

ing to stop here; we can't have the place drenched upside down for a beggar, and a perfect stranger, too."

"It won't turn the house upside down, and he won't trouble you at all; he will have Jane's room, and —"

"Jane's room? And then she will leave, I suppose. It's hard enough to get a girl to live this distance out of town without chasing her away when she suits so well."

"Jane will not be any loss to me if she does leave. She is too impertinent, and I was thinking only half an hour ago of giving her notice."

"Oh, take your own way, as usual, and suffer for it afterwards. But I am determined that the man shall not stay here. It's ridiculous. I'll go over and ask Mr. Ash to lend me his trap to take the old fellow to the hospital, a job I don't thank you for, either."

"Don't trouble; Mr. Ash has gone to town for a doctor; he went in the trap."

"By Jove! And who's to pay for bringing a doctor all this distance from town?"

"I certainly never thought of that. It is awkward. Oh, well, I suppose he had better go to the hospital," and Valerie sighed as she thought of this terrible want of money that was warping the best instincts of her nature.

CHAPTER XVIII.

VALERIE LEAVES CHRISTCHURCH.

It was not before autumn had nearly merged into winter that Frank Day had persuaded his wife to pay her long-promised visit to her sister in the North Island. There was a flush of excitement on her usually pale cheeks as she bent forward in the cab and waved a last good-bye to the smiling old lady who stood at the gate, and who was already installed in the house to look after things during Valerie's absence. She had made up her mind to have a good time, to throw care to the winds, and to try to forget her troubles if she could.

"There, now, I think that is all the luggage, isn't it, Val?" said Frank, as he crushed a dress basket under the seat and tried to make room for himself amidst portmanteaux, hat-boxes, etc.

"Yes, I think that is all. There's room the other side; you'll crush my basket if you sit there, Frank."

They drove down the New Brighton road into Worcester-street, and when they reached the Stanmore road Valerie could not help exclaiming at its beauty. It looked so lovely with the sun glinting through the trees on to the dead leaves that lay thick on the ground, and the pretty bridge in the distance made a charming picture. This road always looked lovely at that time of year, and Valerie caught a glimpse of it at its best.

"Isn't it lovely, Frank?" Valerie was quite vivacious now.

"What do you mean? I don't see anything particularly lovely about here."

"You are too late now; we've turned into Hereford-street, so the scene is lost to view."

"You seem in high spirits to-day; glad to be rid of me, I suppose."

"Don't be so sarcastic, please. There is one thing I never pretended to love you as you did me. You know very well you are very glad indeed to see the last of me for some time. I, at least, am no hypocrite, and feel sorry you should start this sort of thing on my last day. We may never meet again, you know."

"Oh, all right. I didn't mean to start an argument. It's grand weather for your trip."

"I think autumn the loveliest time of all the year. Spring isn't to be compared to it, in my opinion," said Valerie.

The cab drew up at the station, and Frank got out and assisted his wife to alight. He directed a porter to take the luggage to the train, whilst he went to the office for the tickets. The train was packed, as it always is on Thursdays, that being the day on which the Union Company's boats leave Lyttelton for the North Island and Sydney. As the train passed through Heathcote, Valerie thought she had never seen the valley look so lovely and green. It was an ideal autumn day, just tinged with frost, and the many passengers who were returning to Australia after spending the summer in New Zealand were giving expression to their regret at leaving so perfect a climate.

"You wouldn't be so enchanted with the climate of Auckland after spending a winter there, nam?" remarked an old gentleman to one of the Australian party.

"Indeed! Why so?"

"Oh, incessant rain and gales, the wind is awful, especially the equinoctial gales."

"Dear me!" responded a stout lady with a lip. "How dreadful!"

"Yes," continued the old gentleman, "I remember one Sunday morning when I went to church I found it lying on its side."

"Good gracious! But that surely isn't a usual occurrence."

"Oh, yes, it is. Anyway, if the churches don't blow over now the houses do—it's all the same. Why, man, didn't I see a man in a sentry box in the early days carried over half a mile in the air; but that was in a whirlwind, and the man wasn't at all hurt. You see, he was doubtless used to it. But here we are entering the longest tunnel in the colony, one and three-quarter miles, man."

"Really! So we are! Well, I am glad that we did not spend last winter at Auckland, as we had intended doing. After all, we are safer in Australia, although it is so hot in summer; but nobody can deny that the winters are perfect."

"Quite true, madam; I've been in Sydney, and —"

"What do you think of our harbour?" interrupted an unsophisticated young lady who had taken her first trip abroad under the wing of the stout lady. Everybody who had been to Sydney had heard that question before, and they smiled with amusement as they awaited the old gentleman's reply.

"The harbour, Miss? Let me see—well, I don't think it's as pretty as the Auckland Harbour, do you?"

"You don't mean that, surely," returned the girl, indignantly. "Why, next to Rio, it's the most beautiful in the world—everybody says so."

"In that case my opinion can't amount to much, so I hope you will excuse my want of taste."

"Shut up, Juliet; everybody is laughing at you," said the girl's brother, as he noticed the smiles of amusement on the passengers' faces.

His sister blushed, and turned to the window to hide her confusion.

By this time the train had emerged from the tunnel, and everybody began to gather up their parcels, flowers, etc., preparatory to leaving the train, which drew up close to the wharves. The Tarawera, with her red funnel, was conspicuous not far off, and, after seeing the luggage on to a trolley, Frank and Valerie Day made their way over to her. There was the usual bustle and crowd of visitors seeing their friends off, but no one whom the Days knew was amongst them. After Frank had stowed his wife's luggage away under her berth, they both returned to the deck.

"I hope somebody nice will occupy the other berth in my cabin," said Valerie. "I was unfortunate in that respect when I went to Dunedin."

"It's to be hoped so. They appear to be a decent lot of passengers this trip; but then one can never tell who will get on at Wellington and the other ports. Do you intend going ashore at Napier and Gisborne?"

"It will depend on the weather, principally."

"Well, old girl, there's only ten minutes left, so I'll say good-bye and get on to the wharf again. Shall I get your rug for you first, or will you go to your cabin now?"

"Oh, I'll stop on deck as long as I feel well. I will have too much of my cabin soon. Well, good-bye, Frank, and—and I hope to see you soon again."

"Good-bye, Val, and a pleasant trip."

The last bell had rung, and all the visitors were back on the wharf again, and as the Tarawera moved slowly from her moorings quite a battery of repartee was exchanged between those on shore and those on the departing steamer. And the last thing Frank Day saw was the stout lady who had been a fellow passenger in the train speaking to his wife. When there was nothing more to see, and the land was almost lost to view, Valerie went to her cabin, and found that the stout lady was already in bed in the other berth.

Valerie smiled as she said, "Are you and I to be companions, madam?"

"It looks like it, my dear. My name is Mrs. Truebody. I saw yours on your luggage. I always like to know who I am travelling with."

"You are quite right, although I am afraid you would not learn much from my luggage. I generally feel nervous myself; once I had a barmaid in my cabin, and she was not always sober."

"That's bad. Did you go in to dinner? I did not; I had a bit here."

"No, I stayed on deck and had a few biscuits and a cup of hot water."

"Ah, you are a bad sailor, I can see."

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