

Fifteen minutes later, as he stood alone in his chamber, he opened his memorandum book to make an entry therein; something fell to the floor. As he bent to find it, he saw only a dried, crinkled bunch of apple-blossoms. Yet he sat, forgetful of everything else, gazing upon it, until at last two tears fell plump upon the little dead petals.

Whatever he had thought of the countess, she was now forgotten, and in her place he saw a fresh, slim girl in white, with pink cheeks and pink flowers peeping out behind them. He had that morning decided, his business being now properly adjusted, to take a run over to Switzerland, as the countess had said she should do. But, instead, he took up his newspaper and looked at the steam-ship list. Within twenty four hours he had engaged a state-room on a steamer bound for New York.

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A jar, a crash, a shudder felt from stem to stern, and Alene was wide-awake in a trice. People were rushing on deck—everybody was frantic—what had happened?

They had collided with another steamer, and their own ship was slowly filling and sinking.

At length it was discovered that the other ship was comparatively uninjured, and boats were put out, and the throng of terrified passengers conveyed as rapidly as possible to the other vessel.

With no baggage and little clothing, just as they had fled from their state-rooms, they were conveyed on board the waiting steamer, a crowd of woe-begone, frenzied, frightened people.

Warm-hearted passengers were waiting to receive and aid, and women and children were carried by strong arms to the welcome nooks of shelter provided for them.

One gentleman—a finely formed fellow of about thirty—stopped short, as the flickering light of the cabin fell on the face of the young girl he held. She had not fainted, but she was weeping hysterically, and heeded nothing about her.

Her gold-brown hair fell in masses over her white wrapper, and tangled in his hands.

He seemed to realize the situation.

"Ah, Mr. Willis, here is your—wife."

Mr. Bob Willis turned.

"My what?" he asked, looking as if the terror of the night had been such as to leave him prepared for anything.

"Your wife."

"Oh!—ah!—you are mistaken, sir. Ah, I see, old friend Ogere! How d'ye do?" and the next moment he was gone.

But Alene, from the moment Ogere had spoken, ceased her weeping, and was now staring into the face above her own with wide-open, rational eyes. She knew that voice, and all fear was gone, yet she was much overwrought still. She had heard what Ogere had said, and remembered the note.

"His wife? Never!" she cried fiercely. "Do you think I would ever marry such a creature as that?"

Then the comical side of the situation striking her, she burst into hysterical laughter, in which Ogere joined, so overjoyed was he at the discovery he had made.

Of course it had all been a mistake; yet, had not Bob Willis intimated he was engaged to this girl, and even shown him her note of acceptance?

Yes, Mr. Bob had done all this in order to rid himself of a formidable rival, and he had succeeded; but his vanity had overleaped itself, and he had not found the poor but beautiful Miss Ellerby so much in love with himself or his money-lags as with her memory of the absent.

After all, in these modern days, it is refreshing to meet with a little sentiment, though there are those who are totally unprepared for it.

"They must have broken off," thought Ogere, as he finished his promenade with Alene.

"Will you be my wife?" he whispered, as they sat down. And now his tone is sober enough, goodness knows!

And for answer Alene turns her poor, foolish, tear-stained face, and hides it on his sleeve; for, between laughing and crying, she despairs of trusting her voice.

But she does not turn upon him look of scorn she had sent after Bob Willis, and the movement bespeaks some little interest in his companionship that is remarkably satisfactory to Raymond Ogere.

"It is an ill wind that blows no one any good," quotes Ogere; "and