

Mayne's comrade had fallen ill only a day or two before the events about to be narrated happened, and a substitute had been sent in his place. Willie Mayne was a slight, delicate-looking boy, with a pale face and blue eyes. He had been frail and delicate ever since his mother's death, which happened when he was only two years old. He was also a little lame, the result of an accident. Altogether he was the very reverse of the person you would willingly have chosen to leave in charge of a lighthouse at night—a fact no one was more alive to than the boy's own father.

Kenneth Mayne rowed himself to the mainland in his boat, fastened it to the little wooden jetty which had been built for the use of the lighthouse-keepers, and set off for Rowanfells, the nearest village. Having purchased a small can of oil, sufficient to serve him until he should be able to get a larger supply conveyed to the lighthouse, he started on his way homeward again. The road he was pursuing led along the shore, the sea on one hand and a line of steep and lofty cliffs on the other.

Mayne was proceeding at a rapid pace, carrying his can on his shoulder, and had reached a break in the cliffs made by the narrow ravine, when he was suddenly attacked by three men, who leaped out upon him from their concealment in the cleft of the rocks. Stunned by a blow on the head from a heavy bludgeon, he fell to the ground; his assailants were upon him in a moment, and in a few minutes had him gagged and bound hand and foot. The conspirators carried their victim between them a little way up the ravine, and left him, still unconscious, behind a rock, lying with his back against the wall of the cliff.

Willie Mayne expected his father to be at home at six o'clock. When that hour arrived without him, he became a little anxious. Another hour passed, and still Willie could see no signs of his father, as he stood on the small wooden landing built out from the little rock islet on which the lighthouse was situated, and directed his gaze to the shore. He was growing every minute more anxious and distressed in mind. What had become of his father? Was it an accident or mishap of any kind that prevented him being back, at the expected hour?

It was now growing dark, and with the approach of night Willie's fears and anxieties increased greatly. The lamps would have to be lit, and who was to do it? could he possibly manage it? The boy knew his own weakness of body and nerve only too well, and he feared terribly in his heart that he was not equal to the task of kindling the lamps.

He waited on the landing, gazing towards the shore in the direction in which his father must approach, until it was nearly dark. Then he entered the house again, and mounted the narrow winding stairs to the room where the cans of oil for the lamps were kept. Willie felt that at all hazards he must make the effort to fill his father's place to-night. If the lamps remained unlit, no one could tell what the consequences might be. Ships were constantly passing up and down

that part of the coast, the captains of which looked to the Inverkaldy lighthouse both as a warning and a guiding beacon.

Willie knelt down upon the floor. "Oh, God," he prayed, "give me strength and skill for what I have to do, that the ships may not miss the lights and be driven on the rocks, and the people lost. Keep my dear father from danger, and bring him safe home again, for Christ's sake. Amen."

On examination, Willie found that there was still some oil remaining in one of the cans, enough to last some hours. He took the can and began climbing the staircase again, until he reached the small chamber at the top of the lighthouse which contained the lamps. Willie could not nearly reach the lamps standing on the ground. He put the can with oil down on the floor, and descended to one of the lower rooms, returning with a chair and a wooden stool. But, standing on the stool and the chair, the little fellow could not yet reach his object.

Again descending the long and steep stairs, which in itself was a hard and painful task to the boy on account of his lameness, he returned with a couple of thick books, and placing these on the top of the stool, he climbed upon the whole pile, and now found that he could reach the lamps.

Willie had seen his father kindle the lights oftener than once, though, from the difficulty he had in climbing up to the top of the lighthouse, he was not often with his father at such times. Still he understood enough about the matter to pour the oil into the lamps, and to trim and light the wicks.

He had just poured a portion of the oil into the first lamp, lifting the large can with some difficulty, when the support beneath his feet suddenly gave way and he fell heavily to the ground, striking his face against the sharp edge of the can.

For a few minutes Willie was quite stunned by his fall, and lay white and motionless on the floor, a thin stream of blood welling up from his forehead. The chair had been standing rather unevenly on the floor, which Willie had not noticed. In leaning forward a little, as he had to do to reach the lamps, he had disturbed his balance, and hence the accident.

But Willie's swoon was not a deep one, and presently his consciousness returned. He rose, set the chair, the stool, and the books in their former position, this time taking care to arrange the pile quite evenly, and again raised himself upon them. The blood was still flowing freely from his forehead, but Willie heeded it not. His whole mind and energies were engrossed in his task; his one object was to get it quickly and successfully accomplished. Through the windows he saw the night had turned out a very dark one, not a single star illuminating the black sky; and Willie knew that on such a night the danger to the ships, if there were no lights to guide them while passing that treacherous part of the coast, would be greatly increased.

One by one Willie replenished the lamps with oil, turned up the wicks, and lit them from the light with which he had provided himself. The broad light flashed its streaming radiance

far out over the dark waters—a guiding star to whatever might be abroad upon the seas that night.

Willie's task was done, but as he again descended to the lower rooms of the lighthouse his feet shook beneath him. The strain of strength and nerve to one so small and frail of body had been very severe, and, now that his task was over, Willie felt as if every bit of strength had gone out of him. But there was the feeling in his heart, too, that he had done all he could, that God had answered his prayers, and given him just as much strength and skill as was necessary for the work which had fallen on him to do.

He sat down in the little sitting-room of the lighthouse to await his father's return, hoping, with an intensity of feeling that may be imagined, that nothing had happened him which would prevent his reaching home before the oil in the lamps was exhausted.

The plan of the wreckers—for such the men were who had waylaid Kenneth Mayne—had thus completely miscarried. They left the village together, waited in ambush for Kenneth Mayne as he made his way home, and assailed him in the manner described.

As soon as it grew dark the conspirators proceeded to a long ragged reef that stretched out from the land far into the sea, almost covered by the water at high tide, but lifting a jagged, saw-like ledge above the surface at low water. Here the men raised a lamp, and suspended it from a tripod of poles, arranging in such a manner that it slowly revolved, turning now a bright side, now a dark, towards the sea, and thus resembling at a distance the lamps of the real lighthouse. But they had hardly lit their false beacon when they saw, to their rage and chagrin, the lighthouse itself flash forth its strong bright blaze. Their hopes for luring some unfortunate ship to its destruction upon the cruel reef, and securing a rich prize from the wreck, were frustrated. They knew of the presence of the lighthouse-keeper's son, but had never for a moment anticipated that the "wee cripple," as they called him, would have strength and spirit enough to manage the lamps.

But, baffled in their designs and enraged as they were, the wreckers were not so blinded by anger as not to perceive that it would answer no purpose of theirs to allow the lighthouse-keeper to remain all night as they left him. It might only increase the chance of their detection in their attempted crime, or, if anything happened to Mayne through a night's exposure, aggravate the case against them if their deed ever came to light. So they judged it safest to return to where they had left Mayne and release him.

Long before Kenneth Mayne reached the lighthouse, of course he saw that the lamps were alight, and when he did reach home and heard Willie's story, his joy and pride in his little lameson, who had that night so bravely done his duty—as bravely as though he had had double his actual strength—could hardly find expression in words.

"Thank God, laddie," he said, "that by God ye hae been upborne this night to do your duty sae bravely and sae well!"