

upon this I got over all misgivings about the dirtiness of my jacket, and did what I had feared to do, by reason of great respect for her; that is to say, I put both hands very carefully under her, and lifted her like a delicate fish, and set her crosswise on my lap, and felt as if I understood her; and she could not have weighed more than twenty pounds, according to my heft of fish.

Having been touched with trouble lately, I was drawn out of all experience now (for my nature is not over-soft) towards this little thing, so cast, in a dream almost, upon me. I thought of her mother, well drowned, no doubt, and the father who must have petted her, and of the many times to come when none would care to comfort her. And though a child is but a child, somehow I took to that child. Therefore I became most anxious as to her state of body, and handled her little mites of feet, and her fingers, and all her outworks; because I was not sure at all that the manner of her yawning might be nothing more or less than a going out of this world almost. For think, if you can see it so, how everything was against her. To be adrift without any food, or any one to tend her, many hours, or days perhaps, with a red-hot sun or cold stars overhead, and the greedy sea beneath her!

However, there she was alive, and warm, and limp, to the best of my judgment, sad though I was to confess to myself that I knew more of bass than of babies. For it had always so pleased God that I happened to be away at sea when He thought fit to send them; therefore my legs went abroad with fear of dandling this one, that now was come, in a way to disgrace a seaman; for if she should happen to get into irons, I never could get her out again.

Upon that matter, at any rate, I need not have concerned myself, for the child was so trim and well ballasted, also ribbed so stiff and sound, that any tack I set her on she would stick to it, and start no rope; and knowing that this was not altogether the manner of usual babies (who yaw about, and no steerage-way), I felt encouraged, and capable almost of a woman's business. Therefore I gave her a little tickle; and verily she began to

laugh, or perhaps I should say by rights to smile, in a gentle and superior way—for she always was superior. And a funnier creature never lived, neither one that could cry so distressfully.

"Wake up, wake up, my deary," said I, "and don't you be afraid of me. A fine little girl I've got at home, about twice the size that you be, and goes by the name of 'Bunny.'"

"Bunny!" she said; and I was surprised, not being up to her qualities, that she could speak so clearly. Then it struck me that if she could talk like that I might as well know more about her. So I began, very craftily, with the thing all children are proud about, and are generally sure to be up to.

"Pretty little soul," I said, "how old do you call yourself?"

At this she gathered up her forehead, not being used to the way I put it, while she was trying to think it out.

"How old are you, deary?" said I, trying hard to suck up my lips and chirp, as I had seen the nurses do.

"I'se two, I'se two," she answered, looking with some astonishment; "didn't 'a know that? Hot's 'a name?"

This proof of her high standing and knowledge of the world took me for the moment a good deal off my legs, until I remembered seeing it put as a thing all must give in to, that the rising generation was beyond our understanding. So I answered, very humbly, "Deary, my name is 'old Davy.' Baby, kiss old Davy."

"I 'ill," she answered, briskly. "Old Davy, I likes 'a. I'll be a good gal, I 'ill."

"A good girl! To be sure you will. Bless my heart, I never saw such a girl." And I kissed her three or four times over, until she began to smell my plug, and Bunny was nobody in my eyes. "But what's your own name, deary, now you know old Davy's name?"

"I'se Bardie. Didn't 'a know that?"

"To be sure I did;" for a little fib was needful from the way she looked at me, and the biggest one ever told would have been a charity under the circumstances.

"Please, old Davy, I'se aye hungry," she went on ere I was right again, "and I 'ants a dink o' yater."