

# SIX BELLS AND ALL'S WELL

(Continued from Page 4)



*"Was There Any thing I Could Have Done?"*

In the long nights of sorrow, many a mother has said again and again: "Was there anything I could have done to save my baby? Anything I left undone?"

Oh, you mothers with little babies in your arms—don't let that dull reproach come to you again! Do what you should do now. Learn that nine of ten babies who die are not fed right.

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fanity among the men. This was at the first; it was after he was thoroughly secure in Miss Florence's friendship that he gradually dropped his attitude of respect and answered my orders slowly and sarcastically, with a sneer upon his face and often a laugh. It irritated me, of course, but until he committed some overt act of insubordination I could not reprimand him.

Eventually, however, he gave me my chance, just after we had crossed the Line. Standing at the break of the poop he roared out a string of curses at the men at the braces. I stood aft near the binnacle, and near me stood Miss Florence, ignoring me, as usual, while her father was below, with his window wide open. But I cared nothing for the presence or absence of either of them. I was the signed first mate of the ship, and my orders had been disobeyed. Yet, not doubting that it was chivalry that affected me instead of wounded self-esteem, I waited until the work was done, and called out sharply: "Mr. Taynter, I want to speak to you."

HE turned and entered the port alley with darkening face.

"Mr. Taynter," I said, "you have broken the one rule aboard this ship which must not be broken. What have you to say? Do you mean to disobey my orders?"

"Your orders?" he answered loudly. "Break your rules? What have you to say? What right have you to make rules for me to follow—me, a man who ought to be in your place, not eating at second table—"

"Steady, Mr. Taynter," I interrupted, as calmly as I could. "There is no quarrel at present. I want to know if you mean to disobey my rule against the use of profanity."

"I will if I like," he stormed; "and as for a quarrel, there will be one soon, and a short one. If you call me down again before the men I'll knock your block off and put you out of business. Then we'll see who makes rules."

"Do you mean," I said in a voice rising in anger, "to threaten your superior?"

"You my superior? Not on your life."

"Wait a minute," I said, and went down the poop steps to my room. Pocketing my pistol—one of the newly invented automatics—I returned to the alley and faced the sulky second mate.

"Mr. Taynter," I said, "I admit that you are the better man physically. Your present offence will go down in the log, and if it is repeated, and I am alive when we reach Frisco, there will be a complaint to the Commissioner, which will cost you your ticket. On the other hand, if you strike me, there will be no complaint. I will shoot you dead as soon as I am able to. See this—" I drew forth the pistol and held it flat in the palm of my hand—"It carries ten cartridges in the handle. The whole ten can be expended in two seconds, and each is warranted to go through one second mate and four grizzly bears, or one grizzly bear and four second mates. Watch it."

Aiming over board I spat six bullets into the water in less than a second. He was visibly impressed; he paled and stepped backward, but, as I slipped the weapon into the pistol pocket of my trousers, he gathered himself for a spring. He did not even begin it. I still clutched the pistol, and quickly withdrawing it, I aimed for his face, pinning him in a half-crouched position. Slowly he stood erect, while I lowered the gun and pocketed it again.

"Now, you see," I said, "that I've saved your life by being the quickest. Furthermore, I can hit you on the fore-castle deck from where we stand."

He did not answer, but the Captain

did, coming along the alley to join us.

"What's all this shootin' for?" he asked. "And all this talk o' shootin' irons, and shootin' people?"

"My talk, Captain Hayward," I answered, hotly; for I was angry at his interference. "I have been promised a thrashing by your superior second mate, and I have promised him what he will get if I survive it."

"I heard it all, from beginnin' to end. It seems you object to Mr. Taynter's cussin' the men."

"I most certainly do, Captain."

"Why? You cuss men yourself, don't you?"

"Not in the hearing of a lady, sir, and there is a lady aboard."

"Oh, well, she's used to it; this is her third voyage w' me, and has heard a lot of it—some from me, I reckon. But it seems that I'm the man, not you, to make a rule against it."

"Nevertheless, sir, the rule is made, and I insist that it be obeyed."

"Then fight it out yourselves, but don't bring me into it. However, Mr. Wilson—John Wilson, as it would read in court—don't be too sure o' your rights in the matter. I shot a man once when I was mate—in self-defense, too, and served five years in San Quentin. A good lickin' is better than a dose o' San Quentin."

The practical advice of the old man had cooled us down, but not to the point of answering him. So, he went aft and descended the companion, slowly followed by the second mate, to the binnacle, while I moved myself to the extension of the poop where he had stood when cursing the men. It was in the last dog watch, and the quick darkness of the tropics was closing down; yet there was sufficient light for me to see Taynter and the girl standing side by side near the binnacle. It was his watch on deck, and he had a right to be there; so it was not this that sent me down to my room in a silent rage. It was the sight of her beautiful face, lifted up to his with a smile, and the sound of her musical voice as they conversed.

"You're all kinds of a fool," I growled at myself, as I reloaded the pistol and lay down in my berth for a smoke. "Bill Hayward's daughter, and used to it. Perhaps she can out-curse any man on board." So, despising her now as much as I disliked her, I smoked myself into a cold resolve to keep out of trouble, to let Taynter curse all he liked, and to assist him at it if necessary.

BUT it was not necessary. Taynter emitted no more billingsgate, and we did not quarrel again, nor speak to each other except at the change of watches and in the matter of routine work. He and Miss Florence seemed as friendly as ever, but—I could not help seeing them and hearing them at times. I noticed that she did not smile upon him as before, and that her voice, when audible, held a pleading note, only once did this pleading note become articulate; it was when I was smoking in my berth in the last dog watch and they passed along the port alley together that I heard her say through my open window: "He will surely kill you if you do."

"Sh-sh-sh," he answered, knowing, I suppose, that I was within hearing.

"Got him galleyed," I chuckled, as I rolled over on my left side to bring the hard pistol in my pocket from beneath me. "No wonder she don't smile any more."

But she did smile again, and not only smiled, but laughed at him when, two days later, carrying a pitcher of water, he slipped on the deck and drenched himself. Both the girl and I saw the accident, saw him sit up, a ludicrous picture of bewilderment, and it was a full half minute before he got his breath and

strength to rise. Meanwhile peal after peal of silvery, derisive laughter came from the girl, and I joined her in it; but as Taynter, after an angry order to the watch as to clearing up the wreck, marched aft to his room with glowering mortification in his drenched countenance, the girl's laughter took on a hysterical note, and she, too, hurried aft, going below by the other companion. I was amazed, but knowing nothing about women except their inscrutability, put the incident from my mind. And I only mention it here because it had something to do with the events of the night and the following morning, when *Florence Hayward spoke to me.*

THOUGH it was my turn below in the last dog watch, I kept the deck until Taynter relieved me at eight bells, when I went below, very tired, and turned in, boots and all—falling asleep immediately. I lay on my left side, to avoid the pressure of the pistol, thus facing my open door, and at the regulation time I awoke, my drowsiness somewhat abated by the short sleep, and waited to hear four bells strike. But it did not strike, and the waiting and expectancy combined to waken me thoroughly, enabling me to see distinctly in the half light from the cabin lamp the figure of Taynter sneaking past my door into the forward cabin or mess room. He had no business there at the time and I sat up—wondering. Then I felt of my empty pistol pocket, and rolled out on my feet, non-plussed and nervous,—knowing my protection was gone. I cautiously peeped around through the doorway, then seeing that the forward cabin was empty, softly entered it. Simultaneously a report sounded from the after cabin, and in a moment the swinging door flew open, and Taynter burst through, staggering and stumbling, turned around once and fell on his side at my feet with blood streaming from his mouth and my pistol in his right hand. He gasped and choked a few times, then lay quiet in death, and I picked up the pistol. Then again the swinging door flew open and the Captain appeared in his pajamas, coincident with the appearance of the steward from his room at the starboard side.

"What's this shootin'?" exclaimed the Captain. "Oh, I see," he added, glancing at the body and at the pistol. "You've done it, as you said you would, and you're caught with the goods. Steward, you're a witness. You see him standing over the man he threatened to kill, with the gun in his hand that killed him."

"Yes, sir," answered the steward, his eyes popping in terror and horror.

"On the contrary, Captain," I said calmly. "I did not kill him. He must have shot himself, after taking my gun from my pocket while I was asleep. I always waken at four bells of the middle watch, as I've told you, and this time I saw him sneak past my door into the cabin. Then I missed my pistol, and followed in here just in time to hear the report from the after cabin; then he stumbled through the door with my gun in his hand."

"The h—l you say. It don't happen to be four bells."

I looked at the double faced clock above the door in the bulkhead between the two cabins. It was *six bells*—three o'clock in the morning. My mental alarm had waited one hour.

"I cannot help that, sir," I answered. "I awoke just as he passed my room. I saw this forward cabin empty, I heard the shot from the after cabin, and saw him tumble through the door and fall dead with my gun in his hand. I picked up my property a second before you came through the door."

"But why did he steal your gun and