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THE BISHOP'S CHECKMATE.

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BISHOP Checkmate found himself in need of the sea air after a hard winter of confirming and marrying off his flocks. He had not lost the bland, rosy cheeks and rounded form, due to a genial nature and good cheer, that proclaimed him Bishop a block off. Still he felt he required a month's rest to nerves and brain—all the more because he had been much worried recently about getting his nephew, Tom Squares, decently through his preliminary examinations for college; whose studies, owing to a great fondness for pretty faces and very slight fondness for text-books, were sadly snarled up. Tom was to work hard during the whole trip; this was the condition on which the Bishop had paid his little bills at the florist and at Huyler's and taken him along. The Bishop, with Ramsay's *Saint Paul* and a volume of Milman to read, together with the first proofs of his own *Sermons for Sad Hearts* to revise, promised himself many quiet, profitable moments on board the "Minnehaha."

After two days of much suffering, Bishop Checkmate made his way to the promenade deck and let himself down gently into the nest of rugs which had been cosily laid out for him on his steamer chair by the faithful steward. Our poor friend looked pale and wan, and with one feeble hand fingered the pages of the manuscript he had brought with him for a preliminary inspection, while his glassy eyes looked sadly out to sea.

Something between a little laugh and a cough drew his eyes to the chair beside him, on which lay another bundle of rugs. The sprightly face of Mrs. Ronalds and the red cover of Dwight Jilton's *Miss Petticoats* peeped from the wrappings of fur and tweed.

"Good morning, Bishop," said a pretty voice, "I fear you have been working too hard these last few days, for we have not seen you at all."

"Oh, madam," sighed the ever-gallant old gentleman, "I have been working rather hard, and in this rough weather I was afraid to trust my inkstand on deck, but this afternoon I found the seclusion of my cabin too confining, and have brought my papers to revise up here in pencil."

Saying this, he turned towards his neighbour, whom he had hardly more than bowed to the first day out. She was a sight any man's eyes might be pleased to dwell on. Plump, dark-haired, bright-eyed, with alert and graceful movements, she sparkled over with good health, and a chat with her was a tonic for anyone. The Bishop soon began to feel its beneficial effects, which, together with the sea breezes, brought the colour back to his genial face, and he was nothing loth

to accept a caviare sandwich and join her in a cup of broth when "eight bells" sounded. Mrs. Ronalds was that ideal woman companion—a good talker and a better listener; and the Bishop was soon galloping off on his pet hobbies, with her ambling at his side.

A chance remark about his nephew brought him back to *terra firma*, if this expression is permissible of ship life.

"What a nice fellow your nephew is," the widow said, smiling sweetly, "so polite and kind; he was most attentive to us last evening during the storm, and we are both quite in love with him already."

At the word *both* the Bishop started, remembering the glimpse he had caught on first coming aboard of Miss Lucy Sweet, Mrs. Ronalds' niece—a dangerously pretty girl, all fluffy hair and pinkness. *He* had wanted Tom, too, during the storm, and had sent the steward for him. But first Tom was not to be found, and later he sent back word that he would come as soon as he had finished his chapter of the *Anabasis*. Then had come a terrible lurch of the vessel, and the Bishop had remembered nothing more.

"Tom, the rascal, where is he now?" darted through his mind, and, jumping up with a courteous but short bow, he ran off in search of him.

He did not have to go far. For after one or two stumbles and a tussle with his cap on rounding a windy corner, he came upon his nephew in the act of teaching little Miss Sweet the mysteries of shuffle-board. Now, the day was still rough, and Lucy was not very sure-footed, so Tom's hands were busy helping her to stand and play all at once.

"My word, what a good shot! Splendid! Whew, here comes a whopper! Take care, lean on me," as a great wave dashed its spray on Lucy's rosy face; such was the scene that greeted the poor Bishop as he approached, staggering and struggling.

"Tom!" he cried. And in a few moments the little group was broken up. Miss Sweet declared she was tired and very ready to sit down and read; and Tom, muttering beneath his breath, reluctantly took to his chair on the further side of the Bishop, who rather stiffly returned to his own seat by Mrs. Ronalds.

The worthy old gentleman looked flustered and worried, and responded very frigidly to a few playful remarks of Mrs. Ronalds about young people finding amusement in anything and everything. Her quick eye glanced first at her niece, whose dainty brows just puckered above the gilt top of Herbert Spencer's *First Principles*; then at Tom, moodily fingering his pencil; then at the Bishop, who was somewhat savagely beginning to arrange his notes. A ripple of amusement passed over her face as the whole situation flashed upon her. She gave a little sigh, and then drew forth from a bag which lay on her knees a small leather booklet, something like a large cardcase. Settling herself comfortably in her chair, so as to rest her elbow on the arm nearest the Bishop, she opened the book, and with her free hand began moving some little objects about on its inner surface.

A look of deep and earnest absorption settled on her face, when she had arranged the board—for it was nothing less than a pocket chess-board—to her satisfaction; and soon the whole group was in deep quietude. The only sound was the rustling of the Bishop's notes, for neither Miss Sweet nor Tom seemed to progress in their reading beyond their first pages.

Bishop Checkmate glanced out to sea. It was calmer now, blue and serene, just one sea-gull showing like a puff of foam in the sky. He glanced at Miss Sweet, who caught his eye and immediately withdrew hers; then at Tom—all was well there; then his eye rested on his other neighbour. He started, for the sight of a chess-board was to him like the sound of a fire-bell to an engine horse.

But no; he would, he must, finish his work. "Work before play," that was always his motto.

He made some notes; he drew his pencil through some words; he underlined a word twice, then looked back and wondered why he had done so. Then he took a peep over his neighbour's shoulder. He looked again, longer.

"Madam, excuse me, but *would* you make that move?"

"Oh, Bishop, do *you* play chess?" answered she, "let's have a game. I love it."

Poor Bishop Checkmate—all his good resolutions flown to the winds! The widow turned the board, and with heads close together, he and she were soon in deep contemplation.

The moments passed. Once in a while the Bishop's firm, broad hand, on which rested a big seal ring, would meditatively worry a piece out of its crack and make a move. Quickly the widow's snow-white hand, sparkling with jewels, would as it were answer him back with another. Now and again the Bishop looked up at his nephew, whom he knew he must watch; but less frequently as the game enthralled him more and more.

What was that fluttered across the deck? Miss Lucy Sweet's handkerchief, carried off by the naughty wind. Tom saw and ran. Common politeness called him. He returned it, said a few words and looked towards his uncle. Lucy looked too. Their eyes met and both laughed.

"What a dear old gentleman," said Lucy, "and how fond he seems of chess."

"May I?" said Tom, and without more ado sank into the empty chair at her side.

The long day waned. The soft and beautiful light of late afternoon slanting across the deck caught in Lucy's hair and made a halo of gold, as the Bishop and his opponent began their third and deciding game. The Bishop had missed Tom, had even seen him sitting further down the deck; but as one in a trance who, seeing, understands not, he was so absorbed with his own moves that he could not comprehend his nephew's.

Half an hour more and the widow, with a little cry of triumph, flashed a move:

"I have you now, Bishop, I think," she exclaimed, laughing.

The Bishop hesitated, then flushed with pride and joy, for he thought he saw not only a safe escape, but a winning combination.

Would it work? He looked up and saw Tom's hand enveloping in its broad depths both the tiny ones of Miss Lucy. He could not stop: would his strategy work? Perhaps the widow had seen that other game being played five chairs off, perhaps she had read into Lucy's heart; but now her eyes were fixed in apparently deep study on the board.

Yes; it would work. The Bishop saw the whole beautiful combination. His face glowed with ecstatic delight, and his hand trembled slightly as he played his moves in rapid succession. At last there were only two moves more and he would give mate. He checked her king with one bishop. She hastily retreated from the zone of danger, and he lifted the other bishop to give the *coup de grâce*.

"I win, madam," he cried, exultant, "you cannot escape the mate!"

"One moment, Bishop; it is you who are beaten." So saying, she pointed down the now darkened deck, and the Bishop's horrified glance beheld Tom, his own nephew Tom, to whom he had forbidden the even so much as speaking to a girl during this voyage, in his very presence pressing a kiss on the blushing cheek of Miss Lucy Sweet.

"Oh, Bishop! love will always find a way."

It was too true; the last moves which had so engrossed him had covered his nephew's strategy; and so was, by the moves of his own bishop, Bishop Checkmate checkmated.