

Father and the Runaway Sailor.

By Mrs. William G. Matheson, Port Morien, C.B., N.S.



"Balm o' Gileads."

The fallen leaves, wet and gray, were blown hither and yon, reminding one of weird ghosts, phantoms of the dear departed summer.

It was a dismal rainy day in the latter part of October. Drip, drip, went the slanting downpour, and little gusts of a complaining wind whined through the branches of the

Inside the house was cheerful enough. A fire burned in our cosy sitting room where Mother, Nora and I sat at work. Mother placidly stitching quilt squares; Nora, cutting out more squares; while I was sewing too, or pretending, I scarcely knew which. At any rate, I was holding my work in my hands. But the "spirit of unrest," always with me in dreary weather, was this day especially troublesome.

A dozen times I walked to the window and looked out. A dozen times I dropped spool and scissors to the floor with a

jingling clang. I envied Mother her peaceful face and untiring industry.

Father was out in the kitchen, shoe-mending. He was a fairly good amateur "cobbler," and his rainy days were usually devoted to the repairing of foot-wear.

Jack, my brother, was out at the barns repairing something in anticipation of fast coming winter.

At last I just groaned out aloud, "Oh, dear! I can't sew any more. I feel as though I was haunted, and oh, how it does rain!"

"Then," cried Nora, "for pity's sake go away somewhere. You make one nervous with your uneasy ways."

"I think I will," I answered, for a brilliant idea had just come to me. "I'll go make a call on father."

Nora turned to mother with a solemn expression on her face.

"I always said that some dark, pouring day like this would be her finish."

Hush!" I said, "not so loud. I mean this. I am serious. I am going to visit father dressed in the character of a runaway sailor. I'll put on some of Jack's clothes, go around to the back door and knock. Gray twilight will soon be closing in, the kitchen will be getting dim; father wears glasses, and he won't be suspicious, anyhow. Let tea wait until I am out again safe. Jack's movements I must run the risk of."

Mother laughed softly. "Father will know you right off. If I were you I wouldn't."

And Nora was nearly in fits over what she called my "conceit."

"Never mind all that now," I said. "Come help me dress," and I ran upstairs followed by my giggling sister.

I was soon ready. I turned the pants up at the bottom of the legs, and the sleeves of the old blue reefer jacket up underpenth—not too short—I did not want my hands to give me away, as they did once before (but that belongs to another story). So I left my sleeves as long as I dared to. Then I grimed both face and hands, for, as Nora said, while she never ceased dancing around me, "Best not to look too clean. A poor sailor, dodging from justice and sleeping anywhere at night, wouldn't be expected to bestow much attention to his toilet."

I put my hair up, under an old flop straw hat, and eluding a kick—bestowed upon me by way of a parting blessing—I ran downstairs, out at the front door, and around the house.

As I passed the kitchen window—stooping to avoid being seen—I could hear the tap, tap of the shoe hammer descending upon leather. At the door I stopped a little uncertainly. Poor father! Why should I treat him in this absurd way? The kindest father a girl ever possessed. Then I hardened my heart and rapped—a weak, wobbly sort of rap.

I heard the great "cobble stone" slide down on the floor with a thud, then footsteps crossing the inner doorway out into the small porch. Then father opened the door.

He peered at me sharply over the top of his glasses, but I did not wait for my courage to cool.

"Good evening, sir," I said in a mumbly voice. "I have run away from the barque Mary Ellen. She is in D—Harbor (naming a port some twenty miles distant). I have been lying low all day on account of the rain, but I got so cold, I thought I would come and ask leave to warm myself for just a few minutes."

"Come on in," replied father, leading the way, and I slunk along after him, my head bent low. I sat down on the first chair I came to, then drew it up close to the stove and crouched over, pretending to shiver.

Father shovelled in some more coal, then went back to his work, for which I was extremely thankful, as it took him a distance away.

"Are you wet?" he enquired. "This has been a bad day."

"No, sir, I answered. "I sheltered where the trees are close and thick. Not a drop came near me."

"Are you hungry?" he asked, resuming the beating of his leather.

"No, thank you, sir," I replied. "I stowed away a good bit of food about me before I left. I have plenty to last until I reach S— (another port some miles further on). I thought this hat would make me look like a farmer; the cook brought it on board one day. I daresay he stole it, so when I was coming away I just brought it along."

Father was looking at me very gravely—I could feel his eyes—but I was sure from his manner that there was no recognition in that gaze. I knew also he never approved of sailors running away from their ships, but he was easily melted by a sad story.

"What made you leave?" he asked. "Cross captain, a crosser mate, and bad victuals not fit to feed a dog on. Besides, I wanted to get away from this coast for the winter," I said.

I was getting anxious to get out now before any "complications" set in. So I got up and moved towards the door. "Thank you for the warm, I feel much better, and I must get back to my shelter before dark."

"Better have some more lunch to take with you," said father. "You might run



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