

It was many years since he had mingled much with society, and those he had known were always men—club intimates, or people pursuing the same studies in which he had tried to forget the past; and it was something strange to him to be there on board that vessel, thrown amongst ladies, whose company he avoided as much as possible; but before many days had passed he encountered Winifred Rayne.

In his efforts to dull his feelings, to crush out thought and force himself to wait for his punishment, it seemed to have happened to him that, closing one mental door, he had unwittingly opened another.

That door had been so rigidly sealed up that for long past all impressions connected therewith were dead, frozen, non-existent. But now day after day he was finding more and more that love had only been latent and was being awakened in all its strength, now when it was an impossibility for such as he, while to the great increasing of his mental agony, he realised the fact that there was a growing current of sympathy between them, and that for some reason or another, Fate was teaching him that, whatever might be in store, he was not to avoid this fellow-passenger.

One evening as he passed the music-room Winifred Rayne was seated at the piano singing, and accompanying herself with the sympathetic hands which lightly touched the keys and sustained the voice which hushed the many listeners to appreciative silence.

John Mildred stopped short as if entranced; a strange feeling of emotion swelled within his breast, and he felt as if he could have sobbed aloud. And he stood with brimming eyes, trembling and agitated, feeling at last in agony as the final notes died away moving him to a strong desire to forget all there, and to hurry across to beg her to sing again.

But he could not stir, until as he stood there supporting himself by the back of one of the settees, he started violently, for someone spoke, and the sweet singer was looking into his eyes, while a murmur of applause had accom-

panied her as she left the piano and crossed the wide cabin.

Just then two of the gentlemen came up, and one of them spoke. What he said was all a dull sound to John Mildred; all he knew was that he was speaking words endorsed by his companion, and whatever they were they had awakened a strange feeling of rage, of almost hatred, against this man who had dared to speak to her.

Then she replied with a quiet smile, and Mildred sighed with relief as the two bowed and passed on.

Then their eyes met again.

"I could not do that," she said. "It was an effort to sing, but people begged so hard."

"And you have refused to sing again?" he said earnestly.

"No, no," she replied, smiling, "but I should have declined. I wish to be quiet. It was to play a few waltzes that they might dance."

"And you did not care to do that?" said Mildred eagerly.

"No; certainly not."

"Why?"

She made a gesture, and looked down sorrowfully, and he observed for the first time that she was in mourning.

He looked at her enquiringly, and earnestly.

"My mother died," she said—"a year ago."

"Ah!" he said earnestly; and he raised his hand slightly as if nerved to take hers, but it fell back to his side.

"I am going to join my brother at the Cape."

The room was nearly empty now, for, attracted by the delicious calm of the warm night, most of the passengers had strayed on deck to watch the spangled heavens, whose myriad stars were reflected in the heaving waters beneath their feet, and hardly knowing what he did, he drew a chair towards her, into which she sank at once, and leaning towards him she said half tremulously.

"And you too—you are in mourning?"

"I?" he said, starting.

"I thought—I hardly know what I was

going to say. Forgive me if I have made a mistake and hurt your feelings."

"Oh, it is nothing," he said.

"I am afraid I have blundered. I am very sorry," and the tears were in her eyes as she held out her hand.

The movement sent a spasm of excitement through him. What might have been, thrilled him to the core. Starting forward, in another moment he would have clasped that hand in his and raised it passionately to his lips; but uttering a faint gasp he shrank back, and shivered as he shook his head and drew away.

"No, no. Impossible!" he cried hoarsely. "I cannot—I dare not."

He covered his eyes for a moment with one hand and seemed to wrench himself from his seat as he rose to his feet and hurriedly walked on deck, unconscious of the fact that his companion was gazing at him wistfully, his one thought now to reach some spot where he could be alone.

"Handsome girl that, sir," said a voice behind him; and Mildred started violently, to find that he had walked right aft into the soft darkness of the summer night, and a feeling of strange resentment at what he looked upon as a daring insult from a comparative stranger took possession of him. For how dared this man, a passenger whom he hardly knew by sight, speak of her like this!

"I beg your pardon," said the stranger quickly. "Forgive me. I meant no offence. What a lovely night! Will you have a cigar?"

It was on Mildred's lips to decline, but feeling that it would be better to accept the position he took the cigar offered. Then a light was struck and held out by the stranger, and they drew close together, gazing full in each other's eyes, till the two rolls of leaf were well ignited, and Mildred's anger began to gather again as he resented the other's searching look.

But it died out directly as his fellow passenger said quietly and rather awkwardly, as he rolled his cigar in his mouth and jerked one hand towards a distant light:

"Bright light that. Miles away, I sup-

pose. But would that be where we wish to touch first?"

"Madeira," said Mildred quietly. "I don't know. This is my first voyage."

He stopped short and laid one hand upon the rail, standing quite alone and as far as either could have made out no one within sight or hearing, while the notes of one of Waldteufel's saddest waltzes floated to their ears.

Suddenly one of the passenger's hands came firmly down upon Mildred's wrist as he supported himself by the brass rail, and he said in a low stern tone:

"Mr. John Mildred!"

Mildred started violently.

"Yes," he said, in a startled voice, "How did you know my name?"

"I have been slightly in doubt, sir, ever since we came on board, but I am certain now. Ulysses Club, St. James's."

"Quite right," said Mildred wonderingly; "but I do not know you, sir, except as a fellow-passenger."

"No, of course not, sir, for I would not intrude upon you until I was perfectly sure. Will you take it quietly, sir? It is useless to make a scene. I arrest you for the murder of Edgar Brydges. I am from Scotland Yard."

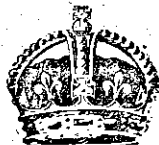
"My God!"

The expected that he had felt he should take as a calm relief was agonising, and he saw nothing now but the sweet sad face of her who had spoken to him so sympathetically but a short time back, whose thrilling voice still rang in his ears.

But a few hours back he had been ready to welcome death, even the most shameful that man can die, the execrated of his fellow creatures. But she had interposed and seemed to hold out before him life, ecstatic life and happiness, with a future of which he had never dreamed.

And now there was this!—this! And with every nerve palpitating within his frame he made one effort to fling off the hand that grasped his wrist, when another closed upon him.

There was a quick effort, a heave with a strength of whose existence he was



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