

Continued from 1st Page.

"I am very much obliged to you, Mr. Tombey," she said; "you have done me a great honor, the greatest honor a man can do to a woman; but I can not marry you."

"Are you sure?" gasped the unfortunate Tombey, for his hopes had been high. "Is there no hope for me? Perhaps there is somebody else!"

"There is nobody else, Mr. Tombey; and I am sorry to say, you don't know how much it pains me to say it, I can not hold out any prospect that I shall change my mind."

He dropped his head upon his hands for a minute, and then lifted it again.

"Very well," he said, slowly; "it can't be helped. I never loved any woman before, and I never shall again. It is a pity—a hard, little laugh—" "That so much first-class affection should be wasted. But, there you are; it is all part and parcel of the pleasant experience which make up our lives. Good-bye, Miss Smithers; at least, good-bye to a friend!"

"We can still be friends," she faltered.

"Oh, no," he answered, with another laugh; "that is an expanded notion. Friendship of that nature is not very safe under any circumstances. Certainly not under these. The relationship is antagonistic to the facts of life, and they, or one or other of them, will drift either into indifference and dislike, or some thing warmer. You are a novelist, Miss Smithers; perhaps some day you will write a book to explain why people fall in love where their affection is not wanted, and what purpose their distress can possibly serve. And now, once more, good-bye!" and he lifted her hand to his lips and gently kissed it, and then with a bow turned and went.

From all of which it will be clearly seen that Mr. Tombey was decidedly a young man above the average, and one who took punishment very well. Augusta looked after him, sighed deeply, and even wiped away a tear. Then she turned and walked off, to where Lady Holm-hurst was sitting enjoying the balmy southern air, through which the great ship was rushing with outspread sails like some huge white bird, and chatting to the captain. As she came up, the captain made his bow and departed, saying that he had something to see to, and for a minute Lady Holm-hurst and Augusta were left alone.

"Well, Augusta," said Lady Holm-hurst, for she called her "Augusta" now.

"Well, Lady Holm-hurst!" said Augusta.

"And what have you done with that young man, Mr. Tombey—that very nice young man?" she asked with emphasis.

"I think that Mr. Tombey went forward," said Augusta.

The two women looked at each other, and, woman-like, each understood what the other meant. Lady Holm-hurst had not been altogether innocent in the Tombey affair.

"Lady Holm-hurst," said Augusta, taking the bull by the horns, "Mr. Tombey has been speaking to me and has—"

"Proposed to you," suggested Lady Holm-hurst, admiring the Southern Cross through her eyeglasses. "You said he went forward, you know."

"Has proposed to me," answered Augusta, ignoring the little joke. "I regret, he went on hurriedly, "that I have not been able to fall in with Mr. Tombey's plans."

"Ah!" said Lady Holm-hurst, "I am sorry for some things. Mr. Tombey is such a very nice young man and so very gentleman-like. I thought that perhaps it might suit your views, and it would have simplified your future arrangements. But as to that, of course, while you are in New Zealand I shall be able to see to that. By the way, it is understood that you come to stay with us for a few months at Government House before you hunt up your cousin."

"You are very good to me Lady Holm-hurst," said Augusta, with something like a sob.

"Suppose, my dear," answered the great lady, laying her little hand upon Augusta's beautiful hair, "that you were to drop the 'Lady Holm-hurst' and call me 'Beatie'! It sounds so much more sociable, you know, and, besides, it is shorter and does not waste so much breath."

Then Augusta sobbed outright, for her nerves were shaken. "You don't know what your kindness means to me," she said. "I have never had a friend, and since my darling died I have been so very lonely!"

CHAPTER VII.  
THE TWO FAIR WOMEN TALKED, making plans for the future as though all things endured forever, and all plans were destined to be realized. But even as they talked, somewhere up in the high heavens the Voice that rules the world, spoke a word, and the Messenger of Fate rushed forth to do its bidding. On hoard the great ship was music and laughter and the sweet voices of singing women; but above it hung a pall of doom. Not the most timid heart dreamed of danger.

What danger could there be a board of that grand ship which sped across the waves with the lightness and confidence of the swallow? There was naught to fear. A prosperous voyage was drawing to its end, and mothers put their babes to sleep with as sure a heart as though they were on solid English ground. Oh! surely when the overflowing load of sorrows and dire miseries was meted out to man, some gentle spirit pleaded for him—that he should not have foreseen added to the tale, that he should not see the falling knife or hear the water lapping that one day shall entomb him! Or, was it kept back because man, having knowledge, would be man without reason—for terror would make him mad, and he would end his fears by hurrying their fulfillment! At least, we are blind to the future, and let us be thankful for it.

Presently Lady Holm-hurst got up from her chair and said that she was going to bed, but that, first of all, she must kiss Dick, her little boy, who slept with his nurse in another cabin. Augusta rose and went with her, and they both kissed the sleeping child, a bonny boy of five, and then they kissed each other and separated for the night.

Some hours afterward, Augusta woke up, feeling very restless. For an hour or more she lay thinking of Mr. Tombey and many other things, and listening to the swift "lap, lap" of the water as it slipped past the vessel's sides, and the occasional tramp of the watch as they set fresh sails. At last her feeling of unrest got too much for her, and she rose and, partially, very partially, dressed herself—in the gloom she could only find her flannel vest and petticoat—twisted her long hair in a coil round her head, put on

a hat and a thick ulster that hung upon the door—for they were running into chilly latitudes—and slipped out on deck.

It was getting toward dawn, but the night was still dark. Looking up: Augusta could only just make out the outlines of the huge bellying sails, for the "Kangaroo" was rushing along before the westerly wind under a full head of steam, and with every inch of her canvas set to ease the screw. There was something very exhilarating about the movement, the freshness of the night, and the will, sweet song of the wind as it sung among the rigging. Augusta turned her face toward it, and, being alone, stretched out her arms as though to catch it. The whole scene awoke some answering greatness in her heart—something that slumbers in the bosom of the higher race of human beings, and only stirs—and then but faintly—when the passion moves them, or when Nature communes with her nobler children. She felt that at every moment she could write as she had never written yet. All sorts of beautiful ideas, all sorts of aspirations after that noble calm and purity of thought and life for which we pray and long but are not allowed to reach, came flowing into her heart. She almost thought that she could hear her lost Jeanie's voice calling down the gale, and her strong imagination began to paint her hovering like a sea-bird upon white wings high above the maimosts' taper point, and gazing through the darkness into the soul of her loved. Then, by those faint and imperceptible degrees with which thoughts fade one into another, from Jeanie her thought got round to Estancia Mason. She wondered if he had ever called at the lodgings at Birmingham after she left.

Somehow, she had an idea that he was not altogether indifferent to her; there had been a look in his eyes she did not quite understand. She almost wished now she had sent him a line or a message. Perhaps she would do so from New Zealand. Just then her meditations were interrupted by a step, and turning round, she found herself face to face with the captain.

"Why, Miss Smithers!" he said, "what on earth are you doing here at this hour!—making up romances!"

"Yes," she answered, laughing, and with perfect truth. "The fact of the matter is, I could not sleep, so I came on deck; and very pleasant it is!"

"Yes," said the captain "if you want something to put into your stories you won't find anything better than this. The 'Kangaroo' is showing her heels, isn't she, Miss Smithers? That's the beauty of her, she can sail as well as steam; and when she has a strong wind like this abate, it would have to be something very quick that would catch her. I believe that we have been running over seventeen knots an hour ever since midnight. I hope to make Kerguelen Island by seven o'clock, to correct my chronometers."

"What is Kerguelen Island?" asked Augusta.

"Oh! it is a desert place where nobody goes, except now and then a whaler to fill up with water. I believe that the astronomer sent an expedition there a few years ago to observe the transit of Venus; but it was a failure because the weather was so misty—it is nearly always misty there. Well, I must be off, Miss Smithers. Good-night; or rather, good-morning!" Before the words were well out of his mouth there was a loud shout forward: "Ship ahead!"

Then came an awful yell from a dozen voices: "Starboard! Hard a-starboard, for God's sake!"

With a wild leap, like the leap of a man suddenly shot, the captain left her side and rushed on to the bridge. At the same instant the engine-bell rang and the steering chains began to rattle furiously on the rollers at her feet as the steam steering gear did its work. Then came another yell:

"It's a whaler—no lights!" came an answering shriek of terror from some big black object that loomed ahead. Before the echoes had died away, before the great ship could even answer to her helm, there was a crash, such as Augusta had never heard, and a sickening shock, that threw her on her hands and knees on to the deck, shaking the iron masts till they trembled as though they were willow wands, and making the huge sails flap and for an instant fly back. The great vessel, rushing along at her frightful speed of seventeen knots, had plunged into the ship ahead with such hideous energy that she cut her clean in two and passed over her as though she were a pleasure boat! Struck upon a shriek of despair came piercing the gloomy night, and then, as Augusta struggled to her feet, she felt a horrible succession of bumps, accompanied by a crushing, grinding noise. It was the "Kangaroo" driving right over the remains of the whaler.

In a very few seconds it was done, and looking astern, Augusta could just make out something black that seemed to float for a second or two upon the water, and then disappear into its depths. It was the shattered hull of the whaler.

Then there arose a faint murmuring sound, that grew first into a hum, then into a roar, and then into a clamor that rent the skies, and up from every hatchway and cabin in the great ship, human beings—men, women, and children, came rubbing and tumbling with faces white with terror—white as their night gear. Some were absolutely naked, having slipped off their night-dress and had no time to put on anything else; some had put on ulsters and great-coats, others had blankets thrown round them or carried their clothes in their hands. Up they came, hundreds and hundreds of them (for there were a thousand souls on board the "Kangaroo"), pouring off like terrified spirits flying from the mouth of hell, and from them arose such a hideous clamor as few have lived to hear.

[To be Continued.]

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