

OUR SHORT STORY PAGE

THE CAPTAIN'S ARM

BY PERCEVAL GIBBON

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Ruskin

IN those days the Burdock had a standing charter from Cardiff to Barcelona and back with ore to Swansea, a comfortable round trip which brought the Captain and his son home for one week in every five. It suited the mate's convenience excellently, for he was a man of social habits, and he had at last succeeded in interesting Miss Minnie Davis in his movements. She was the daughter of the Burdock's owner and Arthur Price's cousin in some remote degree, a plump, clean, clever Welsh girl, of quick intelligence and pleasant good nature. He was a tall young man, a little leggy in his way, who filled the eye splendidly. Women said of him that he "looked every inch a sailor," matrons who watched his progress with Minnie Davis considered that they would make a handsome couple. Captain Price, for all his watchfulness, saw nothing of the affair.

Minnie fell into a way of driving down to see the Burdock off. It was thus that Captain Price learned how matters stood. All was clear for a start and the lock was waiting; Arthur Price, in the gold-laced cap he used as due to his rank, was standing by to cast off. The Captain went forthwith to the bridge; Minnie on the dockhead could see his black shore-hat over the weather cloths and his white collar of ceremony. She smiled a little for she did not know quite enough to see the art with which the Captain drew off from his moorings under his own steam, nor his splendid handling of the big boat as he hustled her down the crowded dock and laid her blunt nose cleanly between the piers of the lock. She was watching the brass-buttoned chief mate lording it on the fo'c'sle head, as he passed the lines to haul into the lock; Captain Price was watching him, too. He saw him smiling and talking over the rail to the girl.

The Captain snorted, and gave his whole attention to hauling out, only turning his head at the last minute to wave a farewell to his owner's daughter. The mud pilot took charge and brought her clear; and as soon as he had gone over to his boat, the Captain rang for full steam ahead and waited for the mate to take the bridge.

The young man came up smiling. "It's a fine morning, father," he remarked as he walked over to the binnacle. "I don't reckon to slack off and take in my lines myself," went on the Captain. "I reckon to leave that to my officers. And if an officer carries away a five-inch manilla through makin' eyes at girls on the pier head, I dock his wages for the cost of it and I log him for neglectin' his duty."

The mate looked at him sharply for a moment; the Captain scowled back. "Have you got anything to say to me?" demanded the Captain.

"Yes," said the mate, "I have." He broke into a smile. "But it's something I can't say while you're actin' the man-o'-war Captain on your bridge. It doesn't concern the work o' the ship."

"What does it concern?" asked the Captain.

"Me," said the mate. He folded his arms across the binnacle and looked into his father's face confidently. The Captain softened.

"Well, Arthur?" he said.

"I don't reckon to slack off and take in my lines myself," went on the Captain. "I reckon to leave that to my officers. And if an officer carries away a five-inch manilla through makin' eyes at girls on the pier head, I dock his wages for the cost of it and I log him for neglectin' his duty."

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