

Her Prince

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protection. For a moment he forgot everything but that he was alone with her upon the island—that she was beautiful and that she loved him with the first passion of a young love. The time of night, the mystery of the situation, the charm of the girl, overcame him, and he held out his arms to her. An intoxicating sense of bliss overcame her as she sank into them, and felt his tender kisses on her cheek.

"Poor little child," he said, gently, drawing her down on the rocky seat by the cave. "You are frightened. There—lean against me, little one. Let us be happy while we can. You have found what you were searching for at last. Poor little bird, shut up in a cage of gold—you have broken through the bars and got your freedom!"

She fell asleep, with her head upon his breast, her fair young face turned up toward the sky, her beautiful bosom heaving gently with each breath like a child in its first sleep of innocence. And the man of the world looked out toward the sea, lost—deeply lost—in thought. The waves rose higher and higher. She stirred in her sleep and started at their swishing sound, but smiled when she saw his face.

"Is not it beautiful?" she murmured. "What, sweetheart?" he asked, softly. "Oh, everything," she answered—"the waves, the moonlight, the wind, and you."

His grasp tightened round her, his lips were touching hers. "Listen to me, little one," he whispered. "This is only a foretaste of love; this is but a peep through a half-closed door. The great, broad, unlimited valley lies beyond us. Your little feet have never trodden there, but, by your will, they shall yet tread. I cannot promise you lifelong renunciation. A past too black for sensitive eyes like yours prevents it—but I can promise you the happiness you have craved for. Will you come with me, little sweetheart? Will you risk the bitter dregs of the cup for the sake of the sweet essence flowing at the top?"

She listened and her breath came fast in hysterical sobs. There was the sound of the splash of oars in the distance. Herr Goshen sprang to his feet and a voice answered his call. The passing sail had come.

Lady Sylvia was dressed for the opera and her maid regarded her with satisfaction as she pinned the spray of pink geranium near to the full white throat. She had noticed a change in her mistress these last few days and she went down to remark on it to the servants.

"It isn't his lordship that she's going to the opera with tonight," she said—"his lordship's in the library—it's another gentleman—that foreigner that's been so much here lately. It's a wonder his lordship isn't jealous, for her ladyship was never better looking than she is now; and when a woman grows suddenly good looking—well, there's generally a cause for it."

Lord Robertshaw was not uneasy. He had allowed Herr Goshen to come as he would to the castle. He had allowed Sylvia to go with him where she liked. "Cast every temptation in a woman's way," was his motto, "and let her prove her virtue. The untried woman is not virtuous at all." But he did not know how sensitive were the little feet he had placed the net for.

In the closed carriage Lady Sylvia drove away by the side of the only man who had brought the sunshine into her uneventful life. They had taken the path by the sea. The tide was high, and the moonlight was shining upon the inwashing waves as if a white angel of purity had, over all, spread out her shining wings.

It was the sight of this that awoke the girl from her dream. The vision came to her with startling reality. The prayer of St. Agnes had been unconsciously her prayer from birth. She had wandered to the edge of the precipice, like one drugged by a powerful narcotic; and now, as she opened her eyes to the depths beneath her, she started back, and with a frightened cry reached out both hands to the man who had led her blindfolded there.

"What are you going to do with me?" she asked. "I cannot marry you—I have given my word to another man."

"Marry me!" he answered, as he took her hands in his. "Oh, heaven! that I could offer marriage to you! A past too black prevents that, child. What can I offer you for your self-renunciation? What I have offered scores of others—a few weeks of delirious happiness, and then the darkness. That is all; but to many it is worth it."

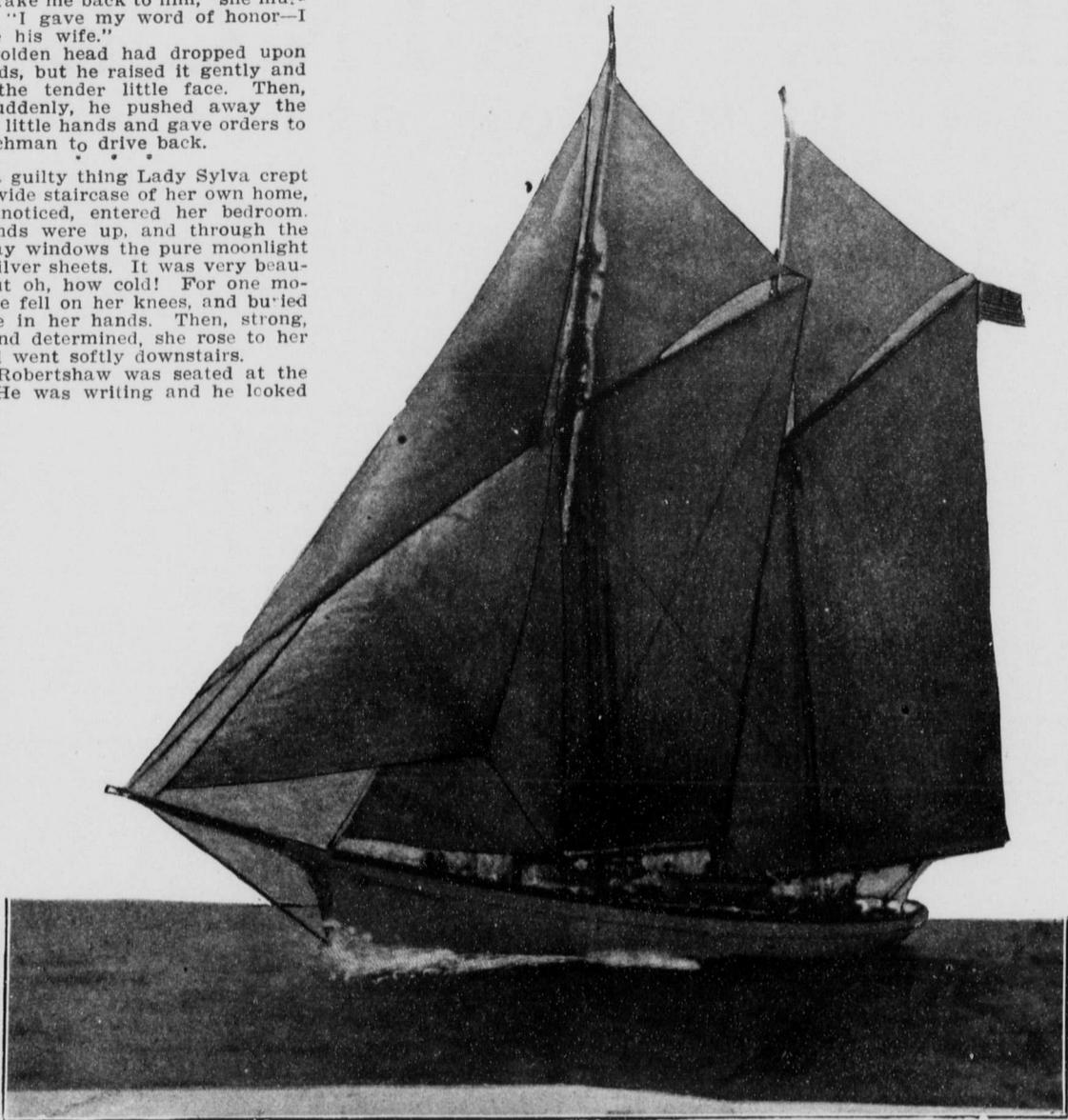
She shivered from head to foot, like

a sensitive snowdrop struck by an icy wind. "Take me back to him," she murmured. "I gave my word of honor—I must be his wife."

Her golden head had dropped upon her hands, but he raised it gently and kissed the tender little face. Then, quite suddenly, he pushed away the clinging little hands and gave orders to the coachman to drive back.

Like a guilty thing Lady Sylva crept up the wide staircase of her own home, and, unnoticed, entered her bedroom. The blinds were up, and through the great bay windows the pure moonlight fell in silver sheets. It was very beautiful, but oh, how cold! For one moment she fell on her knees, and buried her face in her hands. Then, strong, brave and determined, she rose to her feet and went softly downstairs.

Lord Robertshaw was seated at the table. He was writing and he looked



SCHOONER YACHT LURLINE OF LOS ANGELES

up impatiently at the interruption.

She did not advance toward him—she stood at the bottom of the table, her white opera cloak falling off her bare shoulders, her hands clasped in intensity of feeling.

"Aubrey, forgive me!" she burst forth. "I have deceived you—you, who I would rather have died than have wronged—you, who are to be my husband."

"Well?" he said, with icy gravity, as she paused.

She came a few steps nearer and faced him bravely. "I told you I was going to the opera tonight, and I deceived you; but that was not all. I have been untrue to you. I forgot my promise—I forgot my pledge—and—I went with Herr Goshen."

She stretched out her arms toward him as she said the words. There was eloquence enough in eyes and attitude to touch a harder heart than his; but he was not looking at her.

"Where did you go?" he asked shortly, thought his heart was beating to suffocation as he awaited her reply.

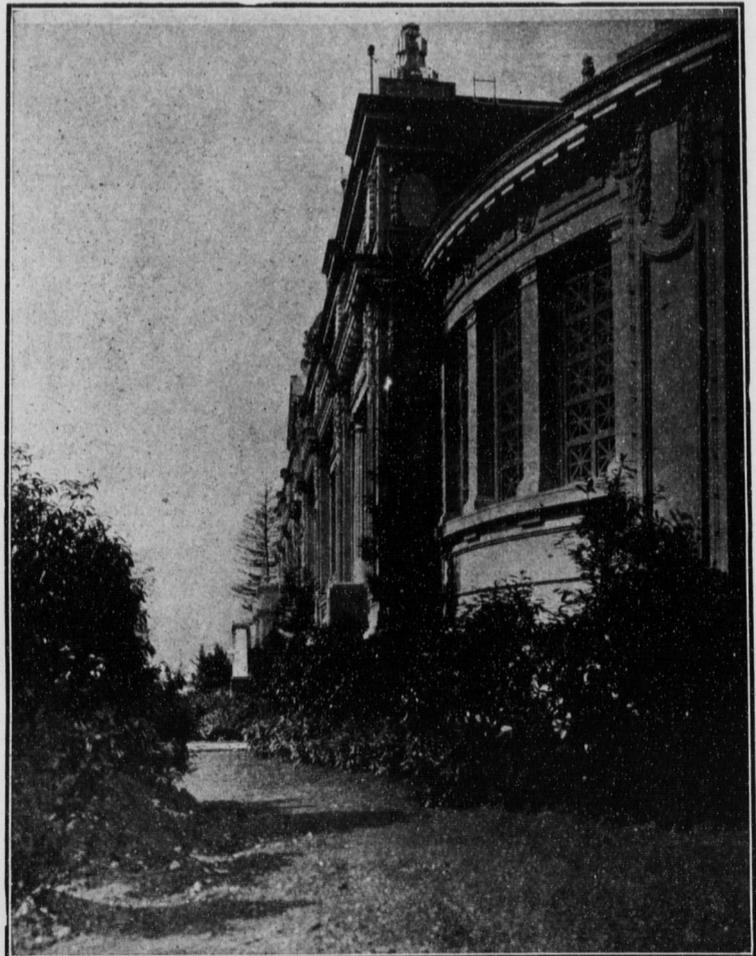
"We took the path by the sandhills," she replied. "The moon was up and the water and the sands were white—and—and—then I came back. Oh, Aubrey, I cannot bear it! Let me go."

She rushed toward the door, but he was there before her, and had placed his back against it.

"Listen to me," he cried, and he caught her wrists in a grip that hurt. "Do you think I have been blind to your doings all these weeks? Why did not I marry you at the beginning? Why did not I marry you when I brought you from the convent here—a sweet, untried and unaffected girl? If I had carried out the last wish of your father, then I should have done it. But no. I wanted to prove you first. Temptation had never touched you with its burning fingers, and I meant to wait until it had. Oh, I know women! I have not lived all my life for nothing. You are like the rest of them." And, with an exclamation of disgust, he flung her from him and returned to his seat.

"Oh, Aubrey!"—her cry was like that of a struck child—"I never meant to

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