

LITTLE JARVIS.

A STORY FOR THE YOUNG FOLKS.

(CONTINUED.)

It was now three o'clock in the morning. The moon was going down and there was a kind of ghostly half-light, through which little Jarvis's face could be seen. The Vengeance at that moment increased her fire, the men inspired by the example of their officers; and the Constellation answered her loudly.

"We can hold on awhile yet, can't we, Bell?" asked Jarvis, with a coolness equal to the veteran sailor's.

"No, sir," said Jack Bell, shaking his head. They were now being tossed fearfully about, and the awful crackling of the mast, to which they clung desperately, had begun. "And 'tain't no shame for a man to leave his post when he can't stay there no longer, Mr. Jarvis."

"Not for a man—but I'm—I'm—an officer—and an officer must die at his post—"

Jarvis jerked the words out above the frightful crashing and swaying of the mast, the furious uproar of the fight. With a steady eye and a smile on his handsome boyish face, he looked down below; but the black and drifting smoke was so thick he could not see the captain. The men, at that ominous creaking and swaying, without waiting for orders, were climbing down, catching anything in their way.

"For God's sake!" cried Jack Bell, preparing to leap. His face was white and desperate, and his harsh voice was imploring. But little Jarvis, with all of his intrepid soul shining out of his unflinching eyes, did not move an inch. There was a strange light upon his face, and a manly and heroic calmness had taken the place of his boyish excitement.

"No," he said, "I cannot leave my station; if the mast goes, I must go with it."

Then a terrible cry went up from below. The wind had cleared the heavy smoke away for a moment, and those on deck saw the great mainmast, after the grinding sound of breaking, reel like a drunken man and topple over with a crash that made every timber in the Constellation tremble. It was as if the noble ship groaned and shuddered with the agony of that blow. The men in the top had managed to save themselves by leaping and hanging on to the shrouds and rigging. But little Jarvis came down with the mast.

The captain ran to him, and lifted the boy's head upon his knee—but he was quite dead, wearing still on his young face the brave smile with which he had faced death when glory beckoned him upward. By this time Jack Bell came running up, wiping the blood from his face and head. He stood close to the captain's elbow, and half sobbed, half shouted:

"He could 'a saved hisself, sir. I told him she was a-goin'—but he said as he were a officer, he couldn't leave his post. He done his duty like a man, sir—and he were the bravest little chap I ever see!"

And when the day broke and the splendid sunrise of the tropics came blushing over the sea, the Vengeance had her great hull battered and broken, her fifty-four guns silenced, and nearly two hundred of her men lay dead or wounded on her decks. The Constellation, her mainmast gone, her sails torn to ribbons, but sound and whole in her hull, and with every gun as good as when she went into action, had lost forty men and only one officer—little Jarvis. They buried him at sea that night, just at the solemn hour that he had been swinging about aloft the night before, singing so cheerily:

"Won't we have a jolly time
When we get home again?"

The officers and men, standing on the quarter-deck with uncovered heads, gazed with a sort of reverence at the small body wrapped in the flag—for he was little Jarvis even in death. He was only a little midshipman, but he had done his duty so as to merit immortal fame. The words, terrible yet consoling, were uttered over him, "And the sea shall give up its dead." As the words of the burial service were finished, two of the oldest sailors were unloosing the flag, when the captain, his gray head bared, motioned with his hand.

"No," he said, "make it fast. He has well defended that flag, and he shall be buried in it."

The sailors, with deft fingers, made fast the flag, the tears from their hard and weather-bent faces dropping upon little Jarvis. In another moment the small body slid gently over the rail, and sunk swiftly and peacefully into the untroubled depths of the ocean. Little Jarvis was forever at rest in the sea he loved so well.

In the midst of the death-like pause, when every breath was stilled, the captain spoke in a husky voice:

"Gentlemen," said he, turning to his officers, "Little Jarvis has indeed gone aloft—"

He stopped suddenly, and his voice seemed to leave him. He had meant to say something further—that every officer and man on that ship, when his time came, might well envy little Jarvis the manner of his going. But he could say no more. What need was there for words? And in the midst of the deep silence Jack Bell, who stood by the rail, with his head and his arm bound up, raised his bandaged arm to his eyes and uttered a loud sob. The captain put his cap to his face and hurried silently below. The drums beat merrily, the bugles blared out. All was over; but to every heart came back the words, "He was the bravest little chap!"

When the story of that splendid fight was told at home, the Congress of the United States, after passing a resolution of thanks to the officers and men of the Constellation, and awarding Captain Truxtun a gold medal, passed a separate and special resolution in honor of little Jarvis; and it said: "Be it further resolved: That the conduct of James Jarvis, a midshipman on said frigate, who gloriously preferred death to an abandonment of his post, is deserving of the highest praise; and the loss of so promising an officer is a subject of national regret."

THE END.

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