

me out as soon as his stroll with Cuby was over.

"When are you going to give me a sail over to Waldeck, Captain Turbine?" he inquired, his broad smile indicating that he would esteem it over every earthly privilege to become my bosom friend.

There are some people you yearn over. They may be vain or silly, or worse; but there's some quality about them makes you yearn over them. So my old fool of a heart yearned over that sad boy; but I was under rules along with Mary and the doctor.

"Well, that's kind o' difficult to say, Mr. Hilton," I answered; "wind and tide, and all that, have so much to do with it, you know."

"Wind and tide don't faze you. I wish you'd call me 'Rob,' Captain. Why, now, I wonder, won't you sail me over, Jim? Are you afraid I won't pay you?"

"No, oh no, Rob; but I sail under quick orders when I do go."

"Orders,—why, you own your own vessel, and are master of it."

"Well,"—I had to smile—"I make strict orders on myself, all the same. I'm awful careful, Rob, to obey my own orders."

"Pshaw. You can do what you like."

"Maybe, then, it's because I'm so old and rough and used to it, but I like it better to be under orders."

"You lose all the fun," said Rob, a little impatiently.

"Not a bit. I've been through seas, and sheered off rocks, that 'ud call a circus tame, and put a picnic nowhere."

"Oh, I know you're a fast sailor, Jim; and, say," he added, in a confidential tone, wheedling sweetly, "you are not old, you're hardly in your prime. Now look here, Captain, you sail some of the other boys over, now and then—why don't you take me? I'd lay around shore waiting to take my chances. I'd lay around all night and all day, and a week, if I could get the chance to go when you do sail." He was wide awake on his subject; he had infused a wild, pathetic tremor into his voice. It was hard; it was harder on me than on him.

"Well," said I, turning my head away, "when the right time comes that I can take ye, I'll let ye know, Rob."

"Thanks," he sighed heavily, walked away a rod or so, then returned with a great air of having been reminded of something.

"By the way—this letter, Captain; do you mind posting it for me the next time you sail over?"

I knew the letter would not make any difference with the way he was being treated by that old doctor in New York, and I knew that no money would be sent to him right away to leave Power Lot, God Help Us. I had not the least objections to taking the letter, and I longed to do it without a word more. There was no postage stamp on it. It seemed an infinitesimal small thing, and worse for Rob's nature to think people could be so mean. But rules are rules, and especially promises—even as to a penny—are promises. Poor Mary had been bound to it sacredly, "even a penny" having been mentioned in particular, and I ought to be up to her endurance; besides, my promise had been made through her. That settled it. It should stand. So I steeled myself up to the business.

"Where's the little picture of some imperial sovereign or other, that belongs in the corner of it?" I said.

What a look those blue eyes gave me. I think he saw through me, and I think he pitied me and believed in me, though he did not know what for nor why.

He dived into his pocket with an artificially offhand and impetuous manner.

"Thunder," said he, "I've left all my change at home."

I had become absorbed, apparently, in some tinkering I was doing on my boat, and to confirm my mental

aloofness from the dilemma in hand, I had begun to whistle.

"Look here, Jim," he grinned, "I've been ass enough to leave all my change up at the house."

His air of bravado was transparent; my manner of indifference was as loudly transparent. I made no reply.

"Good Lord," he blurted out, "if I had a hundred dollars right here, I'd give it to you, Jim, for the asking."

"I know you would, Rob," said I. "I know that right well." Again his impatient glance changed to a frank and unfathomable pity.

"Say, old man, money's kind o' scarce around here, ain't it? Well, I'm going to attend to this little matter, right now."

He went back up the hill (at a very different gait from that he had exhibited on his first arrival at Power Lot, God Help Us); and how he would get the penny for a stamp he did not know, but it seemed incredible to him that Fate should face him out with denial and disaster in so small an enterprise.

Just then he heard the fruitful cackling of a hen, and lo, escape from the clutch of impecuniosity lay open before him, though it led through the clandestine and abhorrent paths of theft. Rob darted in at the rear door of the shed, and looked over into the hen's nest nearest at hand.

There lay four eggs in an enticing cluster, and, at present prices, one of them would buy a stamp. Into Rob's pocket went an egg, and down he came to me, holding out letter and egg, his mouth as wide abeam with laughter as though Sin had not claimed him for her own.

"I swiped it, Jim," pon my honor. Say, Lord Harry—look where I've got—I've stolen an egg."

The look of it, indeed. A man of his majesty of size and classic beauty of feature, shaking that purloined egg in wicked and hilarious triumph before my very eyes. I laughed till my sides ached. His moral restitution would not be reached through me. I had failed, myself, in this bout with the ordained ethics of the law; the ludicrous side of the thing had done me up.

"Now, will you post my letter?"

"Sure. Hand her over. I'm not sure but I'll make a special trip."

"Oh, say—take me along."

"Likely. Sailing over to Waldeck with a henroost thief. Not much."

But the tears of helpless laughter still swam in my eyes.

"Go alone, then, you old weepin'-willow, and be hung to you," said Rob; but there was honest love as well as wild gawdiness in his tone. A

has sometimes a sort of strange saving power over folks.

He lifted his hat ceremoniously from the crisp, handsome waves of his hair.

"Good-day, Captain Turbine. He turned on me once more, warningly, and his eyes flashed—"I'll sail with you yet, Jim."

My cap went off. "Good-day, Brother Rob, and it will be a glad day for me when you sail with me."

CHAPTER X.

The Passage Through.

Rob, in his mad haste, had not discovered that Miss Stingaree was sitting slightly shadowed by a pile of material objects, in a corner of the shed, peeling rhubarb, when he thrust his predatory hand into the hen's nest.

As he returned this third time from the shore, sucking parsimoniously at his pipe, Mary saw him through the house windows; tall, erect, brown, so that the waving fair hair, growing tawnier every day through exposure to wind and sun, looked stirringly picturesque beside the deepening tan of his countenance—as she saw this goodly spectacle, and then reflected on the stolen hen's egg, her heart revolted that so comely an exterior should contain a soul of such mean dimensions.

Rob unconsciously mended his case

at once, as, seeing her within, he entered, hat in hand, frankly smiling:

"Miss Stingaree, you harbor a thief—a petty thief. I abstracted an egg from old 'Ginger's' nest and applied it to my own private necessities."

She smiled back at him with a happy revulsion of feeling, and her rare laugh encircled him with a sense of bliss.

"Were you hungry, Robert? Where did you go to boil it?"

"Oh, it wasn't quite so grovelling as that, Miss Stingaree. I gave it to Captain Turbine to be converted into a postage stamp. Ho! ho! Ha! ha!"

"So you still want to get away from us?" she said, and her lip drew a little as if with mortification and pain. "I cannot blame you, but I hoped you would not mind it to stay awhile."

What he had written in his letter, of the sordid and poverty-stricken conditions of Power Lot, of disreputable Bate, of outlandish Mrs. Byjo, even of Mary's coldness and pride (instead of lauding her hard-working, faithful performance of duty)—and the disagreeable way in which he had written it—all surged back upon him now, as if he had lifted his hand to strike the beautiful woman before him a cruel and brutal blow.

"Well," blushed Rob, "I feel that I'm an awful burden, don't you know, that's a fact; and I feel, besides, that there is tremendously urgent business of my own back in the States that I ought to attend to."

As Mary looked at him, this statement did not seem farical, as it certainly would have appeared when he first arrived at Power Lot. His powers of recuperation seemed nothing less than inspired; and she made up her mind that she would herself write, recommending his release from her low roof and mean fare—and from Bate.

"Perhaps you ought to go," she said.

"Oh, Miss Stingaree, will you write and advise them? It's scandalous, their keeping me here."

"Yes, I will write."

"It isn't because I want to leave you," said Rob; "but—but perhaps it would be wisest on that account, too. For I—I think you're grand, you know; and I might get to liking you more—more—he did not look at her—more than you would wish to have me like you."

"You affections are so broadly scattered about, Robert," said Mary quietly and kindly, "that I should feel very sorry if I did not come in for some share of them."

"You mean Cuby Tee-bo," he blurted out. "A man can't live without any society, and she's an amusing little girl, that's all."

Mary flashed a look at him; it was evident that her liking for him was limited, and under strict control.

"I've never been a saint, you know," Rob defended himself. "I'd try to be—I'd try for anything, if you'd stand by me and encourage me."

"If you mean that you would like to have me respect you," she replied, "honestly, I should not be able to do that until you could stand by yourself."

"Don't you think that's kind o' lonesome?" said Rob, pale, and gazing afar through the window.

"Try it and see," she answered. Rob thought her tone implied that there might be unguessed spiritual rewards in the stalwart attitude she had recommended; but the prospect was hazy to him, and especially unattractive. His face was dreary.

"Well, I must go to work," he sighed. "One thing," he added, in a hopeful and unresentful tone, "when I get hold of a few pennies again, I'll hug 'em up and kiss 'em a while, an' get kind o' used to the looks o' them, before I spend 'em—that's sure. I never sailed so close to the wind before, and it's awful."

His mouth trembled a little, but not weakly. He looked Mary straight in the face without appeal or reproach; only with a sort of resigned adoration.

"Well," he repeated sadly, "I must be off to work."

"Mrs. Stafford says she would be very glad to hire you to assist some with her hoeing. You could put in a little time there, perhaps, before your own potatoes are ready."

"If I help Bate four hours this afternoon, I shall be two days ahead on my board, shan't I, Miss Stingaree?"

"Yes." Mary was secretly delighted, the question showed such close mental application and correct figuring on Rob's part.

"Then, to-morrow morning," he went on, "I can get another lap ahead on my board, and in the afternoon I'll help Captain Byjo—I mean Mrs. Stafford; and she will pay me the same you do?—only she will pay me in cash, of course?"

"You can depend upon her to do so."

"Miss Stingaree," said Rob, ingratiatingly, with a little catch in his throat, "I'm a 'hired man'; that's the size of it."

"You can make it any size you like," observed Mary. She hesitated a moment, then added distinctly, "I do not know of anyone with greater opportunities, for you have not only the power to build a strong character now, but to do it in spite of, and over, an—unfortunate past, which is harder, and greater; and if you remained a 'hired man' through the whole business, that would not make any difference."

Rob again asserted simply that the world looked rather lonely; again he withdrew his sad gaze, and remarked in a stupefied sort of way, without rancor:

"When I've earned the penny that I owe you for old Ginger's egg, of course I will pay it back to you."

"Well," said Mary. Her smile drew him; he found himself looking straight into her eyes again, and, in spite of the smile, or through it, they seemed to him to be very grave and kind and beautiful. "I do not think," she said, "that I am at heart petty or stingy. I think if you would believe that you would not be mistaken."

"Lord, I know it," cried Rob.

"You do, for love's sake and charity's sake, what I would never do. And old Jim—Captain Turbine, I mean—he's got some sad or other for acting mean and stingy. You're both playing at it, but I guess I know. Don't you ever think but what I do."

"Captain Turbine," assented Mary, "is a Don Quixote."

"No," cried Rob, "he's a real knight, marked genuine—all but the trimmings, helmet, shield and mail. He doesn't wear any mail, and, confound him, he doesn't bring me any mail. Ho, ho! Ha! ha!"

Mary acknowledged the brilliance of his jest with a gay laugh of her own.

Just then Mrs. Stingaree's cane rapped sharply from her bedside to the floor in the closed bedroom.

"Everybody has left me," called the old woman; and immediately her tortured sense of endurance gave way to the shrill tones that were beginning to dominate the diseased brain.

"Come in here, somebody. Come and sit with me," she called raspingly. "That Robert Hilton said he would come but he never came."

Mary started instantly for the door. Rob saw everywhere about the signs of the unfinished housework which he had interrupted, and a pang of shame went to his soul, that he had never fulfilled his promise to sit sometimes with the afflicted woman.

"Let me go," He advanced to Mary eagerly. "She asked for me. Let me go in and sit with her."

He knocked at the door. "It is Robert Hilton," he announced in his clear voice. "I am coming in to sit with you a while, if you will allow me."

That hearty, singularly glad voice seemed to delight and soothe the old woman.

"Come in, dear," she said; "they all neglect me, they all desert me."

"You know Miss Stingaree has such a lot to do to get meals for us fellows, and all; for my part, I feel