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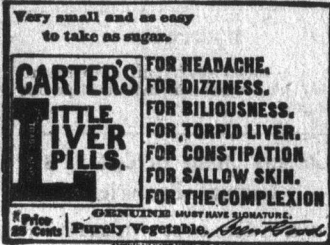
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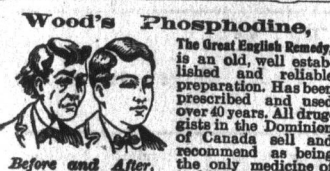
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Minard's Liniment Cures Diphtheria.

Moran of the Lady Letty

By FRANK NORRIS.
Author of "The Octopus," "The Pit," Etc.

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By this time the captain, Wilbur and all on board could plainly make out a sail some eight miles off the starboard bow. Even at that distance and to eyes so inexperienced as those of Wilbur it needed but a glance to know that something was wrong with her. It was not that she failed to ride the waves with even keel; it was not that her rigging was in disarray nor that her sails were disordered. Her distance was too great to make out such details. But in precisely the same manner as a trained physician glances at a doomed patient, and from that indefinable look in the face of him and the eyes of him pronounces the verdict "death," so Kitchell took in the stranger with a single comprehensive glance and exclaimed:

"Wreck!"

"Yes, sah. I tinkum velly sick." "Oh, go to, or go below and fetch up my glass—hustle!"

The glass was brought. "Son," exclaimed Kitchell—"where is that man with the brains? Son, come aloft here with me." The two clambered up the ratlines to the crow's nest. Kitchell adjusted the glass.

"She's a bark," he muttered, "iron built—about 700 tons, I guess—in distress. There's her ensign upside down at the mizzenhead—looks like Norway—an' her distress signals on the spanker gaff. Take a blink at her, son—what do you make her out? Lord, she's ridin' high."

Wilbur took the glass, catching the stranger after several clumsy attempts. She was, as Captain Kitchell had announced, a bark, and to judge by her flag, evidently Norwegian.

"How she rolls!" muttered Wilbur. "That's what I can't make out," answered Kitchell. "A bark such as she ain't ought to roll that way; her ballast'd steady her."

"What's the flags on her boom aft? One's red and white and square shaped, and the other's the same color, only swallowtail in shape."

"That's H. B. meanin' 'I am in need of assistance.'"

"Well, where's the crew? I don't see anybody on board."

"Oh, they're there right enough." "Then they're pretty well concealed about the premises," returned Wilbur as he passed the glass to the captain.

"She does seem kinda empty," said the captain in a moment, with a sudden show of interest that Wilbur failed to understand.

"An' where's her boats?" continued Kitchell. "I don't just quite make out any boats at all." There was a long silence.

"Seems to be a sort of haze over her," observed Wilbur.

"I noticed that—air kinda quivers oily-like. No boats, no boats, an' I can't see anybody aboard." Suddenly Kitchell lowered the glass and turned to Wilbur. He was a different man. There was a new shine in his eyes; a wicked line appeared over the nose; the jaw grew salient, prognathous.

"Son," he exclaimed, glinting Wilbur with his contracted eyes, "I have re-marked as how you had brains. I kin fool the coolies, but I can't fool you. It looks to me as if that bark yonder was a derelict. An' do you know what that means to us? Chaw on it a turn."

"A derelict?"

"If there's a crew on board, they're concealed from the public gaze. An' ALMOST AFRAID TO GO TO SLEEP FOR FEAR SHE WOULD NOT WAKE UP."

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where are the boats then? I figger she's an abandoned derelict. Do you know what that means for us—for you and I? It means—and, gripping Wilbur by the shoulders, he spoke the word into his face with a savage intensity—"It means salvage, do you savvy? Salvage, salvage! Do you figger what salvage on a 700 tonner



"Well, of course I'm with you, cap." would come to? Well, just lemme drop it into your think tank, an' lay to what I say. It's all the way from fifty to seventy thousand dollars, whatever her cargo is. Call it sixty thousand—thirty thou' apiece. Oh, I don't know! he exclaimed, lapsing to landman's slang.

"What'd I say about a million to one on the unexpected at sea?"

"Thirty thousand!" exclaimed Wilbur, without thought as yet.

"Now y'r singin' songs," cried the captain. "Listen to me, son," he went on, rapidly shutting up the glass and thrusting it back in the case. "My name's Kitchell, and I'm hog right through!" He emphasized the words with a leveled forefinger, his eyes flashing. "E-o-g spells very truly yours, Alvinza Kitchell; ninety-nine swine an' me make a hundred swine. I'm a shot with both feet in the trough first, last an' always. If that bark's abandoned, an' I says she is, she's ours. I'm out for anything that there's stuff in. I guess I'm more of a beachcomber by nature than anything else. If she's abandoned she belongs to us. To biases with this cool game. We'll go beachcombin' you an' I. We'll board that bark an' work her into the nearest port—San Diego, I guess—an' get the salvage on her if we have to swim in her. Are you with me?" He held out his hand. The man was positively trembling from head to heel. It was impossible to resist the excitement of the situation, its novelty—the high crow's nest of the schooner, the keen salt air, the Chinamen grouped far below, the indigo of the warm ocean, and out yonder the forsaken derelict, rolling her light hull till the garboard streak flashed in the sun.

"Well, of course I'm with you, cap," exclaimed Wilbur, gripping Kitchell's hand. "When there's thirty thousand to be had for the asking I guess I'm a 'achel bawn' beachcomber myself."

"Now, nothing about this to the coolies."

"But how will you make out with your owners? Aren't you bound to bring the Bertha in?"

"I ain't a shipper of no oil boat any longer. I'm a beachcomber." He fixed the wallowing bark with gleaming eyes. "Strike me," he murmured, "ain't she a daisy? It's a little Klondike. Come on, son!"

The two went down the ratlines, and Kitchell ordered a couple of the hands into the dory that had been rowing astern. He and Wilbur followed. Charlie was left on board, with direction to lay the schooner to. The dory flew over the water, Wilbur setting the stroke. In a few moments she was well up with the bark. Though a larger boat than the Bertha Millner, she was rolling in lamentable fashion, and every laboring heave showed her bottom incrustured with barnacles and seaweed.

Her fore and main tops'ls and to'gal-tops'ls were set, as also were her lower stays'ls and royals. But the braces seemed to have parted, and the yards were swinging back and forth in their ties. The spanker boom thrashed idly over the poop as the bark rolled and rolled and rolled. The mainmast was working in its shoe. The rigging and backstays sagged. An air of abandonment, of unspeakable loneliness, of abomination, hung about her. Never had Wilbur seen anything more utterly alone. Within three lengths the captain rose in his place and shouted:

"Bark ahoy!" There was no answer. Thrice he repeated the call, and thrice the dismal thrashing of the spanker boom and the flapping of the sails were the only answers. Kitchell turned to Wilbur in triumph. "I guess she's ours," he whispered. They were now close enough to make out the bark's name upon her counter, Lady Letty, and Wilbur was in the act of reading it aloud when a huge brown dory, sn, like the triangular sail of a lugger, cut the water between the dory and the bark.

"Shark!" said Kitchell. "And there's another!" he exclaimed in the next instant. "And another! Strike me, the water's alive with 'em! There's a stiff on the bark, you can lay to that." And at that, acting on some strange impulse, he called again, "Bark ahoy!" There was no response.

The dory was now well up to the derelict, and pretty soon a prolonged and vibratory hissing noise, strident, insistent, smote upon their ears.

"What's that?" exclaimed Wilbur, perplexed. The captain shook his head, and just then, as the bark rolled almost to her scuppers in their direction, a glimpse of the deck was presented to their view. It was only a glimpse, gone on the instant, as the bark rolled back to port, but it was time enough for Wilbur and the captain to note the parted and open seams and the deck bulging and in one corner blown up and splintered.

The captain smote a thigh. "Coal!" he cried. "Anthracite coal! The coal he's up and generated gas, of course—no fire, 'n' understand; just gas blew up the deck—no way of stepping combustion. Naturally they had to cut for it. Small the gas, can't you? No wonder she's blisssing—no wonder she rolled—cargo goes off in gas—and what's to weigh her down? I was wonderin' what could 'a' wrecked her in this weather. But it's as plain as A B C."

The dory was alongside. Kitchell watched his chance and as the bark rolled down caught the mainmast brace hanging in a light over the rail and swung himself to the deck. "Look sharp!" he called as Wilbur followed. "It won't do for you to fall among them sharks, son! Just look at the hundreds of 'em. There's a stiff on board, sure."

Wilbur steadied himself on the swaying broken deck, choking against the reek of coal gas that hissed upward on every hand. The heat was almost like a furnace. Everything metal was intolerable to the touch.

"She's abandoned, sure," muttered the captain. "Look." And he pointed to the empty chocks on the house and the severed lashings. "Oh, it's a haul, son—it's a haul, an' you can lay to that. Now, then, cabin first." And he started aft.

But it was impossible to go into the cabin. The moment the door was opened suffocating billows of gas rushed out and beat them back. On the third trial the captain staggered out, almost overcome with its volume.

"Can't get in there for awhile yet," he gasped, "but I saw the stiff on the floor by the table. Looks like the old man. He's spit his false teeth out. I know there was a stiff aboard."

"Then there's more than one," said Wilbur. "See there!" From behind the wheel box in the stern protruded a hand and forearm in an oilskin sleeve. Wilbur ran up, peered over the little space between the wheel and the wheel box and looked straight into a pair of eyes—eyes that were alive. Kitchell came up.

"One left anyhow," he muttered, looking over Wilbur's shoulder. "Bail or man, though. Can't interfere with our salvage. The bark's arect right enough. Shake him out of there. Can't you see the lad's dotty with the gas?"

Cramped into the narrow space of the wheel box, like a terrified hare in a blind burrow, was the figure of a young boy. So firmly was he wedged into the corner that Kitchell had to kick down the box before he could be reached. The boy spoke no word. Stupefied with the gas, he watched them with vacant eyes.

Wilbur put a hand under the lad's arm and got him to his feet. He was a tall, well made fellow, with ruddy complexion and milk blue eyes, and was dressed, as if for heavy weather, in oilskins.

(To Be Continued.)

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