

CHAPTER XLVI.

JOHN had been late in applying for his passage, and in consequence, the ship being very full, had had to take what berth he could get, which happened to be in the second cabin. The occupants of these quarters, however, were not rated as second-class passengers. The Vaterland took none such on her outward voyages, and all were on the same footing as to the fare and the freedom of the ship. The captain and the orchestra appeared at dinner in the second saloon on alternate nights, and the only disadvantage in the location was that it was very far aft; unless it could be considered a drawback that the furnishings were of plain wood and plush instead of carving, gilding, and stamped leather. In fact, as the voyage proceeded, our friend decided that the after-deck was pleasanter than the one amidships, and the cozy second-class smoking-room more agreeable than the large and gorgeous one forward.

Consequently, for a while he rarely went across the bridge which spanned the opening between the two decks. It may be that he had a certain amount of reluctance to encounter Mrs. Edward Ruggles.

The roof of the second cabin deck-house was, when there was not too much wind, a favorite

place with him. It was not much frequented, as most of those who spent their time on deck apparently preferred a place nearer amidships. He was sitting there on the morning of the fifth day out, looking idly over the sea, with an occasional glance at the people who were walking on the promenade-deck below, or leaning on the rail which bounded it. He turned at a slight sound behind him, and rose with his hat in his hand. The flush in his face, as he took the hand which was offered him, reflected the color in the face of the owner, but the grayish brown eyes, which he remembered so well, looked into his, a little curiously, perhaps, but frankly and kindly. She was the first to speak.

"How do you do, Mr. Lenox?" she said.

"How do you do, Mrs. Ruggles?" said John, throwing up his hand as, at the moment of his reply, a puff of wind blew the cape of his mackintosh over his head. They both laughed a little (this was their greeting after nearly six years), and sat down.

"What a nice place!" she said, looking about her.

"Yes," said John; "I sit here a good deal when it isn't too windy."

"I have been wondering why I did not get a sight of you," she said. "I saw your name in the passenger list. Have you been ill?"

"I'm in the second cabin," he said, smiling.

She looked at him a little incredulously, and he explained.

"Ah, yes," she said, "I saw your name, but as you did not appear in the dining saloon, I thought you must either be ill or that you did

not sail. Did you know that I was on board?" she asked.

It was rather an embarrassing question.

"I have been intending," he replied rather lamely, "to make myself known to you—that is, to—well, make my presence on board known to you. I got just a glimpse of you before we sailed, when you came up to speak to a man who had been saying good-bye to Mr. and Mrs. Ruggles. I heard him speak their name, and looking over the passenger list I identified you as Mrs. Edward Ruggles."

"Ah," she said, looking away for an instant, "I did not know that you had seen me, and I wondered how you came to address me as Mrs. Ruggles just now."

"That was how," said John; and then, after a moment, "it seems rather odd, doesn't it, that we should be renewing an acquaintance on an ocean steamer as we did once before, so many years ago? and that the first bit of intelligence that I have had of you in all the years since I saw you last should come to me through the passenger list?"

"Did you ever try to get any?" she asked. "I have always thought it very strange that we should never have heard anything about you."

"I went to the house once, some weeks after you had gone," said John, "but the man in charge was out, and the maid could tell me nothing."

"A note I wrote you at the time of your father's death," she said, "we found in my small nephew's overcoat pocket after we had been some time in California; but I wrote a second one before we left New York, telling you of

our intended departure, and where we were going."

"I never received it," he said. Neither spoke for a while, and then:

"Tell me of your sister and brother-in-law," he said.

"My sister is at present living in Cambridge, where Jack is at college," was the reply; "but poor Julius died two years ago."

"Ah," said John, "I am grieved to hear of Mr. Carling's death. I liked him very much."

"He liked you very much," she said, "and often spoke of you."

There was another period of silence, so long, indeed, as to be somewhat embarrassing. None of the thoughts which followed each other in John's mind was of the sort which he felt like broaching. He realized that the situation was getting awkward, and that consciousness added to the confusion of his ideas. But if his companion shared his embarrassment, neither her face nor her manner betrayed it as at last she said, turning, and looking frankly at him:

"You seem very little changed. Tell me about yourself. Tell me something of your life in the last six years."

During the rest of the voyage they were together for a part of every day, sometimes with the company of Mrs. William Ruggles, but more often without it, as her husband claimed much of her attention and rarely came on deck; and John, from time to time, gave his companion pretty much the whole history of his later career. But with regard to her own life, and, as he noticed, especially the two years since the death of her brother-in-law, she was distinctly reticent. She

never spoke of her marriage or her husband, and after one or two faintly tentative allusions, John forebore to touch upon those subjects, and was driven to conclude that her experience had not been a happy one. Indeed, in their intercourse there were times when she appeared distraught and even moody; but on the whole she seemed to him to be just as he had known and loved her years ago; and all the feeling that he had had for her then broke forth afresh in spite of himself—in spite of the fact that, as he told himself, it was more hopeless than ever: absolutely so, indeed.

It was the last night of their voyage together. The Ruggleses were to leave the ship the next morning at Algiers, where they intended to remain for some time.

"Would you mind going to the after-deck?" he asked. "These people walking about fidget me," he added rather irritably.

She rose, and they made their way aft. John drew a couple of chairs near to the rail. "I don't care to sit down for the present," she said, and they stood looking out at sea for a while in silence.

"Do you remember," said John at last, "a night six years ago when we stood together, at the end of the voyage, leaning over the rail like this?"

"Yes," she said.

"Does this remind you of it?" he asked.

"I was thinking of it," she said.

"Do you remember the last night I was at your house?" he asked, looking straight out over the moonlit water.

"Yes," she said again.

"Did you know that night what was in my heart to say to you?"

There was no answer.

"May I tell you now?" he asked, giving a side glance at her profile, which in the moonlight showed very white.

"Do you think you ought?" she answered in a low voice, "or that I ought to listen to you?"

"I know," he exclaimed. "You think that as a married woman you should not listen, and that knowing you to be one I should not speak. If it were to ask anything of you I would not. It is for the first and last time. To-morrow we part again, and for all time, I suppose. I have carried the words that were on my lips that night all these years in my heart. I know I can have no response—I expect none; but it can not harm you if I tell you that I loved you then, and have——"

She put up her hand in protest.

"You must not go on, Mr. Lenox," she said, turning to him, "and I must leave you."

"Are you very angry with me?" he asked humbly.

She turned her face to the sea again and gave a sad little laugh.

"Not so much as I ought to be," she answered; "but you yourself have given the reason why you should not say such things, and why I should not listen, and why I ought to say good-night."

"Ah, yes," he said bitterly; "of course you are right, and this is to be the end."

She turned and looked at him for a moment. "You will never again speak to me as you have to-night, will you?" she asked.

"I should not have said what I did had I not thought I should never see you again after to-morrow," said John, "and I am not likely to do that, am I?"

"If I could be sure," she said hesitatingly, and as if to herself.

"Well," said John eagerly. She stood with her eyes downcast for a moment, one hand resting on the rail, and then she looked up.

"We expect to stay in Algiers about two months," she said, "and then we are going to Naples to visit some friends for a few days, about the time you told me you thought you might be there. Perhaps it would be better if we said good-bye to-night; but if after we get home you are to spend your days in Homeville and I mine in New York, we shall not be likely to meet, and, except on this side of the ocean, we may, as you say, never see each other again. So, if you wish, you may come to see me in Naples if you happen to be there when we are. I am sure after to-night that I may trust you, may I not? But," she added, "perhaps you would not care. I am treating you very frankly; but from your standpoint you would expect or excuse more frankness than if I were a young girl."

"I care very much," he declared, "and it will be a happiness to me to see you on any footing, and you may trust me never to break bounds again." She made a motion as if to depart.

"Don't go just yet," he said pleadingly; "there is now no reason why you should for a while, is there? Let us sit here in this gorgeous night a little longer, and let me smoke a cigar."

At the moment he was undergoing a revulsion of feeling. His state of mind was like that

of an improvident debtor who, while knowing that the note must be paid some time, does not quite realize it for a while after an extension. At last the cigar was finished. There had been but little said between them.

"I really must go," she said, and he walked with her across the hanging bridge and down the deck to the gangway door.

"Where shall I address you to let you know when we shall be in Naples?" she asked as they were about to separate.

"Care of Cook & Son," he said. "You will find the address in Baedeker."

He saw her the next morning long enough for a touch of the hand and a good-bye before the bobbing, tubby little boat with its Arab crew took the Ruggleses on board.