



Main Street After the Water Receded, Showing Boats and Wreckage Piled High and Dry on Land. Custom House in the Background.

A QUESTION OF HABIT

“WIMMIN aboard ship I don't 'old with," said the night-watchman, severely. "They'll arsk you all sorts o' silly questions, an' complain to the skipper if you don't treat 'em civil in answering 'em. If you do treat 'em civil, what's the result? Is it a bit o' bacca, or a shilling, or anything like that? Not a bit of it; just a 'thank you,' an' said in a way as though they've been giving you a perfect treat by talking to you.

"They're a contrary sects too. Ask a girl civil-like to stand off a line you want to coil up, and she'll get off an' look at you as though you ought to have waited until she 'ad offered to shift. Pull on it without asking her to step off fust, an' the ship won't 'old her 'ardly. A man I knew once—he's dead now, poor chap, and three widders mourning for 'im—said that with all 'is experience wimmin was as much a riddle to 'im as when he fust married.

"O' course, sometimes you get a gal down the fo'c's'le pretending to be a man, shipping an ordinary seaman or boy, and nobody not a penny the wiser. It's happened before, an' I've no doubt it will again.

"We 'ad a queer case once on a barque I was on as steward, called the Tower of London, bound from the Albert Docks to Melbourne with a general cargo. We shipped a new boy just after we started as was entered in the ship's books as 'Enery Mallow, an' the first thing we noticed about 'Enery was as 'e had a great dislike to work and was terrible sea-sick. Every time there was a job as wanted to be done, that lad 'ud go and be took bad quite independent of the weather.

"Then Bill Dowsett adopted 'im, and said he'd make a sailor of 'im. I believe if 'Enery could 'ave chose 'is father, he'd sooner 'ad any man than Bill, and I would sooner have been an orphan than a son to any of 'em. Bill relied on his langwidge mostly, but when that failed he'd just fetch 'im a

By W. W. JACOBS

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cuff. Nothing more than was good for a boy wot 'ad got 'is living to earn, but 'Enery used to cry until we was all ashamed of 'im.

"Bill got almost to be afraid of 'itting 'im at last, and used to try wot being sarcastic would do. Then we found as 'Enery was ten times as sarcastic as Bill—'e'd talk all round 'im so to speak, an' even take the words out of Bill's mouth to use agin 'im. Then Bill would turn to 'is great natural gifts, and the end of it was when he was about a fortnight out that the boy ran up on deck and went aft to the skipper and complained of Bill's langwidge.

"'Landwidge,' ses the old man, glaring at 'im as if 'e'd eat 'im—'what sort o' langwidge?"

"'Bad langwidge, sir,' ses 'Enery.

"'Repeat it,' ses the skipper.

"'Enery gives a little shiver. 'I couldn't do it, sir,' he ses, very solemn; 'it's like—like you was talking to the bo'sen yesterday.'

"'Go to your duties,' roars the skipper; 'go to your duties at once, and don't let me 'ear any more of it. Why, you ought to be at a young ladies' school.'

"'I know I ought, sir,' 'Enery ses, with a w'imper. 'but I never thought it'd be like this.'

"The old man stares at him, and then he rubs his eyes and stares agin. 'Enery wiped his eyes and stood looking down at the deck.

"'Eavens above,' ses the old man, in a dazed voice, 'don't tell me you're a gal!'

"'I won't if you don't want me to,' ses 'Enery, wiping his eyes agin.

"'What's your name?' ses the old man, at last.

"'Mary Mallow, sir,' ses 'Enery, very softly.

"'What made you do it?' ses the skipper, at last.

"'My father wanted me to marry a man I didn't

want to,' ses Miss Mallow. 'He used to admire my hair very much, so I cut it off. Then I got frightened at what I'd done, and as I looked like a boy I thought I'd go to sea.'

"'Well, it's a nice responsibility for me,' ses the skipper, and he called the mate, who 'ad just come on deck, and asked his advice. The mate was a very straitlaced man—for a mate—and at fust he was so shocked 'e couldn't speak.

"'She'll have to come aft,' he ses, at last. "'O' course she wil,' ses the skipper, and he called me up and told me to clear a spare cabin out for her—we carried a passenger or two sometimes—and to fetch her chest up.

"'I suppose you've got some clothes in it?' he ses, anxious-like.

"'Only these sort o' things,' ses Miss Mallow, bashfully.

"'And send Dowsett to me,' ses the skipper, turning to me agin.

"'We 'ad to shove pore Bill up on deck a'most, and the way the skipper went on at 'im, you'd thought 'e was the greatest rascal unhung. He begged the young lady's pardon over and over agin, and when 'e come back to us 'e was that upset that 'e didn't know what 'e was saying, and begged an ordinary seaman's pardon for treading on 'is toe.

"Then the skipper took Miss Mallow below to her new quarters, and to 'is great surprise caught the third officer, who was fond of female society, doing a step-dance in the saloon all on 'is own.

"That evening the skipper and the mate formed themselves into a committee to decide what was to be done. Everything the mate suggested the skipper wouldn't have, and when the skipper thought of anything, the mate said it was impossible. After the committee 'ad been sitting for three hours it began to abuse each other; least-ways, the skipper abused the mate, and the mate kep' on saying if it wasn't for discipline he knew