they put a few blankets and a compass that useful little machine that points always to the north, and shows the sailor which way to go, so that he sails in the dark night as surely as in the broad day.

"Now," said the captain, "I think that there is a chance of escape yet. Get on board, lads, as fast as you can. I fear the ship won't float long." All the men now hastened on board. The captain's wife, who was the only female in the ship, was the first to step on the raft, and it soon began to be crowded. When about half of the sailors had left the ship the captain suddenly cried out, "Ho! Ben Block, we've forgot a mast and sail. Run below with a couple of hands and fetch one as fast as you can." Just at that moment the ship gave a heavy plunge, the ropes broke, and the raft floated slowly away, leaving the men who were yet in the ship in a state of despair. One or two of them jumped into the sea and tried to swim to the raft; but the first man who did so was nearly

drowned, and the others got back to the ship with great difficulty. It was a terrible sight to witness the misery of the poor captain, as he beheld his wife, standing with her arms stretched out towards him, and the raft drifting slowly away, until at length it appeared like a small black spot far off upon the sea.

“Oh, my poor wife!” he cried, “I shall never see you more.”

The tears were rolling down Ben Block’s weatherbeaten face as he went up to the captain and took him by the hand.

“Never fear, sir,” said he; “the Almighty can save her.”

“Thank you, Ben, for saying that,” replied the captain; “but the ship won’t float long. My wife may indeed be saved, but we are sure to be lost.”

“I don’t know that,” cried Ben, trying to look cheerful. “When you sent me down below, sir, to look for a mast and sail, I observed that the water in the hold had ceased rising. If we can only keep her afloat a little longer, we may manage to make another raft.” The captain smiled sadly and shook his head, and Davy, who had been standing beside him all the time, felt his heart sink again.

To add to the horror of the scene, night came on, and the water was so high in the cabin that the captain and men who had been left in the wreck had to try to sleep on the wet decks the best way they could. Next morning the wind was still blowing pretty hard, and they now saw that they were drawing near to a wild shore, where there seemed to be many large rocks in the water near the beach. The crew of the Fair Nancy looked anxiously towards the land, hoping to see people there who might help them when the ship struck on the rocks; but they saw no one. In about an hour afterwards the ship struck, and the shock was so great that Davy’s heart seemed to leap into his throat. The shore was lined with great dark cliffs and precipices, at the foot of which the waves roared furiously. While the men stood looking helplessly at the land another wave lifted the ship, carried her forward a long way, and dashed her down on the rocks, where she stuck fast, with a sharp rock quite through her hull, and the water foaming round her. What made their situation more dreadful was, that a great deal of snow had fallen during the night. It covered the decks of the ship, and made the land look cold and dreary.

“We must swim for it now,” said the captain, as he looked sorrowfully at the boiling surf and immense waves which swept over the rocks, and bursting like thunder on the cliffs, were flung back upon the ship in spray.

“No one can swim in such a surf as that,” said one of the sailors gloomily.

“Surf” is the name given to the white foam which is formed by the waves when they dash upon the shore. It is very difficult, sometimes quite impossible, to swim in the surf of the sea, and many poor sailors have been hurled on the rocks by it and dashed in pieces while attempting to swim from their wrecked vessels to the land.

Every time a wave came it lifted the Fair Nancy, and, as it passed, let her fall heavily on the sharp rocks, so that she began to break up. Still the men were afraid to venture into the sea, and they clung to the bulwarks, quite uncertain what to do. At last Ben Block turned to the captain and said

“I’m a good swimmer, captain, and I think I could swim to the shore well enough perhaps; but there are some o’ the men who can’t swim, and poor Davy, there, could never do it; so I’ll just throw a rope round my shoulders and make for the shore. If I land I’ll fix the rope to the cliffs, and you’ll all be able to get ashore easy enough. If I should be drowned, it’ll only be a little sooner, that’s all, and it’s well worth risking my life to save my shipmates.”

“You’re a brave fellow, Ben,” said the captain. “Go and do it if you can.”

Ben Block went down below and soon returned with a stout rope. On the end of this he made a loop, which he passed round his shoulders, and then, raising his eyes to heaven with an imploring look, he leapt into the sea. At first he swam vigorously, and the sailors looked on in anxious hope. But a large wave came. It fell, and Ben Block disappeared, while a cry of fear rose from the deck of the ship. In a few seconds, however, they saw him rise again and struggle manfully with the raging billows. The next wave that came lifted Ben up and threw him on the beach, to which he clung with all his power; but as the wave retired it swept him back into the sea, for he could not hold on to the loose sand. He now rolled over and over quite exhausted, and the sailors thought he was dead. But a man’s life is dear to him, and he does not soon cease to struggle. Another wave approached. It lifted Ben up and threw him again on the beach. This time he made a desperate effort to hold on, and, fortunately, he observed a large rock close to where he lay. With a sudden spring he caught hold of it and held on till the wave went back; then he ran forward a few steps and caught hold of another rock a little higher up, so that when the next wave broke over him it had not power to draw him back. Another run and he was safe!

The men gave a loud cheer when they saw him land. After he had rested a little, Ben fastened the end of the rope to a mass of rock. The sailors hauled it tight and fixed the other end in the ship; and then, one by one, they slowly crept along the rope and reached the shore in safety. Here they all fell on their knees and thanked God for their deliverance.

But now they found that the land was not inhabited, and they walked along that dreary coast for several days, almost starved to death with hunger and cold, for they had only a few biscuits among them, and their clothes were never dry. Little Davy was the best walker among them, and helped to keep up their spirits greatly by his cheerful conversation as they toiled along. At last they arrived at a little village, where the people were exceedingly kind to them; gave them food and dry clothes, and, after they became stronger, sent them to the great city of Quebec. Here they were kindly treated, and finding a ship bound for England, they all returned home.

You may imagine the delight of the poor captain when he arrived and found his wife safe and sound. She and all the people on the raft had been picked up by a homeward-bound vessel the day after they lost sight of their ship, and were brought safe back to England. And you may fancy the joy of little Davy's parents when their son opened the cottage door one day and rushed into his mother's arms.

Davy never went to sea again, but continued for many years after to help his poor father to fish. And the Fair Nancy that beautiful ship, which Davy had watched so long, which he had seen launched, and which had sailed so gallantly from her native shores, with her snowy sails glancing in the sun like the white wings of a seagull! alas! she lay a total wreck now, on the rocky shores of a foreign land.

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