

Ah! That remark had given the mean old woman dead away. She'd been listening. She knew what had happened in the cabin.

"Sit down and enjoy yourself!"

He'd fix her. He—well, he did not know what he would do just yet; but he'd do it. She'd better wait. He'd show her.

"Little boy—Dave!" He wished he could meet her on the docks some dark night. Her fate was sealed. He would croak her. Then he'd forgive Captain Bill, and things would be all right aboard the Amos R.

"I declare, ain't he got beautiful eyes?" said Mrs. Tubbs, scooping potatoes.

"Yessum!" gulped Captain Bill, holding the end of his necktie under his cup, so as to drop nothing on the appallingly clean cloth.

Of course there were napkins on the table, but they were spread out like fans in the tumblers, and obviously to both Dave and the captain were to be part of the table decorations.

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"Beautiful eyes!" Croakin' was too good for her. She should die a long, lingering death. Dave knew what he would do. He'd lead her up behind old White Face, and then tickle his leg. Old White Face would fix the rest for him.

She handed him the potatoes—nice, big, round ones.

He took one and began to eat it the way any man would, gripping it firmly, an elbow on the table, so that it could not slip. Dave knew his manners. That cloth was perfectly safe.

"Why, Dave," cried Mrs. Tubbs, "don't eat with your fingers!"

Captain Bill and the crew both blushed violently. The captain's fingers clutched a fork. Spearling a potato, he rested an elbow on the table and elegantly bit off hunks of mealy sustenance.

"I guess I ain't taught him his manners," said the captain.

"Oh, I'll attend to that! Tuck your napkin under your chin, Dave."

Hurriedly the captain laid hold of a table decoration and tucked it under his chin also.

The two males, confronted with good food and enmeshed in fine manners, which prevented their enjoying it, confronted each other across the appalling table.

The table deserved the word—it was so clean—everything on it shone with so much unnecessary appetite-destroying polish and glitter.

Glasses and knives and forks without number cluttered together, giving no room for elbows. And in the center was a red glass dish of flowers. Could foolishness go farther?

"It was a weddin' present from Uncle Henry" (thus the widow explained the dish). "I ain't set it out since Hen died. Ain't had the heart to. I declare it does seem good to see a man enjoying his vittals again. You ain't got no idea how lonely I get at meals, Willie."

"Willie," she said it—just like that—"Willie!"

The eyes of the dumfounded crew were fixed on his hero. Was he going to stand for that? Had Captain Bill arisen and felled the widow with one blow of his mighty fist Dave would not have been surprised.

"Yes, mum," said the captain.

The world crumbled beneath Dave. If the captain would stand for that, all was over between them. Oh, well!

He knew from the first that all was ended. That woman hated him. He could see that by the way she picked on him from the first.

Well, the captain had gone back on him.

He'd clear out. He could have her. He was only in the way, anyhow.

He'd—he'd go somewhere. Perhaps some day the captain, when "that there woman" had made his life a misery, would wish he hadn't gone back on him. He'd get out—a hint was as good as a kick to him—he'd—

Self-pity shut his throat and caused him to swallow a piece of huckleberry pie the wrong way, and he had the coffee cup

in his hand to wash down that pie. His eyes bulged out and he began to choke, coffee stopping on the spotless cloth.

The captain did the proper thing under the circumstances—hit him violently on the back.

Straight as a Johnson could have thrown it went the coffee cup from his hand at the glass dish. There was a crash and the dish was done with life as a dish. Over the white cloth streamed the coffee.

"I declare," wailed the widow—"oh, ain't that terrible? Poor Uncle Henry's dish has went!"

Stified with shame and pie, choking, gasping, the crew of the Amos R. went, as fast as feet could take it, aboard the Amos R. Down into the cabin it dived. Its mind was made up.

It would desert then and there. No use of hoping for anything after that catastrophe of the glass dish. And when a captain goes back on his crew, why, the only thing for the crew to do is to pack and git. And yet—and yet—

Well, we hate to confess it, but the crew was certainly crying.

You see, the captain had been a good captain.

The crew began to pack. It took a fish-pole, a mouth organ, and was collecting the marvelously colored pebbles abstracted from a cargo intended for the new road at Boonton when—

But the "when" requires another paragraph for its importance.

Some one had washed the dishes.

Yes, sir, there they were, all piled and scoured and shining. Every tin face had a broad, clean grin. What is more, somebody had swept the floor—somebody who evidently did not know that they were going to unload coal at the next stop.

"Doggone it," cried the crew in high excitement, "there has been a crook aboard of us!" To be sure, crooks hardly wash dishes and sweep floors, yet what right had anybody else to take those liberties aboard the Amos R.?

And then the crew was aware of an eye regarding it from around behind the flour barrel.

Above the eye was a forehead surrounded by hair dragged asunder in a painful part. "I ain't a crook," said a small voice.

"You—you come out from there," said the crew with a valiant quaver. "I see you—an' Captain Bill is right outside. He'll tear you right in two if—if— Oh, gee!" (This last in tones of intense disgust.)

From behind the flour barrel a figure not much taller than his own, clad in blue gingham of the severest cut and most unemotional hue, had risen to confront him.

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"Looks here, kid," said the crew with recovered nerves and brutal scorn, "what you doin' hidin' in our cabin?"

"You scart me," said the "kid." "I thought you was the constable."

"Say! you get right offen this boat. We ain't got no use for women."

The crew had evidently forgotten that it, too, had now no right on the Amos R.

"You will, will you?" The tone was full of dogged courage and determination.

"How you goin' to do it?"

Evidently the new arrival had a mind of her own.

"How'm I goin' to do it? Never you mind how I'm goin' to do it. You beat it."

"I won't. I'm goin' to stay right on this boat an' ast the captain to take me as a hired girl. He needs one. A more awful dirty place I never see."

"You—you—" Astonished rage tied the words tight. "Aw!"

"I know all about Captain Bill," continued the blue gingham sternly. "The woman at Belleville Lock told me. She said he needed a woman on board the Amos R., so I cum."

"I know what you are," cried Dave at last, light bursting on him. "You're one of the town's poor at Belleville. I've seen you walking out in lines all dressed up like that. Git offen this boat. We ain't got no use for town's poor."

"I won't. You ain't Captain Bill."

This plainly was a case for action—

quick action. The crew advanced to repel boarders. The blue gingham stiffened. Eyes of stern fighting light burned upon the other sex.

"Say—" the crew hesitated.

The situation was unique. The male sex has to battle with a thousand years of civilization before it can lay violent hands upon the female.

"Say, you'd better beat it. Captain Bill, if he sees you, he'll just tear you in pieces. He's awful sore on women. Iffen he gets one aboard he just twists their necks and throws 'em into the canal."

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"Yes, sir. He just throws a fit when he sees one, an' nothin' but their blood will suit him."

"I ain't goin' back to that poorhouse, anyway," said the intruder, stamping her foot so that the dust of many a weary mile flew again.

"You'll get some other place, sure." The crew, having removed the danger, was inclined to sympathy. "You'd hate it here. It takes an awful brave man to stand up to Captain Bill."

"Gimme your hand: it's only a step up, Mrs. Tubbs," said a voice outside.

She was there—the woman whose dish he had broken! She was coming for revenge. Nothing could be plainer. He was there—the awful captain who twisted the necks of women and threw them into the canal! Even a poorhouse neck has its value—to its owner.

"I wanta go home; I wanta go home," wailed the poorhouse girl, wiggling her hands in awful helplessness before the crisis.

"Shut up!" hissed the white-faced crew. "We gotta hide. Our lives may depend onto it."

"I wanta go home."

"Git under that bunk. Scrooge close against the wall, so as I can have room, too. An' don't you breathe too loud, neither," commanded the crew.

When the Widow Tubbs, followed by the captain, entered the cabin of the Amos R., nothing but inanimate objects were visible.

"This is the cabin—Ella," explained the captain when they were well in it.

"Ain't it small?" said the widow.

"Land sakes, ain't it hot?"

"Yessum," agreed the captain eagerly. "It's a wonder we don't git heat prostrated. Most people do when they ain't used to it."

"Well," said the widow, with a firm gleam in her eye, "you'll be all the gladder to git back to a nice, cool house Saturdays and Sundays."

"Yessum," said the captain in a faint voice. So she was not going to live aboard the boat! What would people say?

"I must say you keep it nice and clean," said the widow. "Them dishes, now, is washed like they ought to be. I never could stand messes. You wouldn't believe the way I work cleanin' up. It near kills me in hot weather, but I keep at it."

The captain tried to conceal his astonishment at what he saw in the cabin.

It was real thoughtful of the kid to clean up the place. That boy had a head on him. He had realized that the widow might want to come aboard.

"Yessum," said the captain, referring to her remarks about messes. "I can't stand them, either."

"I'm glad of that, because then you and me will fit in."

The captain shuddered. Somehow he felt that he would not fit in.

"Where is that there boy?" demanded the widow. "I don't feel as if I could get over Uncle Henry's dish."

"I guess he's hidin', poor little tyke," said the captain.

"There's one thing certain, Willie," said the widow. "That there boy will learn some manners or he won't live with me."

"Yessum."

"I never have had a boy in the house, and it's only my love for you that makes me think onto the idea. But he's gotta behave."

"Yessum."

"All right, then. When you come back from Boonton we'll be married. I wisht

we had been married today; then I could have gave that boy something to remember Uncle Henry's dish by."

"Yessum," said the craven captain. Really, the widow looked quite capable of giving even a husband something to remember if his memory was at fault.

"Kerchoo," came from under the bunk where the dust had been swept.

"For the land's sake!" cried the widow. "It's that boy. I see his legs. Willie, he's been listin' to our love-makin'."

The captain investigated and dragged out the crew.

"Great day!" cried the widow, bending double. "There is another one. I see more legs."

And then the captain dragged out the boarder. When the boarder found herself in the clutch of the twister of necks she screamed, tore herself loose, and threw herself on the widow.

"Oh, don't let him kill me," wailed the boarder.

The crew said nothing, but sidled against the captain's leg and took enough of trousers in a small hand to indicate that he had anchored for protection near his buddy.

"Hush, honey," soothed the widow. "Nobody ain't goin' to hurt you with me around."

"What have I done to her?" protested the captain. "I ain't never seen her before."

"He's awful cruel to women—he throws them into the canal." The words came through strangled sobs of fright.

The widow sat bolt upright. "Who said so?"

"I heard people sayin' it. One of the first laws of the poorhouse is not to tell tales on a comrade."

"Aw, now, little girl," pleaded the captain. He took a step toward her, with the kindest of intentions.

"Don't let him git me," screamed the blue gingham, misreading the intentions.

"Git away from her. You'd oughter be ashamed of yourself," said the widow. "How'd you come to git here, honey?" she asked of the suppliant clutching her.

"I heard the lady that keeps the lock say after she let the Amos R. through this morning that it was a shame that Captain Bill was takin' the woman he was—that he didn't want her—that she would never fit onto a boat. So I thought I would come and see if he wanted me, because I'm sick of that poorhouse. He wasn't here, so I just give him a sample of my work by cleanin' up."

"Did you sweep this floor?" demanded the widow.

"Yessum."

"And wash them plates?"

"Yessum."

"Then," with an affectionate light in her eyes, the widow stood up and took the small, rough hand, "you come home with me. You sha'n't go back to that poorhouse, honey."

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She went toward the door, the boarder clinging hopefully to her. At the door she fronted the captain.

"I've come to the conclusion that I don't know enough about your habits to marry you," she said firmly. And: "You tell that there woman at Belleville Lock, the next time you go through, that I don't want you, anyway, and just took you outer pity; and, furthermore, if that there boy as much as ever touches one of my flowers like I seen him do sometimes, I'll have the constable arrest you both. In my opinion, you are a pair."

If the opinion of the world counts for anything, the two females who went briskly up the walk to the little house were also a pair—a most congenial pair.

The captain waited until he was sure that the little house had hidden its own. Then he tore off coat, collar, and shoes.

"Dave," said the captain, with a huge sigh of relief, as he reached for his overalls, "get offen that collar and them shoes and let's get to work."

The crew took a mouth organ from a pocket and slung it on the bunk. "Say, let's have something to eat. I'm hungry."

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