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The Minck Brewing Co

An Ocean Acquaintance

By Claude Parnace

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The great steamer plowed its way onward, each throb of the engines bringing her nearer to the destined haven.

At first the man had paid but scant heed to the slender, dark eyed woman who faced him at the long table.

Henceforth they fell into the way of being together. They read and criticized each other's books and magazines, they spent much time pacing the deck, and now had come the last night of it all.

"And am I never to see you again?" he asked. She shook her head. "It is very unlikely."

"You mean"—he demanded. "I mean that it is best not," was the quiet answer, but he bent rebelliously closer.

"Listen," he said determinedly. "I know that it is far too soon to speak, that you have known me barely a week, yet when you talk in this way—say that we shall not meet again!"

"You know nothing of me either," broke in the woman hurriedly—"who I am or whence I come."

"I know you are the loveliest and sweetest woman in the world," he said, with a stubborn frown, "and that I"—

"No, no," cried she sharply. Then she lifted her head. "I have not told you the whole truth," she said, a quiet dignity in her bearing.

"Bancroft's sister." He repeated the words incredulously. "Bancroft's sister." His voice betrayed only an amazed bewilderment, but the woman, sensitively alive to every intonation, heard or fancied a certain hidden repugnance beneath the surprise.

"So I am sure you will agree with me that any further friendship between us is impossible," she said clearly. "Good night and goodbye."

Below in the narrow little cabin Mrs. Raymond threw herself upon the bunk. The heavy tears hung upon her lashes. He hated her then. She wondered at it in a dull sort of way.

"Pardon me," said the old man on the end of the seat, his watery eyes distended in lively apprehension, "has there been some awful disaster? Have you been forced to look upon some awful tragedy?"

"No, sir. You see, we have just become engaged, and we were talking of what a calamity it would have been had we never met."

The derivation of the word "fad" is possibly traceable in the Welsh language. By the law of mutation of initial consonants peculiar to that tongue the root words ffedd and medd are convertible terms.

The young people regarded each other in some confusion. Hesitatingly the youth answered: "No, sir. You see, we have just become engaged, and we were talking of what a calamity it would have been had we never met."

There is a strange little bird, about as big as a robin, which nearly every winter brings us. It is generally alone, like a tiny black and gray hawk in many of his ways, but related truly to the gentle vireos and waxwings. He is the northern shrike, or butcher bird, and he gets a cruel living by catching mice and little birds, which he hangs on locust thorns, sharp twigs or the points of a wire fence, as his little feet, unlike the hawk's, are not strong enough to hold his prey.

It looked very cheerless in the big room. A few persons were clustered about one end of a long table. She cast a quick glance about, hardly know-

ing for what she hoped, but he was not there. The steward brought eggs and coffee, and she managed a cup. Then she went on deck.

The rain was dripping dimly. Here and there a light glimmered faintly through the thick mist. So that was Plymouth. The gang plank leading to the tender was steep and slippery. People moved through the dusk like disembodied spirits. It was all very gloomy and very forlorn, and despite herself she shivered.

"It would be hard to sleep through that racket," assented his companion. At the voice she started violently. Was it—could it be—Cortwright? For a moment she scarcely breathed, thrilled between ecstasy and fear.

"It is you," said the voice, and this time unmistakably it was Cortwright's. "I wasn't sure at first."

"But you!" gasped the woman. "Your ship—Cherbourg?"

"Hang Cherbourg," said he cheerfully. Then his voice dropped. "Do you think that you were very kind to me awhile back?" he asked gravely. "Wasn't it rather mean to spring a surprise of that sort on a man and then run before he could recover?"

"Oh!" expostulated she weakly. This was a new view of the matter. "I thought it was because you didn't care," he went on. "You know, you wouldn't wait, wouldn't give me a chance to speak. I thought—perhaps—anyway, I felt mighty blue when I went below. Then I found—this." She could just glimpse the tiny square of lawn that he showed her. "It lay on the carpet near my door, and it told me—it told me—Ah, sweetheart," he cried, a sudden subdued exultation ringing through his tone, "that gave me the courage to come. It told me that perhaps you felt sorry for me; that perhaps you, too, cared—just a little bit—that you might listen to me. Was I wrong, dear? Will you marry me?"

The mist was drifting out to sea. The clouds had broken, and in the east appeared a glow of crimson and gold. The sun was rising in all its splendor and majesty. The rain was over. For a moment the woman gazed with wide, glad eyes at the newborn day; then she turned to meet the man's eager entreaty.

"I will marry you whenever you like," she said.

They had walked halfway through the park, and suddenly she sat down on a bench. He sat beside her. They were entirely alone save for an old man at one end of their seat immersed in a book. Their agitated conversation continued:

"Oh, it is too dreadful!" she shuddered as she covered her face with her hands as if to shut out some unbearable sight.

"Horrible," she added. "I cannot bear to think of it. The loss of hope, happiness, perhaps even life itself."

"Hush!" he interrupted gently. "Let us no longer think of it or it may grow to prey on our minds."

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