

plainly could he trace his mother's hand in this. He was used to it, had been since childhood; but in spite of what he had oftentimes termed "injustice" he had ever been singularly filial toward his parents; and never had he gone contrary to their known wishes—save it might be in the matter of falling in love with the beautiful "ocean waif."

But thwarted in this plan, he felt he could not be, 'twas nothing to be lightly set aside or over-ruled.

"But father, you encouraged my going at the time when I spoke of it to you before."

"Yes, yes! I know, and perhaps it is as well, only I—but Slocum is quite efficient, and we will get on. Act your pleasure."

The question was, however, suddenly and unexpectedly settled by the banker contracting a cold the following day which resulted in a prolonged illness. The remainder of the winter he spent in his library rather than the bank, and the care of the latter fell entirely on Arthur. Thus ended a project that might have made a difference to somebody, sometime.

Lee Mason sat at his desk, pen in hand, but he was not writing. His forehead was wrinkled, and an annoyed frown clouded his whole face as he watched, in an absent-minded manner, the antics of two kittens in the tiny back yard visible from his private office window. Certainly there was nothing in the frolic of the innocent creatures to provoke such an expression. There was nothing wrong with his books (Lee Mason was the soul of precision), and the roomy salesroom beyond was well-filled with customers being promptly served by some half-dozen obsequious clerks. There really seemed nothing in his surroundings to irritate or annoy the young proprietor, who was succeeding in business beyond his most sanguine expectations; but he frowned on, occasionally gnawing a corner of his mustache savagely until at last he broke into the following soliloquy:

"Confound the fellow's impudence! How dare he come into my house and rob me of my darling whom I have loved from the first hour Mildred and Max brought her home—a tiny ocean-waif. I would not mind so much if he were a man, a decent American citizen, but to have to surrender her to that oily Frenchman, a fraud and adventurer I am sure, I cannot do it, I cannot; but what am I to do? Mildred seems to countenance the affair, and as for Petsie"—he had always called her that—"I cannot make her out. One minute I think that she adores him, and the next detect something like fear or hate. Poor child, she is so delicate and, to me, seems to be failing. I wish Max were here, he would know what to do, and not be blinded by the sneak's blandishments as the women are. I

know not——" So absorbed was he that he did not notice a stranger on the threshold until a voice said:

"Beg pardon, sir! but have I the honor of addressing Mr. Lee Mason?"

"That is my name, can I be of service to you?"

"We will know in a few moments. I will briefly explain my errand, if first you will be kind enough to inform me if your family resided in San Francisco in 18—when a vessel known as the *Storm Bird* went down?"

Lee started, but promptly replied in the affirmative.

"And were any of you present at the 'Gate' at the time she foundered?"

"My sister was, had been waiting at a friend's there for two days, as she—she expected a friend on the *Storm Bird*."

"Indeed? and is your sister in this city now?"

"She is."

"My errand in Portland is to see her if I may. I was told in San Francisco that she was interested in the fate of the vessel, in some way. I came here to advertise for her whereabouts as I also learned of her removal to Oregon some years since."

"I will take you to her at once if—"

"A word more in explanation, and then I will be most grateful to meet her. My wife perished on that steamer, and I long to see some one actually knowing of the disaster."

"We will go at once," Lee repeated, extending his hand while a look of genuine sympathy obliterated the last vestige of the recent frown.

Mildred Browning sat alone in the family sitting room. Her mother was visiting at the home of a friend, and Pet was in her room with one of the numerous headaches so common to her of late, when Lee and the stranger entered.

"Prof. Gettwood," he said furtively consulting the card in his hand, "this is my sister, Mrs. Browning. Millie this gentleman wishes to see you for a little time, you will kindly excuse me," and was gone.

There was a moment's silence as the two, whose lives had been running close together, unknown to themselves, stood for the first time face to face.

"Mrs. Browning, my business in Portland, even in Oregon, is wholly to see you, to ask a favor of you. I was told in San Francisco, and the statement is corroborated by your brother, that you were present on the shore at the going down of the *Storm Bird*."

Mildred grew very white as she answered with evident trepidation:

"I was, sir."

"On that vessel were my two choicest earthly treasures, all, in fact, that I held dear, my wife and child. For fifteen years I mourned them both as dead; but