

Complete Story.

# Sundered Hearts.

A STORY OF THE SEA.

L

Far away to the north-east gleamed Sinbad's Diamond Mountains, their crags of crystal salt shining like flame above the tumultuous white-manned swell of the Persian Gulf. Spray flashed high at every plunge of the steamer, gulls wheeled and screamed astern, black shadows of mast and shrouds danced on the iron deck, while there, against the scorching sky and the light, leaning against the rails of the upper bridge, the mate stood brooding over the woman he had married for love.

Married for love—she was very pretty in her practical, wilful way; fair, dainty, crisp from the silken ribbons on her hat to the fresh white cotton of her well-cut skirt; and as she lay in a deck chair, the lining of her parasol casting a flush of warm colour over her sun-browned face, she seemed an impossible apparition to be found afloat on such a grimy ocean tramp as the "Juliet," of Liverpool. Everybody knows that a mate is never allowed to take his wife to sea, and even now Tom wondered vaguely by what wiles she had prevailed upon her uncle, the owner, to countenance a honeymoon here in the blazing East.

And what had induced her to marry him? His prospects? There were none. His money? The man was penniless. His gift for making love? Why she had reduced him to the very dust with

her chaff. His good looks? The handsome, manly chivalrous idiot had not the slightest suspicion of being so commended to a woman's eyes. As for her wanting to quarrel now, to be disdainful, whimsical, inconsequent beyond all bearing, these things were quite beyond the understanding of a mate at nine pounds a month.

The lady having a will of her own, flatly declined to conform with his theories as to the care and management of women; and so Tom, bewildered by her moods, could only come to one rueful and totally false conclusion—that he had married a cyclone in stays! They had quarrelled viciously, they were scarcely on speaking terms; in fact, the tramp "Juliet," bound in salt ballast from Ormuz to Bombay, carried something which was not declared in her manifest—a load of misery.

And yet, after pretending to read her novel this last hour, Mrs Brunt found it a sorry victory that she had reduced poor Tom to silence. Looking up with a wistful smile, and two big tears just ready to seal the peace. "This book is really too funny," said Tom's wife, partly to herself. "One would think that love ruled the world."

## II.

Their quarrel would have been ratched up then, but that the steward was already half way up the lad-

der calling to Mr Brunt in a stage whisper:

"Can you come aft, sir?"

"Eh!" Tom went over to the ladder head.

"Hush, or she'll hear us! The old man's took bad, sir; yes, the cap'n, sir."

"What's wrong?" growled Tom, bending down over the handrail.

"Over-eating again?"

Mrs Brunt could only hear an occasional whisper. "Since this time yesterday, sir. . . he was what you may call decoltay. . . them pilgrims we landed at Bassora. . . I've been shigmates with it before. . . Java way. . . you'll come, sir?"

Mrs Brunt ran to the ladder head when Tom went down, and saw him stop to speak with a young sailor by the wheel house door. "Hello—who on earth told you to leave the wheel?"

"Feeling awful bad, sir," groaned the man.

"Why," said the mate, more kindly, "what's wrong with you?"

But the sailor only looked at him, his mouth twitching as though he tried to speak, his face white and running with perspiration, his eyes glazed; then without a word staggered away past the boats and down the ladder which led to the upper deck.

Tom called to another sailor who was painting ventilators. "Johnson, relieve the wheel—east b' south."

"East b' south it is, sir."

And the mate went aft. Mrs Brunt waited on the bridge, and listlessly she watched the cook sending away the sailors' dinner. The fo'ble answered seven bells to the wheel house, and the second mate was called; after a long time came the striking of eight bells at noon, the clanging of the wheel, then the relieved watch went forward to dinner; but still nobody came near the upper bridge.

The distant mountains had melted away in the haze; it would be a week before the land-fall at Bombay. The heat was stifling now as two bells

sounded; yet the steward never came to announce dinner, nor was the table laid under the poop awnings. Silence like the hush of death brooded over the ship, broken once by a distant scream of pain, and the time dragged on.

At last the steward arrived carrying a covered tray.

"Please, ma'am," he said, briskly, "Mr Brunt wants you to take your meals here for the present—not to come down. Bos'n has orders to rig up a tent for you; I'm to bring along your bed after sundown. Will you have claret, ma'am, or beer?"

With a scared white face, Mrs Brunt lay back in her chair, staring at him; then glancing at the tray with some disfavour.

"Take it away," she said, fretfully. "No, don't go," she cried, laying her hand upon his shirt sleeve. "For goodness' sake, what's the matter with us?"

"She noticed the man's hesitation. "Tell me at once!"

The steward had no lie ready that would deceive a child. "Better now," he muttered, "than later—orders be hanged. Well, ma'am, things might be worse. Mr Brunt's doing splendidly for us. Fact is, ma'am, there is sickness aboard, but bless you that ain't—"

"What sickness?"

"Well, ma'am—"

"What is it, I say?"

"Cholera."

She started to her feet. "Cholera? And he's down there in the middle of it. Oh, do go and see if he's all right. He looked pale! Stay, I'll go myself. I must—I will!"

"Hush, ma'am, don't ye take on like that. Mr Brunt has nothing to fear. Why, there ain't no confection made as'll touch the likes of him, that is— unless you make it worse by going down."

She fell back into the chair and rocked herself to and fro. "Cholera! Cholera!"

She must not move for fear of adding to his anxiety, she must remain hopeless, helpless, useless, while he

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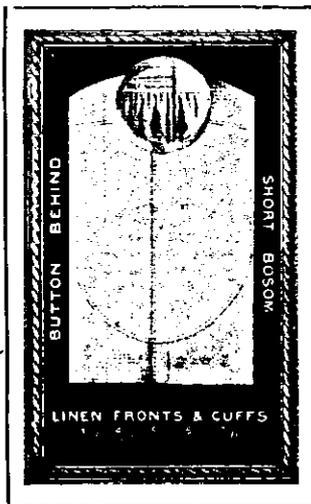
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