

## WEE TEENY

THE *Vital Spark*, in ballast, Clydeward bound, lay inside the passenger steamer, ready to start when the latter had got under weigh, and Para Handy and his mate meanwhile sat on the foc'sle-head of "the smertest boat in the tred" watching the frantic efforts of lady excursionists to get their husbands on the steamer before it was too late, and the deliberate efforts of the said husbands to slink away up the village again just for one more drink. Women loudly defied the purser to let the ship go away without their John, for he had paid his money for his ticket, and though he was only a working man his money was as good as anybody else's; and John, on the quay, with his hat thrust back on his head, his thumbs in the arm-holes of his waistcoat, and a red handkerchief full of dulse at his feet, gave a little display of step dancing that was responsible for a great deal of the congestion of traffic at the shore end of the gangway.

Among the crowd who had got on board was a woman with eleven children. She was standing on the paddle-box counting them to make sure—five attached to the basket that had contained their food for the day, other four clinging to her gown, and one in her arms. "Yin, twa, three, fower, and fower's eight, and twa's ten, and then there's wee Teeny wi' her faither doon the caibin." She was quite serene. If she could have seen that the father—at that moment in the fore-saloon singing—

"In the guid auld summer time,  
In the guid auld summer time,  
She'll be your tootsy-wootsy  
In the guid auld summer time"—

had no wee Teeny with him, she would have been distracted. As it was, however, the steamer was miles on her way when a frantic woman with ten crying children all in a row behind her, and a husband miraculously sobered, made a vain appeal to the captain to go back to Ardrishaig for her lost child.

The child was discovered on the quay by the local police ten minutes after the excursion steamer had started, and just when Para Handy was about to cast off the pawls. She was somewhere about three years old, and the only fact that could be extracted from her was that her name was Teeny. There had probably not been a more contented and self-possessed person on Ardrishaig Quay that day: she sucked her thumb with an air of positive relish, smiled on the slightest provocation, and showed the utmost willingness to go anywhere with anybody.

"The poor wee cratur!" said Para Handy sympathetically. "She minds me fearfully of my brother Cherlie's twuns. I wudna wonder but she's a twuns too; that would be the way the mistake would be made in leavin' her; it's such a terrible thing drink. I'm no' goin' to ask you, Dougie, to do anything you wudna like, but what would you be sayin' to us takin' the wean wi' us and puttin' her shore at Rothesay? Mind you, chust if you like yourself."

"It's your own vessel, you're the skipper of her, and I'm sure and I have no objections, at aal at aal," said Dougie quite heartily; and it was speedily arranged with the police that a telegram should be sent to wait the captain of the excursion steamer at Rothesay, telling him the lost child was following in the steam-lighter *Vital Spark*.

Macphail, the engineer, and The Tar kept the child in amusement with pocket-knives, oil-cans, cotton-waste, and other maritime toys, while the

captain and Dougie went hurriedly up the village for stores for the unexpected passenger.

"You'll not need that mich," was Dougie's opinion; "she'll fall asleep as soon as it's dark, and no' wake till we put her ashore at Rothesay."

"Ah, but you canna be sure o' them at that age," said the captain. "My brother Cherie wass merrit on a low-country woman, and the twuns used to sit up at night and greet in the twa languages, Gaelic and Gleska, till he had to put plugs in them."

"God bless me! plugs?" said Dougie astonished.

"Ay, chust plugs," said the captain emphatically. "You'll see them often. They're made of kahouchy, with a bone ring on them for screwing them on and off. It's the only thing for stopping them greetin'."

"To let you ken," he said, "I wass feared the wean would sterve. Nothing in the ship but sea biscuits and salt beef. I went into wan shop and got a quart of milk on draught, half a pound of boiled ham the same as they have at funerals, and a tin tinny For a Good Girl. Dougie wassna slack either; he went into another shop and got thruppence worth of sweeties and a jumping-jeck. It wass as nice a thing ass ever you saw to see the wee cratur sittin' on the hatches catin' away and drinkin' wi' the wan hand, and laughing like anything at the jumpin'-jeck wi' the other. I never saw the ship cheerier; it wass chust sublime. If Dougie wass here himsel' he would tell you. Everything wass going first-rate, and I wass doon below washing my face and puttin' on my other jeket and my watch-chain out o' respect for the passenger, when Dougie came doon in a hurry wi' a long face on him, and says—

"She's wantin' ta-ta."

"Mercy on us, she canna be more ta-ta than she iss unless we throw her over the side," I says to Dougie. But I went up on dake and told her she would

be ta-ta in no time becaase the ship wass loggin' six knots and the wind wi' us.

"Ta-ta," says she, tuggin' my whiskers the same as if I wass merrit on her—ah, man! she wass a nice wee thing. And that good-natured! The best I could do wass to make The Tar show her the tattoo marks on his legs, and Dougie play the trump (Jew's harp), and when she wass tired o' that I carried her up and doon the dake singin' 'Auld Lang Syne' till she wass doverin' over.

"She's goin' to sleep noo," I says to Dougie, and we put her in my bunk wi' her clothes on. She wanted her clothes off, but I said, 'Och! never mind puttin' them off, Teeny; it's only a habit.' Dougie said, if he minded right, they always put up a kind of a prayer at that age. 'Give her a start,' I says to Dougie, and he said the 23rd Psalm in Gaelic, but she didn't understand wan word of it, and went to sleep wi' a poke o' sweeties in her hand.

"We were off Ardlamont, and Macphail wass keepin' the boat bangin' at it to get to Rothesay before the mother went out of her wuts, when I heard a noise doon below where Teeny wass. I ran doon and found her sittin' up chokin' wi' a sweetie that wass a size too lerge for her. She wass black in the face.

"Hut her on the back, Peter!" said Dougie.

"Hut her yoursel'; I wudna hurt her for the world," I says, and Dougie said he wudna do it either; but he ran up for The Tar, that hasna mich feelin's, and The Tar saved her life. I'm tellin' you it wass a start! We couldna trust her below, herself, efter that, so we took her on dake again. In ten meenutes she fell doon among Macphail's engines, and nearly spoiled them. She wassna hurt a bit, but Macphail's feelin's wass, for she wass wantin' the engines to her bed wi' her. She thought they

were a kind of a toy. We aye keep that up on him yet.

"My Chove! this wean's no canny,' said Dougie, and we took her up on dake again, and put up the sail to get as mich speed out of the vessel as we could for Rothesay. Dougie played the trump even-on to her, and The Tar walked on his hands till she was sore laughing at him. Efter a bit we took oor eyes off her for maybe two meenutes, and when we turned roond again Teeny wass fallin' doon into the foc'sle.

"This iss the worst cargo ever we had,' I says, takin' her up again no' a bit the worse. 'If we don't watch her like a hawk aal the time she'll do something desperat before we reach Rothesay. She'll jump over the side or crawl doon the funnel, and we'll be black affronted.'

"I wudna say but you're right,' said Dougie. We put her sittin' on the hatch wi' the jumpin'-jeck, and the tin tinny For a Good Girl, and my watch and chain, Dougie's trump, the photygraf of The Tar's lass, and Macphail's new carpet slippers to play wi', and the three of us sat roond her watchin' she didna swallow the watch and chain.

"When I handed her over to her mother and father on Rothesay Quay, I says to them, 'I'm gled I'm no' a mother; I would a hunder times sooner be a sailor.'

"But it's a nice thing a wean, too; for a week efter that we missed her awful."

HUGH FOULIS.

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