



Ririro

READ ANYWHERE, ANYTIME

The Shark Story

William J. Hopkins

Once upon a time there was a wide river that ran into the ocean, and beside it was a little city. And in that city was a wharf where great ships came from far countries. And a narrow road led down a very steep hill to that wharf, and anybody that wanted to go to the wharf had to go down the steep hill on the narrow road, for there wasn't any other way. And because ships had come there for a great many years, and all the sailors and all the captains and all the men who had business with the ships had to go on that narrow road, the flagstones that made the sidewalk were much worn. That was a great many years ago.

The wharf was Captain Jonathan's and Captain Jacob's, and they owned the ships that sailed from it; and, after their ships had been sailing from that wharf in the little city for a good many years, they changed their office to Boston. After that, their ships sailed from a wharf in Boston.

Once the brig Industry had sailed for a far country. Little Jacob and little Sol had gone on that voyage, and they always raced through their breakfast so that they could get out on deck and see what there was to see. Little Sol generally beat and went on deck first, but sometimes little Jacob was first. The reason that little Sol generally beat was that little Jacob had been brought up not to hurry through his meals, but to wait for the older people; and he had to wait, anyway, because he couldn't get the second part until his father and his mother, and any company they had, had finished the first part. Then the first part was carried out and the second part was brought in; and little Jacob had to sit quietly in his chair with his hands folded in his lap until it came in. But little Sol didn't bother much about those things.

One morning little Jacob and little Sol had raced through breakfast, as they always did, and they had finished at exactly the same time, because little Jacob hurried. Then they both tried to go on deck at the same time. They managed to go up the cabin steps together, but they couldn't get through the door together without squeezing very tightly. And, in that squeezing, little Jacob caught his jacket on the lock of the door so that the jacket tore. But little Jacob didn't know it, and he kept on pushing, and at last he and little Sol went bouncing out and fell sprawling on the deck.

Captain Solomon was sitting in the cabin, and he laughed to see them go sprawling out, but he thought that he guessed the little boys had done enough of

that racing business. For somebody would have to mend little Jacob's jacket and, besides, there was danger that little Jacob would forget his manners, and that would never do. Little Jacob had beautiful manners. So Captain Solomon made up his mind that Sol would have to wait until little Jacob finished his breakfast, after that, and then they should go up the cabin steps like little gentlemen and not push and crowd and tear their jackets. And that would be a good thing for little Sol, too, but he wouldn't like it at first. Captain Solomon didn't care whether he liked it or not.

The little boys didn't know what Captain Solomon was thinking about, and they laughed and picked themselves up and looked around. And they didn't see anything but water all about, and the bright sunshine, and one or two little hilly clouds, and all the many sails of the Industry. For they were still in the trade winds where it is generally good weather. And they saw the mate, and he was standing at the stern and looking down into the water behind the ship.

"Let's see what Mr. Steele is looking at," said little Sol.

"All right," said little Jacob, "let's."

So the two little boys walked to the stern and leaned on the rail and looked down at the water. But first little Jacob said "Good morning" to the mate.

"Good morning, Jacob," said the mate. "Now, what do you see there?"

"I know," cried little Sol. "It's a shark."

"Oh, is it?" cried little Jacob. He was very much interested and excited. "Where is it, Sol?"

Little Sol pointed. "Right there," he said. "You can see his back fin, just as plain."

And little Jacob looked again, and he saw all the little swirls and bubbles and foam that made the wake of the ship, and right in the middle of it all he saw a great three-cornered thing sticking up out of the water. It was dark colored, and it followed after the ship as if it were fastened to it.

"Is that his back fin?" asked little Jacob, "that three-cornered thing? I don't see the rest of him."

"If you look hard," said Mr. Steele, "you'll make him out. He's clear enough to me."

Little Jacob looked hard and at last he saw the shark himself; but there were so many bubbles and swirls, and the shark was colored so exactly like the water, as



he looked down into it, that it wasn't easy to see him. Both the little boys watched him for some time without saying anything.

At last little Jacob sighed. "He's pretty big," he said. "Why do you suppose he follows the ship that way? It's just as if we were towing him."

"Well," said the mate, "I never had a chance to ask any shark that question—and get an answer—but I think it's to get what the cook throws overboard." The mate turned and looked forward. "I see the cook now, with a bucket of scraps. You watch Mr. Shark."

Little Jacob and little Sol both looked and they saw the cook walking from the galley with his bucket. The galley is the kitchen of the ship. And he emptied the bucket over the side. Then the two little boys looked quickly at the shark again, to see what he would do.

They saw the shark leave his place at the stern of the *Industry* as the things came floating by, and they saw him turn over on his side and eat one or two of the things. He took them into his mouth slowly, as though he had plenty of time; or it seemed as if he ate them slowly. Really, he didn't. They lost sight of him, for he stayed at that place until every scrap was gone.

Little Jacob smiled. "He doesn't have to race through his breakfast," he said, "does he, Sol? Did you see that his underneath parts were white? I wonder why that is. I s'pose it's because anything that looks down looks into darkness, and anything that looks up looks into lightness. Is that why, Mr. Steele?"

"So that the fish wouldn't see him coming?" asked Mr. Steele. "Well, Jacob, to tell you the truth, I never thought much about it. And I don't really know how a shark would look from underneath, in the water. The pearl divers in India could tell you. But I guess that comes as near to the reason as any other—near enough, anyway. I've no doubt that his coloring makes him very hard to see, in the water."

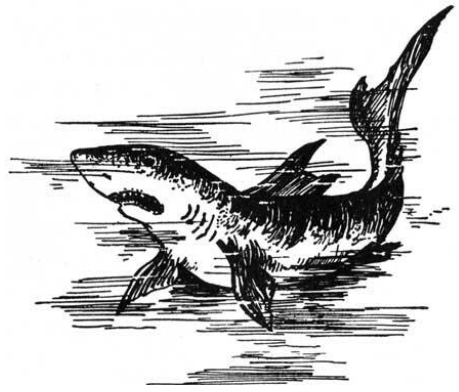
"I would like to see the pearl divers," said little Jacob, "but I s'pose I can't. And I'm rather glad the shark is gone."

"Huh!" said little Sol. "He isn't gone. He only stopped a minute. He'll be back. Won't he, Mr. Steele?"

Mr. Steele smiled. "There he comes, now."

And the boys looked and they saw the three-cornered fin cutting through the water at a great rate. The shark caught up with the ship easily and took his old place, just astern.

The shark stayed with the Industry all of that day, and little Jacob watched him once in a while. He thought the shark was kind of horrible and he wished that he would go away. But he didn't, that day or that night, or the next. And Captain Solomon didn't like it, either.



So, when Captain Solomon saw him on the third morning, he spoke to the mate.

"Better get rid of that fellow, Mr. Steele," he said. "Got a shark hook?"

"Yes, sir," answered the mate. "But I'm afraid it isn't big enough for him."

But Captain Solomon told him to try it, anyway. And he called some of the sailors and told them to rig a tackle on the end of the mainyard. That was so that it would be easy to haul the shark in, when they hooked him. And he went down and got the shark hook. It was a great, enormous fishhook and it had about a yard of chain hitched to it, because if it was rope that went in the shark's mouth, he might bite it off. And a large rope ran through the blocks of the tackle, and the sailors hitched the end of that rope to the end of the chain. A lot of sailors took hold of the other end of the rope, and they stood with the rope in their hands ready to run away with it, just as they did when they were hoisting a yard with a sail.

Then the cook came with a big chunk of fat salt pork, and he put it on the hook so that the point of the hook was all covered. And the mate looked at it, to see if it was done right, and he saw that it was.

"Slack away on the line," he called to the sailors.

And they let out the rope, until the mate thought that there was enough let out, and then he threw the hook, that was baited with the salt pork, overboard, and it trailed out astern.

The shark saw the pork and he left his place at the stern and went over to see about it. First he seemed to smell of it and make up his mind that it was good to eat. Then he turned lazily over upon his side, showing his whitish belly, and opened his mouth and swallowed the pork, with the hook inside it, and nearly all of the chain. Little Jacob was watching him, and he saw that the shark's mouth was not at the end of his nose, as most fishes' mouths are, but it was quite a

way back from his snout, on the under side. And he saw his teeth quite clearly. There were a great many of them, and they seemed to be in rows. Little Jacob didn't have time to count the rows, but he thought that the teeth looked very cruel. The shark's mouth was big enough to take in a man whole. And then the mate, who still had his hand on the rope, jerked it with all his might.

What happened then was never quite clear to little Jacob. He heard the sailors running away with their end of the rope and shouting a chanty and stamping their feet. And he saw the water alongside the ship being all foamed up by an enormous monster that seemed large enough for a whale. Then some water came up from the ocean and hit him in the face, so that he couldn't see for a few minutes and his jacket was all wet through. But the noise kept on.

When little Jacob could see again, the enormous monster was half out of the water and rising slowly to the yard-arm, while he made a tremendous commotion with his tail in the water, and a sailor was just reaching out with an axe. The sailor struck twice with the axe, but little Jacob didn't see where. Then the shark dropped back into the ocean with a great splash and out of sight.

"Well!" said the mate. "He's a good one! Took a good shark hook with him and pretty near a fathom of new chain!"

And when little Jacob had got his breath back again, he ran down into the cabin to write all about the shark in the log-book.

And that's all.

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