

THE SON OF A HERO

By J. OLIVIER CURWOOD

ILLUSTRATED BY WILLIAM CLARKE

DOWN near the edge of the big lake a small boy was wading ankle-deep in a pool. Very near him, sitting on the shattered rib of a ship, was a woman, smiling with a proud, glad look in her eyes.

"This is papa's ship!" cried the child, jerking a little boat tied at the end of a string.

The mother laughed with him.

"Yes, it's papa's ship," she said. "Papa's ship's coming home!"

The boy turned his rosy face to the woman on the wreckage and opened his eyes wide in simulated fear.

"But there's going to be a storm—a big storm!" he exclaimed. He kicked his bare feet in the pool until the tiny boat bobbed up and down and came near upsetting. The mother packed her pretty mouth and cried "Oh-h-h-h!" in a way that made the boy run up to her and kiss her.

"But I won't let any harm come to papa," he cried, consolingly. "See how the ship is tossing?" He kicked in the pool again, and his boat jumped and dipped until it was wet and heavy. "Hurray, they're going to take to the boats."

The mother leaned over the edge of the water.

"And now what does papa do?" she asked proudly.

The child screamed with delight. "He's seen all the boats over but one," he replied. "Now they're going to that, an'—it's got a big hole in it!"

The mother tried to look alarmed.

"And what in the world will they do?" she questioned.

"They're getting into the other boats, mamma. They're all in but two, and one of them is papa."

"Oh-h-h-h!" cried the mother again. "Are you

self on his knees and one arm, while the other arm was raised, like a cat's ready to scratch at the yellow, hair-hung visage of the man he despised.

After a moment the sailor settled back on his haunches with a cackling laugh and glanced furtively at a stick just out of reach. There was something terribly suggestive in the leerings look of the man as he nodded toward the pig-tough shelter.

"Are y' honest, Cap'n?"

"Honest as God!" declared the little man.

He went back and sat down in front of the pine-hough shelter. For a few minutes the half-striped sailor lay in the sand, burying his arms and shivering. Then he crawled up and huddled close to the fire. The other suffered in grim silence, staring out fixedly against the wilderness of lifeless sand dunes. As the captain looked his season-slipped beyond his clutch and the righted heaps seemed to take a thousand fantastic shapes and fill the air until they walled him in. After a time they settled again and were peopled with a score of romping children, among whom was a rosy-cheeked boy with a tiny ship trailing at the end of a string. Behind them all was a woman, who smiled over their heads and down at him. The man was filled with joy, and he crooned and beckoned to the woman and the child until something pulled at his arm, and the sailor crept between him and his vision.

"My Gawd, Cap'n, wake up!"

The captain dragged himself back to consciousness with a start. His first instinct was to

He pulled himself to his feet and stood away like a drunken man. With an effort the captain stood up. He piled a few more sticks on the fire, and then the two men staggered through the dunes. The little man's weakness was overpowering. In a moment of delirium he fell upon the sand and hunted for tracks. "They were here—they were here—" he moaned monotonously. "They were here—they were here!" He dug his way up the side of a dune that crumbled away under him as he kicked and clutched it with his hands and feet. Again and again he rolled back exhausted, his eyes and mouth filled with sand. Fighting his way weakly, inch by inch, he crawled at last to the top of the dune, and with an unheard cry flung his arms above his head and turned his gaunt face up to the cold, gray vastness of the sky. Then he pitched forward and like a dead thing rolled down the other side of the dune. With a powerful effort he concentrated what was left of his mind, and at times stumbling along on his feet, at others creeping upon his hands and knees, trudged through the drifting sand until he came to the edge of the lake along which the searching sailor was winding like a snake.

He failed to notice that he had made less than a hundred fathoms. On bleeding hands and knees he still crept along, resting now and then, sometimes even in the freezing wash of the sea. The glow burned out of the sky, and now up through the gloom of the twisting sand dunes came the sailor.

"Nothing—nothing," he groaned wearily.

hands he clutched a tiny morsel to his breast. When he came to his knees he held the precious shell out for the sailor to see. The eyes of the latter burned with a maniacal fire. He approached like a thing half-human and fell upon his companion, tearing and scratching with the viciousness of a cat.

"Gimme it—gimme it!" he cried.

The two rolled over and over in silent combat. The great hands of the stayng sailor caught at the other's throat and held there until the wan face went black and the captain opened his mouth like a strangling fish. By chance he freed himself, and using the chain for a weapon dug its sharp edge deep into the sailor's naked chest. Inside the captain's shirt was concealed a pistol. In their smothering embrace he reached for it, but his arm was pinioned. At that instant the sailor's hand came in contact with a small stone and with it he raised blow after blow upon the little man's head. Under them the captain sank like a dead man and lay crushed beneath the body of his enemy. He was conscious of a flow of warm blood gushing over his face and he knew that he must be terribly wounded. His hand touched the revolver butt and with a supreme effort he twirled the muzzle upward and exhausted all of his dying strength in a pull upon the trigger. There followed a smothered explosion, and the sailor lurched back and pressed his hands to his stomach. A moment more and he tumbled over upon the sand, keeling and sobbing in the agonies of death, while the victim lay very quiet with blood soaking his hair and beard and forming in a pool under his face.

Darkness had fallen thick and cold over the sea when the captain raised his head. He seemed to be awakened from his deathless sleep.

THE SON OF A HERO

By J. OLIVIER CURWOOD

ILLUSTRATED BY WILLIAM CLARKE

DOWN near the edge of the big lake, a small boy was wading ankle-deep in a pool. Very near him, sitting on the shattered rib of a ship, was a woman, smiling with a proud, glad look in her eyes.

"This is papa's ship!" cried the child, jerking a little boat tied at the end of a string.

The mother laughed with him.

"Yes, it's papa's ship," she said. "Papa's ship—coming home!"

The boy turned his rosy face to the woman on the wreckage and opened his eyes wide in simulated fear.

"But there's going to be a storm—a big storm!" he exclaimed. He kicked his bare feet in the pool until the tiny boat bobbed up and down and came near upsetting. The mother puckered her pretty mouth and cried "Oh-h-h-h!" in a way that made the boy run up to her and kiss her.

"But I won't let any harm come to papa," he cried, shrilly. "See how the ship is tossing?" He kicked in the pool again, and his boat jumped and dipped until it was wet and heavy. "Hooray, they're going to take to the boats."

The mother leaned over the edge of the water. "And now what does papa do?" she asked proudly.

The child screamed with delight. "He's seen all the boats over but one," he replied. "Now they're going to that, an—it's got a big hole in it!"

The mother tried to look alarmed.

"And what in the world will they do?" she questioned.

"They're getting into the other boats, mamma." They're all in but two, and one of them is papa."

"Oh-h-h-h!" cried the mother again. "Are you going to let papa stay there and drown?"

"There's room for just one more," said the boy, partly puzzled. "I guess som-body's got to drown."

"And what does papa do, dear?" There was a pretty expectancy in the mother's face.

The child, thoroughly puzzled, stopped kicking in the water and looked from the woman to the little boat tumbling in the wavelets of the pool. He was very sober now.

"Papa—gets—in—the—boat," he said, finally. "The other man stays. I ain't going to let papa get drowned!"

The mother reached out her arms and the child came into them for a moment.

"No—no—no," dearie, papa would never do that!"

"Then we won't have any more storm, mamma, and papa's ship is still coming home."

self on his knees and one arm, while the other arm was raised like a cat's ready to scratch at the yellow, hair-hung visage of the man he despised.

After a moment the sailor settled back on his haunches with a cackling laugh and glanced furiously at a stick just out of reach. There was something terribly suggestive in the leerish look of the man as he nodded toward the pine-bough.

"Are y' honest, Cap'n?"

"Honest as God!" declared the little man.

He went back and sat down in front of the pine-bough shelter. For a few minutes the half-stripped sailor lay in the sand, burying his arms and shivering. Then he crawled up and huddled close to the fire. The other suffered in grim silence, staring out fixedly against the wilderness of lifeless sand dunes. As the captain looked his reason slipped beyond his clutch and the righted heaps seemed to take a thousand fantastic shapes and fill the air until they walled him in. After a time they settled again and were propped with a score of romping children, among whom was a rosy-cheeked boy with a tiny ship trailing at the end of a string. Behind them all was a woman, who smiled over their heads and down at him. The man was filled with joy, and he crooned and beckoned to the woman and the child until something pulled at his arm, and the sailor crept between him and his vision.

"My Gawd, Cap'n, wake up!"

The captain dragged himself back to consciousness with a start. His first instinct was to crouch back in an attitude of preparedness, his second to glance hastily in the shelter where the coat-wrapped bundle still lay where he had placed it.

In a vague sort of way he felt that he had something to fear, and he turned his cavernous eyes in a sulken, suspicious look at his companion.

"I've got a plan," said the sailor. With a trembling forefinger he drew a circle in the sand. "We'll both start here—at the end of the island. You go one way, me th' other. Mebby we'll find a clam."

The mother reached out her arms and the child came into them for a moment.

"No—no—no," dearie, papa would never do that!"

"Then we won't have any more storm, mamma, and papa's ship is still coming home."

He pulled himself to his feet and stood away, like a drunken man. With an effort the captain stood up. He piled a few more sticks on the fire, and then the two men staggered through the dunes. The little man's weakness was overpowering. In a moment of delirium he fell upon the sand and hunted for tracks. "They were here—they were here—" he moaned monotonously. "They were here—they were here!"

He dug his way up the side of a dune that crumbled away under him as he kicked and clutched in it with his hands and feet. Again and again he rolled back exhausted, his eyes and mouth filled with sand.

Fighting his way weakly, inch by inch, he crawled at last to the top of the dune, and with an unheard cry flung his arms above his head and turned his gaunt face up to the cold, gray vastness of the sky. Then he pitched forward and, like a dead thing, rolled down the other side of the dune. With a powerful effort he concentrated what was left of his mind, and at times stumbling along on his feet, at others creeping upon his hands and knees, toiled through the drifting sand until he came to the edge of the lake along which the searching sailor was winding like a snail.

He failed to notice that he had made less than a hundred fathoms. On bleeding hands and knees he still crept along, resting now and then, sometimes even in the freezing wash of the sea. The glow burned out of the sky, and now in through the gloom of the twisting sand dunes came the sailor.

"Nothing—nothing," he groaned weakly.

"Nothing—nothing—nothing."

The little man stood up beside him and together the two gazed out upon the gray waste of water that was dissolving itself in the gathering darkness of night.

After a moment the captain's chin fell upon his chest and his eyes searched the sand at his feet.

Suddenly he gave a cry and fel upon his face, sobbing, laughing, and raving in his madness until the other drew back in horror. For a few moments he lay very quiet and during those moments the captain fought to re-establish his reason, while with both

hands he clutched a tiny mussel to his breast. When he came to his knees he held the precious shell out for the sailor to see. The eye of the latter burned with a maniacal fire. He approached like a thing half human or fell upon his companion, tearing and scratching with the violence of a cat.

"It's me—it's me—it's me!" he cried.

The two rolled over and over in silent combat. The great hands of the starving sailor caught at the other's throat and held there until the wan face went black and the captain opened his mouth like a struggling fish. By chance he freed himself, and using the clam for a weapon dug its sharp edge deep into the sailor's tallow chest. Inside the captain's shirt was treasured a pistol. In their smothering embrace he reached for it, but his arm was plunged. An instant later the sailor's hand came in contact with a small stone, and with it he rained blow after blow upon the little man's head. Under them the captain sank like a dead man and lay crushed beneath the body of his enemy. He was conscious of a flow of warm blood passing over his face and he knew that he must be terribly wounded. His hand touched the revolver butt and with a supreme effort he twisted the muzzle upward and exhausted all of his dying strength in a pull upon the trigger. There followed a smothered explosion, and the sailor lurched back and pressed his hands to his stomach. A moment more and he toppled over upon the sand, kicking and sobbing in the agonies of death, while the victor lay very quiet, with blood soaking his hair and beard and forming in a pool under his face.

Darkness had fallen thick and cold over the sea when the captain raised his head. He seemed to be awakened from his death-sleep by the crying of a child. Groaning he struggled to rise, and falling in this he dragged himself foot by foot toward the dead pine from which floated the signal of distress. That pine had been in his mind for a day and a night. He had figured that his last duty would be the sending up of a pillar of flame that might call a ship to the little girl he would leave when he died. They had burned a fire each night. This would be the last. On his stomach he worked his way toward it, and again and again he attempted to raise his voice in response to the calls of the child coming from among the dunes. After a little it seemed to the wounded man that the sounds were nearer. Each minute now he marked the cries of the baby girl until he knew that she had toddled almost to the beach. Frantically he strove to reach the pine. The light of it would bring to him the only living thing he had saved from his ship, and he prayed and gibbered in his weakness as he came nearer and nearer to it. He was bleeding profusely again and knew that he had only a few minutes more before him. His last progress was made by inches. At the base of the pine he had only strength enough left to strike a match and light the pile of coals. Then he rolled upon his face again at the noise.

Away up on the wilderness edge of the big northern sea, where Superior is always shivering cold and the Michigan forests are bleak and desolate, a ship had beaten herself to pieces. A few of her timbers were scattered along the waste-dried, frozen beach. The rest of her had

"cried the mother again. "Are you ~~going~~ going to stay there and drown?" "I'm ~~going~~ going to stay there for just one more," said the son, puzzled. "I guess somebody's got ~~some~~ some ~~bad~~ bad news for us."

"What does papa do, dear?" There was expectancy in the mother's face.
A child, thoroughly puzzled, stopped kicking
the water and looked from the woman to the
boat tumbling in the wavelets of the pool.
"He's very sober now."
"Papa—gets—in—the-boat?" he said, finally.
"The other man stays. I ain't going to let papa
get drowned!"

The mother reached out her arms and the child came into them for a moment.

"I can't help you now, but I'll do my best to help you later."

"Then we won't have any more stormy mamma,
and papa's ship is still coming home."

Away up on the wilderness edge of the big northern sea, where Superior is always shivering cold and the Michigan forests are bleak and desolate, a ship had beaten herself to pieces. A few of her timbers were scattered along the white dunes, frozen bleak. The rest of her had沉没 into one of the cavernous pits at the bottom of Superior, whatever no ship ever breaks to the again and where, like things of ice, human bodies lie forever. Over the ugly gray rim of the sea, a man looked out from an island desolate with drifting sand and ragged pines. In its dreary region he was the only object that heaved a sign of life. Nearly doubled under the weight of a suddenly changed to his rightness, he stood upright, his feet suspended, clinging now to a sunken, slowly sloping rock. His arms were encircled by the ripples of the waves of darkness, and his hands clutched helplessly to the sides of his head, showing the hair torn and matted, impregnating the skin, bristling and stiff upon his forehead. Gathering his strength together like living energy, he gazed down over the sea of gas and smoke that beat in the darkness of creation, but the other way, westward, he saw the land, the shore, the hills, the plains, and the city, and he struggled with all his might to shake off the thought that the land would never appear to him again. In despair and gloom he lay upon the rock, holding his head in his hands, weeping the pain from his lungs.

In turn and sheltered somewhat from
the wind by the headland, a group of long-
lowed sheep in a shelter made of straw
and brushwood lay down to sleep. A single
sheep lay down in the open, stretching its
hind legs wide, and looking directly at me.
The flock was scattered over the hillside.

His right hand is raised, holding up a hand

There is one more group, possibly smaller
but just as interesting, which consists of little
birds with long, straight, slightly downward-curving sticks protruding from the ground and
the birds sitting on them, which are burning sticks near the
bottom. The song is like the other, but more rapid.
I say "more rapid" because it is hard to distinguish
the individual notes from the rapid trill.
The birds sing from their undisturbed nests
located on the ground. There was a really singular
~~one~~^{one} bird which had a very large nest,
about 12 inches in diameter, built of sticks.

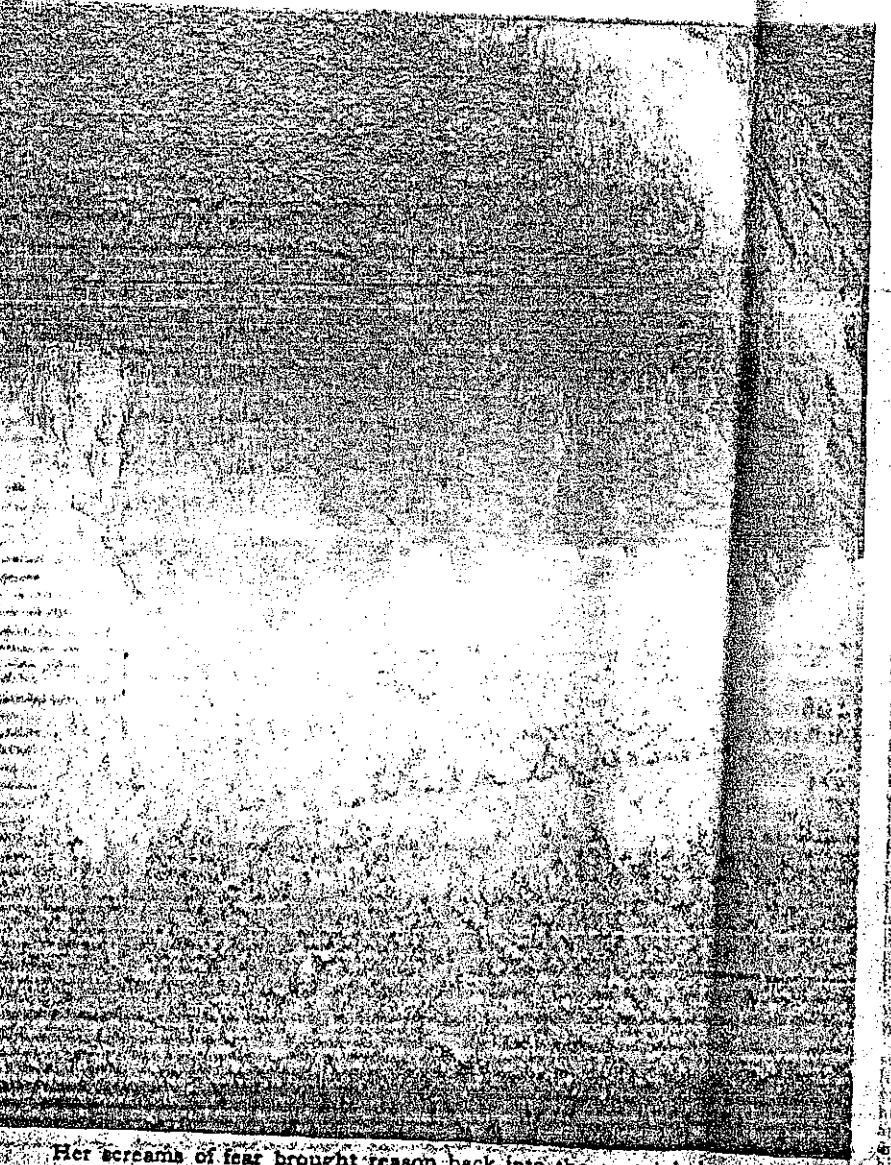
"Nothing—nothing," he groaned weakly. "Nothing—nothing—nothing." The little man stood up beside him and together the two gazed out upon the gray waste of water that was dissolving itself in the gathering darkness of night. After a moment the captain's chin fell upon his chest and his eyes searched the sand at his feet. Suddenly he gave a cry and fell upon his face, sobbing, laughing, and raving in his madness until the other drew back in horror. For a few moments he lay very quiet and during those moments the captain could be seen looking down at the sailor.

brought to re-establish his reason, while with both

darkness had fallen thick and cold over the sea when the captain raised his head. He seemed to be awakened from his death-sleep by the crying of a child. Groaning he struggled to rise and failing by his side dragged himself foot by foot toward the dead pine from which floated the signal of distress. That pine had been in his mind for a day and a night. He had figured that his last duty would be the sending up of a pillar of flame that might call a ship to the little girl he would leave when he died. They had burned a tree each night. This would be the last. On his stomach he wormed his way toward it, and again and again he attempted to raise his voice in response to the wails of the child coming from among the dunes. After a little it seemed to the wounded man that the sounds were nearer. Each minute now he marked the cries of the baby girl until he knew that she had tumbled almost to the beach. Frantically he strove to reach the pine. The fight of it would bring to him the only living thing he had saved from the ship, and he prayed and sobbed in his weakness as he came nearer and nearer to it. He was bleeding profusely again and knew that he had only a few minutes more before him. His last progress was made by inches. At the base of the pine he had only strength enough left to strike a match and light the pile of cones. Then he rolled upon his face again as the flames began to climb their way up the resinous tree.

... somewhere in the marshes he had met and called
the last call to life. It struggled with his desire to die, and conquered by bringing him back
into the agony of existence. He heard the crackling of flames over his head, much as he might have listened to the murmurings of the fire on a peaceful night of a happier day. He
possessed no fear, no pain, and his only desire
was that he might rest in peace. But the spirit
of life dragged him out of the valley of content-
ment and opened his eyes again to the crystal
child. His eyes sprung round him in a
aze of light. The pine-tree was nothing but a torch
catching up a hundred feet in the air. Its heat
had burned his face and scorched it like hell, but
it gave him no pain or burning. His was ab-
solute blindness; but he could see far to see
the child. More than once he had seen him at
the dragon's lair, however lost. In fact, he
had seen the dragon, who was sleeping in the
darkness, but he had never seen the dragon's body.
He had seen the dragon's head, and that point
where all the scales meet, where the final
menacing effort of the dragon to seize him
by his hearing, when he was still a tiny infant,
the dragon and himself were together in the pit.
He struggled up, and up until his eyes
and his heart recurred to him, and when he
then gazed upon the dragon, he saw that his
collapsing limb had given him a good pinch, with
a glad cry upon his lips. He lay there, and
then the dragon, who was lying beside him, said
to him, "I now know that you are the son of the
fire. You tried to break my hold, but the heat of your
giant steamed away. I am not like the numbers two
and three before you, who are accustomed to the
heat, and therefore dispense with it. You are
indeed a creature of the fire, and I am beginning
to understand you. You have a power of
heat which I have not. You are a

the captain turned his head to the right, and saw the figure of a tall man standing by the bed. It was a man of middle age, with a long white beard, and a long white hair. He was wearing a white robe, and had a white cap on his head. He was looking at the man who was sleeping.



er screams of fear brought reason back into the captain's brain.