

AN OCEAN WAIF.

BY VELMA CALDWELL MELVILLE.

PART III.

"A" T first I was stunned at the news; but when I realized the truth I was more like a mad man than a rational human. I raved to myself, I would have her; I would tear her from his arms though a thousand services had been performed. She was mine—mine before heaven, and I would have her. But by and by calmer thoughts came to me and I began dimly to perceive that no one was at fault; that Providence had ordered it so, and that she was not in the least to blame for marrying another when she honestly believed me dead. I spent one long, dreadful night in, as it were, mortal combat. On the one side, was my intense longing to seek out my darling—the woman whose image had filled my mind day and night through weeks of delirium and almost death; the light of whose eyes had seemed my guiding star when, in the blackness of midnight I tossed on the angry billows, clinging to a bit of wood in mid-ocean. She must be mine despite the law of God or man. On the other hand, should three suffer instead of one? As it was, she thought me dead, had doubtless mourned for me, and then innocently married one who had been a life-long friend. Was it not now my duty to go away, walking, so to speak, on the water, that the waves might obliterate my footsteps forever, saving her the knowledge that I existed? saving her the knowledge that could only bring misery upon herself and husband, and in the end could not help me, for—had I been wild and base enough to propose it—I knew Mildred Mason would never consent to break her marriage vow. Besides she doubtless loved him. This thought roused the demon in me every time, but at last right triumphed, and going to the only two men who knew my story, I bound them over to silence, and sailed once more, and intentionally this time, for Australia.

"I had no near relatives in the States, save my father (my mother having died years before, and there were another wife and her children in the old home) and though he loved me I knew that he, too, thought me dead, and dead I might as well remain to him.

"How differently I felt, and how changed the world seemed, as I sailed this time from my native shores, from what it did that other morning, an eternity ago it seemed to me, but in reality less than two short years before. I almost cursed heaven that I had not died, that I had survived sickness and danger on sea and land for such misery as this. Gazing landward through a mist of tears, I could seem to see the slight, girlish form standing on an eminence, her soft white

robes fluttering in the breeze, waving her handkerchief until it was but a tiny speck to my straining vision. She had had a presentiment of evil from the time she knew that I must go to Japan, and had repeatedly begged me to refuse to go.

"And now I was never to see her again. In order to completely conceal the fact of my existence I took my mother's maiden name, Lawrence. I wandered about the Australian continent for two or three years, aimless, hopeless, and unspeakably wretched; but finally secured a situation in Sidney where I have since made my home—or my stopping place. I have no home and no friends, save those who, like yourselves, I chance to make for the time being. No one rejoices that I live, no one would mourn if I die. I have been prospered in business, and am now what the world calls a rich man—but I care little for it. Wealth can never satisfy a hungry soul."

When he ceased speaking, Imogene was strangely white and silent, but the Professor rose and stood beside him, laying one hand tenderly on his shoulder.

"My friend, when you hear my story you will see that both our lives were wrecked with the wrecking of the *Storm Bird*," he said huskily, and there was a dimness before the vision of each. Without a word Imogene rose and left them alone.

After giving the facts elsewhere recorded in regard to himself, Prof. Gettwood said:

"I understand from your story that the lady of whom you speak was living in San Francisco when the *Storm Bird* went down?"

"Yes."

"And of course particularly interested in its fate?"

"Doubtless."

"Then I must see her. Who knows but she may be able to throw some light on the fate of my wife. Hardly probable, but still I must find and talk with her."

Veeder did not answer for a full minute, and then starting up suddenly, he exclaimed:

"Prof. Gettwood, I will go with you. She would not know me, even though she did not think me dead, and you will call me 'Lawrence' and I will invent some business excuse. Great Heavens! I will, I must look on her face once more."

"My advice to you would be to do so," said his companion. "You will not find her the blooming girl you left her, and she was never your wife; it may do you good. The sight of a matter-of-fact middle-aged woman, happy in her equally matter-of-fact husband's affections, and surrounded, doubtless, by sons and daughters of her own, will go far toward making you forget the dream of your life—will be a death blow to the romantic ideal you have cherished with the ardor of youth all these years. My friend, I do not mean to