

ABOARD THE AMOS R.

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Illustrated by Eric C. Lonsbury.



IF A MAN proposes to a woman and then discovers that she and he are utterly unsuited for the same boat, can't tow at all in the same harness, does it take more courage to

marry her or to tell her you won't?

On the whole, it is better to run away of the Amos R. than to try and answer questions like that.

But suppose that one can't run away? Suppose that the place where you work is drawn right by the house where she lives regularly once a week by two mules that can't be either hurried or hid?

The whole trouble started when Captain Bill of the Amos R. Hendricks went to the Widow Tubbs for a bucket of water. The back garden of the Widow Tubbs fronted on the canal.

It was only a step or two from the towpath to the well. But by the well was the widow.

"In my opinion"—thus the lady lock-keeper of Cheeping Falls, commenting on what subsequently happened—"she was fishing for him, and she got him. Captain Bill is too good natured. He never could say 'No' to nobody."

"And you bet that boy will have a time to get along with her. She's awful set against boys. She had Timmy Larkin of the Polly T. Patterson arrested just for pulling some of her flowers. Captain Bill and that kid has my pity."

On the deck of the Amos R. Hendricks a small boy sat in a sullen heap regarding with awful hate a small house in a neat garden which flowered right down to the towpath. Hitched to the neat fence of the little house two mules drowsed and switched flies.

From the cubby of the Amos R. came the sound of a brush on leather. Captain Bill was shining his shoes!

When the captain of a canal boat shines his shoes he is either going to court or going courting.

"I'd just like to know," said the small boy savagely to the small house, "I'd just like to know what he's goin' to do it for."

This remark was not original with the small boy. The lady lockkeeper at Cheeping Falls had made it first. The canal, from the basin to "Mortans Slide," had echoed it.

"If he is thinkin' of marryin', why don't he git a girl from the canal?" the lady lockkeeper had said.

There was deep wisdom in the remark of the lady laborer of Cheeping Falls. A wife who is not accustomed to a home which is towed from the bay to the mountains, who has never cooked dinner in one county and served it in another, is apt to be set in her ways and unable to get into the swim of canal society.

And if she refuses to follow her husband aboard his boat, but lives ashore—well! She can't sink any lower in the opinion of the Erie Basin.

"Dog take it! What did he want to do it for?" demanded the small boy of the small house.

The small house, which had two little windows like eyes on each side of a low door like a mouth, said nothing. But the

expression on the face of the small house a certain kind of expression, it means was rather like that of a white cat who much and more to come.

"Awh, Dave!" thus mildly and uncer-

tainly from the pink-shirted, green-socked giant to the small blue huddle on the deck.

Nothing from the blue huddle—that is, nothing in words, words being not neces-

"Dave!" The call came from the cabin

The small boy hunched

his back, lowered his head

"I'll have the constable arrest you both. In my opinion you are a pair."



between his shoulders, wiggled his toes, and said nothing.

"You Dave!"

"Watcherwant?"

"You come an' git dressed."

Dave was dressed in overalls and shirt. What more does any boy need?

"Dave."

"Yes."

"You hear me?"

Dave heard him. His scowl gave proof of that, but Dave did not move. The time had come to make a stand, and he knew it.

If the captain wanted to make a fool of himself, all right. Dave was not going to join him.

The mules flapped the flies. The little house grinned across the neat rows of flowers. Mutiny—silent, furious, deadly—was on the Amos R.

The sound of shoe polishing ceased. Out into the sunlight, which pitilessly revealed his shame to the eyes of the crew, came the captain.

The signs of the shame were: A hard pink shirt blazing with the shine put on it by the Chinese laundry at Garrisonville; a pair of trousers with two rigid, contempt inspiring creases down their front; a brown face, shaved, clean shaved on a Tuesday.

Green socks filled with large feet hesitated on the deck. A shoe, on which was a dull, black bluish, clothed one large hand. The once admired captain of the Amos R. was a sight for gods, men and small boys, as a man generally is when he is to be a sight for women.

"What's the matter with you, Dave?"

The voice was not at all the kind to be expected from a captain addressing a crew in mutiny; pleading, propitiation, pathos—all were mingled in the tones.

"Nothin'" said the crew, not one of the three p's registering.

When a small boy says "Nothin'," with

sary in some cases on board a canal boat.

"Looka here, Dave"—the captain advanced the boot with the dull black bluish in pleading—"you gotta get dressed. We can't keep Mrs. Tubbs waitin'. It's most time for dinner now. She's a cookin' it." This last had reference to a thin curl of smoke from the chimney of the little house.

"I don't need women folks to cook my dinner. I can do it myself," said the crew, which was true.

"But she wants to see you, Dave," implored the captain.

From under the brim of the straw hat one eye filled with deadly scorn was shifted from the little house to the big captain.

"I seen her, that's enough," said the crew, echoing the remark of the lady laborer of Cheeping Falls.

A lover would have resented this remark, but the question that the canal was asking was, if Captain Bill was one? Captain Bill was a bachelor. The Amos R. and the mules had been sole and satisfactory consorts up to the time when the crew had added itself unto them.

The crew had come aboard one night when the harbor police had been poking under the docks with searchlights. It came aboard very unobtrusively, and Captain Bill had never discovered the fact until near Newark, when the smell of dinner had brought the crew out of hiding.

It was a miserable, half-starved little crew, and instead of calling the law to relieve him of the stowaway, Captain Bill had signed it on.

The crew had proved itself an able seaman when it came to navigating the mules; furthermore, the crew had taken to the canal as though born on it. All had gone well for two years.

Captain and crew had fitted together like two peas in a pod, or like two congenial, hard-working, and sober men until

the dark day when the captain had gone to the widow's well and come back with a hook in his gills.

"That ain't the way to talk, Dave," protested the captain. "You'll get on fine with her when you know her. She likes little boys."

Now, the crew was a kid, and not a "little boy." Never in the two years that they had been comrades had the captain insulted him like that before. It was clearly the influence of "that there" woman.

"I ain't goin'," growled Dave, taking a tighter clutch on his knees.

"But she told me to bring you," timidly explained the captain. "She—she says she'll be a mother to you."

"Awh"—a snarl—"what do I want wit' a mother? I had one oncet"—very much in the manner of a gentleman who says he has had an unfortunate experience and is not going to be fool enough to repeat it.

Truth forces the confession, the crew's experience of mothers had been a painful one, ending invariably in personal violence, when the pilfering from the docks could not defray the maternal desire for liquor.

The large captain looked helplessly at the small crew. He wanted the kid to make a good impression up at the little house. Something told him that it behooved the crew of the Amos R. to stand well with the new owner.

He was very fond of his crew, was Captain Bill. "Don't talk like that, Dave," he persuaded; "we need a woman to look out for us. Every boat had ought to have a woman aboard."

This a canal axiom.

"Say"—the crew gave the captain a new attention—"is that why you are git'in' married?" The tone was that of one man to another, their usual manner of conversation.

Before the captain could answer the door of the little house was thrown open, and a lady in a white apron appeared and rang a dinner bell.

"Great Scott!" cried the concerned captain, "we are late as all get out! Come, hustle, kid."

But the crew in flat mutiny squatted in a small blue bunch on the deck, hands locked about knees.

"Not me," snarled the crew.

The bell rang steadily, authority in every stroke.

"Yes, you are!" cried the captain.

Reaching down, he secured the crew and carried it down the deck, a hanging bundle of protest, skidding on bare, stubborn heels.

In the cabin the mutiny must have continued, because the captain's voice issued from thence in growing exasperation and authority. Finally the voice ceased and sounds as of vigorous applause took its place, echoing through the drowsy quiet of the sunny day.

In due time a small mutineer in the punishment irons of clean collar and shoes followed the captain up the walk to the little house.

"Well, I declare," said Mrs. Tubbs in affability and a false front, viewing the washed, brushed and ominously silent crew, "so this is little Dave!"

"Davie!" It took a woman and one who wanted to be a mother to invent that insult.

"Sit right down, little boy, and enjoy yourself," said Mrs. Tubbs, helping the stew.

"Sit down and enjoy yourself!"