

## HER FATHER'S SIN

Captain Bill Johnson had been away for ten years and was very anxious to be home. He had been delayed, not by the sea, for the ship could weather any storm, but by the fact that, upon reaching New York, he found awaiting him an order to the East Indies. There was money in it, which made it worth while, even though he was so impatient to get home to Boston, where his wife, Mary, and daughter, Marguerite, were living. He had not seen Marguerite since she was an infant, and fatherly love made him want to see her again. The trip to the Indies took a year. At last it was over, and joy came to his heart as he piloted his ship into native waters and docked her at his native town.

Once again he was home. Hurriedly he called the first taxi at the wharf and hastened to the eastern part of the city, where he supposed his family were waiting for him. How sweet it would be to hold within his arms his only child, whose baby face he had not looked upon for eleven years, and over all the thrill and glory shone the high splendor of his love for Mary.

The taxi stopped at a white cottage, which the sun bathed in a glow of yellow light. He had expected Mary and Marguerite to rush out to welcome him before he had even alighted. But the door did not open. Even after he had paid the taxi-driver and mounted the steps no signs of life rewarded him.

He took his key from his pocket, but fearing to frighten them, rang the bell. Steps sounded, but not the light steps which trod on his heart whenever he thought of Mary or Marguerite. The door opened and a stranger stood before him.

"Where is Mary?" he said.

The woman started, wiped her face with her apron, and said, "Did you not know? We sent a cable to you. She's dead, sir."

"Dead!" he repeated. All the light was gone from the summer day. Mary—his loving Mary—dead. The sky would dare be blue, but Mary would never more see the blue of Heaven with him. Fate laid its icy hand upon him. He turned to go; he knew not where.

"Won't you stay here and see the little girl?" the woman asked.



"No," he said, harshly, turning towards the street. He was so down-hearted he wanted to see nobody, but fatherly love moved him; he turned and entered.

The house was clean and fresh, as Mary had always kept it, but it lacked the cheerfulness it had had when she herself was there. Marguerite came downstairs with tears in her eyes. She did not recognize her father. Her mother had often talked about Dad, but she had been only an infant when he last sailed from home waters. She had seen his picture, but he had changed so much during the past ten years that she would not know him from his photograph.

"Marguerite!" he said.

Instantly she knew who he was and jumped into his arms. They took seats and talked as father and daughter would under the circumstances.

Thereafter, all his thoughts centered on his child. He was going to make money for her, and he did not care how he made it, so long as the gold flowed in. Mrs. Lee, who had met him at the door, was persuaded to stay and care for Marguerite. He entrusted to her all the services which pertained to his daughter's welfare, he paid her well, and supplied her with all the money needed for Marguerite's education and clothing. Between his voyages he visited them, binding his child to him with his love and bringing her quaint gifts from foreign lands.

As time went on he found a new way to acquire money; the Eighteenth Amendment came into effect, opening up a new source of trade on both land and sea. Before Mary died, Bill had been a Godfearing man, but little by little he had come to disregard the laws both of God and man. The sea was his sphere of operations, so he added rum to his cargo of goods. It was a dangerous trade, but it brought great profits for both the captain and his mates.

After taking up this course of illegal trade, the obtaining of a crew proved a great difficulty. Men knew the consequences if caught and feared them. A crew could not be picked as before; one had to take any man who came along, and very often went to sea minus a member of the required crew. Johnson's crew was poor compared to what it had been formerly; the sailors did not go cheerfully and willingly to their work; they had to be driven like animals. Brutality took the place of



kindness. The captain loathed the sight of the men, whining piteously under the treatment of the first mate.

A person cannot lie and break the law, and still keep himself clean and high-minded. In rum-running one does not deal with people of good standards; such a trade is carried on in the most degraded places in the city. A person cannot frequent these places, breathe their foul air, see horrid sights that are daily occurrences in them, and still keep himself unsoiled. Little by little he falls to the level of his surroundings.

So it was with Bill. By degrees his moral standards lowered. His weakening character showed its effects. When he went to see Marguerite, she looked at him wonderingly, and became a timid, frightened thing. All his tenderness and endearments were required to hold the love of his daughter. Every time he returned home he had to win her back, for she saw in his face the evil and cruelty which he practised.

Nine years passed since Mary died, and Marguerite grew into womanhood. While at Bermuda on one of his voyages, her father received a cable saying:

"I am now twenty and Joe and I were married yesterday; we are waiting for you."

Marguerite a bride! It did not seem possible. It made Bill feel old. Only yesterday she had jumped into his arms for the first time and talked of the sad happening which had befallen them. The baby Marguerite, clinging to him, dreading to let him go; then the girl Marguerite, fearing him, sensing the lowness he tried to hide, but loving him still. How he desired to see her again! He remembered the happy days of his own early marriage. "Lucky Joe," he mused. "Be kind to her, Joe. Be worthy of her. God help you if I see her abused at your hands."

Once again he piloted his ship into home waters, just as anxious as he had been years ago. He had two days to discharge his cargo and reload the boat again. He rushed to see Marguerite, happy in her love, happy in her home. She was alone. Joe tried to stay, she said, but had to go out of town on business for his firm. Bill was not sailing until Wednesday morning and Joe was expected back Tuesday evening, so they would meet then.

All day Tuesday Bill worked with his men, loading the boat. Dick, the first mate, was in and out like a



madman; he was making the rounds of the men, questioning them. The captain knew something was wrong.

"What's the matter, Dick?" he asked.

"It's bad news, captain; the big coon has left us. He got a chance to go on another boat and sailed at dawn. We nearly got into a fight last night. I wasn't going to mix it up with that boy; there was too much at stake."

"We've got to replace him before morning," said the captain. "Take a man with you and drug 'em; any-one at all, so long as he's a man. We'll keep him under till we get to sea and he'll get back sometime."

"Leave it to me, captain; I'll get a man before dawn."

Johnson spent his last night with Marguerite. The white cottage was a bower of blossoms, and Marguerite was the prettiest flower of them all. Her table was set for three—for three who never yet had eaten together. The memory of this table and of Joe's home-coming was to be carried away to the limits of the sea.

"Joe not here yet?" her father asked teasingly, seeing how daintily Marguerite was dressed for the occasion.

"No, Daddy, but he's home. He rang up a while ago. He had to go to the warehouse down at the wharf to see about some shipments. He told me not to worry as he would be home at eight o'clock."

While father and daughter waited, they made great plans for the future, when the captain and the sea would be finally separated; plans that included the three of them. The hours dragged on—nine, ten, eleven—and still Joe did not come. Bill grew restless. What was the young devil doing while Marguerite worried and fretted about him?

They called the warehouse, but the night-watchman said Joe had left there at seven-thirty. They ate the delicious supper in silence. Marguerite did not know what was keeping Joe. He must surely be in an accident. At midnight there was no sign of him, no word.

At dawn the Blue Bird hoisted anchor and was soon gliding over the waves towards the mighty Atlantic. A strong wind was blowing from the east, making the sea rather choppy. The captain had his hands so full watching the winds and waves that the crew was left to Dick. On the fourth day, when the sea had calmed somewhat, he took a walk around to see the crew at work. His eyes travelled about the little group and came to rest on one



face, strange to him, yet familiar. It was a sick face, as sick from mental suffering as from physical want. He looked again to see wherein it was familiar. It might have been the clean boyish look in his eyes—a look he had not seen in his crew for years—but somewhere he had seen that look before, or one like it. The man caught the captain's gaze and changed his expression to one of angry defiance.

Two days later Bill came upon a scene he had witnessed many times since he had begun to go down hill. The roar of Dick's voice, borne to him on the wind, told him that the new recruit was "getting his." He was on board long enough now to get to work, the mate thought.

"To the rigging!" he roared.

The boy stood up.

"I did not agree to this—"

"To—," shouted the mate, and the great hand landed menacingly upon the boy's jaw, sending him reeling to the deck. He staggered to his feet and tried to speak, but the mighty fist shot out and knocked him down again. Three times this was repeated. At last the boy arose, faint and staggering, his face covered with blood from the hideous blows. The captain expected him to yield, but there was a quality to that boy's courage that was out of all proportion to his physical strength. He even tried to strike back at his persecutor. The mate was about to repeat the blows when the captain, determined to end the slaughter, shouted, "Wait!"

He told the boy politely and calmly to go to the rigging. But the boy's anger was up and he shouted, "Curse you!"

This aroused the captain's anger into flame. He repeated the performance of the mate till the boy's body lay almost lifeless on the deck. Sometime during the night his spirit went to its Maker. In the morning the waters, rolling, ebbing endlessly, received the body into its grave.

A few days later the Blue Bird docked at New Orleans and the captain received a telegram. It read thus:

"Daddy! Joe never returned."

"If ever I get hold of him," Bill said to the howling winds and the sea. But before he had finished his threat, the stained white face, courageous in living terror, was



before his mind. Somewhere, someone waited too, for that boy who never returned.

Bill grew to dread the nights. No matter how he strove to govern his imagination, he could not banish that sickening face. Its owner had cursed the captain from the depths of his despair. Call it remorse, call it sting of conscience; that haunting face would not let him rest.

When at last the trip was ended, he hurried to Marguerite. The little cottage was closed. No answer came to his ring. He used his key. There were signs of her occupancy and she was probably out to the store or visiting some friends. He settled himself in the parlour. There was a lonely feeling in the room. He cast his eyes around and, irresistibly, they went to the mantle shelf, and rested upon a photograph which brought him to his feet. The eyes met his, the look of courage in them—the eyes of the boy who had cursed him. He was still staring at it when Marguerite entered.

"Daddy!" she said, running to him. "Daddy, he never returned."

"Who is this?" Bill asked, holding up the picture.

She took it from him and pressed it to her heart.

"It's Joe—my husband."

Bill returned to the sea, but he could not stay. The sight of the deck brought the murder to his mind; the wind sounded the curse in his ears. He could not stay; he could not return. When one morning after a blowy night, he was discovered missing, the first mate sent out the report, "WASHED OVERBOARD." That was all.

—H.G., '30.