

The Captain and the Kid

by Marta Randall

The captain's taken to looking sneaky again. Usually, when she pretends to help around the farm, she stands leaning against a rake or staring out at the ridge of mountains to the west. But lately she's made a show of looking down the valley toward town, or out along the stretch of lake. I know the signs by now, but there's nothing to be done. It comes around like clockwork, I put up with it, it goes away for another eleven months. I used to tell her that she should make an effort, work the land, make the best of things, but I gave that up long ago.

Sure enough, this evening after supper she starts pacing around the slap-dash kitchen, then stalks out into the yard. She walks different, outside. Not disdainful, not up-nosed. Just hates the earth, is all. She'd rather be upstairs.

Course, so would I, but at least I'm graceful about it.

"Not fair!" the captain shouts. Down comes the mug. Break, splatter, mess. No great loss, ugly mug anyway. Second evening of the sneaky-time, and I'm prepared with mop, bucket, towels, broom, soap. I start to clean up.

"I ran that ship for them centuries, centuries, while they were all asleep. D'you hear me, kid? You think they care I got them off and got them back again? You think they even think about it, kid? Do you?"

"Don't know," I say. Wring out the towel. "Expect not."

"Course not! They don't give a damn, no respect, no consideration. I've done my share, damn it. Took 'em up, brought 'em down. Ought to be left alone. Hate farming. Not fair."

"Could make an effort," I say. "Home again, new beginning. Everyone's labor needed. Important."

The captain makes a skeptical noise in her throat. "No sense of history. Hate growing things. Pigsty. Unfair to make me do it."

"I do it."

"Different, kid. Menial. Negligible."

"Menial!" I shout. Throw broken crockery in the fire. She's gone too damn far, this time. "Twenty-five years upstairs! Negligible!"

"I saved your life!" the captain roars, flings a bowl of stew against the stove. "Broken creche-box, got you out, raised you up, taught you all you know. Saved your life, kid!"

"And I saved yours! Leaky suit, shorted vanes, went out

