

AN OCEAN WAIF.

BY VELMA CALDWELL MELVILLE.

PART V.

AT precisely half-past ten the following evening two figures in long cloaks crept out of the Mason-Browning house, and moved stealthily toward a little side entrance, known as the "east gate." A magnificent elm waved its giant arms above it, and beside it was a little rustic bench. A tall, dark figure started from amid the shadows and came to meet the two women.

"*Mon Dieu!* at last you are here my darling, and I may clasp you once more to my loving, aching breast."

Imogene was in no mood to relish lover's nonsense, and with curling lip moved aside where she could guard and yet be undisturbed, save by an occasional unguarded exclamation from Monsieur, or a sob from his trembling victim. It was growing late, and when a sufficient time, in her estimation, had elapsed, she approached them, chancing to arrive just as Monsieur, having exhausted his stock of argument and loving entreaty, had reached the tragic stage.

"Then kiss me farewell, sweet one, kiss me farewell," he was saying in his weird, musical voice; at the same time the tiny dagger flashed in the pale moonlight.

"Stay! don't, Monsieur, don't," pleaded Pet, catching hold of his arm.

"I have told you before *Ma chere*, that coldness from you means death for me. As the matter stands 'tis death to either Monsieur Gettwood or myself, and I prefer to die an innocent man. I have no friends, no one to shed a solitary tear when I am gone."

Pet was sobbing piteously now.

"Here," went on the Frenchman, "will you not do me one last favor—grant a dying man's request? Take this ring and wear it about your neck in memory of one who died for love of you; and this purse contains money. Let me not lie in the pauper's field; let it not be said that Antoine Le Grand, the last of the famous line of Le Grands, and a duke by right, lies in an unmarked grave. And you will come sometimes—once in a while at least—and kneeling by the lowly mound, think of the despised creature whose only sin was loving you too well."

Pet's sobs had ceased and she listened in horrified silence to the rythmical voice, chanting, as it were, this gruesome charge. Even Imogene with her strong will and practical trend stood rooted to the spot. It seemed an age to her, standing there in the weird moonlight, before Pet's whisper broke the awful stillness.

"I will go with you Monsieur Le Grand," she said in a tone of determination—a determination born of utter hopelessness and despair. "To-morrow night at twelve o'clock I will await you here. Have a minister with you, and Imogene shall be the witness. Good-night."

Impatiently, almost angrily, she pushed her lover aside as he fell on his knees before her, and essayed to clasp her to his breast.

"Let me go. Where is Imogene?"

The news of "Mrs. Browning's romance," as people were pleased to term it, soon spread among her friends, and a merry, informal company gathered in the pretty cottage the evening after the clandestine meeting at the east gate. Music was in constant demand, and Prof. Gettwood had never heard his daughter play as she did that night, or look so lovely either. Her color was unusual, and the blue eyes danced and sparkled with suppressed excitement.

"I have never seen our little girl so charmingly animated," he remarked to Mildred, late in the evening.

"She is certainly looking very bright; but I do not quite like her manner. I fear another nervous attack," replied the latter, anxiously noting the hectic flush.

The father sighed. "So like her mother. No, she is not strong, and I shall have to ask your consent to take her abroad soon."

Mildred's eyes filled with tears, but she answered bravely: "Whatever is for her good will meet with my approval."

No one but Pet noticed that Imogene was absent from the room several times during the evening.

When the company had taken their leave Pet kissed the Professor and Mildred good-night, telling the latter that she need not go upstairs. They both remembered afterward how feverish her lips had felt, and how lovingly she clung about their necks. No sooner had she reached her own room than her strength forsook her; and when Imogene came for her, she was kneeling by the bedside, still in the light dress worn during the evening. There was no time to lose then and soon Imogene had helped her into a traveling suit.

"Everything is ready now," she whispered. "Monsieur took the valises early in the evening."

She had to support the trembling girl—part of the time almost carrying her—until they were joined by the impatient lover. A close carriage was in waiting and together the three entered and were driven away. A clergyman—previously notified—awaited them in his study. He started at sight of the pale, child-like bride; but Imogene's presence and composure reassured him. In less than an hour from the time the