

## LOVE AND A SHIPWRECK

'William Thomas Osbon' was the way the name was written in the big family Bible, but since he had graduated from curls and short skirts and 'Willie,' he had been 'Bill' to all the boys and 'Will' to all the girls. Only the occasional appearance of a letter addressed in full reminded him that his name was both sonorous and impressive.

Like Peter Pan, Osbon never had grown up. He had arrived at the dignity of a moustache, and, since his father's retirement, he had more than doubled the capacity and capital of Osbon and Son, yet he was still the same light-hearted, apparently care-free Bill Osbon that he had been in his boyhood and his college days. Therein lay the source of his great trouble.

From the time she first could toddle about until he had left for college, Betty Durand had been his almost constant companion. About the same time she had gone to a finishing school, and when they had returned Osbon found that there had arisen a great barrier between them.

Betty had developed ideals, and her boyish sweetheart—boyish still—did not measure up to her romantic standards. She still liked Osbon except when he spoke of love, but Osbon was too genuinely light-hearted to play the love-sick swain, and when he spoke of love with a smile upon his lips Betty was wont to frown.

'It's utterly absurd to ask me to marry you,' she had declared. 'I like you awfully well, Will, but I must respect and look up to the man I marry.'

'I see,' was the light-hearted response. 'You want to be miserable, though married.'

Betty frowned again at this exhibition of levity at so important a moment, and assured herself that she was right in her refusal to marry Osbon.

Augustus Esterbrooke seemed to answer Betty's description of an ideal. He was tall, dark, mysterious, and handsome in a saturnine way. No one ever dreamed of addressing him as 'Gus,' and he moved majestically in a little world of his own, where the cares and worries of every day existence were not permitted to intrude. Esterbrooke had inherited wealth and estates, wherefore he despised the little things of prosaic everyday life.

It was characteristic of Osbon that he smiled as he saw the majestic Esterbrooke escorting Betty down the dock at the end of which lay the little steamer chartered for the Sunday school excursion down the lake.

Osbon was keenly conscious that he wanted Betty to be his companion, as she had always been in those early years when they had eaten a mixture of cake and sandwiches and deviled eggs out of the same shoe box and had been supremely content.

It was all different now. Esterbrooke's man solemnly bore a lunch hamper and rugs and wraps enough for a score.

Betty smiled in friendly fashion upon Osbon, who was darting from crowd to crowd, exchanging a jest there, a jest here, giving a word of greeting there, and doing his best to inspire the holiday spirit.

He paused for a moment to exchange a word with Betty, then Esterbrooke led her off to the upper deck where they could make themselves comfortable in the shade of the pilot house. Passengers were not allowed on the upper deck, but Esterbrooke held a block of stock in the transportation company owning the fleet of three steamers plying the lake, and he was a privileged person.

The pair were not again visible to the rest of the picnickers until the grove was reached, then the servant spread the rugs, made coffee by the aid of an alcohol stove and served the lunch.

Esterbrooke and Betty wandered away to escape the crowd, and they did not reappear until the boat was ready to leave. Esterbrooke hated crowds, and he had come merely because Betty insisted. He argued to himself that there would be time enough after marriage to bend her to his ways.

When they reached the upper deck he directed the captain to take the back channel on the way home.

'It's a beastly bore to repeat the scenery,' he offered in explanation. 'The back channel will be a little different.'

'The lake is at a pretty low stage,' objected the captain. 'There are some pretty nasty rocks in the channel, Mr. Esterbrooke.'

'Of course, if you are afraid——' he began, and smiled softly to himself as the captain brought his teeth together with a snap and stepped inside the pilot house. Esterbrooke had caused the discharge of one of the oldest men in the employ of the line for less than this, and the employees feared and hated him.

Presently the steamer entered the back channel, and Osbon came hurrying up to remonstrate at the risk. He was familiar with the lake, and as the chairman of the excursion committee, it was his province to interfere.

The captain referred him to Esterbrooke, and the latter smiled as he reminded him that the charter did not specify any particular route. Osbon beaten, still smiled as he descended the gangway, but half an hour later the steamer struck a reef and held fast.

As the keel grated along the rocky ridge, all was confusion, but in the midst of the confusion Osbon's voice rang out clear:

'No danger,' he shouted. 'You can get shipwrecked without extra charge, and we'll get our names in the papers.'

There's a desert island within wading distance, and if we have to, we'll all turn Robinson Crusoes.'

The joke was inane enough, but it served its point. The confusion died down, and when it was found that the boat was not sinking, everyone decided to accept the happening as a huge lark.

One of the boats put off with men to wire that the steamer was safe, and Esterbrooke suggested to Betty that they go with the boat. 'We can get a rig somewhere and drive into the nearest town,' he explained, 'and get the night express home. We are a good four miles from shore, and the rest of the party cannot be taken off until the Champion comes along in the morning. There is no steamer at this end of the lake.'

Betty shook her head. 'We will stay with the others,' she declared, and with no very good grace. Esterbrooke led the way back to the upper deck.

'We might as well have some supper,' he declared, as he motioned to his man, and presently they partook of the remnants of the hamper's contents.

The evening fell, and Betty insisted upon going below. Esterbrooke held back as they entered the saloon. Here was a babel of sound. Babies and children cried through hunger and fear, and tired mothers sought ineffectually to secure quiet.

Through the confusion Osbon passed with the assurance that two row boats had been sent out to forage, and that food would presently arrive. His good humor had not failed him, and wherever he passed he left a trail of smiles behind.

At the sight of the mass of rugs borne by Esterbrooke's man, Osbon's eye brightened, and after seeing that Betty was made comfortable the rest were commandeered for the women and children. Esterbrooke ventured a protest, but for once Osbon forgot to smile.

'Your order got us into this hole,' he said fiercely. 'If I hear another word from you, I'll throw you overboard.'

He looked as though he longed to do it, and Esterbrooke subsided with a suddenness that was surprising.

The return of the boats with such stores as they could obtain helped to lessen the discomfort. Osbon dealt out the supplies with a careful hand and a cheery word, and presently the women and children sought rest on the saloon floor. The men gathered on the lower deck, and smoked and slept as their fancy dictated.

Esterbrooke, finding the situation intolerable, at last engaged some of the crew to put him ashore. When the morning sun began to paint the east, and Betty came out of the cabin for a breath of fresh air, she found Osbon leaning against a pillar and searching the horizon for the smoke that should signal the advent of the rescuing steamer.

'You have been up all night?' she asked, with quick sympathy.

Osbon nodded. 'I never did like to sleep in a coal bin,' he explained. 'This was hard coal, too.'

'How did Mr. Esterbrooke stand it?' she asked. 'He went ashore,' explained Osbon. 'He felt sure that you would be looked after.'

'With you on board,' assented Betty tenderly. 'You were a host in yourself, dear. I—I guess I love you even if you are not romantic.'

'Good humor is better than romance sometimes,' he said softly as he took her in his arms. 'But I never thought that it would win you for me, dear.'

Betty looked into the heavy-lidded eyes now glowing with affection and saw the man behind the boyishness.

'I'm glad it did,' she simply said, and to that Osbon added 'Amen.'

Here's a hint of value to you: If you have to shift be sure you get the NEW ZEALAND EXPRESS COMPANY, LTD., to move your things. Their men are expert at the work, and take as much care of things as if they were their own. Careless carriers can do pounds' worth of damage to your furniture. It's wise, therefore, to get the N.Z. EXPRESS CO., on whom you can thoroughly rely....

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