

and harassed by unusual mental activity. Around her gathered half a dozen others, all tanned, weather-beaten, and having that appearance of being half amphibious characteristic of all Gulf-Coast men. A mixture of eagerness and suppressed excitement was very apparent in them, as they seemingly awaited the verdict on some question, from the citizen in the boat, who, on the other hand, seemed utterly devoid of any sense of hurry.

"Well, Nick," said one of them finally, "what do you think?" Thus prompted, Nick slowly shifted his quid, contemplating a cleat, that had once held the main-sheet, but now hung dejectedly, end down, by one nail, and in slow, drawing, disjointed sentences rendered judgment.

"Well, boys, I'll tell yer—she's just got er about ez bad er case er dry-rot as ever I see—an' thar ain't er sound timber in her from stem to stern—nur er plank—nur even a cleat; but with lots er galvanized nails, and six, or mebbe seven false ribs, an' er kaig er white lead, an' about er bar'l er pitch—an' er bale or so o' oakum—why we might make her go through; ennyhaow I'm willin' ter try—I can't do no more than that ennyhaow."

When Nick said "ennyhaow," it meant business, and was understood to give the same finality to his remarks as the amen of the preacher, or the Pax Vobiscum of the priest. The group scattered under his direction in quest of tools and material; and quickly, but quietly enough to escape the not very observant curiosity of the village, returned to the scene of action. Every one of them was more or less of a jack-leg boat-carpenter, and each, under Nick's supervision, was soon earnestly at work on the particular part of the job assigned to him.

It was the day of the great annual regatta, under the supervision of the Southern Yacht Club, held at Bay St. Louis.

The beach, the long white shell-road, known simply as the "Front Road," the steamer-wharves and the approaches to the L. & N. R. R. bridge, were filled with a miscellaneous mass of people. Yachtsmen in all the glory of S. Y. C. uniform and caps; ladies with flushed excited faces, in their best holiday regalia, fluttering with bright badges and ribbons; gamblers, sailors, watermen and wharf-rats all mingled in democratic freedom.

Schooner-yachts from other points, with gay parties on board, sloops destined for entry in the race, fisher craft, oyster-boats, "dago" luggers (the staunchest, smartest sailors in the Gulf, but looking, with their single enormous peaked sail and narrow hull, as though a catspaw would upset them), yawls, canoes, and every other variety of small craft fluttered excitedly here and there or waited at anchor for the commencement of the grand event. Every now and then the keen eye of some expert would discern a new white speck on the distant horizon; and, almost before the uninitiated could note the dot on the water's edge, had named the yacht her home port, given an opinion as to her chances and a guess as to the make-up of her crew.

For an unknown craft to have appeared among the incoming fleet would have been as unexpected to the coast resident as for a strange fish—one he couldn't name to have flashed into the hot sunlight from those familiar glittering waters. And yet this is just what did happen; and curiosity was not relieved as to the identity of the new-comer, even when she had passed within a stone's throw of the T of the long "Public Wharf."

A very tough-looking craft she was; unpainted and dark with age, streaks of pitch and patches of white lead making a weird fresco of her deck and sides; an immense suit of sails, black as ever were abandoned to moth and mildew, patched with all shades from new white duck to second, third and fourth hand sail-cloth. One of the crew was kept constantly bailing with bucket and can, in a struggle to keep up with the leakage through the strained old seams. And yet a certain trimness, even in her rags, seemed to differ-

entiate her from the hoi polloi of fishing craft, trading smacks, hired sloops and other parasitical accessories to the race. She moved with a certain dignity of her own, with no greater speed, however, than might have been anticipated from her general rig and make-up. This was easily demonstrated by a saucy sloop, a class below her size, which danced alongside, took her wind and rushed merrily ahead, leaving the old black rags all a-quiver.

But if the boat wasn't known, her crew were—every weather-beaten, sun-tanned tar of them; and lots of ironical but good-natured bandiage passed back and forth between the unknown and the wharf and adjacent craft. "Why don't yer enter her in ther race?" finally yelled one particularly extravagant humorist. But when the answer came back in Nick's long drawl, "Thet's wot we're her fer," the hilarity passed all bounds, reaching the summit of its crescendo when Nick, leaving his charge for a few moments, came in and gravely entered and obtained his number for Baby Mine, in the "First Class for Open Sloops."

Nick had always been known as cranky and obstinate, but the boys looked a little serious when he carried things to the extent of laying sundry bets for himself and his crew, on Baby Mine against the favorites, and was even prevailed upon by one fun-loving individual to put a little with long odds, "agin ther field." "Nick's jus' gone plumb crazy," said the individual in question. "Why ther little Aggie jus' run clean away from his ole tub not twenty minutes ago—wonder whar he picked her up anyhow?"

Old Captain Jim, a lifelong enthusiast and follower of boat-racing in all forms, standing on the deck of his big lumber schooner Concordia, as she lay at anchor near the starting point, had a puzzled and somewhat absent look on his face as he scrutinized Baby Mine. Suddenly the dawn of some long-past memory lit up his wrinkled brown face. Turning, he clambered down into the little room that had formed his home for most of his long life. Out of his big sea-chest, he took an old cigar-box and among a mass of tattered bills, memoranda and clippings from newspapers and sporting magazines, he finally found the particular slip of which he was in search—a long article on American centre-board yachts, clipped from a well-known authority on sporting aquatics. This he read over carefully, deposited in a pocket, and going on deck, clambered into his yawl and threw off her painter.

Rowing slowly around Baby Mine, he measured her with his eye and carefully studied every point; noted that below her water-line, she had been smoothly planed and black-leaded; that her galvanized wire-rope stays and her standing rigging generally, was true and taut; then rowed a few feet astern and peered down into the yellow depths. When he raised his head, the last sign of bewilderment had passed, leaving his keen face unusually knowing.

Baby Mine's crew had watched the whole performance in serious silence. "Jim's on to us," said one of them at last. "Yaas, but he won't give us away," answered Nick.

The Captain did not return to the Concordia, but rowed in behind the long wharf, tied his yawl, climbed up, and sauntered carelessly into the vicinity of a group of resplendent S. Y. C. men. One of them was laying down the law to a more or less respectful group of listeners. He was well informed in yachting lore, and after having exhausted the subject of the International Cup Races and twisted the Lion's tail like a true American citizen, to his own glorification, struck the subject of yachts in the Gulf.

Finally he struck the present season, and offered to lay any reasonable odds that the boat of the year, the beautiful Silence—with her straight wedge bow, hollow spars, adjustable step, and faultless lines—nodding to her anchor by the side of the Lady Emma, last year's invincible, would walk away with the fleet. There seemed to be no takers, and a convincing silence ensued.

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