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THE LIFE OF A SHIP

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R. M. Ballantyne

The Life of a Ship

Chapter One

The Life of a Ship from the Launch to the Wreck

Song of the Sailor Boy

Oh! I love the great blue ocean,
I love the whistling breeze,
When the gallant ship sweeps lightly
Across the surging seas.
I watched my first ship building;
I saw her timbers rise,
Until her masts were towering
Up in the bright blue skies.

I heard the cheers ascending,
I saw her kiss the foam,
When first her hull went plunging
Into her ocean home.

Her flags were gaily streaming,
And her sails were full and round,
When the shout from shore came ringing,
“Hurrah! for the Outward-bound!”

But, alas! ere long a tempest
Came down with awful roar
And dashed our ship in pieces
Upon a foreign shore.
But He who holds the waters
In His almighty hand,
Brought all the sailors safely
Back to their native land.

Davy was a fisher boy; and Davy was a very active little boy; and Davy wanted to go to sea. His father was a fisherman, his grandfather had been a fisherman, and his great-grandfather had been a fisherman: so we need not wonder much that little Davy took to the salt water like a fish. When he was very little he used to wade in it, and catch crabs in it, and gather shells on the shore, or build castles on the sands. Sometimes, too, he fell into the water neck and heels, and ran home to his mother, who used to whip him and set him to dry before the fire; but, as he grew older, he went with his father in the boat to fish, and from that time forward he began to wish to go to sea in one of the large ships that were constantly sailing away from the harbour near his father's cottage.

One day Davy sat on a rock beside the sea, leaning on his father's boathook, and gazing with longing eyes out upon the clear calm ocean, on which several ships and boats were floating idly, for there was not a breath of wind to fill their sails.

"Oh, how I wish my father would let me go to sea!" said Davy, with a deep sigh. "I wonder if I shall ever sail away beyond that line yonder, far, far away, where the sky seems to sink into the sea!" The line that he spoke of was the horizon.

Davy heaved another sigh, and smiled; for, just at that moment, his eyes fell on a small crab that stood before him with its claws up as if it were listening to what he said.

"Oh, crab, crab," cried the little boy, "you're a happy beast!"

At that moment he moved the boathook, and the crab ran away in such a desperate hurry that Davy opened his eyes wide and said, "Humph! maybe ye're not a happy beast after all!" While he sat thus, a stout fisherman came up and asked him what he was thinking about. On being told, he said, "Will you come with me, boy, to the building-yard, and I'll show you a ship on the 'stocks.' I'm goin' as one of her crew when she's ready for sea, and perhaps by that time your father will let you go too." You may be sure that Davy did not refuse such a good offer; so the man and the boy went hand in hand to the yard where ships were built. Davy had never been there before, and great was his surprise when he saw a huge thing standing on dry land, with great pieces of wood of all shapes sticking round it, like the skeleton of a whale; but greater still was his surprise when the fisherman said, "There,

lad, that's the ship."

"Well," exclaimed Davy, opening his large eyes to their widest, "it don't look like one just now!"

The fisherman laughed. "That's true, lad; but come—I'll explain;" and taking Davy by the hand, he led him nearer to the "skeleton" of the ship, and began to explain the names and uses of the different parts.

"You see that long thick timber," he said, "that runs from this end, which is the 'stern,' to that end, which is the 'bow'—well, that is the 'keel.' This post or beam that rises out of it here is the 'stern-post,' and that one that rises up at the far end yonder is the 'stem' or 'cutwater.' These are the principal timbers of the vessel, and upon their strength the safety of a ship chiefly depends. The sticks that you see branching out from the keel like deers' horns are called 'ribs;' they are very strong, and the timbers that fasten them together at the top are called 'beams.' Of course these pieces of wood are some of them far larger than any trees that you have ever seen; but if you examine them you will find that each timber and rib is made up of two or three separate pieces of wood, fastened very strongly together. When all the beams are fixed they will begin to nail the planks on to the ribs; iron bolts are used for this purpose, but by far the greater number of the nails are made of wood. After this is done the seams between the planks will be filled with oakum and the whole ship covered over with pitch and tar, just in the same way as your father does to his boat when she lets in water. Then the bottom of the ship will

be entirely covered with sheets of copper, to prevent the wood worms from destroying it. These little rascals would eat through a ship's bottom and very soon sink it, but for the copper. Next, the deck is laid down, and the ship will be ready for 'launching.' A ship's masts and rigging are always put in after she is launched. Now, lad, what d'ye think of it?" said the fisherman as he walked home again with Davy. "The ship's to be a 'three-master' full-rigged, and is to go by the name o' the *Fair Nancy*."

As he said this he smiled, patted the little boy on the head and left him. But Davy replied not a word to his friend's remarks. His curly head was stuffed quite full with the keel, timbers, ribs, beams, stern-post, planks, and cutwater of the *Fair Nancy*; he could not speak, he found it difficult even to think, so he thrust his hands deep into his pockets, sat down on the shank of an anchor, and stared out to sea. In half an hour he heaved a very deep sigh indeed, and said, "Oh! dear me, I wonder if I shall ever go to sea in the *Fair Nancy*!"

Time flew on, and little Davy fished with his father, and worked for his mother, and paid many a visit to the building-yard, to watch the progress of the ship—his ship, as he called it. He begged very hard, too, to be allowed to go in her when she should be ready for sea. At first neither father nor mother would hear of it, but at last they began to think that Davy would make a very good sailor, for certainly he was an active obedient boy; so, although they did not say Yes, they were not nearly so determined as they used to be in saying No.

The day of the launch was a great day at the seaport where Davy lived. The launch of a large ship is always a very interesting and wonderful sight indeed; so that thousands and thousands of people flock from all directions to see it. Whichever way Davy looked he saw crowds of people, some on foot, some on horses, some on donkeys, and some in carriages, all streaming towards the one great point—the ship-builder's yard. It seemed quite like a holiday or a fair, and was such a bright, warm, sunny day that people's hearts felt far lighter than usual. Davy saw all this at a glance the moment he left home; and, throwing his red nightcap into the air, he gave one long loud hurrah! and ran away as fast as his heavy fishing-boots would let him.

The ship was very different now from what it had been when he first saw it. There were four little masts put up in it, on which were hoisted gay and gaudy flags. Her "hull," or body, was now coppered and neatly painted, while all the rubbish of the building-yard was cleared away, so that everything looked neat and clean. The stocks, or framework on which she had been built, sloped towards the water, so that when the props were knocked away from the ship, she would slide by her own weight into the sea. Ships are always built on sloping stocks near to the water's edge; for you can fancy how difficult it would be to drag such a great thing into the water by main force. In order to make her slip more easily, the "ways," down which she slides, are covered with grease.

Very soon the crowds of people stood in silence, expecting the

great event of the day; and, as the moment drew nigh, the band, which had been playing all morning, suddenly stopped. Davy became very anxious, because he was so little that he could not see in the crowd; but, observing a post near at hand, he struggled towards it and climbed to the top of it. Here he saw famously. The workmen had begun to knock away the props; there was just one remaining. At this moment a lady stepped forward with a bottle of wine in her hand to christen the ship. This she did by breaking the bottle against the cutwater; just at that instant she began to move. Another second and the *Fair Nancy*

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