

## Chapter 1

### Daydreams

Twelve-year-old Joseph Bates sat up straight on the hard bench behind his wooden desk when he heard the teacher call his name.

“Joseph! Please pay attention. All day you have been daydreaming.”

All day Joseph sat in school, but he paid no attention to his classes. He had been waiting for the sound of the closing bell. Instead of solving arithmetic problems, his pencil sketched ships-ships with sails and tall masts. All day he kept thinking about his uncle Frank, who would soon be guiding his ship into the busy Bedford harbor. What stories Joseph expected that Uncle Frank would tell him!

Joseph jumped from his seat when the dismissal bell rang. He waved to his schoolmates as he headed across the playground and straight for the harbor.

The harbor! That was the most important place in Joseph’s life. There he could watch the ships come and go. There he could dream of great adventures.

He hardly noticed Prudence Nye, who waved and called hello to him as he passed. Sometimes he and Prudence went together to watch ships. They had been good friends most of their lives. But today Joseph didn’t even stop to say hello.

Little puffs of dust arose from the dirt road as Joseph ran past a horse-drawn carriage. He rounded the corner and darted past the bakery shop. On another day he might have taken time to visit a moment with the jolly baker and enjoy a free cookie. But today he didn’t stop.

Nearing the harbor, he slowed down a bit and looked at the ships already anchored. He knew he could recognize Uncle Frank’s ship if it stood there. His gray eyes narrowed as he searched for the familiar ship. A soft breeze rocked the anchored boats, and gulls filled the air with their screams. Sails flapped in the breeze. For a moment Joseph lost himself in daydreams. He became the captain of a large ship, ordering the set of the sails. Would his dream ever come true?

Joseph walked out onto the pier, all the while looking for his uncle’s ship. But he looked in vain.

“Maybe he chose another pier this time,” Joseph spoke out loud, but the sailors around busied themselves with loading or unloading

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their ships, so no one answered. Most of them knew the young boy and tipped their caps or waved as he passed. Up and down the piers he walked. But his uncle's ship was not there.

Joseph stopped to listen to the sailors talking as they unloaded one of the ships.

"A terrible storm struck in the north last night," one sailor said.

"We sailed just ahead of it, but we still felt the strong winds," another added.

"Excuse me, Sir." Joseph stepped over to one of the men. "Did that storm hit between here and Newfoundland?"

"Exactly!" The sailor shook his head. "Another ship followed up quite a ways back, my lad, I'm sure the storm blew it off course."

Joseph took a deep breath. Could that ship belong to my uncle? he wondered. Then to the sailor he asked, "Do you think they will make it through?"

"Probably," replied the sailor. "But not on schedule."

"And," added the second, "providing they didn't get blown into drifting icebergs."

Joseph shivered as he looked out at the ocean, hoping that at any minute he would see his uncle's ship with full sail coming toward the harbor. As time passed, he knew he would have to leave. Mother would expect him soon to do his evening chores. Slowly he turned from the pier and headed home. All the excitement of the day had failed. Now he scuffed along the road. Before turning the corner, he looked back one last time, even though he knew his uncle's ship would not be there.

When he reached home, he told Mother of his disappointment. "But Uncle Frank is a good captain," he said. "I know he can handle his ship in any storm!" Joseph tried to convince himself.

"Yes," Mother replied. "Uncle Frank always seems to manage. Don't worry. Now run and do your chores before Father gets home."

That evening after supper Joseph left his mother with her mending in her lap and his father in front of the glowing fire and went to his room. But he couldn't help hearing Mother and Father talking about Uncle Frank and the storm.

"The life of a sailor is rough," Father said. "I'm glad I'm in commercial business. I only hope Joseph will join me in my office someday. He's a bright young man."

Mother didn't answer, and Joseph thought he knew why. He had talked with Mother many times, telling her of his love of ships and his desire to be a sailor someday. She always tried to discourage him and

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get him interested in other things, but Joseph wanted only to be a sailor. How he wished he could talk with his Father about it.

Tabbie, the cat, walked into Joseph's room and jumped up onto his lap.

"I'm afraid Father wouldn't understand or approve," he said to Tabbie, who blinked one eye and purred.

Joseph didn't rest well that night. He kept waking up and wondering if Uncle Frank would really make it this time.