THE PIRATES

The Story of a War-Craft Stolen From the Brooklyn Navy Yard

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SYNOPSIS OF PRECEDING CHAPTERS

William Denman and John Forsythe have been every from boyhood. Denman winning as Annapolis superintendent over Forsythe and the latter thereupon left the service and, having light finances, before going to Annapolis, had had a terrible love affair with Florence Fleming, a richer neighbor's daughter, the young girl in the enthusiasm of a romantic boy believing that he had been built in the Brooklyn Navy Yard Jenkins, a convict, at the head of twelve escaped prisoners, seizes the destroyer and takes her to sea. One of the band is Forsythe. Denman is overpowered and carried along. The pirates overhaul a yacht which is on fire. From it they rescue a woman. Forsythe shows Denman, wounding him in the head.

CHAPTER VIII.

(Continued.)

STILL he struggled, and puzzled and guessed weakly as to what had happened to him, and when a committee from the loungers above visited him, and asked what struck him, he could only point suggestively to his throat, and wag his head. He could not even whisper and so they left him, pondering upon the profanely expressed opinion of old Kelly that it was a "visitation from God!"

The committee went aft to the skipper's quarters, and here loud talk and profanity ceased; for there was a woman below, and, while these fellows were not gentlemen—as the term is understood—they were men, bad men, but men.

On the way down the stairs, Kelly struck, backhanded, his watch mate Hawkes for expressing an interest in the good looks of the woman; and Sampson, a giant, like his namesake, smote old Kelly, hip and thigh, for qualifying his strictures on the comment of Hawkes.

Thus corrected and enjoined, with caps in hand, they approached the open door of the starboard room, where lay the injured woman in a berth, fully clothed in her now dried garments, and her face still hidden in Denman's bandage.

"Excuse me, madam," said Sampson, the present chairman of the committee, "can we do anything for you?"

"I cannot see you," she answered faintly. "I do not know where I am, nor what will happen to me. But I am in need of attention. One man was kind to me, but he has not returned. Who are you—you men?"

"We're the crew of the boat," answered Sampson awkwardly. "The skipper's forward, and I guess the man that was kind to you is our prisoner. He's not on the job now, but—what can we do?"

"Tell me where I am and where I am going. What boat is this? Who are you?"

"Well, madam," broke in old Kelly, "we're a crowd o' jail breakers that stole a torpedo boat destroyer and put to sea. We got you off a burned and sinking yacht, and you're here with us; but I'm blest if I know what we'll do with you. Our necks are in the halter, so to speak—or rather, our hands and ankles are in irons for life, if we're caught. You've got to make the best of it until we get caught, and if we don't, you've got to make the best of it, too. Lots o' young men among us, and you're no spring chicken, by the looks o' you."

Old Kelly went down before a fist blow from Hawkes, who thus strove to rehabilitate himself in the good opinion of his mates, and Hawkes went backward from a blow from Sampson, who, as yet unsullied from unworthy thought, held his position as peacemaker and moralist. And while they were recovering from the excitement, Denman, with blood on his face from the wound in his scalp, appeared among them.

"Are you fellows utterly devoid of manhood and self-respect," he said sternly, "that you appear before the door of a sick room and bait a woman who cannot defend herself even by speech? Shame upon you! You have crippled me, but I am recovering. If you cannot aid this woman, leave her to me. She is burned, scalded, disfigured—she hardly knows her name, or where she came from. You have saved her from the wreck, and have since neglected her. Men, you are jailbirds as you say, but you are American seamen. If you cannot help her, leave her. Do not insult her. I am helpless; if I had power I would decree further relief from the medicine chest. But I am a prisoner—restricted."

Sampson squared his big shoulders. "On deck with you fellows—all of you. Git—quick!"

They filed up the companion, leaving Sampson looking at Denman.

"Lieutenant," he said, "you take care o' this poor woman, and if any one interferes, notify me. I'm as big a man as Jenkins, who's knocked out, and a bigger man than Forsythe, who's now in command. But we're fair—understand? We're fair—the most of us."

"Yes, yes," answered Denman, as he staggered back to a transom seat.

"Want anything yourself?" asked Sampson as he noted the supine figure of Denman. "You're still Lieut. Denman of the navy, understand?"

"No, I do not. Leave me alone."

Sampson followed his mates.

Denman sat a few moments, nursing his aching head and trying to adjust himself to conditions. And as he sat there, he felt a hand on his shoulder and heard a weak voice saying:

"Are you Lieut. Denman—Billie Denman?"

He looked up. The bandaged face of the woman was above him. Out of the folds of the bandage looked two serious gray eyes, and he knew them.

"Florrie!" he said, in a choke. "Is this you—grown up? Florrie Fleming! How—why—what brings you here?"

"I started on the trip, Billie," she said calmly, "with father on a friend's yacht bound for the Bermudas. We caught fire, and I was the only one saved, it seems; but how are you here, subordinate to these men? And you are injured, Billie—you are bleeding! What has happened?"

"The finger of fate, Florrie, or the act of God," answered Denman, with a painful smile. "We must have the conceit taken out of us on occasions, you know. Forsythe, my schoolmate, is in command of this crowd of jail breakers and pirates."

"Forsythe—your conqueror?" She recoiled a step. "I had——" Do you know, Mr. Denman, that you were my hero when I was a child, and that I never forgave Jack Forsythe? I had hoped to hear——"

"Oh, I know," he interrupted hotly, while his head throbbed anew with the surge of emotion. "I know what you and the whole town expected. But—well, I knocked him down on deck a short time back, and the knock-down stands, but they would not allow a finish. Then he shot me when I was not looking."

"I am glad," she answered simply, "for your sake, and perhaps for my own, for I, too, it seems, am in his power."

He answered her as he could, incoherently and meaningless, but she went to her room and closed the door.

CHAPTER IX.

DOWN the wardroom companion came Forsythe, followed by Sampson, who edged alongside of him as he peered into the after compartment, where Denman sat on the transom.

"What do you want down here with me?" asked Forsythe, in a snarl, as he looked sidewise at Sampson.

"To see that you act like a man," answered the big machinist. "There's a sick woman here."

"And a more or less sick man," answered Forsythe, "that if I hadn't made sick would ha' had you in irons. Get up on deck. All I want is a chronometer."

"Under the circumstances," rejoined Sampson coolly, "though I acknowledge your authority as far as governing this crew is concerned, when it comes to a sick woman defended only by a wounded officer, I shift to the jurisdiction of the officer. If Lieutenant Denman asks that I go on deck, I will go. Otherwise, I remain."

"Wait," said Denman weakly, for he had lost much blood. "Perhaps Forsythe need not be antagonized or coerced. Forsythe, do you remember a little girl at home named Florrie Fleming? Well, that woman is she. I appeal to whatever is left of your boyhood ideals to protect this woman, and care for her."

"Yes, I remember her," answered Forsythe, with a bitter smile. "She thought you were a little tin god on wheels, and told me after you'd gone that you'd come back and thrash me. You didn't, did you?" His speech ended in a sneer.

"No, but I will when the time comes," answered Denman; but the mental transition from pity to anger overcame him, and he sank back.

"Now, this is neither here nor there, Forsythe," said Sampson sternly. "You want a chronometer. When you get it, you've no more business here than I have, and I think you'd better use your authority like a man, or I'll call a meeting of the boys."

"Of course," answered Forsythe, looking at the big shoulders of Sampson. "But, inasmuch as I know this fellow from boyhood, and knew this little girl when a child, the best care I can give her is to remove this chap from her vicinity. We'll put him down the fore peak and let one of the cooks feed her and nurse her."

"We'll see about that on deck," said Sampson, indignantly. "I'll talk"——

"Yes," broke in Denman, standing up, "Forsythe is right. It is not fitting that I should be here alone with her. Put me anywhere you like, but take care of her, as you are men and Americans."

Forsythe made no answer, but Sampson gave Denman a troubled, doubtful look, then nodded and followed Forsythe to the various rooms until he had secured what he wanted; then they went on deck together.

But in an hour they were back; and, though Denman had heard nothing of a conclave on deck, he judged by their faces that there had been one, and that Forsythe had been overruled by the influence of Sampson. For Sampson smiled and Forsythe scowled, as they led Denman into the wardroom to his own berth and locked him in with the assurance that the cooks would feed him and attend to the wants of himself and the woman.

Billings soon came with arnica, plaster and bandages and roughly dressed his wound; but he gave him no information of their plans. However, Denman could still look out through a deadlight.

A few hours after the boat's engines had started, he could see a steamer on the horizon, steering a course that would soon intercept that of the destroyer.

She was a one-funnelled, two-masted craft, a tramp, possibly, a working boat surely; but he only learned when her striped funnel came to view that she belonged to a regular line. She made no effort to avoid them, but held on until within hailing distance, when he heard Forsythe's voice from the bridge.

"Steamer ahoy!" he shouted. "What's your cargo?"

"Oil," answered the man on the steamer's bridge. "What are you holding me up for?"

"Oil," answered Forsythe. "How is it stowed—in cases or in bulk?"

"In bulk, you doggoned fool."

"Very good. We want some of that oil."

"You do, hey? Who are you? You look like that runaway destroyer I've heard so much about. Who's going to recompense the company for the oil you want? Hey? Where do I come in? Who pays the bill?"

"Send it to the United States Government, or send it to the devil. Pass a hose over the side, and dip your end into the tank."

"Suppose I say no?"

"Then we'll send a few shells into your water line."

"Is that straight? Are you pirates that would sink a working craft?"

"As far as you are concerned we are. Pass over your hose, and stop talking about it. All we want is a little oil."

"Will you give me a written receipt?"

"Of course. Name your bill. We'll toss it up on a drift bolt. Pass over the hose."

"All right. Hook on your own reducer and suck it full with your pump; then it will siphon down."

"Got reducers, Sampson?"

"Got several. Guess we can start the flow."

The two craft drew close together, a hose was flung from the tanker to the destroyer, and the four machinists worked for a while with wrenches and pump fittings until the connection was made; then they started the pump, filled the hose, and, disconnecting, dropped their end into the tanks.

The oil, by the force of gravity, flowed from one craft to the other until the gauges showed a full supply. Then a written receipt for 125 tons of oil was signed by the leaders, tied to a piece of iron, and tossed aboard the tanker, and the two craft separated, the pirate heading south, as Denman could see by the telltale.

Denman, his wounded scalp easier, lay down in his berth and smoked while he thought out his plans. Obviously the men were pirates, fully committed; they would probably repeat the performance; and as obviously they would surely be caught in time. There was nothing that he could do except to heal his wound and wait.

He could not even assist Miss Florrie, no matter what peril might menace her; then, as he remembered a bunch of duplicate keys given him when he joined as executive officer, he thought that perhaps he might. They were in his desk, and, rolling out, he secured them.

He tried them in turn on his door lock, and finally found the one that fitted. This he took off the ring and secured with his own bunch of keys, placing the others—which he easily surmised belonged to all the locking doors in the boat—in another pocket. Then he lay back to finish his smoke. But Sampson opened his door and interrupted.

"You'll excuse me, sir," he began, while Denman peered critically at him through the smoke. "But I suppose you know what we've just done?"

"Yes," he answered. "I could see a little and hear more. You've held up and robbed an oil steamer."

"And is it piracy, sir, in the old sense—a hanging matter if we're caught?"

"Hardly know," said Denman, after a moment's reflection. "Laws are repealed every now and then. Did you kill any one?"

"No, sir."

"Well, I judge that a pirate at sea is about on the same plane as a burglar on shore. If he kills any one while committing a felony, he is guilty of murder in the first degree. Better not kill any fellow men, then you'll only get a long term—perhaps for life—when you're nabbed."

"Thank you, Mr. Denman. They're talking big things on deck, but—there'll be no killing. Forsythe is something of a devil and will stop at nothing, but I'll"——

"Pardon me," said Denman lazily, "he'll stop at me if you release me."

"Not yet, sir. It may be necessary, but at present we're thinking of ourselves."

"All right. But, tell me, how did you get a key to my door? How many keys are there?"

"Oh, from Billings, sir. Not with Forsythe's knowledge, however. Billings, and some others, think no more of him than I do."

"That's right," responded Denman. "I knew him at school. Look out for him. By the way, is the lady aft being attended to?"

"Yes, sir. Daniels, the other cook, brings her what she needs. She is not locked up, though."

"That's good. Give her the run of the deck, and take care of her."

"Yes, sir, we will," answered Sampson as respectfully as though it were a legitimate order—for force of habit is strong. Then he left the room, locking the door behind.

Denman smoked until he had finished the cigar, and, after he had eaten a supper brought by Billings, he smoked again until darkness closed down. And with the closing down of darkness came a plan.

CHAPTER X.

TOSSING his cigar through the opened deadlight, Denman arose and unlocked his door, passing into the small and empty wardroom. First he tried the forward door leading into the petty officers' quarters and to the armroom, and, finding it locked, sought for the key which opened it, and passed through, closing the door softly behind him.

Further forward he could hear the voice of Billings, singing cheerfully to himself in the galley; and, filtering through the galley hatch and open deadlights, the voice of Forsythe, uttering angry commands to some one on deck.

He had no personal designs upon Billings, nor at present upon Forsythe, so he searched the armroom. As Forsythe and Daniels had found, there was nothing there more formidable than cutlasses, rifles and torpedo heads; the pistols had been removed to some other place. So Denman went back and searched the wardroom, delving into closets and receptacles looking for arms; but he found none, and sat down on a chair to think. Presently he arose and tapped on the glazed glass door of the captain's apartment.

"Florrie," he said, in a half whisper. "Florrie, are you awake?"

There was no answer for a moment; then he saw a shadow move across the door.

"Florrie," he repeated, "are you awake?"

"Who is this?" came an answering whisper through the door.

"Denman—Billie Denman," he answered. "If you are awake and clothed, let me in. I have a key, and I want to talk with you."

"All right—yes. Come in. But I have no key, and the door is locked."

Denman quickly found the key and opened the door. She stood there, with her face still tied up in cloths, and only her gray eyes showing in the light from the electric bulbs of the room.

"Florrie," he said, "will you do your part toward helping us out of our present trouble?"

"I'll do what I can, Billy; but I cannot do much."

"You can do a lot," he responded. "Just get on deck, with your face tied up, and walk around. Speak to any man you meet, and go forward to the bridge. Ask any one you see any question you like, as to where we are going, or what is to be done with us—anything at all which will justify your presence on deck. Just let them see that you are on deck, and will be on deck again. Will you, Florrie?"

"My face is still very bad, Billy; and the wind cuts like a knife. Why must I go up among those men?"

"I'll tell you afterward. Go along, Florrie. Just show yourself and come down."

"I am in the dark. Why do you not tell me what is ahead? I would rather stay here and go to bed."

"You can go to bed in ten minutes," said Denman. "But go up first and show yourself and come down. I will do the rest."

"Well, Billie, I will. I do not like to, but you seem to have some plan which you do not tell me of, so—well, all right. I will go up."

She put on a cloak and ascended the companion stairs, and Denman sat down to wait. He heard nothing, not even a voice of congratulation, and after a few moments Florrie came down.

"I met them all," she said, "and they were civil and polite. What more do you want of me, Billie?"

"Your cloak, your hat and your skirt. I will furnish the bandage."

"What?"

"Exactly. I will go up, dressed like you, and catch them unawares, one by one."

"But, Billie, they will kill you or—hurt you. Don't do it, Billie."

"Now, here, Florrie girl," he answered firmly. "I'll go into the wardroom and you toss in the materials for my disguise. Then you go to bed. If I get into trouble they will return the clothes."

"But suppose they kill you! I will be at their mercy. Billie, I am alone here without you."

"Florrie, they are sailors; that means that they are men. If I win you are all right, of course. Now let me have the things. I want to get command of this boat."

"Take them, Billie; but return to me and tell me. Don't leave me in suspense."

"I won't. I'll report, Florrie. Just wait and be patient."

He passed into the wardroom, and soon the skirt, hat and cloak were thrown to him. He had some trouble in donning the garments; for, while the length of the skirt did not matter, the width certainly did, and he must needs piece out the waistband with a length of string, ruthlessly punching holes to receive it. The cloak was a tight squeeze for his broader shoulders, but he managed it; and, after he had thoroughly masked his face with bandages, he tried the hat. There were hatpins sticking to it, which he knew the utility of; but, as she had furnished him nothing of her thick crown of hair, he jabbed these through the bandage, and surveyed himself in the skipper's large mirror.

"Most ladylike," he muttered, squinting through the bandages. Then he went on deck.

His plan had progressed no further than this—to be able to reach the deck unrecognized, so that he could watch, listen to the talk, and decide what he might do later on.

Billings still sang cheeringly in the galley, and the voices forward were more articulate; chiefly concerned, it seemed, with the replenishing of the water and food supply, and the necessity of Forsythe's pursuing his studies so that they could know where they were. The talk ended by their driving their commander below; and, when the watches were set, Denman himself went down. He descended as he had come up, by the captain's companion, reported his safety to Florrie through the partly opened stateroom door, and also requested that, each night as she retired, she should toss the hat, cloak, and skirt into the wardroom. To this she agreed, and he discarded the uncomfortable rig and went to his room, locking the captain's door behind him, also his own.

His plan had not progressed. He had only found a way to see things from the deck instead of through a deadlight; and he went to sleep with the troubled thought that even though he should master them all, as he had once nearly succeeded in doing, he would need to release them in order that they should "work ship." To put them on parole was out of the question.

The sudden stopping of the turbines woke him in the morning, and the sun shining into his deadlight apprised him that he had slept late. He looked out and ahead, and saw a large, white steam yacht resting quietly on the rolling ground swell, apparently waiting for the destroyer to creep up to her.

"Another holdup," he said; "and for grub and water this time, I suppose."

Wishing to see this from the deck, he rushed aft to the captain's room and tapped on the door, meanwhile fumbling for his keys. There was no answer, and, tapping again, he opened the door and entered.

"Florrie," he called, in a whisper, "are you awake?"

She did not reply, but he heard Sampson's voice from the deck.

"This is your chance, miss," he said. "We're going to get stores from that yacht; but no doubt she'll take you on board."

"Is she bound to New York, or some port where I may reach friends?" asked the girl.

"No; bound to the Mediterranean."

"Will you release Mr. Denman as well?"

"No. I'm pretty sure the boys will not. He knows our plans, and is a naval officer, you see, with a strong interest in handing us. Once on shore, he would have every warship in the world after us."

"Then I stay here with Mr. Denman. He is wounded, and is my friend."

Denman was on the point of calling up—to insist that she leave the yacht; but he thought, in time, that it would reveal his position, and leave him more helpless, while, perhaps, she might still refuse to go. He heard Sampson's footsteps going forward, and called to her softly; but she, too, had moved forward, and he went back to his deadlight.

It was a repetition of the scene with the oil steamer. Forsythe, loudly and profanely announcing their wants, and calling the yacht's attention to two twelve-pounders aimed at her water line. She was of the standard type, clipper-bowed, square-sterned, with one funnel and two masts; and from the trucks of these masts stretched the three-wire grid of a wireless outfit.

Forward was a crowd of blue-clad sailors, on the bridge an officer and a helmsman, and aft, on the fantail, a number of guests, while amidships, conversing earnestly, were two men, whose dress indicated that they were the owner and sailing master.

In the door of a small deck house near them stood another man in uniform, and to this man the owner turned and spoke a few words. The man disappeared inside, and Denman, straining his ears, heard the rasping sound of a wireless "sender," and simultaneously Casey's warning shout to Forsythe:

"He's calling for help, Forsythe. Stop him."

Then came Forsythe's vibrant voice. "Call that man out of the wireless room," he yelled, "or we'll send a shell into it. Train that gun, Kelly, and stand by for the word. Call him out," he continued. "Stop that message."

The rasping sound ceased, and the operator appeared; then, with their eyes distended, the three ran forward.

"Any one else in that deck house?" called Forsythe.

"No," answered the sailing master. "What are you going to do?"

"Kelly," said Forsythe, "aim low, and send a shell into the house. Aim low, so as to smash the instruments."

Kelly's reply was inarticulate, but in a moment the gun barked, and the deck house disintegrated into a tangle of kindling from which roared a cloud of smoke. Women screamed, and, forward and aft, the yacht's people crowded toward the ends of the craft.

"What in thunder are you trying to do?" roared the sailing master, shaking his fist. "Are you going to sink us?"

"Not unless necessary," replied Forsythe; "but we want grub—good grub, too—and water. We want water through your own hose, because ours is full of oil. Do you agree?"

There was a short confab between the owner and the sailing master, ending with the latter's calling out: "We'll give you water and grub, but don't shoot any more hardware at us. Come closer and throw a heaving line, and send your boat, if you like, for the grub. Our boats are all lashed down."

"That's reasonable," answered Forsythe. "Hawkes, Davis, Daniels, Billings—you fellows clear away that boat of ours, and stand by to go for the grub."

The two craft drew together, and for the rest it was like the other holdup. The hose was passed, and, while the tanks were filling, the boat passed back and forth, making three trips, heavily laden with barrels, packages and boxes. Then, when Forsythe gave the word, the hose was drawn back, the boat hoisted and secured, and the two craft separated without another word of threat or protest.

CHAPTER XI.

"FULLY committed," muttered Denman, as he drew back from the dead-light. "They'll stop at nothing now."

He was about to open his door to visit Florrie, if she had descended, when it was opened from without by Billings, who had brought his breakfast.

"We'll have better grub for a while, sir," he said, as he deposited the tray on the desk. "Suppose you know what happened?"

"Yes, and I see life imprisonment for all of you, unless you are killed in the catching."

"Can't help it, sir," answered Billings, with a depreciatory grin. "We're not going back to jail, nor will we starve on the high seas. All we're waiting for is the course to the African coast—unless—" He paused.

"Unless what?" demanded Denman, leaning over his breakfast.

"Well—unless the vote is to stay at sea. We've got a good, fast boat under us."

"What do you mean? Continued piracy?"

"I can't tell you any more sir," answered Billings, and he went off, after carefully locking the door behind him.

When Denman had finished his breakfast, he quietly let himself out. Tapping on the after door, he saw Florrie's shadow on the translucent glass, and opened it.

She stood before him with the bandages removed, and he saw her features for the first time since she had come aboard. They were pink, and here and there was a blister that had not yet disappeared; but, even so handicapped, her face shone with a beauty that he had never seen in a woman nor imagined in the grown-up child that he remembered. The large, serious, gray eyes were the same; but the short dark ringlets had developed to a wealth of hair that would have suitably crowned a queen.

Denman stood transfixed for a moment, then found his tongue.

"Florrie," he said softly, so as not to be heard from above, "is this really you? I wouldn't have known you."

"Yes, I know," she answered with a smile, which immediately changed to a little grimace of pain. "I was badly scalded, but I had to take off the cloth to eat my breakfast."

"No," he said. "I didn't mean that. I meant you've improved so. Why, Florrie, you've grown up to be a beauty. I never imagined you—you—looking so fine."

"Don't talk like that, Billie Denman. I'm disfigured for life, I know. I can never show my face again."

"Nonsense, Florrie. The redness will go away. But, tell me, why didn't you go aboard that yacht? I overheard you talking to Sampson. Why didn't you go and get away from this bunch?"

"I have just told you," she answered, while a tint overspread her pink face that did not come of the scalding. "There were women on that yacht. Do you think I wanted to be stared at, and pitied, and laughed at?"

"I never thought of that," said Denman; "but I suppose it is a very vital reason for a woman. Yet, it's too bad. This boat is sure to be captured and there may be gunfire. It's a bad place for you. But, Florrie—let me tell you. Did you see what came on board from the yacht?"

"Boxes, and barrels, and the water."

"Yes, and some of those boxes contained whisky and brandy. Whisky and brandy make men forget that they are men. Have you a key for your door?"

"No; I never saw one."

Denman tried his bunch of keys on the stateroom door until he found the right one. This he took off the ring and inserted in the lock.

"Lock your door every time you go in there," he said impressively; "and, Florrie, another thing—keep that pretty face of yours out of sight of these men. Go right in there now and replace the bandages. Then, after a while, about 9 o'clock, go on deck for a walk around, and then let me have your rig. I want a daylight look at things."

She acquiesced, and he went back to his room, locking himself in just in time to escape the notice of Billings, who had come for the tray.

"Are you fellows going to deprive me of all exercise?" he demanded. "Even a man in irons is allowed to walk the deck a little."

"Don't know, sir," answered Billings. "Forsythe is the man to talk to."

"I'll do more than talk to him," growled Denman between his teeth. "Carry my request for exercise to him. Say that I demand the privilege of a convict."

"Very good, sir," answered Billings as he went out.

In a few moments he was back with the news that Forsythe had profanely denied the request. Whereat Denman's heart hardened the more.

He remained quiet until two bells—9 o'clock—had struck, then went out and approached the after door just in time to see Florrie's shadow pass across the glass as she mounted the stairs. He waited, and in about five minutes she came down, and, no doubt seeing his shadow on the door, tapped gently. He promptly opened it, and she said:

"Leave the door open and I will throw you my things in a minute. They are drinking up there."

"Drinking!" he mused, as he waited. "Well, perhaps I can get a gun if they drink to stupidity."

Soon Florrie's hand opened the door, and the garments came through. Denman had little trouble now in donning them, and with his head tied up as before he passed through the captain's apartment to the deck. It was a mild, sunshiny morning, with a little wind, and that from the northeast. White globes of cloud showed here and there, and Denman knew them for the unmistakable sign of the trade winds. But he was more interested in matters on deck. All hands except Billings, who was singing in the galley, and Munson, one of the wireless men, were clustered around the forward funnel, and there were several bottles circulating around. Forsythe, with a sextant in his hand, was berating them.

"Go slow, you infernal sinks," he snarled at them, "or you'll be so drunk in an hour that you won't know your names. Ready—in there, Munson?"

"Yes," answered Munson from the pilot house.

Forsythe put the sextant to his eye, and swept it back and forth for a few moments.

"Time!" he called suddenly, and, lowering the sextant, looked in on Munson.

"Got it?" asked Munson.

"Yes; and have it down in black and white," Forsythe made a notation from the sextant on a piece of paper.

"Now, again," said Forsythe, and again he took a sight, shopped, "Time!" and made another notation.

Then he went into the pilot house, and Munson came out and made the shortest cut to the nearest bottle.

"He's taken chronometer sights," mused Denman as he leaned against the companion hood. "Well, he's progressing fast, but there never was a doubt that he is a scholar."

He went down, and through a crack of the door obtained Miss Florrie's permission to keep the cloak and skirt for the morning, as he wanted to see later how the drinking was progressing. Florrie consented, and he went to his room to wait.

As he waited, the sounds above grew ominous. Oaths and loud laughter, shouts, whoops and grumblings, mingled with Forsythe's angry voice of command, came down to him through the open deadlight. Soon he heard the thumping of human bodies on deck and knew there was a fight going on.

A fight always appealed to him, and yielding to this unworthy curiosity, Denman again passed through the captain's quarters, making sure on the way that Florrie was locked in, and reached the deck.

There were two fights in progress—one a stand-up-and-knock-down affair near the pilot house, the other a wrestling match amidships. He could not recognize the contestants, and, with the thought that perhaps Forsythe was one of them, stepped forward a few feet to observe.

At this moment Billings—the cheerful Billings—came up the galley hatch, no longer cheerful, but morose of face and menacing of gait, as is usual with this type of man when drunk. He spied Denman in his skirt, cloak, hat and bandage, and with a clucking chuckle in his throat and a leering grin on his face made for him.

"Say, old girl," he said thickly, "let's have a kiss."

Denman, anxious about his position and peculiar privilege, backed away, but the unabashed pursuer still pursued, and caught him at the companion. He attempted to pass his arm around Denman, but did not succeed. Denman pushed him back a few feet, then, with the whole weight of his body behind it, launched forth his fist and struck the suitor squarely between the eyes.

Billings was lifted off his feet and hurled backward his whole length before he reached the deck; then he lay still for a moment, and as he showed signs of life Denman darted down to the wardroom, where he shed his disguise as quickly as possible. Then he roused Florrie, passed the garments in to her, warned her to keep her door locked and went to his own room, locking the doors behind him.

He waited and listened, while the shouts and oaths above grew less, and finally silent, though at times he recognized Forsythe's threatening voice. He supposed that by now all of them except Forsythe were stupidly drunk, and was much surprised when, at eight bells, Billings opened the door with his dinner, well cooked and savory. He was not quite sober, but as sober as a drunken man may become who has had every nerve, sinew and internal organ shocked as by the kick of a mule.

"Bad times on deck, sir," he said. "This drinkin's all to the bad." He leered comically through his closed and blackened eyelids and tried to smile; but it was too painful, and his face straightened.

"Why, what has happened?" inquired Denman. "I heard the row, but couldn't see."

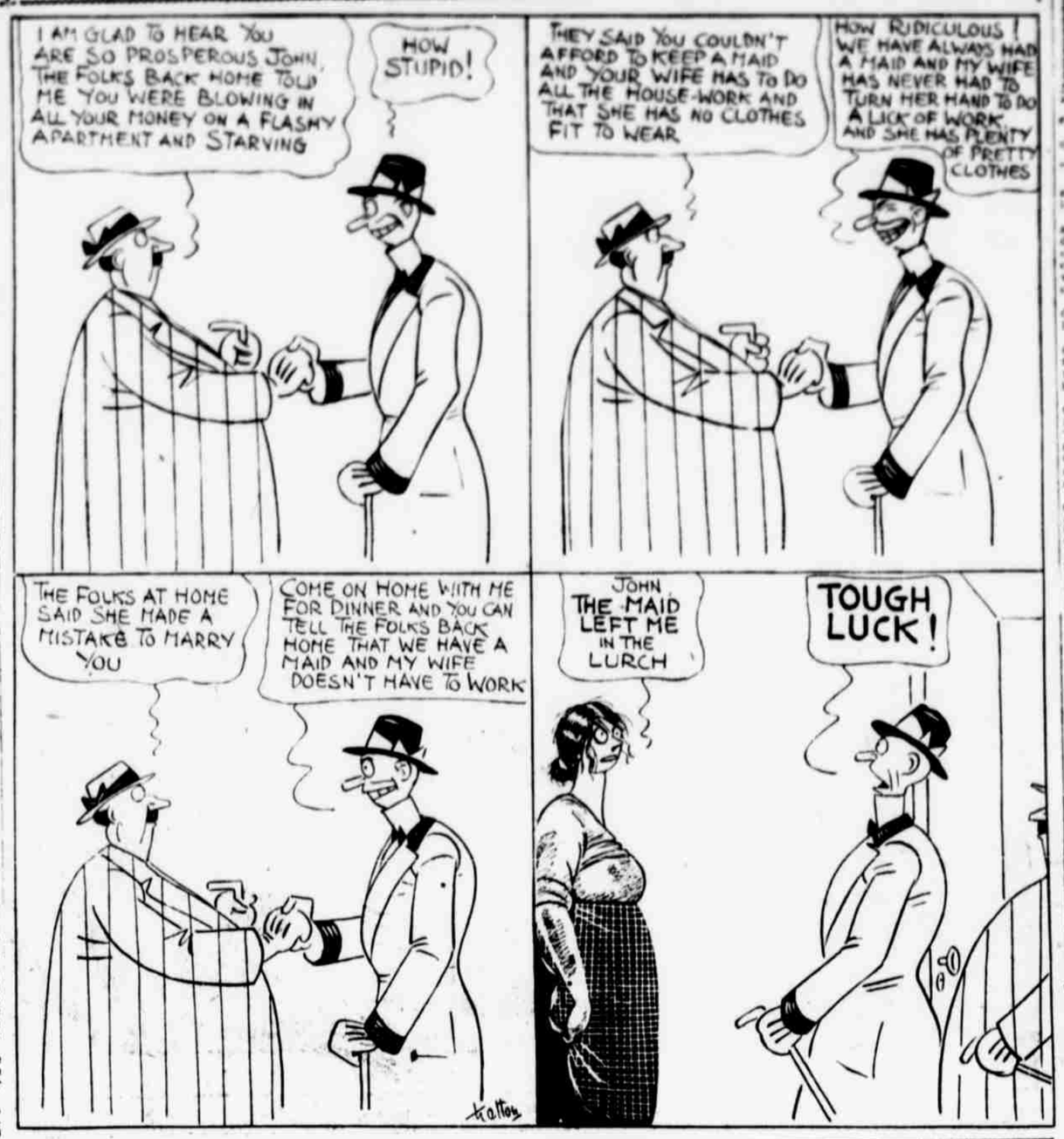
"Nothin' serious, sir," answered Billings, "except to me. Say, sir—that woman aft. Keep away from her. Take it from me, sir, she's a bad un. Got a punch like a battering-ram. Did you ever get the big end of a hand spike jammed into your face by a big man, sir? Well, that's the kind of a punch she has."

Billings departed, and Denman grinned maliciously while he ate his dinner; and after Billings had taken away the dishes—with more comments on the woman's terrible punch—Denman went out into the wardroom, intending to visit Miss Florrie. A glance overhead stopped him and sent him back. The lubber's point on the tell-tale marked due west northwest.

(To Be Continued.)

Tough Luck!

By Maurice Ketten



NEXT WEEK'S COMPLETE NOVEL IN THE EVENING WORLD

The Sword of the Emperor

By ALBERT PAYSON TERHUNE