

Kentucky's Ghost

By Elizabeth Stuart Phelps

True? Every syllable.

That was a very fair yarn of yours, Tom Brown, very fair for a landsman, but I'll bet you a doughnut I can beat it; and all on the square, too, as I say,—which is more, if I don't mistake, than you could take oath to. Not to say that I never stretched my yarn a little on the fo'castle in my younger days, like the rest of 'em; but what with living under roofs so long past, and a call from the parson regular in strawberry time, and having to do the flogging consequent on the inakkeracies of statement follering on the growing up of six boys, a man learns to trim his words a little, Tom, and no mistake. It's very much as it is with the talk of the sea growing strange to you from hearing nothing but lubbers who don't know a mizzen-mast from a church-steeple.

It was somewhere about twenty years ago last October, if I recollect fair, that we were laying in for that particular trip to Madagascar. I've done that little voyage to Madagascar when the sea was like so much burning oil, and the sky like so much burning brass, and the fo'castle as nigh as hell as every fo'castle was in a calm; I've done it when we came sneaking into port with nigh about every spar gone and pumps going night and day; and I've done it with a drunken captain on starvation rations,—duff that a dog on land wouldn't have touched and two teaspoonfuls of water to the day,—but someways or other, of all the times we headed for the East Shone I don't seem to remember any quite as distinct as this.

We cleared from Long Wharf in the ship *Madonna*,—which they tell me means, *My Lady*, and a pretty name it was; it was apt to give me that gentle kind of feeling when I spoke it, which is surprising when you consider what a dull old hull she was, never logging oven ten knots, and uncertain at that. It may have been because of Moll's coming down once in a while in a days that we lay at dock, bringing the boy with her, and sitting up on deck in a little white apron, knitting. She was a very good-looking woman, was my wife, in those days, and I felt proud of her,—natural, with the lads looking on.

'Molly,' I used to say, sometimes,—'*Molly Madonna!*'

'Nonsense!' says she, giving a clack to her needles,—pleased enough though, I warrant you, and turning a very pretty pink about the cheeks for a four-years' wife. Seeing as how she was always a lady to me, and a true one, and a gentle, though she wasn't much at manners on book-learning, and though I never gave her a silk gown in her life, she was quite content, you see, and so was I.

I used to speak my thought about the name sometimes, when the lads weren't particularly noisy, but they laughed at me mostly. I was rough enough and bad enough in those days; as rough as the rest, and as bad as the nest, I suppose, but yet I seemed to have my notions a little different from the others. '*Jake's poetry,*' they called 'em.

We were loading for the East Short trade, as I said, didn't I? There isn't much of the genuine, old-fashioned trade left in these days, except the whiskey branch, which will be brisk, I take it, till the Malagasy carry the prohibitory law by a large majority in both houses. We had a little whiskey in the hold, I remember, that trip, with a good stock of knives, red flannel, handsaws, nails and cotton. We were hoping to be at home again within the year. We were well provisioned, and Dodd,—he was the cook,—Dodd made about as fair coffee as you're likely to find in the galley of a trader. As for our officers, when I say the less said of them the better, it

ain't so much that I mean to be disrespectful as that I mean to put it tenderly. Officers in the merchant service, especially if it happens to be the African service, are brutal men quite as often as they ain't (at least, that's my experience; and when some of your great ship-owners argue the case with me,—as I'm free to say they have done before now,—I say, 'That's *my* experience, sir,' which is all I've got to say);—brutal men, and about as fit for their positions as if they'd been imported for the purpose a little indirect from Davy Jones's Locker. Though they do say that the flogging is pretty much done away with in these days, which makes a difference.

Sometimes on a sunshiny afternoon, when the muddy water showed a little muddier than usual, on account of the clouds being the color of silver, and all the air the color of gold, when the oily barrels were knocking about on the wharves, and the smells were strong from the fish-houses, and the men shouted and the mates swore, and our baby ran about deck a-play with everybody (he was a cunning little chap with red stockings and bare knees, and the lads took quite a shine to him), 'Jake,' his mother would say, with a little sigh,—low, so that the captain never heard,—'think if it was *him* gone away for a year in company the like of that!'

Then she would drop her shining needles, and call the little fellow back sharp, and catch him up into her arms.

Go into the keeping-room there, Tom, and ask her all about it. Bless you! she remembers those days at dock better than I do. She could tell you to this hour the color of my shirt, and how long my hair was, and what I ate, and how I looked, and what I said. I didn't generally swear so thick when she was about.

Well; we weighed, along the last of the month, in pretty good spirits. The Madonna was as staunch and seaworthy as any eight-hundred-tonner in the harbor, if she was clumsy; we turned in, some sixteen of us on thereabouts, into the fo'castle,—a jolly set, mostly old messmates, and well content with one another; and the breeze was stiff from the west, with a fain sky.

The night before we were off, Molly and I took a walk upon the wharves after supper. I carried the baby. A boy, sitting on some boxes, pulled my sleeve as we went by, and asked me, pointing to the Madonna, if I would tell him the name of the ship.

'Find out for yourself,' said I, not over-pleased to be interrupted.

'Don't be cross to him,' says Molly. The baby threw a kiss at the boy, and Molly smiled at him through the dark. I don't suppose I should even have remembered the lubber from that day to this, except that I liked the looks of Molly smiling at him through the dark.

My wife and I said good-bye the next morning in a little sheltered place among the lumber on the wharf; she was one of your women who never liked to do their crying before folks.

She climbed on the pile of lumber and sat down, a little flushed and quivery, to watch us off. I remember seeing her there with the baby till we were well down the channel. I remember noticing the bay as it grew cleaner, and thinking that I would break off swearing; and I remember cursing Bob Smart like a pirate within an hour.

The breeze held steadier than we'd looked for, and we'd made a good offing and discharged the pilot by nightfall. Mr. Whitmarsh—he was the mate—was aft with the captain. The boys were singing a little; the smell of the coffee was coming up, hot and homelike, from the galley. I was up in the maintop, I forget what for, when all at once there came a cry and a shout; and, when I touched deck, I saw a crowd around the fore-hatch.

'What's all this noise for?' says Mr. Whitmarsh, coming up and scowling.

'A stow-away, sir! A boy stowed away!' said Bob, catching the officer's tone quick enough. Bob always tested the wind well, when a storm was brewing. He jerked the poor fellow out of the hold, and pushed him along to the mate's feet.

I say 'poor fellow,' and you'd never wonder why if you'd seen as much of stowing away as I have.

I'd as lief see a son of mine in a Carolina slavegang as to see him lead the life of a stow-away. What with the officers from feeling that they've been taken in, and the men, who catch their cue from their superiors, and the spite of the lawful boy who hired in the proper way, he don't have what you call a tender time.

This chap was a little fellow, slight for his years, which might have been fifteen, I take it. He was palish, with a jerk of thin hair on his forehead. He was hungry, and homesick, and frightened. He looked about on all our faces, and then he cowered a little, and lay still just as Bob had thrown him.

'We—ell,' says Whitmarsh, very slow, 'if you don't repent your bargain before you go ashore, my fine fellow,—me, if I'm mate of the Madonna! and take that for your pains!'

Upon that he kicks the poor little lubber from quarter-deck to bowsprit, on nearly, and goes down to his supper. The men laugh a little, then they whistle a little, then they finish their song quite gay and well acquainted, with the coffee steaming away in the galley. Nobody has a word for the boy,—bless you, no!

I'll venture he wouldn't have had a mouthful that night if it had not been for me; and I can't say as I should have bothered myself about him, if it had not come across me sudden, while he sat there rubbing his eyes quite violent, with his face to the west'ard (the sun was setting reddish), that I had seen the lad before; then I remembered walking on the wharves, and him on the box, and Molly saying softly that I was cross to him.

Seeing that my wife had smiled at him, and my baby thrown a kiss at him, it went against me, you see, not to look after the little rascal a bit that night.

'But you've got no business here, you know,' said I 'Nobody wants you.'

'I wish I was ashore!' said he,—'I wish I was ashore!'

With that he begins to rub his eyes so very violent that I stopped. There was good stuff in him too; for he choked and winked at me, and did it all up, about the sun on the water and a cold in the head, and well as I could myself just about.

I don't know whether it was on account of being taken a little notice of that night, but the lad always kind of hung about me afterwards; chased me round with his eyes in a way he had, and did odd jobs for me without the asking.

One night before the first week was out, he hauled alongside of me on the windlass. I was trying a new pipe (and a very good one, too), so I didn't give him much notice for a while.

'You did this job up shrewd, Kent,' said I, by and by; 'how did you steer in?'—for it did not often happen that the Madonna got fairly out of port with a boy unbeknown in her hold.

'Watch was drunk; I crawled down ahind the whiskey. It was hot, you bet, and dark, I lay and thought how hungry I was,' says he.

'Friends at home?' says I.

Upon that he gives me a nod, very short, and gets up and walks off whistling.

The first Sunday out that chap didn't know any more what to do with himself than a lobster just put on to boil. Sunday's cleaning day at sea, you know. The lads washed up, and sat round, little knots of them, mending their trousers. Bob got out his cards. Me and a few mates took it comfortable under the to'gallant fo'castle (I being on watch below), reeling off the stiffest yarns we had in tow. Kent looked on at euchre awhile, then listened to us awhile, then walked about uneasy.

By and by says Bob, 'Look oven there,—spry!' and there was Kent, sitting curled away in a heap under the stern of the long-boat. He had a book. Bob crawls behind and snatches it up, unbeknown, out of his hands; then he falls to laughing as if he would strangle, and gives the book a toss to me. It was a bit of Testament, black and old. There was writing on the yellow leaf, this way:—

'Kentucky Hodge.
'from his Affecshunate mother
'who prays, For you evry day, Amen.

The boy turned fust red, then white, and straightened up quite sudden, but he never said a word, only sat down again and let us laugh it out. I've lost my reckoning if he ever heard the last of it. He told me one day how he came by the name, but I forget exactly. Something about an old fellow—uncle, I believe—as died in Kentuck, and the name was moniment-like, you see. He used to seem cut up a bit about it at first, for the lads took to it famously; but he got used to it in a week or two, and, seeing as they meant him no unkindness, took it quite cheery.

One other thing I noticed was that he never had the book about after that. He fell into our ways next Sunday more easy.

They don't take the Bible just the way you would, Tom,—as a general thing, sailors don't; though I will say that I never saw the man at sea who didn't give it the credit of being an uncommon good yarn.

But I tell you, Tom Brown, I felt sorry for that boy. It's punishment bad enough for a little scamp like him leaving the honest shone, and folks to home that were a bit tender of him maybe, to rough it on a trader, learning how to slush down a back-stay, or tie reef-points with frozen fingers in a snow-squall.

But that's not the worst of it, by no means. If ever there was a cold-blooded, cruel man, with a wicked eye and a fist like a mallet, it was Job Whitmansh, taken at his best. And I believe, of all the trips I've taken, him being mate of the Madonna, Kentucky found him at his worst. Bradley—that's the second mate—was none too gentle in his ways, you may be sure; but he never held a candle to Mn. Whitmansh. He took a spite to the boy from the first, and he kept it on a steady strain to the last, night along, just about so.

I've seen him beat that boy till the blood ran down in little pools on deck; then send him up, all wet and red, to clear the to'sail halliards; and when, what, what with the pain and faintness, he dizzied a little, and clung to the ratlines, half blind, he would have him down and flog him till the cap'n interfened,—which would happen occasionally on a fair day when he had taken just enough to be good-natured. He used to rack his brains for the words he slung at the boy working quiet enough beside him. It was odd, now, the talk he would get off. Bob Smart couldn't any more come up to it than I could: we used to try sometimes, but we had to give in always. If curses had been a marketable article, Whitmarsh would have taken out his patent and made his fortune by inventing of them, new and ingenious. Then he used to kick the lad down the fo'castle ladder; he used to work him, sick on well, as he wouldn't have worked a dray-horse; he used to chase him all about deck at the rope's end; he used to mast-head him for hours on the stretch; he used to starve him out in the hold. It didn't come in my line to be over-tender, but I turned sick at heart, Tom, more times than one, looking on helpless, and me a great stout fellow.

I remember now—don't know as I've thought of it for twenty years—a thing McCallum said one night; McCallum was Scotch,—an old fellow with gray hair; told the best yarns on the fo'castle always.

'Mark my words, shipmates,' says he, 'when Job Whitmarsh's time comes to go as straight to hell as Judas, that boy will bring his summons. Dead or alive, that boy will bring his summons.'

One day I recollect especial that the lad was sick with fever on him, and took to his hammock. Whitmarsh drove him on deck, and ordered him aloft. I was standing near by, trimming the spanker. Kentucky staggered for'ard a little and sat down. There was a rope's-end there, knotted three times. The mate struck him.

'I'm very weak, sir,' says he.

He struck him again. He struck him twice more. The boy fell over a little, and lay where he fell.

I don't know what ailed me, but all of a sudden I seemed to be lying off Long Wharf, with the clouds the color of silver, and the air the color of gold, and Molly in a white apron with her shining needles, and the baby a-play in his red stockings about the deck.

'Think if it was him!' says she, on she seems to say,—'think of it was *him!*'

And the next I knew I'd let slip my tongue in a jiffy, and given it to the mate that furious and unrespectful as I'll wager Whitmarsh never got before. And the next I knew after that they had the irons on me.

'Sorry about that, eh?' said he, the day before they took 'em off.

'No, sir,' says I. And I never was. Kentucky never forgot that. I had helped him occasional in the beginning,—learned him how to veer and haul a brace, let go on belay a sheet,—but let him alone general speaking, and went about my own business. That week in irons I really believe that lad never forgot.

One time—it was on a Saturday night, and the mate had been uncommon furious that week—Kentucky turned on him, very pale and slow (I was up in the mizzen-top, and heard him quite distinct).

'Mr. Whitmarsh,' says he,—'Mr. Whitmarsh,'—he draws his breath in,—'Mr. Whitmarsh,'—three times,—'you've got the power and you know it, and so do the gentlemen who put you here; and I'm only a stow-away boy, and things are all in a tangle, but *you'll be sorry yet for every time you've laid your hands on me!*'

He hadn't a pleasant look about the eyes either, when he said it.

Fact was, that first month on the Madonna had done the lad no good. He had a surly, sullen way with him, some'at like what I've seen about a chained dog. At the first, his talk had been clean as my baby's, and he would blush like any girl at Bob Smart's stories; but he got used to Bob, and pretty good, in time, at small swearing.

I don't think I should have noticed it so much if it had not been for seeming to see Molly, and the sun, and the knitting-needles, and the child upon the deck, and hearing of it oven, 'Think if it was *him!*' Sometimes on a Sunday night I used to think it was a pity. Not that I was any better than the rest, except so far as the married men are always steadier. Go through any crew the sea over, and it is the lads who have homes of their own and little children in 'em as keep the straightest.

Sometimes, too, I used to take a fancy that I could have listened to a word from a parson, on a good brisk psalm-tune, and taken it in vary good part. A year is a long pull for twenty-five men to be becalmed with each other and the devil. I don't set up to be pious myself, but I'm not a fool, and I know that if we'd had so much as one officer abroad who feared God and kept his

commandments, we should have been the better men for it. It's very much with religion as it is with cayenne pepper,—if it's there, you know it.

If you had your ships on the sea by the dozen, you'd bethink you of that? Bless you, Tom! if you were in Rome you'd do as the Romans do. You'd have your ledgers, and your children, and your churches and Sunday schools, and freed niggers, and 'lections, and what not, and never stop to think whether the lads that sailed your ships across the world had souls, or not,—and be a good sort of man too. That's the way of the world. Take it easy, Tom,—take it easy.

Well, things went along just about so with us till we neared the Cape. It's not a pretty place, the Cape, on a winter's voyage. I can't say as I ever was what you may call scar't after the first time rounding it, but it's not a pretty place.

I don't seem to remember much about Kent along there till there come a Friday at the first of December. It was a still day, with a little haze, like white sand sifted across the sunbeam on a kitchen table. The lad was quiet-like all day, chasing me about with his eyes.

'Sick?' says I.

'No,' says he.

'Whitmarsh drunk?' says I.

'No,' says he.

A little after dark I was lying on a coil of ropes, napping it. The boys were having the Bay of Biscay quite lively, and I waked up on the jump in the choruses. Kent came up while they were telling

'How she lay
On that day
In the Bay of BISCAY O!'

He was not singing. He sat down beside me, and first I thought I wouldn't trouble myself about him, and then I thought I would.

So I opens one eye at him encouraging. He crawls up a little closer to me. It was rather dark where we sat, with a great greenish shadow dropping from the mainsail. The wind was up a little, and the light at helm looked flickery and red.

'Jake,' says he all at once, 'where's your mother?'

'In—heaven!' says I, all taken aback; and if even I came nigh what you might call a little disrespect to your mother, it was on that occasion, from being taken so aback.

'Oh!' said he. 'Got any women-folks to home that miss you?' asks he, by and by.

Said I, 'Shouldn't wonder.'

After that he sits still a little with his elbows on his knees; then he speens at me sidewise awhile; then said he, 'I s'pose I've got a mother to home. I ran away from her.'

This, mind you, is the first time he has even spoke about his folks since he came aboard.

'She was asleep down in the south chamber,' says he. 'I got out the window. There was one white shirt she'd made for meetin' and such. I've never worn it out here. I hadn't the heart. It has a collar and some cuffs, you know. She had a headache making of it. She's been follering me round all day, a sewing on that shirt. When I come in she would look up bright-like and smiling. Father's dead. There ain't anybody but me. All day long she's been follering of me round.'

So then he gets up, and joins the lads, and tries to sing a little; but he comes back very still and sits down. We could see the flickery light upon the boys' faces, and on the rigging, and on the cap'n, who was damning to bo'sen a little aft.

‘Jake,’ says he, quite low, ‘look here. I’ve been thinking. Do you reckon there’s a chap here—just one, perhaps—who’s said his prayers since he came aboard?’

‘No!’ said I, quite short: for I’d have bet my head on it.

I can remember, as if it was this morning, just how the question sounded, and the answer. I can’t seem to put it into words how it came all oven me. The wind was turning brisk, and we’d just eased her with a few reefs; Bob Smart, out furling the flying jib, got soaked; me and the boy sitting silent, were spattered. I remember watching the curve of the great swells, mahogany color, with the tip of the white, and thinking how like it was to a big creature hissing and foaming at the mouth, and thinking all at once something about Him holding of the sea in a balance, and not a word bespoke to beg his favor respectful since we weighed our anchor, and the cap’n yonder calling on Him just that minute to sent the Madonna to the bottom, if the bo’sen hadn’t disobeyed his orders about the squaring of the after-yards.

‘From his Affecshunate mother who prays, For you evry day, Amen,’ whispers Kentucky, presently, very soft. ‘The book’s tone up. Mr. Whitmarsh wadded his old gun with it. But I remember.’

Then said he: ‘It’s ’most bedtime to home. She’s setting in a little rocking-chair,—a green one. There’s a fire, and the dog. She sets all by herself.’

Then he begins again: ‘She has to bring in her own wood now. There’s a gray ribbon on her cap. When she goes to meetin’ she wears a gray bunnet. She’s drawed the curtains and the door is locked. But she thinks I’ll be coming home sorry some day,—I’m sure she thinks I’ll be coming home sorry.’

Just then there comes the order, ‘Port watch ahoy! Tumble up there lively!’ so I turns out, and the lad turns in, and the night settles down a little black, and my hands and head are full. Next day it blows a clean, all but a bank of gray, very thin and still,—about the size of that cloud you see through the side window, Tom,—which lay just abeam of us.

The sea, I thought, looked like a great purple pin-cushion, with a mast on two stuck in on the horizon for the pins. ‘Jake’s poetry,’ the boys said that was.

By noon that little gray bank had grown up thick, like a wall. By sundown the cap’n let his liquor alone, and kept the deck. By night we were in chop-seas, with a very ugly wind.

‘Steer small, there!’ cries Whitmarsh, growing hot about the face,—for we made a terribly crooked wake, with a broad sheer, and the old hull strained heavily,—‘steer small there, I tell you! Mind your eye now, McCallum, with your foresail! Furl the royals! Send down the royals! Cheerily, men! Where’s that lubber Kent? Up with you, lively now!’

Kentucky sprang for’ard at the order, then stopped short. Anybody as knows a royal from an anchor wouldn’t have blamed the lad. I’ll take oath to ’t it’s no play for an old tan, stout and full in size, sending down the royals in a gale like that; let alone a boy of fifteen year on his first voyage.

But the mate takes to swearing (it would have turned a parson faint to hear him), and Kent shoots away up,—the great mast swinging like a pendulum to and fro, and the reef-points snapping, and the blocks creaking, and the sails flapping to that extent as you wouldn’t consider possible unless you’d been before the mast yourself. It reminded me of evil birds I’ve read of, that stun a man with their wings; strike *you* to the bottom, Tom, before you could say Jack Robinson.

Kent stuck bravely as far as the cross-trees. There he slipped and struggled and clung in the dark and noise awhile, then comes sliding down the back-stay.

‘I’m not afraid, sir,’ says he; ‘but I cannot do it.’

For answer Whitmarsh takes to the rope's-end. So Kentucky is up again, and slips and struggles and clings again, and then lays down again.

At this the men begin to grumble a little low.

'Will you kill the lad?' said I. I get a blow for my pains, that sends me off my feet none too easy; and when I rub the stars out of my eyes the boy is up again, and the mate behind him with the nope. Whitmarsh stopped when he'd gone far enough. The lad climbed on. Once he looked back. He never opened his lips; he just looked back. If I've seen him once since, in my thinking, I've seen him twenty times,—up in the shadow of the great gray wings, a looking back.

After that there was only a cry, and a splash, and the Madonna racing along with the gale twelve knots. If it had been the whole crew overboard, she could never have stopped for them that night.

'Well,' said the cap'n, 'you've done it now.'

Whitmarsh turns his back.

By and by, when the wind fell, and the hurry was over, and I had the time to think a steady thought, being in the morning watch, I seemed to see the old lady in the gray bunnet setting by the fire. And the dog. And the green rocking-chair. And the front door, with the boy walking in on a sunny afternoon to take her by surprise.

Then I remember leaning over to look down, and wondering if the lad were thinking of it too, and what had happened to him now, these two hours back, and just about where he was, and how he liked his new quarters, and many other strange and curious things.

And while I sat there thinking, the Sunday-morning stars cut through the clouds, and the solemn Sunday-morning light began to break upon the sea.

We had a quiet run of it, after that, into port, where we lay about a couple of months on so, trading off for a fair stock of palm-oil, ivory, and hides. The days were hot and purple and still. We hadn't what you might call a blow, if I recollect accurate, till we rounded the Cape again, heading for home.

We were rounding that Cape again, heading for home, when that happened which you may believe me or not, as you take the notion, Tom; though why a man who can swallow Daniel and the lion's den, on take down t'other chap who lived three days comfortable into the inside of a whale, should make faces at what I've got to tell I can't see.

It was just about the spot that we lost the boy that we fell upon the worst gale of the trip. It struck us quite sudden. Whitmarsh was a little high. He wasn't apt to be drunk in a gale, if it gave him warning sufficient.

Well, you see, there must be somebody to furl the main-royal again, and he pitched onto McCallum. McCallum hadn't his beat for fighting out the royal in a blow.

So he piled away lively, up to the to'-sail yard. There, all of a sudden, he stopped. Next we knew he was down like heat-lightning.

His face had gone very white.

'What's to pay with *you*?' roared Whitmarsh.

Said McCallum, '*There's somebody up there, sir.*'

Screamed Whitmarsh, 'You're gone an idiot!'

Said McCallum, very quiet and distinct: 'There's somebody up there, sir. I saw him quite plain. He saw me. I called up. He called down. Says he, '*Don't you come up!*' and hang me if I'll stir a step for you on any other man to-night!'

I never saw the face of any man alive go the turn that mate's face went. If he wouldn't have relished knocking the Scotchman dead before his eyes, I've lost my guess. Can't say what he would have done to the old fellow, if there'd been any time to lose.

He'd the sense left to see there wasn't overmuch, so he orders out Bob Smart direct.

Bob goes up steady, with a quid in his cheek and a cool eye. Half-way amid to'-sail and to'-gallant he stops, and down he comes, spinning.

'Be drowned if there ain't!' said he. 'He's sitting square upon the yard. I never see the boy Kentucky, if he isn't sitting on that yard. "*Don't you come up!*" he cries out,—"*don't you come up!*" '

'Bob's drunk, and McCallum's a fool!' said Jim Welch, standing by. So Welch volunteers up, and takes Jaloffe with him. They were a couple of the coolest hands aboard,—Welch and Jaloffe. So up they goes, and down they comes like the rest, by the back-stays, by the run.

'He beckoned of me back!' says Welch. 'He hollered not to come up! not to come up!'

After that there wasn't a man of us would stir aloft, not for love nor money.

Well, Whitmarsh he stamped, and he swore, and he knocked us about furious; but we sat and looked at one another's eyes, and never stirred. Something cold, like a frost-bite, seemed to crawl along from man to man, looking into one another's eyes.

'I'll shame ye all, then, for a set of cowardly lubbers!' cries the mate; and what with the anger and the drink he was as good as his word, and up the rat-lines in a twinkle.

In a flash we were after him,—he was our officer, you see, and we felt ashamed,—me at the head, and the lads following after.

I got to the futtock shrouds, and there I stopped, for I saw him myself,—a palish boy, with a jerk of thin hair on his forehead; I'd have known him anywhere in this world on t'other. I saw him just as distinct as I see you, Tom Brown, sitting on that yard quite steady with the royal flapping like to flap him off.

I reckon I've had as much experience fore and aft, in the course of fifteen years aboard, as any man that even tied a reef-point in a nor'easten; but I never saw a sight like that, not before non since.

I won't say that I didn't wish myself well on deck; but I will say that I stuck to the shrouds, and looked on steady.

Whitmarsh, swearing that that royal should be furled, went on and went up.

It was after that I heard the voice. It came straight from the figure of the boy upon the upper yard.

But this time it says, '*Come up! Come up!*' And then, *a little louder*, '*Come up! Come up! Come up! Come up!*' So he goes up, and next I knew there was a cry,—and next a splash,—and then I saw the royal flapping from the empty yard, and the mate was gone, and the boy.

Job Whitmarsh was never seen again, alow on aloft, that night or ever after.

I was telling the tale to our parson this summer,—he's a fair-minded chap, the parson, in spite of a little natural leaning to strawberries, which I always take in very good pant,—and he turned it about in his mind some time.

'If it was the boy,' says he,—' and I can't say as I see any reason especial why it shouldn't have been,—I've been wondering what his spiritooal condition was. A soul in hell,'—the parson believes in hell, I take it, because he can't help himself; but he has that solemn, tender way of preaching it as makes you feel he wouldn't have so much as a chicken get there if he could help it,—'a lost soul,' says the parson (I don't know as I get the words exact) ,—'a soul that has gone and been and got there of its own free will and choosing would be as like as not to haul another

soul alongside if he could. Then again, if the mate's time had come, you see, and his chances were oven, why, that's the will of the Lord, and it's hell for him whichever side of death he is, and nobody's fault but hisn; and the boy might be in the good place, and do the errand all the same. That's just about it, Brown,' says he. 'A man goes his own gait, and, if he won't go to heaven, he *won't*, and the good God himself can't help it. He throws the shining gates all open wide, and he never shut them on any poor fellow as would have entered in, and he never, never will.'

Which I thought was sensible of the parson, and very prettily put.

There's Molly frying flapjacks now, and flapjacks won't wait for no man, you know, no more than time and tide, else I should have talked till midnight, very like, to tell the time we made on that trip home, and how green the harbor looked a sailing up, and of Molly and the baby coming down to meet me in a little boat that danced about (for we cast a little down the channel), and how she climbed up a laughing and a crying all to once, about my neck, and how the boy had grown, and how when he ran about the deck (the little shaver had his first pain of boots on that very afternoon) I bethought me of the other time, and of Molly's words, and of the lad we'd left behind us in the purple days.

Just as we were hauling up, I says to my wife: 'Who's that old lady setting there upon the lumber, with a gray bunnet, and a gray ribbon on her cap?'

For there was an old lady there, and I saw the sun all about her, and all on the blazing yellow boards, and I grew a little dazed and dazzled.

'I don't know,' said Molly, catching onto me a little close. 'She comes there every day. They say she sits and watches for her lad as ran away.'

So then I seemed to know, as well as every I knew afterwards, who it was. And I thought of the dog. And the green rocking-chain. And the book that Whitmarsh wadded his old gun with. And the front-door, with the boy a walking in.

So we three went up the wharf,—Molly and the baby and me,—and sat down beside her on the yellow boards. I can't remember rightly what I said, but I remember her sitting silent in the sunshine till I had told her all there was to tell.

'*Don't cry!*' says Molly, when I got through,—which it was the more surprising of Molly, considering as she was doing the crying all to herself. The old lady never cried, you see. She sat with her eyes wide open under her gray bunnet, and her lips a moving. After a while I made it out what it was she said: 'The only son—of his mother—and she—'

By and by she gets up, and goes her ways, and Molly and I walk home together, with our little boy between us.