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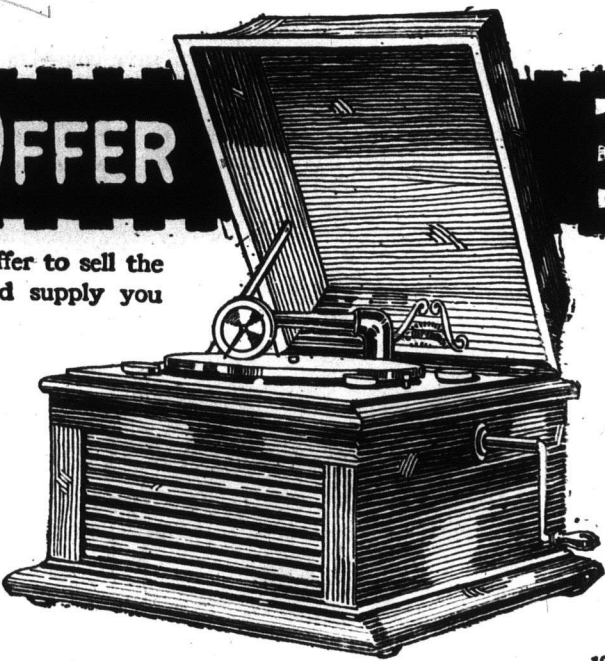
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Grains of Grit

Continued from Page 17

look after your own head? It's all curly!"

"I'm going to," muttered Tommy, struggling behind the log with his overalls. "I'm going to use the razor blade. I don't want curls on my head, but I am never going to have my arms shaved, Beulah! Seems as they're getting about as hairy as Polly Voo's."

"Oh, let me see!" trilled Beulah, dancing barefooted up and down, but Tommy silenced her with a look.

"You musn't forget you're the youngest. You got to act like a girl. But I'll let you help with my head."

Together they whacked and pulled at Tommy's curls till they were reduced.

"We may as well start right," theorized Tommy, wiping a stream of blood away with scorn. "All the grit here is to belong to me. I'll defend you. If monsters come I'll drive them off."

"What's monsters?"

"Lions and things."

"What if it's people—officers an' furious folks?"

"We'll never surrender—never! Will we?"

"Of course not," murmured Beulah, busily.

"Never!" emphasized Tommy, shorn to a stubble and feeling masterful.

"Not ever, ever, ever!" swore Beulah, crossing her heart.

Then they fished.

The hours passed. Out on the great lake a storm was quickening, but where the runaways dropped their lines the little waves nibbled and tugged at them like hungry trout. They grew hungry themselves—famished: but their shining treasures multiplied. At last they ate dry bread from Beulah's basket. Then, being sleepy, they slept.

Tommy woke suddenly to find the wind in a gale, and Beulah harkening to something beyond the point.

"What is it?" demanded Tommy.

"I heard something."

"What?"

"I think it's the Sea Lion!" quaked Beulah.

Tommy sprang to his feet, just as a series of short, coughing barks cut through the wind. The lake was washed white, and a drifting boom far out moved like a thing alive.

"It's the Sea Lion!" declared Beulah with agitation.

"Don't be afraid. Hide back of the log. Just let it come near—" Tommy fixed the boom with his eye. "I'll take care of it!"

Obediently Beulah scurried over the log. The blood curdling cough rasped out again.

"I don't want to hide!" rebelled Beulah, popping up.

"You must."

She ducked, and Tommy stood on his guard, his knife open at the razor blade.

"Do you see it?" pantomimed Beulah.

"Hide this instant!" warned Tommy, sternly. The boom was too long for a lion, too stiff for a serpent; Tommy had withdrawn his attention. Every fiber of him was steeled. "Do you want it to claw you to pieces?"

"Claw me to pieces?" gasped Beulah. Then she began giggling, with one hand considerably over her mouth. "Tom Tower, don't you know yet what the Sea Lion is?"

"It's a monster!" muttered Tommy, tense and vigilant.

"Tithn't gither!" lisped Beulah, riotously. "Te he he! Tithn't no such thing! It's Jack's new motor boat—looky! There it comes! And Jack is in it! Oh, goody, goody, goody!"

"Sure enough, around the foaming point swooped the motor boat. Beulah leaped to the log and flourished her arms and danced.

"Get down, get down!" supplicated Tommy. "Can't you see it's somebody coming after us? Maybe it's policemen!"

"Here I am, Jack!" shrilled Beulah.

The motor boat slowed down, dodging the boom. Three harried faces scanned the shore. One of them was a beautiful, woeful, tear-stained face, framed with a glory of wind wrecked curls.

"Why, it's Merm!" cried Tommy, the biggest and sweetest emotion he had ever suffered welling up from the deep springs of his being. "Oh, Merm, here I am!"

"Haloo, there, you little rascals!" challenged Mr. Jack Kingdom.

"Here I am, Jack!" lovingly answered Beulah.

The swift little Sea Lion nosed in, and out on the fallen log sprang Mr. Jack Kingdom and Tommy's mother. Then there followed a mixed-up but wholly acceptable embrace, which ended with Tommy's being on his mother's wildly beating heart.

"Oh, my precious!" half laughed, half wept his Merm, "and you, you dear child Beulah! What will you drive us to! Didn't you know you'd have us half crazy? And with the lake storming so, and that letter the only guide! Tommy, what have you done to your head!"

"Tom'th shaved," pointed out Beulah with impish complacency. "We eloped."

"Eloped!" groaned a deep old voice. And there in the boat, an erect and pitiful figure, crippled and alone, sat Madam Tower.

"Yes, grandmother. Did Merm show you the letter?" exulted Tommy. "I knew I'd get gritty pretty quick when I started. Merm, if you'd like to elope, why, it's just as easy! All you need is—"

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