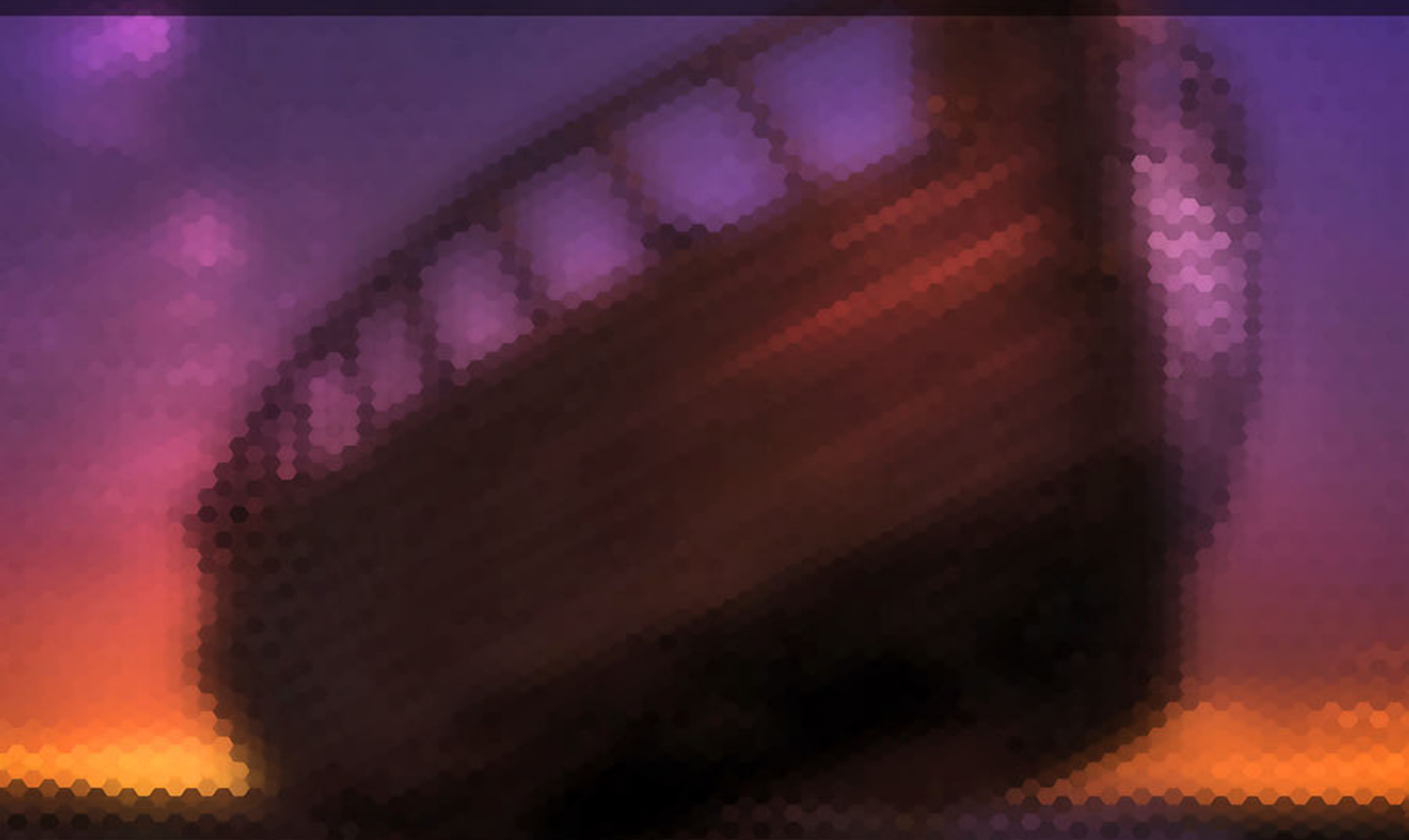


**EDWARD A. RAND**

# **AT THE BLACK ROCKS**



**MUSAICUM CHRISTMAS SPECIALS**

**Edward A. Rand**

# **At the Black Rocks (Musaicum Christmas Specials)**

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# I.

## Was He Worth Saving?

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"I might try," squeaked a diminutive boy, whose dark eyes had an unfortunate twist.

"Ye-s-s, Bartie," said his grandmother doubtfully, looking out of the window upon the water wrinkled by the rising wind.

"Wouldn't be much wuss," observed Bartholomew's grandfather, leaning forward in his old red arm-chair and steadily eying a failing fire as if arguing this matter with the embers. Then he added, "You could take the small boat."

"Yes," said Bart eagerly. "I could scull, you know; and if the doctor wasn't there when I got there, I could tell 'em you didn't feel well, and he might come when he could."

"That will do, if he don't put it off too long," observed the old man, shaking his head at the fire as if the two had now settled the matter between them. "Yes, you might try."

Bartie now went out to try. Very soon he wished he had not made the trial. Granny Trafton saw him step into the small boat moored by the shore, and then his wiry little arms began to work an oar in the stern of the boat. "Gran'sir Trafton," as he was called, came also to the window, and looked out upon the diminutive figure wriggling in the little boat.

"He will get back in an hour," observed Gran'sir Trafton.

"Ought to be," said Granny Trafton.

It is a wonder that Bartie ever came back at all. He was the very boy to meet with some kind of an accident. Somehow mishaps came to him readily. If any boy had a tumble, it was likely to be Bartie Trafton. If measles slyly stole into town to be caught by somebody, Bartie Trafton was sure to be one catcher. In a home that was cramped by poverty--his father at sea the greater fraction of the time, and the other fraction at home drunk--this under-sized, timid, shrinking boy seemed as continually destined for trouble as the Hudson for the sea.

"I don't amount to much," was an idea that burdened his small brain, and the community agreed with him. If the public had seen him sculling Gran'sir Trafton's small boat that day, it would have prophesied ill before very long. The public just then and there upon the river was very limited in quantity. It consisted of two fishermen wearily pulling against tide a boat-load of dried cod-fish, a boy fishing from a rock that projected boldly and heavily into the water, and several boys playing on the deck of an old schooner which was anchored off the shore, and had been reached by means of a raft.

The fishermen pulled wearily on. The boys on the schooner deck ran and shouted at their play. The young fisherman's line dangled down from the crown of the big shore-rock. The small sculler out in Gran'sir Trafton's small boat busily worked his oar. Bart did not see a black spar-buoy thrusting its big arm out of the water, held up as a kind of menace, in the very course Bart was taking. How could Bart see it? His face was turned up river, and the buoy was in the very opposite quarter, not more than twenty feet

from the bow of the boat Bart was working forward with all his small amount of muscle. A person is not likely to see through the back of his head. Closer came the boat to the buoy. Did not its ugly black arm, amid the green, swirling water, tremble as if making an angry, violent threat? Who was this small boy invading the neighbourhood where the buoy reigned as if an outstretched sceptre? On sculled innocent Bartholomew, the threatening arm shaking violently in his very pathway, and suddenly--whack-k! The boat struck, threatened to upset, and did upset--Bart! He could swim. After all the unlucky falls he had had into the water, it would have been strange if he had not learned something about this element; but he had reached a place in the river where the out-going current ran with strength, and took one not landward but seaward. How long could he keep above water--that timid, shrinking face appealing for pity to every spectator? The boys on the deck of the old schooner soon saw the empty dory floating past, and they now caught also the cry for help from the pitiful face of the panting swimmer--a cry that amid their loud play they had not heard before.

"O Dick," said one of the younger boys, "there's a fellow overboard, and there's his boat! Quick!"

At this sharp warning every one looked up. Then they rushed to the schooner's rail and looked over. Yes: there was the white face in the water; there was the drifting boat.

The boy addressed as Dick was the leader of the party. His black, staring eyes, and his profusion of black, curly hair, would have attracted attention anywhere. His eyes now

sparkled anew, and he tossed back his bushy curls, exclaiming,--

"Boys, to the rescue! Attention! Man the *Great Emperor*."

"Throw this rope," was a suggestion made by another boy, seizing a rope lying on the deck. A rope did not move Dick's imagination so powerfully as the *Great Emperor*. The rope was not nearly so daring as the raft, though it would have given speedy and sufficient help.

"To the rescue!" rang out Dick's voice. "Not in a rush! Ho, there! Orderly, men!"

Strutting forward with a blustering air, Dick led his rescue-band to the *Great Emperor*, which at the impulse of every rocking little wave thumped against the schooner's hull. The band of rescuers went down upon the raft with more of a tumble than was agreeable to Captain Dick of the *Great Emperor*. Dick concluded that there was too much of a crew to dexterously manage the raft in the swift voyage that must now be made. Several would-be heroes were sent back disappointed to the schooner, and they proceeded, when too late, to cast the rope which had been ignominiously spurned. It splashed the water in vain. Bartie tried to reach it; but it was like Tantalus in the fable striving to pluck the grapes beyond his grasp.

"Cast off!" Dick was now shouting excitedly, pompously. "Pull with a will for the shipwrecked mariner!" was his second order.

This meant to use two poles in poling and paddling, as might be more advantageous.

In the meantime the boy fisherman on the rock had been operating energetically though quietly. He had seen the

catastrophe, and had not ceased to watch the little fellow who was struggling with the current somewhere between the schooner and the shore. Bartie had aimed to reach the shore, and the distance was not great; but just in this place the current ran with swiftness and power, and the little fellow's strength was failing him. He had given several shrieks for help, but it seemed as if he had been doing that thing all through life; and as the world outside of gran'sir and granny had not paid much attention to his appeals, would the world do it now? Bart had almost come to the conclusion that it would be easier to sink than to struggle, when he heard a noise in the water and close at hand. Was it the *Great Emperor*? No; its deck was still the scene of an impressive demonstration of getting ready to do something. The noise heard by Bart had been made by the boy fisherman, who, stripping off his jacket, kicking off his boots, and sending his stockings after them, had thrown himself into the water, and was making energetic headway toward Bart. It was good swimming--that of some one who had both skill and strength on his side.

"Bartie!" he shouted.

What a world of hope opened before Bartie at the sound of that voice!

"Here! here! Put your hands on my shoulders, not round my neck, you know. There! that is it. Now swim. We'll fetch her."

Fetch what? It was a pretty difficult thing to say definitely what that indefinite "her" might mean. The current was still strong. Bart's rescuer, if alone, could have gained the shore again; but could he bring the rescued? Bart's face, pitiful



and pale, projected just above the water, and as his wet hair fell back upon his forehead his countenance looked like that of a half-drowned kitten.

A third party on the river, that of the fishermen in their cod-laden boat moving slowly up river and hugging the shore for the sake of help from the eddies, had now become conscious that something was going on.

"What's that a-hollerin'?" asked one of the men, Dan Eaton, reversing his head.

"Trouble enough!" exclaimed Bill Bagley, who had also taken a look ahead. "Pull, Bill!"

"Put for them two boys, Dan! one is a-helpin' t'other."

The boat began to advance as if the dead cod-fish had become live ones and were lending their strength to the oarsmen.

"Good!" thought the rescuer in the water, who saw between him and the far-off, level, misty sky-line a boat and the backs of two fishermen. "Hold on there!" he said encouragingly to Bartie; "there's a boat coming!"

The help did not arrive any too soon. Bartie's hands were resting lightly on his rescuer's shoulders, and he was arguing if he could not throw his arms around the neck of his beloved object, whether it might not be well to relinquish his feeble, tired hold altogether, and drop back into the soft, yielding depths of the water all about him; such an easy bed to lie down in! Life had given him so many hard berths. This seemed a relief.

"Ho, there you are!" shouted Dan, as the boat came up. He seized Bartie, while Bill Bagley gripped the other boy, and both Bartie and his companion were hauled into the

boat, rather roughly, and somewhat after the fashion of cod-fish, but effectually.

"Now, Dan, let us pull for that cove and land our cargo!" said Bill. "You boys can walk home? We have got to go to the other side and take our fish to town."

"Oh yes," said the rescuer.

"I--I--can--walk!" exclaimed the shivering Bartie.

"Ah, youngster, you came pretty near not walking ag'in if it hadn't been for t'other chap."

This made Bartie feel at first very sober, and then he looked very grateful as he turned toward his rescuers and said,--

"I--thank--you all. I--I--I'll do as--much for you--some time."

"Will ye?" replied Bill Bagley with a grin. "Really, I hope we shan't be in that fix where you'll have to."

"See there!" exclaimed Dan. "There's the boat adrift!"

The Trafton boat was leisurely floating down the stream. Bart had forgotten all about this craft. A frightened look shadowed his face.

"Don't you worry, Johnny!" said Bill Bagley kindly. "We will land you, and then go a'ter your craft."

"But I promised gran'sir to go for the doctor."

"Dr. Peters?"

"Yes."

"Wall, Dan and I are goin' near the old man's, and we'll send him over.--Won't we, Dan?"

"And I'll bring your boat up to your landing," said his young rescuer to Bart. "So you go right home and get warm and don't worry."

A thankful look, like sunshine out of a dark cloud, broke out of Bart's black eyes, and he shrank closer to the sympathetic breast on which he leaned.

"I'll do as much for you," he whispered to the boy fisherman.

"That's all right, Bartie," replied his rescuer.

"See here!" now inquired Dan. "What are those spoonies up to? Where are they a-goin', I wonder, on that raft? To Afriky?"

"Guess that craft's got to be picked up too. She's a-makin' for the sea in spite of all their polin'," said Bill.

The *Great Emperor* was indeed moving seaward. Captain Dick was frantically ordering his crew to "pull her round;" but like sovereigns generally, the *Great Emperor* had a mind of its own, and would not be "pulled round." Deliberately the raft was making headway for the open sea, and possibly "Afriky." It might be a conspiracy on the part of wind and tide to aid in this wilful attempt of the raft; but if a conspiracy, it was no secret. The tide was openly pressing against the raft with its broad blue shoulders, and the wind openly blew against the boys, as if they were so much canvas spread for its filling.

"What you up to, fellers?" shouted Dick to Dab and John Richards, who managed one of the poles. "Bring her round and head her for the shore!"

"We can't," said John pettishly.

"Can't!" replied Dick in scorn. "Why can't you? Tell me! Then we will spend the night on the sea.-- You pull, Jimmy."

"Can't!" said Jimmy Davis nervously. "She--she--won't turn--and--"

Here his pole slipped out of its hole and down he tumbled on the raft, his pole falling into the water.

"Oh dear!" shrieked Dick. "What a set! There goes that oar! Reach after it, Dab!"

Dab already was beating the water furiously with his pole in his efforts to reach that "oar" now adrift. It was all in vain. The conspiracy to take them all to sea and there let them spend the chilly night had spread to the very equipments of the *Great Emperor*.

"Catch me on a raft ag'in!" whimpered John Richards.

"Catch me on one with you!" replied Dick fiercely. "Might have got that boy if you had pulled, and now those other folks have got him."

"Those other folks' are coming after us!" observed Dab Richards.

"Oh dear!" groaned the humiliated Dick. "Make believe pull up river."

"I won't!" said John Richards.

"Pull so that they may think that we don't need them. Now!" urged Dick.

"I won't!" declared Dab.

Jimmy Davis also was going to say, "I won't;" but he remembered that his pole was in the water, and refrained. He looked rebellious, though he said nothing.

There was now not only a conspiracy among the elements, but a mutiny among the crew. Dick sulked.

"Let her drift!" he said. "I don't care!"

"She won't drift long!" remarked Dab sarcastically. "The *Great Emperor*, that started to pick up somebody, is now going to be picked up by somebody."

Yes, the fishermen were pulling out from the shore. They picked up the boat, attached it to their own craft, and then laboriously rowed for the vessel in the hands of conspirators without and mutineers within.

"Where you chaps bound?" shouted Dan.

"Bound for the bottom of the sea," said Dick grimly.

"We'll stave that off," said Bill. "Here, take this rope! Now, we must try to git you ashore."

It was rather a queer tug-boat that did the towing---a fisherman's dory in which, sandwich fashion, alternated piles of codfish and oarsmen rowing; Bill, Dan, and Bart's rescuer. It was a singular fleet also that was towed ashore--the *Great Emperor* and Gran'sir Trafton's boat.

"Who is that boy rowing with those fishermen?" wondered Dick. "Can it be--"

Then he concluded it could not be.

Again he guessed. "Must be--"

Then he declared it was somebody else.

Finally, when this strange fleet had been beached, Dick shouted out, "That you, Dave Fletcher?"

"Nobody else," answered Bart's rescuer, advancing. "I have been nodding to you, but I guess you didn't know who it was; and I don't wonder--the way I look after my bath. Haven't got on the whole of my rig yet. How is Dick Pray?"

The two shook hands warmly.

"I haven't seen you for some time, Dave. I have been from home a while, going to school and so on. I am stopping at my cousin's, Sam Whittles, just now."

"And I have been here only a few days, visiting at my uncle's, Ferguson Berry."

"All right. We will see each other again then. I'll leave the old raft here and come for it when the tide is going up river."

"And I am going to get the doctor. Oh no, come to think of it, these men will get him for that little fellow's folks--the one we picked up, you know."

"We? You, rather. You did first-rate. Well, who was that little shaver?"

"I heard somebody call him Bartie. That's for Bartholomew, I guess."

"Oh, it's 'Mew,'" explained Dab. "Bartholo\*mew\*; and they say 'Mew' for short--'Little Mew.'"

"His face looked like a kitten's there in the water," said Dick, "and he mewed pitifully. I've heard of him. Sort of a slim thing. Well, may sound sort of heartless, but I guess some folks would say he is hardly worth the saving. Oh, you're off, are you?"

"Yes," said one of the two fishermen who were now pushing their boat off from shore. "We must get to town with our fish as soon as we can."

"Well, friends, I am much obliged to you," said Dick Pray.

"So am I! so am I!" said several others.

"Count me in too," exclaimed Dave Fletcher. "Might not have been here without you.--Give 'em three cheers, boys!"

Amid the huzzahs echoing over the waters, the fishermen, smiling and bowing, rowed off.

"Many thanks, boys, if you will help me to turn Bart's boat over and get the water out. I must row it up to the rock where the rest of my clothes are, and then we might all go along together. We can pick up the fellows on the schooner."

The remnant of Captain Dick's crew on board the schooner gladly abandoned it when Gran'sir Trafton's boat came along, and all journeyed in company up the river.

And where was Little Mew? He went home only to be scolded by gran'sir because he had not brought the doctor, and because he had somehow got into the water somewhere. Granny was not at home, and Little Mew dared not tell the whole story. He was sent upstairs to change his clothes and stay there till granny got home.

"Gran'sir don't know I haven't got another shift," whined Little Mew. "Got to get these wet things off, anyhow."

He removed them and then crept into bed. It was dark when granny returned.

From the window at the head of his bed Bartie watched the sun go down, and then he saw the white stars come into the sky.

About that time the evening breeze began to breathe heavily; and was that the reason why the stars, blossom-like, opened their fair, delicate petals, even as they say the wind-flowers of spring open when the wind begins to blow?

"They don't seem to amount to much--just like me," thought Bartie; and having thus come into harmony with the world's opinion of himself, he closed his eyes, like an anemone shutting its petals, and went to sleep.

Don't stars amount to much? They would be missed if, some night, people looking up should learn that they had gone for ever.

And granny coming home, having learned elsewhere the full story of Little Mew's exposure to an awful peril, went

upstairs, and, candle in hand, looked down on the motherless child in bed fast asleep.

"Poor little boy!" she murmured. "I should miss him if he was gone. Yes, I should terribly."

She wiped her eyes, and then tucked up Bartie for the night.



## **II. Caught on the Bar**

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Dave Fletcher and Dick Pray were boys who had grown up in the same town, but from the same soil had come two very different productions. They were unlike in their personal appearance. Dick Pray would come down the street throwing his head to right and left, scattering sharp, eager glances from his restless black eyes, and swinging his hands.

"Somebody is coming," people would be very likely to say.

Dave Fletcher had a quiet, unobtrusive, straight-forward way of walking. Dick was quite a handsome youth; but the person that Dave Fletcher saw in the glass was ordinary in feature, with pleasant, honest eyes of blue, and hair--was it brown or black?

Dave sometimes wished it were browner or blacker, and not "a go-between," as he had told his mother.

Dave and Dick were not as yet trying to make their own way; but they were between fifteen and sixteen, and knew that they must soon be stirring for themselves.

They had already begun to intimate how they would stir in after life.

Dave had a quiet, resolute way. There was no pretence or bluster in his methods. In a modest but manly fashion he went ahead and did the thing while Dick was talking about it, and perhaps magnifying its difficulty, that inferentially his