

Mr. Grubbe had evidently discovered something about the mouth, eyes, nose, cheeks, face, form, figure, movements of the young girl which did not exist for others.

Nevertheless, whatever Mr. Grubbe saw there, he had become infatuated. I could see the warm flame radiating from the general expression of his features like heat waves from a radiator. His eager and appealing manner of addressing the young lady betrayed the well of emotion that was bubbling up within him.

In my passive way I could tell that the very reverse was the temperature of the girl's heart towards her fellow countryman. I had a suspicion that she feared him, dreaded that something might happen, and I fancied that she would welcome escape from his society. At times the silent eyes would regard me as though they would voice an appeal for protection. Of course I dared not act lest my suspicions might be imaginary.

Grubbe had chaperoned the young lady all the way from Ireland, perhaps assuming the self-imposed duty without mutual agreement. This might have been well and good had he remained friends and a chaperon only. At Winnipeg they were to part company according to the individual itinerary.

That evening in our stateroom the Irishman confessed his love to me. He was like an apparently extinct volcano suddenly burst out into flames again. He told me a story that could only end in disaster. I could see no hope, no sunshine, no future for the man in the light of what I knew.

I lay stretched out in the upper berth under the blankets and listened to him. He paced up and down, and at rare intervals would sit on the edge of his bunk. I thought the machinery of his vocal energy would never run down. In a wild spasmodic monologue—for that is all that it could be called—I learned that my friend was fifty years of age, had never been married, and had never been in love before.

And Oh! the madness of his belated passion for the deaf mute creature of about twenty summers whom he had met by such a slim chance in the drifting human tide! It was the dammed-up supply of fifty years suddenly broken loose and tearing through the gap at one time in one uncontrollable torrent.

At intervals he would break off into an unpatriotic abuse of Ireland. It might be said of him, however, that his hatred for Ireland was instigated by a great loyalty to Great Britain. He appeared to hate the one to as great a degree as worshipped the other. It was not Ireland he complained of, it was the bearing of a number of his fellow countrymen towards the British Empire. With the two problems of Ireland on the one hand and his mad love on the other, I was inclined to suspect the soundness of his mental balance.

My eyes closed with the turbulent flow of words radiating through the confined space of the stateroom, and the last thing I remembered before sleep came with its soothing balm to my relief was "me room mate" gulping down another drink of his favorite drug during effervescence.

"I'd give ye some too, but it's nearly done. I take it as a medicine."

A few seconds later there was the uncertain impression of the Irishman rinsing his mouth with iced water. I fell asleep wondering in a half-conscious sort of way if my friend was washing the taste of Ireland from his mouth.

The following forenoon I was walking the deck alone. I saw our mutual friend of the perpetual silence sitting on a seat gazing across the water. There was a swish of waves and the steamer rose and fell with cradled motion. There was an occasional toot of the fog horn for we were befogged; but, in the dense opaqueness of her head the deaf mute could not hear a sound. In all the tragedy of her almost wooden headedness, however, she enjoyed the blessed sense of sight, for she saw me approaching, and turned her head around slightly and smiled.

I went and sat down beside her.

She wrote on a slip of paper and handed it to me:

"Can you save me?" it said.

I looked at the note and then at the girl in astonishment. "Save you!" I wrote. "Why, do you expect to be drowned?"

She smiled as I thought tragically.

"From Mr. Grubbe," she wrote again.

I was more astonished than ever, although, as I have said, I suspected that she feared and dreaded the man, and would welcome any avenue of escape.

"But he is going to Vancouver, you to Edmonton. You will soon be free of him," I replied in writing.

She shrugged her shoulders as though in doubt, or as though she feared differently.

"YOU are going to Edmonton?" was the unexpected question that followed, and one which seemed to put it up to me again.

Further conversation was interrupted by the appearance of Mr. Grubbe in person. When the girl saw him approaching she gathered up the scraps of paper on which we had conversed, and which were lying on the seat beside us, rose hastily and threw the fragments over the side of the vessel into the water.

The Irishman sat down so that our young friend was between us. He apparently saw nothing amiss in the girl's actions, for he smiled sweetly and touched her hand as I thought intentionally, in the wildness of his passion. She recoiled from the unwelcome familiarity and frowned angrily. Even this did not daunt the bold lover for he continued to smile and began to speak through the medium of his fingers.

In Winnipeg we went in a body to one of the large hotels, Mr. Grubbe and myself assisting the girl with her wraps and baggage in the handicap of her misfortune. We had supper together and then retired separately to our various apartments.

A little later in the evening while walking up and down in the large waiting room, I was surprised to feel a touch on my arm.

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