

**Selected Story.**

**EDWARD BROWN, STOKER.**

We were very quiet, Mary and I, as we strolled out of the churchyard, down one of the lanes, and then crossing a stile, we went through a couple of fields and sat down on another stile, with the high hedge on either side of us and the meadow that they were beginning to mow at the other end, one glorious bed of flowers and soft, feathery grass.

"Polly," says I at last, breaking the silence, "ain't this lovely?"  
"And you feel better?" she says, putting her hand on mine.  
"Better!" I says, taking a long draught of the soft, sweet-scented air, and filling my chest, "better, old girl; I feel as if I was growing backward into a boy."

"And you fifty last week!" she says.  
"Yes," I says, smiling, "and you forty-seven next week." And then we sat thinking for a bit.

"Polly," I says at last, as I sat there drinking in that soft breeze and feeling it give me strength, "it's worth begin ill, only to feel as I do now."

For you see I'd been very bad, else I dare say I'm not the man to go hanging about churchyards and watching fanerals. I'm a stoker and my work lies in steamers trading to the East. I'd come home from my last voyage bad with fever, and had been carried home to die, as my mates thought, and it was being like this and getting better that had set me thinking so seriously and made me so quiet. Not that I was ever a noisy sort of a man, as any one who knows me will say. And now after getting better, the doctor had said I must go into the country to get strong; so there was no more voyaging until I was strong. There was nothing for it but to leave the youngsters under the care of the eldest girl and a neighbor and come and take lodgings out in this quiet Surrey village.

Polly never thought I should get better, and one time no more did I; for about a month before this time, as I lay hallow-eyed and yellow on the bed, knowing, too, how bad I looked, for I used to make young Dick bring me the looking glass every morning, the doctor came as usual and like a blunt Englishman, I put it to him flat.

"Doctor," I says, "you don't think I shall get better?" and I looked him straight in the face.

"Oh, come, come, my man!" he says, smiling, "don't look at the black side of it like that."

"None of that doctor," I says. "Out with it like a man. I can stand it. I've been expecting to be drowned or blown-up half my life, so I shan't be scared at what you may say."

"Well, my man," he says, "your symptoms are of a very grave nature. You see the fever had undermined you before you came home, and unless—"

"All right, doctor," I says, "I understand. You meant that unless you can get a new plate in the boiler she won't stand another voyage."

"Oh, come! we won't look upon it as a hopeless case," he says. "There's always hope." After a little more talk he shook hands and went away.

Next day when he came I had been thinking it all over, and was ready for him. I don't believe I was a bit better. In fact I know I was drifting fast, and I saw it in his eyes as well.

I waited till he had asked me his different questions, and then, just as he was getting up to go, I asked him to sit down again.

"Polly, my dear," I says, "I want a few words with the doctor," and she put her apron up to her eyes and went out, closing the door after her very softly, while the doctor looked at me curious like, and waited for me to speak.

"Doctor," I says, "you've about given me up. There, don't shake your head, for I know. Now, don't you think I'm afraid to die, for I don't believe I am; but look here. There's seven children down stairs, and if I leave my wife a widow, with the few pounds I have been able to save, what's to become of them? Can't you pull me through?"

"My dear fellow," he says honestly, "I've done everything I can for your case."

"That's what you think, doctor," I says. "But look here. I've been at sea thirty years, and in seven wrecks. It's been like dodging death with me a score of times. Why, I pulled my wife there regularly out of the hands of death, and I'm not going to give up now. I've been—"

"Sop, stop," he says gently. "You're exciting yourself."

"Not a bit," I says, though my voice was quite a whisper. "I've had this over all night, and I come to think I must be up and doing my duty."

"But my good man—" he began.

(To be Continued.)

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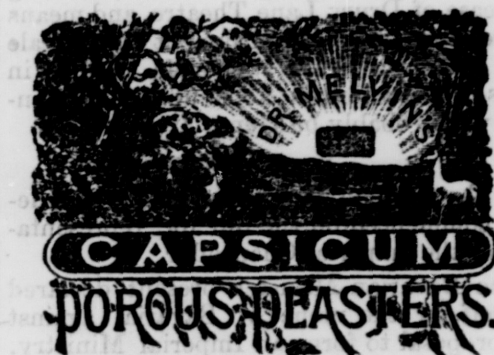
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