

"Fifteen be blowed! Thirty's my due, an' I ain't takin' a penny less. An' don't gie me no lip. I don't take back-talk from tykes like you!"

"Oh, don't you!" said Dick hotly. "you're a thief and a crimp to swindle a kid like that, who didn't know what a blackguard he was dealing with. You wouldn't have dared to do it to me, you cauliflower-nosed object!"

With a growl and an oath the boarding-house master sprang at Dick, and was met with a left-hander which had the full force of the young seaman's muscular frame behind it. The crimp fell headlong backwards down the stairs, and lay groaning at the bottom.

"That's a rascal well served," said Dick, with satisfaction; "it'll cost him something in plaster, too, before he gets his beauty back. You'll have to leave your clothes, Archie, it's no good asking him for them now. Let him keep 'em as payment, and get into these I've—Great Scott!"

He clapped his hand to his coat under which he had carried the clothes, and turned pale.

"Haven't you brought any?" exclaimed Archie.

"I must have left them on the tram!" gasped Dick.

"This is a pretty business! What's to be done?"

"We must find yours somehow. Look sharp, for goodness' sake! Have you any notion where they are?"

"Not an earthly! And Cope's got up and gone away. For a policeman, p'raps?"

"Not he," said Dick grimly; "he daren't! Ransack all the rooms—quick!"

They turned out several cupboards and drawers in the next two rooms; but there was no man's clothes of any sort. Dick suddenly glanced out of the window, which overlooked the Clyde and the quays.

"Great flounders! There's the Barralong just warping out of dock. If we miss her, we're both done! Here, shove this on! You've got to go in something."

"But it's a girl's!" said Archie, as Dick hurriedly snatched a girl's skirt and a light-blue blouse from a peg on the door. "Those belong to Cope's wife. She's a music-hall singer, and—"

"Never mind who they belong to. On with them! You'll have to change when you get aboard."

"Fair exchange is no robbery!" chuckled Archie, slipping into the skirt and blouse. "My duds are worth a lot more than these. Chuck us those boots—I can just get 'em on. I'll have the hat, too, and there's a theatrical wig, or I am a Dutchman! May as well do the thing properly. The golden hair was hanging—"

"Come on, you young idiot!" cried Dick, in a frenzy. "I shall lose my berth through you!"

He dashed down the stairs, and Archie followed, holding up his skirt, and clapping a hand on the plush-trimmed hat to keep it on. The crimp, with a severe black eye, came running from an inner room to stop them; but Dick slammed the shop-door on him, and the brothers bolted down the street. Round the corner, by good luck, they came upon a cab, into which they jumped.

"The docks, and drive like blazes!" cried Dick to the driver.

"May as well titivate myself a bit," said Archie, whom nothing ever flurried, as he looked at himself in the little mirror above the match-holder in the cab. He had grabbed two or three details before leaving the room at Cope's, and now, arranging the golden wig, he fastened the hat coquettishly on it with a couple of hatpins that were sticking in the headgear. He then padded himself artistically with a small shawl, and fastened a bit of lace—the last thing he had found—round his neck.

"Darling, let me hug you!" he said, embracing his rescuer.

Dick looked at him, and was astonished to see what an uncommonly pretty girl appeared to be sitting beside him. The stage wig was a good one—quite good enough to appear grown on the premises. Archie's pink-and-white complexion helped the picture, and, having pulled his waist in rather painfully tight by a little clasp-belt, Archie looked a very fair grown-up schoolgirl in a long skirt.

But Dick was too worried about the ship to pay much attention to this. He was in a fever of anxiety lest she should sail without them.

"You'll have to skip aboard as far aft as you can, and p'raps the Old Man won't see you from the bridge," said Dick. "We shall be just in time as she passes the dockheads if we're lucky. I shall board her up forward. We mustn't appear together."

The cab drew up outside the dock gates just as the Barralong was gliding past the end quay. Dick, throwing the fare to the cabman, dashed off through the crowd and sprang on to her fore deck.

"Late again, Mr. Morris!" said the large, red-faced Captain Foyle, in a stern voice. "You're lucky not to lose your berth. As for that scamp of a brother of yours, he has lost his already. He has missed the ship again, and I've had enough of his escapades. He is dismissed, and he won't get his wages either!"

While the skipper was making this harangue, Archie jumped lightly aboard the steamer, aft of the bridge, and bolted into the galley before the captain turned round. The cook, who was washing the frying pan, dropped it with a crash. "Who the—? Wot are you a-doin' of, missie? Lemme go!"

"Hush, Joe," whispered Archie, who had flung his arms round the cook's neck. "Don't you know your own pet ducksie-wucksie? It me—Archie."

The cook, flabbergasted, took quite five minutes to realize it. Then he broke into a hoarse guffaw.

"Go and get me some of my clothes, there's a good chap," said Archie. "I'll change in here. The old man can't say anything when he finds I'm aboard."

"I can't," said the cook. "The skipper says you're sacked, an' he's locked up your bunk room and taken the key."

"E was in a reglar rage about it."

"Blow it!" said Archie. "Locked my room, did you say? I must have those clothes before he sees me. Where'll the cabin key be?" A ray of hope came to him. "He might have left it in his cabin—ten to one he has. I'll see if I can find it while he's on the bridge."

"It's about your only chance," said the cook grinning. "I'd give a quid for him to see you in them duds. I'll lay he wouldn't know you, neither."

"Cookie, promise me you won't give me away, whatever happens? Don't say a word among the chaps, will you, not till after this voyage, anyhow? You'll get me sacked."

The cook, who was an old friend of Archie's, promised, though it was a sore trial to him. Archie tried to make a dash for the cabin; but now they were out of dock, so many were passing about the after deck, that he had no chance to slip across unseen, and he had to wait, chafing with impatience, until the steamer was standing right down the river, before the opportunity came.

He fitted like a streak of light to the cabin, dived in, and went to the door of the captain's state-room. To his dismay it was locked. He was just trying the handle, when he heard a step behind him, and a sharp cry of surprise.

He turned, and found himself face to face with Captain Foyle.

It was an awful moment. Archie looked at the skipper, and then his gaze dropped. The captain stared with eyes as big as saucers.

"What on earth does this mean?" he said. "Who are you, miss? What are you doing here?"

The intruder drew a little lace handkerchief from his bosom and put it to his eyes with a sob. He was not recognized, at any rate, and, having the cheek of any ten, he decided to carry the game on. If he was sacked, nothing much mattered. If he could gain time, he might save himself yet.

"Who are you?" cried the captain.

"What have you come for?"

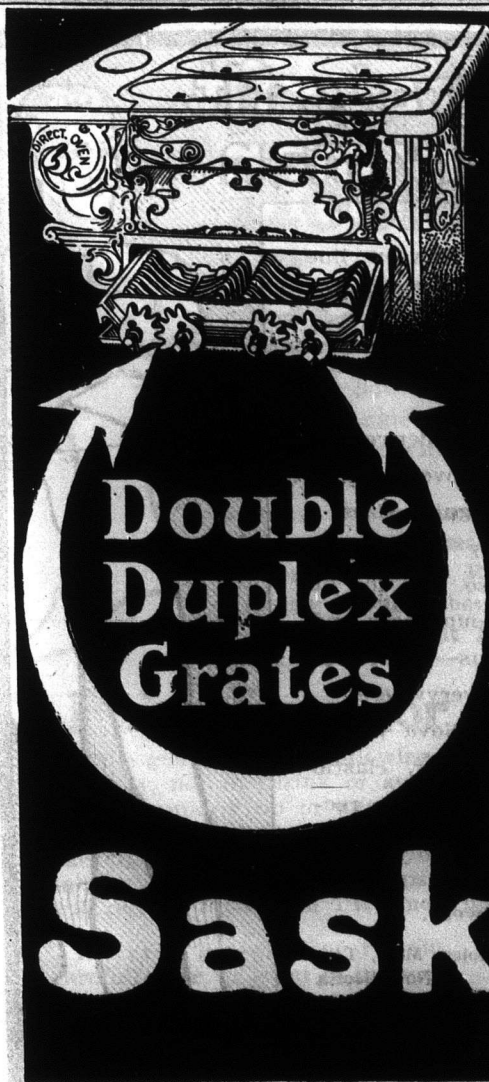
"Boo hoo! Archie Morris!" sobbed the culprit. "P-please don't be cross with me."

"Morris!" exclaimed the captain. "What do you mean? Bless my soul—are you—yes, you must be—his sister. You might be his twin—barring that you are decent looking, while he was an ugly young sinner. Why, you foolish girl, did you come aboard to see him?"

"I e-came to ask you not to d-discharge him," said the visitor, tearfully wiping both eyes. "Oh, please you won't, will you? He g-got kept ashore, but it wasn't his fault—it wasn't really."

The skipper's guest smiled prettily at him.

"But, my good girl," gasped Captain Foyle, "do you know that this ship has



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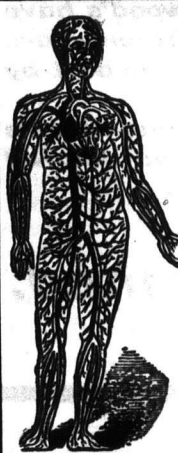
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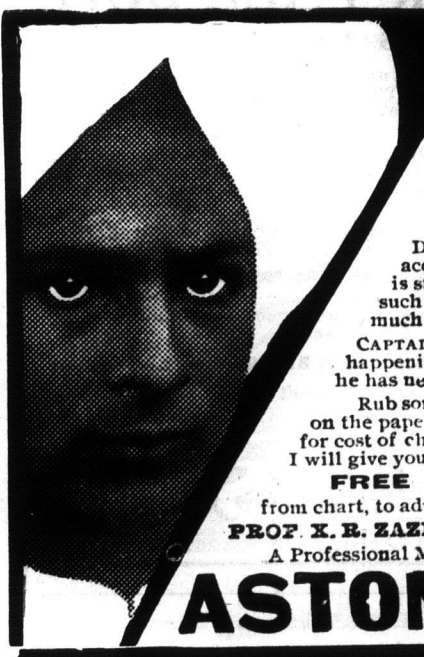
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