

The captain and the cabin boy

It's 1875. The Cutty Sark is a fast ship on the way from China to England with a lot of tea on board. It's a very long way from Shanghai to London.

5 After only a week at sea the ship gets into an awful storm. Big waves hit the ship and throw the people aboard from one side of the deck to the other. The sailors can't walk on deck and the captain can't hold the wheel.

The captain is scared of the storm and tells his sailors to take the sails down. He tells the cabin boy Ben Briggs to climb up, too. Ben is fourteen
10 years old and he usually works in the cabins.

It isn't easy to climb up to the top of the sails in a storm, but it is the sailors' normal work. But for Ben this work is new and so he's slow. The captain looks at Ben's slow climb and gets angry, because he thinks Ben is just scared and not brave. So he shouts loud: "Come down, Briggs — you're in the way.
15 Don't stand in the brave men's way." Now the sailors climb up to the sails very fast and take them down. The captain can hold the wheel again, but he needs the first mate's help. Everyone is tired, but there's no time to sleep. The storm is very dangerous.

The captain is happy and says to his men: "We're all tired now and need a
20 drink. Hey Briggs, bring us something to drink." Ben runs and comes back to the deck with water. But he doesn't get to the men around the wheel, because just then a monster wave hits the ship. Ben sees a lifebuoy and can hold on to it with one hand. Then the wave hits the men around the wheel and takes the first mate with it into the sea. The mate can't swim and shouts: "Help me! I
25 can't swim! Save me!" The captain throws a lifebuoy to him, but the first mate can't get to it, because he can't swim. Then the captain tells his men to save the man with a lifeboat. But Ben knows the first mate needs help right away. There isn't enough time for the lifeboat to save the first mate. Ben thinks fast. He doesn't wait for the lifeboat. He can swim and jumps into the water right
30 away. He swims to the lifebuoy and takes it to the first mate. After that, Ben doesn't swim away from the first mate, but stays with him till the lifeboat comes.

The captain watches how Ben saves his first mate. Well, that's how he finds out he's wrong about his cabin boy. He's really sorry about his angry words.
35 When Ben and the sailors are back on board, he thanks them very much. After the storm he talks to Ben. "You're very brave, Briggs," he says, "and brave people make good sailors. I'm very happy to have you on Cutty Sark."