THE GIRL AT RUDDER GRANGE.

One afternoon, as I was hurrying down Broadway to catch the five o'clock train, I met Waterford. He is an old friend of mine, and I used to like him pretty well.

"Hello!" said he, "where are you going?"

"Home," I answered.

"Is that so?" said he. "I didn't know you had one."

I was a little nettled at this, and so I said, somewhat brusquely perhaps:—

"But you must have known I lived somewhere."

"Oh, yes! But I thought you boarded," said he. "I had no idea that you had a home."

"But I have one, and a very pleasant home, too. You must excuse me for not stopping longer, as I must catch my train."

"Oh! I'll walk along with you," said Waterford, and so we went down the street together.

"Where is your little house?" he asked.

Why in the world he thought it was a little house I could not at the time imagine, unless he supposed that two people would not require a large one. But I know, now, that he lived in a very little house himself.

But it was of no use getting angry with Waterford, especially as I saw he intended walking all the way down to the ferry with me, so I told him I didn't live in any house at all.

"Why, where *do* you live?" he exclaimed, stopping short.

"I live in a boat," said I.

"A boat! A sort of 'Rob Roy' arrangement, I suppose. Well, I would not have thought that of you. And your wife, I suppose, has gone home to her people?"

"She has done nothing of the kind," I answered. "She lives with me, and she likes it very much. We are extremely comfortable, and our boat is not a canoe, or any such nonsensical affair. It is a large, commodious canal-boat."

Waterford turned around and looked at me.

"Are you a deck-hand?" he asked.

"Deck-grandmother!" I exclaimed.

"Well, you needn't get mad about it," he said. "I didn't mean to hurt your feelings; but I couldn't see what else you could be on a canal-boat. I don't suppose, for instance, that you're captain."

"But I am," said I.

"Look here!" said Waterford; "this is coming it rather strong, isn't it?"

As I saw he was getting angry, I told him all about it—told him how we had hired a stranded canal-boat and had fitted it up as a house, and how we lived so cosily in it, and had called it "Rudder Grange," and how we had taken a boarder.

"Well!" said he, "this is certainly surprising. I'm coming out to see you some day. It will be better than going to Barnum's."

I told him—it is the way of society—that we would be glad to see him, and we parted. Waterford never did come to see us, and I merely mention this incident to show how our friends talked about Rudder Grange when they first heard that we lived there.

After dinner that evening, when I went up on deck with Euphemia to have my smoke, we saw the boarder sitting on the bulwarks near the garden, with his legs dangling down outside.

"Look here!" said he.

I looked, but there was nothing unusual to see.

"What is it?" I asked.

He turned around and seeing Euphemia, said:—

"Nothing."

It would be a very stupid person who could not take such a hint as that, and so, after a walk around the garden, Euphemia took occasion to go below to look at the kitchen fire.

As soon as she had gone, the boarder turned to me and said:—

"I'll tell what it is. She's working herself sick."

"Sick?" said I. "Nonsense!"

"No nonsense about it," he replied.

The truth was, that the boarder was right and I was wrong. We had spent several months at Rudder Grange, and during this time Euphemia had been working very hard, and she really did begin to look pale and thin. Indeed, it would be very wearying for any woman of culture and refinement, unused to house-work, to cook and care for two men, and to do all the work of a canal-boat besides.

But I saw Euphemia so constantly, and thought so much of her, and had her image so continually in my heart, that I did not notice this until our boarder now called my attention to it. I was sorry that he had to do it.

"If I were in your place," said he, "I would get her a servant."

"If you were in my place," I replied, somewhat cutting, "you would probably suggest a lot of little things which would make everything very easy for her."

"I'd try to," he answered, without getting in the least angry.

Although I felt annoyed that he had suggested it, still I made up my mind that Euphemia must have a servant.

She agreed quite readily when I proposed the plan, and she urged me to go and see the carpenter that very day, and get him to come and partition off a little room for the girl.

It was some time, of course, before the room was made (for who ever heard of a carpenter coming at the very time he was wanted?) and, when it was finished, Euphemia occupied all her spare moments in getting it in nice order for the servant when she should come. I thought she was taking too much trouble, but she had her own ideas about such things.

"If a girl is lodged like a pig, you must expect her to behave like a pig, and I don't want that kind."

So she put up pretty curtains at the girl's window, and, with a box that she stood on end, and some old muslin and a lot of tacks, she made a toilet-table so neat and convenient that I thought she ought to take it into our room, and give the servant our washstand.

But all this time we had no girl, and as I had made up my mind about the matter, I naturally grew impatient, and at last I determined to go and get a girl myself.

So, one day at lunch time, I went to an intelligence office in the city. There I found a large room on the second floor, and some ladies, and one or two men, sitting about, and a small room, back of it, crowded with girls from eighteen to sixty-eight years old. There were also girls upon the stairs, and girls in the hall below, besides some girls standing on the sidewalk before the door.

When I made known my business and had paid my fee, one of the several proprietors who were wandering about the front room went into the back apartment and soon returned with a tall Irishwoman with a bony weather-beaten face and a large weather-beaten shawl. This woman was told to take a chair by my side. Down sat the huge creature and stared at me. I did not feel very easy under her scrutinizing gaze, but I bore it as best I could, and immediately began to ask her all the appropriate questions that I could think of. Some she answered satisfactorily, and some she didn't answer at all; but as soon as I made a pause, she began to put questions herself.

"How many servants do you kape?" she asked.

I answered that we intended to get along with one, and if she understood her business, I thought she would find her work very easy, and the place a good one.

She then turned sharp upon me and said:—

"Have ye stationary washtubs?"

I hesitated. I knew our washtubs were not stationary, for I had helped to carry them about. But they might be screwed fast and made stationary if that was an important object. But, before making this answer, I thought of the great conveniences for washing presented by our residence, surrounded as it was, at high tide, by water.

"Why, we live in a stationary washtub," I said, smiling.

The woman looked at me steadfastly for a minute, and then she rose to her feet. Then she called out, as if she were crying fish or strawberries:—

"Mrs. Blaine!"

The female keeper of the intelligence office, and the male keeper, and a thin clerk, and all the women in the back room, and all the patrons in the front room, jumped up and gathered around us.

Astonished, and somewhat disconcerted, I rose to my feet and confronted the tall Irishwoman, and stood smiling in an uncertain sort of a way, as if it were all very funny; but I couldn't see the point. I think I must have impressed the people with the idea that I wished I hadn't come.

"He says," exclaimed the woman, as if some other huckster were crying fish on the other side of the street—"he says he lives in a washtoob."

A low murmur ran through the crowd of women, while the thin clerk edged toward the door.

I saw there was no time to lose. I stepped back a little from the tall savage, who was breathing like a hot-air engine in front of me, and made my explanations to the company. I told the tale of "Rudder Grange," and showed them how it was like to a stationary washtub—at certain stages of the tide.

I was listened to with great attention. When I had finished the tall woman turned around and faced the assemblage.

"An' he wants a cook to make soup! In a canal-boat!" said she, and off she marched into the back room, followed closely by all the other women.

"I don't think we have any one here who would suit you," said Mrs. Blaine.

I didn't think so either. What on earth would Euphemia have done with that volcanic Irishwoman in her little kitchen! I took up my hat and bade Mrs. Blaine good morning.

"Good morning," said she, with a distressing smile.

She had one of those mouths that look exactly like a gash in the face.

I went home without a girl. In a day or two Euphemia came to town and got one. Apparently she got her without any trouble, but I am not sure.

She went to a "Home"—Saint Somebody's Home—a place where they keep orphans to let, so to speak. Here Euphemia selected a light-haired, medium-sized orphan, and brought her home.

The girl's name was Pomona. Whether or not her parents gave her this name is doubtful. At any rate, she did not seem quite decided in her mind about it herself, for she had not been with us more than two weeks before she expressed a desire to be called Clara. This longing of her heart, however, was denied her. So Euphemia, who was always correct, called her Pomona. I did the same whenever I could think not to say Bologna—which seemed to come very pat for some reason or other.

As for the boarder, he always called her Altoona, connecting her in some way with the process of stopping for refreshments, in which she was an adept.

She was an earnest, hearty girl. She was always in a good humour, and when I asked her to do anything, she assented in a bright, cheerful way, and in a loud tone full of good-fellowship, as though she would say:—

"Certainly, my high old cock! To be sure I will. Don't worry about it—give your mind no more uneasiness on *that* subject. I'll bring the hot water."

She did not know very much, but she was delighted to learn, and she was very strong. Whatever Euphemia told her to do she did instantly with a bang. What pleased her better than anything else was to run up and down the gang-plank, carrying buckets of water to water the garden. She delighted in out-door work, and sometimes dug so vigorously in our garden that she brought up pieces of the deck-planking with every shovelful.

Our boarder took the greatest interest in her, and sometimes watched her movements so intently that he let his pipe go out.

"What a whacking girl that would be to tread our grapes in the vineyards of Italy! She'd make wine cheap," he once remarked.

"Then I'm glad she isn't there," said Euphemia, "for wine oughtn't to be cheap."

Euphemia was a thorough little temperance woman.

The one thing about Pomona that troubled me more than anything else was her taste for literature. It was not literature to which I objected, but her very peculiar taste. She would read in the kitchen every night after she had washed the dishes, but if she had not read aloud it would not have made so much difference to me. But I am naturally very sensitive to external impressions, and I do not like the company of people who, like our girl, cannot read without pronouncing in a measured and distinct voice every word they are reading. And when the matter thus read appeals to one's every sentiment of aversion, and there is no way of escaping it, the case is hard indeed.

From the first I felt inclined to order Pomona, if she could not attain the power of silent perusal, to cease from reading altogether; but Euphemia would not hear to this.

"Poor thing!" said she; "it would be cruel to take from her her only recreation. And she says she can't read any other way. You needn't listen if you don't want to."

This was all very well in an abstract point of view; but the fact was, that in practice, the more I didn't want to listen, the more I heard.

As the evenings were often cool, we sat in our dining-room, and the partition between this room and the kitchen seemed to have no influence whatever in arresting sound. So that when I was trying to read or to reflect, it was by no means exhilarating to my mind to hear from the next room that:—

"The h dy ce sel i a now si zed the weep on and all though the door ly villy an re tain ed his vy gor ous hold she drew the blade through his fingers and hoorl ed it far be hind her dryp ping with jore."

This sort of thing, kept up for an hour or so at a time, used to drive me nearly wild. But Euphemia didn't mind it. I believe that she had so delicate a sense of what was proper, that she did not hear Pomona's private readings.

On one occasion even Euphemia's influence could scarcely restrain me from violent interference.

It was our boarder's night out (when he was detained in town by his business) and Pomona was sitting up to let him in. This was necessary, for our front door (or main hatchway) had no night latch, but was fastened by means of a bolt. Euphemia and I used to sit up for him, but that was earlier in the season, when it was pleasant to be out on deck until quite a late hour. But Pomona never objected to sitting (or getting) up late, and so we allowed this weekly duty to devolve on her.

On this particular night I was very tired and sleepy, and soon after I got into bed I dropped into a delightful slumber. But it was not long before I was awakened by the fact that:

"Sa rah did not fl inch but gras ped the heat ed i ron in her un in jur ed hand and when the ra bid an i mal a proach ed she thr ust the lur id po ker in his——"

"My conscience!" said I to Euphemia, "can't that girl be stopped?"

"You wouldn't have her sit there and do nothing, would you?" said she.

"No; but she needn't read out that way."

"She can't read any other way," said Euphemia, drowsily.

"Yell at her yell res oun ded as he wil dly spr ang——"

"I can't stand that, and I won't," said I. "Why don't she go into the kitchen?—the dining-room's no place for her."

"She can't sit there," said Euphemia. "There's a window-pane out. Can't you cover up your head?"

"I can't breathe if I do; but I suppose that's no matter," I replied.

The reading continued.

"Ha, ha! Lord Mar mont thun der ed thou too shalt suf fer all that this poor—"

I sprang out of bed.

Euphemia thought I was going for my pistol, and she gave one bound and stuck her head out of the door.

"Pomona, fly!" she cried.

"Yes, sma'am," said Pomona; and she got up and flew—not very fast, I imagine. Where she flew to I don't know, but she took the lamp with her, and I could hear distant syllables of agony and blood, until the boarder came home and Pomona went to bed.

I think that this made an impression upon Euphemia, for, although she did not speak to me upon the subject (or any other) that night, the next time I heard Pomona reading, the words ran somewhat thus:—

"He's crazy!" ejaculated Mrs. Blaine, with an air that indicated "policeman" as plainly as if she had put her thought into words.