

**MAIDA'S SHIPWRECKED WOOER**

By H. M. EGBERT

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MAIDA stood still and looked at the black object upon the beach. At first she thought it was a seal, washed ashore after the great storm that had whipped up the shingle in great ridges all around the lighthouse rock. Then she saw that it was a man.

She held her breath in terror. Presently she ventured to draw nearer. It was a young man, with dark hair and a pale face, the tan of the neck ending in a V where the open shirt collar disclosed the white of the skin beneath.

For a moment Maïda did not know what to do. Then, moved by compassion, she knelt beside him and rested his head upon her knees, while she tried to revive him, chafing his hands and dashing sea water upon his face.

All the while her heart beat furiously. She had never seen a man before, except some occasional sea captain, grizzled and bowed, who rowed out to the lonely lighthouse, and the man who brought oil and provisions in his motor boat.

Maïda's mother had kept the lighthouse ever since Maïda was born. She had lived there alone, tending the light ceaselessly, a worn and shriveled, hard-featured, taciturn old woman, who seldom spoke.

She had bought books and taught her daughter to read and write. Often Maïda had spoken of her desire to see the world outside; but the very suggestion aroused the mother's fury to such a degree that Maïda had come at last to acquiesce in her lot as inevitable.

The sea captains, though they looked at her pityingly, had been afraid of the grim old woman, whose loneliness had turned her brain. They spoke to Maïda hurriedly, and always watched to avoid the old lighthouse keeper's anger.

The young man opened a pair of dazlingly blue eyes on Maïda.

"Am I dead and are you a fairy?" he asked.

"No," answered Maïda. "This is Inch rock."

He groaned. "I remember," he muttered. "Let me see if I can stand."

She helped him to his feet and stood beside him, watching him anxiously. No bones were broken. But he was very weak, and the chopping sea made any thought of putting out impossible.

"If mother finds you she will kill me," said the girl.

"Why?" inquired the young man, regarding her curiously.

"She hates men. She never means me to marry or see a man. Oh, I don't know what to do, sobbed Maïda.

"Isn't there some place where I can hide until an opportunity comes for going away?" asked the young man.

"Yes," answered Maïda. "The base of the tower. You can stay there and I can bring you food. Mother leaves me to carry up oil from the store-room. But you will go soon, won't you?"

"As soon as I can," answered the young man, groaning. "I think," he added, "something is broken after all—in my side. It feels as if a rib had gone."

Maïda got him to the base of the tower and made him comfortable upon some sacking. The young man stretched himself out at ease. He told her how he had been on the bark that had gone ashore two miles away the night before. He had been the only survivor when the lifeboat swamped. He had clung to it until the waves washed him ashore off Inch rock. Then he had remembered nothing.

Maïda listened in fascination as he told her his story. He was the only son of a rich importer, an Englishman who had settled in the Canaries and married a Spanish lady. He, too, had been tired of his island. His father, reluctant to lose his only child, had at last granted him permission to sail on a voyage to Boston, to which port he had consigned an importation.

He spoke of his own island home in terms which aroused every dormant desire in the girl to travel. His own father had spent his youth in the United States, and, strangely enough, not far from the lighthouse—at Seabury, on the Maine coast.

"Maïda! Maïda! Where are you, child?"

Maïda started in terror and ran up the lighthouse stairs as her mother summoned her.

"Where have you been, Maïda?"

"On the shore, mother," faltered the girl, and she lowered her eyes, unable to meet her mother's piercing gaze.

"Aye, dreaming of sweethearts, I'll warrant. All my words to you for nothing. Didn't I refuse a handsome young fellow, and rich, who loved me to distraction, because I had learned all men were villains?"

"Yes, mother."

"You'll stay with your old mother, Maïda?" The voice was pleading now, and it was the first time Maïda's mother had ever pleaded with her.

The girl's eyes filled; she nodded and turned away.

But those stolen hours were the sweetest in which the girl had lived. They loved each other at sight, she and the young man in the basement of the lighthouse. They planned a thousand things. When he got well he was to confront Maïda's mother

boldly, and demand Maïda by natural right. If she refused, they two would go away together in the next sea captain's boat that touched at Inch rock.

Maïda listened with beating heart while he told her of his home in the Canaries, of his father, who would never reject the choice his son made of a bride; of the tropical trees and palms in that island paradise.

So three nights and days passed. The young man had recovered from his injury. And they ever planned the method of breaking the news to the crazed old woman above.

Maïda feared her mother no longer. She seemed to have unfolded from girlhood to womanhood in those three days; and, as if sensible of it, her mother's demeanor toward her had insensibly altered.

On the fourth night the mild air and a brilliant moon tempted them from the cellar. Above, they knew the old woman would be seated, as she always sat, beside the light, thinking—of what Maïda never knew. It was safe if they kept under the tower. They wandered on together, and her lover's arm sought Maïda's waist and held her, and their lips met in a happy kiss. Insensible of the passage of time, they wandered on.

Suddenly a slight noise startled them. Before them stood Maïda's mother, frantic, with rage and grief. She shook her fist at Maïda and babbled incoherently.

"Come, mother," said the young man. "I own we played you an unfair trick, but it wasn't my fault that I should have got washed ashore upon an island where the dearest girl in the world lives."

"Aye, you've stole her from me," sobbed the old woman. "But I'll hold her. I'll kill you both first. I'll burn the tower and you—"

"Now, mother, be sensible," pleaded the young man, laying his hand on her arm. "You haven't thought that Maïda would grow up to womanhood some day, that marriage is her right, as love is. You haven't created her rightly."

"Rightly?" cried the old woman. "What right has a girl in the world today? Who is there to care for her except her mother? Listen to me, and I'll tell you something that not even Maïda knows."

"You'll laugh and sneer when I tell you that in my day I was the belle of my native town, not many miles from here. Among all my suitors there was just one I gave my heart to. He was handsome—oh, yes, he was handsome. I was just a girl, and I didn't know that the young, quiet Englishman, whom I laughed at, because he was afraid to look me in the face, was worth twenty of my false lover. I trusted him."

"He was coming back to marry me very soon, and so nobody need know. And I had faith in him—the faith a girl has. And I waited, and he never came. And the folks found out my shame, and where everybody had sought my company I was despised and outcast, and I had nobody, nobody at all to ask advice of before Maïda was born. That's the sort of chance a girl has. And now you know, do you still want Maïda, knowing what she is?"

Maïda shrank back, hardly understanding the passion of bitter memory that lashed her mother, but the young man drew her to him.

"I do," he answered.

"I learned too late what false hearts men have," continued the mother. "There was just one that stood by me—the young Englishman who had loved me. He wanted me still, he wanted to care for Maïda. But I couldn't let him. I knew it would be pity and not love. So I came here. If there's another man alive like him I might trust my girl to him, but to none other. And there could be only one Geoffrey Hale in the world."

The young man, who had listened attentively, started and then sprang forward.

"My father!" he cried. "You are Louise Troy. He has often spoken of you. Look at me, mother. Don't you see my father's face in me?"

Incredulously the old woman seized him by the shoulder and stared into his eyes. Suddenly a mask seemed to fall from her face.

"I have—lived for this day," she said solemnly. "Be good to her. I—I—"

He caught her as she stumbled forward. But he knew that, having her day, she could rest peacefully till her night ended.

**Fiddler Crab One of Oddities of Nature**

There is one member of the crab family for which the Latin name is Gelasimus, meaning "laughable." The name seems appropriate, for he is a very queer little fellow, says the Montreal Star. The male has one claw of immense size, the other being quite small. The big claw is brightly colored, and when he runs he waves it about as if he were energetically beckoning, or playing a stirring tune on a violin; hence he is often known as the "calling crab" or "fiddler crab."

Fiddler crabs inhabit various parts of the world and usually are found in large numbers on muddy or sandy flats left dry by the tide, where they may be seen hurrying over the sand or peering out of their holes, into which they vanish when alarmed. The holes, about a foot deep, are made by the crab digging up and carrying away mud or sand.

**Excess Baggage!**

"This car has four-wheel brakes—" began the salesman.

"Applesauce!" snorted the fuming youth. "Show me one with four accelerators and no brakes."

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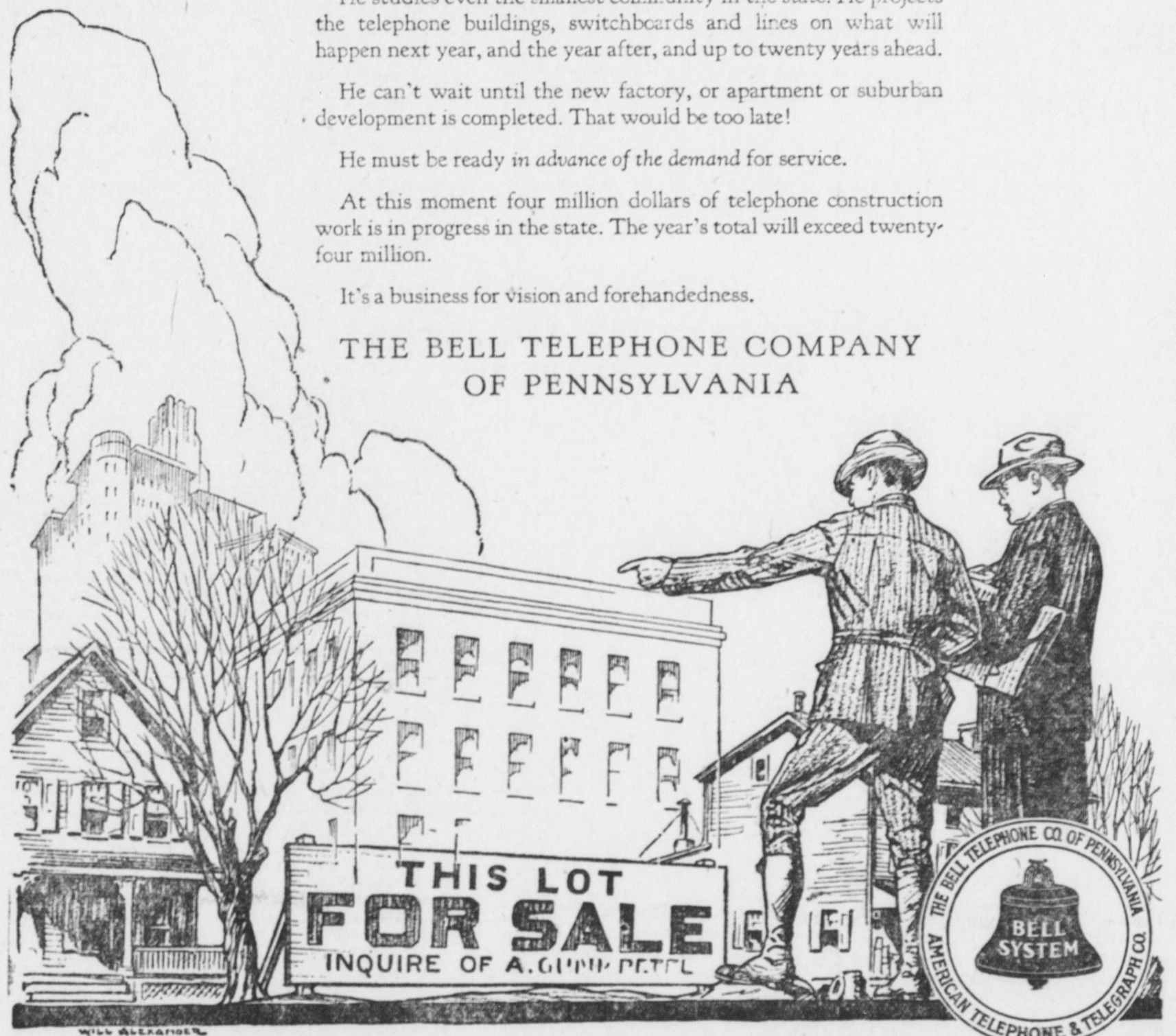
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