MANY CARGOES

By W. W. Jacobs

The Skipper of the "Osprey"

It was a quarter to six in the morning as the mate of the sailing barge Osprey came on deck and looked round for the master, who had been sleeping ashore and was somewhat overdue. Ten minutes passed before he appeared on the wharf, and the mate saw with surprise that he was leaning on the arm of a pretty girl of 20, as he hobbled painfully down to the barge.

"Here you are then," said the mate, his face clearing. "I began to think you weren't coming."

"I'm not," said the skipper. "I've got the gout crool bad. My darter here is going to take my place, an' I'm going to take it easy in bed for a bit."

"I'll go and' make it for you," said the mate.

"I mean my bed at home," said the skipper sharply. "I want good nursing an 'attention."

The mate looked puzzled.

"But you don't really mean to say this young lady is coming abroard instead of you?" he said.

"That's just what I do mean," said the skipper. "She knows as much about it as I do. She lived aboard with me until she was quite a big girl. You'll take your orders from her. What are you whistling about? Can't I do as I like about my own ship?"

"O' course you can," said the mate drily; "an' I s'pose I can whistle if I like—I never heard no order against it."

"Gimme a kiss, Meg, an' git aboard," said the skipper, leaning on his stick and turning his cheek to his daughter, who obediently gave him a perfunctory kiss on the left eyebrow, and sprang lightly aboard the barge.

"Cast off," said she, in a business-like manner, as she seized a boat hook and pushed off from the jetty. "Ta-ta, Dad, and go straight home, mind; the cab's waiting."

"Ay, ay, my dear," said the proud father, his eye moistening with paternal pride as his daughter, throwing off her jacket, ran and assisted the mate with the sail. "Lord, what a fine boy she would have made!"

He watched the barge until she was well under way, and then, waving his hand to his daughter, crawled slowly back to the cab; and, being to a certain extent a believer in homeopathy, treated his complaint with a glass of rum.

"I am sorry your father's so bad, miss," said the mate, who was still somewhat dazed by the recent proceedings, as the girl came up and took the wheel from him. "He was complaining a good bit all the way up."

"A willful man must have his way," said Miss Cringle, with a shake of her head. "It's no good me saying anything, because directly my back's turned he has his own way again."

The mate shook his head despondently.

"You'd better get your bedding up and make your arrangements forward," said the new skipper presently. There was a look of indulgent admiration in the mate's eye, and she thought it necessary to check it.

"All right," said the other, "plenty of time for that; the river's a little bit thick just now."

"What do mean?" inquired the girl hastily.

"Some o' these things are not so careful as they might be," said the mate, noting the ominous sparkle of her eye, "an' they might scrape the paint off."

"Look here, my lad," said the new skipper, grimly, "if you think you can steer better than me, you'd better keep it to yourself, that's all. Now suppose you see about your bedding, as I said."

The mate went, albeit he was rather surprised at himself for doing so, and hid his annoyance and confusion beneath the mattress which he brought up on his head. His job completed, he came aft again, and sitting on the hatches lit his pipe.

"This is just the weather for a pleasant cruise," he said amiably, after a few puffs. "You've chose a nice time for it."

"I don't mind the weather," said the girl, who fancied that there was a little latent sarcasm somewhere. "I think you'd better wash the decks now."

"Washed 'em last night," said the mate, without moving.

"Ah, after dark, perhaps," said the girl. "Well, I think I'll have them done again."

The mate sat pondering rebelliously for a few minutes, then he removed his jacket, put on in honor of the new skipper, and, fetching the bucket and mop, silently obeyed orders.

"You seem to be very fond of sitting down," remarked the girl after he had finished. "Can't you find something else to do?"

"I don't know," replied the mate slowly. "I thought you were looking after that."

The girl bit her lip and was looking carefully round her, when they were both disturbed by the unseemly behavior of the master of a passing craft.

"Jack!" he yelled in a tone of strong amazement, "Jack!"

"Halloa!" cried the mate.

"Why didn't you tell us?" yelled the other reproachfully.

"Tell you what?" roared the mystified mate.

The master of the other craft, holding on to the stays with one hand, jerked his thumb expressively toward Miss Cringle and waited.

"When was it?" he screamed anxiously, as he realized that his craft was rapidly carrying him out of earshot.

The mate smiled feebly and glanced uneasily at the girl, who, with a fine color and an air of unconcern, was looking straight in front of her; and it was a relief to both of them when they found themselves hesitating and dodging in front of a schooner which was coming up.

"Do you want all the river?" demanded the exasperated master of the latter vessel, running to the side as they passed. "Why don't you drop anchor if you want to spoon?"

"Perhaps you'd better let me take the wheel a bit," said the mate, not without a little malice in his voice.

"No. You can go an' keep a look-out in the bows," said the girl serenely. "It'll prevent misunderstanding, too. Better take the potatoes with you and peel them for dinner."

The mate complied, and the voyage proceeded in silence, the steering being rendered a little nicer than usual by various nautical sparks bringing their boats closer than was necessary in order to obtain a good view of the fair steersman.

After dinner, the tide having turned and a stiff head windd blowing, they brought up off Sheppey. It began to rain hard, and the crew of the Osprey, having made all snug above, retired to the cabin to resume their quarrel.

"Don't mind me," said Miss Cringle scathingly, as the mate lit his pipe.

"Well, I didn't think you minded," replied the mate. "The old man——"

"Who?" interrupted Miss Cringle, in a tone of polite inquiry.

"Captain Cringle," said the mate, correcting himself, "smokes a great deal, and I've heard him say that you liked the smell of it."

"There's pipes and pipes," said Miss Cringle oracularly.

The mate flung his on the floor and crunched it beneath his heel. Then he thrust his hands in his pockets and, leaning back, scowled darkly up at the rain, as it crackled on the skylight.

"If you are going to show off your nasty temper," said the girl severely, "you'd better go forward. It's not quite the thing, after all, for you to be down here—not that I study appearances much."

"I shouldn't think you did," retorted the mate, whose temper was rapidly getting the better of him. "I can't think what your father was thinking of to let a pert—to let a girl like you come away like this."

"If you were going to say pretty girl," said Miss Cringle, with calm self-abnegation, "don't mind me, say it. The captain knows what he's about. He told me you were a milksop. He said you were a good young man and a teetotaller."

The mate, allowing the truth of the captain's statement as to his abstinence, hotly denied the charge of goodness. "I can understand your father's hurry to get rid of you for a spell," he concluded, being goaded beyond all consideration of politeness. "His gout 'ud never get well while you were with him. More than that, I shouldn't wonder if you were the cause of it."

With this parting shot he departed, before the girl could think of a suitable reply, and went and sulked in the dingy little fo'c'sle.

In the evening, the weather having moderated somewhat, and the tide being on the ebb, they got under way again, the girl coming on deck fully attired in an oilskin coat and sou'wester, to resume the command. The rain fell steadily as they ploughed along their way, guided by the bright eye of the "Mouse," as it shone across the darkening waters. The mate, soaked to the skin, was at the wheel.

"Why don't you go below and put your oilskins on?" inquired the girl, when this fact dawned upon her.

"Don't want 'em," said the mate.

"I suppose you know best," said the girl, and said no more until 9 o'clock, when she paused at the companion to give her last orders for the night.

"I'm going to turn in," said she; "call me at 2 o'clock. Good night."

"Good night," said the other, and the girl vanished.

Left to himself, the mate, who began to feel chilly, felt in his pockets for a pipe, and was in all the stress of getting a light, when he heard a thin, almost mild, voice behind him, and, looking round, saw the face of the girl at the companion.

"I say, are these your oilskins I've been wearing?" she demanded awkwardly.

"You're quite welcome," said the mate.

"Why didn't you tell me?" said the girl indignantly. "I wouldn't have worn them for anything if I had known it."

"Well, they won't poison you," said the mate resentfully. "Your father left his at Ipswich to have 'em cobbled up a bit."

The girl passed them up on the deck, and, closing the companion with a bang, disappeared. It is possible that the fatigue of the day had been too much for her, for when she awoke and consulted the little silver watch that hung by her bunk it was past 5 o'clock, and the red glow of the sun was flooding the cabin as she arose and hastily dressed.

The deck was drying in white patches as she went above, and the mate was sitting yawning at the wheel, his eyelids red for want of sleep.

"Didn't I tell you to call me at 2 o'clock?" she demanded, confronting him.

"It's all right," said the mate. "I thought when you woke would be soon enough. You looked tired."

"I think you'd better go when we get to Ipswich," said the girl, tightening her lips. "I'll ship somebody who'll obey orders."

"I'll go when we get back to London," said the mate. "I'll hand this barge over to the cap'n and nobody else."

"Well, we'll see," said the girl, as she took the wheel. "I think you'll go at Ipswich."

For the remainder of the voyage the subject was not alluded to. The mate, in a spirit of sulky pride, kept to the fore part of the boat, except when he was steering, and, as far as practicable, the girl ignored his presence. In this spirit of mutual forbearance they entered the Orwell, and ran swiftly up to Ipswich.

It was late in the afternoon when they arrived there, and the new skipper, waiting only until they were made fast, went ashore, leaving the mate in charge. She had been gone about an hour when a small telegraph boy appeared, and, after boarding the barge in the unsafest manner possible, handed him a telegram. The mate read it and his face flushed. With even more than the curtness customary in language at a halfpenny a word, it contained his dismissal.

"I've had a telegram from your father sacking me," he said to the girl, as she returned soon after, laden with small parcels.

"Yes, I wired him to," she replied calmly. "I suppose you'll go now."

"I'd rather go back to London with you," he said slowly.

"I daresay," said the girl. "As a matter of fact, I wasn't really meaning for you to go, but when you said you wouldn't I thought we'd see who was master. I've shipped another mate, so you see I haven't lost much time."

"Who is he?" inquired the mate.

"Man named Charlie Lee," replied the girl. "The foreman here told me of him."

"He'd no business to," said the mate frowning. "He's a loose fish. Take my advice now and ship somebody else. He's not at all the sort of chap I'd choose for you to sail with."

"You'd choose?" said the girl scornfully. "Dear me, what a pity you didn't tell me before."

"He's a public house loafer," said the mate, meeting her eye angrily, "and about as bad as they make 'em. But I suppose you'll have your own way."

"He won't frighten me," said the girl. "I'm quite capable of taking care of myself, thank you. Good evening."

The mate stepped ashore with a small bundle, leaving the remainder of his possessions to go back to London with the barge. The girl watched his well-knit figure as he strode up the quay until he was out of sight, and then, inwardly piqued because he had not turned round for a parting glance, gave a little sigh and went below to tea.

The docile and respectful behavior of the newcomer was a pleasant change to the autocrat of the Osprey, and cargoes were worked out and in without an unpleasant word. They laid at the quay for two days, the new mate, whose home was at Ipswich, sleeping ashore, and on the morning of the third he turned up punctually at 6 o'clock, and they started on their return voyage.

"Well, do you know how to handle a craft," said Lee admiringly, as they passed down the river. "The old boat seems to know it's got a pretty young lady in charge."

"Don't talk rubbish," said the girl austerely.

The new mate carefully adjusted his red necktie and smiled indulgently.

"Well, you're the prettiest cap'n I've ever sailed under," he said. "What do they call that red cap you've got on? Tam-o'-Shanter is it?"

"I don't know," said the girl shortly.

"You mean you won't tell me," said the other, with a look of anger in his soft dark eyes.

"Just as you like," said she, and Lee, whistling softly, turned on his heel and began to busy himself with some small matter forward.

The rest of the day passed quietly, though there was a freedom in the new mate's manner which made the redoubtable skipper of the Osprey regret her change of crew, and to treat him with more civility than her proud spirit quite approved of. There was but little wind, and the barge merely crawled along as the captain and mate, with surreptitious glances, took each other's measure.

"This is the nicest trip I've ever had," said Lee, as he came up from an unduly prolonged tea, with a strong smelling cigar in his mouth. "I've brought your jacket up."

"I don't want it, thank you," said the girl.

"Better have it," said Lee, holding it up for her.

"When I want my jacket I'll put it on myself," said the girl.

"All right. No offense," said the other, airily. "What an obstinate little devil you are."

"Have you got any drink down there?" inquired the girl, eyeing him sternly.

"Just a little drop o' whiskey, my dear, for the spasms," said Lee, facetiously. "Will you have a drop?"

"I won't have any drinking here," said she sharply. "If you want to drink, wait till you get ashore."

"You won't have any drinking," said the other, opening his eyes, and with a quiet chuckle he dived below and brought up a bottle and a glass. "Come, you'd better have a drop. It'll put a little color in your cheeks."

"Put it away now, there's a good fellow," said the captain, timidly, as she looked anxiously at the nearest sail, some two miles distant.

"It's the only friend I've got," said Lee, sprawling gracefully on the hatches and replenishing his glass. "Look here. Are you on for a bargain?"

"What do you mean?" inquired the girl.

"Give me a kiss, little spitfire, and I won't take another drop tonight," said the new mate tenderly. Come, I won't tell."

"You may drink yourself to death before I'll do that," said the girl, striving to speak calmly. "Don't talk that nonsense to me again."

She stooped over as she spoke and made a sudden grab at the bottle, but the new mate was too quick for her, and, snatching it up jeeringly, dared her to come for it.

"Come on, come and fight for it," said he. "Hit me if you like, I don't mind. Your little fist won't hurt."

No answer being vouchsafed to this invitation, he applied himself to his only friend again, while the girl, now thoroughly frightened, steered in silence.

"Better get the sidelights out," said she at length.

"Plenty o' time," said Lee.

"Take the helm, then, while I do it," said the girl, biting her lips.

The fellow rose and came toward her, and as she made way for him threw his arm round her waist and tried to detain her. Her heart beating quickly, she walked forward, and not without a hesitating glance at the drunken figure at the wheel, descended into the fo'c'sle for the lamps.

The next moment, with a gasping little cry, she sank down on a locker as the dark figure of a man rose and stood before her.

"Don't be frightened," it said quietly.

"Jack!" said the girl.

"That's me," said the figure. "You didn't expect to see me, did you? I thought perhaps you didn't know what was good for you, so I stowed myself away last night, and here I am."

"Have you heard what that fellow has been saying to me?" demanded Miss Cringle, with a spice of the old temper leavening her voice once more.

"Every word," said the mate cheerfully.

"Why didn't you come up and stand by me?" inquired the girl hotly.

The mate hung his head.

"Oh," said the girl, and her tones were those of acute disappointment, "you're afraid."

"I'm not," said the mate scornfully.

"Why didn't you come up, then, instead of skulking down here?" inquired the girl.

The mate scratched the back of his neck and smiled, but weakly. "Well, I—I thought"—— he began, and stopped.

"You thought"—— prompted Miss Cringle coldly.

"I thought a little fright would do you good," said the mate, speaking quickly, "and that it would make you appreciate me a little more when I did come."

"Ahoy! Maggie! Maggie!" came the voice of the graceless varlet who was steering.

"I'll Maggie him," said the mate, grinding his teeth. "Why, what the — why you're crying."

"I'm not," sobbed Miss Cringle, scornfully. "I'm in a temper, that's all."

"I'll knock his head off," said the mate. "You stay down here."

"Maggie!" came the voice again. "Mag—Hullo!"

"Were you calling me, my lad?" said the mate, with dangerous politeness, as he stepped aft. "Ain't you afraid of

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