

**KATE
BEAUMONT**

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Kate Beaumont by J. W. De Forest

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"I beg of you!" he implored. "Will you not do me the favor to hear my reasons?" — Page 14.

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BY

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WITH ILLUSTRATIONS.



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KATE BEAUMONT.

CHAPTER I.

IN the good old times before the Flood, in the times which our retired silver-gray politicians allude to when they say, "There were giants in those days," the new, commodious, and elegant steamship *Mersey* set out on her first voyage across the Atlantic.

The *Mersey* was one of a line of steamers which had lately been set up between England and the United States of America. On the side of England this line sailed from Liverpool, one of the mightiest of the commercial queens, or perhaps we should say *deities*, of the world, — a deity whose storm-winged and steam-winged angels fly to all lands, and whose temples of trade resound with all tongues. On the side of the United States it sailed from a city less known to the human race at large, but which we Americans shall recognize when we come to it.

This city thought the strongest kind of beer of itself. It held that in intellects, morals, and manners it stood head and shoulders above any other American municipality. It believed, to use a French phrase, that it marched at the head of civilization, at least so far as concerned the Western continent. There was, also, a general faith in this city that nothing had prevented it from being the commercial metropolis of the Republic but a lack of sufficient commerce. A sufficient commerce it had, therefore, decided to have; and, as the first step towards this end, the first step towards leveling off the mercantile rivalry of New York, the first step towards monopolizing the export and import business of a vast back country, it had established this line of steamers; the next step being a sort of informal proclamation, running from mouth to mouth, to the effect that every citizen of the city, and of the State attached to it, must go in said line, and send his goods by it, however slow and costly it might be.

Well, the *Mersey*, built in England, owned mainly by Englishmen, and manned by an English crew, but commanded by a home-made captain, had started on her first voyage. She started at night; came to light next

day in a foaming tempest; sailed sixty hours on her lee bulwark or precious near it; not a passenger able to keep his legs, and only two able to eat; steward and stewardess flying wildly from state-room to state-room; in short, a howling, rolling, disgusting, miserable sixty hours of it. It is such kind of weather which has decided what peoples shall rule the seas and do the great colonizings.

At last the wind folds its hands, and the sea dolls its battle plumes; the waves are fine enough to be admired and not too fine for comfortable travelling; passengers re-surrect, break away from that undertaker, the steward, and come on deck, much occupied in mutual staring, never having seen each other before. The two who have not been sick are of course out, and are smoking their cigars with an heroic air, as much as to say, "Old sea-dogs!" They seem to be old acquaintances, and familiar ones for they hit each other in the ribs and address each other with, "I say, Duffy," and "I say, Bill Wilkins." Just now there is some bantering going on between them as to a young lady who is looking out of the companion door wistfully.

"Wilkins, go and offer your arm," says Duffy. "Family trades at your shop."

"O, get out," returns Wilkins, with an air of despising Duffy as being a man who does not know when to joke. "I know where I ought to put myself, if you don't."

"I say, Wilkins, you don't like that," chuckles Duffy, his flat, expressionless face puckering with a snigger which he, mistaken man, supposes to be sly.

"Don't like what?" demands Wilkins, rather too scornfully for mere pleasantry.

"Calling your bean-new store a shop," grins Duffy, clearly one of the smallest of wits.

"That's just like you, Duffy. I never knew you make a joke, but what you had to explain it."

Duffy, considerably cut up, keeps on smiling like a wax doll, and tries to think of something severe.

"By Jehu, somebody ought to offer her

an arm," resumes Wilkins, his dusky, twinkling, good-humored eyes glancing sideways at the young lady. She really wants to get out here. If it was any of the Beaumonts that I know, I'd venture."

"Bill Wilkins, I never saw you modest before," says Duffy, at last laying hands on a bit of satire. "Must be somebody's threatened to give you a licking."

And O, how Duffy enjoyed his bit, and how eagerly he looked out of the corner of his eye at Wilkins, as if expecting to see him too enjoy it!

Scorning to reply, Wilkins, an intelligent-looking, civil-mannered man, though evidently not aristocratic, was about stepping out in the direction of the young lady, when he saw something which checked him.

"Go along, Bill," whispered Duffy, giving his friend a dig under the ribs. "One of us ought to help her."

"No. She's got some one. Jehu! what a tall fellow! By Jehu! that man could wade ashore. Shut up now, Duffy. They're coming this way. Don't make a fool of yourself *all the time*. I can stand it, but other folks can't."

Duffy shut up, and both men drew aside respectfully as the young lady passed them, her gloved fingers just touching the arm of the tall gentleman who escorted her.

The young lady's face was handsome, and, what is more, it was interesting. It was as different from the commonplace handsome face as a cultivated voice is different from the cackle or twang of the ordinary untutored windpipe. Quite young; not more than eighteen apparently; maidenly purity there, of course. But this purity was so remarkable, it amounted to something so like superior intelligence, that it almost imposed upon the beholder, at the same time that it attracted him. In short, this was one of those rare countenances in which girlish innocence rises to the nobleness of matronly dignity, without losing its own appealing grace. As she passed our two prattlers on the quarter-deck, even the stolidly jocose Duffy became humble in remembrance of the way he had jabbered about her, feeling much as a man might feel who should discover that he had been saying six things of Santa Cecilia or the Mater Amabilis. O potent influence of mere speechless, unobtrusive, carefully veiled and yet splendidly visible womanly purity! It has done, how much we cannot fully discover or declare, towards civilizing and sanctifying the other sex.

This young lady lifted her face a little shyly and yet with perfect self-possession toward the man whose arm supported her. It was obvious enough that she did not know him, and that she had only accepted

his assistance because she needed it, and not with the slightest thought towards flirting.

"Do you wish to go aft?" he had ventured to ask as he passed her in the breezy house on deck which enclosed the companion-way. "I judged so by your looking out. May I offer you my arm and give you a seat?"

"I was waiting for my aunt," she replied. "But she does not seem to come."

Then, finding it very uncomfortable there, with the wind sucking through the door in a gale, she passed her hand over his sleeve, saying, "If you will take me to a seat, I will be much obliged to you."

"We have had a horrible time of it," he was remarking as they passed the respectful Duffy and Wilkins. "The weather has treated us like enemies and criminals."

"I am so glad to get on deck once more!" she said, her face lighting and coloring like an eastern sky under the rising of the sun. "O, how beautiful the ocean is!"

He looked down upon her with pleasure because of her admiration. Who at twenty-four does not see eighteen as childhood, and rejoice in exhibiting marvels to it, and sympathize with its wonder! The next moment, remembering what had been asked of him, he halted and placed a chair for her.

"Thank you," she said. "Don't let me trouble you further. I see that my aunt is coming. You are very good."

Thus liberated, or rather perhaps graciously dismissed from his charge, the tall young man quietly touched his brimless cloth cap, turned on his heel with the dignity natural to giants, walked to the other side of the quarter-deck, leaned a yard or so over the bulwark, and watched the swift whirls of white and blue water, as they boiled out from under the paddle-box and raced along the ship's side.

The aunt, a stoutish lady, invariably veiled, — clearly not disposed to be blown to pieces before fellow-passengers, — was in charge of a far stouter man, the captain of the *Mercy*. The captain got the aunt a chair, slapped it down in a jolly way alongside the niece, and then planted himself bolt upright in front of the two babbling and boasting louder than the weather, as if he were all speaking-trumpet.

"Yes, a fine ship, noble ship. Never commanded a better. Twelve, thirteen, fourteen knots. Make the passage before you could dress a salad. It's the beginning, ladies, of a great enterprise. At last our State will stand on its own feet, do its own business, put its money in its own pocket. Independent of New York? Of course we will be. It's high time. Don't you think so? I agree with you."

Captain Brien talked loud and bragged much, partly because he was of Celtic blood and born in Ireland (only a baby at the time; raised in the American marine), and partly because he had found that passengers, and especially women, were cheered and humbugged by that sort of thing. After a certain amount of his hurrah-boys gabble, he felt that he had done his duty by the ladies, and he prepared to leave them. It was time; he was running out of conversation: when he had shouted and huzzaed a little, he had done; such was Captain Brien as a member of society. So he glared at the helmsman; then he threw a glance aloft, as if he were still in a sailing-vessel and carried top-gallants; then, with a sudden lurch and a sharp shuffle, he was away. Next he was looking over the side, not far from the tall young gentleman, guessing at the ship's speed by the flight of the water. As he was about to move off—the uneasy, restless, hyena-like creature—the giant lassoed him with a question.

"Well, Captain Brien," he said, with the air of one who may have money to invest, "how is the new line to succeed?"

"Succeed? Prodigious!" promptly shouted the skipper, in his loud cracking voice; a voice full of cheerful and almost frolicsome brag and bluster; a voice which had an undertone of humbug. "Sure to pay. Pay right off. Keep paying. First great step in the right direction. Change the channels of trade in our country."

Captain Brien was very short and very thick; what our Southern mountaineers would call a chunk of a man; not protuberant nor even corpulent, yet every ounce of a two-hundred-pounder. His face was flat, broad, nearly four square, ponderous in jowl, with cheeks as plump and solid as a pig's. His complexion was a dark, rich, and curiously mottled mixture of sun-tanning and whiskey-tanning. So long as you merely looked at him, you thought him a bluff, frank, honest sailor; but the moment you heard him talk, you suspected him of being a humbug; admitting, however, that he might be a good-hearted as well as a jolly one.

"It is not easy to change the channels of trade," observed the tall young gentleman. "It frequently takes centuries to do that. New York has an immense start."

A serious-minded person he seemed to be; one of those persons who love to speak veracities and to hear veracities uttered; who, perhaps, takes some offence when you offer them a mess of undisguisable clap-trap.

Captain Brien looked up quickly at hearing his enthusiastic prophecies questioned. He did not frankly turn his face of bronze and mahogany; he merely slewed his gray,

piggish, yet furtive, quick-glancing eyes. In an instant he had warned himself: "This man is not to be fooled with, at least not at times; and this is one of the times."

"You are right, sir," he said, dropping his trumpet bluster to a confidential, honest undertone. "New York has an immense start."

"Only two vessels in the line, I believe," continued the passenger.

"Only two," answered the captain briefly, not caring to continue the conversation, since he could not splash and spout and play the whale in it.

"And the other is not yet built?"

"Not yet built," softly admitted the captain. He began to look around him for duty: leaking at this rate was not agreeable nor wise.

The passenger saw that the subject was no longer a welcome one, and he dropped it. There was a silence of a few seconds, during which the captain glanced two or three times at the young man, as if trying in vain to call him to mind, or as if struck with his appearance. An imposing young fellow really; height something quite extraordinary; could hardly have measured less than six feet four. His face, too, notwithstanding its fine pink and white complexion, and notwithstanding the softness of his curling blond hair and long blond whiskers, was not such a face as one prefers to shake a fist at. Although the features were, in general, pleasing, the cheekbones were somewhat broad and the jaws were strong, showing a character full of pluck and perseverance. In expression it was charming; there was a wealth of both dignity and benignity in it; it reminded one of the portraits of Washington.

"We have had rough weather," he said presently. "This is my first morning on my legs. Who are my fellow-passengers, may I ask?"

"All the right sort, sir," shouted the captain, for surely this was a subject that he might brag upon, without giving offence. "All of the right sort, and from the right spot," he blustered ahead. "Such people as I like to carry. A most elegant lady, sitting over there just now, a perfect lady, sir. Her niece is one of the most charming, innocent, modest,—bless you, just the kind that we raise and brag of—just our own best kind, sir. Her brother Tom, too—" The captain stopped here, and looked at his helmsman, headstays, hobstays, etc. It seemed as if he had not so very much to say in favor of the brother Tom.

"What is the name?" inquired the tall gentleman, who doubtless had his reasons for wanting to know.

"The name is Chester; no, beg pardon, the aunt's name is Chester,—Mrs. Chester.

The young lady's name is Beaumont. The Beaumonts of Hartland!" repeated the captain, proudly.

The tall young gentleman did not start; he merely looked as if he had heard before of the Beaumonts of Hartland; he also looked as if he were not pleased at meeting them.

"Ever been in Hartland?" inquired the captain. "Lovely village, — town, I should say."

"I have been there," was the brief and dry answer.

"Perhaps you have known the Beaumonts, then? I dare say they would be pleased to —"

"I never knew them," interrupted the youngster, more dryly than before.

"In a little company like this —" continued Captain Brien.

"I dare say I may make their acquaintance, at a proper time."

His intentions towards an immediate introduction being thus bluffed, the captain fell silent, and looked once more at his hussar, hobstays, jackstays, etc.

"How many days more of it?" inquired the passenger, after some seconds of grave meditation, his face meanwhile turned from the Beaumont group, as if he might wish to avoid recognition.

"How many days? Why that depends, you know. The weather comes in there. So does the newness of the engine. I should n't like to prophesy, Mr. McMaster."

The young man gave the captain a singular glance, had the air of being about to speak, and then checked himself. Could it be that his name was not McMaster, and that he had reasons for lecturing the error uncorrected? After another meditation, he swung slowly away from the captain, his back still toward Mrs. Chester and Miss Beaumont, strode forward to the waist of the vessel, lighted a cigar, and smoked in deep thought.

Meanwhile Wilkins and Duffy, the latter with his narrow gray eyes constantly fixed on the tall passenger, were conversing about their own affairs.

"Duffy, how much do you suppose we've made by going to England?" queried Wilkins, puckering the corners of his mouth into satirical wrinkles.

"Made? How should I know? Foot it up at the end of the season. What do you think we've made, yourself?"

"Made blasted fools of ourselves."

"O, you'd better jump overboard, and done with it. You're always looking at the black side of things. How do you figure that out?"

"Well, figure it yourself; you can cipher, can't you? Expenses going and coming

just four times what they would be to New York, taking in board out the St. Nicholas, a course through the theatres, and a blow out generally. It cuts down all my profits and eats into the capital. I think, by Jehu, we'd better let importing alone. It may do from a seaport; but hang me if I ever try importing into an inland village again. If we had n't been as green as swamp meadows, we would n't have been got out of our little two-penny shops on any such business. And I believe the whole line will turn out a scam. O, it's all very well as a spree. That's it, a big spree. But we can't make fortunes on spreeing it."

At this moment the tall passenger passed them on his way forward to the waist. Duffy followed him with his eyes, then hurried to the companion-way, and took a long, sly look, then came back, staring inquiringly at his chum.

"I say, Bill Wilkins, how about that fellow?" he demanded.

"Big chap," returned Wilkins, turning his face upward and surveying every point of the horizon.

"Yes, but who is he?" persisted Duffy.

"How should I know?" returned Wilkins, trying to look indifferent, but unable to conceal annoyance.

"Don't know him, eh?" continued Duffy, smiling and triumphant. "Ever live in Hartland?"

"Yes, of course I've lived in Hartland, twenty years or thereabouts. But he's no Hartland man."

"He may have been a Hartland boy, though."

Wilkins squared his back on Duffy, and walked aft; but Duffy would not be got rid of in this fashion; he followed, and continued his subject.

"Don't know him, hey? You know those people opposite, don't you?"

"Whar, Mrs. Chester and Miss Beaumont? Yes, I know who they are."

"And where they live?"

"Yes, and where they live."

"Well, you know the people on the other hill?"

"What other hill?"

"O, now make believe you can't understand anything," said the indignant Duffy. "Why, the other hill. Other side of the town. Straight back of your store. Two miles back."

Wilkins would not answer, and persisted in staring at every nook and corner of the weather, as if he did n't hear his gabbling comrade.

"That's one of the —" began Duffy.

"Shut up!" broke in Wilkins.

"The youngest one," went on Duffy.

"Been abroad eight years, studying and travelling. Changed wonderfully. I ci-