

## AFRAID

Bennie Allen burned with indignation as he stole unnoticed away from school; for he had that day been reprimanded. In the Geometry class the teacher had scolded him for not being able to prove an exercise, and had even threatened to whip him before the whole school if he should come again unprepared. Such a warning would have hurt anybody, but it galled Bennie exceedingly as he was a boy of sensitive nature. Moreover he had tried, and tried hard, as he thought, to work out that proposition the night before, but without success. He thought that the teacher was very unjust to accuse him of neglect and laziness.

The sound of light footsteps roused him from his bitter reflections, and he turned to discover that one of his classmates had overtaken him. It was Nell Kenny, one of his best friends. His face brightened up as he saw her, but soon grew dark again, for he began to fear what she was thinking of him.

"Hello, Nell," he said abruptly.

For some time they walked along side by side in silence; finally he inquired bluntly:

"Well, I suppose you heard what the teacher said?"

"Yes, I did," she responded, in a low tone.

A few minutes silence ensued, and then, bitterly:

"I suppose you think it was all right, too."

"Not exactly, Ben, but you should have studied that geometry."

You can't blame him for saying what he did."

"I did study that darn stuff last night. If I hadn't I wouldn't have cared. Anyway he had no business saying that. He is just down on me,—that's all."

"You're just sore because you got a scolding," she replied warmly. "You couldn't have studied that very much last night or you would have known it. Ben,—if you weren't so lazy you could do it all right."

"I ain't lazy,—I worked at it,—oh!—I'm going to give up the old stuff. I can't do it."

"She stopped and looked full at him.

"You're going to give it up Ben, just because you are scared of it,—or scared of the teacher. Oh Ben,—are you too scared?"

Ben flushed. Then she, too, thought he was scared. This was the limit! He flung his schoolbag at her and his eyes glared.

"Scared, am I?—scared?—There's my books"—He pushed them towards her with his foot. "Before I lay a hand on them again you will take back what you said, miss.—or else—or else you won't have to!"

He turned and walked away quickly, to hide the burning tears that blinded him. Scared," he muttered, "scared,—scared—" Nell stood in amazement gazing at his retreating form, then tossing her head defiantly she stepped over the school bag and walked homeward.

Ben wandered aimlessly for some time, till finally, through force of habit, he turned his steps towards the wharf, where the boys were wont to have their daily swim. Here he found them, some sitting around in their bathing suits chatting, others splashing about in the water. Ben did not feel like a swim today, though he was really the best swimmer of them all, for now all his former joy was turned to bitterness. Most of the boys ignored him now, though a few spoke, and asked him to join them, but he sullenly refused.

"Sore because you got a bawling out from the teacher today, I'll bet."

Ben turned quickly on the speaker.

"I'll show you who'll be sore in about two—" but he was interrupted by a loud splash, as the offender dived into the water for safety. A laugh went up among the boys, and Ben passed on, but not before he heard one remark:

"Old Squeers gave Ben a bad scare today."

There it was again, the same old story.—scared! The word rang in his ears. He reached a quiet corner on the end of the wharf, and sitting down, buried his face in his hands. He was scared! What had he done to earn that hateful title in so short a time? The teacher,—and Nell,—and even the boys—all had the same reproach to fling at him.

He sat for a long time, meditating bitterly. Then he lifted his head and gazed vacantly across the wharves, but his face now had a firm, though pained expression.

The sound of splashing water and laughing voices died away along the wharf: the sun dropped gradually towards the horizon: dim twilight lapsed into darkness,



but the boy remained motionless, his hands clasped about his knees, staring into space.

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The sun was just climbing above the horizon as the schooner "Ala Ventus" swung away from her pier. A cool crisp breeze blew off the land, and the schooner surged ahead like a hound on a scent, as she turned on her course seaward. The crew were hurrying about setting the sails and trimming the sheets. The Captain, whose kindly face had been browned and set in hard lines from constant exposure to the elements, stood at the wheel smoking his pipe leisurely, and occasionally giving orders to the crew.

"Nice breeze for a starter, Cap." remarked a sailor as he coiled up the mainsheet.

"Yes," the Captain replied, glancing instinctively to windward. "But it is hard to say how long it will last. Besides, it is not the best thing to clear for Port au Basque with so little ballast, even at this time of year. I don't believe this breeze will hold long, but it's a help."

The men, having finished their work for the time, were glancing expectedly at the fo' castle companionway, whence came the sound of the Cook's song as he hustled about preparing the breakfast. Suddenly the song ended abruptly in an exclamation of surprise. A few hasty words followed, then.

"McKay, come here a minute." the Cook called.

One of the men rose from his seat on the rail, and descended the companionway. A hasty conversation followed, and in a few minutes McKay reappeared followed by a lad of about sixteen years, his countenance bearing a haggard and forlorn expression. It was none other than our friend Bennie Allen. McKay grabbed him by the arm and led him aft to the cabin, where the captain was standing.

"Look here, Cap, what the Cook discovered hiding up behind the pall post in the fo' castle."

The Captain looked at the boy in amazement, scanning him from head to foot.

"Found him hid up behind the pall post?" he asked incredulously.

"Yes sir, he was looking for some onions an' saw somethin' hiding behind the pall post. This is it" he replied indicating Bennie.

"When did you get aboard this vessel—and how?"

"He musta' crawled in and stowed himself away las' night, I guess," suggested McKay.

"I asked him, not you," said the Captain significantly, then to the boy, "Well is that right?"

"Yes, sir," ventured Ben, hanging his head." I came on last night, sir: I—I hope you don't mind."

"Mind, eh? Well, did you suppose we were taking in boarders free. This is'n't a summer hotel, young fellow."

"P'raps he wanted to sign up," proffered McKay, grinning.

"What's your name?" inquired the Captain, ignoring this remark.

"Benjamin Allan, sir."

"Well, Benjamin Allan, since you took it on yourself to ship aboard this craft, I am not responsible. But we will have to keep you till we reach port, as I am not going to beat all the way back now with this light wind and without ballast for the sake of putting you ashore,—but, mind, this is'n't going to be any pleasure voyage.—Well, what do you say?"

"All right, sir,—I'll work," said Ben gaining courage, and he looked up wistfully.

The Captain was touched by the boy's piteous face, but did not wish to show any leniency to him before the crew, who were now gathered on the deck watching the scene curiously.

"Well, I don't suppose you can do much, but you can help the Cook. He turned to McKay, "Here, take him to the Cook and give him something to do,—and something to eat too: he must be hungry."

Benny was plied with many questions by the crew as he ate his breakfast among them. He was glad when they had finished eating, and had gone on deck. Then the Captain came to breakfast. While he ate he asked the boy why he had stowed away on the vessel. Benny was much embarrassed by the question, and sought to form some excuse.

"I came because—because my father beat me, and I couldn't stand it any longer," he answered, blushing at his falsehood.

The Captain finished his breakfast in silence, then he too went up on deck. Benny worked with the cook for sometime, washing the dishes and tidying up the fo' castle



but he soon got tired, as the monotonous motion of the vessel annoyed him; besides, he had now an opportunity to think over what he had done, and his remorse increased with the miles that separated him from home. He wanted to rest, so he asked the cook if he might lie down for awhile.

"All right, go ahead. Are you getting sick already? You can use that bunk up there." And he pointed to an upper bunk.

Benny crawled into it and lay thinking. It was nearly a day since he had left home, and he wondered if they were worrying much over him. By this time the whole town would be out looking for him. They would think he fell over the wharf:—then they would be sorry for the cruel things they said to him. Still he felt sorry now, and he began to see the folly of his act. Besides he feared these rough strange men, and was already sick of the stuffy fo'castle which was always in motion like a large cradle. Again the thought of fear assailed him. Why could he not be brave instead of a weakling? He held back the rising tears. Oh, it was hard, but he must try to be brave among these men who were so brave themselves. He would work and show them that he, too, could be brave. His lids closed from weariness, and the motion of the vessel lulled him into a deep sleep.

The sailors were at supper when he awoke and crawled out of his bunk: he was hungry now, and partook of the hearty meal spread before him. Later the Captain came forward.

"Well, I guess this breeze is done," he remarked, "We are going to have a fine night."

After the supper was put away, Ben was put to work preparing the side lights for the night, while the men crowded into the fo'castle for their evening's chat. Then it was that Ben began to get a knowledge of sea life. He heard many stories of the most thrilling perils and marvellous escapes from these men, and was thrilled with wonder and admiration of them. He crawled into his bunk and listened to their tales of mystery,—the superstition and wonder of the sea, and of fierce battles with the elements. He wished he could become a part of that wonderful life,—if he could only become brave?

At last the stories began to lag. One by one the men crawled away to their bunks. Then all was silent, except for an occasional grunt or snore, and the ceaseless gurgling

of the water against the ship. Ben lay for awhile long thinking over what he had heard; he wondered if he could become hardy like these men, whose strength resembled the sea that had nurtured them. If they only knew what he had done, how they would despise him. He blushed as he thought of the lie he had told the Captain, that wonderful gray eyed man who was so strong and brave.

He listened to the deep breathing of the men about him. They were all asleep. Then he carefully climbed out of his bunk to the floor. He reached the companion-way, and ascended the steps noiselessly to the deck.

The vessel had ceased to move; the air was still as death; and a silent darkness that bespoke mystery enshrouded all. High up overhead dark patches of clouds were scurrying, and occasionally the waning moon peered timorously from between them. The ship lay in a velvety darkness, and the undulating sea in smooth topped ridges faded away on all sides into the mysterious shadows; the black water gurgled and tinkled softly as she swayed easily to its motion. There was no other sound, save the low creak of the boom as it swung easily to the motion of the schooner, and the muffled tread of the Captain as he paced the deck by the cabin, silently keeping his watch. The boy held his breath in awe. Then slowly a realization of the mighty mysteriousness of the sea gripped him. This was the great master whom those sailors were serving,—the giant from whom they drew their strength. He repressed a shudder as he crept noiselessly towards the cabin where the Captain was pacing the deck. As he sat on the corner of the cabin the Captain stopped in his walk before him.

"Is that you, lad? I thought you were in your bunk." He inquired in a low voice.

"I was, sir, but I couldn't sleep, so I came on deck for a few minutes. It is lovely tonight."

"Yes, a little too lovely to suit us; we won't get far at this rate." and he gave the wheel an impatient turn.

"I thought there would be storms on the sea; this is—different somehow," the boy remarked.

"A calm is usually before a storm," replied the Captain significantly, as he sat down besides the lad on the cabin. "We have to take weather as it comes."

Silence ensued for some minutes, then the boy turned to the Captain.



"It must be lonesome at night like this,—sometimes:" he ventured. The Captain was gazing away into the darkness; then the boy felt a hand lightly laid on his shoulder.

"No lad, not lonesome," he replied slowly. "Out here where things are so big, and quiet, and clean, a man can't help feeling that he's part of it all, and he just wants to feel that he's clean and big before his Maker—Then he can't feel lonesome. I think that's why I like it."

"I'm afraid," the boy said timidly "that I haven't been like that. I lied, sir, today when I told you why I came here, and I want to tell you the truth now. I came because I was—scared!"

"Scared, eh? How was that?"

The boy then told the whole story of his disgrace, and his resolution to run away. The Captain listened attentively to the narration, and at its conclusion turned solemnly to the boy.

"Aye lad, it is ever so. Misunderstanding often breeds cruel words that hurt us badly, and we wince. Brave men endure them patiently: they do brave things because they forget themselves. When you were hurt you sympathised with yourself,—see? Well, you are going to be brave now, because the sea is showing you the way. It made you tell the truth. Now I think you had better go to your bunk and sleep. Remember, be brave and true, like the sea." and he turned away into the darkness.

Ben crept softly to his bunk. He admired this great kind man who seemed a part of that mysterious something called the sea,—and he felt that he, too, was becoming part of it. He was happier now, and soon was fast asleep.

When he awoke next morning the vessel was no longer lagging. He could hear the smart splash of the waves against her side, and the dull roar of water as she rushed on. The Cook was singing his morning song as usual.

"Is it blowing hard?" asked the boy, sitting up in his bunk. "No," the Cook replied, "We just struck a little breeze, but it may blow up after a while. How about rollin' out an' eatin' yer breakfast?"

Ben needed no second invitation, and was soon eating heartily. Afterwards he went up on deck. How different it was from the night before! Now the sails were swelling

proudly, and the vessel sped through the water. White-capped waves were on all sides, and their constant swish blended with the freshening wind in a delightful song.

McKay was at the wheel talking to two men who sat near him on the rail. Ben crawled up on the cabin and listened to their conversation. As they talked a low rumble came across the water.

McKay looked towards the Nor' West.

"That's a squall comin' down there all right," he remarked indifferently.

"Yes, and by look the of things she's comin' our way too," said Landry, the Mate, scanning the horizon, where a thick mist was gathering beneath a pile of heavy clouds.

McKay resumed the wheel. The clouds were rising and spreading, and louder rumbles followed. He looked again at the mist, then stepped to the cabin companionway.

"Squall comin' up from Nor' West, sir,"

A few minutes later the Captain's head appeared in the companionway. He scanned the horizon carefully.

"How are you heading?" he asked.

"North East half East, sir," McKay replied. "Hold her a point or so closer for a little while."

"A point or so closer, sir," McKay repeated.

The Captain disappeared again into the cabin. Five minutes later he emerged clad in his oilclothes.

"You'd better go get your togs on; I'll take her for a while." As the men went forward to don their waterproofs, the Captain turned to Ben:

You'd better go below, boy. It'll likely be wet here in a little while."

"Oh, let me stay on deck. I won't get in the way," Ben pleaded, determined to see through it all.

By the time the men returned the growls of thunder had become much louder and occasional forks of lightning shot up from the horizon. The Captain was carefully studying the advancing squall. Bennie sought to read the truth of the situation in his face, but it betrayed no emotion: he admired the Captain's coolness and indifference: then he thought of what he had said the evening before:—Brave men forget themselves.

"Stand by your mainsail" the Captain called.

"Aye sir, Mainsail!" and two men hastened to obey the command "Lower away," and the large sheet of canvass was soon tucked away snugly.



A few minutes silence, and then—

"Haul down the jibs." Soon those sails were stowed away also, and the vessel stood under foresail alone.

The line of whitecaps was quite handy now. Suddenly a blinding flash of lightning rent the sky, and the ocean caverns re-echoed with the clatter and roar of thunder. McKay straightened himself at the wheel; a gust of wind and a sheet of rain swept across the deck; the ship staggered in her course as she was borne down by the violence of the blast. Bennie involuntarily grasped the rail, and looked up in fear to the Captain, who smiled knowingly.

"The sea is strong," he said simply. But that was sufficient. Bennie's fear left him.

The Captain turned to McKay.

"I think we'll let her run ahead of it for a few minutes; it will ease her some, because I don't want to lower the foresail. This will be over in a few minutes."

He went forward and paid out the fore sheet, while the vessel swung round with the wind. He then saw to the setting of the jumbo. In the meantime the vessel was still swinging. The wind had caught her stern, and McKay put the wheel hard over to check her, but he was too late. The foresail lifted. McKay uttered a warning cry as it jibed. The Captain saw it coming, but all too late did he put up his hand to save himself. The boom struck him and knocked him senseless against the rail. Then he fell limply into the seething water.

Ben saw the accident and started up horrified.

"The Captain!—overboard—" he cried—and then before the gaze of the startled seamen he plunged over the rail to the Captain's rescue.

Now it was that the boy's prowess as a swimmer helped him. He swam under water as long as he could, towards the point where the Captain had disappeared. When he came to the surface he scanned the water eagerly for a trace of the missing man. Finally he saw him but a few yards away, and made his way towards him, catching hold of him as he sank beneath the surface. He grasped the limp form firmly about the neck with his arm, placing the head on his own shoulder, as high out of water as he could; then he turned towards the schooner. She had come about, but, though not far away, could make little progress towards him against the wind and under shortened sail. Ben prayed that he would not be exhausted before

help reached him. He examined the Captain's head, and found it badly bruised. Blood was oozing from a cut on the forehead.

Then Ben saw with joy that a dory had been lowered over the side of the schooner, and was heading towards him. The boy had a heavy burden, and was already beginning to weaken; he struggled bravely towards the oncoming dory, hoping to reach it before his strength failed, but he grew weaker continually. The water was colder than he was accustomed to, and his wet clothes clung to him, impeding his progress. Water splashed in his face and he gulped it in mouthfuls, then gasped for breath. A wave swept over him, but he struggled feebly to the surface. The dory was nearer now, but he was—oh, so useless. His legs became cramped, and his arms relaxed. He felt sick, and cold, and dizzy; the water rushed loud in his ears, and everything faded away into darkness.

When he opened his eyes again, he was lying in the mate's bunk. McKay was bending over him.

"Don't ask any questions sonny, but swallow this," and a glass was pressed to his lips. After the draught he felt better, and began to gaze about him; then he remembered.—

"Where,—where's the Captain?" he asked, starting up. "Did you get him?"

"You bet we did,—thanks to you. Poor Cap got a bad blow, but I guess he'll pull through all right. But never mind questions now. Go to sleep, you are tired. You will hear everything after a while."

Ben sank back and soon fell into a deep, refreshing sleep. When he awoke he felt much better, and could make his way to the Captain's bunk, where he lay with a large bandage bound about his head. He was still weak, but he smiled when he saw the lad.

"They told me all about it, son," he said, taking the boy's hand. "It was your bravery that saved my life. Why—How did you do it?"

The boy's lip quivered. "I guess," he said slowly "I guess I just forgot myself. The sea must have told me."

The Captain smiled wanly.

"Yes, and now no one will ever call you scared again. We are coming back home, and I am going to tell them all. I will make them all understand,—even that little girl," he added.