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“N’ Bill ’e said to Hanner,
 Ez Hanner sed t’ me,
 ‘There ain’t no thing like livin’
 When ye’r livin’ on th’ sea.
 F’r it’s up ‘n’ shoot th’ hawser,
 ‘N’ it’s down ‘n’ shoot th’—

“Good Lor’, matey, there she is, bright ‘n’ blooming’ as a slapped brisket!”

The big freighter Uranus was looming up like an ebon shadow in the white moonlight. Just ahead the third buoy was bobbing and laughing and grimacing as if all the little devils at the bottom of Lake St. Clair were struggling to carry it under. You cannot but have seen the third buoy. Perhaps you have heard its story. Vesselmen will show it to you as you enter the Government Canal from below, and the legend on its side will advise you that when not on a frolic it is guarding the twenty-foot channel. If your captain is communicative he will further make affidavit that on nights so black that the lantern at the vessel’s peak shone like a faraway star, when Heaven and the earth and the deep, black abyss over the side were wrapped in one smothering pall, he had seen the third buoy careening like mad a mile from its course across Lake St. Clair; that others had seen little devils playing in its light, and will end with the finding of Jacob Strauss.

Whatever may be laid to superstition, it remains an indisputable fact that the third buoy from the lower end of the Government Canal has oftentimes been found amiss, and it is not disparaging to seamen that an ordinary man should call it queer.

"But w'en th' cook's yer wife, Matey,
Bo'sun, mate 'n' all,
'N' th' little tub y' ride in
'S yer amber-tinted hall,
W'en——"

The man with the banjo throttled himself unwittingly, rolled over and heaved a sigh and a load of tobacco in the direction of the third buoy.

"Mark me," he said, leaning close to the other. "I aint natcherly superstitious, 'n' jes' as natcherly I aint afeared o' man 'r devil, but w'en it comes t' th' workings o' th' Creator I wot 'n a little book at 'ome that'll carcumvent y'r reasonin'. 'Twas th' thirteenth, matey, 'n' God knows th' laws o' th' sea aint like th' laws on land."

The third buoy slipped alongside, tossing furiously in the short, deep swells chopped up under the Uranus' bows.

"Jes' on th' edge on't ees bobbed up before me wi' its head a-ha'f out 'n' sparklin' white in th' moonshine, bubblin' 'n' sparklin' 'n' a-spittin' at me wi' ha'f a mill-un little sparks o' fire in its eyes, 'n' th' water swimmin' up 'n' round' like black ile. 'N' there's been Mamie at 'ome ever since we were married four years ago, God bless 'er sweet 'eart, a-beggin' 'n' a-prayin' fr me t' cum off th' lakes 'n' sat up sun'eres along th' shore in a little cottage all our own 'n' w'ere we could teach th' baby together, God bless 'im! They think a lot o' me, matey, does my sweet Mamie 'n' th' kid, but I can't leave wi' th' bad luck o' thirteen floaters followin' me. I got t' find my fourteenth, 'n' then I'm goin' t' make a little 'ome wi' 'oney-suckle 'n' jas'mine all about, 'n' th' big lake at the foot o' th' garden 'n' Mamie 'n' th' baby gettin' prettier 'n' 'appier every day."

The Uranus slowed up as she entered the canal. On either side was the sparse sixty feet of white sand and willows, and from the stern the two men peered back through the curious shadows of the moon-whitened night at the glimmering of the last buoy.

Amidships a figure had crouched in dread doubt for a full minute. Cautiously it drew itself from the shadow of the rail, disclosing the face and tattered raiment of a black man. It was the face of a man who had suffered—and suffered deeply; none too intellectual features, but kind features emaciated and cavernous with starvation. The hands shone black with a blackness that did not come of blood, and the naked feet were thick with the dirt and grime of a stowaway's bed. Over the side ran a rope. The black fingers had worked it there by degrees, and sedulously quiet the lithe, ragged form slipped after.

In the narrow canal the wash of a big freighter is fierce and noisy and full of foam. It interests sailors, especially the whirling,

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spattered froth on brilliantly moonlit nights, and the two men stood watching the play of it under the stern.

In the midst of the seething gulf for a lightning moment appeared a face, white, ghastly, awful! Oftentimes white light playing on ebon will turn it to snow. Once—twice—three times it turned and twisted, a whirling, water-logged mess, and from the throat of Jacob Strauss went up such a cry of joy that a man hears only once or twice in a life-time.

Slowly the Uranus was lost in the gloom of a white night, but back over the waste came the voice of a man who had found his fate and was going home to his wife and child:

“But w'en th' cook's y'r wife, Matey,
Bo'sun, mate 'n' all,
'N' th' little tub y' ride in
'S yer amber-tinted hall——”

* * * * *

A few moments later the same black, emaciated face raised itself weakly over the breakwater, hung there for an instant, then fell back. Another essay and the long, dripping fingers clutched tenaciously in the sand, caught a willow-root half bared and drew the tired, buffeted form above the wash of the water.

And who built the little 'ome w' 'oney-suckle 'n' jas'mine, w' th' big lake at th' foot o' th' garden?

Was it the fourteenth floater of Jacob Strauss, or the black stowaway?

