"CAPTAINS COURAGEOUS"

A STORY OF THE GRAND BANKS

by

Rudyard Kipling

TO

JAMES CONLAND, M.D.,

Brattleboro, Vermont

I ploughed the land with horses,

But my heart was ill at ease,

For the old sea-faring men

Came to me now and then,

With their sagas of the seas.

Longfellow.

CHAPTER I

The weather door of the smoking-room had been left open to the North

Atlantic fog, as the big liner rolled and lifted, whistling to warn the

fishing-fleet.

"That Cheyne boy's the biggest nuisance aboard," said a man in a frieze

overcoat, shutting the door with a bang. "He isn't wanted here. He's

too fresh."

A white-haired German reached for a sandwich, and grunted between

bites: "I know der breed. Ameriga is full of dot kind. I dell you you

should imbort ropes' ends free under your dariff."

"Pshaw! There isn't any real harm to him. He's more to be pitied than

anything," a man from New York drawled, as he lay at full length along

the cushions under the wet skylight. "They've dragged him around from

hotel to hotel ever since he was a kid. I was talking to his mother

this morning. She's a lovely lady, but she don't pretend to manage him.

He's going to Europe to finish his education."

"Education isn't begun yet." This was a Philadelphian, curled up in a

corner. "That boy gets two hundred a month pocket-money, he told me. He

isn't sixteen either."

"Railroads, his father, aind't it?" said the German.

"Yep. That and mines and lumber and shipping. Built one place at San

Diego, the old man has; another at Los Angeles; owns half a dozen

railroads, half the lumber on the Pacific slope, and lets his wife

spend the money," the Philadelphian went on lazily. "The West don't

suit her, she says. She just tracks around with the boy and her nerves,

trying to find out what'll amuse him, I guess. Florida, Adirondacks,

Lakewood, Hot Springs, New York, and round again. He isn't much more

than a second-hand hotel clerk now. When he's finished in Europe he'll

be a holy terror."

"What's the matter with the old man attending to him personally?" said

a voice from the frieze ulster.

"Old man's piling up the rocks. 'Don't want to be disturbed, I guess.

He'll find out his error a few years from now. 'Pity, because there's a

heap of good in the boy if you could get at it."

"Mit a rope's end; mit a rope's end!" growled the German.

Once more the door banged, and a slight, slim-built boy perhaps fifteen

years old, a half-smoked cigarette hanging from one corner of his

mouth, leaned in over the high footway. His pasty yellow complexion did

not show well on a person of his years, and his look was a mixture of

irresolution, bravado, and very cheap smartness. He was dressed in a

cherry-coloured blazer, knickerbockers, red stockings, and bicycle

shoes, with a red flannel cap at the back of the head. After whistling

between his teeth, as he eyed the company, he said in a loud, high

voice: "Say, it's thick outside. You can hear the fish-boats squawking

all around us. Say, wouldn't it be great if we ran down one?"

"Shut the door, Harvey," said the New Yorker. "Shut the door and stay

outside. You're not wanted here."

"Who'll stop me?" he answered, deliberately. "Did you pay for my

passage, Mister Martin? 'Guess I've as good right here as the next man."

He picked up some dice from a checkerboard and began throwing, right

hand against left.

"Say, gen'elmen, this is deader'n mud. Can't we make a game of poker

between us?"

There was no answer, and he puffed his cigarette, swung his legs, and

drummed on the table with rather dirty fingers. Then he pulled out a

roll of bills as if to count them.

"How's your mamma this afternoon?" a man said. "I didn't see her at

lunch."

"In her state-room, I guess. She's 'most always sick on the ocean. I'm

going to give the stewardess fifteen dollars for looking after her. I

don't go down more 'n I can avoid. It makes me feel mysterious to pass

that butler's-pantry place. Say, this is the first time I've been on

the ocean."

"Oh, don't apologize, Harvey."

"Who's apologizing? This is the first time I've crossed the ocean,

gen'elmen, and, except the first day, I haven't been sick one little

bit. No, sir!" He brought down his fist with a triumphant bang, wetted

his finger, and went on counting the bills.

"Oh, you're a high-grade machine, with the writing in plain sight," the

Philadelphian yawned. "You'll blossom into a credit to your country if

you don't take care."

"I know it. I'm an American - first, last, and all the time. I'll show

'em that when I strike Europe. Piff! My cig's out. I can't smoke the

truck the steward sells. Any gen'elman got a real Turkish cig on him?"

The chief engineer entered for a moment, red, smiling, and wet. "Say,

Mac," cried Harvey cheerfully, "how are we hitting it?"

"Vara much in the ordinary way," was the grave reply. "The young are as

polite as ever to their elders, an' their elders are e'en tryin' to

appreciate it."

A low chuckle came from a corner. The German opened his cigar-case and

handed a skinny black cigar to Harvey.

"Dot is der broper apparatus to smoke, my young friendt," he said. "You

vill dry it? Yes? Den you vill be efer so happy."

Harvey lit the unlovely thing with a flourish: he felt that he was

getting on in grownup society.

"It would take more 'n this to keel me over," he said, ignorant that he

was lighting that terrible article, a Wheeling 'stogie'.

"Dot we shall bresently see," said the German. "Where are we now, Mr.

Mactonal'?"

"Just there or thereabouts, Mr. Schaefer," said the engineer. "We'll be

on the Grand Bank to-night; but in a general way o' speakin', we're all

among the fishing-fleet now. We've shaved three dories an' near scalped

the boom off a Frenchman since noon, an' that's close sailing', ye may

say."

"You like my cigar, eh?" the German asked, for Harvey's eyes were full

of tears.

"Fine, full flavor," he answered through shut teeth. "Guess we've

slowed down a little, haven't we? I'll skip out and see what the log

says."

"I might if I vhas you," said the German.

Harvey staggered over the wet decks to the nearest rail. He was very

unhappy; but he saw the deck-steward lashing chairs together, and,

since he had boasted before the man that he was never seasick, his

pride made him go aft to the second-saloon deck at the stern, which was

finished in a turtle-back. The deck was deserted, and he crawled to the

extreme end of it, near the flag-pole. There he doubled up in limp

agony, for the Wheeling 'stogie" joined with the surge and jar of the

screw to sieve out his soul. His head swelled; sparks of fire danced

before his eyes; his body seemed to lose weight, while his heels

wavered in the breeze. He was fainting from seasickness, and a roll of

the ship tilted him over the rail on to the smooth lip of the

turtle-back. Then a low, gray mother-wave swung out of the fog, tucked

Harvey under one arm, so to speak, and pulled him off and away to

leeward; the great green closed over him, and he went quietly to sleep.

He was roused by the sound of a dinner-horn such as they used to blow

at a summer-school he had once attended in the Adirondacks. Slowly he

remembered that he was Harvey Cheyne, drowned and dead in mid-ocean,

but was too weak to fit things together. A new smell filled his

nostrils; wet and clammy chills ran down his back, and he was

helplessly full of salt water. When he opened his eyes, he perceived

that he was still on the top of the sea, for it was running round him

in silver-coloured hills, and he was lying on a pile of half-dead fish,

looking at a broad human back clothed in a blue jersey.

"It's no good," thought the boy. "I'm dead, sure enough, and this thing

is in charge."

He groaned, and the figure turned its head, showing a pair of little

gold rings half hidden in curly black hair.

"Aha! You feel some pretty well now?" it said. "Lie still so: we trim

better."

With a swift jerk he sculled the flickering boat-head on to a foamless

sea that lifted her twenty full feet, only to slide her into a glassy

pit beyond. But this mountain-climbing did not interrupt blue-jersey's

talk. "Fine good job, I say, that I catch you. Eh, wha-at? Better good

job, I say, your boat not catch me. How you come to fall out?"

"I was sick," said Harvey; 'sick, and couldn't help it."

"Just in time I blow my horn, and your boat she yaw a little. Then I

see you come all down. Eh, wha-at? I think you are cut into baits by

the screw, but you dreeft - dreeft to me, and I make a big fish of you.

So you shall not die this time."

"Where am I?" said Harvey, who could not see that life was particularly

safe where he lay.

"You are with me in the dory - Manuel my name, and I come from schooner

'We're Here' of Gloucester. I live to Gloucester. By-and-by we get

supper. Eh, wha-at?"

He seemed to have two pairs of hands and a head of cast-iron, for, not

content with blowing through a big conch-shell, he must needs stand up

to it, swaying with the sway of the flat-bottomed dory, and send a

grinding, thuttering shriek through the fog. How long this

entertainment lasted, Harvey could not remember, for he lay back

terrified at the sight of the smoking swells. He fancied he heard a gun

and a horn and shouting. Something bigger than the dory, but quite as

lively, loomed alongside. Several voices talked at once; he was dropped

into a dark, heaving hole, where men in oilskins gave him a hot drink

and took off his clothes, and he fell asleep.

When he waked he listened for the first breakfast-bell on the steamer,

wondering why his state-room had grown so small. Turning, he looked

into a narrow, triangular cave, lit by a lamp hung against a huge

square beam. A three-cornered table within arm's reach ran from the

angle of the bows to the foremast. At the after end, behind a well-used

Plymouth stove, sat a boy about his own age, with a flat red face and a

pair of twinkling gray eyes. He was dressed in a blue jersey and high

rubber boots. Several pairs of the same sort of foot-wear, an old cap,

and some worn-out woollen socks lay on the floor, and black and yellow

oilskins swayed to and fro beside the bunks. The place was packed as

full of smells as a bale is of cotton. The oilskins had a peculiarly

thick flavor of their own which made a sort of background to the smells

of fried fish, burnt grease, paint, pepper, and stale tobacco; but

these, again, were all hooped together by one encircling smell of ship

and salt water. Harvey saw with disgust that there were no sheets on

his bed-place. He was lying on a piece of dingy ticking full of lumps

and nubbles. Then, too, the boat's motion was not that of a steamer.

She was neither sliding nor rolling, but rather wriggling herself about

in a silly, aimless way, like a colt at the end of a halter.

Water-noises ran by close to his ear, and beams creaked and whined

about him. All these things made him grunt despairingly and think of

his mother.

"Feelin' better?" said the boy, with a grin. "Hev some coffee?" He

brought a tin cup full and sweetened it with molasses.

"Isn't there milk?" said Harvey, looking round the dark double tier of

bunks as if he expected to find a cow there.

"Well, no," said the boy. "Ner there ain't likely to be till 'baout

mid-September. 'Tain't bad coffee. I made it."

Harvey drank in silence, and the boy handed him a plate full of pieces

of crisp fried pork, which he ate ravenously.

"I've dried your clothes. Guess they've shrunk some," said the boy.

"They ain't our style much - none of 'em. Twist round an' see if you're

hurt any."

Harvey stretched himself in every direction, but could not report any

injuries.

"That's good," the boy said heartily. "Fix yerself an' go on deck. Dad

wants to see you. I'm his son, - Dan, they call me, - an' I'm cook's

helper an' everything else aboard that's too dirty for the men. There

ain't no boy here 'cep' me sence Otto went overboard - an' he was only a

Dutchy, an' twenty year old at that. How'd you come to fall off in a

dead flat ca'am?"

"'Twasn't a calm," said Harvey, sulkily. "It was a gale, and I was

seasick. Guess I must have rolled over the rail."

"There was a little common swell yes'day an' last night," said the boy.

"But ef thet's your notion of a gale - - " He whistled. "You'll know

more 'fore you're through. Hurry! Dad's waitin'."

Like many other unfortunate young people, Harvey had never in all his

life received a direct order - never, at least, without long, and

sometimes tearful, explanations of the advantages of obedience and the

reasons for the request. Mrs. Cheyne lived in fear of breaking his

spirit, which, perhaps, was the reason that she herself walked on the

edge of nervous prostration. He could not see why he should be expected

to hurry for any man's pleasure, and said so. "Your dad can come down

here if he's so anxious to talk to me. I want him to take me to New

York right away. It'll pay him."

Dan opened his eyes as the size and beauty of this joke dawned on him.

"Say, Dad!" he shouted up the foc'sle hatch, "he says you kin slip down

an' see him ef you're anxious that way. 'Hear, Dad?"

The answer came back in the deepest voice Harvey had ever heard from a

human chest: "Quit foolin', Dan, and send him to me."

Dan sniggered, and threw Harvey his warped bicycle shoes. There was

something in the tones on the deck that made the boy dissemble his

extreme rage and console himself with the thought of gradually

unfolding the tale of his own and his father's wealth on the voyage

home. This rescue would certainly make him a hero among his friends for

life. He hoisted himself on deck up a perpendicular ladder, and

stumbled aft, over a score of obstructions, to where a small,

thick-set, clean-shaven man with gray eyebrows sat on a step that led

up to the quarter-deck. The swell had passed in the night, leaving a

long, oily sea, dotted round the horizon with the sails of a dozen

fishing-boats. Between them lay little black specks, showing where the

dories were out fishing. The schooner, with a triangular riding-sail on

the mainmast, played easily at anchor, and except for the man by the

cabin-roof - "house" they call it - she was deserted.

"Mornin' - Good afternoon, I should say. You've nigh slep' the clock

round, young feller," was the greeting.

"Mornin'," said Harvey. He did not like being called "young feller";

and, as one rescued from drowning, expected sympathy. His mother

suffered agonies whenever he got his feet wet; but this mariner did not

seem excited.

"Naow let's hear all abaout it. It's quite providential, first an'

last, fer all concerned. What might be your name? Where from we

mistrust it's Noo York , an' where baound we mistrust it's Europe ?"

Harvey gave his name, the name of the steamer, and a short history of

the accident, winding up with a demand to be taken back immediately to

New York, where his father would pay anything any one chose to name.

"H'm," said the shaven man, quite unmoved by the end of Harvey's

speech. "I can't say we think special of any man, or boy even, that

falls overboard from that kind o' packet in a flat ca'am. Least of all

when his excuse is that he's seasick."

"Excuse!" cried Harvey. "D'you suppose I'd fall overboard into your

dirty little boat for fun?"

"Not knowin' what your notions o' fun may be, I can't rightly say,

young feller. But if I was you, I wouldn't call the boat which, under

Providence, was the means o' savin' ye, names. In the first place, it's

blame irreligious. In the second, it's annoyin' to my feelin's - an' I'm

Disko Troop o' the 'We're Here' o' Gloucester, which you don't seem

rightly to know."

"I don't know and I don't care," said Harvey. "I'm grateful enough for

being saved and all that, of course! but I want you to understand that

the sooner you take me back to New York the better it'll pay you."

"Meanin' - haow?" Troop raised one shaggy eyebrow over a suspiciously

mild blue eye.

"Dollars and cents," said Harvey, delighted to think that he was making

an impression. "Cold dollars and cents." He thrust a hand into a

pocket, and threw out his stomach a little, which was his way of being

grand. "You've done the best day's work you ever did in your life when

you pulled me in. I'm all the son Harvey Cheyne has."

"He's bin favoured," said Disko, dryly.

"And if you don't know who Harvey Cheyne is, you don't know

much - that's all. Now turn her around and let's hurry."

Harvey had a notion that the greater part of America was filled with

people discussing and envying his father's dollars.

"Mebbe I do, an' mebbe I don't . Take a reef in your stummick, young

feller. It's full o' my vittles."

Harvey heard a chuckle from Dan, who was pretending to be busy by the

stump-foremast, and blood rushed to his face. "We'll pay for that too,"

he said. "When do you suppose we shall get to New York?"

"I don't use Noo York any. Ner Boston. We may see Eastern Point about

September; an' your pa - I'm real sorry I hain't heerd tell of him - may

give me ten dollars efter all your talk. Then o' course he mayn't ."

"Ten dollars! Why, see here, I - " Harvey dived into his pocket for the

wad of bills. All he brought up was a soggy packet of cigarettes.

"Not lawful currency; an' bad for the lungs. Heave 'em overboard, young

feller, and try agin."

"It's been stolen!" cried Harvey, hotly.

"You'll hev to wait till you see your pa to reward me, then?"

"A hundred and thirty-four dollars - all stolen," said Harvey, hunting

wildly through his pockets. "Give them back."

A curious change flitted across old Troop's hard face. "What might you

have been doin' at your time o' life with one hundred an' thirty-four

dollars, young feller?"

"It was part of my pocket-money - for a month." This Harvey thought

would be a knock-down blow, and it was - indirectly.

"Oh! One hundred and thirty-four dollars is only part of his

pocket-money - for one month only! You don't remember hittin' anything

when you fell over, do you? Crack agin a stanchion, le's say. Old man

Hasken o' the East Wind" - Troop seemed to be talking to himself - "he

tripped on a hatch an' butted the mainmast with his head - hardish.

'Baout three weeks afterwards, old man Hasken he would hev it that the

"East Wind" was a commerce-destroyin' man-o'-war, an' so he declared

war on Sable Island because it was Bridish, an' the shoals run aout too

far. They sewed him up in a bed-bag, his head an' feet appearin', fer

the rest o' the trip, an' now he's to home in Essex playin' with little

rag dolls."