

the farmwork, he said he 'guessed he'd put in a patch o' pertaters some time.'

'I do believe I could stand it better if it wasn't for his looks,' the girl said to herself one day. 'I think he gets himself up that way on purpose to madden me.'

Abel was clothing himself from the contents of an old sea-chest, a relic of his early life as a sailor. The chest, which seemed to have no bottom, contained garments of extraordinary age and shape. From time to time he unearthed such as he wanted, and wore them till they were ragged; his hats might have been filched from neighboring scarecrows.

The girl, fresh from the lively, hopeful existence she had left behind in the city, felt a sudden smarting of the eyelids as she looked at him. Old Giggles represented the outward and visible sign of her degradation—for it seemed to her degrading to be tied to a life such as this, and to know that she belonged to it.

Yet after the first moments of despair, a glimmer of hope came to her.

'It's bad enough,' she said to herself. 'But if I had money I could make it better. I could hire a man to do some work, and I could have the house repaired and painted, so that mother could have something like a home. Poor mother, what would she say to find herself in a clean, pretty house such as other women about here have! It's worth trying for.'

She tried hard; she plunged into a very fury of housecleaning. Yet at the end of the first fortnight she could not see that she had made any headway in her fight against the disorder.

At dusk one day Abel came in of his own accord, without having been summoned to supper as usual. In the kitchen doorway he stopped and stared about in a discomfited fashion. Emily was flat on her face on the old lounge, and every line of her prostrate figure expressed such despair that even Abel was alarmed. He tiptoed across the room and spoke to her.

'Sick, Emily?' he asked.

She lifted her tear-stained face and looked at him. 'No, Abel,' she said. 'I'm only discouraged. I've worked all this time, and the place looks more like a pig's shack than ever. If I had twenty backs and broke them all I couldn't make it decent.'

Abel glanced round the room, then back to the woeful figure on the lounge.

'Women,' he ruminated, softly, 'are plumb-full of curious notions!'

That was all the comfort Emily got from him that night. The next morning, however, she was awakened by a commotion in the rooms below, and when she came downstairs, she found Old Giggles scrubbing the kitchen floor as vigorously as ever he had swabbed the decks of the *Ella Maria* in his sailor days.

'What on earth are you doing, and what's happened to the stove?' demanded Emily.

'Blacked it. I never noticed 'twas getting so plaguy rusty. You run in and see to your mother. Coffee's made, and I'll set the table in a minute. You're cap'n to-day, Emily; Cap'n Blue—that's your title. You give your orders, and the crew will carry 'em out. I'll scour the ridgepole and put a clean ruffle round the chimney if you say the word.'

They made a great change in the looks of the place that morning. Abel was strong, and proved to be an efficient helper. The old habits of thoroughness that he had learned on shipboard had apparently come back to him.

'Been quite a while since I put my mind on this kind of thing,' he explained.

Emily stopped polishing a window-pane to look at him curiously. 'What kind of things do you generally put your mind on, Abel? I haven't really known much about you all these years. How did you come to be—'

'How did I come to be shiftless?' Abel calmly finished the sentence. 'Pcople round here say I was born that way. When my parents died, I was put out to a family that knocked me round and worked the gimp out of me 'fore I was old enough to have much.

After a while I spunked up and ran away to sea. There they worked out and thumped out what gimp I had left; and some way or other, since I came ashore there hasn't seemed to be much worth doin' 'cept to sit in the sun and whittle, and think that there ain't a soul after me with a belayin'-pin.'

The grim little autobiography touched the girl. 'We've both got mother to think of now, Abel,' she said.

Old Giggles turned his back suddenly.

'That's so. I ain't done right by Mary. She's had it too hard. What's the next job, Cap'n Blue?'

Things went better after that.

'Captain Blue' coaxed Abel to do some ploughing, and to plant a garden on the sunny slope behind the house. She emptied her lean purse to buy enough wire netting to enclose a yard for the hens, whose unchecked depredations had almost made the place a desert.

'It's such a pretty place, too—this sunny little intervale,' Emily said. 'And our land is the best in town. We can raise corn higher than your head on that strip next to the river. Why, plenty of city people would think we had a gold mine 'n this thirty acres!'

'Farmin' is thunderin' hard work,' was Abel's comment. But he ploughed an extra piece for oats and planted the acre of corn before his new zeal should have a chance to evaporate.

Emily took charge of the garden when things began to come up.

'Work comes hard to my "crew," and I-mustn't push him too much,' she reflected.

From the first, the garden came to be her refuge; among the springing rows of green things she worked away many bitter thoughts of her lost chance in life. It was fortunate, she said to herself, that her narrow little world was beginning to smile on her, for she would never have any other.

She tried less successfully to work away her natural youthful longing for the companionship of persons of her own age.

One day she was in the garden, pulling weeds with an energy that presently attracted Abel's attention. 'Don't work so like fury, cap'n,' he said. 'There's plenty more time after to-day. Did I ever tell you,' he added, 'that my great-grandfather was one of the men who defended this town against an Indian attack two hundred years ago this July?'

'No, Abel. Are you studying history?'

'None to hurt, but the town is. The centennial celebration comes next week. All the descendants of the men who fought the Indians are goin' to sit on the platform.'

'Are you going to?'

'Nobody asked me, but maybe they will. You couldn't find time to fix up that old brown suit of clothes, could you, Cap'n Blue?'

A sudden inspiration came to Emily. 'You shall have a new suit, Abel,' she said. 'Why didn't I think of it before? I believe those brown clothes are the very ones your great-grandfather wore when he routed the red men. We haven't used the money that came for the early peas. Yes, you shall have a new suit from head to heels, and a new hat.'

To her amusement, Old Giggles looked delighted, although somewhat abashed. 'You're mighty good to me, Emily,' he said.

'Nonsense! Didn't you help plant and pick those peas and take them to market? We're partners, Abel. You don't seem to realise your value. I couldn't possibly get along without you.'

Old Giggles made no reply, but she knew by his expression that he would not forget what she had said.

'I ought to have told him before,' she thought to herself. 'I'm sure it's true enough. He's the only real prop I've got, and he's not such a feeble reed as the neighbors think. It's funny that even Abel has hankerings after fame, but it's a little bit pitiful, too. Of course they won't ask him to sit on the platform. I wish they would, but they'd be horrified at the idea of displaying Old Giggles among the Welford celebrities.'

The committee did not ask him; but Emily coaxed him to wear his new suit and hat on the anniversary.

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