

A SUMMER ROMANCE

An idle boat, with idle oars, floating idly down with the current of a calm, smooth lake, on whose placid breast the moonlight played at will.

Such a picture, had one been a mere spectator to the mimic scene; but to the two actors, surroundings were lost sight of—they thought only of themselves.

Mocking the moon rays, when they glanced upward, they could see on the bank above them the twinkling lights of the villa and hear the merry voices and gay laughter of the group from which they had escaped.

Arch smiles had passed between its members as they had seen Sidney Allison and Bayard Hunter stroll off arm in arm to where the little boat was moored.

The women had almost ceased to be jealous of Sidney, or to ask where lay her charm. When she exercised her fascination men bowed before her—first from necessity, then from choice.

But, though her victims were countless, she was twenty-three, and Sidney Allison still. However, this time she had encountered (the little girl in Mrs. Graham's villa said) a foe man worthy of her steel.

What she was among men, Bayard Hunter was among women. Therefore, seeing these two brought beneath the same roof, and thrown into daily intercourse, rumor was rife, and speculation awaited results with bated breath.

Meantime, the little boat floated calmly on the quiet surface of the lake. "Miss Allison?"

"It was the first word either had spoken in five minutes. She glanced up at the speaker. The white lace thrown carelessly upon her dark hair, out from which peered the beautiful, pale face, lent her some of the moon's mystic charm; but meeting the magnetic gaze of the dark, earnest eyes bent upon her, hers fell for an instant; then, as though ashamed of the momentary weakness, again she questioned look into Mr. Hunter's face.

"Miss Allison," he repeated, slowly, "did you know that we were in danger?"

"In danger?" Her cheek grew a shade paler. She glanced up at the blue vault where sailed so majestically the Goddess of Night—down into the dark depths of the waters, only to see Luna's brilliancy reflected there—around, about her. Not a leaflet stirred.

"No," he said, in answer to her look, "not from any of these. The moon, the wind, the water, all our friends to-night. We are in danger from other things."

Oh, how she prayed the moon might fall to make apparent the instant flushing of blood to her cheek! She felt it glow, like a warm crimson rose, even while she raised her little head almost defiantly, as though to hurl a challenge at his audacity.

Men had made love to her in many forms, but always as supplicants. This man dared suppose her in equal danger with himself.

"You deal in enigmas, Mr. Hunter," she returned laughingly. "I am accustomed to plain speech."

"Rather say that plain speech is an unknown tongue, and that I am the first man who has dared speak frankly. Would you have me more open still? You shall have your wish. A week longer under the same roof with you, a week more of exposure to my maddened fascination and my ship would go to wreck and ruin on the bar; unless—"

"—he leaned nearer, his voice softer, more full of tender feeling, and his hand fell on hers very lightly, but with caressing grace, "unless, Sidney, you would let it float your pennon and guide it into the safe harbor of your love."

She had been wooed many times, in many climes, by many men, but never had she ever moved her feet from where she stood that night in June. Yet this man dared tell her that in another week this might come to pass.

Others had sworn to go to her presence to put an end to the existence she had rendered miserable; or had vowed that henceforth woman's smile would be gall and wormwood; or pleaded that she had shorn their manhood of its strength, and rendered their life a burden.

This one did none of these things. While his strength yet was his, he saw and met the danger.

"A week hence she said to herself bitterly, 'and the flame might singe him. Now his hands are all unscorched. He does not say 'I love you' in time I might love you.'"

Was he then to win so easy a victory? Not so. "Let us go home," she interrupted, with a little shiver. "It is growing chilly."

"Sidney, is this my answer?" "Your answer?" with an assumption of surprise. "I was not aware of any question."

"You shall not even have this excuse. Will you be my wife?" His voice was stern now—stern to harshness—and his grasp tightened on her hand.

"Nor ever will be!" It was only "the might have been!"

He was not the man, she knew full well, to plunge desperately into flirtation, or to woo a woman's name at one's leisure, or to rise earlier or to retire later or rise earlier or to retire later or rise earlier or to retire later.

The difference between them was only this—his heart was healing, perhaps already healed, but he would bear its scar to the grave, hers was a festering sore, which hurt her as she had to let the physician who might work his cure pass her by.

The Summer wanted to a close. Nature had lent autumn its wondrous paint box and magic brush, and mountain and hillside were converted thereby into glorious beauty.

Then came King Frost, first to heighten by his touch, then to follow by Winter's lagging foot-steps, mercifully bearing the exquisite shroud of snow to cover up all signs of devastation and decay.

The season in the gay world was at its height. Occasional merriment, and the debauches for its honors arising at the fact that, though it was Miss Allison's fourth winter, her former success paled in its most effulgent light.

She and Bayard Hunter constantly met. She almost wished he might avoid her, but at their first chance encounter he had approached with undisturbed heart.

"How charming you are looking, Miss Allison," he said. And all in vain she had watched for a tremor in his tone, or shadow of embarrassment in his manner.

"Only a week between him and shipwreck!" she thought bitterly. He had sailed so far from the fatal rock, that doubtless he would now laugh at its supposed danger; and I—was weak and vain enough to think he stood upon the precipice of ruin.

The new year had come, and one evening Sydney stood alone in her room, her eyes bent upon a letter at the fast gathering darkness, when through its sombre shade she saw a figure pass and mount the steps.

"A visitor!" she uttered wearily; then waited the inevitable announcement she knew must follow.

"But spite of her every effort, she started when the door opened, Mr. Hunter's name. Oh, how glad she was that the rooms were not lighted as she went forward to receive him."

"May I welcome you in darkness?" she questioned.

"As you will," he answered. "I have but a few moments to stay. I am come to bid you good-bye, and to ask you to wish me bon voyage."

"Bon voyage! You are going abroad?"

"Yes, I sail on Saturday. I hesitated about calling, but my desire to see you led me to believe you would pardon my audacity in supposing it worth the while."

"My friends are always welcome, Mr. Hunter. I did not suppose it necessary you should hear that repeated now."

"Nor is it. It was only a hurried fancy on my part which induced me to question you. I shall come back to rest, with my mind clearer. At least I shall be some years older. When I return I presume I shall look for Miss Allison in vain, until I find her in some matron, equally charming. I cannot imagine her quite so old as you."

"So he could speak thus lightly of her becoming the wife of another man? And he was going away; she might never again hear his voice or see his face. It was too cruel!"

He and fate were too strong for her. The tears gathered in the gray eyes but she brushed them down. "He rattled on—she had no need to speak. Then he rose to go."

"Good-bye, Miss Allison!"—he took her hand in both his—"good-bye? God bless you!"

"Was it her fancy that just at the last, his voice trembled?"

He crossed the room; he had gained the door. Another instant, he would be gone—another instant, it might be late.

"Bayard!" she said, softly. Two strides it seemed, brought him back to her.

"You called me? For what? To make my going more painful?"

An Intricate Proposition.

"Did it ever appear to you, my dear, that a person going overland would have to mail two letters a day from the train in order to have one letter a day return to San Francisco?"

"asked Major Max the other evening after the cloth was removed from the table, and his wife was pouring his glass of two-thirds brandy and one-third curacao, which she had just taken from the only civilized drink with which to prepare for the after-dinner cigar."

Mrs. Max passed the Major his cordial, and waited a moment before replying: "Why, no; it seems to me that if a person traveling east mailed a letter each day by a westward-bound train a letter would arrive here each day."

"Mrs. Max answered cautiously, for while she knew that the Major pretended to deplore the fact that it was illogical, he really derived much comfort from his superior comprehension, and was somewhat addicted to studying out intricate propositions with which to puzzle the lady."

"You think so do you?" queried the Major, as though about to be convinced by her, while in truth he only wanted her to commit herself more decidedly, that his victory would be the more signal.

"Why, yes," Mrs. Max continued, somewhat assured, "if you mailed a letter on the first day, it would get here on the next day; if you mailed one on the day following it would arrive here the day after the first, and the letters, being mailed 24 hours apart, would, of course, continue to arrive here a day apart. They couldn't go further apart on the road, could they Major?"

Mrs. Max wound up this sequence of feminine logic with a triumphant accent, and felt sure that she had posed the Major, for he did not reply until after lighting a cigar. Then he said slowly, "You post a letter the first day out?"

"That letter arrives here the day after you leave?"

"Certainly. One day gone, one letter received."

"Exactly. Well, the next day—a little curacao, straight, please—the next day you post another letter from the train, and—"

"And that arrives here the day after the first, of course, making two days out and two letters received, and so on to New York. Eh, Major?"

If Mrs. Max had not been examining a new pattern of lace she had in her sleeve she might have noticed the satisfied smile the Major had as he leaned back in his chair and said:

"The second day out you would be at Ogden?"

"Yes."

"Wouldn't it take as long for a letter to return to San Francisco as it had it had taken you to go Ogden?"

"I suppose so."

"Then the second letter you arrived here two days after you arrived at Ogden, and four days after you left here?"

Mrs. Max looked up and said, hesitatingly:

"Well, I don't see how you make that out."

"I do not make it out, Mrs. Max. I only asked you if I was right."

"No, you are not; if you post a letter on a returning train each day, it will take a letter to arrive here each day, and I don't care."

"Mrs. Max, how long does it take to go to New York?"

"Seven days, I suppose."

"Then a letter to arrive would be seven days after you left the train, and it would take it six days to return, being twelve days after you left here. Now, as you had only mailed five letters before the one which arrived on the twelfth day, how could a letter a day have arrived?"

TACT.

It was once Canezer's good fortune to spend a few days in the modest home of a friend of slender means, a home that was all that its owner could afford to make it, yet lacked many things that would have made it more comfortable and pleasant. During Canezer's stay two guests were entertained at the table, and both of them men of means and wide acquaintance, accustomed to all the luxuries that wealth can give. But they were widely different in their behavior. The first dwelt upon the fact that the house was an out-of-the-way place and that there were few or no neighbors. At the table he told of the delicious tea he had drunk at the house of one friend, of the rich tea service he had seen upon the table of another, of the rare old china that was used in his own household, and of the delicate meals he had eaten from it. 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