

I HAVE previously had occasion to refer Mr. Panzov, who is the managing director and majority shareholder of a local dock-side firm, and one or two things I said might have been construed as aspersions on his business integrity. I may even have given the impression that Pop Panzov is the type of man who would steal the pennies from his dead grandmother's eyes. It is even possible that people may have gained the impression that I considered 50 per cent of his business deals were crooked.

Innate honesty (and a letter from Pop's lawyers) compels me to retract certain remarks I may have made about Pop's so-called business morality, and I go on record as saying that I believe that 50 per cent of his business deals are straight.

I also admit that it is untrue that he stole the pennies from his dead grandmother's eyes. Pop never knew his grandmother or, for that matter, his father, with whom his mother had only a brief acquaintance.

I will conclude this vindication of Pop's sterling character by commending his soul to heaven—with the proviso that the sooner the Good Lord sees fit to stick his foot through a cloud and kick Pop's head off the better I'll be pleased.

He actually has some good points; he is a hard old bastard, but one commodity he is not short of is guts, and this episode I am determined to relate has some bearing on his intestinal fortitude.

Having become filthy rich, Pop paid a visit to England. Way back in his youth he had been brought up in a fishing village in some obscure European country, and apparently the leaven still remained, because when he returned aboard the *Carnarvon Castle* he had as deck cargo the yacht *Scaramouche* which he had bought presumably while under the influence of alcohol.

Let us be as kind as we can about *Scaramouche*.

She had been designed for sailing on the Broads in England, and for that purpose she was possibly adequate. I misremember her vital statistics, but she was about 36-foot L.O.A. and a pregnant 14-foot beam. Her designer evidently had second thoughts four times. It would seem that he had started off with a narrow-gutted fin-and-bulb racer on the drawing board, and had subsequently heard that (for Broads

THE SAGA OF SCARAMOUCHE

sailing) double-bunks were a *sine qua non*. What this did to the beam, of course, was a sin.

Following that came the realisation that this boat was likely to spend 90 per cent of its life aground—voluntarily or involuntarily. That meant sacrificing the fin part of the fin-and-bulb, so *Scaramouche* finished up as a "narrow-gutted fin-and-bulb racer" of enormous beam and minus the fin.

With her long gaff raising plenty of sail over the surrounding reeds she was probably suited to Broads sailing, where a sudden grounding on a mud bank involved no more damage than one or more persons being precipitated from a bunk.

But for the savage Cape weather she was for the birds. Her furnishings were another matter. They included (apart from the double bunks) a whacking great walnut-panelled sideboard and (so help me) a miniature grand piano, with a day's work of knick-knacks, gew-gaws, frippery and fol-de-rols, the mere presence of which proved that never in all her life had *Scaramouche* suffered even a mild clobbering from wind or wave.

Anyway, she was duly installed at her mooring and one fine Saturday afternoon Pop Panzov turned up with his two sons, Hank and Henry, to try out his new possession. The sole trade or profession of these two youngsters was putting the squeeze on Pop for bigger and better allowances.

But they worked hard at this and had become so proficient at biting his ear that they always had oodles of lolly and used to dash about in sports cars with beautiful popies—a different popsie every time. On this occasion they had evidently decided not to take any chances of running short of anything at all, because in addition to a couple of enormous hampers of food and a case or two of liquor they had brought along no fewer than five absolutely smashing dolls—any one of them could have won the title of Miss Universe in a walk. Or, maybe, a wiggle.

They were got up to the nines, with every curl in place,

mascara, make up, nail varnish, the lot. And each was wearing what she imagined to be a suitable costume for yachting, ideas on the subject varying from a bikini to a suit of jeans with boat-pictures printed on it.

The rest of us stood around drooling copiously as each toothsome bit of homework was herded aboard with old Pop, beaming like a wolf, chucking their dimpled chins and patting their little rumps.

There was also a colourless sort of character called Cyril, sporting a shock of pale yellow hair, but he does not come into the picture much. Just happened to be there—which was jolly hard luck on him, come to think of it.

Once this pulchritudinous gaggle was aboard, they started to make sail in a bedlam of shrill squeals and giggles and, after a good deal of agricultural activity, got everything more or less set and shoved off to the Island about seven miles away with the idea of having a lovely picnic.

One would like to detail the full course of this outing in one's imagination, but as a conscientious writer one must stick to the known facts, which are simply that *Scaramouche* arrived safely at the Island and tied up at the jetty, after which they all trooped ashore for fun and games and lashings of chicken, salads, mayonnaise, smoked salmon and other delicacies. Plus, of course, champagne, beer and assorted liqueurs.

Hank reported to me later that he was quite surprised to see how much grub could be stowed inside a slender girlie without altering her shape much.

About 1600 hours they all forgathered at the jetty to find a 40-knot-gusting-to-50 south-easter—a dead muzzler—kicking up a dirty short sea over all the long seven miles of homeward course. Fourteen miles, if you consider how close a draught-deficient cow like *Scaramouche* wouldn't point and how much leeway she would make. However, they had no option, and Pop decided (quite rightly) to reef the cow down to the limit, start the auxiliary, and have a bash at it.

After more agricultural activity they dressed her with the main deep-reefed, a small staysail, started the engine and cast off with all the popies radiant at the idea of an exciting sail home.

Back at the Yacht Club there was some anxiety when the south-easter came through—a good deal of doubt whether *Scaramouche* would be able to cope with conditions she was neither built nor designed for. I don't suppose anybody gave a damn whether old Panzov sank or swam, but nobody liked the idea of anything permanent happening to any of those delicious dolls. So about 1700 hours somebody telephoned the Docks look-out.

"There's a yacht coming up from the Island," the look-out reported. "She's making headway—but she's making heavy weather of it."

A whole bunch of us piled into cars and went down to the Port Office, which afforded a grandstand view of the whole performance. *Scaramouche* was still far out, and all that could be seen of her was an occasional glimpse of sail between the spray-bursts that continually shrouded her. She was certainly having a tough time but—with her engine helping—she was coming along bravely enough and, if nothing went wrong, should make port safely. A good distance farther out a steam trawler was pounding along homeward bound, and we reckoned that if *Scaramouche* blew out her sails or became otherwise disabled the trawler would be on hand to pluck her in.

So we settled down out of the wind to watch and wait, speculate and gossip.

When she was about half-way home we could distinguish a little more detail as she staggered along streaming water like a half-tide rock and lurching and pounding brutally. The trawler altered course to close her and, expertly handled, accompanied her close to leeward for a short while. We couldn't see what happened, but in a short while—less than a minute—the trawler speeded up again and resumed her course, leaving

BY frank robb

MORE ABOUT THE
BIG NOISE OF THE
WATERFRONT...
AND WHY HANK
GAVE UP POPSIES



Scaramouche battling along with a solitary figure at her helm and the rest of her crew below.

The moment the trawler tied up her Skipper stepped ashore dressed in his shore-going suit with his suitcase in his hand as is the habit of trawler skippers the world over, and we crowded around him to find out what the score was.

The skipper was cross. "How should I know?" he snorted. "I tell you—that hooker's in the hands of a madman. I could see she was having a tough time, so I pulled up alongside and offered a tow. Out of sheer kindness of heart. No strings attached—no question of salvage. Just a friendly gesture. And what d'ye think he did?"

He paused for effect and then, seeing that he had our rapt attention, continued. "He swore blue bloody murder at the top of his voice. That's what he did. Cursed and raved like a lunatic—at the man that was offering him the hand of friendship in his hour of need." He waited for this to sink in, and went on. "And that's not all. What else d'ye think he did?"

We said that we had no idea.

"He bloody well threw a megaphone at me!" he announced dramatically. "A huge great megaphone! Can you beat that? Screaming and cursing and blaspheming and chucking megaphones at people who try to help him! He's round the bend—stark, staring, raving mad. And I'm going to report the whole business to the Port Captain right now."

He stomped off muttering angrily. "Perfectly good megaphone! Crazy as a loon!"—leaving us goggle-eyed.

It was fairly inexplicable. Even making all allowances for the fact that Pop Panzov was notoriously short-tempered, it seemed unlikely that the most irascible of men should find cause to swear and throw megaphones at a kindly chap offering him a needed tow. To make it even more extraordinary, Pop was known to be so tight-fisted that by comparison ordinary misers appeared as slap-happy spendthrifts on a charitable spree; it cut him to the quick to chuck so much as an empty match-box away, and it was difficult to entertain the idea that he would under any circumstances whatsoever discard a thing like a megaphone.

The idea grew among us that maybe the trawler skipper was right, and that the strain had been too much for Pop's reason. In the meantime there was nothing to do but sit it out and wait until *Scaramouche* docked, when, we hoped, we would be

Poor old *Scaramouche*, she could not get the hang of this short, vicious, hollow sea... within minutes the first peach-like complexion became underlaid with a delicate green, and Hank prepared for the harvest to come.



* THIS
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IS NOT
FOR THE
SQUEAMISH



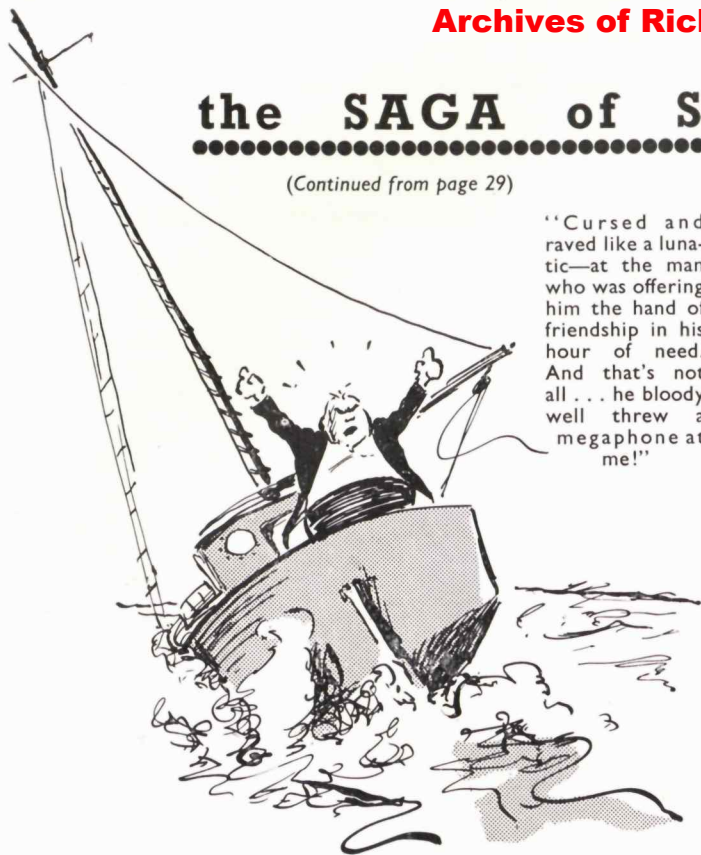
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★ Typical object from the bilge of *Scaramouche*—before the southeaster got to work on it...

the SAGA of SCARAMOUCHE

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"Cursed and raved like a lunatic—at the man who was offering him the hand of friendship in his hour of need. And that's not all... he bloody well threw a megaphone at me!"



vouchsafed some explanation of the extraordinary occurrence. I got the full story from Hank later.

"As you know," he said, "it was blowing great guns, and we hadn't been under way for 10 seconds before the first wave came aboard and drenched everybody to the skin. There was only one suit of oilies aboard and, as the Old Man was steering, he wore that. So he ordered the rest of us below out of the wind where we could be more comfortable."

He shuddered visibly. "Comfortable! Caesar's Ghost! The things that happened in that cabin that day shortened my life by about 10 years. Let me tell you..."

It is safe to say that *Scaramouche's* deck hadn't been wet (except for a spot of rain) for a number of years, and her deck-seams had opened up badly. She leaked (said Hank) like a sieve, with cold, cold water pouring from all over the place in drops and dribbles and gushes and spoutings into every nook and cranny, and everybody might just as well have been sitting under a salt-water shower.

But that was the mildest of their discomforts.

Poor old *Scaramouche*, built for sailing the mirror-flat inland waters of the Broads, could not get the hang of this vicious, short hollow sea. She pitched sickeningly; she tossed dizzily; she rolled drunkenly and she pounded frighteningly. And she combined all this with a twisting, cork-screw progress that (said Hank) made him feel like a fly being washed down a spiral tube which was being rotated in three directions simultaneously while being beaten with hammers and occasionally dropped from a height on to a concrete floor.

Within minutes the first peach-like complexion became underlaid with a delicate shade of green, and Hank prepared for the harvest to come by grabbing a basin from the galley. It was the only receptacle aboard larger than a cup, and although it was a sizeable basin Hank, recalling the gargantuan meal that all had ingested such a short time before, had grave doubts as to whether it would suffice.

"And then, of course, there was the engine," he continued the list of tortures. "It kept going—thank Heaven—but it wasn't in particularly good kilter, and it gave off petrol and oil and exhaust and burning paint fumes. You know what I mean?"

I assured him that I did indeed know—only too well.

"Well, it wasn't long before I was making the rounds with my basin, collecting all contributions." He paused to consider. "Let's be accurate—collecting most of the contributions,

because before we were half-way back the Old Man and myself were the only people aboard who were capable of anything except vigorous regurgitation, and occasionally two—ah—contributors coincided, as it were, and with only one basin—. Well, you see what I mean."

I saw what he meant. The whole affair had evidently made quite an impression on his mind and had remained a vivid memory. "Chicken," he said. "Vegetable salad. Cold meats. Mayonnaise. Smoked salmon—"

I interrupted. "I know, I know!" I said. "You already told me what the menu was—and I've also got some imagination."

"It was a damn good luncheon," Hank insisted. "And—theoretically, anyway—none of those bods had cause to complain. After all—they had it twice."

He went off the boil for a while, lost in the contemplation of some apparently unspeakable horror.

He writhed at the memory. "All that I have told you constitutes a series of practically unnoticeable minor irritations compared with the bilge water."

"What bilge water?" I asked.

"The bilge water of *Scaramouche*," he said, shuddering again. "I can't even begin to describe it to you."

"You must try," I told him. "It may help you psychologically."

So he told me about *Scaramouche's* bilge water.

Now I haven't been sea-sick for longer than I care to remember, but Hank's account of this bilge-water nearly turned my stomach, sitting though I was in a comfortable armchair in the lounge of the Yacht Club.

All yachts accumulate water in their bilges in one way and another—small leaks, rain water, spillage and so on—and the more active they are the more frequently they need pumping. There is, in fact, a saying that a small leak is good for a boat—"because it keeps the bilges sweet." In her idyllic and practically stationary previous existence *Scaramouche* had evidently been pumped seldom and inadequately—probably only when the water made its appearance over the floorboards.

The result of this was a really vintage collection of liquid (you wouldn't call it water) in the bilges.

"The only reason it had not made its presence odoriferously known," Hank explained, "was because whoever serviced the engine had been in the habit of allowing the used sump oil to drain into the bilges, where it formed a thick layer floating on top of the lower goo and sort of sealed it off."

I knew what he meant. Most boats with motors get lubricating oil in the bilges and, allied with sea-water, it forms a sort of sticky tarry substance; if you plunge a hand into it the hand comes out gloved in a black skin that is the very devil to clean off—soap and water won't touch it.

But it was the lower strata, sealed under the oil, that contained the real power. It is difficult to imagine what ingredients had gone into it over the years, but one can make a guess, and during the voyage under review Hank had an excellent opportunity of assessing the stuff.

Cigarette ash and sweepings of the cabin sole formed a comparatively innocuous stiffening. Spilt paraffin and petrol had joined it, with spilt soup, beer, wine, crumbs and slices of bread, escaped vienna sausages, cheese rind, potato parings, bacon fat, cabbage leaves... The list is endless; she had been a "charter-boat," let out for week-ends and fortnights, and none of her very temporary crews had felt it incumbent on them to interrupt whatever they were doing aboard to clean bilges.

This dynamic concoction had been peacefully festering underneath its layer of oil for years and years, undisturbed by anything at all.

"Till this blasted picnic," Hank said. "Every sea picked her up, chucked her about 10 feet to leeward, and plonked her down with a bump on her ear. And every time that happened this—this mixture—surged violently to leeward, slammed against the deckhead and cascaded like a Niagara all over the cabin. All over everybody."

He shook his head reminiscently. "It was full of solids, too—you could see that rats and mice and cockroaches and

(Continued on opposite page)

things had lived aboard. And died aboard. And it all got churned into a sort of emulsion with the tarry oil."

"It must have been hell," I said.

"It was much worse than that," Hank replied with vigour.

"You must remember that this—this liquid (it was about the consistency of S.A.E. 40)—was constantly being given additional—er—body by such—un—contributions as escaped my basin."

"Skip that," I said shortly. "I know the menu back to front."

"That's still not the worst," Hank said. "These surges of bilge substance kept on dripping on to the hot exhaust pipe of the engine, and I can tell you that this added an entirely new element." He became almost enthusiastic. "You take the chicken, for instance. It gets slaughtered, roasted, and eaten by Estelle—that was the babe in the jeans—my fancy at the time. Then Estelle misses the basin and the chicken lands in the bilge, to be..."

"You can skip that, too," I said, shorter than before. "Send the recipe to *Femina*. Get down to telling me about this business of your old man chucking the megaphone away. And going off the deep end at that trawler skipper."

"Oh—that," Hank said. "I know there's been a good deal of misinformed and malicious gossip about the episode—but actually Pop acted in a remarkably restrained manner under the circumstances."

"Restrained?"

Hank said earnestly, "Look—to know all is to forgive all. He was battling through—you gotta say that for him—but he was realising that he'd bought a pup, that *Scaramouche* simply wasn't suitable for local conditions. He was realising that he'd poured about 2,000 nicker into the drain and was now committed to sailing the said drain in a hard wind."

"I still don't see why..."

"You will see the light," Hank promised. "It was all on account of that damn basin. I'd got it about three-quarters filled with unsolicited donations and, what with the violent motion of the boat, I thought that it would be a good idea to empty it overside. So I clambered carefully up the companion and leaned out of the hatch with the intention of emptying the basin and—well, a wave-crest came along and struck it and what with one thing and another it was pretty slippery and I lost my grip."

"No more basin?"

"Gone," Hank said. "Into the depths."

"These things happen," I sympathised. "But—don't tell me your old man went off his rocker just because you lost a basin in the ditch."

"Never ever. I don't think he even noticed it. But the loss of the basin sort of triggered the rest of the tragedy."

He went on to relate how he had returned to the reeling, streaming, body-strewn chaos of the cabin to find that his ministrations were still in demand.

"Estelle was on the verge of another—er—attack, and several others were obviously working up to it. There wasn't a single receptacle anywhere near big enough to cope with the coming emergency. In this desperate crisis I gazed wildly around—and my eyes espied the megaphone hanging in its rack on the after bulkhead."

"With a flash of brilliant improvisation, I grabbed it, clapped one hand over the mouth-piece end, and continued with the good work like a sort of male Florence MacNightingshade."

Let me spare you the details. Suffice to say that after some time it became necessary for Hank to clamber once again up the companion to the hatch to empty his megaphone of mercy. And it so happened that, just at this time, the trawler had pulled up alongside and her skipper had voiced his friendly offer to tow *Scaramouche* to port.

Over to Hank. "Well, it was blowing, as I told you and it was difficult to shout loud enough to be heard. The Old Man was just about to bellow some courteous acknowledgement with little hope of being heard correctly, when his son—me—apparently guided by sheer intuition, emerged from the cabin hatch carefully clasping the megaphone. It was, of course, just what he wanted."

Hank drew a deep breath and wiped his brow. "Before I could say 'Jack Robinson' he grabbed the megaphone from my hands..."

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"GILBEY'S"
SQUADRON
RUM

Dark or Light

POP PANSOV'S PASSION . . .

"My God!" I said. "No wonder he was a bit cross."
"Cross! As you know, even at his most amiable the Old Man behaves like any ordinary person in a vile temper, and when this rather—er—sticky misunderstanding occurred he went off like an atom bomb." Hank shook his head admiringly. "It was a terrific performance. He never repeated himself once for a quarter of an hour, and during the whole time he never used a single printable word. It was just as well that he had to steer, because he told me afterwards that if he had been able to lay his hands on me he would have stripped me naked, wrapped me tightly in a fish net, cut off all the bits of me that protruded with a rusty bait-knife, and sprinkled salt over me for a couple of hours before pulling my head off and going on to murder everybody else aboard as slowly as possible."

"So you see," Hank continued, "that trawler skipper was quite wrong. Pop did not throw the megaphone at him—it was a mere reflex gesture. It's just as well that it didn't hit the trawler, by the way, because at the velocity Pop gave it it'd probably have gone clean through it and sunk it."

He went on. "Nor did Pop swear at the skipper. He was simply voicing his impassioned opinion of a world in which such a thing could happen"

"Your Old Man's really good when he lets himself go," I said.

"That wasn't the half of it. He called on Heaven to explain what mortal sin he had committed that he had to suffer the perpetual agony of knowing that he had fathered a son lacking in every finer instinct—a son beside whom a scrofulous, deformed, diseased, mentally-deficient circus chimpanzee in a paralytic drunken stupor appeared as a startlingly handsome genius. That," Hank explained unnecessarily, "was me."

He concluded his account. "So that's what actually happened."

"I'm glad to have the matter cleared up," I said. "Um—to change the subject a little—that Popsy in the bikini; you don't happen to have her address, by any chance."

(Continued
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The idea grew among us that maybe the trawler skipper had been right, and that the strain had been too much for Pop Pansov's reason . . .

"No," said Hank rather shortly. "I'm off women for life—they're too changeable. Do you like babes in bikinis?"

"I'm partial to them, somewhat."

"You wouldn't be if you'd seen what I've seen." His face twisted at the recollection. "You take a babe in a bikini. She looks luscious—yum-yummy, eh? Then you take that same babe and pour a lot of cold salt water over her. Then you rock her around in various directions until she is violently ill. Now she looks less yummy—hair all stuck to her head, mascara running down her face, mottled lizard-green complexion, all over goose-pimples. On top of that you splash her for hours and hours from all directions with a viscous, sticky mixture of water, tar, old sump oil, paraffin, stale beer, all curdled up with the rotting contents of last month's garbage heap and with the putrefying remains of small deceased rodents and insects."

He wrinkled his nose. "You can take it from me that that babe looks less attractive now. The hair is now smarmed down with gobbets of grease and other less-reputable substances, the face and body smeared with the same mixture. And . . ."

"That's only temporary," I protested. "By now she's probably as good as new—and it isn't likely to happen again."

"Not likely, maybe—but possible; anything that happens once can happen again, and I'm taking no chances," said Hank darkly. "From now on I'm sticking to booze, and the dames will have to do without me." ■■



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