

***Simpson and
Delilah***

**Louis Arthur
Cunningham**

Illustrated by

R. M. Brinkerhoff

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Simpson and Delilah

By

LOUIS

ARTHUR

CUNNINGHAM

*The singular story of a
henpecked sailor and a
bos'n who couldn't do
his own love-making*

Illustrated by

R. M. BRINKERHOFF

Did I ever hear o' mariners comin' back to life after bein' thought dead—did I?" Captain Jonas Hallan leaned forward, glared at his questioner for a moment, then laughed derisively and sank back against the leather cushions of the best chair in the Pilot Rooms. "Listen, me lad, an' I'll tell ye a story that'll make this here Enoch Harding an' Robertson Crusoe, either one o' them, look like a jackass barkentine alongside a China clipper. Ever hear o' Simpson an' Delilah?"

"You mean Sampson, Captain," gently corrected young Larkin, mate of the *Lady Rodney*, who had been fool enough to start Captain Hallan on one of his interminable yarns. "Sampson, a Biblical character, noted for his great strength."

Captain Hallan made a neat bull's-eye through the gleaming maw of the brass cuspidor, and licked his lips. He transfixed Bob Larkin with an eye as mean and glittering as that of the Ancient Mariner.

Son, (said he) I say Simpson an' I mean Simpson. I know the Bible better'n you do. This man I'm speakin' of was named Percy Simpson; he were second mate on a brig sailin' out o' this port, an' as harmless an' mild a feller as you'd meet in a dozen v'yages round the world. And, as is often the case with mild-mannered men, he were married to the sharpest-tongued battle-ax of a woman that ever skinned her elbow leanin' on a back fence to harangue the next-door neighbors. Percy Simpson was a happy man at sea, but once he set foot ashore in town here, there wasn't a dog led a life worse'n him. Her name was Delilah; his, as I've been tryin' to tell ye, was Percy Simpson.

This brig he were second mate of was named the *Blanche K. Lister*—an old tub if ever there was one. Only a miracle kept her afloat, no company

would underwrite her, an' the only reason Percy Simpson stuck to her was because he hoped she'd founder some fine day an' then he wouldn't have to come home to Delilah's infernal tongue-lashin's an' hair-pullin's. Aye, a quiet rating, down deep in Davy Jones' locker, would 'a' been better for Percy than havin' to live with this awful female who was his duly wedded wife, who he'd taken in in one o' his weaker moments when rum got the better of 'im.

Anyways, Percy sailed down the Bay o' Fundy one fine day on the *Blanche K. Lister*. He'd been a month in port, and in all that time he'd suffered misery beyond all namin'. If he stayed in the house Delilah's tongue never stopped waggin'. She fancied that Percy, when he were in furrin' ports in the course of his v'yages, got drunk an' went around with other weemen an' the like. There never was anything farther from the truth, for Percy were just as scaredlike an' quiet in Singapore or Port Said as he would be in his own kitchen with her standin' over him. He were an' awful fool, I'll admit; since he got blamed for everything anyway an' got called all kinds of a blaggard, he might as well have merited it. But not Percy.

He was a happy man when the *Blanche K. Lister* weighed anchor an' hoisted her rotten canvas for a v'yage around the Horn to Valparaiso. He'd be away for months an' months: maybe a good gale o' wind would put a finish to the old brig, or maybe a drunken seaman would drop a belayin' pin on him from up aloft an' split his skull. These were happy prospects for Percy Simpson, just as they'd be for you, me lad, if you was wed to a chin-waggin' hag like Delilah.

Well, sir, to get on with this yarn, Percy's wishes was soon granted. Oh, she rounded the Horn all right, after beatin' her way down a stormy Easting—she rounded the Horn an' then one night she shoves her nose slap into a sunken ledge an', with a high sea runnin' and it blowin' a gale o' wind at the time, she soon gets battered to pieces. They la'nched the boats, an' the captain thought he'd got everybody safe away from her, but when dawn comes Percy Simpson is nowhere to be found. They cruise around a bit, but never see sight nor sign of him.

Word comes to Saint John in the coorse o' time that the *Blanche K. Lister* had been wrecked: an' everyone said, "About time that old scow got sunk." An' when they heard about Percy Simpson goin' down with her they said, "Poor Perce, he's better off." Delilah, she sheds a bucketful o' crocodile tears, gets her duds dyed black an' dons the widder's

weeds, an' lets it be known that, despite the fact o' Percy bein' a brute to her an' gettin' drunk in furrin' parts an' runnin' around with dockside hussies, she loved him an' would never cease to love him—no, sir. But presently she gets a bit of a legacy from Percy's savin's, an' sets herself up in a snug little bar down in Drury Lane, where the bedbugs ate the man.

Now that, ye might say, sounds like the end o' the story. The curtain seems to fall. Here's Percy dead an' at peace, an' Delilah dishin' out the grog to the seamen an' shipworkers who drop in at the Widder Simpson's for a drop to warm themselves. Everyone speaks kind-like about Percy, an' the widder sheds a few tears, dries her eyes with the corner of her apron, an' sighs an' says, "Yes, I miss 'im somethin' terrible. A lone woman has a hard time of it in this world. She needs a strong man, such as Percy were, to be her defense an' safeguard." But the bloom's come back to her cheek, whether from the extra drop she takes or not, I couldn't say; an' she simpers an' giggles like a schoolgirl when a fine strappin' mariner strolls in and rings his money on the bar.

An' Percy has been given up for dead, o' coorse. Five years go by, eight years, ten, an' Percy Simpson is pretty well forgotten. The widder gets more rosy-cheeked an' plump, an' she has a few suitors, mostly simple-minded seamen an' old codgers clever enough to think about featherin' their nest by marryin' her an' helpin' to tend bar but not with sense enough to recall poor Percy Simpson an' how death were a kind release to him, far better'n bein' married to her.

At this time, ten years after the loss o' the *Blanche K. Lister*, I'm sailin' as mate aboard the *Star of Egypt*, Liverpool owned an' plyin' between Canada an' the Old Country. A Bluenose ship she were, with Hurricane Jack Magee for master an' a crew o' Downeasters as hard as iron, with brine runnin' in their veins instead o' blood.

We finished dischargin' a cargo of deals at Liverpool, an' were goin' home in ballast to load again. A couple of Dutchmen, ordinary seamen aboard the *Star*, got into a brawl with some Liverpool Irishmen an' were soon occupyin' comfortable berths in the hospital. Hurricane Jack had bit of a reputation, if you'll remember, an' seamen was a mite shy of signin' on with him.

Anyways, Hurricane Jack he goes to a crimp there in Liverpool this afternoon, an' says to get him a couple of men an' have them aboard afore midnight when the *Star of Egypt* is due to up-anchor an' away. Hurricane Jack tells me to go along with this crimp, whose name is Bull Haney, an' see that Bull don't wish any deaf mutes or Rooshian Finns or cripples on us. It's

been done afore, ye know—seamen put aboard a vessel unconscious, an' when they wake up they ain't seamen a-tall but shop clerks or the like.

“He won't play any tricks on me,” I promises Hurricane. “I'll see what we're gettin', sir, never fear.”

I take meself off to Bull Haney's crimping joint, which is an old shack down by the docks with a bar on the ground floor an' sailors' boardin'-house, so called, aloft. There's plenty o' men there, an' very few that wouldn't cut your throat for a smooth sixpence. The place is filled with smoke an' profanity, and you'd think these fellers was bein' paid double wages to drink the world dry, the way they're swillin' the rum into 'em. Some weemen there too, but the less said o' them the better.

I find Bull Haney in the back room. A big, blubbery scoundrel, with his eyes so far lost in his fat head that ye could scarce tell whether he were sleepin' or wakin'. An' he speaks in a little whisper of a voice that makes me think someone must be listenin', until it dawns on me it's the way he has to talk, due to him havin' his throat eat up by whisky or bronical asthma or somethin'.

“I got me eye on your men, sir,” he wheezes, while I'm still wonderin' if he can see me with those invisible eyes of his. “I got 'em seelected, an' now it's just a matter o' knockin' 'em on the head an' slingin' 'em aboard your vessel. Come along of me now.”

We walks to the back door, an' there's a covered wagon, like a Black Maria, waitin' there. I gets in, an' Bull clammers up after me, an' the wagon begins to creak an' list away over to starboard with the weight o' the big lubber—twenty stone if he were a ounce.

Bull, he clucks to the horse, the worst lookin' old hunk of crowbait as ever was held on his feet by a pair of shafts, an' the beast staggers forward, an' the wagon, with me and Bull aboard, pushes him along the street.

“I got me men to lure 'em out,” wheezes Bull. “Lure 'em out, d'ye see, sir? Then—why, then, it's just a little tap on the skull—ha-ha!” He gives me a poke with his elbow in the ribs, an' I gives him a better one, resentin' this familiarity. He goes “pop,” like a balloon, an' I think maybe I've bust him. But, no, sir, he comes to, an' we rumble down one dark street an' up another.

“Ah,” whispers Bull. “There's one o' them now.”

I haven't time to look hard before someone is heaved into the rear o' the wagon, an' Bull drives off. After a few minutes Bull says:

“Ah, there’s the other one.”

I get a look at this lad. He’s standin’ near a street light an’ I note he has a black beard, an’ I recalled seein’ him in the bar. He’s feelin’ pretty good now, an’ he’s leanin’ again’ the lamp-post an’ singin’:

“Oh, I spent all me tin
Wi’ the lasses, drinkin’ gin,
An’ across the briny ocean I must wander—”

He never said or sang a truer word than that. Just then Bull’s retainers snuk up on him an’ one clipped him on the jaw with a fist decked out with knuckle-dusters. The other picks him up, an’ they cart him over an’ dump him in the wagon.

When we get to the dock, there’s a little matter o’ papers an’ finance. I make an inspection of the new additions to our crew, find them sound enough seemingly, and have them slung aboard in bowlines from one o’ the *Star’s* boats, which rowed us out to the mooring buoy where she lay, all ready to put to sea.

When the crew is mustered aft next mornin’ ye never see a sorrier sight than the man with the black beard. A seaman, when shanghaied, usually takes it philosophical enough, but this one’s eye is wild, and, what with his flowin’ beard an’ all, he looks like one o’ them profits ye see now an’ again’ on church windows.

“What’s your name?” says I.

“Don’t matter, sir,” says he. “I’ll answer to anything. Ye can call me Abel Brown, which is the name I go by.”

I see he’s not meanin’ to be impertinent, so I merely nods an’ looks keenly at ’im. He’s pretty much agitated, an’ he comes to me presently an’ says:

“Are we really bound for Saint John, sir?”

I tells him we are indeed, an’ he seems to stagger as if a terrible blow’s been dealt him. Then he tugs at his beard an’ seems to find some consolation in that. He falls to work, an’ proves himself a first-rate seaman. But he never bothers with anybody in the fo’c’sle nor utters a word he doesn’t need to. A bit of a mystery, he is, but his mates leave him pretty well alone, thinkin’ him a bit cracked in the head.

The bos'n, however, takes a shine to 'im. The bos'n was Paddy Marney, a little wizened-up man with a raggedy mustache an' the finest stock o' profanity I ever did hear, bar none. Whatever he sees in Abel Brown is more than anyone can tell, but he cultivates Abel, gives him baccy, quizzes him, an' generally h'ants the life outen him.

We talked about it on the quarter-deck, an' Hurricane Jack says to me one day:

“Jonas, why is the bos'n forever taggin' around after Abel Brown there? Ye better find out about it. I don't think Brown's right in his head, an' I'm darn' sure the bos'n is no rock o' sense. Ain't he tryin' to marry the Widder Simpson who keeps the bar over in Drury Lane?”

“He is, sir,” I says. “Which proves he's crazy. I'll see what I can find out about all this.”

Next day I corners Paddy Marney an' says to him:

“What's all this about, you an' Abel Brown bein' such friends? Ye never were very sociable with anyone else.”

The bos'n looks confused, chews hard on his baccy, an' squints up at me for a moment afore he answers. Then in a hoarse whisper that reminds me o' Bull Haney, he says:

“Mr. Hallan, sir. I'm a man in love.”

“Ye're a bloody old weasel an' a fool into the bargain,” I tells him. “An' what's that got to do with Abel Brown?”

“Well, sir,” says the bos'n. “I'm nowt but a plain ordinary seafarin' man, an' the words I know is mostly swear words. This, I'm hopin', is me last v'yage. I'm gettin' old now, an' want to settle down in snug harbor. Don't ye see, sir, I'm in love with a deevine creetcher, an' I haven't gumption enough or refinement, so ye might say, or knowledge of how to put what I want to say in words. An' who else could I get to do it that wouldn't make a botch of it, or try to put in a word for themselves, or somethin' else. But Abel Brown is the man for that little job. He's not a marryin' man, he tells me. He reads books—I've seen 'im—an' he talks as smooth as a shipowner, sir.”

“I see,” says I. “An' what does Abel himself think o' this here proposition?”

“He ain't so eager, sir, which is why I have to keep after him so. I feel he's me one hope. I'd be tongue-tied meself; but not him. I think maybe he'll give in after we make port. D'ye know what I think about him, sir?” He

peers around the corner o' the galley very cautiouslike, then winks at me very knowin'. "I think he ain't what he pretends to be. I think, sir, he's a lord or somethin' in-cog-night-oh—that's what he is."

Lookin' at Abel Brown, ye might readily believe there was some truth in it, for he was what ye'd call a distinguished-lookin' man. However, I tells the bos'n that men grow beards very often to hide the fact they have no chin. But that doesn't impress him at all, an' he continues to dance attendance on Abel Brown for the rest o' the v'yage.

Finally the bos'n calls me in to help plead his cause, an' the two of us gets to haranguin' Abel, who just tugs at that thick beard o' his an' looks like the Grand Dook of Rooshia.

"I don't know," says he. "I don't know, sir. I don't know, bos'n. I tell ye I'm no hand at this sort o' thing. I don't like weemen—never did."

"Ye should help a shipmate," I tells him sternly. "The bos'n here's been kind to ye, an' the least ye could do is act as his ambassador an' say for him what he can't say himself."

"All right then," says Abel Brown desperatelike, "I'll do it! Who is this woman, bos'n?"

"Oh," says Paddy, "ye wouldn't know 'er, Abel. She's a widder, Delilah Simpson, an' she keeps a bar in Drury Lane."

Abel Brown stands transfixed. He looks like part of a waxwork show—Man With Beard Hit by Ax—just like that. Then, after a moment, he comes to life an' looks like a wild man all around him, as if seekin' a means of escape; but there's only the sea, wild an' grey, reachin' for miles into the dim greyness of sky. And Abel Brown comes to himself with a sigh an' says:

"I'll do me very best for ye, bos'n, an' I'm prayin' to God from now on—prayin' as I never did afore—that you'll get the Widder Simpson."

Well, sir, we reach port, and presently the bos'n an' Abel Brown goes ashore, after gettin' all dressed up in their Sunday-go-to-meetin's, the bos'n in his own an' Abel Brown in the cook's good blue suit an' silk muffler. I'll tell ye, Mister, Abel, dressed up like that, did look somethin' grand, an' the bos'n appeared like a old wrinkled monkey beside him. I read a pome since then about Miles Standish, who was a feller as got another to plead his case with the girl of his choice, just as the bos'n was

gettin' Abel Brown to propose for him. An', though the pome wasn't written at that time, I says to meself, "Bos'n, you're makin' a big mistake."

The bos'n, however, is feelin' pretty good. They drop into the first bar, which is Sharky Dan's, an' put away a glass or two of grog. Then at all the other saloons along the way they stop an' have a few, till by the time they reach Drury Lane they're feelin' brave an' happy an' singin' a deep-sea chantey, so full o' spirits are they. An' Abel Brown says to the bos'n:

"Bos'n," says he, "if you get the Widder Simpson you'll be the happiest man on earth."

"Aye," says the bos'n. "That I will."

"So will I," says Abel.

The Widder Simpson is sittin' in her snug little bar—a fine, strappin' figure of a woman. Her cheeks get rosier still when she sees the bos'n, who hung around there a lot on previous v'yages, and she bows an' curtsies very sweet to Abel Brown. The bos'n has a room above the shop, where the Widder Simpson keeps lodgers, an' now he says he'll just take a run up to his room. An' with that, he gives Abel a nudge and a wink, and whispers that this is the time.

Abel leans on the bar and strokes his fine black beard with nervous hand. The widder looks very coy, an' says she hopes they had a pleasant v'yage, an' it's good to see them comin' home, an' the world is a hard an' lonely place for widders.

"Not for a right pretty an' youthful one like you, surely," says Abel Brown. "Hardly, for a fine figger of a woman like you, Mrs. Simpson. Sure, not a man in all the world but would be proud to take your late lamented husband's place."

"A fine man," said the widder. "There'll never be another like 'im. I loved him, an' he loved me more'n words can tell. It must 'a' been horrible for him to die away off there, an' I can always imagine him callin' for me with his dyin' breath an'—"

She began to weep, an' Abel handed her the cook's blue silk muffler an' consoled her as best he could.

"I'm thinkin' ye won't be lonesome much longer, Mrs. Simpson," says he. "There's a fine an' handsome an' generous man will have somethin' to say to you after a while. He'll make ye happy, I know."

“Oh, Mr. Brown!” says the widder. And if the bar hadn’t been between ’em, she’d ’a’ leaned on Abel’s chest.

Abel he goes upstairs in a hurry an’ tells the bos’n that now’s his time, that he’s paved the way an’ the widder’s in a receptive an’ mellow mood. Abel himself is shakin’ from the ordeal, an’ he turns to the bottle of rum with which the bos’n has been fortifyin’ himself an’ drinks mightily. Then, what with the excitement an’ all he’s drunk, he wishes the bos’n the best of luck an’ falls down on the bed an’ goes to sleep.

The bos’n, all smiles, goes downstairs into the bar, prepared to conquer, confident that the widder an’ her comfortable bar an’ all will henceforth sail under the house flag of the Marneys. Yes, he figures from what Abel said that she’s about ready to melt into his arms. He finds her still sittin’ there, lookin’ very sweet an’ mild an’ happy.

“Well, Delilah,” says he. “Are ye all ready now to become Mrs. Paddy Marney?”



She jumps up like a tornado an' races around the bar. "What!" says she. "Ye little ould weasel. Is it me you're askin' to marry ye? I'll see ye further first."

She jumps up like a tornado an' races around the bar.

"What!" says she. "Ye little ould weasel. Is it me you're askin' to marry ye? I'll see ye further first. Sure, I'm goin' to marry one o' the handsomest, finest, strongest men in the world. I always said if ever I married again, 'twould be a man with a beard, not a freak like you with hog bristles on your face."

"What! What!" says the bos'n. "Didn't Abel tell ye I wanted—?"

"He never mentioned your name," says she.



Brown, digs into his bag, an' fetches out a pair of scissors an' his razor. Then, quietly, he sits down by the sleepin' Abel an' falls to work.

The bos'n staggers outen the bar. He's feelin' like a madman. He mutters things about traitors an' beards an' Judases, an' he hoofs it upstairs an' into his room. He stares for a moment with horrible venom at Abel Brown, digs into his bag, an' fetches out a pair of scissors an' his razor. Then, quietly, he sits down by the sleepin' Abel an' falls to work.

Now, the bos'n never saw or knew Delilah Simpson's first husband, consequently he never realizes that the face—thin and small-chinned an' with a blue mark by the left lip corner—that comes out from behind the lopped-off shrubbery is the face of none other than Percy Simpson! He didn't know the awful deed he was doin'. He finishes the dirty work while his victim groans an' tosses in his sleep. He finishes the work, picks up his things, an' goes downstairs.

"I'm leavin'," says he. "I'm goin' for good, Mrs. Simpson. An' I hopes ye'll be very happy with yer fine handsome man with a beard. Ye'd better go up an' see to him—he ain't feelin' so good."

With that he leaves the shop, an' the widder, after a moment of shy hesitation, goes quietly upstairs an' taps at the door. The sleeper has just woke up, an' he calls for her to come in. She pushes the door open, smilin' an' gigglin'.

"Here I am, Mr. Brown," she begins. "That little wretch said—"

She stopped in her tracks, an' her mouth hung open an' her eyes popped from her head. For there in front of her is poor Percy, thin-faced and frightened, all his fine looks an' distinction gone with his beard.

"You!" she hollers. "You! Where you been this ten years, you hidden sneak? Drinkin' an' traipsin' around furrin parts with all kinds o' hussies,

an' me here wearin' my fingers to the bone an' at the mercy of every insultin' wretch who comes in—”

Percy just groans as the words flow out of her in a torrent and she advances upon him ready to use her fists. He just closes his eyes an' dreams of that quiet Island in the South Pacific where, after being washed ashore from the wreck of the *Blanche K. Lister*, he'd spent the happiest years of his life.

THE END

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Mis-spelled words and printer errors have been corrected. Where multiple spellings occur, majority use has been employed.

Punctuation has been maintained except where obvious printer errors occur.

Illustrations have been relocated due to using a non-page layout.

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[The end of *Simpson and Delilah* by Louis Arthur Cunningham]