

HER WIDOW

By EDMUND B. D'AUVERGNE Author of "Her Husband's Widow," Etc.

The story of a man and a girl, and circumstances which were altered through the intervention of a kindly disposed fate.

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MAUD PLESSEY rested her elbows on the ship's side and, pressing her hands against her cheeks, gazed out across the sea. The night was dark and moonless. The waves were visible only by their own phosphorescence or in the thin ribbons of light radiated from the little cargo chutes. Here and there a point of light glimmered across the blackness of the night indicated the path of some vessel. The throbbing of the engines and the rush of waters under the keel sounded very loud in the listener's ear.

Suddenly a great star, larger and brighter than any in the heavens, shone out of the darkness to the northward, on a level with the masthead. The broad and level beam of light from the searchlight scanned the horizon for 30 seconds inquisitively, searching on the low deck of the steamer. The girl, dazzled by the light, stepped back a pace, clasping her hands behind her head.

CHAPTER II. SHE looked round and smiled. Captain Arrol was standing by her. He was a broad-shouldered, lithe, and sinewy man of three or four and thirty, with the slightly aquiline features and extremely clean-shaven appearance which one associates rather with the naval officer than the master of a 1200-ton trading steamer.

He leaned with his back to the bulwarks and extracted a cigar from the pocket of his reefer coat. "We shall be in the Thames before 9 tomorrow morning," he remarked thoughtfully. "McCloekie is not sparing the coal tonight. It's wonderful the speed he gets out of those engines, considering they are 20 years old."

He lit his cigar with a patent lighter. The girl looked intently at his face, every detail of which she knew a thousand times better than he did. Tonight she missed the smile which, for all his habit of command and aggressive chin, was generally to be seen in the corners of his mouth. The lines on his forehead were contracted. He had the air of one who has been thinking very seriously.

The stamping of the engines grew suddenly louder, and the vessel lurched and leaped forward as though redoubling her speed. Miss Plessey made a gesture of impatience and kicked the side of the bulwark with the tip of her white shoe. "This beast of a vessel," she exclaimed passionately. "It is like a horse that comes to the stable. Any one would think we were in a hurry to reach London!"

"McCloekie for one," she said. "I scanned his face, but his eyes were fixed in a keen stare on the faraway French light. 'And you,' she asked, 'are you glad?'"

"No, I don't care for London. Haven't set foot there for three years." She turned her head away to hide her disappointment. "You don't say that you're sorry the vessel is so slow?" she said with a trace of bitterness. "I thought perhaps you might be."

"You called this a beast of a ship just now," he reminded her, with a faint upturn of his lips, but he did not look at her.

crew reminded her, she said, of the pirate craft in "Peter Pan." She had telegraphed to her mother that she was safe and on her way home. She was a shrill of the soldiers and a smile of content about his lips, had accompanied her. She had been loath to leave the vessel then; she was loath to leave it now. "Why the crazy old engines seemed to stamp so loudly, the creaking of the boat to be rushing onward like an ocean greyhound. The first light which showed her the shores of England had lit up the deck recesses of her heart. She had been frightened, she had laughed at herself, had talked to herself firmly; but now, when the dawn showed her the shores of England, she could believe herself a truth no longer. At the thought of the impending parting she winced and set her lips together. Then, as she leaned more over the side, she felt a tear rolling slowly down her cheek.

"That is the Grinex light on the side," said a voice at her elbow. "Tomorrow you'll be in South Kensington."

"Are you quite mad, Martin?" she demanded, his Christian name slipping from her lips unawares. "Since we love each other why shouldn't we admit it? Why shouldn't we meet again? Why shouldn't we?" she broke off abruptly and regarded him with frightened eyes. "There isn't another woman, is there?" she asked tremulously.

He dismissed the inquiry contemptuously. "No, there isn't another woman—"

with the red funnel—her with the crates of fruit aboard."

Mrs. Plessey made a peevish exclamation. She rose from the breakfast table and looked through the window of the Tibury Hotel out over the river. The mist had cleared and she had no difficulty in recognizing the vessel by the porter's description. Her maid rose at the same time and followed the direction of her gaze. They exchanged glances of horror and commiseration. Mrs. Plessey sank back in her chair.

"What a shocking old tub!" she exclaimed. "Did you ever see such a boat, Fellee? My poor, poor girl! What a frightful time she must have had and what a dreadful time of day to arrive!"

The maid glanced at the clock. It was a few minutes past 7. "I think it is a little inconceivable," she remarked sympathetically.

Her mistress sighed. "It was very foolish of me to think of meeting her. I don't know why I did. I suppose we had better go out to meet her."

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"The launch is waiting for you, madam," intimated the porter.

Mrs. Plessey pouted and slipped her arms through the fur coat which her maid held in readiness. The garment seemed all too heavy for the frail girl's little figure. Seen from the other side of the room Maud's mother might have

be decent. Besides, you two have known each other in the past, and that's an additional reason. You must want to talk over the lines together."

"A smile flickered across the old woman's face. Captain Arrol smiled also, but his smile was somewhat grim. 'It's quite impossible today,' he repeated sternly. 'The ship has not yet left the pier for the reception of visitors. You must really let me conduct you to your boat!'"

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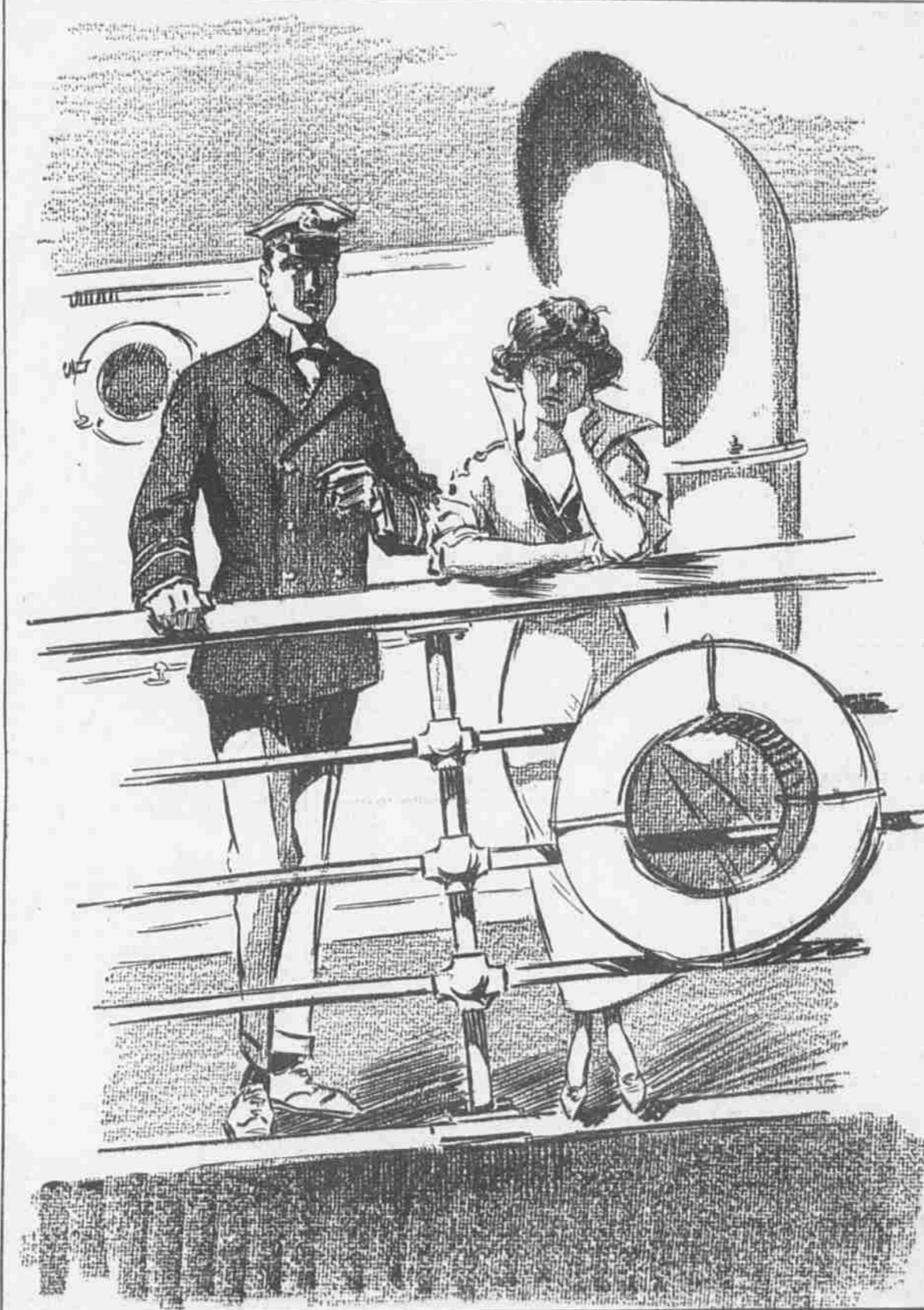
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"OH," CRIED THE GIRL, AS IF SHE HAD BEEN HURT. "I SEE. I— I THOUGHT YOU LIKED ME, THOUGH."

never was. What sort of a woman do you think I am likely to meet cruising on the coast of Morocco? But—"

"Thank heaven for that," she broke in fervently. "I couldn't have stood it if I had been another woman. I never knew I was jealous before!" She pressed his arm, shook the hair from her eyes, and laughed happily.

Martin tried not to laugh. His lips were tightly compressed, his brow was wrinkled. "All the same," he said, "this won't do. I should not have given you like that. I was who told first. Are you going to throw my love back in my face? Kiss me again, dear, and don't be afraid."

brows and lowered them again with an air of resigned acquiescence. "I'm sorry it hasn't worn off yet," he said simply. "But the inference is obvious. I have cut myself off from England and my own people all these years and doomed myself to this sort of life—not that it's been a bad one. There must have been a reason for that, don't you think?"

Her eyes met his. "I don't ask the reason," she said proudly. "I don't believe it was a disgraceful reason, but if it was, I don't care. You are the finest man I ever knew. I love you. I want you."

He bent over, raised her willing lips to his and kissed her. Then, smothering an exclamation, he turned abruptly and stood silent for a long minute, looking out at the chighthouse door.

passed for twenty; from the other side of the table for thirty. Always exultingly gowned, she seemed at first sight a triumph of the fashion artist, a creation of the Rue de la Paix; at a second glance she perceived that she owed less to art than to nature. The fair, fluffy hair still fell in baby curls on her forehead. The dazzling complexion which had raised her from the front row of a musical comedy chorus to the rank of an admiral's wife had suffered little from the ravages of time, and the beauty doctor had so far successfully kept at bay the crowfeet which threatened her big brown eyes.

The porter led the way to a motor-launch which lay alongside the wharf. It was a raw, windy morning, and the river looked very uninviting. Mrs. Plessey shivered and made a grimace as she stepped into the boat followed by her maid. She glanced toward the shore. "You are sure Mr. Huron has not arrived?" she asked the servant.

"Yes, madam. I made very particular inquiries."

"Why, mother," she exclaimed, "you never told me that you had met Captain Arrol! I wonder you didn't recognize the name when I mentioned it. It is rather uncommon. And never told me that you had met the man, half reproachfully, 'why didn't you tell me all this time that you knew mother?'"

"I did in fact tell you that I knew, or rather, had met, the man," she answered. "It is very kind of Mrs. Plessey to acknowledge the acquaintance."

"Why, mother," she exclaimed, "you never told me that you had met Captain Arrol! I wonder you didn't recognize the name when I mentioned it. It is rather uncommon. And never told me that you had met the man, half reproachfully, 'why didn't you tell me all this time that you knew mother?'"

CHAPTER IV. WE do not choose our parents or our brothers and sisters, so we are disposed, till absolutely our own masters, to accept without demur the other relationships forced on us in our childhood. Maud Plessey could only vaguely recall her first introduction to Gilbert Huron. She had a distinct recollection of wringing off his knee and threatening to kick him if he pulled her hair. As this was on her return from her first school and she had not long ceased to wear mourning for her father, she concluded that she must have been then about 7 years old. But her mother assured her that she had been nursed in Gilbert's arms when she was an infant and that he had been an old friend of her father's.

As Mrs. Plessey had managed to cut the acquaintance of almost all her late husband's associates, no one was in a position to dispute this statement; and it had not occurred to Maud to question it. Perhaps his father had been a little hostile toward the man; at any rate, she grew to tolerate him, and by the time she was 14 or 15 his name had become to her as one accepted, not particularly esteemed uncle or aunt. That is not to say that she saw very much of him—or of her mother.

Maternity might or might not be a mode at the moment, but Mrs. Plessey was at the time of the opinion that her charms were increased by the presence of a daughter as tall as herself. She pronounced Maud to be a "very nice little thing," and she had kept the young girl at school, mostly abroad, and took care that she spent a very small fraction of her holidays under the maternal roof.

(To Be Continued in Monday's Evening Ledger)