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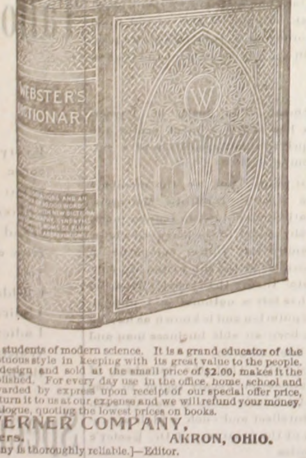

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People wondered that day at the speed with which the tall officer, followed by his orderly, clattered away down Market street. In less than ten minutes Armstrong was at the crowded pier and pushing through the throng to the China's stage. Too late! Already it was swung aloft, the lines were cast loose, and the huge black mass was just beginning to back slowly from its moorings. The rail of the promenade deck swarmed with faces, some radiant, some tearful. Words of adieu, fluttering kerchiefs, waving hands, tossing flowers were there on every side. Two officers, Honolulu bound, shouted Armstrong's name, and a cheery good-by; but he did not seem to hear. A gentle voice, the voice of all others he most longed to hear, repeated the name and strove to call attention to his gesticulating comrades on the upper deck; but he was deaf to both. Eagerly, anxiously, incredulously he was searching along that crowded rail, and all on a sudden he saw her. Yes, there she stood, all gayety, grace and animation, stylishly gowned and fairly burdened with roses; and it was right at him she was gazing, nodding, smiling, all sweetness, all confiding, trusting joy; with just a little of triumph, too, and a tinge of sentimental sorrow in the parting. Apparently, it was all for him; for her blue eyes never faltered till they fixed his gaze, and then, kiss after kiss she threw to him with the daintily gloved little hand, and, leaning far down over the rail, lowering it toward him as much as possible, she finally tossed to him, standing there stern and spellbound, a bunch of beautiful roses she had torn from her corsage. It fell almost at his feet, for in his astonishment and rising wrath he made no effort to catch it. A man, stooping quickly, rescued and handed it to him. Mechanically he said: "Thank you," and took it, a thorn pricking deep into the flesh as he did so; and still his eyes were fixed on that fairy form now surely, swiftly gliding away, and over him swept the consciousness of utter defeat, of exasperation, of dismay, even as he strove to fathom her motives in thus singling him out for such conspicuous—even affectionate—demonstration. Triumph and delight he could have understood, but not, not this semblance of confidential relations, not at least until he felt his arm grasped by a cordial hand, heard his name spoken by a friendly voice, and Mr. Prime's pleasant inquiry: "Have you no greeting for other friends?" Then the hot blood rushed to his face and showed even through the bronze as, turning, his troubled eyes met full the clear, placid gaze of Amy Lawrence.

CHAPTER XIV.

Mid October. The Queen of the Fleet, the finest transport of the Pacific service, thronged with boys in blue at last ordered on to Manila, lay at the wharf at Honolulu, awaiting her commander's orders to cast loose. In strong force and with stentorian voices, the Primeval Dudes joined in rollicking chorus to the crashing accompaniment of their band, and, when they could take time to rest, the crowd ashore set up a cheer. The Hawaiian national band, in spotless white, forming huge and melodious circle on the wharf, vied with the musicians from the states in the spirit and swing of their stirring airs "Aloha Oe! Aloha Oe!" chorused the surging throng, afloat and ashore, as wreaths and garlands—the leis of the islanders—were twined or hung about some favorite officer or favored man. The troops still held to service in Hawaii shouted good-will and good-by to those ordered on to the Philippines. The Dudes of the Queen, and the lads from the prairies and the mountains on other transports anchored in the deep but narrow harbor, yelled soldierly condolence to those condemned to stay. The steam of the 'scape pipe roared loudly and belched dense white clouds on high, swelling the uproar. Dusky little Kanaka boys, diving for nickels and paddling tireless about the ship, added their shrill cries to the clamor. The captain, in his natty uniform of blue and gold, stepped forth upon the bridge to take command, and raised his banded cap in recognition of the constant cheer from the host ashore and the throng of blue shirts on the forecastle head. Then arose another shout, as a veteran officer, in the undress uniform of a general, appeared upon that sacred bound, and, bowing to the crowd, was escorted by the captain to the end overlooking the animated scene below; and then the signal was given, the heavy lines were cast off and hauled swiftly in, the massive screw began slowly to churn the waters at the stern, and gently, almost imperceptibly at first, the Queen slid noiselessly along the edge of the dock, to the accompaniment of a little volley of flowers and garlands tossed from eager hands, and a cheer of godspeed from the swarm of upturned faces. And then there uprose another shout, a shout of mingled merriment, surprise and applause; for all on a sudden there darted up the stairway from the crowded promenade deck to the sacred perch above, defiant of the lettered warning: "Passengers are not allowed upon the bridge," a dainty vision in filmy white, and all in the next moment there appeared at the general's side, smiling, bowing, blowing kisses, waving adieux, all sparkle, animation, radiance and rejoicing, a bewitching little figure, in the airiest, loveliest of summer toilets. The Red Cross nurses on the deck below looked at one another and gasped. Two brave army girls, wives of wounded officers in the Philippines, who by special dispensation were making the voyage on the Queen, glanced quickly at each other and said—nothing audible. The general, lifting his cap, but looking both deprecation and embarrassment, fell back and gave his place at the white rail to the new arrival, and colored high when she suddenly turned and took his arm. The captain, trying not to see her or to appear conscious of this infraction of a stringent rule and invasion of his dignity, grew redder as he shouted rapid orders and swung his big, beautiful ship well out into the stream. The guns of the Bennington boomed a deafening salute as the Queen turned her sharp nose toward the open sea; and almost the last thing Honolulu saw of her human freight was the tiny, dainty, winsome little figure in white, waving a spotless kerchief in fond farewell. Once clear of the narrow entrance the big troopship headed westward toward the setting sun, shook free the reins, as it were, and, followed by less favored craft, sped swiftly on her way, Witchie Garrison, the latest addition to the passenger list, entirely at home, if not actually in command.

Leaning on the general's arm an hour later and deftly piloting that bewildered veteran up and down the breezy deck, she came, just as she had planned to come, face to face once more with Stanley Armstrong. Well she knew that under the escort of that exalted rank she was safe from any possibility of cross question or interference. Well she knew that had he heard of her sudden determination to go to Honolulu she could not have escaped stern interrogation, possibly something worse; and her heart failed her when she realized that the man who had gauged her shallow nature years before, now held a lash over her head in the shape of the paper that mad vanity had prompted her to write and send to the officer of the guard the day that Stewart sailed. What madness it was, indeed, yet how could she have dreamed it would fall into the hands of the man of all others she feared and respected—the one man who, had he but cared, could years ago have had her love, the man who, because he cared not, had won her hate! And, now that he held or had held this paper—nothing less than a forged order in her husband's name as aide-de-camp to Gen. Drayton, she could have cowered at his feet in her terror of him, yet braved him with smiles, sweetness and gayety, with arch merriment and joyous words, quitting for the moment the general's arm that she might extend to him both her little white-gloved hands. Gravely he took the left in his left while with the right he raised his forage cap in combined salute to the woman and to his superior officer. Gravely and almost instantly he released it, and listened in helpless patience to her torrent of playful words; but his eyes were on the general's face as though he would ask could he, the general, know the true character of the woman he had honored above all her sisterhood on board, in thus taking her to the bridge whereon neither officer nor man nor nurse nor army wife had presumed to set foot in all the six days' run from San Francisco; as though he would ask if the general knew just what she was, this blithe, dainty, winsome little thing that nestled so confidingly—indeed, so snugly—close to his battered side, and who had virtually taken possession of him in the face of an envious and not too silent circle of her own sex. Truth to tell, the chief would rather have escaped. He was but an indifferent sailor, and the Queen's long, lazy roll over the ocean surges was exciting in his inner consciousness a longing for cracked ice and champagne. He had known her but the few days the Queen remained in port, coaling and preparing for the onward voyage across the broad Pacific; but a great functionary of the general government had told him a pathetic tale the very day of his first peep at the Royal Hawaiian hotel, had given him a capital dinner at that famous hostelry, whereat she appeared in charming attire, and in a flow of spirits simply irresistible. Her sallies of wit had made him roar with delight; her mimicry of one or two conscientious but acidulated dames who had come over on the Queen, bound as nurses for Manila, had tickled him to the verge of apoplexy; but when later she backed him into the coolest corner of the "lanai" with the plash of fountain close at hand, and the sweet music of Berger's famous band floating softly on the evening air, and told him how her father had loved to talk of his, the general's, dash and daring in the great days of the great war, and led him on to tell of his campaigns in the Shenandoah and the west, listening with dilated eyes and parted lips, the campaigner himself was captivated, and she had her will. A great senator had told him how she had come thither to nurse a gallant young officer in her husband's regiment, how she had pulled the boy through the perils of brain fever until he was now convalescent and going on to rejoin his comrades in Manila, and she, she was pining to reach her husband now serving on Gen. Drayton's staff. Other women were aboard the Queen; could not Gen. Crabb find room for her? It is hard for a soldier to refuse a pretty woman or a prominent member of the committee on military affairs. There was not a vacant stateroom on the ship. Officers were sleeping three or four in a room, so were the Red Cross nurses; and the two army wives already aboard had been assigned a little cubbyhole of a cabin in which only one could dress at a time. There were only two apartments on the big craft that were not filled to their capacity—the room occupied by that sea monarch, the captain, and that which, from having been the "ladies boudoir," had been fitted up for the accommodation of the general. The piano had been wheeled out on deck, the writing table stowed away, and a fine new wide brass bedstead, with dainty white curtains and mosquito bar, a large bureau and a washstand had been moved in, and these, with easy-chairs, electric fans, electric lights and abundant air, made it the most desirable room on the ship. Even Armstrong, colonel commanding the troops aboard, was compelled to share his little cabin with his adjutant, and the general's aides were bundled into a "skimpy" box between decks. There really seemed no place for Mrs. Garrison aboard, especially when it was found that the passenger list was to be increased by three, a surgeon and two officers going forward from Honolulu; and one of these was our old friend and once light-hearted Billy Gray, now nearly convalescent, but weak and, as all could see, feverishly eager to get on to Manila.

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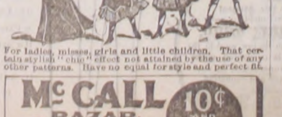

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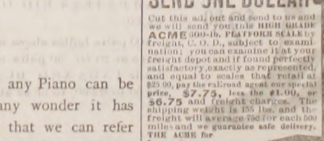

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