

# Jasper



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## Story of the day:

### Captains Courageous by Rudyard Kipling

Once upon a time there was a rich kid who mouthed off too often.

We're on a schooner off the Grand Banks of Newfoundland, far into the Atlantic Ocean.

There are two teenage boys, Dan and Harvey. Harvey is lying against the side of the boat. He's not looking very good. Dan is trying to console him, but he's also telling him that he deserved that sock in the jaw he just got:

*"I warned ye," said Dan, as the drops fell thick and fast on the dark, oiled planking. "Dad ain't noways hasty, but you fair earned it. Pshaw!*

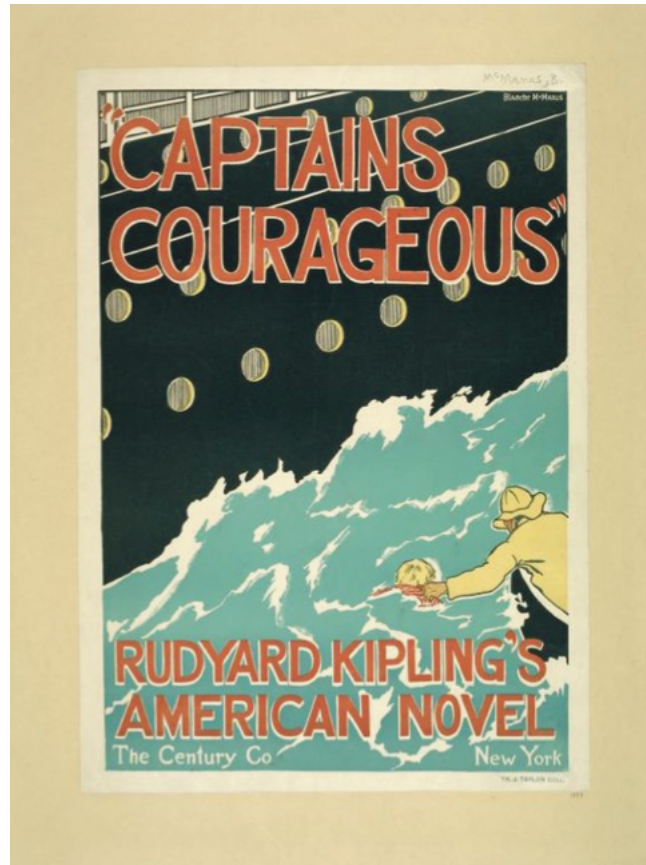
*There's no sense takin' on so."* Harvey's shoulders were rising and falling in spasms of dry sobbing. *"I know the feelin'. First time dad laid me out was the last – and that was my first trip. Makes ye feel sickish an' lonesome.*

*I know."*

*"It does," moaned Harvey. "That man's either crazy or drunk, and – and I can't do anything."*

*"Don't say that to dad," whispered Dan.*

*"He's set agin all liquor an' – well, he told me you was the madman. What in creation made you call him a thief? He's my dad."*



Isn't that last comment wonderful? "He's my dad!"

Dan's Dad is the skipper, a fisherman out for cod with his crew. Harvey is the spoiled son of a man who owns companies all over the United States. Harvey was on a cruise ship crossing the Atlantic and making a nuisance of himself with all his bragging about how rich he was. He was acting like a big man, smoking a cigarette. But that made him sick, and it didn't help

that the weather was bad and the ship was rolling. So Harvey went up to the deck to puke over the side, when a great wave like the paw of a monster swept him overboard. It was the middle of the night and he'd have died for sure,

but one of the fishermen was out in his boat and dragged Harvey to safety.

That gave Harvey the chance to leave his comfortable rich kid's life and really make friends with another boy for the first time. He will also get some firm and fine instruction in how to be a man.

You'd better be quick and certain in your movements if you're on a sailing ship and you run into the bad weather you can expect from the north Atlantic. So one day Dad and the men on the boat, especially a rough old sailor named Long Jack, are teaching Harvey "the ropes." I really do mean it – the ropes. You've got to know the ropes. A ship in those days was an enormous machine made up of smaller machines, like pulleys and booms and windlasses and winches and sails, and they were all worked by ropes. If you foul up a rope in a storm you can make the ship keel over. You have to be fast, and sure of what you are doing. That's what Harvey has to learn.

*"Lower the throat and peak halyards," Harvey went on. Those names stuck in his head.*

*"Lay your hand on him," said Long Jack.*

*Harvey obeyed. "Lower till that rope-loop – on the after-leach – kris – no, it's cringle – till the cringle was down on the boom. Then I'd tie her up the way you said, and then I'd hoist up the peak and throat halyards again."*

*"You've forgot to pass the tack-earring, but*

*wid time and help ye'll larn. There's good and just reason for ivry rope aboard, or else 'twould be overboard. D'ye follow me? 'Tis dollars and cents I'm puttin' into your pocket, ye skinny little supercargo, so that fwhin ye've filled out ye can ship from Boston to Cuba an' tell thim Long Jack larned you. Now I'll chase ye around a piece, callin' the ropes, an' you'll lay your hand on thim as I call."*

But Harvey is a little slow on the move. He's tired. Long Jack flicks a rope on his ribs that nearly knocks the breath out of him. When Harvey owns a ship he can walk, but till that day he'll run. And Long Jim gives him a second cut.

What kind of boy was Harvey in the beginning? We'll let Rudyard Kipling, the author of our story, tell us. Harvey was "the son of a very

clever man and a very sensitive woman, with a fine resolute temper that systematic spoiling had nearly turned to mulish obstinacy." But when Harvey looks round at the crew, he sees that even Dan, who is by now his good friend, is not smiling. You can't make a mistake with the ropes. This is work, and it must be learned and done right. So Harvey does learn.

You have to remember that this was before cell phones and speedboats, so once Harvey is on the schooner, he's in it for months, out in the middle of the ocean, where nobody can get word to his mother and father. That gives him plenty of time to learn not only sail-craft but man-craft. He has warm feelings for each of the men of the crew. He has in Dan a true friend his own age,

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and in “Dad,” the skipper, he has a second father. When the men work, it is sometimes invigorating, sometimes glorious, sometimes a matter of life and limb, sometimes sheer stinking drudgery for many hours on end, salting cod and packing them down below, thousands and thousands of them. But the men do not always work. They tell stories. They recall their lives on land. They sing songs. They save the lives of a couple of men from another schooner wrecked amid the sea.

Harvey’s mother and father think he was drowned overboard. When Dad the skipper finally puts in at Gloucester, Massachusetts, and news gets around that Harvey is alive, Mr. Cheyne, Harvey’s father, takes the train across the country to see his son again. He was expecting the old Harvey, spoiled and always complaining. That’s not the Harvey he meets. It’s a boy of high spirits, a long way toward being a man. Harvey tells his father the story, says he will introduce him to the skipper in the morning, and then, like a lanky boy who has been giving his body a workout for months on end, he kicks off his boots and falls asleep before his father can switch off the lights. “Cheyne sat watching the young face under the shadow of the arm thrown over his forehead,” Kipling writes, “and among many things that occurred to him was the notion that he might perhaps have been neglectful as a father.”

The father will change too. The book is called *Captains Courageous*, because Mr. Cheyne the businessman has just as much fight in him as the skipper does. He’s a Captain too, a captain of business. He goes on to speak to Harvey man to man. In the end, Harvey decides on his own what he will do in the coming years, and what it will have to do with *both* of the fathers and captains he has come to know and love.

Hey, it’s a classic boy-to-man book. Read it and feel the salt air on your cheek.



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