

# Hello m'mselle said

and punished me with a strap.

But I learned to tie knots.

At last, very proud in my uniform, I found myself on the way from Liverpool to Manchester with a brand-new seaman's book to join my first ship, the 9,400-ton freighter Pacific Fortune.

But as I climbed up the gangplank all my old doubts crowded back into my mind.

For the dour old Scottish bos'n on deck looked me up and down and commented bluntly: "Och, I thought it was a boy we were getting."

I was shattered. But as the ship headed out of the Manchester Ship Canal, past the famous Liver bird above Liverpool pier and into the open sea some of my confidence returned.

## Puzzled

I was at sea. I thought I had made it.

My shipmates were puzzled. They couldn't make me out at all. As I sat drinking beer with them and listening to their tales and back-chat I think they were a bit shy of me.

But I worked hard to become one of them, and the wonder of that first voyage helped to keep my mind off my terrible problem; to brush aside the occasional sneers and insults.

Kingston, Jamaica, first, then on to Cristobal. Through the Panama Canal to Los Angeles, San Francisco, Seattle, Vancouver. Finally to a little port called Wood Fibre, where I was told there are six men to every woman. And then home via Antwerp and Rotterdam.

At each port of call I went ashore with the crew, trying so hard to be one of them. I sang with them, drank with them, even sometimes fought with them.

Half in amazement and half in horror I listened to the stories of their conquests...

It was on my second trip that I became more aware that I was changing.

My hips were rounder. The texture of my skin seemed to have become softer. My eyelashes were growing, and I had no trace of a beard.

I caught myself imagining what it would be like to be a woman. The beautiful clothes I'd buy.

More and more I found myself creeping away to be alone.

Far into the night I'd sit



tucked away in a corner of the poop deck, listening to the swish of the water at the bows. And thinking, thinking.

The crisis came at Los Angeles. I was ashore with some of the crew on a drinking bout when one of them, very drunk, made a pass at me.

I half-fought and half-chided the man away. But nothing was the same after that.

The next day, in desperation now, I went to see a doctor. I meant to tell him all my troubles. But I funk'd it and said I was depressed and could not sleep.

He gave me a bottle of sleeping tablets. Soon afterwards, back on board, I swallowed the lot.

## Despair

They rushed me to the Seaside Memorial Hospital at Long Beach, California, where for three days I hovered between life and death.

That was the end of my seafaring. Weeks later, when I had recovered, they shipped me home as a passenger. Back in Liverpool they stamped my seaman's book: "Medically unfit."

I was heartbroken. I lied hard to my parents and friends, telling them only that I'd had a nervous breakdown.

Secretly I went off to the Walton Hospital, Liverpool, and asked for a course of treatment to make me more manly. It lasted a year, and at the end of it they told me it was no use.

Day after day, night after

night, I went out to the end of the Liverpool pier, watching the ships I'd never be able to join now. Often I was close to tears.

It was there, on the end of that pier, that I caught my first glimpse of the twilight world.

The boys with hideous mincing manners, over-pink cheeks, made-up eyes and exaggerated clothes.

Is this, I wondered, what fate intends for me? In my loneliness and despair I could stand it no longer.

I jumped into the cold, dark

April with her  
fiance, Mr.  
Arthur Corbett.

waters of the Mersey. As they closed over my head I prayed that the strong currents would sweep me to my death out where the ships were passing.

**NEXT WEEK. — I am dragged into degradation. The twilight world. Dope fiends for my friends. Grotesque parties.**