

TALE OF A SHAG-EYED SHARK

(from *Pine Tree Ballads*, 1902, p.48ff, by Holman Francis Day)

The mackerel bit as they crowded an' fit
to grab at our gangin' bait,
We were flappin' 'em in till the 'midship bin
held clus' on a thousand weight;
When all of a sudden they shet right down
an' never a one would bite,
An' the Old Man swore an' he r'ared an' tore
till the mains'l nigh turned white,
He'd pass as the heftiest swearin' man
that ever I heard at sea,
An' that is allowin' a powerful lot,
as sartinly you will agree.
Whenever he cursed his arm shot up
an' his fingers they wiggled about,
Till they seemed to us like a windmill's fans
a-pumpin' the cuss-words out.
He swore that day by the fodder hay
of the Great Jeehookibus whale,
By the Big Skedunk, and' he bit a hunk
from the edge of an iron pail,
For he knowed the reason the fish had dodged,
an' he swore us stiff and stark
As he durned the eyes and liver an' lights
of a shag-eyed, skulkin' shark.
Then we baited a line all good an' fine
an' slung 'er over the side,
An' the shark took holt with a dretful jolt,
an' he yanked an' chanked an' tried
To jerk it out, but we held him stout
so he couldn't duck nor swim,
An' we h'isted him over -- that old sea-rover --
we'd business there with him.

A-yoopin' for air he laid on deck,
an' the skipper he says, says he:
"You're the wust, dog-gondest, mis'able hog
that swims the whole durn sea.
'Mongst gents as is gents it's a standin' rule
to leave each gent his own --

If ye note as ye pass he's havin' a cinch,
stand off an' leave him alone.
But you've slobbered along where you don't
belong,
an' you've gone an' spiled the thing,
An' now, by the pink-tailed Wah-hoo-fish,
you'll take your dose, by jing!"
So, actin' by orders, the cook fetched up
our biggest knife on board,
An' he ripped that shark in his 'midship bulge;
then the Old Man he explored.
An' after a while, with a nasty smile,
he giv' a yank an' twist,
"Hurroo!" yells he, an' then we see
the liver clinched in his fist.
Still actin' by orders, the cook fetched out
his needle an' biggest twine --
With a herrin'-bone stitch sewed up that shark,
all right an' tight an' fine.
We throwed him back with a mighty smack,
an' the look as he wsum away
Was the most reproachfulest kind of a look
I've seen for many a day.
An' the liver was throwed in the scuttle-butt,
to keep it all fresh an' cool,
Then we up with our sheet an' off we beat,
a-chasin' that mackerel school.

We sailed all day in a criss-cross way,
but the school it skipped an' skived,
It dodged an' ducked, an' backed an' bucked,
an' scooted an' swum an' dived.
An' we couldn't catch 'em, the best we'd do --
an' oh, how the Old Man swore!
He went an' he gargled his throat in ile,
'twas peeled so raw an' sore.
But a last, 'way off at the edge of the sea,
we suddenly chanced to spy
A tall back-fin come fannin' in,
ag'inst the sunset sky.

An' the sea ahead of it shiverd an' gleamed
with a shiftin' an' silver hue,
With here a splash an' there a dash,
an' a ripple shootin' through.
An' the Old Man jumped six feet from deck;
he hollered an' says, says he:
"Here comes the biggest mackerel school
since the Lord set off the sea!
An' right behind, if I hain't blind,
by the prong-jawed dog-fish's bark;
Is a finnin' that mis'able hog of the sea,
that liverless, shag-eyed shark!"

But we out with our bait an' down with our
hooks,
an' we fished an' fished an' fished,
While 'round in a circle, a-cuttin' the sea,
that back-fin whished an' slished;
An' we noticed at last he was herdin' the
school
an' drivin' 'em on our bait,
An' they bit an' they bit' an' we pulled 'em in
at a reg'lar wholesale rate.
We pulled 'em in till the Sairey Ann was
wallerin' with her load,
An' we stopped at last 'cause there wa'n't no
room
for the mackerel to be stowed.

Then up came a-finnin' that liverless shark,
an' he showed his stitched-up side,
An' the look in his eyes was such a look
that the Old Man fairly cried.
We rigged a tackle an' lowered a noose
an' the shark stuck up his neck,
Then long an' slow, with a heave yo-ho,
we h'isted him up on deck.
The skipper he blubbered an' grabbed a fin
an' gave it a hearty shake;
Says he, "Old man, don't lay it up
an' we'll have a drop to take."

An', actin' by orders, the cook fetched up
our keg of good old rum;
The shark he had his drink poured first,
an' all of us then took some.
Still actin' by orders, the cook he took
an' he picked them stitches out,
An' we all turned to, an' we lent a hand;
though of course we had some doubt
As to how he'd worn it an' how 'twas hitched,
an' whuther 'twas tight or slack,
But as best we could -- as we understood --
we put that liver back.
Then we sewed him up, an' we shook his fin
an' we giv' him another drink,
We h'isted him over the rail ag'in
an' he giv' us a partin' wink.
Then he swum away, an' I dast to say,
although he was rather sore,
He felt that he'd started the trouble first,
an' we'd done our best and more.
'Cause a dozen times 'fore the season closed
an' the mackerel skipped to sea,
He herded a school an' drove 'em in,
as gentlemanlike as could be.
We'd toss him a drink, an' he'd tip us a wink,
as sociable as ye please,
No kinder nor better-mannered shark
has ever swum the seas.

Now, the moral is, if you cut a friend
before that you know he's friend,
An' after he's shown it, ye do your best
his feelin's to nicely mend,
He'll meet ye square, an' he'll call you quits,
providin' he's got a spark
Of proper feelin' -- at least our crew
can vouch this for a shark.