

A WIRELESS DEAL

A LOVE STORY ON SHIPBOARD

By KENT PERKINS



Whisk! cried a rollicking breeze breeze that came prouetting across the green waters of Queenstown harbor.

"You're mine!" he shouted as it caught the week-old American newspaper that John Dexter had bought a few minutes before from a newsboy on the tender.

"We're off!" rustled the paper, as it was jerked from Dexter's listless fingers and sailed away from the Runk's rail as the liner swung bravely around to begin her long westward battle with the wintry Atlantic.

Dexter made a gesticulate grab at the paper and missed it. As he recovered himself he looked into a pair of black eyes and saw that a young woman not ten feet away was inwardly laughing at him.

"Back wid yo!" snapped the fickle Irish breeze to the disheveled news sheets. "You're full o' lies an' I'll have none o' ye!" And the wind, doubling about, slapped the paper full in the face of the girl.

"I beg your pardon," said Dexter. "You are quite excusable," she returned brightly, "and I suppose I am properly punished for laughing at you. You really did look very funny."

"So did you, when that paper stopped your laugh. I think we're quits. Thank you," he added, as she handed him the crumpled paper, "but I really don't care for it. Let's drop it overboard."

"Oh, please!" exclaimed the girl. "It you don't want it may I have it?" Her earnest and frankness gave Dexter a new sensation.

"Certainly, you are most welcome. I hope you don't fear bad news," she ventured, as he saw that she looked down the column of death notices.

"No, no, not exactly. But I always look at the death notices. It's a habit, I suppose, or a fad, if you like."

Dexter's curiosity was aroused. "Disappointed again, Susan?" he heard a pleasant voice say, and he turned to see a middle aged woman of plain features passing him address-

ing the girl. "The young woman smiled deprecatingly and explained:—"A breeze from Cork snatched the paper from this gentleman. I caught it and he has kindly let me keep it."

Miss Eustace looked at Dexter, inclining her head. He lifted his cap. "Miss Susan Witherell, this is a habit, I suppose, or a fad, if you like."

Dexter's curiosity was aroused. "Disappointed again, Susan?" he heard a pleasant voice say, and he turned to see a middle aged woman of plain features passing him address-

ing the girl. "The young woman smiled deprecatingly and explained:—"A breeze from Cork snatched the paper from this gentleman. I caught it and he has kindly let me keep it."

Miss Eustace looked at Dexter, inclining her head. He lifted his cap. "Miss Susan Witherell, this is a habit, I suppose, or a fad, if you like."

Dexter's curiosity was aroused. "Disappointed again, Susan?" he heard a pleasant voice say, and he turned to see a middle aged woman of plain features passing him address-

ing the girl. "The young woman smiled deprecatingly and explained:—"A breeze from Cork snatched the paper from this gentleman. I caught it and he has kindly let me keep it."

Miss Eustace looked at Dexter, inclining her head. He lifted his cap. "Miss Susan Witherell, this is a habit, I suppose, or a fad, if you like."

Dexter's curiosity was aroused. "Disappointed again, Susan?" he heard a pleasant voice say, and he turned to see a middle aged woman of plain features passing him address-

ing the girl. "The young woman smiled deprecatingly and explained:—"A breeze from Cork snatched the paper from this gentleman. I caught it and he has kindly let me keep it."

Miss Eustace looked at Dexter, inclining her head. He lifted his cap. "Miss Susan Witherell, this is a habit, I suppose, or a fad, if you like."

Dexter's curiosity was aroused. "Disappointed again, Susan?" he heard a pleasant voice say, and he turned to see a middle aged woman of plain features passing him address-

ing the girl. "The young woman smiled deprecatingly and explained:—"A breeze from Cork snatched the paper from this gentleman. I caught it and he has kindly let me keep it."

Miss Eustace looked at Dexter, inclining her head. He lifted his cap. "Miss Susan Witherell, this is a habit, I suppose, or a fad, if you like."

Dexter's curiosity was aroused. "Disappointed again, Susan?" he heard a pleasant voice say, and he turned to see a middle aged woman of plain features passing him address-

ing the girl. "The young woman smiled deprecatingly and explained:—"A breeze from Cork snatched the paper from this gentleman. I caught it and he has kindly let me keep it."

L.A. SHAFER

"Why don't you read your own despatch?"

"Why, no," said Dexter, "not exactly. You see, a wireless despatch to Bassett probably means that something important is happening in Wall Street."

"Oh, are you interested in stocks?" queried Miss Witherell.

"Somewhat."

"Have you known Mr. Bassett long?" asked Miss Witherell.

"I haven't seen you talking to any one who looks like a financier. What kind of a man is he?"

"I've known Bassett a good many years. He is a first rate chap, about sixty years old, a thorough gentleman, but not a society man; apparently interested in business; looks more like the president of a bank in Ontario, N. Y., than a leader of finance; has the reputation of never forgetting a favor or an injury. Hello! There he is now, out back of the steward, who is coming for the tea things."

The steward handed Dexter a wireless despatch. Bassett passed along the deck, lifting his cap in response to Dexter's salute.

"The young man tore off the end of the envelope as if it were any ordinary business note, opened out the folded sheet deliberately and read:—

"Outlook black again. Bottom seems to have dropped out of the G. C. and S. A. C. deal. Bassett Hammering it hard. We need \$5,000,000 to carry it through. Can you suggest any way out? Must be quick."

"DAWSON."

The signer of the despatch was Dexter's partner, who was left in charge of the great Gulf Coast and South American Central merger deal when Dexter, nearly broken by the strain of the long struggle, had been ordered abroad by his physician for change and rest after the partners thought success was assured.

There had come a sudden change, however. The money market had tightened and Dexter had been summoned home in hot haste by cable. Now, as he read these words that had flashed thousands of miles under the sea and vibrated hundreds more over the spray-flecked Atlantic to seek him out and smite him beside the girl who had begun to rouse rosy winged hopes in his heart he realized that he stood on the brink of a precipice.

"Whatever else happens," was his first thought, "I'll not run the risk of dragging her down with me."

It had taken him only a moment to read the despatch. Smiling, and without a trace of emotion, he turned and said lightly:—

"Well, perhaps this wireless business isn't so bad after all. My getting this just at this time may make considerable difference to several persons in a few days."

At this moment Bassett approached the group.

"Pardon me, Dexter," he said; "may I have a word with you? Forgive my intrusion. I have some interesting news from New York. Noticed you had a message and thought you would like to know that the Celtic, which relayed our despatches, is likely to get

know that girl. She looks as if I imagine Joe Witherell's daughter would look now. I knew them in Cleveland years ago. Does she come from Cleveland?"

"Bassett, I don't know where she comes from, or who her father is or was. No I'm not offended. I'm perplexed. All confess that I'm pretty hard hit, but I fear she is not free. There is some mystery about her, and, besides, I don't dare allow myself to think of marriage till I know whether I shall have a few dollars ahead or have my last cent shaken out by this earthquake in Wall Street."

"There was a lurch of the great ship, a staggering shiver through its huge frame, a great swash as a mighty wave broke over the weather rail and the water came swishing around the deckhouses and along the promenade."

Dexter rushed aft, fearing the flood would catch the ladies, but it ran off harmlessly into the lee scuppers, and they laughed at the anxiety with which he begged them to seek safety within. They yielded to his persuasion finally, however, after another blow from the sea had made the liner reel ominously, and he led Miss Eustace, who held firmly to his hand, and the girl, who held firmly to his hand, to the deckhouse entrance.

The girl stopped at the high board fitted in the doorway to keep out sudden rushes of water and begged for a last look at the waves and stars. She held firmly to the hand rail. Dexter stood in the shadow outside and a little aft, directly beneath a port-hole, whose bull's-eye swung at right angles in its brass frame.

Miss Witherell turned with a sigh, releasing her hold on the rail and lifting her feet to step over the board. The ship gave a tremendous jerking lurch. The girl reeled and would have fallen down the deck's steep pitch to the rail, but Dexter caught her about the waist with his right arm. He felt himself slipping, thrust his left hand upward and caught the swinging rim of the bull's-eye. He held his precious burden close, but her weight and the quick recovery of the ship swung them both around sharply and one of Dexter's fingers was caught between the rim of the glass and its frame and was painfully crushed.

In a moment the liner had righted to even keel. Dexter let go the bull's-eye rim and helped his companion over the board at the door, holding her damaged hand behind him. She turned with the light shining through her wind-tossed hair. Her eyes beamed upon Dexter as he released her hand, and she said with an intensity of feeling that made him forget his aim:—

"Thank you. You saved me by your quickness from a bad fall."

Then she saw how pale he had become and cried:—"Oh, you are hurt. How? Where?"

As she started toward him he gently prevented her from coming out, stepped inside and said:—

"It's of no consequence," still keeping his left hand out of sight.

"I know you are badly hurt," said Miss Witherell. "Please let me see your hand. Perhaps I can tell you what to do at once before you go to the doctor. You must let me see your hand."

Her anxiety was so keen and unre-

strained that Dexter was glad he was hurt.

"Well, if I must I must," he said, taking his hand slowly from behind him.

The tip of the index finger down to the first joint had been jammed out of shape. The pain was excruciating.

"Oh, Mr. Dexter!" exclaimed his self-appointed nurse, "you must go right to the doctor. Hold your wrist firmly like this to keep the blood from settling in the wound (she seized him by the wrist) and raise your hand as high as you can. If you can't find the doctor right away get some crack-ice and wrap it around the finger tip with your handkerchief. You will do this, won't you?"

Dexter promised and sought the doctor.

"What, Susan, you surprise me! What excuse could I trump up for telling him what you call the truth? You are my very dear friend and I don't want you or any one else to think of you in any other light. I couldn't possibly think of doing what you ask."

"Very well, then, I shall tell him myself. If he asks us to go to the stern-to-night to watch the screws, throw the spray, as he said he would, may I ask him to take Mr. Bassett along?"

"Certainly, that would be jolly," eagerly assented Miss Eustace, hoping that Bassett's presence would dispel all danger of Susan's "telling" Dexter.

After dinner Dexter led the way to the main deck and back to the rail above the screws. He bore good naturedly the bantering of Bassett and Miss Eustace over his damaged finger.

Bassett found that his chances of talking to Susan about Cleveland were remote, for her manoeuvring had placed him with Miss Eustace on one side of the sternpost, while Susan was leaning over the rail with Dexter, twenty feet away on the other side of it.

Miss Eustace noticed that not a word of what the young people said could be heard, and she knew why Susan had wanted Bassett in the party.

They rode high aloft over the top of a billow and gazed far down as from a hilltop through clouds of spray that shimmered in a phosphorescent fire and glittered in the moonlight. Then they sank down, down into the watery abyss and looked upward at the foaming crest that had just surrounded, while the boiling sea writhed and flickered and sparkled in lines of scurrying flame almost within their reach.

After a long silence Dexter leaned toward the frail girl beside him and said:—

"You will be careful not to lean too far over the rail, won't you?"

"Yes, but I am not afraid. I don't believe you would let me go overboard," and she smiled up at him brightly.

"You may be sure I would not," she had never seen an expression like that on his face as he said this. It both startled and attracted her. Then it recalled her resolution.

"Mr. Dexter," she said, "I want to make a confession to you. Will you hear me?"

"Why, most certainly, if you wish to," replied Dexter wondrously, while

his effort to brace himself for any possible shock gave his tone a cold formality that he did not feel.

"You are very kind. Well, I am not what I seem."

"In what respect?"

"I am only Miss Eustace's companion, her servant to be perfectly honest, not her friend and equal, as she—as we have allowed you to believe. She insisted that we should travel in this way and would not listen to putting 'maid' after her name on the passenger list, and she refused to let any one know the truth. I couldn't go on so any longer."

She poured the words out in a torrent and when she stopped short Dexter asked quietly:—

"Is that all?"

"Yes, that is all."

"Your 'confession' surprises me, of course, but it is perfectly plain that Miss Eustace is right in one sense, for you are not a servant in the ordinary meaning of the term, and she evidently does not so regard you. Neither shall I, for you will permit me to consider you my friend. There must be something back of such a situation, it would seem, but if you say there is not that settles it."

He yearned to pour out his heart to her at that moment, as he had never longed to do anything in his life before, but he put a strong restraint upon himself, and as he turned and offered her his hand she felt the chill of his manner without knowing its cause and naturally misinterpreted it.

"I am happy to have you class me as a friend," she said quietly, taking his hand.

Miss Eustace saw this climax.

"Don't look at them," she said to Bassett. "I don't want them to think we are talking about them. I'm sure that girl has just spoiled it all."

"Why, how so?"

"They shook hands as solemnly as second cousins at a funeral and I know she has told him that servant story—which Miss Eustace had just confided to Bassett."

She! That won't make any difference to Dexter. He's sure he is in love with her, and when he makes up his mind he wants anything he usually gets it, if it isn't rivited down, so Joe Witherell left her penniless! That seems hard to believe. The last I heard of him he was one of the solid men of Cleveland. We were old friends, but after I came East we drifted apart."

"All we know," said Miss Eustace, "is that her uncle, Silas Witherell, who was administrator of her father's estate, gave out that not a dollar of his brother's supposed wealth could be found. He took Susan, adopted her and educated her. When she was just ready to make her debut in society two years ago Silas Witherell told her she must marry his friend, David Bonsall, who is old enough to be her grandfather. She rebelled, Silas insisted. Bonsall seems to have some hold on Silas. Bonsall was Joe Witherell's partner you remember. Susan wrote to me and declared she would leave her uncle's house and go to teaching music, or do anything rather than marry old Bonsall. I was her god mother's most intimate school chum and I told her to come to me. She did."

"She said she would not stay with me unless I let her do something to earn her living. I told her she could be my companion at so much a year, she consented and we have been traveling ever since. She never ever sees an American paper that she does not pounce on the death list, always looking for 'Bonsall.' Do you blame her?"

"Not much! Well, well! Here's a pretty mess! Old David Bonsall and Silas Witherell—and Joe penniless and the girl—let me see; when did Joe die?"

"Five years ago."

"Ah! Silas Witherell began going into traction deals about that time. I believe I know a man who can straighten this tangled web of woe! That looks like a steamer's smoke. Perhaps it's the Campana. If it is there ought to be something doing in the wireless line, though I hate to break up this charming party."

"The party" was broken up and Bassett sent this despatch via the Campana:—

"William H. Ferrett, attorney, Cleveland, Ohio:—

"Suspect Silas Witherell and David Witherell conspired to loot Joseph Witherell estate and for Bonsall's aid and abetment, Silas promised Jim Joe's daughter, Susan, to marry her, and with Miss Eustace, investigate, and if there's a peg to hang it on accuse the rascals. Demand restitution. Use my name."

"BASSETT, S. S. Runk."

IV.

The next day dawned with a hurricane shrieking through the steel shrouds of the liner and hushing the sea into a fury. Doors were locked and passengers were not allowed on deck.

Miss Eustace was ill and Susan Witherell remained with her in her stateroom. Bared from the deck, Dexter wandered aimlessly through the long passageways. At the end of every one of his turns about the ship he found himself at the door of the wireless office gazing at the mute instruments. The day dragged its weary length to his close at last. Morning brought a heavy snowstorm and another nerve racking day.

The snow fell in the next night, and on the morning of the sixth day out from Queenstown and the third since Bassett and Dexter had sent their wireless messages to Wall Street the Runk ran into another hurricane, more violent than the first.

Dexter had worked himself into a state of mind in which he hardly cared whether the liner ever got to port or not. The only thing in life he wanted was a wireless message. Bassett was as placid as an unruffled pool in a forest.

In midafternoon, when the gale was shrieking at its topmost pitch, the two men met at the inside door of the wireless office.

"Well, we'll hardly get anything off this ticker to-day," said Bassett. "What's the use of our lining up here?"

"It's too sure, gentlemen; we may run close enough to the Carmania to get a few messages even in this storm," the operator volunteered.

"There comes something now," he cried a moment later, and he quickly adjusted the telephone headpiece that held a receiver to his ear so that not the faintest buzz would escape him.

"Tick-tickety, tick, tick; tickety-tick, tick; tickety-tick," went the instrument.

"It's the Carmania, and a message is coming!" the operator called out triumphantly.

Dexter felt as if every pore in his body was an ear and was straining to catch every "tick."

"The message is for you, Mr. Dexter," the operator said. "It ought to be all in shortly if we have good luck. No! it's stopped in the middle of a sentence. Something must have broken. Here it is what has come and the man tore a sheet from his pad of blanks and handed it to Dexter, who read:—

"Bought G. C. and S. A. C. at 10.

Sold at 11 yesterday. To-day, however, it slumped."

"Great God, man! Can't you do anything to get the rest of this?" cried Dexter.

"I don't know. I'll send word to the captain."

Presently the Captain appeared. "We won't get any more wireless for a time," he said coolly. "The gale has cut your wires from the mast. Mr. Baldwin, as clean as a knife would do it."

"Can't the line be replaced at once, captain?" asked Dexter. "I was just getting a most important message."

"No, sir. We will have to wait till the wind goes down. It would be dangerous to attempt repairs now."

"I'll give one thousand dollars to the man who will do it!" exclaimed Dexter.

"I wouldn't risk the life of one of my men in this gale for ten times one thousand dollars, sir!" snapped the captain and walked off.

And hereupon the gale ceased the next day, but as the wind fell the pent up tempest in Dexter's heart rose by leaps and bounds. It reached hurricane force late in the afternoon. When the sky cleared the passengers were allowed on the snow-covered deck and he watched the men run new wires up to the mast-head.

On the following morning Dexter and Susan stood near the port rail far forward where the promenade deck, carried over the main deck, formed a small lookout just large enough for two and protected from the wind and spray by canvas on the front side. For a time they were as gay and happy as children, enjoying with zest the exhilaration of dodging below the canvas to escape the torrents of spray that were hurled against it when the spray of the snow-crusted liner buried itself deep in the overhanging cliffs of water that seemed ever ready to engulf them.

They had tobogganed down one particularly long mountain side of water and had turned just in time to see a huge wave lifting its giant top ahead of them.

The liner rose gallantly, as usual, toward the impending height, but the wave broke over the prow before the crest was surmounted and the two young people were drenched by them despite their canvas shield. They looked at each other and the sight was as ludicrous as they burst into hearty laughter.

Turning instinctively to see if any one was looking, they saw a steward picking his way over the deck's covering snow.

"Miss Witherell," said Dexter, becoming suddenly serious, "before that fellow reaches us I want to say something. I'm afraid he is coming from Miss Eustace to call you in."

Susan's answer was a quick glance of grave expectancy.

"First, I want to tell you that even if my manner toward you has seemed altered since you told me about your relations with Miss Eustace, it has not been due to any change in my regard for you. The contrary is the case. I have been greatly troubled by business matters and they have been involved with the very thing I want to talk to you about."

"I am glad my story has not changed you," she said simply. "I hope your business affairs have ceased to longer worry you."

"They don't, but not because they are any better. It was this fact that decided me to speak to you."

His manner left no doubt in Susan's mind as to the nature of what he was going to say.

"Miss Witherell," he began, "it is the crumpling of the steward's feet in the snow grated harshly on Dexter's ear. But he and Susan turned at the sound and saw two newspapers in the man's extended hand.

"Beg pardon," he said. "Dispatches. One for Miss Witherell, one for Mr. Dexter."

They tore open their envelopes excitedly and plunged into the text without noting the inside addresses. This is what they read:—

Dexter—Uncle confessed. Turned over \$500,000 your father's estate. Bonsall died heart attack few minutes after accused of plot. I hold money for you. Have informed Bassett. FERRETT.

Susan—Both deals success. Profit \$2,000,000. All cleared up. Bassett crowd jumped in at the slump. Bought without limit. Got out at top. DAWSON.

"Why, this is for you!" they both cried simultaneously and exchanged messages.

"They put the despatches in the wrong envelopes," said Dexter without taking a glance at his own paper. "I congratulate you with all my heart, Susan, and I congratulate you with Miss Eustace. Investigate, and if there's a peg to hang it on accuse the rascals. Demand restitution. Use my name."

"BASSETT, S. S. Runk."

IV.

The liner gave a great lurch and stagger. They had not noticed a big oncoming wave. Dexter seized Susan to keep her from falling. He drew her close and looked up at the med behind the canvas, but the time to escape the shower of spray, which drenched them anew and soaked their telegrams.

"I'll read them to you," Dexter whispered.

He kept his arm about her. They spelled out the words on the dripping despatches. As they finished she turned in his arms, yielded gently to his embrace and looked up at him with unexpressed happiness in her eyes. He could not tell whether it was spray or tears that glistened on her lashes and jeweled in glowing cheeks.

"Bless you, my darling girl! Bless you!" they heard Bassett's voice shouting cheerily. "That's a most charming group. Don't move, please. I want to get a snapshot of you just like this. Will call it 'A Wireless Deal Engineered by Promoter Cupid.'"

The Last Stop.

Argonaut.

One cold, wintry morning a man of tall and angular build was walking down a steep hill at a quick pace. A piece of ice under the snow caused him to lose control of his feet; he began to slip and was unable to stop. At a crossing half way down he encountered a large, heavy woman. The meeting was sudden, and before either realized it a collision ensued and both were sliding downhill. The thin man underneath, that "Argonaut" of the Argonaut, the bottom was reached and the woman was trying to recover her breath and her feet, these faint words were borne to her ear: "Pardon me, madam, but you will have to get off here. This is as far as I go."

Without some help of strife, With fervor fits in the taste (Good brew gone in waste) Of the wine in the cup of life!