

XI. HE HELPS WASH THE DECKS, AND THEN GOES TO BREAKFAST

The next thing I knew, was the loud thumping of a handspike on deck as the watch was called again. It was now four o'clock in the morning, and when we got on deck the first signs of day were shining in the east. The men were very sleepy, and sat down on the windlass without speaking, and some of them nodded and nodded, till at last they fell off like little boys in church during a drowsy sermon. At last it was broad day, and an order was given to wash down the decks. A great tub was dragged into the waist, and then one of the men went over into the chains, and slipped in behind a band fastened to the shrouds, and leaning over, began to swing a bucket into the sea by a long rope; and in that way with much expertness and sleight of hand, he managed to fill the tub in a very short time. Then the water began to splash about all over the decks, and I began to think I should surely get my feet wet, and catch my death of cold. So I went to the chief mate, and told him I thought I would just step below, till this miserable wetting was over; for I did not have any water-proof boots, and an aunt of mine had died of consumption. But he only roared out for me to get a broom and go to scrubbing, or he would prove a worse consumption to me than ever got hold of my poor aunt. So I scrubbed away fore and aft, till my back was almost broke, for the brooms had uncommon short handles, and we were told to scrub hard.

At length the scrubbing being over, the mate began heaving buckets of water about, to wash every thing clean, by way of finishing off. He must

have thought this fine sport, just as captains of fire engines love to point the tube of their hose; for he kept me running after him with full buckets of water, and sometimes chased a little chip all over the deck, with a continued flood, till at last he sent it flying out of a scupper-hole into the sea; when if he had only given me permission, I could have picked it up in a trice, and dropped it overboard without saying one word, and without wasting so much water. But he said there was plenty of water in the ocean, and to spare; which was true enough, but then I who had to trot after him with the buckets, had no more legs and arms than I wanted for my own use.

I thought this washing down the decks was the most foolish thing in the world, and besides that it was the most uncomfortable. It was worse than my mother's house-cleanings at home, which I used to abominate so.

At eight o'clock the bell was struck, and we went to breakfast. And now some of the worst of my troubles began. For not having had any friend to tell me what I would want at sea, I had not provided myself, as I should have done, with a good many things that a sailor needs; and for my own part, it had never entered my mind, that sailors had no table to sit down to, no cloth, or napkins, or tumblers, and had to provide every thing themselves. But so it was.

The first thing they did was this. Every sailor went to the cook-house with his tin pot, and got it filled with coffee; but of course, having no pot, there was no coffee for me. And after that, a sort of little tub

called a "kid," was passed down into the fore-castle, filled with something they called "burgoo." This was like mush, made of Indian corn, meal, and water. With the "kid," a little tin cannikin was passed down with molasses. Then the Jackson that I spoke of before, put the kid between his knees, and began to pour in the molasses, just like an old landlord mixing punch for a party. He scooped out a little hole in the middle of the mush, to hold the molasses; so it looked for all the world like a little black pool in the Dismal Swamp of Virginia.

Then they all formed a circle round the kid; and one after the other, with great regularity, dipped their spoons into the mush, and after stirring them round a little in the molasses-pool, they swallowed down their mouthfuls, and smacked their lips over it, as if it tasted very good; which I have no doubt it did; but not having any spoon, I wasn't sure.

I sat some time watching these proceedings, and wondering how polite they were to each other; for, though there were a great many spoons to only one dish, they never got entangled. At last, seeing that the mush was getting thinner and thinner, and that it was getting low water, or rather low molasses in the little pool, I ran on deck, and after searching about, returned with a bit of stick; and thinking I had as good a right as any one else to the mush and molasses, I worked my way into the circle, intending to make one of the party. So I shoved in my stick, and after twirling it about, was just managing to carry a little burgoo toward my mouth, which had been for some time standing ready open

to receive it, when one of the sailors perceiving what I was about, knocked the stick out of my hands, and asked me where I learned my manners; Was that the way gentlemen eat in my country? Did they eat their victuals with splinters of wood, and couldn't that wealthy gentleman my father afford to buy his gentlemanly son a spoon?

All the rest joined in, and pronounced me an ill-bred, coarse, and unmannerly youngster, who, if permitted to go on with such behavior as that, would corrupt the whole crew, and make them no better than swine.

As I felt conscious that a stick was indeed a thing very unsuitable to eat with, I did not say much to this, though it vexed me enough; but remembering that I had seen one of the steerage passengers with a pan and spoon in his hand eating his breakfast on the fore hatch, I now ran on deck again, and to my great joy succeeded in borrowing his spoon, for he had got through his meal, and down I came again, though at the eleventh hour, and offered myself once more as a candidate.

But alas! there was little more of the Dismal Swamp left, and when I reached over to the opposite end of the kid, I received a rap on the knuckles from a spoon, and was told that I must help myself from my own side, for that was the rule. But my side was scraped clean, so I got no burgoo that morning.

But I made it up by eating some salt beef and biscuit, which I found to be the invariable accompaniment of every meal; the sailors sitting

cross-legged on their chests in a circle, and breaking the hard biscuit, very sociably, over each other's heads, which was very convenient indeed, but gave me the headache, at least for the first four or five days till I got used to it; and then I did not care much about it, only it kept my hair full of crumbs; and I had forgot to bring a fine comb and brush, so I used to shake my hair out to windward over the bulwarks every evening.