



***WILLIAM HENRY
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***HAPPY
JACK, AND
OTHER
TALES
OF THE SEA***

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Happy Jack, and Other Tales of the Sea

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"Happy Jack"

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A Tale of the Sea.

Chapter One.

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The "Naiad."

I go to sea in rather unromantic surroundings.

Have any of you made a passage on board a steamer between London and Leith? If you have, you will have seen no small number of brigs and brigantines, with sails of all tints, from doubtful white to decided black—some deeply-laden, making their way to the southward, others with their sides high out of the water, heeling over to the slightest breeze, steering north.

On board one of those delectable craft, a brig called the *Naiad*, I found myself when about fourteen summers had passed over my head. She must have been named after a negress naiad, for black was the prevailing colour on board, from the dark, dingy forecastle to the captain's state cabin, which was but a degree less dirty than the portion of the vessel in which I was destined to live. The bulwarks, companion-hatch, and other parts had, to be sure, once

upon a time been painted green, but the dust from the coal, which formed her usual cargo, had reduced every portion to one sombre hue, which even the salt seas not unfrequently breaking over her deck had failed to wash clean.

Captain Grimes, her commander, notwithstanding this, was proud of the old craft; and he especially delighted to tell how she had once carried a pennant when conveying troops to Corunna, or some other port in Spain.

I pitied the poor fellows confined to the narrow limits of her dark hold, redolent of bilge water and other foul odours. We, however, had not to complain on that score, for the fresh water which came in through her old sides by many a leak, and had to be pumped out every watch, kept her hold sweet.

How I came to be on board the *Naiad* I'll tell you—

I had made up my mind to go to sea—why, it's hard to say, except that I thought I should like to knock about the world and see strange countries. I was happy enough at home, though I did not always make others happy. Nothing came amiss to me; I was always either laughing or singing, and do not recollect having an hour's illness in my life. Now and then, by the elders of the family, and by Aunt Martha especially, I was voted a nuisance; and it was with no small satisfaction, at the end of the holidays, that they packed me off again to school. I was fond of my brothers and sisters, and they were fond of me, though I showed my affection for them in a somewhat rough fashion. I thought my sisters somewhat demure, and I was always teasing them and playing them tricks. Somehow or other I got the name among them and my brothers of "Happy Jack," and certainly

I was the merriest of the family. If I happened, which was not unfrequently the case, to get into a scrape, I generally managed to scramble out of it with flying colours; and if I did not, I laughed at the punishment to which I was doomed. I was a broad-shouldered, strongly-built boy, and could beat my elder brothers at running, leaping, or any other athletic exercise, while, without boasting, I was not behind any of them in the school-room. My father was somewhat proud of me, and had set his mind on my becoming a member of one of the learned professions, and rising to the top of the tree. Why should I not? I had a great-uncle a judge, and another relative a bishop, and there had been admirals and generals by the score among our ancestors. My father was a leading solicitor in a large town, and having somewhat ambitious aspirations for his children, his intention was to send all his sons to the university, in the hopes that they would make a good figure in life. He was therefore the more vexed when I declared that my firm determination was to go to sea. "Very well, Jack," he said, "if such is your resolve, go you shall; but as I have no interest in the navy, you must take your chance in the merchant service."

"It's all the same to me, sir," I replied; "I shall be just as happy in the one as in the other service;" and so I considered the matter settled.

When the day of parting came, I was as merry and full of fun as ever, though I own there was a strange sensation about the heart which bothered me; however, I was not going to show what I felt—not I.

I slyly pinched my sisters when we were exchanging parting kisses, till they were compelled to shriek out and

box my ears—an operation to which I was well accustomed—and I made my brothers roar with the sturdy grip I gave their fingers when we shook hands; and so, instead of tears, there were shouts of laughter and screeches and screams, creating a regular hullabaloo which put all sentimental grief to flight. “No, no, Jack, I will have none of your tricks,” cried Aunt Martha, when I approached with a demure look to bid her farewell, so I took her hand and pressed it to my lips with all the mock courtesy of a Sir Charles Grandison. My mother! I had no heart to do otherwise than to throw my arms round her neck and receive the fond embrace she bestowed upon me, and if a tear did come into my eye, it was then. But there was another person to whom I had to say good-bye, and that was dear little Grace Goldie, my father’s ward, a fair, blue-eyed girl, three or four years younger than myself. I did not play her any trick, but kissed her smooth young brow, and promised that I would bring her back no end of pearls and ivory, and treasures of all sorts, from across the seas. She smiled sweetly through her tears. “Thank you, Jack, thank you! I shall so long to see you back,” she whispered; and I had to bolt, or I believe that I should have begun to pipe my eye in a way I had no fancy for. My father’s voice summoned me.

“Now, Jack,” he said, “as you have chosen your bed, you must lie on it. But remember—after a year’s trial—if you change your mind, let me know.”

“No fear of that, sir,” I answered.

“We shall see, Jack,” he replied. He wrung my hand, and gave me his blessing. “I have directed Mr Junk to provide your outfit, and you will find it all right.” Who Mr Junk was I

had no conception; but as my father said it was all right, I troubled my head no more about the matter.

My father's old clerk, Simon Munch, was waiting for me at the door, and hurried me off to catch the Newcastle coach. On our arrival there he took me to the office of Junk, Tarbox and Company, shipbrokers.

"Here is the young gentleman, Mr Junk," he said, addressing a one-eyed, burly, broad-shouldered personage, with a rubicund countenance, in a semi-nautical costume. "You know what to do with him, and so I leave him in your hands. Good-bye, Jack, I hope you may like it."

"No fear of that, Mr Munch," I answered; "and tell them at home that you left me as jolly and happy as ever."

"So, Master Brooke, you want to go to sea?" said Mr Junk, squirting a stream of tobacco-juice across his office, and eyeing me with his sole bloodshot blinker; "and you expect to like it?"

"Of course I do; I expect to be happy wherever I am," I answered in a confident tone.

"We shall see," he replied. "I have sent your chest aboard of the *Naiad*. Captain Grimes will be here anon, and I'll hand you over to him."

The person he spoke of just then made his appearance. I did not particularly like my future commander's outside. He was a tall, gaunt man, with a long weather-beaten visage and huge black or rather grizzled whiskers; and his voice, when he spoke, was gruff and harsh in the extreme. I need not further describe him; only I will observe that he looked considerably cleaner than than he usually did, as I afterwards found on board the brig. He took but little notice

of me beyond a slight nod, as he was busy with the ship's papers. Having pocketed them, he grasped me by the hand with a "Come along, my lad; I am to make a seaman on ye." He spoke in a broad Northumbrian accent, and in a harsh guttural tone. I was not prepossessed in his favour, but I determined to show no signs of unwillingness to accompany him.

We were soon seated in the stern of an excessively dirty boat, with coal-dust-begrimed rowers, who pulled away with somewhat lazy strokes towards a deeply-laden brig lying out in mid-stream. "Get on board, leddie, with you," said the captain, who had not since my first introduction addressed a single word to me. I clambered up on deck. The boat was hoisted in, the topsails let fall, and the crew, with doleful "Yeo-yo-o's," began working round the windlass, and the *Naiad* in due time was gliding down the Tyne.

She was a very different craft to what I had expected to find myself on board of. I had read about the white decks and snowy canvas, the bright polish and the active, obedient crew of a man-of-war; and such I had pictured the vessel I had hoped to sail in. The *Naiad* was certainly a contrast to this; but I kept to my resolve not to flinch from whatever turned up. When I was told to pull and haul away at the ropes, I did so with might and main; and, as everything on board was thickly coated with coal-dust, I very soon became as begrimed as the rest of the crew.

I was rather astonished, on asking Captain Grimes when tea would be ready—for I was very hungry—to be told that I might get what I could with the men forward. I went down accordingly into the forecastle, tumbling over a chest, and

running my head against the stomach of one of my new shipmates as I groped my way amid the darkness which shrouded it. A cuff which sent me sprawling on the deck was the consequence. "Where are your eyes, leddie?" exclaimed a gruff voice. "Ye'll see where ye are ganging the next time."

I picked myself up, bursting into a fit of laughter, as if the affair had been a good joke. "I beg your pardon, old fellow," I said; "but if you had had a chandelier burning in this place of yours it would not have happened. How do you all manage to see down here?"

"As cats do—we're accustomed to it," said another voice; and I now began to distinguish objects around me. The watch below were seated round a sea-chest, with three or four mugs, a huge loaf of bread, and a piece of cheese and part of a flitch of fat cold bacon. It was rough fare, but I was too hungry not to be glad to partake of it.

A boy whom I had seen busy in the caboose soon came down with a kettle of hot tea. My inquiry for milk produced a general laugh, but I was told I might take as much sugar as I liked from a jar, which contained a dark-brown substance unlike any sugar I had before seen.

"Ye'll soon be asking for your bed, leddie," said Bob Tubbs, the old man whose acquaintance I had so unceremoniously formed. "Ye'll find it there, for'ard, if ye'll grope your way. It's not over airy, but it's all the warmer in winter."

After supper, I succeeded in finding the berth Bob had pointed out. It was the lowest berth, directly in the very bows of the vessel—a shelf-like space, about five feet in

length, with height scarcely sufficient to allow me to sit upright,—Dirty Dick, the ship's boy I have mentioned, having the berth above me. Mine contained a mattress and a couple of blankets. My inquiry for sheets produced as much laughter as when I asked for milk. "Well, to be sure, as I suppose you have not a washerwoman on board, they would not be of much use," I sang out; "and so, unless the captain wants me to steer the ship, I will turn in and go to sleep. Good night, mates."

"The leddie has got some spirit in him," I heard Bob Tubbs observe. "What do you call yourself, boy?"

"Happy Jack!" I sang out; "and it's not this sort of thing that's going to change me."

"You'll prove a tough one, if something else doesn't," observed Bob from his berth. "But gang to sleep, boy. Ye'll be put into a watch to-morrow, and it's the last time, may be, that ye'll have to rest through the night till ye set foot on shore again." I little then thought how long a time that would prove; but, rolling myself up in my blanket, I soon forgot where I was.

Next morning I scrambled on deck, and found the brig plunging away into a heavy sea, with a strong southerly wind, the coast just distinguishable over our starboard quarter. The captain gave me a grim smile as I made my way aft.

"Well, leddie, how do you like it?" he inquired.

"Thank you, pretty well," I answered; "but I hope we sha'n't have to wait long for breakfast."

He smiled again. "And you don't feel queer?"

“No, not a bit of it,” I replied. “But I say, captain, I thought I was to come as a midshipman, and mess with the other young gentlemen on board.”

He now fairly laughed outright; and looking at me for some time, answered, “We have no young gentlemen on board here. You’ll get your breakfast in good time; but you are of the right sort, leddie, and little Clem shall show you what you have got to do,” pointing as he spoke to a boy who just then came on deck, and whom I took to be his son.

“Thank you, captain,” I observed; “I shall be glad of Clem’s instruction, as I suppose he knows more about the matter than I do.”

“Clem can hand, reef, and steer as well as any one, as far as his strength goes,” said the captain, looking approvingly at him.

“I’ll set to work as soon as he likes, then,” I observed. “But I wish those fellows would be sharp about breakfast, for I am desperately hungry.”

“Well, go into the cabin, and Clem will give you a hunch of bread to stay your appetite.”

I followed Clem below. “Here, Brooke, some butter will improve it,” he said, spreading a thick slice of bread. “And so you don’t seem to be seasick, like most fellows. Well, I am glad of that. My father will like you all the better for it, and soon make a sailor of you, if you wish to learn.”

I told Clem that was just what I wanted, and that I should look to him to teach me my duties.

“I’ll do my best,” he said. “Take my advice and dip your hands in the tar bucket without delay, and don’t shirk anything the mate puts you to. My father is pretty gruff now

and then, but old Grawl is a regular rough one. He does not say much to me, but you will have to look out for squalls. Come, we had better go on deck, or old Grawl will think that I have been putting you up to mischief. He will soon pick a quarrel with you, to see how you bear it."

"I'll take good care to keep out of his way, then," I said, bolting the last piece of bread and butter. "Thank you, Clem, you and I shall be good friends, I see that."

"I hope so," answered my young companion with a sigh. "I have not many on board, and till you came I had no one to speak to except father, and he is not always in the mood to talk."

Clem's slice of bread and butter enabled me to hold out till the fore-castle breakfast was ready. I did ample justice to it. Directly I made my re-appearance on deck, old Grawl set me to work, and I soon had not only my hands but my arms up to the elbows in tar. Though the vessel was pitching her head into the seas, with thick sheets of foam flying over her, he quickly sent me aloft to black down the main rigging. Clem showed me how to secure the bucket to the shrouds while I was at work, and in spite of the violent jerks I received as the vessel plunged her bluff bows into the sea, I got on very well. Before the evening was over I had been out on the yards with little Clem to assist in reefing the topsails, and he had shown me how to steer and box the compass.

Nothing particular occurred on the voyage, though we were ten days in reaching the mouth of the Thames. Clem and I became great friends. The more I saw of him the more