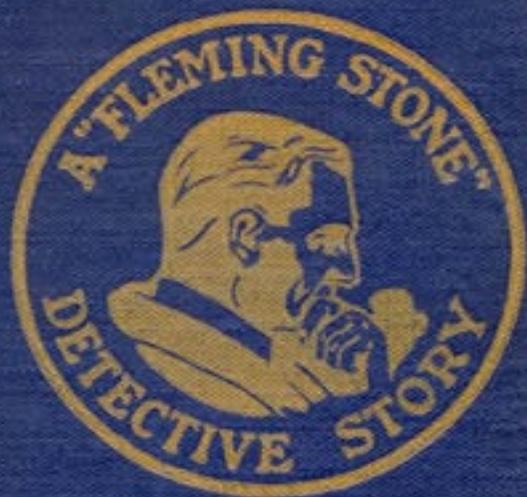


THE BRONZE HAND

CAROLYN
WELLS



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THE
BRONZE
HAND

CAROLYN
WELLS



THE BRONZE HAND

CAROLYN WELLS'

*Baffling detective stories, in which Fleming Stone,
the great American Detective, displays his remarkable
ingenuity for unravelling mysteries*

THE BRONZE HAND
THE DAUGHTER OF THE HOUSE
PRILLILGIRL
ANYTHING BUT THE TRUTH
THE FURTHEST FURY
SPOOKY HOLLOW
FEATHERS LEFT AROUND
THE MYSTERY GIRL
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SYCAMORE
RASPBERRY JAM
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THE MAXWELL MYSTERY
A CHAIN OF EVIDENCE
THE CLUE
THE GOLD BAG

PTOMAIN STREET

A Rollicking Parody on a Famous Book

THE BRONZE HAND

A FLEMING STONE STORY

BY
CAROLYN WELLS

*Author of "Vicky Van"
"The Daughter of the House", etc.*



PHILADELPHIA AND LONDON
J. B. LIPPINCOTT COMPANY

1926

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TO MY DEAR FRIEND

JESSIE FORD

CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. THE PINNACLE	9
II. THE PASSENGERS	27
III. THE YOUNGER GENERATION	45
IV. THE FOURTH OF JULY	63
V. THE MYSTERY	80
VI. THE GLOVES	98
VII. THE JEWELER'S BILL	116
VIII. THE DRESSING CASE	134
IX. THE TREASURE HUNT	152
X. PLANTED?	169
XI. THE JEWELS	187
XII. STANHOPE	204
XIII. MASON, THE FRIENDLY	221
XIV. THE SEARCH	238
XV. THE ANNOUNCEMENT	254

XVI.	<u>ENTER FLEMING STONE</u>	270
XVII.	<u>MAISIE IN DANGER</u>	287
XVIII.	<u>THE MAN IN THE LIBRARY</u>	304

CHAPTER I

THE PINNACLE

Once upon a time there were four men—all bad. That is, they were each bad, but none was entirely bad. Nobody is.

The four were closely associated in their interests and were of varying types and varying degrees of badness.

One was the Cat's-paw; one was the Brutal Ruffian; one was the Arch Villain behind it all; and one was the Judas Iscariot, who carried the bag, and who betrayed the whole bunch.

The good in each was more or less discernible. One was awfully kind to his mother, who never had heard of his badness, and wouldn't believe it if she had. One was generous minded and lavish of gifts. No one ever appealed to him for material help in vain. One was champion of the downtrodden, and always sided with and assisted the under dog in any fight. And one—well, he made it a point of honor always to return a borrowed book. Perhaps his good trait was the most unusual of all.

One was an engaging-looking chap, with deep-set eyes and an irradiating smile. One was plain, but of a strong-featured, though immobile countenance that betokened an indomitable will. One was of fine, ascetic features, which belied his real nature and served as a mask. And one was of nondescript appearance, as most men are.

One had been a fairly well known football player. One had been a Civil Engineer, and was still civil. One was secretly superstitious. And one was addicted to Cross Word Puzzles, Bridge, Chess and Detective Stories, which addictions usually flock together.

The four men figure in this story, also some other men and a few women, who will appear in due course.

Many years ago Kipling wrote:

“The Liner she's a Lady, an' she never
looks nor 'eeds.”

and perhaps the most patrician Lady that ever rode the waves was the liner *Pinnacle* as she left her New York wharf, one summer afternoon, bound for Liverpool.

Without looking nor 'eeding, she steamed majestically down the lane of the Hudson, and out to sea.

Many of her passengers, after screeching themselves hoarse with their goodby to friends on the pier, stayed on deck to watch the fading away of the skyscrapers along the Manhattan skyline.

The *Pinnacle*, as befitted her name, was the last word in steamships. She was, in truth, the very lap of luxury, and the First Cabin passengers, as they crossed her gangplank, represented, perhaps, enough gold to sink the ship.

As was also fitting, Nature had provided a perfect day for the sailing.

Although it was the first day of July, June seemed still to linger, and the blue of sea and sky was gilded by a summer sun, which obligingly tempered its rays by disappearing now and then, behind puffy white clouds.

A delicious breeze added itself to the weather record, and, as an old poet has it,

“All things were teeming with life and with light.”

After the Liberty Statue was passed, the Deck Steward was made suddenly busy explaining why he had assigned to insistent passengers chairs that had been long ago engaged by others.

But the Deck Steward was a pleasant sort, who had a beaming smile and a placating way with him that let him get by with most of his concessions to bribery and corruption.

By tea time, everybody's chair was labelled and most of the recipient sex had gone to their cabins to examine their flowers and gifts, while the men looked up acquaintances and proffered cigars.

But the call of the tea brought many out to their deck chairs and travelling companions gossiped and compared notes.

“Cox is on board,” said Amy Camper to her husband, as she balanced a tray on her knees and poured tea into two cups.

“Yes, I saw him. Oily Oscar is in fine fettle.”

“Always is. He seems to be alone.”

“I believe he has a secretary or satellite of some sort. I shan’t trouble him, anyway. I say, Amy, Lily Gibbs is with us.”

“Oh, Lord! Can I never escape that woman? Well, she’ll attach herself to Oscar Cox’s train as soon as may be.”

“She’ll do that. Has, in fact—or, at least, her deck chair is directly in front of his. Look.”

Amy Camper dutifully looked, and saw Oscar Cox, the Oil magnate, in a chair in the back row of all, while the sprightly Miss Gibbs was in the next row ahead.

It was Saturday afternoon, and after their tea, all felt relaxed and affable, and the seated ones watched the walkers as they strode by, and in return the walkers discussed their indolent neighbors.

Two young men paced round and round the deck.

They were Pollard Nash and Harold Mallory, and they had known one another just twenty minutes.

Somebody had told one of them to look up the other, and the result was an immediate and mutual liking.

“I wonder who that girl is,” said Nash, as they passed a quiet figure in quiet, smart garb, who was looking dreamily out to sea.

“That’s the fourth girl you’ve wondered about,” remarked Mallory. “You’re a bit of a wonderer, Nash.”

“Yes, I’m always at it. Born wondering, I think. But that girl puts it over all the rest. Princess in disguise, I take it.”

“Not very well disguised, then, for she has all the aloofness and disdain commonly ascribed to royalty.”

“Well, we can’t find out until we can manage to get a proper introduction. That’s the worst of these smashing big boats. Everybody is *noli me tangere*. I like the old-fashioned little tubs, where you can scrape acquaintance if you want to.”

“They’re more sociable. But I like better the reserve and exclusiveness of these. Who wants all sorts of people bumping into one, with rowdy greetings and all that?”

“Hello, there’s Cox, the oil man. Know him?”

“No, do you?”

“I don’t. But I shall before long. He’s a chap I’d like to talk to.”

“Why don’t you just tell him so? He’s looking bored and probably lonely.”

“He’d pitch me overboard.”

“Maybe not. I dare you to try it. I’ll stand by, to catch you as you go over the rail.”

Egged on by Mallory’s chaff, Nash paused near the chair of the millionaire.

“Mr. Cox, isn’t it?” he said, in careless, affable tone.

“Yes,” said Oscar Cox. “Are we acquainted?”

“Will be, in a minute,” said the imperturbable Nash. “I’m Pollard Nash, and this is my new-found friend, Mallory. You see, Mr. Cox, I could get dozens of people on board to introduce us—but what’s the use?”

Nash was the sort of blue-eyed person whom it is almost impossible to treat coolly. His manner radiated cordiality of a pleasant, disinterested kind and nine out of ten would have been amiably disposed toward him.

Moreover, Oscar Cox was in the best of humors. He had recently achieved something he inordinately desired, he was off for a long holiday, and he had left behind all his business cares and anxieties. His last few weeks had been strenuous, even dangerous, but they were past, and now, at sea, with every dispute settled, every quandary straightened out, and every danger passed, the great man was at peace with himself mentally, morally and physically.

This explained why he chuckled amusedly at Nash’s boldness, instead of swearing at him to get out.

“That’s so,” he returned, smiling at the two men in front of him. “Let’s go to the smoking room, and see what we can do in the way of cementing an acquaintance—perhaps, a friendship.”

As he rose from his chair, he proved to be younger than they had thought him, for his white hair was misleading. As a matter of fact, Oscar Cox was just fifty, and his whole physique denoted that age, but his white hair, though abundant and crisply curly, made him seem older.

He was enormously wealthy, and though there were those who whispered “Profiteer,” yet his friends, and he had many, rated him as merely a shrewd and

clever business promoter.

His manners were charming, except when it suited his purpose to turn ugly, and in that rôle, too, he was well versed.

His clothes were irreproachable and his whole air that of a man who was at home in any situation.

The short conversation among the three had been avidly listened to by the lady who sat in front of Cox, the quick-witted and busy-minded Miss Gibbs.

“Come back soon, Mr. Cox,” she called out, and he returned to her merely a smiling nod.

“Damned nuisance,” he remarked, as they stepped into the companion way. “Some women ought to be thrown overboard.”

“She seems objectionable,” said Mallory, who had noted the eager face of the spinster. “But there are delightful looking people on board, quite a few I’d like to know.”

“Easily managed,” Cox assured him. “What I can’t arrange for you, the Captain will. But I’ll put you in with a few. The Campers are good sports— young married people, and they’ll know everybody inside of twenty-four hours. Be at the dance in the lounge tonight, and they’ll do the rest.”

“We’ll surely be there,” Nash declared. “Travelling alone, Mr. Cox?”

“Yes; except for my Guardian Angel, a misbegotten freak who looks after my belongings. Name of Hudder, and stupider than his name. You chaps alone?”

“Yep,” responded Mallory. “I’m on a short but well-earned vacation, and my new-found friend here, is on a longer one, but not so well earned.”

“A lot you know about it,” Nash smiled. “But as half an hour ago you didn’t know me at all, I’ll admit that you read me fairly well.”

“I do. I’ll bet your intimates call you Polly.”

“That, of course,” Cox put in. “How could they help it? A man named Pollard invites that nickname. What’s yours, Mr. Mallory?”

“Hal Mall, as naturally as Polly’s. And I know yours, sir. You’re Oily Oscar.”

“Yes, but thank goodness the adjective refers to material oil, and not to any traits of my character.”

“I can well believe that,” and Mallory smiled quickly. For whatever were

Cox's faults or virtues, he was far removed from the type of man known as oily.

Straightforward, almost blunt in his speech, abrupt in his statements, and positive in his decisions, Oscar Cox was never guilty of soft soap or palaver.

And he was a good story teller. Not a *raconteur*, that word connotes a long-winded, self-conceited bore, but a quick, graphic talker whose tales had point, pith and brevity.

As the talk drifted to far-off countries, he told of the brave exploits of his nephew and namesake.

"Young Oscar Cox," he said, "is fearless and often foolishly daring. He's hunting big game now, in South America somewhere. That is, if the Big Game hasn't hunted him. He's on a pretty stiff expedition, and I hope to goodness he'll get home alive."

Further details of the youth's intrepidity were related, and all were amazed when the first bugle call warned of the approaching dinner hour.

Polly Nash and Hal Mall secured a table to themselves in the elaborate Restaurant, and were not surprised to see Cox alone at a table across the room.

And as they gazed with interest at the incoming stream of passengers, they observed some few they already knew, and many others they would like to know.

"Good dancer, are you, Hal?" Nash inquired.

"Best in the world."

"Except myself. Bridge shark?"

"Not in the first rank, but a sound, reliable game."

"Good. I see us the life and soul of the party after a day or two. Lots of pretty girls about, but not so very many captivating young men."

"I'm keen for the outdoors. Deck sports mean more to me than saloon Jazz. I say, there's the google-eyed spinster. Rather more odious in evening togs, isn't she?"

"Well, yes," and Nash looked critically at the complacent Miss Gibbs, resplendent in a black chiffon wisp, precariously held up by a string of jet beads over one shoulder. "But, I think, Mall, I don't disdain the lady. She looks to me brainy, perceptive and responsive."

"Some diagnosis at a first glance! All right, you can have her. Me for the

mysterious princess. She's a dream tonight."

Nash turned quickly to see the girl he had noticed on deck coming into the room alone.

Though very young, not more than twenty-one, he judged, she had poise and *savoir faire* that a real princess might have envied. But it was the self-respect and self-reliance of an American girl, a girl brought up in the best of American ways and means.

She wore a frock of pale, flowered chiffon, daintily short, and with pleasantly rounded neck, a string of beautiful pearls her only ornament.

It was a contrast to the jingling beads and multiple bracelets of most of the women present, but the gown bespoke Paris and the pearls announced themselves as real, while the face of the girl herself was so naively pleased and so frankly entertained by the scene before her, that she easily held all eyes.

With no trace of self-consciousness she walked part way across the room, and pausing at a small table, spoke a few words to the hovering head waiter.

Obsequiously he placed her chair, and flourished about his necessary duties.

Polly Nash gazed in silent admiration.

Then, for he was a devotee of the Gilbert and Sullivan operas, he quoted:

"The maid was Beauty's fairest Queen,
With golden tresses,
Like a real Princess's,"

"They're not golden," Mallory corrected him.

"Well, they're a goldy-brown, a sort of burnished gold—tarnished gold, old gold, if you like. Any way they look gold to me."

"You're infatuated, adoration at first sight."

"Yes, as the moth for the star. You're infatuated, too. Only you think it's wiser not to show it."

"What I like best about her, is her air of enjoyment. She seems not to feel her loneliness, she's all wrapped up in interest in her surroundings. Why do you suppose she's alone?"

"Duenna seasick, probably. I wonder who she is."

“We’ll find out this evening. I shall dance with her first. The Captain will smooth the way for me.”

“All right,” Nash’s gaze had wandered and his attention, too. “By Jove, Mallory, there’s Trent—Max Trent!”

“Who’s he? A celebrity?”

“Not ostensibly. But he’s one of the finest writers in the world. He writes detective stories, but he writes literature, too.”

“You mean his stories are literature? That’s gilding refined gold and painting the lily. A good detective yarn doesn’t need to be literature. In fact, fine writing detracts from its strength.”

“Who’s talking about fine writing? His books are top of the heap—.”

“The detective story heap? Not much of an eminence.”

“Oh, all right. That’s the way everybody talks who doesn’t care for sleuth stories. I’d rather meet that man than all your dancing princesses or oily eminence.”

“Well, you’ll probably be able to manage it. The Captain can surely compass that.”

“Maybe and maybe not. Authors are an exclusive bunch.”

Dinner over, nearly everybody sauntered across to the spacious and spectacular Saloon, where a fine orchestra was already gladdening the ears of music lovers.

The middle of the great room was a dancing floor, while round the borders were tables and chairs for those who wanted them.

Soon it was like an informal At Home Dance. Introductions, if deserved were readily obtained. Acquaintances were made and the correctly-garbed men and beautifully-gowned women filled the dance floor with a brilliant, swaying, smiling crowd that made a fascinating picture for the onlookers.

Pollard Nash achieved his heart’s desire with no trouble at all. For when the Captain presented him to the author, Max Trent, that genius received the stranger most affably and seemed all for a chat.

Mallory, though, was not so successful. With all the good will in the world, Captain Van Winkle was not able to bring about an introduction to the Princess-like girl.

“She is a Miss Forman,” the Captain said. “She is travelling alone, and desires to make no acquaintances, except such as she may choose for herself.”

“Who is she?” asked the disappointed Mallory. “Why is she alone?”

“Mercy on us, I don’t know! She confided to me nothing, except her passport information. But she is, I should say, quite able to take care of herself. If not, she’ll have me to look after her. Though, I’ve seen no necessity as yet.”

“Oh, all right. Well, introduce me to the siren in black over there will you? Perhaps she’ll dance with me.”

The Captain stared at him.

“You go in for extremes, don’t you?” he said, smiling. “Miss Forman is easily the ship’s beauty, while Miss Gibbs—.”

“Yes, she looks like a cook,” said Mallory, pleasantly, “but she’s my choice.”

He didn’t elucidate further that he had a notion Miss Gibbs was the sort to know everybody on board in the shortest possible time. And that with her as a friend at court, he might reach the princess later on.

Lily Gibbs smiled with pleasure at the advent of this most presentable young man, and in a flutter of flattered delight she danced with him.

They circled the dance floor, and *en route*, he gained much gossipy information concerning the passengers.

Miss Gibbs had industriously made hay during the few hours of sunshine already elapsed, and she was more than willing to retail her knowledge.

And later, as they discussed some light refreshment, they indulged in a veritable orgy of tattle and speculation about everybody on board.

“The Campers are a good sort,” the oracle revealed. “Owen is athletic and all that, but he has brains, too. Amy is a dear, but she bosses him terribly. She’s five years older than he is—but they’re happy enough, as things go. The man who just passed is Sherman Mason, a New York clubman.”

“That his wife with him?”

“Oh, my, no! He’s a bachelor, and scorns women, except to flirt with now and then. He loves dancing.”

Impatient of these descriptions of people who didn’t interest him, Mallory took a plunge.

“Who’s the quiet little girl sitting over by the blue-curtained alcove?”

Miss Gibbs gave him a quick glance.

“Got around to it, have you? I knew you were dying to ask that.”

“Why not? She’s one of the prettiest girls on board.”

“Oh, do you think so? Why, these two coming toward us now can beat her all to pieces for looks!”

The girls mentioned were of a dashing type, and wore stunning dance frocks of ultra fashion and bizarre design.

“Of course,” he returned smiling, “if you admire that style, you wouldn’t care for the demure little piece.”

“She isn’t so terribly demure. That’s Maisie Forman, and she’s as independent as they come. She won’t meet anybody except those she picks out herself.” Miss Gibbs looked a little chagrined. “She hasn’t picked me out.”

“Nor me,” and Mallory smiled in sympathy. “Let’s make a bargain. If either of us should get to know her, agree to present the other. How’s that?”

“A little one-sided—” but Miss Gibbs didn’t say which side she meant. “However, I’ll agree to that,” and she gave her hand on it.

“Good hunting?” Hal Mallory asked of Pollard Nash, as they ran across each other in the smoking room just before turning in.

“Fine,” Nash replied. “Had a long hobnob with Trent. He’s great! Then Oily Cox joined us, and he told stories and Trent did, too, and soon there was a whole peanut gallery listening in. What’s your report?”

“Failure. That is, so far. I may meet her later on, but it’s a bit doubtful.”

“Who? Meet whom?”

“Why, the Princess we saw in the dining room. By the way, her name is Forman—Maisie Forman.”

“Well, why didn’t you get to know her?”

“She’s too exclusive. But I learned about her from the Gibbs charmer.”

“Oh, yes, the woman with her eye on Cox. By the way, Mallory, Cox told some yarns about his nephew, the one named after him, you know. And, he made him out a financier in Chicago!”

“Well?”

“Well, don’t you remember, this afternoon, he said the chap was a big game hunter and was now in South America.”

“But a business man can hunt game in his off hours.”

“I know, but Oily Cox made it out tonight that his namesake nephew is even now on his job in Chicago. Devotes his whole life and energy to it, and is rapidly becoming a power in the stock market out West.”

“Cox is nutty, I expect—.”

“No, anything but that. What did Miss Gibbs say about him?”

“Nothing. We scarcely mentioned him. But I tell you, that little dame has the low-down on everybody on this tub. She dances as if she had her rubbers on, but she’s nobody’s fool!”

“No?”

“No.”

CHAPTER II

THE PASSENGERS

Sunday morning is Sunday morning the world over.

Whatever the situation, wherever the locality, whoever the people, Sunday morning has an atmosphere all its own, inevitable and unmistakable.

Entirely unsectarian, it is no respecter of persons, and everyone must feel its influence to a greater or less degree.

But it is not unpleasant. It is rather like a benediction, with its calm, peaceful outward effects and its undercurrents of cleanliness and Godliness.

And Sunday morning on the *Pinnacle* was rather like that Lotus land some poet wrote about, where it is always Saturday afternoon. The sunshine was gently golden, the air downy soft and the blue waves were mountains that skipped like little lambs.

The imminence of bouillon and sandwiches, like a magnet, drew to the deck hungry passengers who had eaten nothing since breakfast.

They came, not single spies, but in battalions, well-dressed, well-groomed, well-mannered, and in more or less audibly happy frame of mind.

Lily Gibbs was early in her chair, alive and alert to catch any sidelights on her neighbors.

The neighbors, mostly wrapped up in their own affairs and their own companions, bustled about her, unseeing, as the far flung line of rugs and pillows settled into place.

Mallory and Nash were doing their daily hundred rounds of the deck, pausing often to pass the time of Sunday morning.

Earlier, they had gone into conference with Garson, the Deck Steward, with the result that they now boasted chairs right in the heart of things. That is, in the immediate vicinity of the chairs of Oscar Cox and several other men of financial importance, the Campers and several other citizens of social importance, and a sprinkling of the sublimely important Younger Generation.

Two of these latter pounced on the young men, as they came toward their

chairs, and claimed them for their own.

“You can be Gladys’ sheik, Mr. Mallory,” Sally Barnes twinkled at him, “and Mr. Nash shall be mine. Now, be nice and possessive, won’t you?”

The two men spoke this language fluently, and responded in kind, as they took the chairs the girls ordained.

The quartette had met before, and failing to make any headway in getting acquainted with the exclusive Miss Forman, Mallory had advised attaching themselves to these pretty little flappers.

The flappers’ mothers sat near by, smiling indulgently at the foolishness of their adored offspring.

Then Oscar Cox appeared on deck.

The audience didn’t rise, but they paid him the homage of turning sidewise in their chairs and craning their necks and staring hard as he made his triumphal entry.

Arrayed in white and looking more like a yachtsman on his own craft than a mere passenger, he was followed by a queer looking little man, who had factotum written large all over him.

Unheeding all else, he bore down on Cox’s chair, spread a rug, propelled his master into it, folded it over his legs with the deft speed of an envelope machine, and then, from a bag he carried, whisked out a leather pillow, some magazines, a pair of blue spectacles and a field glass.

He hung the bag on the chair arm and after a few whispered words and a nod from Cox, he folded his wings like an Arab and silently disappeared.

“How thrilling!” exclaimed Sally Barnes, “Mr. Cox has a minion, a henchman, a—.”

“A vassal, a serf at his side,” supplemented Mallory. “Well, he’s a big man, you know—a man of affairs.

“Love affairs?” asked Gladys, hopefully.

“I don’t know about that. I only know him superficially as yet. But I’ll find out for you—.”

“I’ll tell her,” broke in Cox himself, who was well within earshot. “Yes, Little Girl, I’m keen on love affairs. Any takers?”

Cox had a way with him, and his speech brought only beaming smiles from

the watchful mothers of the girls.

“Don’t believe my white hair,” Cox went on, gayly. “It turned white in a single night, once when I was frightened ’most to death. Why, I have a nephew, my namesake, by the way, who is years younger than I am, and looks older. But then, he’s a parson—a clergyman in Boston.”

“I thought he was in South America,” Nash said, suddenly.

“My nephew, Oscar Cox? I tell you he’s a Unitarian minister, in Boston. Been there, in the same church, five or six years. His people love him. I’m not crazy about the lad myself. He’s too mild for my liking. But he found Hudder for me—so I owe him a debt of gratitude. Notice Hudder? My all-round caretaker? Queer looking, but capable—oh, one hundred per cent. capable.”

“Fascinating devil,” commented Sally Barnes, casually. “Is he a foreigner?”

“Well, he had some Spanish and Italian forebears. But I’m often uncertain whether he’s a devil or a dummkopf. He has traits of both. I never budge without him, he’s as necessary as a toothbrush. Well, who’s for shuffleboard or quoits, or what have you on the Sport Deck.”

Kicking away Hudder’s careful foldings, Cox jumped to his feet. In a moment, the watchful satellite was at his side, moving an empty chair or two, easing his master out into the open, and gathering up the fallen magazines.

Impatiently shaking off the hovering helper, Cox picked up a crowd of young people with his eyes, and strode off along the deck.

Pausing to look back for the others, he stood, with his back against the rail, his big, well-cut face complacent and proud; his sharp gray eyes darting here and there in general anticipation.

About two rows back, Maisie Forman was lying back in her chair, while beside her Max Trent sat upright, eagerly talking on some all-engrossing subject.

The all-seeing eyes of Oily Oscar took them in and then darted on to their neighbors, much as a jerky searchlight pursues its course.

“Isn’t he astonishing!” murmured Maisie, as the magnate passed on, and his merry train came trooping after.

“Yes,” and Trent smiled. “He looks like an event all ready to transpire. Or,” he added, “like a spider with a lot of flies.”

“Why, you don’t know anything bad about him, do you?” the girl asked.

“No, I don’t know him at all, do you?”

“Mercy, no. And I don’t want to.”

“Of course you don’t. I daresay he’s all right, as such men go. But he’s very much of the earth, earthy. When I say I don’t know him at all, I mean—er—personally. I met him with a crowd last night, and he’s a good mixer. He made friends right and left.”

“Never mind him,” and the girl turned her amber eyes on him. They were amber in this light, but sometimes they turned to beryl and topaz and all those shades that old-fashioned people used to call hazel.

Anyway, they were enchanting eyes, and Trent looked into them soberly as he resumed their broken off talk.

The Princess, as Nash had dubbed her, was not so upstage with people if she liked them. But travelling alone, as she was, she must needs watch her step and though the Captain would put her in touch with anyone she wanted, so far she had deigned to smile only on Max Trent, the story writer.

She found him interesting and entertaining, and though she purposed soon to make some pleasant woman acquaintances, she had so far, delayed it.

“Yes,” Trent picked up his interrupted tale, “I thought it would be of use to me in my detective stories, and so I took it up. Oh, I know it is quite the thing to guy a correspondence course in anything. But I guy the guys that guy it. I master it, it doesn’t master me. And, you’d be surprised, not only have I learned enough from it to write my yarns more convincingly and correctly, but I’ve become really interested in detection as a game.”

“What! You want to be a detective?”

“I don’t want to be one—I am one. I didn’t go for to do it. It was greatness thrust upon me. I just couldn’t help it. You see, with the bits I picked out of that correspondence course, and my natural bent for all that sort of thing, I just *am* a detective.”

“And are you going to take—what do you call ’em?—cases?”

“Oh, Lord no! I’m not going to practise. But it’s fine for my books. Don’t you see, I can write better detective stories if I am a detective.”

“Yes, I suppose so!” She lowered her voice. “Who is this bearing down upon us? He looks as if he meant to speak to us.”

She judged correctly, and in another moment the passer-by had paused.

“Good morning, Mr. Trent,” he said, in a quiet, pleasant way. “Sunday is a

day when everybody ought to feel generous-minded and charitable and love their neighbors as themselves. So may I flock with you people a little bit?"

His manner and speech disarmed Miss Forman's suddenly-roused antagonism and she smiled such a welcome, that Trent introduced the stranger at once.

"Mr. Mason," he said, "Mr. Sherman Mason, of New York."

Trent's inflections gave Mr. Mason a standing at once, and Maisie extracted a hand from the fluttering scarf ends she was holding, and gave it to him in greeting.

He sat on the extended front of Trent's chair, and the talk naturally drifted to books.

"Along came Ruth," called out a gay and cheery voice, and Miss Gibbs, all uninvited, joined the group.

"I've been looking for you, Mr. Mason," she chided, "you promised to take me to walk the deck this morning."

Had Sherman Mason voiced his thoughts, he would have said he'd rather take her to walk the plank, but he merely bowed and smiled and observed that the morning was not over yet.

"No," agreed Lily Gibbs, "and I'm glad of your defection since it gives me opportunity to meet the charming Miss Forman. May I introduce myself? I'm Lily Gibbs—Silly Lily—some folks call me!" she giggled appropriately. "Oh, I foresee we shall be *such* friends!"

She hunted out the girl's hand from the enveloping chiffon folds of the futile scarf, and enthusiastically clasped it in both her own. "Dear Miss Forman, how glad I am to call you friend!"

"Thank you," said Maisie, and though her voice was sweet, something about it made Miss Gibbs drop the hand she held, and sit up straighter.

Sherman Mason, seeing it all, smilingly threw himself into the breach and rose, saying, "Come Miss Gibbs, or we shan't have any sort of tramp before lunch time."

The two went off, and Trent looked whimsically at the frowning girl before him.

"I couldn't help it," he said, defensively. "Detectives spot criminals, but they can't prevent crime."

Maisie rippled a little laugh.

“Of course you couldn’t help it. I can’t expect to be shielded from the great army of the Sociably Inclined. And don’t think me a stuck-up, please. I’m not, really, only—alone as I am—.”

“How do you happen to be alone?” said Trent, quietly, with an earnest interest that robbed his query of rudeness.

“Why, it—it just happened—that I have to cross alone. When I arrive on the Liverpool dock, I shall be properly and correctly cared for.”

She looked out to sea as she spoke, and her reply seemed to be more to herself than to her companion.

“Please don’t think I meant to be intrusive,” he begged, and she said, quickly:

“Oh, no, I didn’t. It’s all right. It doesn’t matter. I ought to have brought a maid, you see—but I didn’t. I’ll attach myself to some dear old lady, or a nice young matron, and then I’ll be all right.”

“You’re all right, anyway,” Trent told her; “as right as rain! Captain Van Winkle will find a chaperon for you, if you really want one. But why not live up to your privileges as a free young American girl, and shift for yourself?”

“Perhaps I shall.” Miss Forman still showed that preoccupied air, and Trent was not surprised when she picked up her books and things and left him with a smiling but dignified “Good morning.”

The rollicking crowd came back from their deck games, and Trent quickly immersed himself in a book and drew his cap down over his eyes.

From beneath its brim, he could see Oscar Cox pass, surrounded by laughing girls and their attendant swains.

He heard Cox saying: “—and before I leave this ship, I’ll tell you all something that will knock you silly with astonishment! By Gad, I will!”

He laughed his big, booming chuckle that was infectious if unconventional.

Oily Cox made friends right and left. And though for the moment he was the midst of a crowd of shrieking, giggling youngsters, he was quite as much at home with their dancing mothers, or with their wise, shrewd, business-like fathers.

The man had one Life Motto: Get what you want

And now, after furious struggles, he had got what he wanted, and until a time should come when he wanted something else, he was contentedly happy.

By some strange freak of Nature, Sunday morning always flies by on the wings of the wind, but Sunday afternoon, except for lovers, invariably drags.

There were no lovers, that anyone knew of, on board the *Pinnacle*, and Sunday afternoon was a week long.

Maisie Forman stuck to her cabin, because she didn't want to be bothered with intrusive strangers.

Max Trent stuck to his, because he feared if he went to his deck chair, Miss Forman would think him a nuisance.

The flapper girls huddled in one or other of their cabins, comparing notes of conquest, and their adoring swains forgathered in the smoking room and pretended they were men.

Miss Gibbs wandered about to no purpose, and the big financial magnates got together and listened to one another talk business.

Oscar Cox, being the biggest and wisest, said the least.

Sherman Mason and Owen Camper, only a shade less influential in the busy marts, were nearly as silent.

Hal Mallory and Pollard Nash, scorning the younger crowd, heard with only a half interest the guarded opinions and canny advices of the Powers of Finance, and tried to urge Cox into a mood for telling funny stories.

But he was disinclined, and even made no reference to his somewhat versatile namesake nephew.

Yet, a little later, as the talk somehow drifted to superstition and the power of a curse and all that, Cox suddenly waked up.

"Nobody but a fool believes in the supernatural," he said, dogmatically, "and only a half-wit believes in curses or charms against evil. But I will say that nearly everybody has just one little pet foolishness of that sort. Why, I know a man who goes back home if he sees a black cat on his way to business!"

"Didn't know black cats went to business," put in the irrepressible Mallory.

"That will be about all from you Hal Mall," and Cox scowled in mock severity. "And my wife—dead these many years—" his voice softened, "if she put on any garment wrong side out, by chance, she wouldn't turn it, because that meant bad luck. Nor would she let me. On two occasions I went to my office

with one sock wrong side out!”

“And yet you say you’re not superstitious!” Mason exclaimed.

“That isn’t superstition—that’s marital devotion,” Cox returned. “But as I said, everybody has one little pet foible of his own, and I have mine, though it isn’t a fear to set right a shirt put on wrong side out.”

“What is it?” asked one or two, interestedly.

“Hudder,” Cox said, and though he scarcely raised his voice a note, it was a summons, and the queer little valet crept into the room.

“Get the Hand from my box, and bring it here.”

Noiselessly, the creature crept away, his soundless, slow shuffle being describable by no word other than crept.

“Ugh!” Nash said, involuntarily, “that fellow gives me the creeps! How can you stand him around?”

“Habit,” and Cox smiled. Nothing ever seemed to annoy him. “Hudder isn’t much to look at, I’ll admit, but he’s a wonder at taking care of me. And of my things. He’s valet, secretary, nurse and orderly, all in one.”

The fellow returned then, and handing something to Cox, silently departed.

“This,” and Cox laid the object on the table, “is my Hoodoo and my Mascot. If I have a small, pet bit of superstition, there it is.”

They all looked at it, and saw a bronze hand. A man’s hand, nearly life size, and of wonderful workmanship. It was a strong—diabolically strong hand, its fingers spread apart, yet partly clenched as if to clutch an enemy in a death grip. The hand was lean and sinewy; muscular, not bony, and imbued with the effect of strength and power seldom seen even in a living hand.

Yet withal, there was beauty in the design, genius in the workmanship.

And with a quick appreciation of this, Pollard Nash said, impulsively, “I bet that’s a Rodin!”

Cox flashed him a glance of approval.

“Right, my boy,” he said; “but it’s only a copy. However, it’s a faithful copy, and few could distinguish it from the original. Yes, a copy of one of Rodin’s finest studies. Look at the marvellous detail. This bronze thing has real muscle, real veins—by golly, I’ll bet it has a nervous system!”

Cox’s face was lighted up with enthusiasm, and Nash was only second in

admiration. To most of the others it was merely a good-looking bronze hand, few understood its great art.

“Well,” Cox went on, “That hand is my Luck. But whether good or bad luck, I don’t know. I always keep it by me, so far it hasn’t gone back on me. I’ve snatched all I’ve wanted, along life’s pathway, and if the grip of those bronze fingers portend anything, they mean that what I’ve got I’ll keep.”

Cox’s voice was somber, now, deep as with strong emotion, yet ringing and vibrant as he brought out the last words.

A little gingerly, Mallory lifted the hand.

“Some heavy,” he said, slightly surprised at its weight.

“Yes, solid bronze is heavy. But I lug it around with me, because—well, that’s my little foolishness.”

“It’s worth while, as a work of art,” Nash said, and one or two others nodded assent. “And it’s very beautiful.”

“No,” said Owen Camper, “it’s fine, and I daresay valuable, but I don’t agree that it’s beautiful.”

“Not pleasing to the untrained eye, perhaps,” Nash returned, “but beautiful in its perfect naturalness and gripping effect of strength and—.”

“Oh, it has a gripping effect, all right,” laughed Hal. “I wouldn’t care to have it grip me! I say, Mr. Cox, if you had two of them, they’d make a wonderful pair of book-ends!”

Oscar Cox gave him a look of mild reproach, but the undismayed wag went on to say, “However, having but one, you’ll have to use it as a doorstep—fine for that, just heavy enough.”

“Shut up, Hal,” Nash said; “do you want them all to think you run a gift shop when you’re at home?”

The turned tables warded off the annoyance beginning to show in Cox’s eyes. It was plain to be seen he was sensitive about his treasure, whether superstitious or not.

For a long time Polly Nash played with the Bronze. He patted and stroked it. He gripped his own hand to the same position. He scrutinized the bronze palm, saying, “a palmist could read these lines.”

At last he gave it back to Cox, who turned it over to the hovering Hudder, and then all broke loose with their waiting questions.

“Where did he get it?” “Who made it?” “Why did he think it either lucky or unlucky?” “What was its history?”

“One at a time,” Oscar Cox begged, smiling.

“My nephew made it for me. He’s a young chap—my namesake by the way—and he’s an art student in Paris. At least, he has been a student, now he’s a sculptor. He got a chance, somehow, to copy the Rodin and, I was anxious to have it, so he gave it to me. I made it up to him, of course, and I was delighted to have it.”

“Why?”

“Just foolishness!” Cox laughed aloud. “I told you that in the first place, you remember. I think it brings me good luck—but—.”

“But it may go back on you,” suggested Camper. “In that case, would you pitch it overboard?”

“Only if I were sure that the ill luck came through the direct instrumentality of the Bronze Hand,” and Cox looked serious.

“But how do you know your good luck has come through its direct instrumentality?”

“I don’t,” and Cox beamed his sunniest smile. “But I like to think so. That’s part of the foolishness!”

“Speaking of hands,” said Mallory, “how about a game of bridge?”

A quartette was easily collected, and they went off to the card room.

Others drifted away, until only Cox and Polly Nash were left of the original group.

“And you cart that heavy thing all about?” Nash said, musingly.

“Yes—you see, it wouldn’t be a bad weapon, in case of need.”

“That’s so, too. Why are the fingers half clenched, that way? Was the original part of a whole figure?”

“That I don’t know. My nephew never told me. But the fingers aren’t clenched—or half clenched, they’re clutching. Clutching at something—.”

“Gold?” asked Nash, his imagination stirred by Cox’s intensity.

“Maybe—I don’t know. Perhaps gold—perhaps love—perhaps hate—revenge!”

Nash looked up quickly, saw the twinkle in Cox's eyes and realized he was spoofing.

Nash laughed, too, a bit relieved at the snap of the tension.

"How little we know each other," he said; "I never should have dreamed you had that sort of thing in your makeup, Mr. Cox."

"No, most of our makeup doesn't show on the outside,—unlike the ladies," he added with a laugh.

And this effectually put an end to any further serious conversation, for Oscar Cox betook himself off, chuckling at his own jest, and Polly Nash felt an immediate need for gay companionship.

CHAPTER III

THE YOUNGER GENERATION

Monday was another beautiful *dolce far niente* day.

The portion of deck where Oscar Cox had his chair, back against the side of the ship, and where many of his friends and acquaintances surrounded him, was the chief center of interest, and was a sort of Headquarters for planning entertainments and diversions.

The young people adored Cox, and many fathers had brilliant if vague hopes for the future.

Unstinting in his interest, advice and financial help when required, Oscar Cox, though a hard-headed business man, was soft hearted where the feminine element was concerned.

The flappers hung on his deck chair, they flattered him and jollied him, until, when he tired of the game, he would brush them all away, like a swarm of flies, and forbid them to come near him until summoned.

Whereupon, they would run off, laughing, to the very young gentlemen whom they thought it funny to call Sheiks, though some grouchy, middle-aged people called them Deck Lizards.

Nash and Mallory were too old to be classed in this lot, both being beyond thirty, but they enjoyed the youngsters' fun, and were good sports.

Especially did they make themselves useful when an elaborate game was being arranged.

And today one was in process of unfolding.

"It's too wonderful, my darlings!" Sally Barnes cried, as she ran to meet the pair on the deck, and taking an arm of each, hurried them over to a chattering crowd by the rail.

"A Treasure Hunt!" Gladys Parker cried. "Think of it! We can go poking into everybody's state-rooms and into the Captain's chiffonier and into Miss Gibbs' Innovation trunk and ever'thin'!"

"Not in my stateroom!" Mallory declared.

“Oh, pooh! Hal Mall, there’d be nothing interesting in yours! Bet you haven’t a single thrill in your whole luggage! But fancy Mrs. Camper’s, now!”

“Why especially Mrs. Camper?”

“Oh, she’s so mysterious—so—so exciting, you know. They say—.”

“Oh, you gossips!” Nash cried, impatiently. “Never mind that, tell me more about your game.”

“Well, we have to get a treasure first, a prize, you know—something awfully worth while—two of them, in fact, one for men and one for wimmens. I—I dare to venture to hope that maybe, perhaps Mr. Cox will give us those—one of them anyway. Well, then—oh, gosh! there’s Dolly!” and the speaker ran away to greet a friend.

“I’ll tell you,” another girl began. “You know a Treasure Hunt. You go to one place, and that sends you to another, and so on, all over the ship.”

“But you’ll have to get permission to snoop into people’s state-rooms—.”

“Oh yes, of course. That’s one of the things you’re to do. Everybody must help some. Of course we can’t barge into a lady’s cabin, if she doesn’t know we’re coming. A man wouldn’t mind it so much. Well, all those things have to be looked after. We’re waiting for Mr. Cox, to see what he’ll give us for the Treasure. Oh, here he comes! My gladsome boy, good morning! Are you all set for a touch? I warn you, we’re out for b’ar! We want—.”

“Clear out with you! I don’t care what you want—you won’t get it from me! I’m all full of grouch, and if you come near, I’ll bite you!”

Oscar Cox’s tone was only mock ferocious, yet there was no twinkle in his eye, and the young people sensed at once that he was really out of sorts or out of temper or something.

They realized it was unwise to push him at the moment, and they fell back vanquished but very far from subdued.

“Leave him lay,” Sally advised, sagaciously. “He’ll come out of it all right. Let’s plan the thing all the same. We can get the Hunt all fixed up and then His Oiliness will only have to provide the Treasure.”

“I say,” put in Gladys, “do you suppose Miss Stuck-up Forman will let us hunt in her room? I’d love to get a snoop in there.”

“What do you think, Mr. Nash? You know her, don’t you?”

“I’ve met her but I can’t answer for her amiability in this matter. Why not

ask her?”

Maisie’s chair, with Trent’s now next to it, was half a deck length away and the wild horde ran there half scared, half pleased at the idea of making their request.

“Oh, please, Miss Forman,” cried Sally Barnes, who was a natural born spokesman, “please say ‘yes’—won’t you? You see it’s for the benefit of the sick babies in the third class, and we want it to be a success, and if you’ll say ‘yes,’ lots of other people will tag along—see?”

Maisie roused herself and sat upright.

Though but two or three years older than these rollicking girls, she seemed immeasurably their senior, and her calm dignity made them appear hoydenish and rude.

But, greatly to Trent’s surprise, she received them with the most charming of smiles, drew Sally down to her chair beside her, and said:

“Tell me all about it. I’d love to help the sick babies.”

Sally gazed at her, enthralled. Suddenly she acquired a new enthusiasm.

“Oh, Miss Forman!” she cried, “I care for you! Aren’t you a winner! And ooh! these things!”

She ran her finger-tips admiringly over Maisie’s chic little hat, and her smart sports *ensemble*, and picking up her vanity case, proceeded, as she talked, to rummage therein.

“It’s a Treasure Hunt,” she began to explain—“oh, tell her about it, girls, I want to play wiv dese!”

She drew out the exquisite appointments for facial improvement, and gazed enraptured at a gold-mounted lipstick.

“Yes, tell me,” and Maisie smiled at the others, the while she unostentatiously drew her belongings from Sally’s ubiquitous fingers, and shut them back in her bag, of which she retained possession.

Sally gazed at her a moment, then picked up the hem of her skirt and kissed it. After which, Sally, the invincible, now the devoted slave of Maisie Forman, returned to the babbling chorus.

“You know Treasure Hunts, Miss Forman, don’t you?”

“Yes, of course,” and Maisie smiled encouragingly. “But only in cities, or

across country—.”

“All the same,” one of the very young men struck in now. He simply had to. “We think we can stage one on the *Pinnacle*. We haven’t asked the Captain yet, but he’s pulp in the girls’ hands, and—” with sudden inspiration, “perhaps you’d put in a word for us, Miss Forman.”

“But I thought it was all arranged for,” and Maisie smiled inquiringly.

“Y—yes, all but getting the Captain’s consent—.”

“And Mr. Cox’s gift—.”

“And seeing about going in people’s state-rooms—.”

“Yes,” Sally declared, “it’s all arranged, except a few trifling details of that sort. Now, Miss Forman, can we—may we hunt in your cabin?”

“My Heavens, no! What an idea! I’ll do my part some other way.”

“Oh, it’ll be such a card for us, if you give your permission. Then nobody would refuse.”

“Do you—you can’t possibly mean to let you rummage through my belongings—.”

“Oh, lock up anything you don’t want us to see. All your petting notes and suitors’ pictures. All your booze and dope—.”

“All your transformations and—.”

But Maisie was helpless with laughter. She was unfamiliar with this particular type of free and easy patter, and the breezy, giggling girls, and the hovering, would-be *blasé* boys, seemed to her like an act from a play.

Maisie Forman had no mother, and her tired business man of a father had brought her up conventionally and a bit ignorantly. Jonathan Forman adored his daughter, and had given her luxuries and advantages to the best of his knowledge and belief, but now, alone in the world, for the moment, and eagerly interested in all she saw and heard, Maisie was finding out how little she knew of mundane conditions, after all.

Not that she wanted to belong to this noisy, boisterous herd, but she wanted to see them, to hear them, to watch them. She was beginning to feel that her exclusiveness was perhaps a mistake; that she could enjoy herself better by mixing, to a degree at least, with these people who had startled her at first.

“I’ll tell you,” she said at last, as she gained more definite ideas as to their

wants, "I'll help you. And if it's necessary for you to invade my room, you may. We'll see about that later. But what else can I do? Subscribe to the buying of the Treasure? Take tickets for the Hunt? What?"

"Well, you see, Miss Forman, we plan to get Mr. Cox to give us the Treasure. But he's in a heluva grouch this morning, and we don't dast tackle him. How would it be if you asked him?"

"Me? Ask Mr. Cox! Why, I don't even know him."

"Oh, that doesn't matter. Maybe Mr. Trent would ask him. He knows him."

Trent had been an interested listener but had so far, said little.

"Not I," he declared, positively. "There's nobody so appropriate for that errand as you youngsters yourselves. Wait till he's in his usual sunny mood—not long, probably—and then approach him with your usual tact and delicacy—."

"You're making fun of us—" and Sally somehow managed to bring two big tears to her dancing eyes. It was a trick of hers.

"What else are you good for?" asked Trent, with a wondering stare, as he drew out a big folded handkerchief and offered it with a flourish for the absorption of the tears.

"I say," piped up a good-looking boy, "old Oily is looking over here, and scowling like a pickax!"

"Jealous, probably," said Nash, with a glance across the deck. "He thinks you've deserted him."

Sally jumped up and ran over to Cox's chair.

"I say," she cried, bearding the lion in his den, "Miss Forman over there wants to speak to you."

"To me?" returned Cox, in amazement.

"Yes," Sally lied on, "she sent me to tell you—to ask you if you'd please step over there a minute."

"Certainly," said the Oil man, still looking incredulously at Sally. "Are you sure Miss Forman sent for me? We're—we're not acquainted."

"I'll introduce you, come ahead!" Sally fairly tugged at his coat, for her courage was weakening, and she was about ready to back out.

Oscar Cox strode along the deck, and joined the rollicking group.

“Miss Forman,” he said, “Miss Barnes tells me you do me the honor to wish to speak to me.”

Maisie Forman looked at him, a blank expression on her lovely face.

“I?” she said. “You?” Her air became haughty. All the *camaraderie* she had shown the young people vanished, and she was again the Princess in disguise, and not much disguised at that.

Then she turned to the culprit, now shaking with laughter.

“Sally,” she said, “why did you tell that naughty story? And just when I was beginning to like you!”

Trent picked up the situation.

“Mr. Cox,” he said, “these children are full of the old Nick today. Miss Forman didn’t send for you, Miss Barnes made that up. But may I present you? Miss Forman, this is Mr. Cox, whom I trust I may call a friend of mine. Mr. Cox, Miss Forman—also my friend.”

“Then, now, we’re all friends,” cried Sally, gayly, “and the goose hangs high!”

But a constraint had fallen on the more serious-minded ones of the group.

Maisie kept her aloof, exclusive air, which Trent began to suspect she used toward all but her near friends, and youngsters.

Oscar Cox, himself, seemed uncertain whether to join the gayety of the flappers, or adopt a dignity to match Miss Forman’s.

Mallory and Nash were interested in the whole episode, while the young people, trusting to their safety in numbers, began to clamor for a Treasure for the Treasure Hunt.

“And Miss Forman has promised to help you, has she?” Cox said, at last. “Well, then, I’ll help, too. Now here’s my proposition. If Miss Forman asks me for it, prettily, I’ll give the thing to her, and she can give it to the Hunt Club, or whatever you call yourselves.”

“Hoo-ray!” started the cheer leader, Sally, and the deck rang with their gratitude.

“But you haven’t it yet,” Cox warned them, smilingly. “Will Miss Forman ask for it?”

“Yes, indeed,” Maisie returned, growing a little flushed, as all eyes rested on

her, “of course I will. My dear Mr. Cox, please give these young people the Treasure they want for their game called ‘Treasure Hunt.’ Please give it to them at my request, and for the benefit of the poor little sick kiddies on board. Please do.”

The words were sincere, though the tone was playful, rather than beseeching. Maisie had managed to make it seem a plea, yet with an undercurrent that gave a sense of organized charity and entirely eliminated the personal equation.

Oscar Cox looked at her with a glance that saw right through her pretense and accepted her words at their true worth.

Yet he laughed genially, and told the eager crowd at his side that they should surely have their Treasure, as soon as he could manage to find or procure something appropriate.

“We want to have the Hunt tomorrow,” they told him. “Tomorrow afternoon. It’s Fourth of July, and we’re going to celebrate from morning till night.”

“I’m trying to persuade Puppy Abercrombie to climb up with a Star Spangled Banner and put it in place of the English flag,” announced a blue-eyed baby doll, in a shrill piping shriek.

“Now, don’t be silly,” Cox said, a little sternly. “You kids are so nice when you are just funny without being vulgar. Don’t disturb any flags, you’ll have enough Hail Columbia without. The Captain is going to give you glorious decorations for luncheon and all that. Don’t repay him by any annoyance.”

“No sir,” said one demurely, and the rest repeated it like so many parrots.

Laughing both at them and with them, Cox went off and they followed like the children following the Pied Piper of Hamelin.

“I can’t quite get that man,” said Nash, who, with Hal Mallory had stayed behind and basked in the warmth of Miss Forman’s suddenly displayed cordiality. “He’s a great financier, yet he never talks business. He’s a good deal of a sportsman, I’ve heard, yet he never plays games with anyone but the youngsters. He’s said to be fond of ladies’ society, yet he never speaks to a lady—older than those flappers, and he treats them like children, he isn’t really interested in them.”

“It seemed to me,” Maisie said, “his interest was really fatherly, or like a rich bachelor uncle. Is he a bachelor?”

“No, a widower,” Nash told her. “He has the queerest sort of an orderly or

valet, or something. I'm not crazy about this plan of invading people's state-rooms."

"They won't," said Trent. "Except where they're urgently invited. Captain Van Winkle won't allow any annoying intrusions—of that I'm sure. And there are lots of places for the Hunt. I daresay it'll be rather fun."

"If Cox has a guiding hand, the whole game will be all right," Mallory put in. "I don't altogether like that man, yet I know he has excellent ideas of the eternal fitness of things. And the kids will obey him."

"Why does he seem to be of such importance?" Maisie asked. "I hear much about him, and little of the other influential men on board. There are a lot, aren't there?"

"Heaps," said Mallory. "Why, Owen Camper and Mr. Mason, and Mr. Grell and—oh, lots of Wall Street men are in the smoking room every night. But they, most of them have wives and families along. I fancy Cox is a bit of a gay dog."

"If you mean inclined to gay company or gay doings, I haven't seen anything of it," Nash objected. "Except for playing with those children, he keeps mostly to rather grave and sober company."

"He danced with Miss Gibbs—" Trent offered.

"Then it was because he couldn't help himself!" said Nash so fervently that Maisie laughed outright.

She had a gay, ringing little laugh, and the three men within hearing distance promptly fell more deeply in love than ever.

After tea, Miss Gibbs was moved to read palms.

This was a hobby of hers, and she used it to decided advantage in the matter of attracting people to her side.

The young people soon tired of it, as they knew the lingo by heart. But Oscar Cox surprised the palmist by asking her to read a hand for him.

She lavishly consented, and Cox produced from his deck bag the Bronze Hand.

"What a beauty," exclaimed Miss Gibbs, who knew all about art, though she didn't know what she liked.

"Yes, a fine piece of work. What do you make of it by means of palmistry?"

Though the bronze fingers were bent over at the second joints, the palm of

the hand was freely exposed.

“You don’t think I can really see anything in it?” Lily Gibbs said, looking at him.

“Why not? If the palm is as true as the whole hand, why shouldn’t it tell something?”

“Very well,” and she scrutinized the bronze thoughtfully.

“It is contradictory,” she said, at last. “I get nothing sure, nothing really indicative.” Then, noting the disappointment on Cox’s face, she quickly proceeded to call on her inventive imagination.

“It is the hand of a criminal,” she said, suddenly, careless of the truth. “The lines show evil—deep evil.”

But though she was fibbing, it was not evident. Lily Gibbs was too clever for that.

“There is,” she went on, soberly, “another influence at work, a better part of the man’s nature, that strives against the deep rooted villainy, but it is a hopeless struggle. Whoever was the model for this bronze hand, was a wicked, a diabolically wicked man. That’s all I can say. Do you know anything about the original?”

“No, don’t know for sure that there was one. Maybe the hand is idealized or assembled from several models.”

“Maybe,” agreed Lily. “But, Mr. Cox, aside from the matter of palmistry, I, well, you see, I am a little—a tiny bit—clairvoyant.”

“Are you?” The tone showed interest. “Well?”

“I see things—not apparent to others—I see things of the future, omens, augurs,—circling wings—.”

“In connection with this hand?” Cox was superstitious after all.

“Yes; I see harm coming to you—to your own well-being, your own safety.”

“What sort of harm?”

“That I don’t know, but deep wrong—irremediable disaster.”

“Oh, come, now, Miss Gibbs,” and Hal Mallory’s gay voice proved that he had overheard her chatter. “Don’t scare the poor man out of his wits.”

“But it’s all true,” said Lily Gibbs, a little sulkily. “I can’t help it if I have

second sight!”

“Second fiddlesticks!” snorted Mallory, who was furiously down on all sorts of charlatanry.

“Oh, very well,” and Miss Gibbs walked off in the state of mind commonly known as high dudgeon.

“Now you’ve made an enemy!” exclaimed Cox.

“I don’t care. Why do you encourage her in that rubbish?”

“Maybe it isn’t rubbish—maybe it’s revelation.”

“Maybe you’re the whole Pentateuch and the Apocrypha thrown in! I’d rather listen to the flappers’ babble than to the Gibbs’ hokum. Come along, and I’ll feed you a cocktail to brush the cobwigs out of your brain.”



It was after dinner that night that Maisie Forman, for the first time on board, consented to dance.

Max Trent had urged her again and again, only to be refused, but at last he sensed that she was wavering slightly in her decision, and he renewed his appeals.

“Oh, well, yes, then,” she said, with a smile that was half a sigh. “I do love to dance—I will—just once.”

“Once at a time is enough,” he laughed, as they went on the floor.

The music was perfect, so was the dancing space. Not too crowded, cool and pleasant, and as Maisie at once discovered, they suited one another exactly. She could remember no other partner she had ever had whose ways so pleased her.

She caught herself up quickly. Was she losing her heart to Trent?

Nonsense—just because she liked to dance with a man who knew the art, must she suspect herself of falling in love with him?

But when the dance was finished, she looked white and tired.

“What’s the matter?” asked Trent, aghast. “That little spin couldn’t have done you up like this! Are you ill, Miss Forman?”

“No—no, thank you, I’m all—all right. But if you please, I’ll go at once to

my room. Good night Mr. Trent—and, thank you. Please—please do not go with me. Just put me in the elevator.”

Trent obeyed, and greatly mystified, went out on deck to think it over.

He chose an upper deck, and sat there alone for a long time. He had much to think about, and he didn't want to dance any more that night.

At last, after perhaps two hours, he saw a woman's figure, wrapped in a long cape, come out on the deck where he sat. He was in a dark corner, and though she glanced around, he knew she didn't see him.

With a slow but firm and steady step, she went to the rail and looked over the side of the boat.

She stood motionless a moment or two, then with a quick movement climbed up on the rail, holding to the upright post.

Horror-stricken almost beyond power to move, Trent nevertheless managed to get out of the chair and spring across the deck to her.

He clutched her, bodily, just as she moved to jump. Another second would have been too late—indeed, it was all he could do to overcome the momentum she had already given her lithe limbs.

He set her down on the deck with a jerk, and looked into her face.

It was Maisie Forman!

CHAPTER IV

THE FOURTH OF JULY

Max Trent sat long in his cabin, that night, wondering why Maisie Forman had tried to jump overboard. Save as a conventional human responsibility, it was none of his business. And, naturally, he had done his duty. He had seen her danger, rescued her from it, and then, though he had accompanied her to the short corridor which led to her own stateroom, neither had spoken a word.

She had hurried down the corridor, opened her door and vanished, and he had sought his own room at once.

He was shocked, horrified, moved to pity, suspicious—lots of things—but most of all, curious.

Why? Why should that lovely girl wish to throw away a young life, just commencing, with beauty, charm, power, riches—all at her command?

He knew almost no details of her circumstances, for their talk, when together, had been almost entirely of impersonal matters. Indeed, he realized now that he had told her much more of himself than she had confided to him of her own life.

Not yet had she told him why she was travelling alone.

There was ever an air of reserve about her—reserve so great as to amount to mystery. Yet, hers was no morbid temperament or disposition.

Why, then, why—of all things—want to drown herself?

A momentary thought came, that it was a staged scene. That she knew he was there, and wanted to create a sensation.

But it did not ring true. She did not—could not know he was there. And too, she never glanced toward him. She had walked slowly, but steadily, straight to the rail, and stepped up on it.

God! He could feel the thrill of it yet! The split second that enabled him to get a grip on those already tensed muscles!

She was not out of her mind. She was not walking in her sleep.

Of those two things he was positive.

Then why? *Why?*

But, strangely, he also felt certain she would not repeat her attempt, probably never would. He could feel her shudder of scared relief as she found herself saved, almost as by a miracle.

Trent was not in love with Maisie Forman. He admired her charm, her well-informed mind and her ready flashes of humor.

He was lazily getting acquainted, and enjoying the process. And now, this? What did it portend? What would she say or do the next morning? Why did she do it?

But it was not his business, and he thriftily reached for a notebook, to set down, in the way authors love to do, a few jottings of the affair; so illegible, usually, or so abbreviated, as to be of small use if any.

Trent was a good-looking chap, but wholly without personal vanity.

His dark hair was longish and curlyish on top, but severely cut into place. His chin and muscles were strong—so was his will, and—he chose to think—his personality. His nose formed a perfect angle of forty-five degrees, with base, altitude and hypotenuse, all complete.

His greatest charm lay in his eyes. Not only that they were good eyes, of a deep-colored, deep-set blue, but he had a trick of looking up under his long lashes that was very fetching. He had acquired this habit, a schoolboy affection, purposely. But it had now become natural and he often found it useful in the matter of invitation or persuasion.

At thirty, Trent was experienced enough to be a bit cynical. Eight or ten years ago, the event he had just lived through would have roused different feelings within him.

Just now, his one thought was a wish that the morning would come so he could read the next chapter of Maisie Forman's story.

And when the morning came and the time was ripe, he went on deck, with the same anticipation he would have felt on entering a theater.

Miss Forman was already there, snugly wrapped in her rug, for though it would be hot later, the morning of Independence Day was fresh and cool.

Their chairs had chanced to be adjoining ones, and as they had become acquainted, both felt glad that chance had favored them.

Trent slipped into his place, after a mere smiling "Good morning" and

settling back, with an opened book, left the handling of the situation to the girl.

But Maisie said no word. She looked out to sea, her own calm apparently equalling that of the expanse of glassy water before them. She sat motionless, no nervousness showing in her quiet hands or expressionless face.

After a few furtive glances, Trent felt he might risk a bit of speech.

“What you need is a Life Insurance Policy,” he said, in a light voice.

To his surprise Maisie smiled, almost laughed. Perhaps the tension had been pleasantly if suddenly broken.

“I had something just as good,” she returned, and flashed him a glance that contained a world of unspoken thanks.

“I’m glad you’re duly grateful,” Trent said, answering her look as well as her words. “But it was a narrow squeak.”

“Yes. How did you happen to be there?”

“I’d been there a long time. It’s a favorite corner of mine. And Fate ordained it, of course.”

“Oh, of course—in the sense that Fate ordains everything.”

“Yes, and we can’t circumvent her. Although you tried your prettiest. Why did you do it?”

“Nice of you to call it a pretty attempt. Did I look picturesque, or like a Movie heroine?”

“Both. But, as I said, why did you do it?”

“Just to make a scene,” she said, lightly. “I knew you would catch me—.”

“Don’t tell fibs. You had no idea I was there. You were fully determined to jump. I barely caught you in time. In fact, I was so nearly paralyzed at the sight, I could scarcely command my muscles to move at all.”

“I suppose I ought to be grateful to you—.”

“You are. And you’re going to prove that gratitude by promising not to attempt it again. For next time I might not be there.”

“No, I’d see to that!”

Trent was shocked at the bitterness in her tone.

But he did not take it upon himself to admonish her further. “I suppose you feel,” he said, “that you have the right—.”

“Of course I have. Everyone has a right to end a life that is unbearable. And, ‘over the fence is out!’”

“What, what?” came a low but audible voice, as Oscar Cox paused in front of them. “Miss Forman going to drown herself?”

Both Trent and Maisie were astounded that this man could have heard their conversation or part of it. For they had been speaking almost in whispers. Truly he had phenomenal hearing. Or a chance puff of wind had blown the sound to him.

“Not much,” Trent declared. “We’re playing a Fourth of July parlor game. We guess what is the most unlikely thing another could do. That was my guess for her.”

“And a poor guess,” Maisie declared. “If I want to jump overboard, I have a right to, haven’t I, Mr. Cox?”

“Most assuredly,” he returned, heartily. “And I believe you will. Why, if I thought you wouldn’t, I’d put you over myself. That is, if you really want to go over. Do you?”

“Yes,” said Maisie, and she flashed a mutinous look at Cox, for neither she nor Trent liked his style of kidding.

But the subject was dropped as some young people came along, with flags and streamers of red, white and blue, and with various noise-making and ear-splitting instruments of torture.

“We’re the gems of the ocean,” announced Sally Barnes, “and that dear darling duck of a Captain has given us a table to ourselves for luncheon, and we’re going to make noise enough to be heard in New York, Chicago and points West! Let’s bedeck Mr. Cox—” and from all hands darted streamers of red, white and blue paper ribbon, that enveloped him as in a great meshed net.

With a few flings of his big arms he extricated himself and producing some paper ribbons from his own pockets, so tied and bound Sally that she could scarcely move.

“No,” he said, to their insistent pleas, “no, I won’t sit at your silly table with you! I always lunch on deck, and I propose to do so today. But after luncheon, I’ll help you with your—what do you call it? Treasure Hunt?”

Trent and Miss Forman also declined a somewhat perfunctory invitation to sit at the table of the noisy celebrants of their country’s independence, and the laughing crowd ran away, dragging the not unwilling Cox with them.

“Queer man,” Trent said, looking after him. “How dared he banter you like that?”

“I think he’s impulsive,” she returned, uninterestedly, “and says whatever pops into his head. Let’s cut out people, including ourselves, and talk about books or something.”

Obediently and gracefully, Trent turned the subject to a discussion of a recent novel, and they chatted in desultory fashion until the first bugle for luncheon sounded.

“I’m going inside now,” Trent said, gathering his books together. “Can I help you?”

“No thanks. I shall stay here until I go down to the dining room. I suppose everybody will go down today.”

“Yes, all good Americans, anyway. There are special decorations and dishes and—.”

“And speeches?”

“Probably. I don’t know. Are you patriotic enough to stand those?”

“Patriotic enough for anything,” Maisie returned, smiling, as Trent swung off up the deck.

But her smile faded at once, and she sat motionless, staring out over the sparkling, glittering acres.

Occupants of the chairs near her rose and went inside. Strains of national airs came from the orchestra. Shouts and screams of Young America were heard from all directions, concentrating finally, as the crowd fell into line on the stairs in a sort of impromptu parade.

Very few remained on deck. Maisie could see one or two quite distant from her either way. Also she could glimpse Oscar Cox, in his chair, back against the side of the ship, and just beneath a good sized window that opened into the library lounge.

She saw the queer-looking servant of Cox come to him, presumably to get his order for food, and she thought what a strange specimen of humanity the valet was.

The noise inside grew louder. The Orchestra struck the first notes of “The Star Spangled Banner,” and the wave of song spread over the ship from stem to stern.

In tune or out, patriot or foreigner, everybody seemed to sing.

The mass of people swayed and swung down the stairs and entered the dining rooms to find an exhibition of hearty good will and friendliness to the American nation.

Even after all were seated at their tables, rattles, popguns and shrill whistles made terrible discords, but it was laughingly forgiven by the good-natured crowd.

Captain Van Winkle, who was not only the devoted friend and slave of the young people, but a good-natured man in all respects, beamed round on his cargo of human beings with the benignant smile of the father of his ship if not of his country.

And it was just as he was about to take his first spoonful of *potage a l'Americaine*, brewed by a French chef on an English Liner, that the Deck Steward came to him and whispered a word in his ear.

Quietly laying down his spoon, the Captain quickly but unhurriedly left the table. Once outside the dining room, however, he went upstairs two at a time, scorning the elevators in his haste.

“Get Bowers,” he flung over his shoulder to Garson, and strode on.

The Captain reached the deck where Oscar Cox was wont to sit, and where he usually ate his luncheon.

Already a few curious ones had gathered, but unnoting them, the Captain went to Cox’s chair and paused, horror-stricken at the scene.

On the floor, with its dishes more or less overturned, was the lunch tray, where the waiter had let it half slide, half drop from his nerveless fingers.

On the chair was the body of Cox, indubitably dead, indubitably murdered, and murdered in such horrible fashion as to defy description.

What arm of power, or anger or passion, had dealt such blows on the head and face of the victim that the sight was enough to make a strong man turn away? Who could have crept up on Oscar Cox and killed him as a caveman might kill? What did it mean—this fearful thing, happening in an atmosphere of holiday pleasure, on a broad, peaceful deck, in the bright sunlight of a summer day?

A smothered exclamation at his side, brought Captain Van Winkle out of his momentary daze, and he turned to see Bowers, the Ship’s doctor.

The doctor, too, was shocked almost to helplessness, but his professional

instinct and experience pulled him together and stimulated him to action.

“Murder,” he said, speaking almost casually now, “Oscar Cox—of all men! Where’s the weapon? Good God! there it is!”

He pointed to the floor, under the next chair, and there, crimsoned with the blood of the victim, lay a bronze hand—a horrible, sinister hand, whose clutching fingers, still dripping red, bore mute witness to their own deed.

Though strong-hearted and staunch-souled, Captain Van Winkle was of sensitive nerves, and this further sight of atrocity made him cover his eyes for an instant.

Then, in another second, his orders came, fast and sure.

“Take charge here, Bowers. Cover the body. Let no one see it. Garson, rope off the deck to here—no, to here. You, waiter, pick up the tray and things and take them to the kitchen. And, hark—not a word of this to anyone until you’ve leave. Understand?”

The waiter understood, for the Captain’s eye and glance were even more imperative than his words, and menace is a universal language.

At that moment Hudder appeared. He was carrying a small tray with a bottle and glass.

His small dark eyes took in the scene.

Captain Van Winkle watched him closely, but all he saw was the meticulous behaviour of the perfect servant.

Hudder set his tray down carefully on a nearby chair, without disarranging its contents. His face was white, but its vacant, wooden expression showed no change. He had not been able to see Cox, for the body was being covered, and the doctor and steward with their helpers were grouped about it.

“My master is hurt?” Hudder said, gravely, and Captain Van Winkle could read nothing from his look or speech.

“Yes—very badly hurt. Hopelessly hurt.”

“He is dead,” Hudder said, not with an interrogative inflection, but as one stating a fact.

“Yes, he is dead.”

“By the Hand?”

“Yes by the Hand! Look here my man, what do you know of the Hand? Of

your master, generally? But, of course, you know more of him than anyone else on board. Come to my office with me, and answer a few questions. Now. Stand by, Bowers. This is serious trouble.”

Captain Van Winkle, though not a young man, was far from old, and though well versed in the lore of his calling, and familiar with many if not most of its exigencies and contingencies, he was only academically aware of the procedure expected of him in the case of murder on the high sea.

To be sure, it was not yet proved to be murder, but neither doctor nor captain could imagine any theory of accident that would account for the conditions found.

And so, the Captain’s thoughts were racing in a dozen directions at once as he conducted the imperturbable Hudder to his own private room and interviewed him.

But rankling underneath in the Captain’s mind was a sense of the injustice of Fate. Here he was, past master in the ways and means of his chosen career, one of the best known and best liked Captains on the Line, a man who had always been able to meet any situation, to deal with any emergency that had arisen.

And now, flung at him, was this horrible affair, a thing which, as he was just beginning to realize, would stamp him and his boat with a stigma, a memory, that would always cling to and sully her fair fame.

For a thing like this to happen on the *Pinnacle*! It was inconceivable, incredible! None of his brother Captains had ever been called to meet such a crisis as this!

Good-natured always, this was the straw that broke the camel’s back. The worm had turned. Unreasonably and unreasoningly, he vented his anger on the waiting Hudder.

Nor could he have found a better for the purpose.

The valet of Oscar Cox was, it seemed to Van Winkle, a foreigner, of some Latin country.

But Hudder declared himself of English birth though having lived most of his life in America.

This the Captain thought to himself, mattered little. It was information of Cox he was after.

But questions were hard to frame. Of good education, not unread, and possessed of quick and wise powers of judgment, Peter Van Winkle was all

afloat when it came to what suddenly loomed up before him as Detective Work!

Though not addicted to them, he occasionally read Detective Stories, and mildly interested, marvelled at the strange gift known as detective instinct.

That, he had long ago concluded, he did not possess, and he had never for a moment supposed a time would ever come for him to exercise it.

Yet here was the time. It had come upon him like a thief in the night.

Captain he could be. Judge and jury he could be. Executioner he could be, if he felt the need. But detective he could not be—at least, not to the extent of his own conception of what it meant.

Yet surely—he brought his troubled thoughts back to Hudder, surely, he could ask this man a few straightforward questions about his dead master.

So the following dialogue ensued.

“Where did Mr. Cox live?”

“In New York City, sir.”

“Had he a family?”

“No sir. Mr. Cox was a widower for fifteen years or thereabouts.”

“His business?”

“That I can’t rightly tell you, sir. Mr. Cox had many interests, and big ones. But such matters are above my head.”

Hudder, though he showed a face of wood, had sharp, bright, restless eyes that seemed to dart suddenly from beneath their lids and then as quickly run back to cover. He was not a man that inspired confidence. Van Winkle, who considered himself, and rightly, a fair judge of men, quickly decided that Hudder was one who would rather lie than tell the truth. The little man had a bullet-shaped head, covered with stiff, intractable black hair. When speaking earnestly, which he seldom did, he thrust his head forward, with an insistent air. But for the most part, he sat back in his chair, held his head farther back still, and spoke in monotones.

“At least you know whether he was a butcher or a baker or candlestick-maker.”

Van Winkle’s irritation had its root in his own inability to carry on the interview properly, rather than Hudder’s.

“Oh, he was in finance—high finance, I think they call it. Mr. Cox was a promoter and a director and an advisor and an investor—and all things like that.”

“Connected with any especial company?”

The Captain’s familiarity with high finance was also limited.

“Well, sir, there is the Apollonia Mining Company—that’s the only one I can call by name.”

“Never heard of it. Mr. Cox lived alone, then?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Where?”

“Big bachelor apartment, sir, in one of those new Fifth Avenue buildings.”

“Servants?”

“Six, sir, counting me and his chauffeur.”

“No relatives—in other houses?”

“I think not. I never heard of any.”

“Born in New York?”

“I’m not sure, but I think not.”

“Well, who were his friends? Surely he had some of those.”

“Oh, yes, sir. Lots of them. His parties were noted, sir. Small, but noted, and —.”

“Noted? What for?”

“For their beauty and luxury. Yes, sir, everything of the best and in the best taste. That was Mr. Cox’s motto.”

“Was he a good man?”

“Was he what, sir?”

“You heard me. A good man. Was Oscar Cox a good man?”

“I’m sure I don’t know that,” and Hudder sighed.

“You don’t know! Of course you know! Tell me.”

“Well then, I’ll say he was. He gave quite a bit in charities. He gave all his help fine presents at Christmas and Fourth of July. He never went to Church—

that I know of. But, yes, sir—I call that a good man, don't you?"

"Not necessarily. Now, see here. As his valet, you know a lot about his life. You must! Had he enemies?"

"None that I know of." Hudder sat well back in his chair.

"Women friends?"

"He had ladies at his parties."

"Not at his house at other times?"

"Not that I know of." Still farther back Hudder sat.

"Are you remembered in his will?"

"Not that I know of, sir."

"Bah, get out!" and the exasperated Captain flung wide his door.

"Yes, sir," said Hudder and went.

CHAPTER V

THE MYSTERY

Doctor Bowers, realizing the importance of doing all he could to keep the details of the tragedy from the passengers, made a thorough examination of conditions and then ordered the body of Oscar Cox removed to his stateroom.

It was fortunate that, as luncheon was in progress, and a special luncheon at that, very few passengers were on deck, and it was not long before stewards had cleaned up everything to its usual immaculate state.

Cox's deck chair was removed and its neighbors pushed along to form an unbroken line, so that by the time luncheon was over, no visible sign remained to tell of the tragedy.

The news had, of course, leaked out and seeped among the stewards, and somehow, to the ears of the passengers.

And so, gradually, a hush had stolen over the merriment in the dining rooms and one after another asked the reason.

Then, one after another, groups left their tables and went up on deck.

Miss Lily Gibbs and the Campers, whose chairs stood near the place Cox had occupied, looked curiously about as they approached the spot.

"His chair's gone," Miss Gibbs cried. "It must be true!"

"Of course, it's true," Owen Camper returned. "I had it from the Purser. Cox was killed—shot, I believe."

"No, not shot—stabbed," said a passing stranger, who paused to talk. The occasion made possible conversations that would not have been thought of otherwise.

Wild stories rumored themselves about and still wilder theories. Many declared that they knew the true facts of the case, though their statements were diametrically opposed to one another.

Many who had chairs in the vicinity shunned them, but curiosity drew others, who sank into the vacated chairs and waited eagerly for news.

The young people were shocked and thrilled by the tragedy but were far

more disturbed at the spoiling of their holiday.

They grouped themselves as far as possible from the scene of interest and tried to go on with their gayety, but it was a dismal failure.

“I do think it’s too bad,” Sally Barnes sobbed, “if there had to be an awful thing happen on this ship, why couldn’t it wait till tomorrow?”

And with the thoughtlessness of youth, the rest of them echoed her wail. Max Trent, having heard the news, made it a point to be in his chair, when Miss Forman came to hers. He didn’t know whether she would be deeply affected, as so many of the women were, even though they were not acquainted with the dead man, or whether she would feel only impersonally the tragic horror of the crime.

But her chair remained vacant all the afternoon. Trent hoped that tea-time would bring her out, but she did not appear.

The writer of Detective Stories lay back in his own chair, talking with no one, joining none of the groups of excited talkers.

Here was a detective story with no detective. What the exact procedure would be, he didn’t know, but was intensely interested to learn. Not from the chatterers, however. The passing bits of conversation that came to his ears, proved that those who made the most positive statements, knew the least about the facts. He wanted information from some of the officers, and that, he knew, couldn’t be obtained until later.

“Come on down to the Smoking Room for a gabfest,” said Pollard Nash, approaching.

Trent hesitated, for he wanted to talk to Miss Forman, should she come out on deck. But Nash insisted, and he went along.

The men in the Smoking Room, for the most part, talked in guarded terms of the event. Some few were blatant and self-assertive, but they were snubbed into comparative silence by the more conservative.

Those who had known Oscar Cox were the ones who were listened to with deference, and yet, they had little to tell.

A man named Allen was speaking, as Nash and Trent went in, and he was saying:

“——and that’s all I know of Oscar Cox. To sum up, he was a rich man, who said little about business; who, as I chance to know, put over big deals and represented large interests, without publicity.”

“Anything wrong about him?” asked a shrewd-looking man named Craig.

“Not that I know of,” Allen responded, promptly. “I never heard a breath against his integrity.”

Trent looked sharply at the speaker. To him the voice sounded as if Allen made a mental reservation. But, he thought, he might have imagined that.

“You knew him, Mr. Mason?” he said, turning to Sherman Mason, whom he had known and liked for some days.

“Yes, Mr. Trent. And I have had business dealings with him, though not any of great importance. But like Mr. Allen, I can say I have never heard anything that impugned the reputation of Oscar Cox.”

“Why the discussion?” asked Nash, who wondered. “Why this necessity for guaranteeing Mr. Cox’s honor?”

“Idle questions have been asked,” John Allen said, a little severely.

“Who killed him?” said Nash, suddenly, “and what with?”

This question, hitherto unvoiced by the conventionally tongue-tied ones, opened up a perfect Babel of statements, opinions and assumptions, so confusing and contradictory that Nash subsided into silence, watching and listening in the full indulgence of his irrepressible curiosity.

And Max Trent, also curious, listened too, with deepest interest and attention.

None seemed to know the instrument of death, but all were ready to detail the peculiar heinousness and brutality of the crime.

“Butchered—that’s what he was, butchered,” declared Henry Craig, with that relish of the gruesome inherent in some natures. “Why, if a lion had clawed him, he couldn’t have been worse—.”

“Oh, I say, Craig,” broke in Sherman Mason, “spare us a recital of the horrors! What I’m interested in is the identity of the criminal. Who could have done it? Cox seemed a likable sort. Always kind and jolly with the young people, and all that.”

“And how was it done?” added Allen. “I mean, how could anyone find opportunity to commit such a crime without being seen?”

“The decks were all pretty much empty,” Craig asserted. “The Fourth of July luncheon, you know, took people down to the dining rooms who usually lunched outside. Pity Cox hadn’t gone down.”

“That crime was the result of deep premeditation,” Allen observed. “If the villain hadn’t pulled it off when he did, he would have managed it later. I’m of the opinion Cox was doomed before ever he set foot on board.”

Pollard Nash said nothing, but he listened intently, and one thing that grounded itself in his intelligence was that Mr. Allen seemed to know a lot about it all.

And just then a steward came to Nash and in low tones asked him to come, at the Captain’s bidding, to his office.

Without a word, Nash left the room, his hopes high that he might be asked to help investigate the matter.

Nor was he doomed to disappointment.

The Captain, looking dejected and despairing, greeted him with a nod and offered a seat. In the room were also the First Officer and the Doctor.

“We’re up against it, Mr. Nash,” the Captain said. “As you know, of course, I have full power on my ship, I am the sole authority, and all that. But how can I punish a malefactor if I don’t know who he is? And detective work, even in its most amateur form is out of my line. But I’ve heard you’re interested in it, and more or less experienced—.”

“Interested, yes, Captain, but experienced, no,” said Nash, seriously, as Captain Van Winkle paused. “But if I can help in any way—.”

“I hope you can—I hope you can,” the Captain repeated, looking at Nash. “I don’t mean regular Scotland Yard work; that will come after we land, but if you could do the investigating that is, I believe, considered so necessary to be accomplished at the very first. In fact, Mr. Nash, what I want of you is a sort of First Aid. Your trained eye will doubtless see things that are not discernible to me or to my officers. None of us has any talent of this sort—and I’m sure it is a talent. Will you help me out?”

“To the best and farthest extent of my ability, Captain,” cried Pollard Nash, enthusiastically. “I’m glad to look into it all, for it is most mysterious and desperately interesting. Shall I have full swing, within reason, of course, and shall I report directly to you?”

“Report to me, yes. As to full swing—does that entail inconvenience to passengers?”

“That remains to be seen.” Nash spoke gravely. “You realize, of course, Captain, that if this murder—it *is* murder?” He looked at the Captain and at the

doctor, who both nodded, “that this murder must have been committed by some one on board. Then, if clues, whether true or false, point toward an individual, they must be followed down, even at the cost of inconvenience or even offence to that individual or his companions. You see?”

“Yes. But before making individual investigations, confer with me.”

“That, of course. Now, tell me, do you know what weapon was used?”

“We do,” and the Captain nodded at the doctor.

Whereupon Doctor Bowers, removed a cloth from as terrible looking an object as Pollard Nash had ever looked upon.

It was the Bronze Hand—the awful, clutching, clawing hand of bronze that Oscar Cox had exhibited one day in the Smoking Room, and had descanted on to an interested group of listeners.

“The Bronze Hand!” and Nash recoiled from the sight.

For it was still bedaubed with blood, now partly dried and encrusted, but which gave it a far more horrible and ghastly look than the mere cruelty of the grasping bronze.

“You’ve seen it before?” the Captain asked.

“Oh, yes. Cox showed it to a lot of us. He called it both his mascot and his hoodoo.”

“What did he mean by that?”

“I’m not quite sure, but he seemed to attach a supernatural significance to the thing, though at the same time, he hooted at such magics.”

“It was his property, then?”

“Oh, yes. And a valuable bit, I think.” Nash shuddered as he glanced again at the awful object. “It’s enormously heavy, you know.”

“Yes. It made a diabolically perfect instrument of death. It was found on the floor, nearby the dead man. I had Garson pick it up with tongs—I know enough to look out for finger-prints.”

“Good!” cried Nash, “are there any on it?”

“That we haven’t investigated as yet. Perhaps you’ll look after that?”

But Nash was already scrutinizing the bronze.

“I think there are none,” he said, regretfully. “But, of course, the demon mind

that contrived and carried out this crime, was too wise to leave finger-prints. We could scarcely expect it.”

“Then you think it was a preconceived deed, and not a sudden, passionate anger on the part of some—servant, say—or steward?”

“It’s too soon to decide that, Captain. As you know, the first thing to do is question everybody who can by any possibility tell us anything worth hearing. But before that, may I see the body?”

“Certainly. It is in Mr. Cox’s own stateroom.”

“And the disposal of it?”

“I shall have it embalmed, we have facilities on board—and take it on to Liverpool. There my responsibility for it will end. Also will end my responsibility in the whole matter, for the authorities will take it over. But it is my duty to do all I can here and now to learn the identity of the criminal. That is where I ask your help. You will—er—of course, be duly—.”

“Never mind that part, Captain. If I succeed in finding the villain it will be time enough to talk about remuneration. Just give me a free hand, under your approval, and let me do what I can, in my own way.”

Captain Van Winkle, reader of men, liked the attitudes of this young and amateur detective. Not cocky and self-assured as a professional might be, not full of bumptious enthusiasm as a beginner sometimes is; but sane, rational and moderately hopeful, Nash inspired confidence and hope in the heart of the harassed Captain of the *Pinnacle*.

Doctor Bowers led the way to the locked stateroom of the late Oscar Cox and opened the door to Nash.

As the two men entered, Hudder appeared, apparently from nowhere, and begged that he might go in, too.

“Certainly,” said Nash, in answer to the doctor’s inquiring glance. “Why not?”

So the three men went in, and Nash bolted the door.

But when Bowers turned down the covering sheet, one glance was enough for Pollard Nash. Too much, indeed. He turned away hastily, and went to the open porthole.

“My God, man!” he cried, “only that devilish Bronze Hand could have compassed such a death as that! Only a Bengal Tiger could compete with it! I

had but a momentary glance, yet I took it all in. It is eternally photographed on my brain. I never need look again. I have seen the body!”

He sank into an arm chair, for Oscar Cox’s stateroom was one of the best on the boat, and buried his face in his hands.

“Give me a minute,” he said, “just a minute. There, I’m all right now.”

The noiseless and ubiquitous Hudder offered him a glass of water from the private bathroom adjoining, and inquired solicitously if he would have some spirits in it.

“No,” said Nash, staring at this man, who was positively usurping the prerogatives of a host. “No, Hudder. Stand still, I want to talk to you.”

Hudder stood still, and at attention, while Nash fairly fired questions at him.

“Where was Mr. Cox bound for?”

“London.”

“On what errand?”

“Business—so far as I know.”

“But you don’t think it was entirely or only business!” Nash was intuitive.

“I don’t. But I know nothing.”

“Were you to go with him wherever he went?”

“Wherever he went?”

“Yes, wherever he went. Or, were you to return to America after the ocean trip was finished?”

Hudder stared.

“I supposed I was to go wherever Mr. Cox went. I heard nothing to make me think otherwise.”

For some reason Hudder chose not to use his “sir” with the young man.

Nash neither noticed nor cared for the omission.

“Why do you think there was something other than business in Mr. Cox’s plans abroad?”

Now there was something compelling in Nash’s manner. An urge, an impetus to talk. Had he been called upon to explain it, he would have said that his own eagerness, his insistence on a reply, brought forth the reply even against the will

of the speaker.

And so, Hudder, almost involuntarily, expanded a little.

“I don’t exactly know, but there was a kind of suppressed excitement, a smothered anticipation in my master’s manner at times, that I can explain in no other way, except that he looked forward to some pleasure or some honor to be given him in London.”

“You are an educated man, Hudder. You have a vocabulary.”

As this called for no direct response it received none.

Doctor Bowers, deeply interested, sat on the edge of his chair, taking it all in. So this was the way detectives worked! H’m.

“Did Mr. Cox expect to be killed by that bronze hand?” Nash returned to his volleying system.

“Oh, no, sir!”

“Why did he carry it about with him?”

“I only know that he was fond of it, always had it by him, and said it would be a means of defence against burglars or marauders.”

“I see. And it proved a means of attack instead of defence. How did the murderer get it, Hudder?”

“I’ve no idea, sir. Mr. Cox always kept it lying on his dresser, or on his night table.”

“I see. And it was in place this morning—do you know?”

“I think so, sir.” Hudder began to realize Nash’s worth. “But I’m so accustomed to the sight of it, it might have been missing and I not notice it.”

“That sounds paradoxical, but I know what you mean. The things we always see about us, seem to be there whether we see them or not.”

Doctor Bowers laughed. “Your statement is not much more lucid than Hudder’s, Mr. Nash. But I think I see what you both mean.”

“Of course you do,” Nash returned, “and that is, that anyone could have stepped in and taken the bronze hand—the door was not kept locked, was it Hudder?”

“No sir, Mr. Cox never locked his stateroom door. His valuables were in his trunk,” Hudder nodded toward a large Innovation in the corner of the room,

“except what he had put in the Purser’s safe.”

“Yes. As I say, anyone could step in and pick up the hand, pocket it, and pass on, without causing comment, even if seen.”

“But who did?” asked the doctor.

“That’s our problem. But a preliminary is to see how it could be done, and we’ve at least seen how the weapon could have been obtained. It may be it wasn’t done that way, at all. Maybe Mr. Cox gave the hand or lent it to someone he knew. Or it may be he had it with him on deck, showing it, say, to somebody. But the hand was here within the last day or two, eh, Hudder?”

“Oh, yes, certainly. And I’m pretty sure it was here this morning.”

“Call the Room Steward.”

The response to this was the appearance of a big, stolid-looking fellow named Andrews.

He declared that he was certain the bronze hand was on Mr. Cox’s table when he had done up the room that morning.

He remembered it especially, wondering why the gentleman should want such a fearsome looking thing about.

“Did you think it fearsome, Andrews, even before it was used to harm Mr. Cox?”

“I did, sir. It was an evil-looking hand. A hand that meant trouble.”

“Imaginative nature,” Nash murmured. “When were you in here, Andrews?”

“About ten or eleven o’clock. I go my rounds then. Mr. Cox generally is out of his room by ten.”

“Did you see him this morning?”

“Yes, sir. I always bring him coffee at eight.”

“He seemed just as usual?”

“Just exactly, sir. Gay like, because he said it was his country’s birthday. And he gave me a pound.”

“You noticed nothing different from his usual manner?” and Nash turned to Hudder.

“Nothing at all. He gave me a present, too. He always does on Fourth of July.”

“I see. That will do, Andrews, you may go, for the present. I’ll see you again. Now, Hudder, what men on board did Mr. Cox know best?”

“I don’t know.”

“I think you do. At least, to some extent. And let me tell you right now, Hudder, you’re in a peculiar position. You’re the only man on this boat who knew Mr. Cox intimately. I mean in a personal—a very personal way. So you will be questioned a great deal, both on board, and after we arrive in Liverpool. If you’ll take my advice, you’ll tell a perfectly true story and stick straight to it. You can be a lot of help to us, or you can be a hindrance. And I warn you, if you choose the latter rôle, you’ll find yourself in deep waters. Understand?”

It was plain to be seen that Hudder did understand, but he merely drew his head back, in that peculiar way he had, and said, stiffly:

“Yes sir.”

“All right, I’m glad you do. Now, then, what men on this boat sometimes came into this room—into Mr. Cox’s stateroom?”

“How can I tell that? I was not here when my master had guests.”

“What men came into this room?” repeated Nash, and again his power of compelling a reply showed its force.

“Mr. Craig,” Hudder said, with obvious reluctance.

“Go on.”

“And Mr. Allen and Mr. Camper. I don’t remember of any more.”

“Very well, if you really don’t. But don’t hold back any names, as you value your own well-being.”

“And Mr. Trent and Mr. Mallory and yourself,” Hudder brought out with a jerk, as if emptying a pitcher of its last drop.

Nash laughed.

“Mallory and I were here once,” he said to Bowers. “And I think Trent perhaps once or twice. I think I can eliminate the three of us from any list of suspects. Any more, Hudder?”

“Not that I know of. Mr. Cox may have had others that I didn’t see.”

Nash nodded, sure now, that Hudder was telling all he knew on this subject.

“Next thing,” he said, with a serious glance at Doctor Bowers, “is the matter

of Mr. Cox's private papers. It is necessary that they be gone through, and if the Captain hasn't time, I suppose he will depute you or the First Officer to help me. I shouldn't like to take the responsibility alone. Hudder, where are Mr. Cox's papers?"

"Papers?"

"I'll throw a boot-jack at you if you don't stop that parrot repetition of my words! I hate it! Yes, papers—see, papers. Where are Mr. Cox's personal and private papers, and don't you dare say 'papers'!"

"In his trunk, sir," and Hudder was again the wooden, impassive servant.

"Oh, they are. Which compartment?"

"Here," and Hudder went to the trunk. He approached it on tiptoe, as if afraid of a reprimand from the still, covered shape on the bed.

"There is a drawer, you see, that has been fitted with a Yale lock. The—what you want, sir, is in there."

"Yes, and where is the key?"

"In—in Mr. Cox's pocket, sir."

"Get it out."

But this was too much. Hudder bolted from the room.

CHAPTER VI

THE GLOVES

“Just as well he’s out of the way,” Nash said, as the door closed behind the retreating servant. “Will you get the key, Doctor? I—I can’t.”

Not sharing the layman’s unreasoning horror of death, Doctor Bowers extracted a bunch of keys from Cox’s pocket, and the two men examined the contents of the locked drawer of the trunk.

“No Letter of Credit or Express checks or anything that represents money,” said Nash, as he ran over a few papers the place contained. “Such things he has doubtless put in the ship’s safe. Here’s his Passport, and a lot of receipted bills, and a few letters—.”

“Let’s look at the Passport,” said Bowers.

But from that document they learned nothing that they did not already know, except that Cox was fifty-one years old, and that his object in going abroad was set down as “Travel.”

“Here are some cards of London shops and other business addresses,” Nash said, “mostly clothiers or men’s furnishings.”

“What are the bills?” asked the doctor, who began to think there wasn’t much detective work going on. At least, none of a brilliant nature.

The bills were all from New York shops.

Almost all were from tailors or jewelers.

“To show the Customs people, when he comes home,” Nash said. “He wears a lot of jewelry, good stuff too. See, these bills are old, but here’s his pearl set of evening studs and buttons, and his ring and some pins. But, Good Lord, look at this!”

He held out to the eyes of the other a bill of very recent date from a Fifth Avenue jeweler.

It itemized a pearl necklace, with square diamond clasp at fifty thousand dollars; a shoulder buckle of diamonds and sapphires, at ten thousand dollars, and three diamond bracelets at five thousand dollars apiece.

“Whew!” exclaimed the doctor. “What does this mean? I’m not surprised at his buying the things for I’ve heard he’s a multi-millionaire, but where are they?”

“If on board, they’re in the ship’s safe,” said Nash, eyeing the bill. “But more likely he gave them to some fair dame before he started.”

“Why are the bills here then?”

“Might be lots of reasons. Maybe he made the presentation the night before he sailed, and so had the bills still in his pocket-book. Well, even for a gay dog—which he never seemed to me to be—this is going some!”

“You don’t think he was fond of the ladies?”

“Not to this extent. I mean, I didn’t think so. This looks as if he was. But on board, though he fooled around with those flappers, it was always in a nice bachelor uncle sort of way—.”

“He wasn’t a bachelor.”

“No, but he’d been a widower fifteen years, he told me, and somehow he had taken on bachelor airs. Well, this bill gives us a side-light on his character, whether it is of any help to us or not.”

“Perhaps that Hudder person will know who was or is to be the recipient of these trinkets.”

“It’s not easy, I find, to pry information out of that automaton. But I may be able to surprise or scare it out of him. He won’t answer questions put in the ordinary way.”

“Here’s a letter of introduction.”

“Not social or personal,” Nash said, glancing at it. “Merely a recommendation to a tailor.”

“Great dresser, Cox.”

“All of that. Well, let’s see if his personal belongings tell us any secrets.”

But the toilet appointments and carefully put away underclothing and haberdashery gave up only the evidence that they were the property of a rich man of fine tastes and punctilious neatness. Shirts were monogrammed, handkerchiefs were fit for a Beau Brummel, the silk hose could be drawn through a ring and the neckties might have been selected by an artist.

Checks for other trunks that were in the hold appeared, also for hatboxes and

various cases.

“He’s taking enough luggage not to buy anything over there,” Bowers grunted. “Why such a terrible lot of stuff?”

“He was an extravagant nature all through,” Nash asserted. “Look at this dispatch case and these collar and cuff boxes—all of the finest leather with gold monograms. Even his shoe-trees are made to order. Without being what is termed a dandy, Oscar Cox was one of the most luxurious dressers I have ever seen.”

“But everything seems to be new,” said Bowers, thoughtfully.

“Not everything. And it’s quite in keeping that he should renew things before they were worn, not after.”

“Well, we’ve struck no money at all, not even chicken feed for use on the boat. He must have some about.”

“Belt, probably. You’ll have to get that.”

“The man to embalm the body will be here shortly. Can’t you wait for him?”

“Yes, certainly. It does seem ghoulish, doesn’t it? I say, Doctor, it’s all terribly queer. I mean a murder, with no police, no coroner, no real detectives, no witnesses—bah, how can the criminal ever be discovered?”

“Yet, on the other hand, how it is narrowed down, compared to a murder on land. Here, the murderer is necessarily on this ship. Within a few hundred yards of us this very minute. And, he can’t get away! Surely that ought to make it easy to find him.”

“Surely it doesn’t! Why, we’ve no idea, except for a few, what men on board Cox knew. We don’t know but he had an enemy in the second or third cabin or even in the crew. We don’t know but he had those gems on him, and was murdered for those. In a word, we know almost nothing of the man, and apparently can find out nothing. You must admit that isn’t a hopeful outlook. On land, there are friends, relatives, associates, who may be questioned. On board, everyone lives in select privacy, if he chooses, and no one knows anything about the man in the next stateroom to his own.”

“All true—I hadn’t seen it in just that light.”

“That’s the light it’s in. As you say, the man who clawed Oscar Cox’s face with that awful bronze is even now on board, and separated from us by only a few wooden walls. But he’s as secure from suspicion—I mean, he probably is—as if he were on another ship. Why, in a house, or in a room, all present may

be catechised, for all present have common cause with the victim, in that they are in the same place, and for the same reason. But here—it's like a whole town and there are as many human beings on board as may be found in a small town—you can't ask questions of people who hadn't even nodding acquaintance with Cox."

"What, then? Give up all hope of finding out the truth?"

"No, not that. But it depends largely on chance information, and on—oh, it calls for the work of a real detective—a big one. I'm the merest novice, I've had almost no experience—it wants a super-Sherlock Holmes, not an ignorant beginner."

Nash's tones were so earnest, the doctor didn't affront him with mild compliments or protestations of faith in his powers.

He nodded his head, and Nash went on: "I was pleased and flattered when the Captain asked me to look into the matter, but Lordy, it's a huckleberry above my persimmons! I'm not lying down on the job, and I may have a streak of luck—but I sure recognize my own inadequacy. Guess I'll talk it over with Trent, he's a writer of mystery yarns."

"Does that give him a working knowledge of cases?"

"Not necessarily. But he may give me a steer. I'll put it to the Captain, and if he doesn't mind, I'll call Trent in conference."

"All right, Mr. Nash. And here are the men from the surgery. I'll stay with them and whatever we find on Mr. Cox's person in the way of money belt or other personal effects, I'll turn over to the Captain and you can see them."

Nash obtained a short interview with Captain Van Winkle at once, but was asked to wait until evening before opening the packets Cox had deposited in the safe.

"We must wireless his people," the Captain said, looking harassed. "But he seems uncommonly short of people. That man of his says there are no relatives on the face of the globe, that he knows of. We can't reach any business addresses until tomorrow, and there's only his home address left. But, still, according to Hudder, that's a bachelor apartment house, and his apartment is closed for the summer. No use wirelessing a caretaker and that Hudder vows he doesn't know the name or address of Cox's lawyer. I never heard of a human being so utterly alone, apparently. Any help from his papers?"

"Not those in his stateroom. Perhaps from a money belt—and there's the

safe.”

“Yes. Come to my office directly after dinner, will you?”

“Yes, Captain, and may I bring Max Trent?”

“Who’s he?”

Nash explained and was permitted, even urged to bring Trent.

Captain Van Winkle was a man of sound sense, and not above asking help when needed, and when he had faith in his helpers.

Nash went away, and was immediately joined by Mallory, who had been waiting for him. Together they made their way toward where Trent’s chair was located.

Not uninterruptedly, however. Groups of people stopped them, others waylaid them and it was well nigh impossible to shake them off.

Nash shuddered as he was forced to pass the place where Cox’s chair had been. And near there, Lily Gibbs stopped him, and said pleadingly, “Dear Mr. Nash, do give us some news. Think how anxious we are to know what’s being done toward finding the slayer of dear Mr. Cox.”

“And how should I know?” Nash asked, a little brusquely.

“Oh, now, now!” and Miss Gibbs shook a finger at him, “a little bird told me that you were investigating! That you are a regular Sherlock, and you’re surely going to bring the miscreant to justice.”

Nash had never liked the woman, still less did he like her mode of address, but it occurred to him, that whatever news or rumor might be afloat on the ship, she would know of it, and he felt he must glean every possible bit of information that might help him.

So he stopped, and Mallory with him, and talked to Miss Gibbs.

“You overrate my ability, dear lady,” he said, “but I think we all want to find the criminal if we can. Not I alone, but all the passengers on the *Pinnacle* want that.”

“All except one,” said Lily Gibbs, dryly.

“Point well taken. Yes, all except one. Or more, if he had confederates.”

“You know, Mr. Nash, what he was killed with?”

“What?” Nash was determined to be noncommittal.

“That terrible bronze hand! Do you remember the night I examined it—Mr. Cox showed it to us—and I said it was an evil hand? The lines in that palm were evil lines—remember?”

“Yes, Miss Gibbs, I do remember. And you were a true prophet. Can you see anything more—clairvoyantly, I mean—as to the crime?”

Amy Camper, who sat near, rose and stood by Lily’s side. Her husband remained in his chair, but he was listening.

“Not here and now,” Miss Gibbs replied, in a low, tense voice. “But later I will try—I may—.”

“Now, Lily,” exclaimed Mrs. Camper, rather crossly, “don’t mix in with any of that foolishness. Tell her, Mr. Nash, that it is out of place in real detective work.”

“What do you think about it all, Mrs. Camper?” said Nash, ignoring her request. “What does your husband think? You two sat near Mr. Cox every day—you knew him fairly well, didn’t you?”

“We sat no nearer to him than you did, Mr. Nash,” Amy Camper seemed a little ruffled. “Yours and Mr. Mallory’s chairs are just the other side of his.”

“Yes, but we are not often in our chairs. We’re birds of passage. You and Mr. Camper spend most of your time in yours.”

“But not most of our time talking to Mr. Cox,” she returned with spirit. “Indeed, he devoted a lot of time to that gang of flappers who everlastingly hung round him.”

“Do you know what I think?” said Owen Camper, rising and coming slowly over to them, “I think that hand—that bronze horror, was flung at him—.”

“Flung!” cried Mallory, “I never thought of that!”

“Yes; flung, say, by some one in sudden anger, not meaning to kill the man.”

“But who would do it!”

“Might have been that queer dick of a servant, the one Cox called Hudder.”

“He is devoted to his master,” Nash put in.

“Oh, you can’t tell. He seems so—but who knows? For that matter, who knows anything about Cox, anyway? Anything much, that is.”

“I thought you knew him pretty well, Mr. Camper,” Nash said, quietly.

“Not well, no. I met him a few times at one or two clubs in New York, and I’ve seen him at ball games now and then. But we were not what you could call friends, scarcely acquaintances.”

“Was he fond of ladies’ society?” Nash pursued.

“That I don’t know anything about. As I say, I’ve only seen him among men. He was a general favorite, except once in a while when he would fall into a boasting vein. Then he was insufferable.”

“What do you know of his nephew?”

“Nephew?”

“Yes, nephew and namesake.”

“Oh, you mean the young chap who was so wicked and then reformed. I’ve heard of him but I never saw him. I don’t know where he lives, I’m sure.”

“The difficulty is to know to whom to wireless the news of Cox’s death,” Nash said, watching Camper closely.

“What! Doesn’t anybody know anything about his people? Not Hudder?”

“Can’t seem to get definite information,” Nash said, and then, turning sharply on his heel, he went off and Mallory followed.

A moment later they met Mr. Allen and Mr. Mason, and this time Nash paused of his own accord.

“Can either of you men advise me?” he began. “The Captain has been kind enough to ask me to help him look into the Cox matter a little, and I’m terribly afraid I can’t make much headway. Mr. Cox seems to have been very much alone on board.”

“Lots of us are,” said Mason, looking keenly at the earnest young man. “What do you want to know, especially?”

“Some relative or friend in New York to whom to wireless the news of his death. Tomorrow, it will reach the papers, but if we could get in touch with his people tonight, it would seem more circumspect to advise them first, don’t you think?”

“It does seem so, to be sure,” Allen agreed. “But I’ve no knowledge of his home affairs, have you, Mason?”

“No, except that he didn’t have any. I mean, he lived alone, and I never heard of any relatives. His wife died years ago—.”

“Is he interested in—in any lady now?” said Nash, quickly.

“Not that I know of,” returned Allen, and Mason shook his head in agreement.

“He had parties—,” Nash suggested.

“Parties? Orgies!” and Allen laughed. “I went only once, but that was enough for me! He struck the high spots when it came to entertaining!”

“Then he was a man who may have made enemies?”

“Well, not on account of his parties. For those who like wild times, they were just about what they’d like. And more mildly inclined revelers didn’t have to go. At least, not more than once.” Allen smiled as if at amusing recollections of his experience there.

“I knew Cox a little in a business way,” Mason volunteered. “We had a few deals together in some mining operations and in an oil field. But it was several years ago. He became much richer since. However, I know nothing at all of his private life, and I’ve never heard anything against the man in his business or social relations. I’ve not talked with him much on this trip, because he favored the younger element so strongly—a phase of life very distasteful to me.”

Mason evinced so strong a distaste for the Younger Generation that Nash almost laughed at him, and Mallory set him down for a first-class prig.

“But can’t you advise me, Mr. Allen, how to go about getting in touch with the right persons? What about his lawyer? His banker?”

“Better try a Club, I should say. Try the Millennium Club. I’m pretty sure he was a member of that.”

“Good idea. We can advise them and ask them to notify the proper persons.”

The two younger men passed on, and Allen said, musingly, to Mason:

“Unique case, isn’t it? Murder on the high seas—I mean on a modern liner, is almost unheard of. We might be on a Pirate ship!”

“Yes, and the brutal means employed! Surely it is the work of a fiend in human shape. Poe’s ape would fit into the case better.”

“Doubtless done by some deck hand or sailor, who knew just when to strike.”

“And the motive?”

“Oh, robbery, of course. We all know so little about Cox, that we don’t

know what he had on him or with him in the way of valuables. But I'm told that he frequently went down to the second and third cabins and also down among the sailors and stokers, and gave them money in some cases. It is not improbable that some one of them, ungrateful or jealous, sneaked up and did for him."

"It might be," Mason looked interested, "for the weapon was ready at hand."

"Did Cox have it on deck this morning?"

"I suppose so. He often did, and if not, how did the assailant get it?"

"It's all very mysterious. And there's the other angle, that it was done by one of ourselves. I mean by someone in the first cabin. How do we know what men on board knew Cox far better than we did? With hundreds of people on these upper decks, a secret enemy would never be known or suspected, if he kept his own counsel."

"You mean some one Cox knew?"

"It may be. I'm only surmising. But the field of surmise is so wide, so boundless, that, to my mind, there's practically no chance of discovering the murderer."

"It seems so," Mason agreed. "I think the most astute sleuth would be baffled by such a problem. Come on down for a cocktail, it's nearing dinner time."

Nash and Mallory, on their way, were again interrupted by an onslaught from the bunch of young people who had been Cox's special friends.

There were about a dozen of them, girls and boys both, and they surrounded the two men with a demand for news.

"We know you know things," Sally Barnes declared, "and you've got to tell us. It's our right. Mr. Cox was our friend, and we ought to know all there is to know."

"There's practically nothing to know," said Nash, gently raising her hand from his coat sleeve and giving it back to her as if it were a declined gift.

"Oh, yes, there is, and if you don't tell us, we'll worm it out of Miss Gibbs. I saw her vamping you back there!"

"Do get it from her! That's a fine idea. She'll probably be able to tell you a lot more than I can."

"Yes," Sally pouted, "but her tell won't be true."

"Neither will mine, for I shall have to make it up if I tell you anything."

“Oh, bother!” cried Sally, and turned to Hal Mallory, as Nash went on down the deck.

“You tell me, Mr. Mall,” she said, sidling close to him, and drawing him away from the rest of her crowd.

“Mr. Nash spoke the truth when he said there’s nothing to tell,” Hal told her gravely. “I think, Miss Barnes, you young people might at least show the dead the respect of silence on this awful subject. There’s no reason you should forgo any of your pleasures or sports, for Mr. Cox was merely a fellow passenger, but as he was also your friend, I think it would be better taste for you not to be gossiping about the affair.”

“Gossiping!” and Sally looked at him curiously. “Why, if talking about the murder is gossiping, then everybody on board is doing the same thing. And you bet he was my friend! Why, Mr. Cox told me things he wouldn’t tell anybody else.”

“He did! What sort of things?”

“Oh, that wakes you up, does it? Look here, Mr. Mallory, which is the detective one of you two smart Alecks? You or Mr. Nash?”

“Both of us—.”

“I know. But I mean which is the Sherlock and which the Watson?”

“Oh, we’re not a real firm like that. Nash and I consult together about things.”

“Yes, but which is the detective? You?”

“Yes, if you will put it that way.”

Mallory indulged in this bit of prevarication, hoping to find out if the girl really knew anything of importance, which he could, of course, pass on to Nash.

But his hesitancy enlightened Sally.

“I don’t think you are,” she said, with a positive wagging of her bobbed head. “I think Mr. Nash is. If he will listen to me, I will tell him something. If not, he can go without.”

“Hey, Polly, wait a minute,” called out Mallory, for Nash, having shaken off the youngsters, was looking back for his friend. “Come here, will you?”

The two men and Sally retreated to a sheltered corner, and Sally said, seriously, “I have a clue, Mr. Nash, and I want you to take it and find the bad

man who killed Mr. Cox.”

The quiet simplicity of her statement made Nash look at her in amazement. Usually she was so boisterous and frivolous.

“Yes, Miss Barnes,” he said, “I shall be glad indeed to see your clue.”

In her rather capacious deck-bag Sally fished about until she found a small parcel wrapped in crumpled tissue paper.

“There!” she said, with a look of triumph, “there!”

Shielded from view of passers-by, Nash unrolled the paper and found a pair of kid gloves, tightly rolled up and as he examined them, he discovered they were men’s gloves, of tan kid, of light weight and fine workmanship.

One of them showed a few reddish stains, and the other, a slight blur that might have come from being so closely wrapped up with the stained one.

Nash gazed at them, and said, in low tone, “Where did you get these?”

“I was just down in the third cabin,” Sally explained, “taking some Fourth of July goodies to the kiddies down there. Two women were looking at these gloves. They said the parcel had been thrown from an upper deck and, sucked in by the breeze or by the ship’s motion, had fallen right at their feet. I offered them a dollar for the parcel, and they were glad to take it. That’s all.”

CHAPTER VII

THE JEWELER'S BILL

"You're a bright child," said Nash, rolling the gloves up quickly and stuffing the parcel in his pocket. "Come along with us, while we talk to Mr. Trent."

"No," Sally said, shaking her curly bob, "he thinks I'm a little fool. You tell him about the gloves, and you smarties dope it all out—the murder business, I mean—and then, if you want any more clues found, you just tell me and I'll find them."

With a saucy move, she turned away and went dancing down the deck.

"Queer little thing," Nash said, "but clever as they come."

"Oh, well, getting the gloves from the steerage women wasn't so terribly clever," Mallory returned. "The cleverness will be when you announce from a study of those gloves the age, sex and previous condition of the murderer. Hello, here's Trent alone. Good work!"

Max Trent, his cap well down over his eyes, was lying back in his steamer chair, apparently doing nothing. In point of fact, he was waiting for Maisie Forman to come out on deck, and though that required no physical exertion, his brain and eke his heart were jumping with eager anticipation.

But the girl did not appear, and Nash dropped into her vacant chair as he began to talk to Trent. Most of the passengers had gone in to dress for dinner, and the three men, conversing in low tones, ran small chance of being overheard.

Nash put it plainly to Max Trent that he desired his help or at least the benefit of his advice, for the Captain had asked him to do what he could in the way of investigation and he had the Captain's permission to get Trent to work with him.

"You see," Nash went on, "it's the Captain's duty to record all these happenings and to do what he can to apprehend the criminal. But he can't take the time to do regular detective work, nor does he know how to go about it. He has none of the sleuth instinct nor has he any real responsibility, save as the facts are presented to him. At least, that's what I gather. And between you and me,

Captain Van Winkle, though a gallant and experienced sailor, has small knowledge of Scotland Yard procedure. So, as I'm intensely interested in this thing, I'm hoping you are, too, and that together we can find the man who killed Oscar Cox."

"I am interested—deeply," Trent replied. "I've been thinking it over all the afternoon. But it's like looking for a needle in a haystack. On land, there are certain people or groups of people who know the dead man, who can be called for examination, who will give information that may be of utmost value. But here on this ship, we have no such opportunities. So far as we know, Oscar Cox had few acquaintances, save those he made since we sailed from New York. Yet, he may have had—must have had, on board, some enemy who hated him enough to kill him. Now, how can we learn who that enemy was? How discern among a thousand or more First Class passengers, which one knew Cox and had sufficient grudge against him to kill him? For, as you must see, the crime was the work of a master mind. Whoever killed Cox was a genius. He chose the psychological moment, when everyone, nearly, was off the deck, and on the way down to lunch. Moreover, they were all engrossed in the hullabaloo of the holiday celebration and the opportunity was ideal for the criminal's purpose."

"Also," Nash put in, not willing that Trent should do all the talking, "he was clever enough to leave no foot-prints or finger marks, and no clues of any sort."

"You mean, none that we've found," Trent corrected. "It is said there are always clues, if one can see them."

"And if one can read them," added Nash. "Look here." He drew from his pocket the parcel Sally had given him.

Trent unrolled it, and gazed at the gloves with interest.

"If these are the murderer's gloves," he said, after a moment, "they prove afresh that the crime was carefully thought out. For these are new gloves with no marks of wear or usage that might give us a hint of their owner. Also, it is quite possible that the murderer stole or in some way procured the gloves of another man. Miss Barnes did right in getting them from the women below, and I have not the slightest doubt that they were worn by the murderer when he committed his dastardly crime. But I hold that even Sherlock himself could not deduce from them anything of importance. They were worn, of course, to avoid any finger-prints on the bronze. I think we are not going too fast when we assume the Bronze Hand was the instrument and that it was wielded by a man with murderous intent."

"Or a woman," Hal Mallory said. "There is no reason, on the face of things,

why a woman should not have done the deed. Although the idea is shocking, women murderers have been known, and, given sufficient motive, a woman could have committed this crime. The weight of that bronze is enough to kill, without such very great force behind it. And as we are utterly at sea, there's no reason for exclusively suspecting a man."

"You're quite right, Mr. Mallory," Trent said, gravely. "Now, as I see this thing, we cannot depend on clues at all. I mean material clues. To my mind the gloves indicate little of definite importance. If they belonged to the murderer, then he was a man, and presumably a man of our own class. Indeed, for that matter, it would have been difficult if not impossible for a man from a lower class cabin or from the crew to get up here. Yet, if such a thing did occur, then the villain stole these gloves from some gentleman, or they were given to him. But I can't see a clever, ingenious crime, as this one surely is, committed by other than an intellectual and hundred per cent. efficient mind.

"I agree," and Nash nodded. "However much a brute from below may have wanted to kill Oscar Cox, how could he get up here, just at that particular moment—?"

"Oh, come, now," Mallory said, "it could have been done. Suppose it was a steward or a deck hand—I mean the ones who swab down and all that. One such could come up here unnoticed, if he watched his opportunity. Who of us would pay any attention to the sailors or workmen who attend to routine duties? To be sure, we would notice one now; but before the tragedy, dozens of them might come and go, and we wouldn't even see them, unless they bothered us in some way."

"True enough," Trent said, thoughtfully. "But all the same, it connotes to my mind a mentality far above any sailor or deckhand. The man who could conceive and carry out this thing, ought to be found in a high position of some sort."

"As Mr. Dooley used to say, 'Yer remarks are inthrestin' but not convincin'," Nash said with a smile. "Now, to me, it seems that the criminal had this one set purpose, that he bent every effort and every circumstance toward its accomplishment, and that he need not, necessarily, have had cleverness or brilliancy in any other direction."

"I'm glad we do take different views, Nash," Trent said, cordially, "if we're to work together, it will help us both to see it from various angles. I'm keen to do what I can, but you must remember, that as a detective, I've had positively no experience. My books are purely imaginative. I have that twist in my brain that people call detective instinct, but whether it's worth tuppence when put to actual

test, I've no idea. We see the Captain this evening?"

"Yes, right after dinner."

"There's much to ask him. I think I'll skip dinner, or have a bit sent to my room, for I want to list out a few notes."

But on his way to his stateroom, Trent stopped at the Florist's shop with which this Lady Liner was equipped, and bought a small pot of blooming primroses, which he sent to Maisie Forman's room, with a scribbled note.

And he was greatly pleased half an hour later, to get a short missive saying Miss Forman was quite well, though unnerved by the awful tragedy of the day. And that she would be glad to see him on deck the next morning.

Trent put the little note carefully away, for he never had secrets from himself and he owned right up that he was becoming more and more interested in the girl.

Then, half smiling to himself at his new rôle of working detective, instead of merely a chronicler, he made a systematic and methodical *resumé* of the case, as he knew it.

And he was forced to the conclusion that his knowledge was deplorably limited.

He knew Oscar Cox was dead. He knew, almost to a certainty, that he was killed by the bronze hand, his own property, which he treasured.

A whimsical idea passed through Trent's mind, of a headline, "Killed By His Own Hand!" but he sternly brushed it aside, deprecating his too active imagination which sometimes ran away with him.

And then, he realized, he had no more items of fact to list.

He ran over in his mind what he knew of Cox. He had seen him more or less frequently in the smoking room. He remembered his genial cordiality and unfailing good nature. If he had an enemy on board, it was not one of the men with whom Trent had heard him converse.

As to the women. Cox was uniformly polite and even gallant, but Trent had not noticed his especial attentions to any one woman on board. Several had obtruded themselves on Cox's notice, such as Miss Gibbs and her ilk, also mothers of eligible daughters, but Cox—and Trent had seen him—waved them off with an airy indifference that usually precluded further attempt at friendship.

And yet, though preposterous on the face of it, Mallory's hint of a woman

criminal must be considered. It would certainly be possible for a woman to have accomplished the horrid deed, and as he knew, a woman scorned is held up as the last analysis of Hell's fury.

Not, of course, the women he had been thinking of, who gayly made advances to the jovial millionaire, but some woman who was in his life, and who had, say, followed him on this trip with evil in her heart.

In that case, it would not be one of the women Cox had talked to, but someone who had not spoken to him at all. Someone who knew him and whom he knew, yet to whom he purposely appeared to be a stranger.

Well, Trent mused, there were probably a hundred who would fill these specifications, so far as an outsider could see, and how could the right one be discovered? Anyway, Trent didn't think it was a woman. Of course, it might be, but first, he proposed to look for a man.

A man who knew Oscar Cox, but had not professed to. Who had a mortal grievance of which Cox and himself only, of all on board, were aware.

Yet how to go about tracing such a one?

To begin, it must have been one who had access to Cox's room, with sufficient intimacy to go in there and get the bronze hand. Trent didn't think Cox had it with him on deck that morning, as it was not a handy thing to carry about, and it had been shown so often to Cox's acquaintances that they were all familiar with it.

Yet, how absurd, probably the man had not been in Cox's stateroom at all, before he went in to get the instrument of death. A criminal of his ability wouldn't.

Oh, well, as far as Trent could see, he could see nothing. It was all a most impenetrable mystery. All he could do was to keep an open mind and an alert brain to hear and make the most of what he might be told that evening.

It was too big an affair for a novice to handle. He wished there was a great detective on board, who would take up the case, and let him, Trent, watch his working. That would be the ideal situation, thought the writer of stories.

Then he remembered that the most mysterious crimes are often the simplest of solution. This was comforting, though in no way a definite help.

Deeply absorbed in his thoughts, Trent ate his dinner from the tray the steward brought him, and then, concluding the time was ripe, he went to the Captain's room and found the others already there.

Captain Van Winkle showed his usual suave and courteous demeanor, but the observant Trent could see an underlying effect of resentment, as if the Captain felt the unfairness of the fate that had thrust this trouble upon him and his ship.

“I hope, Mr. Trent,” he said, after a few words of greeting, “that you and Mr. Nash can learn some facts or find some clues, even if you do not identify the criminal. I feel that my responsibility does not extend far in those directions. I shall enter all the facts in my log, of course, and make my report to the Consul at Liverpool, who will take up the matter in such wise as he sees fit. The Police will board the ship and make their own investigations. They will conduct an Inquest or not, as they deem best. The effects of Mr. Cox I shall turn over to the Steamship authorities, or there will be whatever disposal of them the Consul orders. That, gentlemen, is my duty in the matter, and it shall be done. Now, if you can learn anything as to the motive for this crime or the perpetrator of it, you will be conferring inestimable benefit on the public at large, on the Steamship Company and on myself. You may have the freedom of the vessel, with due care as to the rights of the passengers, and you may call on any of the stewards or other hirelings for any aid they can give you. I needn’t say the officers will be glad to help, if possible.”

“In a word, Captain, you are deputing us to do what we can in the matter of investigation and offer all facilities at your disposal.”

“Exactly that, Mr. Trent.”

“Then first of all, I think we must ask to see the property of Mr. Cox which is in the ship’s safe.”

The Captain hesitated. “We are not the Police, Mr. Trent,” he demurred; “I admit I do not feel like opening Mr. Cox’s sealed parcels.”

“Then we can do nothing, Captain,” Trent responded, promptly. “Those deposits might explain matters to such an extent that we could put our hand at once on the criminal’s shoulder. A threatening letter, a bit of a journal, a will or deposition of some sort. Unless we can know all there is to be known of Oscar Cox, I cannot undertake to delve into the mystery at all.”

“Of course,” Nash supplemented, “if there are only valuables, money, bonds, jewels, or such, we would turn them back at once, to be sealed for the authorities.”

“And another thing, Captain,” Trent said, “I understand there were bills found in Mr. Cox’s stateroom for very expensive jewels. He may not have

brought these gems on board, but if he did and if they are not in the safe, they should be sought for. It must be remembered that the murderer, and possibly the thief is on board this minute. He cannot get away. We have three days to track him down. We may not be able to do it, but we should, I think, be given every assistance in your power.”

“You are right, Mr. Trent,” Van Winkle said, thoughtfully. “I will send for the Purser and get the articles Mr. Cox put in his care.”

This was done, and when the packets were opened, everyone was excluded from the room save Trent, Nash and the Captain himself.

“It is wise that no one else knows,” Van Winkle said, “tongues will babble.”

It was not a large array of material that the investigators opened up.

There was a Letter of Credit from a New York Bank, but it was not for an extravagant sum.

“At least it tells us his Bank,” said Nash, with a nod of satisfaction.

Then there was a much-certified letter to a large bank in London, with details of the transfer of a list of securities.

“That looks as if he meant to remain in London a long time. It is like a general moving of his residence.”

Another item of interest was the letter to Oscar Cox, from the Hotel Britz, in London, stating that one of the best suites had been reserved for him and his wife dating from the arrival of the *Pinnacle*.

“His wife!” exclaimed Nash. “Then he is married and she is awaiting him in London!”

“Or Liverpool,” suggested the Captain.

“Yes, one or the other—or maybe somewhere near London. Anyway, he was married, the sly dog!”

“No real reason he should tell of it, if he didn’t choose,” said Trent, sensibly enough. “Hello! here’s a memorandum of those same jewels.”

A small paper bore in Oscar Cox’s fine, neat script, a list of one pearl necklace, one shoulder buckle and three bracelets, all with the same prices attached that had shown on the jeweler’s bill. And this list bore the caption, “For Her.”

“H’m, small doubt those gems were for his wife—likely as not a bride, or

almost so. Now, where are those jewels?"

"How do you make her out a bride, if she's in England, and he just sailed from America?"

"Several explanations for that. They were married and, say, expected to sail. He was detained—of course this is mere suggestion—but for some reason, she went on, and he followed as soon as he could."

"Why keep it secret?" asked the Captain.

"Lord, man! *I* don't know! Perhaps for some reasons mixed up in the mystery which brought about his death. Maybe he ran off with another man's wife or sweetheart. Oh, the fact that he is married opens up an illimitable field for conjecture."

"Maybe he wasn't married yet," remarked Nash. "Maybe he was to join the lady in England and marry her and take her to the hotel where he had reserved a suite of rooms. And maybe he was taking the jewels to her for a wedding present."

"Not at all unlikely," Trent agreed. "That would explain the exceeding newness of his clothing, for all the world like a bridegroom's outfit."

"Here's another paper," cried Nash, fingering an envelope. "By heavens, it's his will!"

It proved to be a will, but a very informal one. Merely a single sheet of paper, which set forth the fact that on the death of Oscar Cox, everything of which he possessed should become the absolute property of his wife, or if she should not be living at that time, then the estate was to go to his relatives. No names were given of wife or kin. But the document was duly witnessed, and Trent opined that it was a true and legal will.

Except for a book of Travelers' checks and two First Class Railway tickets from Liverpool to London, that was all of the lot.

"Why *two* railroad tickets?" said Trent, curiously. "Looks as if he expected to meet the lady in Liverpool."

"I think you've got the story wrong end to," Nash exclaimed. "He had two tickets to London, because he expected his wife to accompany him on this trip. For some reason, purposely or by accident, she couldn't come. He had to proceed—business reasons, or something—and she will follow on the next boat. She has her own steamer ticket, but he forgot to give her her railroad ticket. The jewels she may have, or—they have been stolen on board this ship."

Trent nodded. "Good enough for a theory, but nothing to back it up, especially. Now, Captain, you can put all these things right back in the safe. I have a list of them, and though the list may be helpful, the things themselves are of no use in our work. I think the fact that Cox was married, or possibly was just about to be married, is a most important point. To my mind, it has a strong bearing on the fact of his murder. Now, here's my plan—so far as I've formulated one. Find out all possible about Oscar Cox, in two ways. One, by asking of people on board who knew him. Two, by wirelessly to New York, to his Club and Bank and even to the jeweler who sold him that bill of goods. He could very likely tell us if Mr. Cox was yet married or was about to be. He might give us the lady's name. All such details would be extremely helpful. Further than this I have not yet gone, but I am far more hopeful of ultimate success than I was when I came into this room tonight. I thank you, Captain, for the honor of being asked to help, and I shall use my best efforts and report progress when—or if, any!"

When deeply interested or in earnest, Trent fell into somewhat stilted language, and as Nash put it, "sounded like one of his own books."

"Tomorrow," Trent went on, "I'd like to have Mr. Cox's trunks brought up from the hold and run over their contents. There might be something in them more indicative than all these papers and jewel bills."

"You may have them, Mr. Trent, and then they may as well be left in the Cox stateroom," the Captain told him. "The body has been removed and has been embalmed. But I am told it is still a terrible sight, and I assume there will be no need for its further exhibition on board."

"No, there is nothing to be learned from it," Trent said. "It must await the action of the Liverpool or Scotland Yard authorities, I suppose. But we know the means used, and we have seen the resultant wounds. The clothing and property Mr. Cox had on him when he died are safely taken care of. So, as I say, there is no need for further examination of the remains."

The session over, Trent begged of Nash that they have no more confab that night. He said he believed to sleep over the matter would be the best thing for both of them and they would meet early next morning to compare notes and lay their plans.

Nash agreed and went at once to his stateroom. Trent, with one of the officers went to the Wireless Room to send the message decided upon to compare notes and lay their plans."

While waiting for the operator's maneuvers, Trent asked permission, under

his newly acquired authority, to see the outgoing messages of the afternoon.

There were a lot of them, for the passengers were addicted to communication with the shore, and Trent ran over them rapidly.

None referred to Oscar Cox's death in any way to rouse suspicion. Several told of it as of news, but Trent gleaned no information.

He smiled to himself at his quest, for surely the last thing a criminal would do would be to send word to anyone of his deed!

But the detective's interest was caught by a wireless that he thought might be from Maisie Forman. It was addressed to Jonathan Forman, and it read:

"No behold what do on or back," and it was signed, "Mary."

"Sent by Miss Forman?" he asked the operator.

"Yep. She sends one nearly every day. To her father."

"Thank you."

Trent kept on until he had looked at every message sent out that afternoon. None held his attention save one from Sherman Mason to a man named Frey.

And this interested him only because it also made use of the word *behold* in no apparent connection.

This message said:

"Behold nothing off for italy take muff."

Of course the messages were in code, and "behold" must mean some simple word in general use. He would look up his code book as soon as he reached his room.

"Muff," too, must mean some important paper or article, perhaps known only to the men interested in that particular message.

Trent went to his room, and studied his code book far into the night. But neither the word *behold* nor the word *muff* appeared in its lists.

"Private codes," he grunted, sleepily, and with a weary sigh he put himself to bed.

CHAPTER VIII

THE DRESSING CASE

In spite of his troubled slumbers and the weight of responsibility he felt, Trent rose and dressed next morning in a thrill of delight that he was to see Maisie Forman again.

He frankly admitted to himself that he was rapidly falling in love with her, but he admonished himself sternly that he must not let that fact interfere with his work as detective. He invariably smiled at the notion of being a real detective, but he proposed to take the matter very seriously and do his level best. He had formulated a few of the next steps he should take, and he was impatient to get to work.

So after his breakfast he was among the first on deck and seeing Owen Camper striding along for exercise, Trent joined him.

“Good morning, Mr. Detective,” was Camper’s greeting, and Trent realized that little may be kept secret on an ocean liner.

“Detective in name only,” Trent returned, with a wry face. “Do help me out, there’s a good fellow. Do tell me some facts about our mysterious victim. He’s almost as unknown as his assailant. To be sure we know Oscar Cox’s name, but that’s just about all we do know of him.”

Trent was not really so helpless or so in need of help as he affected, but he hoped to get some scraps of knowledge in this way.

“I don’t know anything more about him than the next man,” Camper said, with an air of indifference. “Why do you try to delve into it, when there’s no hope of solving the mystery?”

“Don’t say ‘no hope.’ In fact, that’s all there is—hope. I’ve practically nothing else to buoy up my spirits.”

“Do you know what I think?” Camper waxed loquacious all at once. “I believe it was that queer man of his who did for him. That thing he called Hudder.”

“Any reason to think so?”

“Not perhaps what can be called a reason—but, elimination, you know. There’s no one else to suspect. Who else on board could have had any motive?”

“Dozens of people, for all we know,” Trent asserted. “Whoever did it had a deep, a desperate motive. That crime was premeditated and carefully executed. It was the work of a fiendish mind, but a clever one. Agree?”

“Yes. But that doesn’t let Hudder out. He may have a far more clever mind than appears in his blank face, and he may be a fiend at heart.”

“May be, yes. But for that matter you may be, or I may be, or anyone on board may be. We have to find more than ‘may be’s’ before we can really suspect anybody.”

“And how are you going about it?”

“I’m going to ask questions. And then more questions. I must find out first, who and what Cox really is—or was. Next, who on board were more acquainted with him than appeared on the surface. There’s the real secret. Somebody knew Cox well enough to want to kill him, and that somebody is even now walking the deck and laughing at our puny efforts to find him out.”

“And you think you can find out?” Camper’s tone was incredulous and a little sarcastic.

“I hope to. As I told you, hope is all I have at the moment. But I expect to get more. More information, more evidence, more—.”

“More clues?”

“This is a case that doesn’t abound in clues nor evidence, of a spectacular kind. You see, the deck and wall and all the locality of Cox’s chair was washed away and scrubbed and swabbed within an hour of the crime. So there’s no chance for that sort of clue. And so far, his stateroom has given up no evidence of importance. You’re sure you know nothing of him, Camper, more than you told?”

“I haven’t told anything, and I don’t know anything. I’ve known Cox for years, but only as a mere acquaintance. I’m not in his class financially, and I never cared to be in his class socially.”

“Why, what sort did he travel with?”

“Big money spenders, gay dogs, high livers, hard drinkers, all that such things imply.”

Owen Camper’s tone was bitter, more so than the subject seemed to call for,

and Trent wondered if perchance, these things implied were not a source of resentment to the man not able to afford them. He had heard that the Campers were climbers, and he surmised they might have been snubbed by Cox for presuming on their slight acquaintance.

“Cox seemed a good-natured, simple-hearted man,” he said, not with entire sincerity.

“Yes, if a snake in the grass is good-natured and simple-hearted!” and this time Camper’s animosity was plainly evident.

“Bad as that!” commented Trent, casually. “Then I’m more than ever sure he had a real enemy on board, and I propose to smoke him out.”

Camper turned pale and then suddenly red.

“No,” he said earnestly, as if regretting his disclosures, “no, you look after that Hudder. He’s the man you want—he’s the man who killed Cox. Why, who else could get that bronze hand from Cox’s stateroom? The servant could, of course, but a fellow passenger couldn’t walk into another man’s room, pick up that murderous thing, and come out here and fire it at his head!”

“Sometimes Cox had that bronze thing with him.”

“He didn’t yesterday morning. For somebody asked to see it, and he said it was in his stateroom. Said he’d have Hudder bring it out after lunch. Well Hudder did—and used it as he saw fit.”

“Maybe,” Trent said, “maybe.” And then as he saw a certain person making her way toward her deck chair, Trent rushed off with rather scant ceremony.

“Good morning, Miss Forman,” he said, as he sat down beside her, “I missed you frightfully yesterday. How are you?”

“I’m all right now, but that awful affair was too much for my nerves. I couldn’t sleep last night. Your dear little posy was a help—.”

The smile that accompanied these words went straight to Trent’s heart.

Such a pathetic, sweet little smile and yet with no hint of coquetry or flattery.

“I’m so alone, you see,” she went on, looking straight ahead, and almost as if thinking aloud, “I’ve no one to speak to when I’m frightened.”

“And you were frightened? It’s all awful, to be sure, but there’s no cause for fear, Miss Forman.”

“No, I suppose not. I mean to overcome it—it’s just a horror of—of being alone.”

Trent damped down his leaping impulses, and forced himself to say, calmly:

“You need never be alone at such times as I can be with you,” putting just the right shade of polite kindness in his tone.

His reward was another little smile, and a nod that accepted his suggestion in the spirit it was made.

“Tell me,” she went on, “have they discovered the—who did the terrible thing?”

“It isn’t they,” he said, a bit ruefully, “it’s I.” And he told her how the Captain had deputed Nash and himself to make such investigation as they could in the hope of solving the mystery.

“And I want to do it,” he concluded. “I want very much to find out who was the criminal, but it is not an easy task. And I am not a practical detective at all. I’ve already learned it’s one thing to make up a crime story, knowing the solution from the beginning, and quite another to be pitched headlong onto a most mysterious case, without a clue or a bit of evidence to guide you!”

“There are no clues?” Maisie spoke in a hushed voice, almost as if afraid of the answer.

“Positively none. Camper, over there, suspects the man Hudder—or says he does. But I can’t see that chap killing his master out on deck. If he had murderous intent, why not carry it out in the stateroom?”

“Then Hudder would surely have been suspected,” she said, quickly.

“So you’re a detective, too!” he bantered. “Yes, you are right. But Hudder was down in the kitchen places, getting Cox’s lunch ready.”

“Who was around where Mr. Cox sat?”

“Nobody and everybody. I mean, nobody that we can definitely name, but at the same time, everybody on board might have been there. With the excitement of the Fourth of July celebration going on, and the noise of the rattles and whistles, the murderer had opportunity to do his dreadful work unnoticed. Even if there was an outcry from the victim, or any sound of impact, it would have been lost in the greater noise of the crowd.”

“But weren’t people just—inside the doors—.”

“As I see it, they were mostly on the stairs. On the upper landings they were

looking down at the crowd below, and the whole mass was slowly moving down the stairs and toward the dining rooms. Where were you?"

"I? Why—why, I suppose I was here—or, no, I must have been in my place at the table. What time did it happen?"

"We place it between one-ten and one-forty."

"How do you know so exactly?"

"It doesn't seem to me that is exact. Half an hour is a long time to investigate. But we know because Mr. Camper says he left the deck at ten after one, and the Deck Steward took Cox's tray up to him at one-forty. He knows the time, because he was late, on account of the extra menu being prepared in the kitchen, and he was afraid Mr. Cox would be annoyed. He says he reached the deck at one-forty, and it was he who discovered the tragedy. That places it surely between one-ten and one-forty, but I can find no one who admits being on deck at all between those times."

"I left the deck about—oh, I don't know what time. I didn't look. I saw the crowds on the stairs, and I went around outside, and stopped at my stateroom for a book, and then I went down in the elevator. I didn't want to get into that crowd."

"No." Trent looked thoughtful. "I left you here, remember? About quarter before one."

"Yes, I know you did. And I stayed a short time longer, and then went in."

"Did you see Mr. Cox as you passed?"

"No. I went around the stern. He's up toward the bow, you know."

"Yes. Did you see anybody?"

"No one I knew. But I know so few on board."

"Yes, of course. Now, look here, Miss Forman. When you went to your room and got your book, did you go immediately to the elevator?"

"Yes, directly."

"Then, you had to pass Cox's stateroom. Did you see anything—notice anything? Was the door open?"

"Why—I don't know. I don't know which Mr. Cox's room is."

"It's at the end of the next corridor to your own."

“Oh, is it? No, I didn’t glance that way at all, for the people were looking over the stair rail, and I paused and looked down for a moment, and then went on.”

“See anyone you knew, then?”

“No, no one. As I looked over I saw the Campers on the landing below. Then they moved along, and I went to the elevator. I reached the dining room just about the time they did.”

“Did you speak to them?”

“No, their table is on the other side of the room. I don’t think they saw me.”

“Oh, well, these things get us nowhere. I shouldn’t be surprised if we have to confess utter failure, after all. You see, it’s hopeless to try to find an enemy of Oscar Cox in such a mass of people, without the least hint as to the man we’re to look for.”

“It certainly seems impossible. Why don’t you drop the whole thing? You can’t be so deeply interested in bringing the criminal to justice, since Mr. Cox wasn’t a special friend of yours.”

“No, he wasn’t. But common humanity demands the effort. And, too, the Captain put it up to us—Nash and myself—to do what we could. So, of course, my duty is clear.”

“And your pride is at stake,” Maisie smiled.

“Well, yes, but that’s riding to a fall. My pride is a limp affair today compared to what it was before this thing happened. My detective instinct, I find, only works when I have invented the problem and its solution both myself.”

At that moment a steward approached, bringing a wireless message for Maisie. She took it quietly enough, but Trent noted that her fingers shook a little.

“Allow me,” he said, and whipping out his penknife, slit the envelope for her, gave it back, and then immersed himself in a book, while she read it.

Returning the paper to its envelope, the girl sat motionless for a time.

Stealing a glance at her face, Trent saw that she was gazing out to sea with an expression that showed her thoughts were far away.

He turned his eyes back to his book, though he was not reading.

At last she said, speaking softly and dully, almost as one in a dream:

“I have to turn around and go back home, as soon as we land.”

“What!” cried Trent, roused to activity. “I won’t have it!”

Maisie stared at him, with a funny little smile.

“What have you to say about it?” she inquired, laughing now, as if the idea were deliciously absurd.

“Oh, I’ve a lot to say about it. I—I don’t want you to do that. I planned to see a lot of you in London—after you—after you had joined your friends.”

“I know—but now I’m not going to London. My father says for me to come straight back home on the *Pinnacle*, or any boat that may sail sooner.”

“Is your father ill?”

“Oh, no. But—but dad is—is by way of being dictatorial—at times.”

“I should say so. Look here, you do a little dictating yourself. Tell him you won’t go home. A nice thing to do! When you’ve just got over!”

“But suppose I want to go home?”

“Suppose you don’t! Anyway, I don’t want you to. And these friends of yours, who are to meet you at Liverpool—what about them?”

“They—they don’t matter. Oh, I *don’t* want to go back—especially now—.”

Trent’s heart jumped. Did she—*could* she mean especially now that they were becoming such good friends?

“Don’t go, then. At any rate, don’t decide today. Let your Dad wait until tomorrow, and then see how you feel about it.”

Trent had in his mind certain wild plans for a moonlight stroll on an upper deck, and a low, whispered conversation, that might—just *might* make a difference in Maisie Forman’s plans for life!

And then Nash and Mallory came along, and Nash gave his colleague a reproving glance as he saw him wasting time dallying with a girl.

“Come on, Trent,” he said, a little shortly, “we’ve the trunks up from the hold, and we’re going to examine them.”

He spoke in an aside, but Maisie heard it. An involuntary shudder could be noticed even beneath her rug, and her face paled again, as Trent had noticed it before.

“I can’t bear to hear anything about it,” she said, in response to Nash’s frankly curious glance. “Please go on, Mr. Trent. I’ll read to divert my mind.”

“Don’t blurt out things like that before a lady, Nash,” Trent said irritably, as they went along the deck.

Nash turned round and faced him, raised his eyebrows, gave a nod of apologetic assent, and turned back again. No word was said, but Trent saw that Nash thoroughly understood and he was glad he did.

They went to Cox’s stateroom, where Hudder awaited them. He had the keys, which had been found in the dead man’s pocket, and he solemnly proceeded to open one piece of luggage after another.

Mallory was present and the four men made quick work of it. For the most part there were only clothes and toilet appurtenances, and again the young men expressed surprise and admiration at the richness and beauty of the things.

“Surely a wedding trip,” Nash declared. “Either he is just married or just about to be. You know nothing of Mr. Cox’s wedding, Hudder?”

“No, sir,” said the stolid one, with such a blank face that Trent had need of much self-control not to pitch him overboard at once.

“Then what do you make of this?” and the active Mallory pulled a fine leather suitcase from a larger and less beautiful one that just held it.

The case he took out was beyond all doubt a lady’s case, and as Hall snatched the keys from Hudder, he at once picked the right one to fit it.

Thrown open, the case proved to be fitted up with the most beautiful and complete set of brushes, bottles and all the appointments of a most elaborate toilet set. The mountings were of gold and the monogram on each was E. M. C.

“For the lady!” Mallory declared, and Nash and Trent nodded.

Hudder betrayed no surprise and no curiosity.

Questioned, he denied any knowledge of the lady they surmised existed, he knew nothing of his master’s plans, he had no idea what names the initials stood for, and with unvarying respect and exasperating indifference, he reiterated his ignorance.

“Well, we’ve got to find that woman!” Nash declared, and Trent, interested anew, agreed.

“The man must have been already married,” Trent said, thinking deeply. “For if not, that will would be of no use. If it were made before the wedding ceremony, it would be annulled by the marriage, so why do that? But it is dated June thirtieth, the day before we sailed from New York. So he must have been

married at that date. Now, where is the lady?"

"Waiting for him on the other side." Nash returned. "They were married, no matter when or where. She went abroad—or maybe lives over there. Then he wound up his business affairs, and started off to join her on a—perhaps belated—honeymoon. He brought this beautiful toilet case, also, as I see it, he brought that consignment of jewelry, and somebody knew of it all, and bashed his head in and robbed him in the excitement of the Fourth. Too easy!"

"As to reconstruction, yes—if that's right," Trent said. "But who did it?"

"Foolish question number seventy-nine," Nash answered. "But I don't mind confiding that if I knew I'd tell you, my friend."

"Well, we have E. M. C. to work on. The C is, of course, for Cox. And probably M stands for the lady's maiden name, while E is for her first name. Edith, Elizabeth, Esther—."

"Ethel, Enid, Emily—." Mallory piped, in mockery. "Why guess? Why not wireless back to New York, to the Bureau of Vital Statistics, or whatever the place is, and inquire the name of the lady Oscar Cox recently married?"

"Hal Mall!" Nash cried, staring at him. "Sometimes you show—."

"Yes, I know—almost human intelligence! Well, you fellows may be astute sleuths and all that, but you haven't much ready chicken feed in the way of common sense."

"Can we do that?" Trent asked of Nash.

"Sure, we can do it. Whether we get a reply before we land, I dunno. I fancy the Bureaus and such places are a bit slow in their returns. But, no harm trying."

"We ought to get some answers to last night's messages pretty soon," said Trent, as they finished going through the trunks and found nothing more of interest. The clothes were left for Hudder to refold and repack, and then Trent conceived the brilliant idea of looking in the ship's letter box for possible missives put there by Cox while on board.

"Everybody writes letters and notes the first few days out," Trent said, "thanks for gifts and all that, if not regular business letters. Let's look."

Permission gained, they opened the mail box, and Cox's handwriting being easily distinguishable, they soon found several letters obviously written by him.

"It seems sort of awful," said Nash, hesitating as he was about to break the seal of the first one, "this opening a man's mail when he can't say a word in

protest!”

“Why, we’re doing it in his interest,” Trent cried. “All we do is for the purpose of bringing justice against the wretch who killed his fellow man. I don’t see the necessity of any apology for that!”

“I should say not!” exclaimed Mallory.

The letters, however, seemed not of great importance. Three were to women and contained thanks for flowers and books sent to the steamer. They were couched in courteous but conventional terms, and were most certainly not to close friends.

Two were to men at summer resorts and merely stated that the writer’s foreign address would be the Hotel Britz, London, until further advices.

The last, a fat letter, was of more enlightenment.

It was quite evidently to Cox’s lawyer, one Mark Sheaffer, and told him of a few business details to be attended to. Also it enclosed two other letters which Mr. Sheaffer was instructed to address and post in New York.

These were penciled on the outside with a light E. F. and J. F. presumably to be erased when the lawyer should address them properly.

They were, of course, opened.

The one to E. F. said simply, “Do not try to find me. It is useless.”

The other, to J. F. said, almost equally briefly, “Everything all right. Muff all right. Don’t worry. Will write from London.” This laconic screed was signed “Osee,” which, they concluded was a nickname for O. C.

“About as wise as when we started,” Nash said, disappointedly.

But Trent was thoughtful. Muff, he remembered was a code word he had seen before. He must find out what it meant. But he said nothing about it, for he had not told the others of the copies of wireless messages he had read up in the operator’s office.

He couldn’t have said, exactly, why he was withholding this information, but he was impelled to do so, for the present, at least.

They went down to report to the Captain, and found his room overflowing with a crowd of youngsters who had come to pester him, as he laughingly expressed it.

Though not overly fond of the flapper gang, Captain Van Winkle was kind

hearted and indulgent toward them.

“Why, yes,” he was saying, as the others came to the door. “Yes, I see no reason why you shouldn’t have your Treasure Hunt. Today?”

“No, tomorrow,” said Sally, the ringleader. “We have the Treasures, Mrs. Craig gave us a gold vanity case, and Mr. Camper gave us a stickpin. So we’ll fix it all up for tomorrow afternoon.”

“All right, all right,” said the Captain, shooing the young folks out as he saw the men arrive. “Scoot, now, I’m busy!”

The rollicking horde ran off, and behind closed doors, Captain Van Winkle listened with interest to the report given him.

“Are we much farther along?” he asked dubiously, for it all meant little to him.

“Indeed, yes,” Nash declared. “We have lots of addresses of people Cox knew and we have a certainty that there is a woman in the case somehow or somewhere. And that, to my mind, is a whole lot!”

“Yes?”

CHAPTER IX

THE TREASURE HUNT

“Have you heard the latest reports?” Amy Camper spoke eagerly, and appropriated a vacant chair near Maisie as the latter sat idly looking out to sea.

The girl looked up, a little surprised, for she had not encouraged the Campers in their efforts at sociability.

“Oh, I know you’re not crazy about me,” said the volatile little woman, “but really, I’m not so bad when you know me. You know you’re very exclusive, Miss Forman.”

The light laugh that accompanied the words was intended to take off the edge of their rudeness, but to Maisie’s mind it only accentuated it.

“Then why intrude on my exclusion?” she returned, but it was said in a good-natured tone.

“Oh, come now, don’t take that attitude. Let’s be chummy, do. You chum with those youngsters, why not with me? I assure you I’m worth while.”

Maisie laughed. The woman was so irrepressible.

“But I don’t doubt that,” she said. “Only I’m not of a gregarious sort, and the trip is so short—.”

“Yes, I know all that. Now, let’s talk about the murder. Do you know they say there’s a woman in the case?”

“Do you mean a woman killed Mr. Cox?” Maisie’s eyes widened in horror.

“Oh, I don’t say that—but it seems there’s a woman mixed up in it somehow.”

“How?”

“Nobody knows, exactly, but in his luggage they found all sorts of presents for her—gold toilet sets and jewels fit for a queen—.”

“Ridiculous, Mrs. Camper. Are you sure of this, or is it unfounded rumor?”

“That I can’t say. Only the stories are afloat—one hears them everywhere. Aren’t you interested in the matter at all?”

Amy Camper looked at her curiously.

“Yes, but not in silly stories, without foundation. I should be glad to know that they have discovered who killed poor Mr. Cox, and that the murderer would be brought to justice. But I have no interest in the details. I never read detective stories, you see.”

“Yet you are close friends with the great author who writes them,” and Mrs. Camper smiled slyly.

“Yes,” Maisie returned, with dignity, “Mr. Trent is very courteous and friendly. He is an interesting man.”

“Who is?” said Owen Camper, joining them. “Trent? Oh, yes, he’s very clever. And I believe he’s on this job of tracking down Cox’s murderer. Personally, I doubt if he can do it. On a big ship like this, it’s mighty hard to know much about people. I say, Miss Forman, don’t you think it might be something to do with ‘The Black Hand,’ the society, you know?”

“Why, I never thought of that! You mean the clan or gang, or whatever they call it?”

“Yes, the Blackhanders. It might be their work.”

“But I understand that bronze hand was Mr. Cox’s property. It would be a coincidence if it had been used by the society! Or do you mean Mr. Cox was a Blackhander?”

“No, not that, of course. But I don’t get it at all.”

“You were among the last to see Mr. Cox alive, weren’t you?”

Maisie put the question quietly, but it seemed to startle Camper.

“Why—what makes you think that?” he said.

“I don’t know—but your chair was near his, and you left the deck—when did you leave the deck?”

“I don’t know—nobody ever knows the time of such movements. When did you?”

“I don’t know, either. But I was at the table when you came into the dining room.”

“Were you?” and Camper looked at her, curiously. “Look here, Miss Forman, do you know what I think? I think we ought to hang together—.”

“Hang together?”

“Yes, all our crowd—I mean all on this side of the deck, Cox’s side, you know. We must stand by one another, if we are questioned.”

“Will you please explain yourself definitely, Mr. Camper?”

“Don’t scare the life out of her, Owen,” said his wife. “Miss Forman is not interested in the murder, personally.”

“But, this is what I mean,” the man insisted. “Anyone on this side of the deck might be suspected of killing Cox. When we are questioned—as we all will be—I think we ought to declare that we were all off the deck before the crime occurred. For, we were, you know, and inquiries would lead nowhere.”

“All off the deck? How can you possibly know that?”

“Because we were all anxious to get down to the dining room and see the fun. Cox wasn’t killed until one-forty, and by that time we were all at our tables.”

“I think they assume the crime was committed between one-ten and one-forty,” Maisie corrected him. “Do you know that they have discovered the time more definitely?”

“No, I don’t know that they have. I went off at one-twenty and he was alive enough then.”

“They say you declared you left the deck at one-ten,” Maisie said, and her straightforward glance was a little disconcerting.

“But, as I told you, we can’t state those things with any exactitude. Nobody knows, to the moment, when he did anything.”

“Then you ought to have told the detectives that,” and Maisie’s glance was now distinctly reproving. “They must be given all the help possible.”

“Are you accusing my husband of this thing?” Amy Camper’s tone was shrill and angry.

“Good gracious, no!” and Maisie smiled at her. “But I’m sure you agree that we must all tell all we know, but we must be most careful as to its accuracy.”

“You’re right, Miss Forman,” Amy smiled at her. “Now, look here, let us take you under our wing. You are so alone on board. We won’t bother you to death but—you do need an older woman at times. Come and sit at our table in the dining room,—it breaks my heart to see you eating all alone.”

“Thank you,” Maisie again withdrew into her shell of cold disdain. “I prefer a table to myself. I like to read while at meals, rather than talk.”

“Oh, very well. But do be friends, do be chummy. I can do a lot for you. I know nearly everybody on board.”

“So do I!” and the beaming face of Lily Gibbs smiled as she came by and heard Amy’s last words. “Nearly everybody. I say, Miss Forman come out of your shell and be a mixer.”

“See if you can persuade her, Lily,” Amy Camper said, as she and her husband drifted away, and Miss Gibbs remained.

“You can’t, Miss Lily,” Maisie said, but not unkindly. “If you’re my friend, I wish you’d try to protect me from ‘mixing,’ instead of thrusting it on me. Can’t you understand, even if the Campers can’t, that I don’t want to mix. Surely, I make it plain enough.”

“Surely you do,” Miss Gibbs returned, placidly. “Why is it, my dear? You know you’re getting yourself talked about.”

“Talked about! What do you mean?”

“Why, everybody’s saying that since you’re so averse to being sociable there must be some reason—.”

“Good Heavens!” cried Maisie, “one would think we were in a small summer boarding-house! Why, on a big liner, one is supposed to be as independent as in a large city hotel!”

“Yes, but they think you’re mysterious. Travelling alone, you see, and no friends on board—but men—.”

“Hush!” and Maisie’s eyes blazed, “I won’t stand it! How dare you talk to me like that?”

“I’m just telling you what they say,” Miss Gibbs’ placidity was undisturbed. “It isn’t nice for a young girl like you to get herself talked about.”

“I’d rather be talked about than to be talked to—like this! I don’t refuse your friendship, Miss Gibbs, but I resent your intrusion on my affairs and I resent your speech. If you and the Campers continue, I shall have no recourse but to remain in my cabin all the time.”

“And what would poor Mr. Trent do then?” Lily laughed slyly.

“He would, I think, be sorry, for we are friends,” Maisie said, simply. “But I would rather forgo his pleasant chat, than be subjected to the sort of talk I’ve had this morning.”

“Well,” Miss Gibbs took her departure, “I’ve done my part. I’ve warned you

that you're being talked about, and called snifty and snobbish and all that. If it doesn't bother you any, why, all right."

"It certainly doesn't!" said Maisie, with a voice full of angry scorn.

Then the youngsters came along. Sally in the lead, intent on her proposed frolic.

"Oh, Miss Forman," she cried, "will you join the Treasure Hunt? You pay ten dollars, you know, and it goes to the sick babies' fund. Then we search the boat for the hidden treasure—and it's such fun! And we've Mr. Mason to help us—in Mr. Cox's place."

She was clinging to the arm of Sherman Mason, who looked a little embarrassed as he smiled down at Maisie.

"You see, Miss Forman," he explained, "the Captain said that the young people ought not to be deprived of their frolics because of the tragedy on board. In fact, he said, and I agree with him, that was all the more reason they should have diversion. It's a terrible shadow to be cast over their sea trip, and I feel we ought to do what we can to blot it from their memory. So I'm—well, I'm just under Miss Sally's orders. May we hope you'll join in the game? Surely you need diversion as much as the other young people."

Maisie smiled at being classed with the flappers, but as she was about to decline the invitation, she remembered what she had been told about her unpopularity and it occurred to her here was a good chance to refute the aspersions, with no help from the Campers-Gibbs faction.

"Why, yes, I think so," she said with her charming smile. "But you must instruct me. It so happens that I've never attended a Treasure Hunt—on board a liner."

"It's this way," Mason said, courteously, "we hunt in couples. If you will be my partner for the event, I will show you the routine and all that."

Again she hesitated. She knew Mr. Mason only slightly, yet save for Trent, there was no one on board she especially wanted for a partner. And after that cat's remarks—as she mentally styled Lily Gibbs—she felt it would be wiser not to hunt with Trent, even if he should ask her.

So she said, gracefully, "Thank you, Mr. Mason. I shall be pleased to have you for my partner in the Hunt—and I hope we shall be the winners—the victors—what do you call them?"

"The finders," chirped Sally. "Good for you, Miss Forman, I was afraid

you'd be too upstage to join in. Now, may we hunt in your cabin? Captain won't allow us anywhere without the passengers' permission."

"No, my child, certainly not. I told you that when you asked me before."

"Yes, but that was before you said you'd hunt with us."

"Not in my cabin," said Maisie, decidedly. "I strenuously object to such an infringement on my privacy. You have plenty of other places?"

"Oh, yes, it will be all right. We'll let you know more when our plans are farther along. Oh, there's Mrs. Hemmingway. We must see her about this. Come on—" and the wild horde flew along the deck, while Mason sat down a moment by Maisie.

"Gay little piece, Sally," he commented. "Real flapper type, but with a good clear brain inside her little bobbed noddle."

"Yes, I can't help liking her. But I'm almost sorry I agreed to this rollicking game. I'm not upstage, as she puts it, but I'm afraid it's a bit undignified—."

"Oh, come now, Miss Forman, you've promised me, and I shan't let you off. It will do you good to mingle with, the scatterbrained bunch, and besides, a lot of older, even elderly people are joining in. Myself, for instance."

Maisie looked up to meet his frankly smiling eyes.

"Oh, well," she said, mischievously, "if you old gentlemen are in it, it is assured of dignity at least."

"Didn't catch any compliment, did I?" he said, gayly. "You'll take back your epithet when you see me scamper for the Treasure."

"Do we have to scamper?"

"Of course. Unless you're just going to be a make-believe seeker, and hang behind."

"Perhaps that's just what I shall do. Will that handicap your efforts?"

"Not of necessity. Though as a proper cavalier I shall wait on my lady."

"Well, we'll see. Here's Sally back again."

"Oh," cried the irrepressible one, "we're going to have the Hunt today, this afternoon at four o'clock. I'm afraid if we wait till tomorrow somebody else will go and get murdered, or something. Puppy Abercrombie and I are going to fix up everything in a jiffy. It's a lot more fun to do things in a hurry. Puppy is a good worker." She looked admiringly at the youth who returned an adoring

glance. His more dignified Christian name of Dane had been extended to Great Dane, and then shortened to Puppy, as easier to handle.

He was tied to Sally's apron string with the rest of the boys, but being as she said, a good worker, his star was just now in the ascendant.

"Miss Gibbs and Mr. Camper are to hide the Treasure," Sally further informed, "and some grown-up Smarty cats are going to invent the clues. I don't do any of those things, for if I did I couldn't hunt, you see. So I look after some other details. Come along, Mr. Mason, you're wanted."

Apparently the energetic girl had found a worthy successor to Oscar Cox, for Mason rose, with an acquiescent smile and followed her.

"What's all this?" Max Trent said, wonderingly, as he turned up a few moments later, and took his own chair. "They say you're going to join in this infernal Hunt game, as Sherman Mason's partner."

"Yes," Maisie smiled her most enchanting smile at him. "You're not pleased?"

"Rather not! Why couldn't you hunt with me?"

"Nobody asked me, sir, she said."

"But you knew I would! And I never dreamed you'd go in for the fool thing!"

He was distinctly disgruntled, and Maisie's feminine whim rejoiced at the sight.

"Oh, well," she sighed, "one must have a little diversion now and then."

"Diversion's all right, but why couldn't you take it with me?"

"I was so afraid I wouldn't be asked, I said 'yes' to the first invitation," she returned, demurely.

"What has come over you? Are you going in for gayety?"

"Why not?"

"Instead of—tragedy?"

Trent felt a bit of a brute to refer thus to the scene of the deck rail, but he was beginning to be impressed by the contradictoriness and mystery of this girl who interested him so deeply and he was determined to get at the root of the matter.

"Yes," she said, steadily, and very gravely, as she looked straight at him,

“instead of tragedy.”

“I’m glad,” he said, heartily, entirely reassured by her sweet, appealing eyes, “and will you—will you promise not to return to the—er—tragedy act?”

“I promise,” she said, but her voice was somber now, and her gaze left him and wandered out to sea. It stayed there so long, that he ventured to interrupt her reverie.

“Well, since you’ve thrown me over in the matter of the Treasure Hunt, will you dance with me this evening, in the lounge?”

Her face turned back to his, white and startled looking.

“Oh, no,” she spoke abruptly, “oh, no—I couldn’t—couldn’t dance—.”

“Very well, then, will you stroll the deck with me. It’s moonlight—and perhaps the moonlight may—may illumine our hearts.”

“Sounds nice!” she said, and now the lurking mischief reappeared in her smile. “I’ll see about it, and—tell you at dinner time.”

With that he was forced to be content, and they lapsed into a desultory conversation that was nearly if not quite in their usual vein.

At four o’clock that afternoon the Treasure Hunters gathered in the lounge for instructions. There was a large party for many were interested in the cause, and others came for the fun.

Maisie looked very sweet in a sports costume of white knitted silk with a fluttering chiffon scarf of jade green and a little hat to match.

The Instructor gave them as a first clue the number forty-nine, nothing more.

Faces were blank for a moment, and then someone cried, “Stateroom 49!”

“Of course,” they chorused and all rushed to that stateroom.

But to their knock the door was opened by a smiling stewardess who said, “No, not *Room* 49.”

The emphasis was unmistakable, and a bright mind offered, “Table 49!”

Down to the dining room they sped, and pounced on the table bearing the charmed number.

Here they found a card under a plate which bore the legend, “Not *Table* 49.”

Well, what next? Aha, Deck Chair 49!

To the deck and found the chair occupied by a pleasant old lady, who

beamed at them through her spectacles, and said, “Not *Chair 49!*”

Then they were puzzled, and much thinking was done.

“Not a real number,” Mason volunteered. “Perhaps a jest—say, a forty-niner.”

“Is there one on board?” asked many, and the information was forthcoming that there was, an old chap in the second cabin, who was a real forty-niner.

Down they trooped, and the guess was right.

Old Mr. Gorton was so glad to see the merry crowd he was loath to do his part and give up the paper which would send them away.

But he was persuaded, and he surrendered a card bearing only the words, Humpty Dumpty.

Here was a poser.

“Eggs,” somebody suggested, “the kitchen!”

Like a flash, many rushed for the kitchen, but Maisie said to Mason, who was watching her animated face with admiration in his eyes, “I don’t believe it means eggs and I’m not going down to the commissariat department. You go, if you choose.”

“Not if you don’t. Have you any idea what it means?”

“No. Humpty Dumpty sat on a wall. There’s no wall on the ship, is there?”

“Not exactly. There may be, but they wouldn’t give such an obscure clue.”

“No, I suppose not. Well, how about Humpty Dumpty in a book—in the Library?”

“Good! Mother Goose, of course. Didn’t suppose they had that in the ship’s collection—it may belong to some child on board.”

Several overhearing, inclined to the Library, and thither they went.

But no Mother Goose was in the catalogue, though the Library Steward aided them in their search all he could.

Nor did anyone know of a child owner of the book.

“Oh, wait!” Maisie cried, “I have it! Alice In Wonderland!”

The beam on the face of the Library Steward showed that her guess was right and that he had known all the time. He handed her the book when she asked for it, and as she quickly turned to the part about Humpty Dumpty, between the

leaves lay a sealed envelope addressed to the Treasure Hunters.

Quickly opened, it read:

Seek the quarter deck,
There you'll surely find
Treasure in good measure
Of a pleasant kind.

The quarter deck. Many didn't know just exactly where to find that locality and stewards and officers were besieged with questions.

All were answered quickly and courteously and the seekers scrambled here and there, hunting assiduously, but in vain.

Nearly half an hour was spent in fruitless hunt, when a clever brain suggested:

“Not the real quarter deck at all! A—oh, a deck of cards!”

Blank faces greeted this idea, until somebody else said, “That's right! The smoking room, or the lounge—.”

Then everybody was off, searching for all the playing cards on board.

And at last, two of the Younger Set, a pretty flapper and her attendant swain, discovered in the drawer of a card table a part of a pack of cards—thirteen, to be exact—representing a quarter of a deck! And on the cards were the two parcels that were their rich reward. A lovely vanity case for the girl and a gold stickpin for the boy were grasped with shouts of glee and triumph.

But Sally Barnes was not among the group of merry-makers.

No, she was down in the Captain's office, shut in alone with him, and her earnest face and grave tones were quite at variance with her usual demeanor.

“Yes, Captain Van Winkle,” she said, and her eyes held unshed tears, “I did just what you told me. I got the Stewardess out of the way, and then I slipped into Miss Forman's room, when all the others were on the other side of the boat. And—in the back part of the wardrobe, behind a hatbox, I found these.”

As gravely as the girl, the Captain looked at what she gave him.

They were five jeweler's cases, empty of contents.

Yet it was only too easily to be seen, that one had been made for a necklace,

three for bracelets, and the other a square case that might have contained a shoulder buckle.

The name on the satin lining of each was the name of the Fifth Avenue jeweler whose receipted bills had been found among the effects of the late Oscar Cox.

“You found these empty, Miss Barnes?”

“Yes, Captain. Oh, what does it mean?” and the unshed tears poured down in a flood.

CHAPTER X

PLANTED?

Captain Van Winkle was at his alert best.

Detective work was not his *metier*, but looking into matters that affected the well-being of his ship was.

“Don’t cry, Miss Sally,” he said, kindly. “Whatever it means you have done only right in finding these things for me. How did you know—or rather what made you suspect the jewels we are looking for might by any chance be in Miss Forman’s possession?”

“Well, you see,” Sally stammered a little, “she wears a stunning pearl necklace with a square diamond for a clasp, that never came from the five-and-ten!”

“And how did you know that the jewelry in question included a necklace of that description?”

This time the girl hesitated longer, but said, at last, “Well, Captain, I wormed it out of Hal Mallory. He’s a nice chap, but about as water-tight as a sieve. And I wanted to know about Maisie Forman. She’s a mystery to us on board. Why is she travelling alone, Captain Van Winkle?”

“Bless my soul, I don’t know! Do you suppose I ask such questions of my passengers?”

“No—but do you—don’t you think she is an—you know—an adventuress?”

Captain Van Winkle threw back his fine head and laughed.

“No,” he said, “no, I don’t. And you’re a minx to mention such a word in connection with that young lady. Don’t do it again.”

Sally was not afraid of the Captain, for she was a minx and was afraid of nobody, but she knew when she was scolded and took it docilely.

“But, Captain,” she said, “what about these jewel cases?”

“Ay, that.” He fell into a brief reverie.

Then suddenly he looked up, touched a bell and sent for Trent.

Max Trent, none too well pleased to be dragged away from Miss Forman's society, came at once, and the captain laid the matter before him.

"You are investigating the murder of Mr. Cox," he said, looking at Trent keenly, "and, as you know, we found among Mr. Cox's papers, certain jewelry bills. Do you think these empty jewel cases represent the items specified on those bills?"

Trent examined the cases with interest.

"I think there can be no doubt of it," he said. "See, this is obviously a case for a necklace. These three just alike would answer to the three bracelets and this other one would just fit a shoulder buckle. It seems a shoulder buckle of gems is a popular ornament just now. And, as you see, these cases bear the name of the firm who sent the bills."

"Yes," said the Captain, "tell Mr. Trent where you found these, will you, Miss Barnes?"

Sally looked up regretfully. There was no sauciness on her pert little face now. It was with a sad inflection that she said:

"I found them, Mr. Trent, in the wardrobe in Miss Forman's stateroom. They were hidden behind a hatbox."

Trent stared at her a moment. He was not a man given to disclosure of his feelings. But his brain worked like lightning. He thought of several things to say, of several attitudes to take, and then decided on the simplest.

"Indeed," he said. "And how did you happen to be looking in there?"

"The Captain asked me to," Sally returned, still with that odd quietness that made her seem older and prettier.

"In the interests of the case," Captain Van Winkle supplemented.

"Well," Trent said next, "it is a find. It certainly is a find. Of course they were planted. That's what detectives call it, when incriminating evidence is purposely placed where it may be found."

"Yes," and Captain Van Winkle nodded. "Now we must find out who did the planting. By the way, Miss Barnes tells me that the pearl necklace Miss Forman wears is like the one described in the jeweler's bill."

"Rot!" Trent was getting nervous. "As if a pearl necklace could be described."

"But it mentioned a square diamond clasp, and they are not common."

“Are you implying that Miss Forman’s necklace could by any possibility be the necklace of the Cox bill?”

Trent’s tone was icy, and his eyes glittered.

Captain Van Winkle sighed. He knew men, and he saw at once that if there was any question of Maisie Forman’s implication in the case, he could expect no more help from Max Trent.

And he had depended on Trent. He knew he was not a detective, but he was experienced in the ways and means of detectives, vicariously, and he had hoped that Trent would at least find a suspect before they landed at Liverpool.

“I am not implying anything, Mr. Trent,” he said, “but it is necessary to take these facts into consideration. It will be an easy matter to ask Miss Forman about the cases. If she denies all knowledge of them and has no idea how they came to be in her wardrobe, we surely have a clue to work on. We must be able to discover who could get to her room and put them there. Perhaps it was done during the Treasure Hunt, for then intrusions into some state-rooms were permitted—.”

“Not Miss Forman’s.”

“No, but Miss Barnes went in there—at my request—and the one who ‘planted’ the cases may have done so, too.”

“Yes,” Trent was holding himself well in hand. “Yes, it may be so. Suppose I ask Miss Forman about it at once. I left her in her deck chair, taking tea.”

“Yes. Just a moment, Mr. Trent. Have you any suspicions at all—in any direction?”

“Not suspicions, Captain. But there are a few ways to look—a few people who might be questioned. For instance, the man, Hudder. You know, in Detective Stories it is frequently the valet or butler who is the villain. In this instance, it is peculiarly probable that Hudder is involved. He knew his master, as no one else on board did. He had every chance in the world to do the dreadful deed. He had unquestioned access to the Bronze Hand, and—,” Trent paused impressively, “he had ample opportunity to take those cases, having himself stolen the jewels—to Miss Forman’s room and secrete them where they were found. That is my opinion as to what happened, and I’ve not the slightest doubt you will find I’m right.”

Trent sat back, with the aspect of a competent and complacent Sherlock Holmes, and Sally told Hal Mallory afterward, that she could almost hear him

saying, "Elementary, Watson, elementary."

The Captain listened attentively and then said:

"You spoke of a few people—who else?"

"Well, I hate to mention names, but I suppose it must be done. I don't like the way Mr. Camper talks and acts. He seems to me like a man with a secret, and I can't help the feeling that he knows more than he has told. Both he and his wife are of a pushing, intrusive sort, yet when you ask them anything, they evade your questions."

"The Campers, eh? Anyone else?"

"No, unless it might be Andrews, the room steward. I have a hunch—that's what we detectives call it—a hunch, that this particularly grewsome murder was not committed by one of the First Class passengers. It seems to me the work of a brutal mind, a man of the lower orders, without heart, soul or conscience. Gentlemen, so-called, have committed murder, but they shoot or stab—they do not batter, like a caveman, and with such a terrific weapon. No club or bludgeon could have done the work of that fearful bronze hand!"

"You knew Cox, Mr. Trent?"

"Only on board. I've heard him hold forth in the smoking room, and I've seen him frolicking about with the youngsters, but I can't say that I knew him. Miss Barnes, here, knew him far better than I did."

Sally, who had been sitting silent, broke into the conversation.

"Yes, I did know him pretty well. That is, I knew the side he showed us young people. And he was as nice as nice. He was gay, genial, and very generous. He treated us as a big, kind uncle might. But that wasn't all there was to Oscar Cox. No sir! That man was deep—oh, but deep! He had a diabolical charm—don't laugh—he did! Oh, not like a Sheik—I know what I'm talking about—more like a—a Power of Darkness. If he wanted a thing, he'd move Heaven and earth, but he'd get it. Yes, sir! And he could bend anybody to his will, not by persuasion, but by absolute domination. Now, don't think all this showed out in his gay friendship with us youngsters, but I read that man, oh, you bet I did!"

"You show great divination of character, Miss Barnes," the Captain said, smiling a little.

"But it's all true, every word of it. And here's what he said to me, one day: 'Before I leave this ship, I'll tell you something that will knock you all silly with

astonishment. By Gad, I will!’ That’s what he said, and by the earnest way he spoke, I knew he meant it. So, I tell you he had some secret, some big secret, and he meant to make it public before we landed. Oh, I don’t mean it was a bad secret, I don’t know what it was. Only—I do believe that his—his death, was the result of that secret. Or mixed up with it somehow. I mean somebody killed him because of the secret.”

“Miss Barnes,” the Captain said, kindly, “I’ve carried many passengers across the ocean, and I think I may say, that fully half of them had secrets. More, I think fully half the earth’s population has secrets. I own I can’t get excited over the news Mr. Cox meant to divulge.”

“And, too,” Trent offered, “the man was an awful liar. I say that dispassionately, for it is true. He told conflicting tales on many subjects, especially of a mythical nephew, of great prowess, who cropped up one day in Boston and the next day in Timbuctoo.”

“Yes,” and the Captain smiled reminiscently, “I’ve heard him tell of his namesake nephew. Well, Mr. Trent, what do you advise as the next step? It seems to me there ought to be some sort of an inquiry. I won’t say Inquest, as we have no coroner, no jury, no witnesses. But I propose to get together a few people and ask questions of and before them all. This may lead to new disclosures which we could get in no other way. I know that both you and Mr. Nash have done all you can in the way of private investigation and technical detective work, but, as you will be the first to admit, it hasn’t amounted to much. So, I shall exercise my prerogative of absolute authority and carry out my own plan. If nothing comes of it, at least there will be no harm done.”

Trent was terribly upset. It seemed to him there might be great harm done by the Captain’s plan. Though he had scoffed at the idea of Maisie Forman’s connection with the case, it had stirred his heart to vague forebodings. There was much about her that was mysterious, much that was strange and inexplicable.

Why had she tried to jump overboard? Why had she told no one of her home life or circumstances?

As if to harass him further, Sally spoke up.

“Do, Captain, and I’ll help you get up the party. We’ll have Hudder, of course, and Andrews. And, then, let me see, the two Campers, and Miss Forman; by the way, Captain the whole ship is talking about that girl.”

“Why, Miss Barnes?”

“Oh, just because she’s so mysterious. At first, they merely kicked because she went high-hatting around, and wouldn’t speak to anybody. But lately there have been rumors—just vague hints, you know, that she’s queer.”

“Queer, how?” Trent’s eyes glared at the volatile Sally.

She looked at him steadily, and returned:

“She walks around, late at night, after everybody else is in bed. There, tie that up in a pink ribbon and take it home! I’m sorry to knock your inamorata but, as I see it, you’re going to lay down on this job, and—I think I’ll have to lend a hand.” Then Sally’s impish little face broke into a lovely smile. “Now don’t think for a minute I’m agin Miss Forman—I’m for her—miles for her! But she’s got to be told that she’ll find the footlights farther front—and I suppose I’ve got to be the one to broadcast it to her.”

Trent hesitated. He resented Sally’s impudence, he resented her remarks about Maisie, but, also, he sensed her attitude as a defender, a helper. Did he want her? He didn’t know, and at his irresolute face, Sally burst out laughing.

“Don’t worry, Mr. Trent, I’m not going to eat the girl. Well, go ahead, Captain, fix up your party. Ask Mr. Sherman Mason, he’s a wise bird, if ever there was one, and Mr. Craig, too. You need people like that for ballast. Then, with Polly Nash and Hal Mall and me, I guess we’ll call the invitation list closed. Oh, you might add Miss Gibbs. Silly Lily they call her, but she’s nobody’s fool.”

“Miss Barnes,” and Captain Van Winkle looked seriously at the girl, “I admit I have heretofore looked upon you as a—.”

“As a half-witted flapper,” Sally put in, coolly, when he hesitated.

“Your own words,” he took it up, with equal coolness. “But today I’ve learned your true worth. If you will continue to help me, I shall be grateful. But I want to exact secrecy. It is not the thing to spread our plans at large, and I’d like your promise.”

“Put it there!” and Sally held out an impertinent hand. “Your word is my law and if I couldn’t keep secrets better than some men, I’d take a correspondence course in silence!”

Trent went at once in search of Miss Forman. She was not in her deck chair,

so he scribbled a hasty note and sent it to her room, begging her to meet him on the upper deck, where he had saved her life that night.

He did not word it thus, but she understood.

He went up and found a secluded nook for them, and had two chairs in readiness when she appeared.

She was already dressed for dinner, and wore a light wrap over her yellow chiffon gown. Round her neck was her string of exquisite pearls, and as she seated herself, Trent noted with a peculiar sensation that the clasp was a brilliant and beautiful square cut diamond.

“I asked you to come out because—because I want to talk with you,” he said, a little lamely, as she looked inquiringly at him.

“Do you know, I thought that might be the reason,” she laughed, and then she gave a little sigh of content as she settled herself in her chair.

The deck was empty save for themselves; everybody was dressing for dinner, and the spot was ideal for a chat.

The sun was still well above the horizon, but it was making its way downward through a tangle of crimson and gold and blue, and the reflections were on softly rolling waves.

A little breeze stirred the gold bronze tendrils of Maisie’s hair, and her fine face looked sweeter than ever as she turned it to Trent confidently.

“I’m glad you sent for me,” she said. “I was listless, and I dressed early thinking I’d come out for a while before dinner. So, here we are.”

“Yes,” he said, with an answering smile, “here we are. Oh, Maisie, I love you so—can you—do you—want me to?”

She sat upright and looked at him.

“Are you in your right mind?” she said, softly.

“Never saner. I didn’t mean to blurt it out like that—but I had to. Tell me, Maisie, tell me—.”

“Tell you what?”

“Tell me everything! Tell me that you love me, that you’re glad I love you, that you will marry me, and that we’ll live happy ever after!”

His spirits rose as he saw no reproof in her glance, but she did look puzzled.

“Max,” she said, quietly, “there’s a reason. Why this avowal just now?”

He stared at her. “I suppose it is precipitate. But, it’s love at first sight, and all that sort of thing.”

Maisie looked off at the sea and sky, and said, as if to herself:

“There’s no moon, he isn’t moonstruck. There’s not enough sun left to think he’s sunstruck. Wake up, Max!”

She smiled at him indulgently, as at a foolish child, but he saw the light of happiness in her eyes, the hint of joy in the dawning flush on her cheeks.

“Good God, Maisie!” he cried, “if to hear that much so enhances your beauty, what will you be when I tell you more!”

“Silly!” and she flushed a little deeper. “And, my Lord, do you already assume that I fall into your hand at your asking, like a ripe plum?”

“Peach, not plum; and of course you’re going to say ‘Yes.’ Eventually, why not now?”

“If this is a proposal, it strikes a flippant note,” she said, musingly, and Trent at once turned serious.

“I don’t mean to, darling. My love for you is the deepest, truest, sweetest thing in my whole nature. It has grown quickly but none the less surely and sanely, in these few days. Please tell me, sweetheart, please tell me you want it.”

He leaned over to her chair, taking both her hands and looking imploringly into her face.

Maisie Forman was very beautiful just then. For the first time in her life she heard words of love that awakened a response in her own breast. For the first time she was asked for love by one to whom she was glad to give it. Other men had proposed to her, other men had begged for her favor, but to none of them had her own heart said “yes.”

Now, and though she had known it before he told her, now she was spoken to by the man she loved, the man she wanted.

For a moment she was silent, dumb with the glory of it.

“Dear,” she said, very quietly, “dear,” and her inflection of the simple word conveyed to him more than the wildest protestations of affection could have done, “I cannot answer you now. I will—at some other time.”

She looked away a moment, and then said, lightly:

“Come, you must run and dress for dinner. You will be late.”

“No, sit still.” He spoke with sudden determination. “Maisie, listen. There is something I must say to you, and say quickly. Your name is being spoken by the passengers—.”

“Yes, I know. Some of the cats told me.”

“But you don’t know all. You are going to be called on to explain—.”

“To explain!”

He could scarce tell whether her face paled with anger or with fear. It was perilously near the latter, he thought.

“Yes. Oh, how can I tell you—but I must. Maisie—Miss Forman,” his deep distress and concern made him seek refuge in formality, “where did you get that string of pearls you wear?”

No stammering schoolboy could have done the thing more stupidly. No village idiot could have been a greater blunderbuss.

Yet his tragic, almost fierce tones, told her this was no jest, no light query.

Unconsciously she clasped the pearls with one hand and stared at him with frightened eyes.

Yes, frightened, he was sure now.

“What—what do you mean?” she stammered.

“What I say,” he returned. He was getting hold of himself now, and this thing must be gone through with. “Surely, you’ve no objection to telling me. Who gave them to you?”

“I fail to recognize your right to put such a question.”

“Perhaps not. Then, tell me this. From what jeweler did they come? At what shop were they bought?”

Her face cleared a little.

“Oh, you’re only asking as a connoisseur. Why, they came, I think, from Cartany’s. They are lovely, aren’t they?”

“Yes. And who gave them to you?”

“Now, see here, my friend. I’m not engaged to you, you know. I didn’t say ‘yes’ to your extraordinary proposal of a short time since. I object to these

questions, and I refuse to answer.”

“But, Maisie, listen. Oh, my dear heart, you’ll have to listen. I’ll have to tell you. Among the papers of that man who was killed, that Mr. Cox, they found some jeweler’s bills from Cartany’s and one was for a string of pearls like these —.”

“How does that interest me, do you think?”

Her hauteur was suddenly in evidence and her tones were like cut steel.

“Because it interests others. Because the pearl necklace itemized had a square diamond clasp. Because—,” he decided on frankness, “because the case that belongs to the necklace was found in your room—.”

“In my room! Another case, beside my own?”

“Oh, dearest, is it your own? Can you prove it?”

The light of hope came to Trent’s eyes, as he awaited the answer.

“What have I to prove? This is my own necklace—given to me by—by a friend. I refuse to be quizzed or questioned in the matter. Perhaps you’ll be good enough to tell me what it’s all about. Why are you telling me these strange things and who is making the trouble?”

“Yes, I’ll tell you.”

They were standing now. Trent held her by her two arms, and with steady eyes looking into her own, and in a steady voice, he told her.

“Among the Cox papers, they found receipted bills for a pearl necklace also three diamond bracelets and a diamond buckle. The jewels cannot be found, but all five of the cases were discovered today, in your wardrobe, behind a hatbox.”

At first, Maisie Forman looked steadily back into the deep eyes fixed on her own. As she continued to gaze, her face grew whiter and whiter, until, with a stifled, choking catch of her breath, she turned aside her own eyes and drew herself away from him.

Then, turning back, she said, suddenly:

“You knew this, just now, when you—you told me—.”

“Yes,” he took her gently in his arms. “Yes, I love you, and always shall. For myself, I ask no explanation, I put no inquiries. But, oh, my Beloved, others will question you. Others will demand explanation. And, so—so, my dearest, let me help you.”

“What do *you* think about the cases found in my wardrobe?”

“I think they were planted there,” he returned, promptly.

“Planted?”

“Yes, that means put there by somebody, with an intent to get you into trouble, or at least, to shift trouble from his own shoulders.”

“Oh. Yes—yes, I see, that’s what they were—planted!”

And then, with a strange, tantalizing, almost mocking smile, she ran away from him, and disappeared down the corridor that led toward her own cabin.

CHAPTER XI

THE JEWELS

Maisie Forman did not remain in her stateroom more than a minute.

She emerged again and returned to the spot where she had left Trent. He had disappeared and the girl looked carefully about the deck. She saw no one, and advancing to the rail, she gave one more quick glance behind her, and then raising her arm flung from her hand something. It flew far out to sea descending in a long curve to the water. And as it fell it glittered in the still brilliant rays of the setting sun.

Maisie clasped her hands and stood, with unseeing eyes, staring across the waves.

A light touch fell on her arm, and Sally Barnes, arrayed in a saucy pink dance frock, stood beside her.

Unlike her usual expression, the girl's face was grave, even accusing.

"What did you throw away?" she demanded, with an air of authority.

Maisie turned to her with such a forbidding look, that a less determined questioner would have been daunted.

"My own property," she answered calmly, though a red flush on either cheek told of her anger at this intrusion.

"May I go with you—will you take me to your room for a few minutes? Oh, Miss Forman, don't refuse—you don't know what you're up against! I am your friend—see, *friend*. Now come!"

She almost pushed the unwilling girl and as they reached the cabin, it was Sally who opened the unlocked door and they entered.

"Now this is going to be one intensive little conference," Miss Barnes declared, as they sat down. "I've got a dinner date, and then I'm stepping out with Puppy to the dance—it's a big one tonight. But, first, I've got to look after you."

Maisie gasped.

"Look after me! Miss Barnes, there are boundaries—."

“Yes, I know, but I’m not *to* ’em. Not yet. Now, you listen, Miss Forman, just listen a minute. You’re in bad, and you’re going to be in worse, unless you watch your step. Where did those jewel cases come from that I found in your wardrobe? Yes, it was I who found them. You needn’t look at me like a siren. Your face is a real ship-launcher, and all that, and you can put it all over the men—any man, but it doesn’t get you anywhere with little Sally. Where did those five jewel cases come from?”

But Maisie had found herself. Her first shock of surprise over, she was more than a match for this sputtering child.

“Oh,” she laughed, lightly, “I know what you mean now. Yes, I heard they were found there. But I have nothing to do with them. They were planted there.”

“Planted! Oho,” said the astute one, “I see. Max Trent has been coaching you. You’d never got off that word so glibly if he hadn’t!”

The quick flush on Maisie’s cheeks told Sally she was right, and all at once she changed her tactics.

“Dear Miss Forman,” she said, “please don’t think me a silly fool. Nor a butter-in. Honestly, I am here to help you, and if you won’t accept my help, at least listen to what I want to say. Those cases held the jewels that belonged to Mr. Cox, the man who was killed. It is thought the man who killed him did it to rob him of the jewelry. I mean, he killed Cox, because he already had the jewels, and Mr. Cox knew it and was after him. But all that doesn’t matter, the men are looking after that. What worries me is the way they are continually dragging in your name. And all the ship is talking about it, and the stories grow bigger and bigger every time they’re told. It is said that you prowl around at night when you ought to be in bed, and that—well, I’ll out with it—and that pearl necklace you wear is the one that is billed to Mr. Cox.”

“Is that all?” asked Maisie, with perfect composure, and with icy calm.

“Why, yes—except that they say you’re mysterious, and nobody knows who you are or why you’re travelling alone, and you won’t speak to anybody hardly, and they say that Mr. Mason is in love with you—.”

“Mr. Mason!” Maisie’s blank amazement was unfeigned. “Mr. Mason! Why I scarcely know the man!”

“They say you know him better than you pretend, and that you and he are in cahoots—you know—oh, how shall I put it—jewel thieves!”

The words were blurted out as Sally burst into tumultuous sobs.

Maisie Forman laughed.

It wasn't an amused laugh, it wasn't a pleasant laugh to hear, but it was intelligible. It was the laugh of one who is laughing at Fate, one who could smile as they piled up the fagots, one who would laugh in the face of death.

Sally sat up.

"Don't do that!" she said, sharply. "My, you give me the shivers!"

"You have given me the shivers, Sally," Maisie said: "Now, look here, is this all true? Are they really saying these things?"

"Not right out, you know. But I hear a lot of talk and that's what they whisper, among intimates. To strangers, they say, 'Ah, yes, Miss Forman. Beautiful girl, but very reserved and exclusive. All alone, yes. No, I don't know anything about her, I'm sure.' That's the way they talk, then."

Sally's mimicry was so perfect, Maisie had to smile.

"Let me think a minute," she said; "but you're in a hurry. Run along, child."

Sally looked wistful.

"Not till you tell me what you're going to do."

"To do?"

"You heard me."

Again Maisie laughed. The chit was so pert.

"Why, I don't know what I shall do," she said, lightly. "What would you do?"

"Me? Oh, I'd come right out and tell the story of my life and what's my real name. Why, how you jumped then! Isn't Maisie Forman your real name?"

But the bait didn't work.

"Go on, what else do you advise?"

"That you tell where you got these," she touched the gleaming pearls at Maisie's throat, "and who gave them to you and all. And then, that you mix a little with the people on board, not chummy, you know, but just don't be quite so Ritzy. You're a darling, *I* think but the censors don't agree with me. And," the bobbed head drew close to the masses of gold bronze hair, "tell Mamma what you threw overboard just now."

"There, there," and Maisie shook a playful finger, "that's only idle curiosity.

I shan't gratify it. Curiosity is vulgar."

"Well, you're not!" and Sally sighed. She looked about at the dainty, though not elaborate appointments and the pretty toilet things on the dresser. "Whatever you are, you're not vulgar."

"I should hope not," and Maisie's face showed horror at the thought.

"Well, I must pop off. I haven't learned much, have I?"

"No. Did you come to learn? I thought you came to dispense information. You've certainly done that."

"Yes. Will you profit by it? Will you promise—?"

"I'll think it over. Let that be enough promise for the present. And—I thank you, Sally. Your action was kind. Your motive flawless. I thank you more than I can tell you. I—I am very miserable, Sally—."

The proud head bowed and Sally's arms went round the shaking shoulders.

"Nonsense!" Maisie cried, suddenly lifting a smiling face, though there was a suspicion of moisture on her eyelashes. "I didn't mean to do that. I never break down—whatever I do, Sally, I don't break down. Now, run away and play."

Sally went, and Maisie Forman turned to her mirror.

Carefully, she rearranged her disturbed hair, touched her pale cheeks with a mere hint of rouge, dusted her nose with powder, and then, her head held high and an angry gleam in her eyes, she went down to dinner.

Trent watched her enter the room, thinking how queenly she was, and how well her air of haughty reserve became her.

Sally Barnes watched her, too, and came to the somewhat obvious conclusion that her plea had been of little effect.



That evening the Captain held an Inquiry.

A man of action, he had decided that the rumors about Miss Forman were too numerous and insistent to be ignored. He had concluded, too, that he must enlist some new help, for Max Trent had showed only too clearly his loss of interest in the detective pursuit.

In a confab with Pollard Nash, it had been decided to call for the advice of

some men of standing and experience, who had not yet been questioned.

“Disinterested witnesses, that’s what we want,” the Captain said, resentful of Trent’s defection.

“I’ve watched the men in the smoking room, when we’ve talked over things,” Nash said, “and I’ve judged more by their attitudes than by what they say. I think if you call in Mr. Allen, and Mr. Stanhope, you’ll get good, sound judgment.”

“Mr. Stanhope is that quiet chap, with glasses.”

“Yes, he says very little, but when he does make a remark or ask a question, it’s always right to the point.”

The gathering in the Captain’s room was more the nature of a pleasant reception than anything official.

That is, at first, but when about twenty had assembled, Captain Van Winkle showed his hand.

“Although unpleasant,” he said, “my duty is plain. I have two grave responsibilities suddenly thrust upon me, which I must deal with so far as I can, before landing at Liverpool. One is the dastardly murder of one of my passengers, the other is, to locate, if possible, a large amount of valuable jewelry, which we have reason to think Mr. Cox had in his possession. I have called you together to ask both advice and help. Passengers can hear and see and learn a great deal which cannot come to the eyes or ears of a Captain. So, in the interest of justice and humanity, I ask you all to help me by telling anything you may know, which may shed light on these two mysteries.”

“May I ask if you wish us to tell you our opinions, Captain, or only to relate facts known to us?”

This query, made in a pleasant, well-modulated voice, came from the man called Stanhope.

He was dark, lean, middle-aged, with a calm, courteous demeanor.

There were scores of men on board whom nobody knew, and this man was one of them. It is always so on a liner. Perhaps a quarter of the passengers are known to everybody, both by name and by appearance. Another quarter may be generally or widely, but not universally known. A third quarter is known to few, and the rest known almost not at all.

This implies no invidious distinction, but is merely the general state of affairs.

Stanhope chanced to be one of those practically unknown, and all present looked at him with interest.

“Both, Mr. Stanhope,” the Captain answered him. “Can you help?”

“I am afraid not; I have heard only the current gossip.”

“I can help,” said Owen Camper, with an air of decision. “I know, Captain Van Winkle, it is almost unpardonable to introduce a lady’s name in such connection, but I feel it my duty to tell you that gossip is rife concerning Miss Forman, doubtless known, at least by sight, to you all.”

“Yes?” said Captain Van Winkle, encouragingly.

“It is known all over the ship that the cases of the missing jewels were found in Miss Forman’s stateroom, concealed in her best hats!”

“Never mind the hats,” the Captain murmured, “go on.”

“Therefore, as one of your passengers, and as one interested in aiding our Captain in any way possible, I submit, that Miss Forman should be summoned and questioned regarding the jewel cases.”

A few voices were raised in protest at this, but more were of consenting opinion.

Captain Van Winkle’s face was stern, and bore an expression that might have served as a model for a statue of Justice.

“I regret the necessity of such action,” he said, at last, “but I feel that Mr. Camper’s suggestion should be followed out. If Miss Forman has an explanation to make, she will doubtless be glad of an opportunity to make it. If not, it is right that we make the request, at least.”

A message was sent to Maisie Forman, requesting her presence, and very soon the girl appeared.

She was accompanied by Max Trent, and though his face showed a veiled belligerence, the countenance of Miss Forman was as serene as if no care lay on her heart and no sin on her conscience.

“It is assumed, Miss Forman,” the Captain said, with the utmost courtesy, “that you will have no objections to answering a few questions, even though asked in this semi-public manner.”

“None at all, Captain Van Winkle,” she replied, and though she showed her customary hauteur, she gave him a hint of a smile.

Except for a few who already harbored resentment in their hearts, the sympathies of her hearers went out to her.

“You were acquainted with the late Mr. Cox?”

“He was introduced to me on board, soon after leaving New York,” she replied, quietly. “After that I saw him every day, but I think I talked with him not more than two or three times—if that is being acquainted.”

The smile recurred, and Maisie’s cause, whatever it might be, was more ardently espoused by the men present.

“Did you know that Mr. Cox had with him on board, some gems of immense value?”

“I knew absolutely nothing of Mr. Cox’s possessions of any value, and I had positively no knowledge of any jewels he may have owned.”

The girl’s voice rang out clear and true. She was not insistent, she made no grandstand play, but her straightforward gaze and her proud, honest tones carried conviction.

But Captain Van Winkle had not piloted small cities across the ocean for years without having learned that the appearance of honesty is one of dishonesty’s strongest cards.

Undaunted, though not unimpressed, he went on.

“Those jewels, Miss Forman, have disappeared.”

“Disappeared from where?”

This calm inquiry placed the Captain more than ever on his guard.

“That we can’t say, but we assume they were among Mr. Cox’s luggage or belongings. They are not to be found, but these cases,” he opened a drawer and produced them, “were found in your stateroom.”

“Yes?” the lovely face showed a sense of injustice. “And may I ask why my room was searched without my permission—in my absence? Why was I not allowed to grant permission for that search, and assist in it?”

For perhaps the first time in his career, Captain Van Winkle felt guilty of a breach of good manners. When he had commissioned Sally Barnes to look for the jewels in Maisie Forman’s stateroom, it had been at the advice and under the influence of the “detective talk” of Pollard Nash and Hal Mallory, and now in his own personal rôle of gallant Captain, the procedure he had followed seemed mean and despicable.

“You are quite right, Miss Forman, it should have been done that way. But I am going to ask you to forgive it, and lend your aid at present, if you can, to the unravelling of the mystery. How do you suppose the cases came to be in your wardrobe?”

“I assume they were placed there by the person who robbed Mr. Cox, with the intent, doubtless, of incriminating me in the affair.”

Dispassionately, even uninterestedly, the girl looked about the room.

So far as her manner showed, the whole business was outside her attention. It would seem that she took for granted the jewel cases had been planted in her room, and had later been removed therefrom. To her, then, the incident was closed.

But this very aloofness, this very indifference, awoke fresh suspicion in the mind of the worldly-wise Captain.

If not a technical detective, he had at least a power of reading the mental processes of others, and, too, he was given to quick action.

A brief whispered order sent an attendant on an errand, the result of which was the immediate appearance of a stewardess.

Closely watching Maisie, his eyes alert for any danger or trouble to her, Max Trent saw her pale a little and her fingers clinch slightly as the woman entered.

“Your name?” the Captain said, briefly.

“Susan Magee, sir.”

“Stewardess?”

“Yes sir.”

“You have charge of Miss Forman’s stateroom?”

“Yes sir.”

“Very well. Now, Magee, have you ever seen these cases before?”

The woman gave one glance at the five leather jewel cases, and stood silent, twisting the corner of her white apron.

“Answer!” said the Captain, amazed at her hesitation.

“Yes sir,” her voice was a mere whisper and her lips quivered.

“Where?”

“In Miss Forman’s room, sir.”

“In her wardrobe?”

“No sir—in her dresser drawer.” This was barely audible.

“Brace up, Magee,” the Captain spoke kindly, but decidedly. “Were they empty when they were in Miss Forman’s dresser drawer?”

“I don’t know sir. I never touched them.”

“How do you know they were there?”

“I would see them, now and again, when Miss Forman might open the drawer, sir.”

“I see. And when did you see them? Only within the last day or two?”

“That I don’t rightly know, sir. I should say longer ago than that.”

Maisie Forman’s clear voice broke the short silence that ensued.

“You can’t be sure, Magee, that these are the same cases, can you?”

“No, Miss, I can’t rightly be sure of that.” She seemed relieved at this suggestion.

“You only know that you saw some similar boxes in my possession?”

“That’s all, Miss.”

Captain Van Winkle was deeply impressed with Maisie’s charm and beauty. He admired her patrician bearing and aristocratic effect. But now, he was beginning to be amazed at her poise and cleverness, especially the latter.

And as her exceeding cleverness dawned upon him, he became more and more suspicious of her good faith.

At any rate, he believed, the girl must have had a number of jewel cases in her room, and if they were her own they would be there still and could be brought forward. He determined to strike in another direction while irons could yet be heated.

“Magee, you are here to answer questions truthfully and without any personal bias. To your knowledge does Miss Forman ever go out of her room late at night—very late?”

“She—she has done so, sir.”

“Yes. And where did she go. Perhaps to the Baths?”

“Miss Forman’s room has its private bath, sir.”

“Can you tell me then, on what errand Miss Forman went from her room so late?”

“I—I don’t like to, sir.”

“Tell, woman!” For the first time the Captain raised his voice.

“Well, one night—that would be Monday night, I was going off duty at twelve o’clock, sir, and I saw Miss Forman come quietly out of Mr. Cox’s room and slip round to her own room, sir.”

The silence was so heavy that one scarce dared look up.

Trent’s face was drawn with an agony he could hardly control.

Amy Camper dropped her eyes to hide her joyous excitement. The men, especially those disinterested witnesses who had been called in for advice and judgment, looked at the floor, with instinctive effort to spare the feelings of the girl, who now seemed in the position of the prisoner in the dock.

But Maisie Forman herself, held her head high, her face was impassive—only her eyes, tortured, despairing, hopeless, looked like the eyes of a lost soul.

“Yes,” the Captain’s voice took up his task again, though he was conscious of the same distress he had once felt he had to watch a subordinate flogged.

“And was that the only time?” he went on.

“The next night, sir, Miss Forman tried to throw herself overboard.”

“What?”

“Yes, sir, I think the poor girl is—.”

“Stop! We are not asking you what you think. Did you rescue the young lady?”

“Not I, sir. That young gentleman there did.”

She pointed to Trent.

“I did,” and Max Trent took up the cudgels. “Miss Forman is not at all times responsible for her actions. This, Captain Van Winkle, must explain to you a great many things otherwise mysterious. I sat on deck Tuesday night, and I saw Miss Forman come out there. She walked straight past me, with unseeing eyes, and climbed up on the rail. She was just about to leap—or it seemed so—when I sprang and caught her. She returned at once to her room, and I discovered that

beyond all doubt she had been walking in her sleep. The same explanation, I assume, would cover her trip to Mr. Cox's room, if indeed she made such a trip. The two rooms are at the ends of similar and contiguous corridors and the mistake might easily be made, even by a person awake. At any rate, to my positive knowledge Miss Forman had the merest acquaintance with Oscar Cox."

"It doesn't require much acquaintance to enter a man's room and steal his valuables," Owen Camper declared. "And the sleep-walking is a good dodge, but it won't go down."

"Are you a sleep-walker, Miss Forman?" asked the Captain, directly.

"Not that I know of," she replied quietly, and a scornful smile curving her lips.

"No," the stewardess broke in, irrepressibly, "the lady is not that, but—oh, sir, let me speak—but she isn't in her right mind. Only this evening, just before dinner, I saw her throw her jewelry far out to sea."

This interruption went unreprieved, for Captain Van Winkle's mind was in a state of chaos.

If Miss Forman was really demented, or had some form of mental derangement, that would explain nearly all if not all of the mysteries. She certainly seemed sane enough, but that was no sure criterion.

He cut the Gordian knot. Rising, he bowed with grace, announced that the meeting was over and said good night.

CHAPTER XII

STANHOPE

Most of the men drifted to the smoking room.

Some possessed enough chivalry to refrain from public comment on the proceedings, but others had no scruples against discussing every phase of the case.

“Off her nut, eh,” scoffed Owen Camper. “Not that queen! She knows what she’s about and which side her bread is buttered. Jump overboard, indeed! She’d do anything to get the sympathy of the public.”

“She doesn’t have to do anything like that to get my sympathy,” declared Pollard Nash. “That poor girl is in a fix. And I believe she’s entirely the victim of circumstances. I don’t believe for a minute she stole those jewels—if indeed, there were any jewels to steal.”

“What was in those empty cases, then?” demanded Camper. “Don’t talk bosh just because the thief is a pretty girl.”

“Perhaps it’s kleptomania,” suggested Hal Mallory. “I’ve heard rich women are sometimes afflicted with that.”

“How do you know she is a rich woman?” countered Camper. “Lives by her wits, I’ll bet.”

A murmur of disapproval went round the room.

Then Sherman Mason spoke.

“Look here, I’ll set you straight on a few points. Miss Forman is a well born and well brought up young lady. She is the daughter of Jonathan Forman, a man well known in New York business circles. She is an only child and lives with her father on Madison Avenue. Her mother has been dead many years, but an aunt has always had charge of the girl. That is the extent of my knowledge of Miss Forman’s circumstances, but I want it to go on record that her name is not one to be bandied about so lightly.”

Camper was abashed, for Sherman Mason was not only a power financially and socially, but he was a big, strong man, physically, and like all bullies,

Camper was a physical coward.

“Then,” he said, sarcastically, “granting she is such a fine young lady, how do you explain her going to Cox’s room and stealing his gems, and then when discovery was imminent, throwing them overboard?”

“I don’t explain it, nor do I admit that those are proven facts. But I advise you, Mr. Camper, to be a little more moderate in your statements.”

Mason calmly lighted his cigar, but his cold, steely gaze was fixed on Camper in a way that made that boulder squirm.

Yet Mason gave no further hint that he was at all personally interested in Miss Forman. He seemed merely a squire of dames, in general, and most of the men present mentally applauded his attitude.

“I knew Cox slightly,” Mason resumed, “though I was not a social friend of his. But I have taken over his queer servant, Hudder. The chap was at loose ends and he is remarkable in many ways. Wonderful valet and all that, and glad to get a position.”

“Gee! I wouldn’t want the beggar around!” exclaimed Allen. “Aren’t you afraid he’ll do for you with that Bronze Hand, same’s he did for Cox?”

“Why, do you think Hudder killed Cox?”

“Certainly I do. Most people on board think so. Who else?”

“Oh, how can anyone tell? Just think, here’s this brutal, this fearful murder, and the villain right here on this ship, and not a thing can be done to find him out! The Captain’s Inquiry meeting brought out nothing of value. There can be no Inquest, because there’s no Coroner and no Jury, and, therefore, no verdict. Consequently, of course, no arrest, and Friend Murderer walks the decks serene and safe!”

“Yes, a nice sociable kind of murder,” said the irrepressible Mallory. “Sort of Pink Tea murder, nothing real about it but the victim. It’s all very well for Captain Van Winkle to hold his little sociables, and then say, ‘Thank you all so much. Good night. Come again.’ But where does that get us?”

“But Captain—.”

“Oh, Lord, I’m not blaming the Captain. He’s done all he can, and a lot more than some captains would have done. But what we want on the job is a real, live detective, who could read the clues which must lie around thicker’n spatter, only we can’t see ’em.”

“They’ll get that sort from Scotland Yard as soon as we land. They’ll be waiting for us at Liverpool.”

“Yes, and what good will that do? They can’t hold this shipload of passengers while they go sniffing around with a lens, like a hound on a scent. There never was a detective story where the Tec didn’t go round like a hound on a scent. And by the time the hound is through scenting, the criminal will be off to Paris and the Riviera!”

“There seems to be an astonishing lack of clues,” said Stanhope, in his mild way.

“Seems to be, yes!” and Mallory scowled. “But I tell you that’s only ’cause we can’t see things right before our eyes! I admit I can’t, and I rather fancy myself as a detective. Now, take those gloves—.”

“What gloves?” asked Stanhope.

Mallory told, then, of the gloves that had been found by Sally Barnes.

“Gloves ought to mean something,” Stanhope said, musingly.

“Are you a detective?” It was Polly Nash who spoke. He had been sitting listening, dumb and despondent over his failure to achieve any brilliant results from his efforts.

“A sort of one,” Stanhope said, smiling.

“Oh, Lord, we all seem to be a sort of one. I wish we had the real thing.”

“I never heard of a case so lacking in essential details,” Mallory said; “no coroner and all that, but also no suspect, no motive—.”

“Oh, yes,” Mason interrupted, “the motive was robbery. As I see it, the murderer stole the gems, then killed his man, then tried to plant the evidence on Miss Forman.”

“Well, you *have* doped it all out,” said Nash, with pretended admiration. “Only trouble seems to be that we don’t know the murderer, we can’t find the gems, and we haven’t yet extricated Miss Forman from her net of difficulties.”

“You’ll never find the murderer,” Camper said, having recovered his self-esteem. “I tell you that hand was flung—see, flung from a distance—.”

“Then we should look among the champion quoit throwers or shuffle-boarders,” said Stanhope, smiling. “Now, I don’t think it was flung at all.”

“Why not?” Camper sounded belligerent.

“Well, first, why do you think it was?”

“Because by doing so, the murderer could be some distance off, could watch his chance, and fling the thing so quickly, and then turn away, that even if he were seen a moment after, he would not be suspected.”

“Clever, very clever,” Stanhope said. “But Mr. Camper, have you examined the wounds on the dead man’s face?”

“Heavens, no! I wouldn’t do it for a million dollars!”

“I did,” said Stanhope, gravely. “And let me tell you gentlemen, those gashes were clawed in, not made by a flung missile.”

“What!” cried Nash, looking with fresh interest at Stanhope.

“Yes, and moreover, they were made by someone standing behind Mr. Cox.”

“Behind him! But his chair was always back against the wall.”

“Yes, and that wall is the outer wall of the ship’s Library. And there is a window just there, right above Mr. Cox’s chair—not a porthole, but a square window. Remember?”

“Yes.”

“It was through that window that the brute leaned out, and committed his fearful crime. There was no one in the Library, not even the Library steward, for all were out on the stairs, looking at or joining in the general festivities.”

“That’s fine reasoning, Mr. Stanhope,” said Mason. “You say you examined the—the—.”

“The wounds, yes. It was not a pleasant thing to do, but I felt that some information might be gained that way. The depth and direction of the terrible gashes show beyond all doubt, that the clawing hand was used from behind and above Mr. Cox’s face. The embalmer will deliver the body to the authorities in Liverpool and what I say will then be evident.”

“Well,” Camper said, “that’s good work, Mr. Stanhope—fine sleuthing, but it doesn’t get us anywhere. Now, can you go ahead and find the Man in the Library?”

“No,” and Stanhope smiled ruefully, “that’s as far as I’ve gone. The finding of the gloves proves that the murderer was too canny to leave finger-prints on the bronze hand—but nobody leaves finger-prints nowadays. They’re all too wise.”

“After all, is Oscar Cox much loss to the community?”

This remark in cold, scornful accents came from Craig, who heretofore had not said much.

“That’s aside the point,” said Pollard Nash, severely. “If we are citizens of a law-abiding country, it is our duty to apprehend any criminal, irrespective of the worth of his victim.”

“And Cox was as good as the average,” Mason put in.

“Awful boaster,” commented Craig. “Look at those stories now, about his nephew! Sometimes that chap was in Europe, then again in Asia, Africa or America.”

“A traveller,” said somebody else.

“Yes, but now the nephew is a parson, and next an artist, or a blacksmith.”

“Not a blacksmith,” said Mason, smiling. “I’ll set you straight on the nephew business. As a member of a club Cox belonged to, I’ve often heard him yarning his big stories. And the truth is, he had five brothers, and each of them named his oldest son after Oscar Cox. So, there are a lot of namesake nephews, and it pleased him to mystify his hearers with apparently conflicting tales, which were all true.”

“Then, that’s that!” and Nash smiled. “Wish we could clear up all the other mysteries as easily.”

Max Trent stuck to Maisie like a shadow, that is, when she would let him. After the session in the Captain’s room, she told Trent she must go at once to her cabin, for her nerves were unstrung and she was on the verge of a nervous breakdown.

“And I don’t wonder,” said Trent, in the gentlest way. “You shall go, dear, very shortly, but first take a few turns with me on the upper deck. The fresh air will help calm you, and I just can’t let you go quite yet. It’s early, you know.”

She smiled faintly, and went with him in silence.

In silence, too, they walked several times around the deck. It was little used at night, and the few who were up there were absorbed in their own affairs.

At last, he found two chairs in a pleasant corner, and they sat down there.

“I don’t know what you must think—,” Maisie began, but Trent interrupted her.

“Then I’ll tell you what I think.” He leaned over and drew her light wrap more around her shoulders. “I think you’re the dearest, sweetest thing God ever made. I think you’re in a peck of trouble through no fault of your own. I think you’re going to confide in me to whatever extent you choose, but if you tell me nothing at all, I still think you are the purest, best woman in the world, and you are mine. If you don’t love me already, you are going to do so, and if you wish me to leave that subject for future discussion, as you implied, I will do that. Only understand this thoroughly, I am yours, to command, to use, to lean upon, to consult, to ballyrag, to offend, to deceive, to mystify—and, after this trouble is all over, to marry. There, my Little Girl, how do you like that?”

“Oh, Max—” And she buried an agonized face in her hands.

“Only one thing,” he said, soberly—“Maisie—you’re—you’re not married, are you?”

She showed a scared, white face.

“Oh—I don’t know—oh, no, no, of course not!”

And then, with one of her sudden motions, she jumped from the chair and ran away to her own room.

Trent sat thinking.

But his thoughts were so chaotic, so inextricable, that it could scarce be called thinking.

What did she mean? What *did* she mean?

In her room Maisie found Lily Gibbs awaiting her.

“Door wasn’t locked, so I popped in,” said that self-complacent person, as Maisie plainly showed her surprise at the invasion.

“So I see.”

“Mind if I look at you?”

“Not in the least. Shall I primp a bit?”

The comedy of the situation helped to restore Maisie’s poise, and she seated herself at her dressing table, and calmly proceeded to use her vanity case, as if dressed for a party.

“How old are you?” said the strange visitor.

“Twenty-three.”

“Why aren’t you married?”

“Why aren’t you?”

“Oh, pshaw, turn around here and look at me.”

Not at all unwilling to be diverted by this farce. Maisie turned and gazed calmly at the other.

She seemed to see a new Lily Gibbs. One with an earnest, kindly face, with searching, but understanding eyes, with a sorry but sympathetic smile.

Wondering, Maisie kept on looking at her. It seemed to her that Lily was reading her very soul.

But she wasn’t, for though Miss Gibbs pretended to clairvoyance and all that, it was only pretence, and she had no more idea of what was in Maisie Forman’s soul, than Maisie had of what was in hers.

“Well,” said Miss Gibbs, in a practical way, “you’re in deep, aren’t you?”

“In deep?” said Maisie, who had long since learned that nothing so confuses a questioner as to have words repeated.

“Yes, in deep trouble.”

“Trouble?”

“Look here, Miss Forman, you could do a lot worse than to have me as a friend.”

Then Maisie forgot herself and spoke on impulse.

“Yes, I could have you as an enemy!”

Lily Gibbs flushed. “I didn’t quite mean that, but really, my dear girl, if you will let me—.”

“I’ll not let you do anything if you call me your dear girl! It’s a phrase I hate.”

“Well, I guess you aren’t mentally deranged, after all. I came in to see if you were.”

“Oh, so that’s the latest rumor in the ship’s higher circles, is it? It got about quickly!”

“Yes, and strongly. I tell you, Miss Forman, you may be sane, but you’re a fool!”

“Who isn’t?” Maisie spoke listlessly. “I don’t so much mind these ridiculous

rumors, you know, except that I'm rather a conservative person by nature and I hate to go on deck and hear everyone whispering about me, and looking at me. Yet, I hate even worse to stay in my cabin all the time. What can I do?"

"You hook up with me. See? Then, I'll be with you, and if anyone says anything or even looks at you cross-eyed, I'll fix 'em!"

"How?" Maisie gave an amused smile.

"How? I'll talk about 'em, that's how! And that'll be quite enough, I can tell you."

"Oh, I believe it. Now, Miss Gibbs, why are you willing to befriend me? You know I am under all sorts of clouds, none of which, at present, seems to show any silver lining."

"Yes, but that's all right, so long as you aren't demented. I have a horror of folks who aren't all there."

"Oh, I'm all there. I assure you, I'm quite all there."

"I see you are. You couldn't fool me about that. I says to Amy Camper, 'I don't believe for one minute that girl's crazy, but I'm going to find out.'"

"And what did Mrs. Camper say to that?"

"Oh, she said you wouldn't let me in, and if you did you wouldn't talk to me."

"Mistaken, wasn't she?" And then Maisie bestowed on her guest one of her very best smiles, which completed the subjugation of Lily Gibbs.

"Oh, Miss Forman, how beautiful you are!" was the spontaneous tribute of the plain-visaged spinster. "I'm so glad you're friendly with me. Now, you listen to me. You move your deck chair over by mine—."

"Oh, no," and Maisie gave a distinct shudder. "You're over there by—."

"Yes. I know," and Lily watched her closely, "by Mr. Cox's chair. But I can't come over by you—there's no chair vacant."

"We'll make Mr. Trent give up his. At least whenever we require it. I quite understand and value your offer, Miss Gibbs. And I accept it as frankly as you make it. I am alone, and I am bothered by the rude curiosity of the people. It would be of great help to have you back of me—I mean by my side, ready to help if intrusive people come round and chatter. I wonder why you are so good to me."

Lily Gibbs did not tell the truth, which was merely that she was gratifying her own curiosity and satisfying her own love of adventure and excitement.

It was not, as she pretended, to help and comfort a friendless girl, but to learn for herself what was the truth of the rumors about Maisie Forman, and what was the real meaning of the mystery that surrounded her.

Miss Gibbs existed on excitement, and her opportunities were limited.

Here was her chance, and if, incidentally, she could help the girl, she had no objection to that.

A tap at the door interrupted their confab with a message from the Captain, full of courteous apology, but requesting her presence at once.

“Since you’re my friend, will you go with me?” Maisie asked, handing Miss Gibbs the note to read.

Lily was a bit disappointed, for she had looked forward to some immediate confidences, but they could come later.

So the two went to Captain Van Winkle’s room at once.

The Captain had on his judicial air, and Maisie’s heart sank. Here was no occasion for engaging smiles or appealing femininity. It was to be an interview of serious inquiry and perhaps accusation.

“Miss Forman,” the Captain began, unheeding her companion, “as you know, my duties in the present crisis are painful but inexorable. I will therefore, without apology, ask you some questions which I expect you to answer.”

“Yes, Captain Van Winkle,” Maisie returned, and there was not a flicker of an eyelid to betray apprehension of any sort.

“You have been in the habit of sending wireless messages to your father during this voyage.”

“Yes.”

“You have sometimes employed code words, or words whose meaning has been prearranged between your father and yourself?”

“Yes,” Maisie’s wonderment was unfeigned, and Lily Gibbs fairly lapped up the situation.

“Naturally, in our investigations, all the wireless messages sent by passengers have been examined, and where necessary, inquiries have been made. I tell you this, that you may realize this questioning is part of our routine

work.”

“Yes.”

“Then, I trust you will be willing to explain what is the meaning of the message you sent to your father yesterday. It reads, ‘No behold what do on or back.’ Will you translate?”

“Certainly,” and Maisie gave him her sunniest smile. “I hoped to be met at Liverpool by some friends. But they were to wireless me on board if they would be able to meet me there. I have had no message from them and I am a little uncertain whether to proceed on my journey alone, or turn back to America. The word *behold* means merely outlook, view of the future. Translated, it means, ‘I have not heard from Aunt Isabel. I have no plan. What shall I do? Shall I go on alone, or shall I turn back to New York?’ My father understood it and replied for me to go back home at once. If possible on the *Pinnacle*. That is all, Captain.”

The Captain looked at her. Though urbanely courteous, he had never been one easily inveigled by feminine charm, and, moreover, always had a lurking suspicion that their charms were used oftener than not to deceive and dissemble.

And, in man or woman, he detected at once a false note, a lack of sincerity, with almost unerring accuracy.

And he knew Maisie Forman was not telling the truth. He knew that her translation of the code was not the real one. What she was, he did not know. Whether an adventuress, an anarchist, a smuggler, or what wrong-doer she might be, he could form no opinion; but that she was lying he was positively certain.

This conviction made him less hesitant about going on with his inquiry.

“Thank you. Now, here is a message sent the same day by Mr. Mason. I will trouble you to listen to it. ‘Behold nothing off for italy take muff.’ Do you note the use of the word behold?”

“Yes, how interesting. And does Mr. Mason use it for the same meaning Dad and I do?”

“I don’t know,” the Captain suppressed his desire to shake her. “Can you imagine what muff means?”

“I certainly cannot, but it must be code, as muffs are not usually needed on an Italian trip.”

“No. Now here’s another coincidence. A letter put in the ship’s mailbox by Mr. Cox, before he died, uses the same word. See, ‘Everything all right. Muff

all right. Don't worry.' Strange, isn't it?"

"It certainly is. But why, Captain, am I entertained with these cross-word puzzles? Do you want me to decode any more of my own messages for you?"

"No, thank you," the Captain returned, with, for him, a short manner. "Good night, Miss Forman."

She said, "Good night, Captain," and went away and he remarked to himself, a little forcibly, "Damn the women!"

CHAPTER XIII

MASON, THE FRIENDLY

Maisie went to her room, threw herself down on her bed and gave herself up to the luxury of tears. She had one of those big, tumultuous, soul-clearing crying spells which seemed to shake her all to pieces, mentally, morally and physically.

She had lied to the Captain, the message she had decoded for him was anything but correct. She had carried off the interview with a brave face, but her heart was quaking. She didn't know which way to turn. If she could only reach Liverpool without having her secrets discovered—but, she reflected, what should she do then?

Her father had said to return home at once—but, she didn't want to go home. This, she frankly told herself, was because of Max Trent. She loved him, and he said he loved her—but, how could that matter go any further, with her awful secret between them?

Trent was so adorable, with his deep eyes and that fascinating little way he had of looking out from under his brows.

And yet—and then the tears would flood again, and Maisie cried until she was utterly worn out and dropped off to sleep from sheer exhaustion.

Awaking in the small hours, she saw the corner of an envelope under her door. It proved to be a letter from Trent, and she read it with eagerness.

“My darling: I must write you to tell you again how I love you, and how I want to help you. Trust me Maisie, in every way. I know you are the purest, most innocent soul in the world, and nothing could make me believe otherwise, unless you told it to me yourself. But, no confession of wrong of any sort or in any degree could make me love you less or trust you less. I have to say this, for I want you to know how absolutely and entirely I believe in you. If there is anything wrong, anything that you have to account for or explain, tell me all about it and let me help. For our lives are henceforth inextricably bound together, and you can never escape me. I know something is troubling you,

Dear Heart, and I want to share all your troubles and help you to overcome them. Do with me as you will. See me when you wish, run away from me when you choose. But know always that I am right here, loving you, waiting for you and ready to do your bidding whatever it may be. Always and forever, your own Max.”

Maisie read the letter again and again.

“Oh,” she breathed to herself, “that is the kind of love I have always dreamed of. Dear Max—if only—oh, if he knew! if he knew!”

But with the precious letter clasped in her hand beneath her pillow, she returned to sleep and only woke to find the stewardess bringing her morning coffee.

“So you think I’m demented, Magee, do you?” she said, so cheerily that the woman stared at her.

“Oh, Miss, if you knew how sorry I was to tell—.”

“That’s all right, Magee, you only did your duty. But, do you really think I’m—er—touched?”

“Well, Miss Forman, ma’am, since you ask me right out like, I’ll say that I have noticed queer things about you that I can’t account for otherwise.”

“Very well put, Magee. Let it go at that. Naturally, you couldn’t account for them otherwise. I’m not sure I can, myself.”

Which speech made the stewardess more than ever firm in her conviction. But she was so relieved that the lady took it so easily, that she promptly dismissed the matter from her mind. A stolid sort was Magee.

Maisie concluded she would go out on deck that morning. She knew she must face a battery of curious glances, perhaps impertinent speeches, but she preferred to face it, rather than show fear.

So, in one of her smartest deck costumes, and with her chair-arm bag containing books and writing portfolio, she sauntered out.

She found Trent there ahead of her, and he rose with quiet politeness to arrange her rug and pillow for her.

“You had my note?” he whispered as he bent above her.

“Yes or I shouldn’t be here,” and the glance that passed between them was that of complete understanding.

“And you can do something for me,” she said, as they were both seated and looking out on the white-caps.

“Anything.”

“You may not enjoy it, but I want you to give up your chair now and then to —,” she hesitated and smiled at him, “to Lily Gibbs.”

“To anyone you mention,” he said with alacrity. “But why the fair Lily?”

“She thinks,” and Maisie spoke seriously, “that I ought to have a respectable female companion, and she’s applying for the position.”

“And a good trick,” said Trent, heartily. “That’s just what you do need, and whatever else Miss Gibbs may be, she’s respectable.”

“Yes; so, if she comes around—or Sally Barnes either, I’d like you to rise and stretch your wings, and flee to some other place.”

“It’s the same as done. And my reward will be a little quiet talk with you alone—when—where?”

“On the upper deck—.”

“In our corner?”

“Yes. About—well, just before lunch time.”

“All right. And I see the Lily heaving in sight, so I’ll fade.”

Maisie was immeasurably grateful to Trent for the light tone with which he carried on, for had he been too serious, she felt her tears were still near the surface. The strain was beginning to tell on her. Her thoughts ran wild, yet she had to preserve outward calm and even gaiety.

“Here you are!” cried Miss Gibbs, and plumped herself in Trent’s vacant chair.

“Yes, here I am,” Maisie smiled at her. “And very glad to see you. I am afraid I left you rather abruptly last night. But, to tell the truth I was pretty much all in.”

“I don’t wonder, after all you had to go through. I declare, Miss Forman, it’s a shame the way you are treated.”

“I’m misunderstood, that’s all,” Maisie looked as calm as if she hadn’t a care on earth. “And what are they saying about me this morning, Miss Lily?”

“Do you really want to know?”

“Yes—it is amusing to hear.”

“Well, they’re sure now that you’re mentally deranged, and they think you ought to have a keeper—a caretaker.”

“Or be put in irons, I suppose. And what is my latest lunatic development?”

“Well, one woman told me that she heard you sent a wireless to somebody saying you were going to Italy and wanted a muff to take with you.”

“Ah, yes, she mixed up my messages with the ones that used muff as a code word. I didn’t, you know. Look here, Miss Gibbs,” a sudden thought struck Maisie, “you went with me to see the Captain last night. I was glad to have you, I didn’t want to go alone. But there was no one else present. Now Captain Van Winkle doesn’t babble, so it must have been you who gave out the bulletins about those code messages, and the gossipers got them all mixed up.”

Lily Gibbs had the grace to look embarrassed, but that’s all she did do. She made no apology for her spreading of the news, and Maisie gave no further sign of reproof or annoyance.

“And so you see,” Miss Gibbs went on, cheerfully, “they think you’re plumb crazy, and they’re feeling sorry for you.”

“Sorry!” and Maisie Forman seemed to resent this rather more than if they had censored her. “Oh, well—and what do you think about me, Miss Lily?”

“Oh, call me Lily. Let’s drop into first names, shall we? Why, I think you’re entirely sane, or I shouldn’t be here at all. As I told you, I can’t stand the idea of an affected mind. It scares me.”

“Thank you. And I assure you I am sane, whatever my actions may seem to indicate. But then how do you explain my taking muffs to Italy?”

Maisie was making talk for the express purpose of impressing the people who were passing and who gave curious if furtive glances, by her friendship with Lily Gibbs. She knew Miss Gibbs was one of the staunchest pillars of society as it was represented on the *Pinnacle*, and she knew that intimacy with her would give a *cachet* few other conditions could bring about.

“Oh, well, in the first place you are not taking muffs to Italy. That was in some other wireless message. And besides, I know enough of that sort of thing to know that code words sound not only meaningless but ridiculous.”

Miss Gibbs spoke as from the wisdom of a person of great affairs and endless secret communications.

“No, I didn’t use the word muff at all, but as you say it means something totally different. Probably it means certain papers or valuable securities.”

“Yes, like as not. But, Miss Forman, they’re going to search your room for those jewels.”

This statement was flung like a bombshell purposely. Lily Gibbs wanted to see how it would be received.

“They may,” returned Maisie, most disappointingly. “I’ve no objection, except that of course no one likes to have her things pawed over by strangers. And I’m not sure they have a right. There’s no question of police—.”

“No, but the Captain is the same as police or anything else, you know. If he says search, they search.”

“Who are ‘they’? Who will conduct the treasure hunt?”

“I don’t know; some officer, I suppose, and probably your stewardess will be present.”

“I see. It’s a little inconsistent, isn’t it, after they said I threw those jewels overboard, to search my room for them? And if I didn’t steal them, they can scarcely think that the thief, after concealing the cases in my wardrobe, would also hide the jewels in my room.”

“My land, Miss Forman, you’re mighty logical, I must say! Why, you might almost be a detective yourself.”

“If I were, I’d take this thing by the right handle, and find out first of all who killed Mr. Cox. Then they might come nearer to finding the jewel thief and the jewels. But perhaps I am also accused of the murder?”

The sudden flush on Lily Gibbs’ face proved that Maisie’s suggestion could not be entirely denied, and the girl exclaimed, angrily; “So that’s it, is it? Do you know, I’m not sure I can stand much more!”

“Oh, now—come, now, nobody thinks you killed Mr. Cox! Why, you were—let’s see, where were you at the time?”

“How do I know? I was either here in this chair or on my way to my room for a book or on my way downstairs or at my place at the luncheon table. It’s impossible to say where one was at a given moment! I’ve been questioned about this before, and that’s the best I can do.”

“Well, they’re asking everybody, you know, and checking up by the Table stewards as to those who were at the tables. It’s all so exciting! My, I’ve

crossed lots of times, but nothing like this ever happened before.”

“Can’t we talk about something else, Miss Gibbs? If you want to befriend me, do change the subject.”

“I don’t wonder you feel like that. Let’s talk about clothes. Where do you get yours? You always look so awfully well turned out. Me, no matter what I buy or how much I pay, they never seem to be right.”

But before Maisie could make a politely contradictory response, Sally Barnes came flying up to them.

“My turn now,” she declared, “hop out of that, Lily Gibbs.”

A vigorous pull from two young arms brought Miss Gibbs suddenly to a standing position, and whirling her out of the way, Sally jumped into the vacated chair.

“Run along, Lily,” she said, “you had your innings and now it’s mine.” She settled herself comfortably, her long legs tucked under her, and touched Maisie’s cheek caressingly with her finger-tips.

“Angel,” she said, “be glad you’ve got me to love you, for you’re being sized up pretty cruelly by the passenger list of this fancy old tub. Do you know they’re saying you did in old Oily Oscar?”

“Killed him?” Maisie looked her horror.

“Nothing less, Angel. And no matter how utterly absurd, how positively ridiculous, how intensely amusing the idea may strike you and me, it’s winging its way like wildfire round the boat and I just thought I’d drop in and tell you.”

“But Sally,” Maisie looked puzzled rather than indignant, “you know how slightly I was acquainted with Mr. Cox. Why should I kill him?”

“Well, they do say,” Sally was hugging her knees and rocking back and forth as she sat sideways on the chair and faced Maisie, “as how you knowed him more’n you pertended.”

“Ridiculous!”

“Yes’m. That’s what I told ’em. And, what do you think they came back with? They say that one day Coxie was passing you—here, you know, in your chair—and he said he’d throw you overboard and drown you.”

Maisie sat up.

“He did say that, I was talking to Mr. Trent at the time, but Mr. Cox was

merely joking.”

“Of course. But the point is, that he knew you pretty well to joke with you like that. See? Oh, Maisie, darling child, they get up all sorts of things to say! Honestly, it’s getting to be like a game—each one tries to see what awful things can be said about you.”

“But why? *why*? Sally, why do they do this to me?”

“Oh, because you antagonized them from the start—.”

“I didn’t mean to.”

“Well, you did, anyway. Why, they wouldn’t act that way to me, if I was deemed guilty of petty larceny and murder and arson and bigamy and all such things. They’d say, ‘Come here, you naughty kid, and ’fess up.’ But with you, they say, ‘Aha, so Miss High and Mighty is in for it!’ and they’re glad.”

“I see.”

“Of course you see, and now—what are you going to do about it?”

“What can I do?”

“Well, as I told you, you could be a little more sociable—but it’s too late, I guess, for that now.”

“Look here, Sally, don’t talk as if I were a condemned criminal. The opinions of a crowd of silly people don’t affect me at all. Gossip means nothing to me. I am above and beyond all such considerations. If there is a definite accusation against me, let somebody in authority come forward and tell me so. These rumors and hints and made up stories are rubbish. I am afraid of nobody, I am afraid of nothing! Let them do their worst!”

“Gee! you’re some goddess! When you talk like that, you look like you could beat the world! Say it again, and say it louder, here comes a bunch of the worst ones!”

Maisie glanced up at the group of people passing, but waited until they were out of earshot before she proceeded.

“No, Sally, I have no intention of justifying myself or my actions except where justification is due. Perhaps—.”

“Perhaps Scotland Yard, then! Oh, Maisie, I’ve *got* to warn you. Won’t you please understand it is serious. The gossip is nothing, the chatter is nothing, but there is an undercurrent of accusation against you—my, I’m talking like a book! that will explode and blow you up if you don’t watch out!”

“And you advise—?”

“Why, I think you ought to have a lawyer, or somebody who can advise you. Mr. Trent adores you, and he is a perfect duck, but you should have a real lawyer, a smart one, who will put all these scandal mongers in their right places, and leave you in peace.”

“My peace isn’t disturbed—.”

“Oh, yes, it is. Your pose is magnificent, but it’s only a pose. And to think of your being advised by Silly Lily Gibbs—.”

“And silly Sally Barnes—.” Maisie’s affectionate smile pleased the girl.

“Yes, I am silly to think of advising you—you Queen! But, will you get a lawyer?”

“How absurd, Sally. Whom could I get?”

“Oh, there are lots on board. I’m sure your father would want you to have one.”

“At last, Sally, you have hit on a real argument. I believe he would. Who is a lawyer?”

“Well, there are lots. And it needn’t be a regular lawyer. Any big, wise business man would do just as well. Here comes Mr. Mason—he’s a corker. And I do believe he means to speak to you. I’ll ooze.”

Like a swift shadow, Sally slipped away, and Sherman Mason came up to find Maisie looking at him with what seemed an especial interest.

“Good morning,” he said. “May I sit here a moment?”

“I wish you would, Mr. Mason. I’d like to talk to you.”

“Do. I am honored.”

“You don’t mean dishonored, do you? I am told that I am not held in high esteem by the majority of the passengers.”

Sherman Mason looked grave.

“It is not an occasion for chaff,” he said, and his gray eyes looked at her seriously. “It is not a matter for light conversation. By some unfortunate mistake, Miss Forman, your name has become mixed up with some unpleasant matters and as I see it, it should be checked before it goes any further.”

“Yes, I quite agree to that. Don’t think I don’t know about it, Mr. Mason, for

I do. But I am curious to know just what it is I'm suspected of, and why."

"Are you in possession of the Cox jewels?"

Maisie turned on him a sudden angry glance, and then said, quickly, "I assure you, Mr. Mason, I have no jewels in my possession except those which are my very own."

"Thank you, I take your word for that."

"Now, I will ask a question," she said; "who killed Mr. Cox?"

"Hudder," he returned, promptly. "Who else could have done so?"

"Why, I heard you had taken Hudder into your employ?"

"Yes, I have. It's one way of finding out if I am right in my surmise, and also the man is a good servant, and if I should be wrong, and he is innocent, I shall be glad to retain him as a servant."

"I've just been told that I am suspected of killing Mr. Cox."

Mason laughed lightly. "That, I grant you, is something that need not be discussed seriously. But what about these other stories? Did you throw jewelry overboard?"

Maisie looked him straight in the eyes.

"Yes," she said.

To her amazement, Mason broke into hearty laughter.

"You are delicious!" he said. "Will you go for a walk with me? I'm sure you've taken no exercise this morning."

"No, I haven't. Yes, I'll go."

With a certain feeling of elation at promenading the decks in company of one of the most honored and distinguished men on the cabin list, Maisie rose and went with him.

It was a little crowded and at Mason's suggestion they sought an upper deck where there were fewer pedestrians.

"I'm glad to have you to myself for a time," he said, looking at her admiringly as the brisk walk brought more color to her cheeks. "The Treasure Hunt was not much fun after all, was it?"

"Why did you join it? I thought you detested youngsters."

"I do. I mixed up in that thing in hope of gaining you for a partner, and by a

stroke of rare good fortune I succeeded.”

“Why Mr. Mason, how gallant you are, and I scarcely know you!”

By some reaction of feeling from the gloom that had enveloped her, Maisie suddenly felt flirtatious, and the smile she gave the man beside her was encouraging. Or so Sherman Mason chose to consider it.

“Miss Forman,” he said, earnestly, “you may not know me well, but I trust you’ll let me amend that. I do know your father well, however, and have known him for years. We have been associated in business ventures—.”

“The Apollonia Mine?” she said quickly.

“That and other affairs of even greater magnitude. He will tell you of my life and standing. But I want to tell you of my regard for you—my love for you. Maisie, dear child, give me the right to care for you, to stand between you and this evil that has come upon you. Give me the right to refute the gossip, to deny the aspersions, to proclaim you to the world, the spotless perfect woman that you are.”

Maisie stood still and turned to look at him. There was no one about and she gazed inquiringly at the man who had spoken to her in such impassioned tones.

“Mr. Mason,” she said at last, with the merest hint of a smile, “some of my detractors declare that I am not in my right mind. I think, I begin to fear that dementia is becoming epidemic.”

Her lovely face was almost mischievous, her dimples showed for a fleeting instant, and Sherman Mason thought he had never seen anyone fairer to look upon.

He lost his head.

“Maisie!” he whispered, “you are too beautiful!” And clasping her in his arms he sought to kiss her.

“How dare you!” she cried, starting from him, her imperious eyes blazing with anger.

“Forgive me,” he said, contritely, “I’ve no excuse, save that I couldn’t help it. But, give me the right—oh, Maisie, you are in deep waters, more so than I have let you know of. *I* can help you, no one else can. I can save you from the consequences of your rash act—.”

“My rash act!”

“Yes, dear. Don’t think I don’t know. I do know. I know all—*all*. Do you

understand me?”

“N—no.”

“I think you do, but I’ll make it plainer. I know your secret—your terrible, desperate secret. I know what happened the day you left New York. I know your plan, your agreement as to the trip across—.”

“Oh, hush!”

“No, I will not hush. I know all, I tell you, and I still want you! I want to marry you. Who else would, if he knew—.”

“Stop! I tell you! I won’t have it!”

“You can’t help yourself. You *must* hear this. Marry me, promise to marry me as soon as we can get a license, and all that, and I will free you from every and any suspicion, from—.”

“I wouldn’t marry you if you were the only man on earth! I would rather beg my bread—I would rather go to jail—I would—.”

“Oh, you vixen! you beautiful vixen!” and fairly snatching her slight form in his arms, Mason covered her face with kisses, before he let her go.

CHAPTER XIV

THE SEARCH

“Well, now I am in a pretty mess!” said Maisie, ruefully, to herself, as she sat down in front of her toilet mirror to restore her equanimity and her tidiness.

“Sherman Mason in love with me, of all things! Wonder what Dad would say to that. A steamer seems to be a wonderful place for romantic attachments. But how much or how little shall I tell Max.”

Deeply absorbed in her thoughts, she freshened her toilette and went out again, to meet Trent, as she had promised.

He was waiting for her on the upper deck, in the place they had come to regard as their own.

“Well, Milady,” he said, “you put me out of my chair, and then you proceeded to entertain not only Miss Gibbs and Miss Barnes, but it seems you took up with the attention of the great Mason. Explain yourself.”

The tone was light, but there was an undercurrent of anxiety, and Trent looked out from under his brows with a questioning air.

Maisie became serious at once.

“Max,” she said, “I am told first by one and then by another, that I am in bad and in deep waters and all that sort of thing. Now Sherman Mason is a lawyer, and he knows my father. He seems to be a clever, capable man—do you think I’d better—er—retain him, or whatever you call it?”

Maisie’s little air of helplessness and uncertainty was so adorable that Trent could scarcely resist his impulse to kiss the drooping red mouth and try to bring the light back to the somber eyes.

“Dear,” he said, quietly, “I don’t think you need a lawyer. Why don’t you just sit tight until we reach Liverpool. Then, your people will meet you, won’t they?”

This was the first time Trent had ever asked such a question. He had been punctiliously careful to show no curiosity regarding Maisie’s plans. She had not yet really said “yes” to his proposal, and he had no wish to hurry her decision or

trouble her in any way.

But now she was asking his advice, and he wanted to give it to the best of his judgment.

“No, Max—I shan’t be met in Liverpool by anybody.”

“Then I’ll look after you. Where shall you go? Straight on to London?”

“Oh, I don’t know—I don’t know. Father wants me to turn right round and go back to New York—but I don’t want to do that—.”

“Why not, Maisie—Darling, why not?”

“Because—oh, Max, because of you!”

“You Sweetheart! Really—oh, tell me, Maisie, I’m so hungry to hear it—do you, can you love me?”

He leaned over her chair, but she gently pushed him away, saying:

“Don’t ask me, Max. I can’t tell you—Oh, yes, I do love you—but—but you wouldn’t want me to, if you knew—if you knew!”

“Yes, I should, dearest. There is nothing in Heaven or earth that could come between us if you love me. No trouble, no wrong, no crime—nothing can possibly matter. Nothing could ever disturb my faith in you as the one perfect woman in the whole world.”

Though Trent’s words were extravagant, his simple, straightforward manner and his true, even tones carried implicit conviction, and Maisie looked at him gratefully, but sadly.

“No, dearest,” she said, “no, if you knew what I have done—what I am, you would want only to forget me.”

“Never. There is no possibility of your having done anything really wrong, and if you had, you would still be my Maisie, my precious girl. Just tell me, dear, that you want to be mine—.”

“Oh, I do, Max. I do.”

“Then you are, and you shall be. Now, dear, as you know, I ask for no confidences. But if there is anything in which I could help you, if I knew more of your troubles, I am ready to hear it when it suits you to tell me.”

“Max, you are the dearest thing! I can’t tell you—I just can’t—at least I shall have to think it over first. You see, I don’t know where I stand—the Captain thinks all sorts of things of me—I thought Mr. Mason could help me, could

advise me—but instead, he—he—.”

“He made love to you!”

“Yes, how did you know?”

“Oh, you transparent little thing, you showed it in your face! And you looked so horrified.” Trent laughed. “I say Maisie, did he kiss you?”

“Y—yes.”

“Well, forget it! If you looked as disgusted about it as you do now, I’ll bet he never tries it again!”

“Oh, Max, you’re such a comfort!” Maisie slipped her hand into his under cover of the steamer rugs. “I am so—what is that word I want—oh, yes, distraught, that’s what I am, distraught.”

“Well, get over your distraction as soon as you can. For after you’re through with it, I want you to begin to make plans for our wedding. If you go straight back from Liverpool, I’ll go back too, and go to see your father, and put this thing on a proper basis. I’m only on a pleasure trip, and there’s no pleasure for me any more unless you’re within sight, at least.”

“Max, I don’t suppose you could hush up this whole investigation, could you?”

“That’s a pretty large order. I’m ready to do anything in the world for you as far as my own efforts go, but I doubt if I could move the Captain of the *Pinnacle* to cut short his investigations regarding a crime committed on his ship.”

“No, I suppose not. Mr. Mason says Hudder killed Oscar Cox.”

“Maybe he did—but I don’t think so.”

“Who do you think did it?”

“That’s where I’m utterly at sea. My detective instinct collapsed like a pricked balloon as soon as I tried to adapt it to practical work. At one time I had a fancy for Camper as the criminal, but I doubt it. I rather think it was a dark horse—I mean somebody of whom we have never thought. Someone who knew Cox, and had a motive of which we know nothing. Just think, there must be fully a hundred men on the First Cabin list, of whom we know just about nothing at all. Any one of these could have been Cox’s deadly enemy, any one could have picked up that bronze hand from Cox’s stateroom, as he passed it—nobody locks a door—and could have banged the poor man through that window, and then gone on down to his luncheon, without rousing the curiosity or attention of

anybody. The thing was too easy. There's no use checking up time and all that. There is more than a half hour in which the thing could have been done—must have been done. Now, on the face of things, it is far more probable that some First Cabin passenger did all that, than to suppose somebody from a lower cabin or some steward could have come up unnoticed. So, I say that some unknown enemy of Cox's just watched his opportunity and did for him cleverly and with small chance of detection."

"Yes, I daresay that was the way of it," and Maisie nodded thoughtfully. "Well, then, I suppose the truth never will be known."

"Perhaps not. But the greater danger is, that they will fasten the crime on the wrong person."

"Yes, they're trying to fasten it on me."

"Don't say such awful things, dearest. As you know, all sorts of gossip is about, and those cats of women revel in making sensational speeches. Don't listen to them."

"Oh, here you are, Maisie," and Sally Barnes came round the corner to where they sat. "Sorry, but I'll have to ask you to come with me for a few minutes."

"Whether I want to or not?" asked Maisie, smiling at her.

"Yes, my child, whether you want to or not."

But Sally did not smile. Trent thought he had never seen her look so solemn. Maisie rose and the two girls went off together.

"Come to your room," Sally said, still with that strange quiet, that queer soberness.

Maisie went, wondering, but her heart sank. What was going to happen now?

In her room she found Lily Gibbs, and she, too, looked as if she were ready to cry.

"What's it all about?" Maisie asked, with a fine show of bravery.

"You tell her, Sally," said Miss Gibbs.

"All right," and Sally took her courage by the throat. "It's just this, Maisie. The Captain is getting funny, and he wants—he wants you—er—searched for those confounded jewels—"

"I won't be searched!" and, her eyes blazing with anger, Maisie faced her

two embarrassed visitors.

“Listen, dear,” Sally said. “It’s only a form, of course, but it would be better for you just to stand for it, and have it over. Because—because, Maisie, if you don’t let us—search you, the Captain is going to send two stewardesses—.”

Maisie had fallen limply into a chair, and stared with baffled, despairing eyes.

“I won’t!” she said, “I won’t! He can’t make me—.”

“Yes, he can, Maisie. He can enforce any order he chooses to give. And dear, forget the—the indignity—for it won’t really be any indignity if Lily and I do it. If you knew what a time I had to persuade old Van Winkle to let us come instead of some horrid stewardess woman—.”

“Listen, dear,” Lily Gibbs said, gently. “The Captain put it this way. They’re trying every way possible to find those jewels. They have searched this stateroom, and they feel that they must know for sure that you haven’t them on you, and then they can search other people’s state-rooms.”

“Whose?”

“I don’t know, but if you just let us put this matter through, you’ll be out of it and they can go ahead as they choose. Why, it’s nothing. Of course you have an under pocket or a jewel bag around your neck or something where you carry your pearls and your keys and all that. We all have. I have a suede pocket on a belt that I buckle round my waist. Awful nuisance, but I don’t feel safe travelling without it. Come, now, it’s only a farce, but we must make our report. Show us how you carry your pearls and your other jewelry.”

“Here it is, now!” and Sally’s sharp eyes caught sight of a silk cord round Maisie’s neck.

Half laughing, half crying, she pulled at it, and Maisie sat motionless, Sally drew forth a bag of gray chamois skin, that fastened with snaps.

“Here we are,” Lily Gibbs cried, gayly, “I’ll just peep into this, and then the show’s over.”

She undid the snappers, and out into her lap tumbled the pearl necklace with the square diamond clasp, also a square buckle of beautiful stones. Also three exquisitely lovely diamond bracelets, of the slender, bangle design so much in fashion.

There was nothing else in the bag.

A silence fell on the group.

Then Lily Gibbs spoke:

“Sally, we found nothing. See? We found nothing at all.”

She replaced the jewels in the bag and handed it back to Maisie, who took it without a word. She seemed incapable of speech, and stared vacantly, as one who is hypnotized.

“I understand,” said Sally, heavily. “I understand, Lily. We found nothing at all.”

“Pull yourself together, Sally,” said the older woman. “You can’t face the Captain looking like that. You stay here, I’ll go to the Captain alone.”

“No—no,” Sally seemed almost frightened, “I can’t stay here—,” she looked at Maisie, who still sat, her face devoid of expression, and holding the bag of jewels in her hand.

Then Maisie raised her eyes and looked at the two women.

Lily Gibbs said afterward she had never seen such a look. It blended reproach and forgiveness, it showed fear and relief, it seemed to express utter despair and indomitable courage, yet back of it all there was a mystery, a baffling something that could not be understood or translated.

“Can you—,” Maisie said, eagerly, “can you tell the Captain—.”

“No, they cannot!” came a stern voice, and from the tall wardrobe there stepped the menacing figure of Magee, Maisie’s stewardess.

“I sensed what you women would be up to, I knew you’d try to shield this thief, and I took my precautions.”

“I see you did,” said Maisie, coldly. “Will you please leave this room and never enter it again so long as I am here. As to the knowledge you have gained by your eavesdropping, do with it what you will. But go!”

She rose, opened the door, and pointed with such inexorable command, that the stewardess was cowed and went away at once.

“You two,” Maisie sighed and brushed her hand wearily across her forehead, “have only done your duty. And you have been kind. It was good of you to come yourselves instead of letting them send horrid servants. I appreciate it and I am grateful. Now, of course, you cannot suppress the information you have gained, you must report truly to the Captain. Please go away now, I want to think out some things. I shall be right here, when anybody wants me. I hope they

will let me have a different stewardess. I never did like Magee.”

Dazed at the turn affairs had taken, stunned at the discovery of the jewels, and utterly amazed at Maisie’s attitude, changing so suddenly from almost a stupor to alert self-command, the two ambassadors of Captain Van Winkle went slowly away.

They scurried to Lily Gibbs’ stateroom, where they locked themselves in, and then sat down and stared at each other.

“Do you know,” said Sally, slowly, “somehow, I still believe in Maisie. I can’t help it.”

“Believe in her! What do you mean? Didn’t she have the Cox jewels, hidden on her? Aren’t they the ones, beyond all doubt that were in those cases that were in her wardrobe? What do you mean, believe in her?”

“I don’t know, Lily, but I think there is—there must be, some explanation. Maybe she had jewels just like those that are missing, and so didn’t want to show them up.

“Yes, maybe she had five pieces, exactly like the ones Cox had! And maybe they were in five cases exactly like Cox’s cases—.”

“What do you know about Cox’s cases? Why shouldn’t Maisie Forman have bracelets and a buckle as well as anybody else?”

“Oh, Sally, dear, don’t be absurd! If she had, why hasn’t she worn them? She wore her pearls, why not a bracelet or two—.”

“That’s just it, Lily. She did wear the pearls—.”

“But they’re not so conspicuous—so especial, you know—.”

“Look here, what is it that you suspect Maisie of, exactly. Of stealing those jewels from Mr. Cox?”

“What else can we think? You see, Sally, you’re young and innocent. I mean you don’t know half the wickedness there is in this world. Why, there are lots of women who look and act and seem as classy and high-toned as Maisie Forman, who are professional jewel thieves or adventuresses of some sort.”

“I don’t believe she is, anyway,” Sally’s tearful face was belligerent. “She’s too sweet and dear for that sort of thing.”

“Well, all right,” Lily didn’t press the point, “what do you think, then?”

“Just what I said, that she happened to have jewelry like Mr. Cox’s bills.

Why, the bracelets on his bills may have been very different from her bracelets.”

“Yes—but it’s the coincidence of the three bracelets and the buckle and the pearls with the square diamond clasp. Did you ever see another string of pearls with that kind of clasp?”

“N—no. But it’s the newest style, there must be lots of them.”

“Oh, well, as I said, it’s the coincidence. And Miss Forman had no other jewelry at all.”

“Then she can’t be much of a jewel thief! Why doesn’t she have more loot?”

“Sally, you are impossible! But it’s nice of you to stand up for her. Now, what are we to do?”

“Oh, I don’t know. I simply can’t go to the Captain with this story. You go alone, will you, Lily?”

“Why, yes. You know I had an insane idea of hushing it up and not telling what we found. But it wouldn’t have done, anyway, and, too, now that that stewardess heard and saw the whole scene, we have to tell.”

“Yes. Well, you do the telling. My, I feel as if I’d been to an execution or something! I think I’ll go and collect Puppy and make him play something with me.”

“Yes, do and I’ll see the Captain by myself.”

Miss Gibbs was sorry indeed for Maisie Forman, but far more were her interests centered in herself and her doings. The visit to the Captain and the story she had to tell him seemed so exciting and important, that she could scarcely wait to get to him.

Full of her mission, she went to the Captain’s room, and was at once admitted.

She found there Pollard Nash and Frederick Stanhope, who were in conference with the Captain.

“Shall I speak before these gentlemen?” Miss Gibbs inquired, and the reply was affirmative.

“Well, then,” she made the most of her dramatic opportunity, “we found the Cox jewels in a bag hung around Miss Forman’s neck, under her blouse.”

Three pairs of startled eyes looked at her.

“Yes,” Miss Gibbs proceeded, thoroughly enjoying herself, “Miss Forman

was exceedingly averse to being searched. She was just bound we shouldn't do it. But of course, we had to. So, as I say, we found the little chamois bag, and in it, the five pieces which you have often described as the Cox jewels."

"Where are they?" asked Nash.

"Oh, we left them with her. You didn't tell us to confiscate them, you know, Captain. Besides, she can't get away."

"She can throw them overboard," said Nash.

"Why should she? There'd be no sense in that. They say she did throw some jewelry overboard, but I don't believe it. At least, I don't believe it was anything of value. But, what do you make of it all, Captain Van Winkle?"

"I don't know what to make of it, Miss Gibbs. I think we are forced to the conclusion that Miss Forman, is—well, is a person to be watched, and I may add, to be questioned."

"Yes," agreed Stanhope, "very much to be questioned. I'd like to be present when you question her, Captain, if you don't mind."

"Certainly, certainly, sir. But the interview must wait until this afternoon. I am very busy for the rest of the morning. It's already noon."

So his visitors, construing this as a dismissal, went away.

Nash and Lily Gibbs went off for a confab, in which after declaring their surprise and consternation at the state of things, they continued to discuss and argue round and round in circles until they returned to their original proposition that it was all a most inexplicable mystery.

Stanhope went to look for the stewardess who had witnessed the "search."

He found her with little trouble, and though reserved and taciturn, he found an efficacious means of making her talk.

Like most of her tribe she was amenable to a financial consideration and like many of them, when she was once started she seemed to find it easier to go on than to stop.

"Yes, sir," she said, "from the very first, I thought Miss Forman was a queer one. She'd mope and sit for a long time thinking and looking like she was just going to cry. Then, all of a sudden, she'd jump up and dress herself all up to kill and go flaunting down to dinner or out on deck, as gay as you please."

"Did she have many visitors in her stateroom?"

“Never a one, sir. None of the ladies seemed to care for her much—or she didn’t care for them—I don’t know which. Oh, she’s a high-strung one, she is. A lady born, as far as manners and all that goes. Kind to me, but in an aristocratic way, you see. Not haughty, not dictatorial, but quiet-spoken, yet positive. What she wanted done must be done the way she directed. And as for me, I was willing enough to do all I could to please her, until—until she began to act queer.”

“And when was that?”

“After the gentleman died—Mr. Cox, you know, sir.”

“Yes. Did Miss Forman know Mr. Cox?”

“Well, sir, that I don’t know. But this I do know. She went to Mr. Cox’s room late one night. Whether he was there and she went to see him, or whether he was not there and that was when she stole the jewels, I can’t say. But I can swear I saw her come out of his room, and close the door behind her, and go to her own room about midnight. That I can swear to.”

“What night was this?” Stanhope could see the woman was speaking the truth.

“That was Monday night, sir. We sailed Saturday, you know.”

“Yes.” Stanhope was thinking. If the theft was the work of a professional jewel thief, she had done her task early in the game.

“Well, tell me more about Miss Forman—about her queerness, I mean.”

“Then, the next night, Tuesday night, she tried to drown herself. Tried to jump overboard.”

“Who saved her?”

“That Mr. Trent—he’s her beau now.”

“Naturally! Well, don’t you think she knew he would catch her in time?”

“I daresay, sir. Well, then, next, she threw some jewelry overboard.

“Yes, that’s what I want to know about. What sort of jewelry?”

“That I don’t know. I only saw something that sparkled like gold in the sunlight.”

“When was that?”

“That was Wednesday night.”

“You said the sun was shining.”

“Yes sir, just setting. It would be about seven o’clock, sir.”

“You seem to have these dates and hours down pretty fine.”

“Yes sir. I can’t forget ’em, sir.”

“So it seems. Thank you, Magee, I’ll see you again sometime.”

CHAPTER XV

THE ANNOUNCEMENT

Maisie had her luncheon served in her cabin.

She thought deeply while she was eating it, and when the waiter came in for the tray, she was serene and smiling.

She made a careful toilette, and put on a new frock that she hadn't before worn on board. It was a smart, rather daring affair of white, faced here and there with orange, and a white steamer coat and hat, with an orange scarf completed the costume.

She wore no jewelry of any sort, not even a ring, and no string of dangling beads or trumpery chains.

She went out to her own deck chair, confident that Trent would be sitting in his adjoining chair awaiting her.

He was, and as he sprang to his feet at sight of her, she smiled dazzlingly and said, "Did you miss me from the dining room?"

"Yes, indeed. It's always sunshine where you are, and darkness where you're not."

"How pretty!" and Maisie gave him a look of real affection that told him her lightness of tone was for the benefit of the passers-by.

As always after luncheon, the throngs swept by on their eternal rounds of the deck constitutional.

Nearly every one of them glanced curiously at Maisie, and after Trent had tucked up her rug, and she was ensconced in her chair as on a throne, she returned glance for glance. Not rudely, not starting, but showing apparently the same lively interest in them that they showed in her.

Trent watched her with satisfaction. He had implicit and unshakable faith in her, in every way. He believed that no wrong, no evil of any sort that might be mixed up in her life was of her own making or brought about by her own hand or mind.

Trent's creed was simple. It was of the "trust me not at all, or all in all"

variety. So far, he trusted Maisie all in all. Should the time come when he must revise his opinion of her—well, that condition should be met when it arose.

But as he looked at the pure, sweet face, the straightforward, honest eyes, he could see no evil, hear no evil, think no evil of that queen of his heart. His deepest regret was his inability to help her. If he knew more, he felt sure he could do more. But the vague plans that came into his mind, he dared not attempt, lest he harm her cause in his well-meant efforts to assist it.

Without seeming to ask for more confidences than she had already vouchsafed, he told her this.

“I know it, dear,” she said, the chattering crowds and the dash of the spray making their low-voiced conversation unheard to others. “I know exactly what a difficult position I’ve placed you in. But I am in a quandary. And it’s a sea of doubt which I must swim out of myself—or, sink. No one can help me—you, least of all! If I didn’t care so much for you, I would just tell you all, and throw the whole burden on your big, strong shoulders—.”

Maisie’s face was wistful, her sad little smile was appealing, and Trent’s self-control nearly gave way. As usual, he sought refuge in lightness.

“You are mysterious, My Queen,” he said, smiling. “Yet I love your mysteries better than other people’s disclosures. Tell me more of them.”

“Then here’s a deep one. I shall probably be arraigned, and soon, at a court of justice, to be accused of—of dire misdeeds.”

Maisie’s smile was at variance with her words, it was almost roguish, and, sensitive to every play of light in her eyes, every quiver of her sensitive lips, Trent took heart from her tone, and said eagerly:

“I may go with you?”

“I don’t see why not. Ah, here comes my little friend. Hello Sally—good afternoon, Mr. Abercrombie. Any more Treasure Hunts on the carpet?”

“No, Miss Forman,” and the boy smiled at her. “We’re going to have tableaux tonight, will you take part?”

“Can’t keep still long enough. But we’ll be in the audience, Mr. Trent and I, and we’ll promise to applaud the ones you want us to.”

“Oh, do be in then, Maisie,” Sally cried, almost forgetting in the presence of this radiant being the angry, scornful person she had so lately “searched.”

“What could I be?” Maisie dallied with the idea.

“Oh, you can be Le Brun’s ‘Girl with the Muff.’ You look exactly like that! I never thought of it before, but you do! Doesn’t she, Pup? Doesn’t she, Mr. Trent?”

The mention of the word muff brought a look of startled agony to Maisie’s face, but only for a moment, and no one but Trent saw it. Nor did he know the reason for it.

Then laughingly, Maisie rolled up a corner of her rug, held it up to her face, and tilting her head sidewise, was such a perfect imitation of the picture in question, that they all exclaimed in surprise and admiration.

“Oh, perfect! Top hole!” screamed Sally. “You can fix up a costume out of a scarf or something, and I know where I can get the very right hat! Oh, will you, Maisie, will you?”

Passers-by now paused to see what the excitement was all about, and the Campers, coming along, stopped in front of Maisie’s chair and smiled with the appearance of friendliness. The friendliness, however, was only in appearance and veiled an intense curiosity.

“What, Miss Forman, are you thinking of going into the Tableaux?” and Amy Camper’s shrilled voice carried a disagreeable note.

Maisie did not think of doing anything of the sort, but the unpleasant speech so irritated her that she felt impelled to retaliate.

“Why, I don’t know,” she said, sweetly, “are you? Let’s strike a bargain I’ll go into them, if you will, Mrs. Camper. How’s that?”

Now Mrs. Camper hadn’t been asked, and Maisie, though she didn’t know, was pretty sure she hadn’t. Amy Camper’s pettish little face was not the sort most sought for the purposes of Living Pictures, while Maisie’s expressive beauty was just what was desired.

“Oh, I shouldn’t dream of it!” Mrs. Camper returned, “It’s so—so public, don’t you know. But you don’t object to publicity?”

“No,” said Maisie, quietly, “I like it.”

With the merest hint of a nod of dismissal, Maisie turned to Trent, saying, “But as to that other matter—.”

“Yes,” said Trent, taking his cue instantly, “yes, I tell you it’s the chance of a lifetime! Why a man I know got rich over night just by the investment of a small sum in it. It’s a wonderful invention!”

“And it runs by electricity?” Maisie went on, suppressing her inclination to laugh at the Campers’ tardy departure.

At last they went on along the deck, and Maisie gave way to her amusement.

“You’re a brick, to pick up the chatter so beautifully! I hope I snubbed that fearful woman?”

“It was a gentle little snub, dear, and I doubt if it penetrated her thick intelligence as such, but at least they did get away.”

“Hello, girlie, here’s me!” and this time it was Lily Gibbs who bore down upon them. Trent sprang up to give her his chair, which Miss Gibbs took with an air of proprietorship. So Trent sat down on the footrest of Maisie’s chair, and in a few minutes, Nash and Mallory, coming along, joined the group.

Sally and her wild horde ran back and forth, and the place became the center of interest.

Whatever the people of the group that gathered round Maisie knew or surmised concerning her, they were one and all frankly under the spell of her charm.

The girl scintillated with wit and gayety, she bubbled over with mirth and fun. She was gracious, cordial, whimsical and altogether enchanting.

Trent fell more deeply in love with her than ever, and Nash and Mallory looked at one another and shook their heads in negation of a girl like that being in any way a wrong-doer.

Lily Gibbs, seemingly forgetting the jewel episode, assumed an air of proprietorship in Maisie that would have been funny, but Maisie herself encouraged it, and with one hand on Lily’s, continually turned to her for corroboration or approval of her chaff.

She paid no especial attention to Trent. Now and then she spoke laughingly to him, but for the most part her talk was a general bantering of Sally’s crowd and the group in general.

Others, even strangers were attracted, and stood along the rail, listening.

Not that Maisie made herself at all conspicuous, on the contrary, her efforts were toward the drawing out of the others by her sallies and repartee.

Sherman Mason, strolling by, paused, and almost at the same moment Stanhope came along, and the two men met and smiled in unison, as Sally’s shrieking laugh rang out.

“Fascinating little piece!” said Stanhope, and Mason returned:

“The Barnes baby? Yes, but I see no charm in flappers.”

“Oh, they have a freshness—.”

“You said it!” laughed Mason. “They have a freshness, and that’s just what I object to.”

“At least, it’s a defect that time will remedy,” said Stanhope, good naturedly. “I say, Mr. Mason, you’ve taken that man, Hudder into your service. Did it ever strike you that he may have been the Man in the Library?”

“I have thought of that, Mr. Stanhope, and, in fact, that’s one reason I took him on. Also the fact that he’s a mighty good servant. Cox had him trained perfectly.”

“And have you discovered anything—er—suspicious?”

“Well, I haven’t had him twenty-four hours yet, so one can’t expect much. But as a matter of fact, he seems to me, faithful, doggedly—I guess I mean doggishly so—like a dumb animal, you know.”

Mason was floundering a little, for which there seemed to be no reason unless it was that Stanhope looked at him so intently.

“Yes, he is almost dumb,” Mason went on. “He says next to nothing, and when I tried, as I thought adroitly, to quiz him a little about his late master, he—he shut up like a clam.”

“Ah, a combination of the clam and the dog nature must combine to make a valuable servant. Where is the Bronze Hand now?”

“Heavens, I don’t know!” and Mason looked as if the question amazed him. “I suppose the Captain has it, or has it in custody. That’s the weapon, isn’t it? It must be given to the Scotland Yard people, mustn’t it?”

“Are they going to put it all up to the Yard?”

“I believe so, as soon as we arrive in Liverpool.”

“Good business. It ought to be put in charge of the most competent hands. To my mind it is the most inexplicable murder I ever heard of! What do you say?”

“All murders are inexplicable to me.”

“Do you mean their solution, or that the mere fact of murder is to you inconceivable?”

“Both,” and Sherman Mason gave a wry smile. “I say, Mr. Stanhope, you seem a bit of a detective. Do you think the murder—the Cox murder, could by any possibility have been done by a woman?”

“So far as the physical force necessary is concerned, I should say yes. Women, girls even, today, are often as muscular and forceful as man. They, of course, have less main strength, but to use that Bronze Hand as it was used could easily have been the act of a woman. Moreover, the diabolical cruelty of the mind that conceived that mode of killing, the cold brutality of the nature that could carry out the design, might be found in the female of the species, said, you know, to be more deadly than the male.”

“Yes—yet it seems impossible for a woman—.”

“The elemental passions know no sex. That murder was not only the result of a fierce fury, an implacable hate, but it was planned by a cool head and carried out with a steady hand.”

“Yes, a hand of bronze!”

Stanhope did not smile at the grewsome jest, but went on.

“That’s why I hesitate to deduce a feminine will back of it. It seems to me a woman could do all that, could claw her victim with that awful instrument in the heat of passion or outraged feelings, but I can’t see her planning it ahead, watching her chance and then striking so coolly—.”

“How do you know the stroke was made coolly?”

“Because it hit so true—you know I’ve examined the dead man, and I could distinguish the marks of the two blows—there were two blows, clawing, dragging blows—.”

“Oh, hush! How can you rehearse such fearful details!” Mason put a hand over his eyes for a moment, as if to shut out the awful picture Stanhope conjured up.

“Forgive me, Mason. I didn’t realize how graphic I was.”

“Oh, that’s all right, I’m not squeamish, only it was a terrible thing!”

And then Stanhope’s quick eye caught sight of an unobtrusive messenger who came and spoke a word or two to Miss Forman.

“Certainly,” she said, with what seemed to him like a little sigh of relief.

She rose, and nodded invitingly to Trent, who went along with her.

Without a word, Stanhope followed.

“Miss Forman,” he said, as he caught up with her, “you’re going to see the Captain?”

“Yes,” she said, speaking coldly, but smiling more amiably as she noticed his pleasant, kindly expression and earnest gaze.

“May I go with you? I may be of real assistance to you?”

His low, deep tones sounded a note of sincerity and hope, and the girl quickly responded to it.

“I should be glad to have you, Mr. Stanhope,” she said. “It is perhaps a—a —sort of crisis.”

“Yes,” he said, understandingly, and dropping behind them, he followed her and Trent to the room appointed.

Captain Van Winkle looked a little surprised as he saw Maisie enter with the two men.

“I had expected you alone, Miss Forman,” he said, gravely.

“I know, Captain, but do you mind if I bring these two friends?”

“Not at all, if you don’t object to their hearing what I have to say.”

“No, I don’t object,” and Maisie, looking charmingly carefree and light-hearted, seated herself in the chair the Captain held for her.

Indeed, so serene and pleasant was her attitude that the Captain felt suddenly a great distaste for the ordeal before him.

But he never flinched from a duty, and he plunged at once into the subject.

“I’m sorry, Miss Forman,” he said, with real regret in his tones, “but I have to ask you some questions.”

“Of course you have, Captain, go right ahead. I’m here to answer them.”

The three men looked at her.

Captain Van Winkle, with real relief that she was taking it thus lightly instead of being sulky, or worse, tearful.

Stanhope, with an intense interest to hear the coming conversation, and full of earnest hope that he might be able to help this beautiful girl out of whatever meshes of circumstance might yet involve her.

Trent, with ever growing love and trust, with steadfast loyalty, with no

doubts of his Maisie, but with a wary eye out for any danger that might assail her, and a ready will to do anything in his power to aid her, should such a chance be given him.

“You see, Miss Forman, we are trying to find a number of pieces of valuable jewelry that we have reason to believe were stolen from the effects of Mr. Oscar Cox, either before or after his untimely death.”

“Yes,” said Maisie, and the word was absolutely without inflection of any sort.

But it seemed to be a gracious permission to proceed, and the Captain, detesting his task more and more, floundered on.

“And we—we had reason—or thought we had, to suspect—that is, to think they might be in your possession. And,” he rushed it through now, “and so, we asked two ladies to—er—investigate. And they said—.”

“Yes?”

This time the inflection was slightly interrogatory.

“They said you had the jewels—.”

“Why did they think they were the Cox jewels that they had found in my possession?”

“Because there were five pieces, which corresponded exactly with the jewels listed on Mr. Cox’s bills. These pieces of jewelry were not found in his effects, and we feel justified in assuming that they are the pieces you have. Can you assure me they are not?”

“I can most certainly assure you, Captain Van Winkle, on my honor, that I have no jewelry in my possession at this moment that is not absolutely and unquestionably my own property.”

“Then you’ve thrown it overboard.”

“I have thrown overboard no bit or piece of property that was not my very own.”

“You were seen to fling far out to sea something that sparkled like gold.”

“Yes.”

“Was it gold?”

“Captain Van Winkle have you a right to ask me these questions?”

Maisie did not seem embarrassed, so much as perplexed. She asked her question straightforwardly and the Captain answered as directly.

“Yes, Miss Forman, I have. It is not at all an easy thing for me to do, to quiz you thus, but I have the right, and moreover, it is my duty. So I ask you to explain why you would throw away valuable jewelry?”

“It wasn’t of great value,” she spoke a bit reminiscently, “it was only a ring, and not a very expensive ring at that. I threw it away because I didn’t want it. In fact, I never liked it!” This last bit of information came with a sort of burst of confidence and was accompanied by an irradiating smile, that showed a trace of mischievousness, almost as if a naughty child had been caught in an act of disobedience or mutiny.

“And that was all you threw overboard? We are not interested in a ring. There is no ring in question.”

“Yes, that’s all I threw overboard, Captain.”

“How well did you know Mr. Cox?”

“He was introduced to me after I came on board the *Pinnacle*.”

“He admired you?”

Maisie stared at him.

“If he did he didn’t say so. I saw him to speak to only a few times, and then he was most formal and conventional in his conversation.”

“Yet I am told he threatened, jestingly, to throw you overboard.”

“Throwing things overboard seems to be a habit on this boat. But I suppose no more so than on others. I never look over the rail, but I have the impulse to pitch something in!”

Stanhope chuckled to himself. He was enjoying this conversation, and rather pleased at the girl’s attitude. It seemed to him she was sparring for time, and yet, he wondered, what help would delay give her? Also, he thought, if he were in the Captain’s place he would bring that inquiry to a head with a few sudden turns and find out where things really stood.

Trent, still watchful of the course of events, still mutely adoring his goddess, sat silently by, contented to remain in the dark as long as Maisie chose to keep him there.

The Captain sighed and began again. The poor man was out of his element but he had to carry on, and he struggled afresh with his waning courage.

“What I mean is, Miss Forman, that a man wouldn’t jestingly threaten to throw a lady overboard, unless he was pretty well acquainted with the lady. It is not a joke a stranger would make.”

“Isn’t it, Captain?”

“No; that is, it doesn’t seem so to me. Therefore, I am assuming that you knew Mr. Cox better than you have given me reason to suppose.”

“Well, I can tell you frankly that I didn’t think I knew him well enough to have him speak to me in that jesting way. I certainly did not. But as he did speak so, as he did say that very thing, I simply assumed that his idea of joking with a lady and mine differed, and I let it go at that. You must see that I couldn’t openly resent the speech. That would have seemed to attach too much importance to it, and I didn’t really consider it important at all. In fact, I promptly forgot it. But I didn’t see Mr. Cox again, to speak to—at least, I don’t think I did.”

“Not when you visited him in his stateroom?”

“You have been told that I did that?”

“Yes, do you deny it?”

“I neither deny or admit it. But I do deny your right to ask me about it. I think, as you say, you have certain rights in this inquiry, but I claim that question is outside your right. What is your opinion Mr. Stanhope?”

It was the first time Maisie had spoken to anyone except the Captain, but Stanhope’s attention was so earnest, his expression so eager, that Maisie wanted him to speak.

“I think, Miss Forman, that Captain Van Winkle is entirely within his rights in asking you anything that bears on the subject of Mr. Cox, his affairs or his death, and if I may advise you, it is to be utterly and entirely frank.”

Then Maisie Forman turned white—not only pale, but a chalky, deathly white, that made Max Trent fear she was going to faint. But she did not. She gripped the arms of the chair she sat in, and said, in a very low voice, “Go on, Captain.”

The Captain was shrewd enough to press this advantage.

“Where are the jewels?” he said, abruptly.

“Here they are,” said Maisie Forman, and drawing a small jewel bag from the handbag she carried, she poured forth upon the table a string of pearls with a square diamond clasp, a shoulder buckle set with precious stones, and three

diamond bangle bracelets.

“Those are the Cox jewels?” said the Captain, his voice a bit unsteady.

“They are mine.”

“You—you—took them from Mr. Cox—.”

“I did not. He gave them to me.”

“He gave them to you—why did he give you such a gift?”

“Because—” Maisie’s beautiful eyes fell at last, and her voice was a mere whisper as she said:

“Because I was—his wife.”

CHAPTER XVI

ENTER FLEMING STONE

To say Maisie's hearers were thunderstruck at her words, would be putting it very mildly.

Captain Van Winkle looked utterly blank and stared at her with a vacant gaze as if she had spoken in a language not known to him.

Stanhope stared, too, but his face showed not only intelligent understanding of her words, but his alert eyes and quick play of expression showed his thoughts were racing and he was weighing the meaning and consequences of what the girl had just disclosed.

As for Trent, he was almost comical in his bewilderment. Perhaps of all the astounding things Maisie could have said, this was the most bewildering and incredible.

Maisie, Cox's wife! Impossible! It just simply couldn't be!

Then as Trent looked at her, and saw her sweet mouth droop and noted the misery in her eyes, he realized that at last his time had come to help, or at least to stand by.

He moved his chair nearer to hers, and taking her hand in his, said clearly and distinctly:

"This lady is my *fiancée*, and whatever is to be said to her, must be said in my presence."

This gave Captain Van Winkle another shock, and he struggled hard to keep his poise.

Then Stanhope intervened.

"We have reached a crisis," he said, slowly, "and since revelations seem to be in order, I think it is time for me to make one. My name is not Stanhope, I am using that alias for reasons of my own. But I am Fleming Stone, the detective, and I offer you my services, Captain Van Winkle, trusting you may be able to make use of them. I have been exceedingly interested in the Cox affair from the start, and, though I have kept quiet in the matter, I think I know all the details that

have been brought to light.”

Captain Van Winkle turned to the speaker as a drowning man to a lifeboat.

“Are you really Fleming Stone? Oh, sir, I am glad indeed to have your help. I know nothing of detective work. This murder is too great, too terrible for amateur sleuths to take care of. I so longed for a real, an experienced detective, and now you are here! Please, Mr. Stone, if you will, take the case in hand, do whatever you choose, use your own methods, but oh, I hope you can apprehend the murderer, or at least get some definite evidence before we land at Liverpool.”

“We’re due Sunday morning,” Stone ruminated, “and it’s Friday now. Something less than forty-eight hours. But if I can solve the mystery at all, I can do it in that time. At any rate, the murderer is on board, and two days ought to give me time to smoke him out.”

“And now, Miss Forman—er—Mrs. Cox,” the Captain said, still looking bemused and bewildered, “have you anything to add to your statement—your rather surprising statement?”

“Yes,” Maisie said, quietly, “I have. I should like to tell you men, briefly, the circumstances that led to my sailing under the name of Miss Forman.”

“We should be glad to hear anything you care to tell us,” the Captain said, having regained his manners if not his mental balance.

But if truth were told the other two listeners were even more eager to hear the girl’s story, and Trent, looking like a man who was keying his nerve up to highest pitch, forced himself to sit quietly and await calmly the coming revelation.

Fleming Stone, his dark, deep-set eyes somber with the gravity of the occasion, watched Maisie, without seeming to do so, and waited for her to speak.

“Without going into all the details,” she said, “and without mentioning names, unless necessary, I will tell you that my father, one of the most upright and honorable men in the world, was made the tool and the cat’s-paw of a company of shrewd and unscrupulous swindlers. Perhaps swindlers is too strong a word, but that is what it amounted to. I can’t tell you the particulars, for I don’t know enough about business and all that. But it was the Apollonia Mine, and it was a fake. They were what you call, I think, crooked promoters, and they inveigled my father into the thing, because he had some knowledge of mines and ores that they wished to use. Well, anyway, they hoodwinked him and deceived

him into thinking the company was all right and honest and all that, and when he discovered they were all wrong, he declared he would show them up.

“I can’t tell you exactly what happened, but they had so fixed things that my father would be arrested and put in prison for life, if he exposed them. They had fixed everything so that Dad was the scapegoat, and the whole blame would rest on his innocent shoulders. He tried every way to arrange things so that they should bear their own share of the blame, he was willing enough to take his own share, which was nothing compared to the terrible schemes of those villains. But he couldn’t get at them, legally, and when he tried, they said they would jail him anyway, for he was too dangerous to be at large, knowing what he did. All these things you men can verify, by asking the lawyers. I can’t tell this part of the story as it should be told. But here’s where I come in. Oscar Cox was one of the principal men in the company, and he was the worst enemy father had. If Cox would agree not to make trouble for Dad, the others would do as he said.

“And so,” here Maisie blushed and looked a little embarrassed, “Mr. Cox happened to take a fancy to me—and he told father that if—if I would marry him, there would be no further mention of Dad’s name with the scandal of the mine business. But if I would not, then he would break my father. That’s the word he used, and he meant it in its widest, fullest sense. He meant to ruin my father utterly, blast his reputation, take away all his property and land him in prison for a long term, if not for life. I can’t tell you of all the plans he had made and traps he had laid, but everything was ready to fall on father and crush him utterly—unless—unless I married Oscar Cox.”

“You poor darling,” Trent murmured, holding Maisie’s hand more closely, as he looked at her with troubled eyes.

“I had no choice,” the girl said, simply. “I would have married anybody on earth, rather than see my loved father the victim of those men’s cruelty. It wasn’t only Mr. Cox, there were others, I don’t even know the names of some of them. A Mr. Frey seemed to be one of the worst.”

“Ellison Frey?” said Stone. “Yes, I know who he is.”

“Well, anyway, I not only had to agree to marry Mr. Cox, but I had to pretend to father that I wanted to marry him. Ugh!” she gave a shiver of disgust.

“So this is what I did. I told Oscar Cox that I would marry him on one condition. That was, that we should be married Saturday morning, that we should sail on this boat Saturday afternoon, but that after the ceremony, he should not consider me his wife, or even seem to be acquainted with me, until we landed in Liverpool. I stipulated that I should sail under my maiden name,

and that he should pretend we were strangers all the way across. He agreed to this more willingly than I anticipated, for he said it meant only about a week of waiting and he should have me under his eye all the time. He looked forward with pleasure to the ocean trip, and I—well, my plan was to gain time to think things over, and if I found I just simply couldn't stand the idea of being married to him, to throw myself overboard. This I tried to do."

"Thank Heaven I was there!" breathed Trent, fervently.

"Then he bought the jewels for you?" the Captain said.

"Yes—you see they have my initials on the back—very small—E. M. C. My name is Elizabeth Mary, and—I suppose it is Cox."

"That explains the E. M. C. on the beautiful gold-fitted dressing-case. That was doubtless meant as a present to you."

"Yes—," Maisie sighed. "He told me he had ordered it. You see, I didn't see him at all after the ceremony. I went straight back home with father. Then I came to the steamer alone at sailing time. Of course I had my passport made out in my maiden name, which was my name when I went for the passport. And of course all my luggage bore my own initials and all that. He gave me the jewels the moment after I became his wife, and I put them in my bag. I wore the pearls, but the other things I had never taken out of their cases, until—until—."

"Never mind, dear," said Trent, seeing her agitation at the remembrance.

"Well, that's about all," Maisie said; "then, then—" she smiled bravely, "then I met Mr. Trent, and we both knew at once that we cared for each other. So, there was nothing for me to do, but to jump overboard. I tried to do so, and Mr. Trent saved me. I had no idea he was there, I couldn't see him, and I thought there was nobody about. Then—then Mr. Cox was—was killed. I suppose it's very wicked, but I was glad! Yes, glad. I threw my wedding ring overboard, and that's what the stewardess or somebody saw sparkle as it fell."

"You have your wedding certificate?" asked Fleming Stone, who was deeply pondering the story as it was unrolled to him.

"Yes; though I wish I need never make it public. I mean, I wish it need not be known that I was his wife. Must it?"

"No!" began Trent, but Stone interrupted him.

"It need not be told to the whole passenger list, perhaps," he said; "but it is not a matter that can be kept entirely secret. You forget we have yet to find the murderer of Oscar Cox. Miss Forman—for I for one, shall continue to call you

by that name—.”

“Oh, please do,” begged Maisie. “I should die if I had to be called Mrs. Cox!”

“Miss Forman, then, have you any idea who could have done the deed?”

“Not the slightest,” and Maisie looked straight into his eyes. “No, Mr. Stone, I have no idea. The only one I can think of is Hudder, and I have no real reason to suspect him.”

“It may easily be that Cox had enemies on board of whom we know nothing,” Trent offered. “Just think of the scores of men who have never taken part in the smoking room discussions, and never evinced any interest or expressed any opinions on the case. If one of those had killed Cox, that’s just the way he would carry it off.”

“Yes,” said Stone, “you’re doubtless right. Unless he were shrewd enough to see that such a course is really more open to suspicion than to join in the gossip.”

“In either case there are too many such men, I mean possible suspects, with not a vestige of evidence to point their way.”

“Mr. Trent,” Stone said, looking at him, “you are interested in detective work, I know. Will you help me, and perhaps together we can solve the mystery of Cox’s terrible death?”

“Yes, I will,” Trent responded. “I admit that I felt inclined to keep away from the investigation when I saw how Miss Forman was getting mixed up in the jewel matter. But now that is all cleared up, I am ready to do all I can to track down the criminal.”

“Will you tell us now, Miss Forman, what you meant by the code words you sent to your father?”

“I have no reason for concealing anything, now,” said Maisie with a sigh of relief. “Now that my only secret, that of my marriage, is known, I have no further secrets to hide. Yes, Captain, I will tell you. I don’t know where it originated, but it was the habit among the men to call Mr. Cox ‘Behold.’ It was because his initials, O. C. sounded like ‘oh, see!’ or behold. Anyway, he was called ‘Behold’ by all who knew him intimately. Now, I knew my father would learn of his death at once, through the New York papers. I did not know what to do about my own journey, so I wirelessly father to the effect that Behold was no more, and what should I do, go on or go back. He replied for me to return to New York

as soon as possible—but,” here Maisie blushed distractingly—“but by that time, Mr. Trent and I had come to care so much for one another, that I didn’t want to go back.”

“But I’m going back with you, dear—unless we go on, and stay in England for a time,” Trent said.

“I’m not sure our private affairs interest these gentlemen,” and Maisie smiled. “But,” and immediately her face grew serious again, “but I’ll tell you one thing. If it becomes known that I was—was married to Mr. Cox, I am the one who is going to be suspected of his—murder.”

“Maisie! No!” Trent cried, but Fleming Stone said:

“Yes, Miss Forman, you are quite right. And, I’m sorry, but I scarcely think it can be kept secret. Remember, you are even now suspected of having stolen those valuable pieces of jewelry. To clear yourself of that charge, you will have to admit they were given to you. This will necessitate a true statement of the situation, or—you will be supposed to have accepted those gems from one who was merely a friend at most, and apparently, on your own showing, a stranger!”

“It is a moil,” said the girl, thoughtfully. “But I did not kill Mr. Cox, and I do want the murderer, whoever he is, brought to justice.”

“What is your opinion and advice, Mr. Stone?” the Captain asked. He had recovered his natural poise, but he still felt shaken, as a man who has been through a sort of mental cyclone.

“My opinion is, that Miss Forman will most certainly be looked at askance. The truth itself is sensational, to say the least, and the exaggerated reports which it will engender, will be a dozen times worse! I am not an alarmist, but that is the way I see it, and I want Miss Forman to be forewarned, and therefore forearmed.”

“And I shall be, Mr. Stone,” Maisie’s head went up proudly. “If I followed my inclinations, I would go into my cabin and stay there until we land in Liverpool. But my father brought me up to face the music—always. I have done nothing wrong. My marriage to Oscar Cox was solely and only to save my father’s reputation and life—for imprisonment would have killed him, I am sure of that. I willingly made the sacrifice for him, but when I found that my own death would be preferable to life with that man, I attempted to bring it about. It could not have nullified the sacrifice I made, for Mr. Cox had arranged the business matters so that my father could never be blamed in any way for what the company had done. This was his price for me and he had paid it. So if I

chose to drown rather than live with him, it was no one's business but my own."

"Then when Mr. Cox laughingly said he'd throw you overboard, he knew what you had tried to do?"

"He must have overheard Mr. Trent referring to it that next day. He wanted me to know he had heard, and he chose to make that jest so I would realize that he owned me, and could, if he chose, throw me overboard. It was a poor and ill-timed joke, but that was his idea, I'm sure."

"And you went to his room one night?" The Captain was himself again and asking his own questions.

"Yes. I had a right to do so—I was his wife. I went to beg him to release me. To try to persuade him to set me free. But I might as well have asked the gale to stop blowing. He tried to keep me with him then, but I reminded him of his solemn agreement not to molest me in any way during the trip across. So he only said, 'Very well, my lady; wait till I get you in Liverpool!' And so repulsive was he and so impossible, that I made up my mind never to reach Liverpool."

Maisie's voice was steady, and her statements straightforward. She spoke frankly, and her words carried the ring of truth.

"Then you must have been—pardon my plain speaking—you must have been glad when Mr. Cox was—was out of your way."

The Captain stammered a little, but he never could quite overcome his suspicion of the feminine nature, and he felt he must sound the girl as to this.

"Captain Van Winkle," Maisie said, "I cannot truthfully deny that I am glad Oscar Cox is, as you put it, out of my way. But that does not prevent my deep regret at the manner of his passing, or lessen my horror of the dreadful deed that brought about my freedom from that man. He was a bad man, a very bad man, as you can all learn from people who really knew him. But I would not rejoice at the death of the worst man in the world, if it had to come in such a dreadful way."

"Of course, you wouldn't, Miss Forman," Stone said kindly. "Then, as I see it, you propose to 'face the music' and take your usual place on the deck and in the dining room?"

"Yes, Mr. Stone. I am not afraid. There is no use in advertising my own private and personal affairs, but in so far as they must be made public, I am willing to accept the situation. Do you think you can clear me from the accusation of having killed Mr. Cox, or must I wait for Scotland Yard's

investigation?”

“That is what I’m thinking about,” the detective returned, very soberly. “Miss Forman, did—or does—anybody on board know of your marriage to Mr. Cox? How about that man named Hudder? Can he know of it?”

“I don’t know about Hudder. I’ve no idea whether he knows it or not. I fancy not, for Mr. Cox promised to tell no one, and I believe he meant to keep his word.”

“Then unless he told Hudder, no one knows it?”

Maisie hesitated, then she sighed.

“I am resolved, Mr. Stone, to keep nothing back. I mean to tell you everything and anything I possibly can that may bear on this case. And so, I must tell you that Mr. Mason knows about it.”

“Sherman Mason!”

“Yes, he told me so. I don’t know whether Mr. Cox told him or how he learned it, but he told me he knew what happened on Saturday morning before I left New York.

“How did he come to tell you this?”

Again Maisie flushed with embarrassment.

“I seem to be obliged to confess to many unpleasantnesses,” she said, smiling a little. “But the truth is, Mr. Mason informed me that I was, as he expressed it, in deep waters, and the only way out was for me to marry him. I’m sorry to be obliged to relate so many of my matrimonial opportunities, but it is true. Mr. Mason then told me that he knew of—he did not say my marriage to Mr. Cox, he didn’t even mention Mr. Cox’s name—but he said, he knew the circumstances, and knew the arrangement under which I was crossing. Of course, he meant the agreement that Mr. Cox and I should appear as strangers on the way over. He said that he wanted to marry me, and he said, too, that very few men would be willing to marry me, knowing about Mr. Cox.”

At this Trent swore under his breath, but said no word aloud.

“What did you say to him?” Stone inquired, almost casually.

“I wanted to say that very few would be enough!” Maisie dimpled and smiled. “But I didn’t. I didn’t really feel in a jesting mood. I simply told him that I wouldn’t marry him if he was the last man on earth! Then I left him.”

“Is Mason, by any chance, mixed up in this business affair that affected your

father so disastrously?"

"I don't think so. I never heard of Mr. Mason until I came on board. But he must have known of it through Mr. Cox, or in some way, for he seemed to know of the Apollonia Mine, though I merely mentioned it. I don't know, Mr. Stone, whether or not he is in the combine, or whatever they call it, but I think not. For when he asked me to marry him, he said he knew father and that Dad would look on him favorably as a son-in-law. He didn't use those words, but he conveyed that idea."

"Look here," Trent said, suddenly. "What was that message Mason sent, that used the word behold as a code word?"

"That's so," said the Captain, and looking up his records. "Here you are. 'Behold nothing off to Italy take muff.'"

"Aha," Stone said, "then Mason knew Cox well enough to call him by that nickname. For that message was sent the day Cox died. Surely it means that now Cox is dead, or is nothing, he, Mason will go to Italy and take whatever the word muff stands for. To whom is the message?"

"To a man named Frey—Ellison Frey."

"Never heard of him. Have you, Miss Forman?"

"Yes, I have heard the name; he is one of the men mixed up in that Apollonia scheme."

"Then he didn't kill Cox—he was on his side."

"Oh, no, of course Mr. Mason didn't kill Mr. Cox! Why, as I see it, Mr. Mason and Mr. Cox and this Mr. Frey were all banded together and all against my father. Whatever they were, they were partners, and I think I remember Mr. Frey as an elegant gentleman, and seemingly rather more friendly to Dad than the others."

"Where did you meet any of these men?"

"I didn't exactly meet them—but a few times they have come to see Dad in the evening, and if the waitress was out, I would take wine and cakes in for them. They never spoke to me, but perhaps the next day I might ask father who this or that one was. Mr. Cox I saw several times. Mr. Mason I never saw. I don't know whether he ever came or not. But I do distinctly remember Mr. Frey."

"Well, it doesn't matter," Stone said. "Now, Miss Forman, I think you need a rest. Why don't you go to your room till tea-time and then make your

appearance on deck, with your colors flying?"

"I'll be on deck at tea-time, all right," Maisie promised him, but she didn't agree to the plan of going to her room.

Instead, she went with Max Trent, straight to their own corner on the upper deck.

With one accord, they went to the rail, where Trent had saved her life that memorable night.

"Darling," he said, as they stood side by side there, "I knew I loved you, but I didn't half know what a brick you are, nor how much you had to bear. My Blessed Little Girl, why didn't you confide in me, sooner?"

"Oh, I couldn't, Max. I didn't know how you'd take it. And, too, every day seemed to bring some new development. Why, I didn't know but I'd be in irons, down in some dungeon in the hold—or wherever the dungeons are! And I don't know yet but I shall! Isn't it strange, Max, that that Stanhope man should turn out to be Fleming Stone!"

"It's fine! Why, he's the greatest private detective in the U. S. A. I'd rather he'd be on this case than all Scotland Yard put together! But, Dear Heart, there may be trouble ahead. I don't know what it will be, but I can see that Mr. Stone is far from easy about things. So, I want to beg of you, dearest, don't have any more secrets from me. Tell me everything as soon as you learn of it yourself. You are mine, you know, all mine—."

"And you don't mind that I—."

"Maisie, if you ever so much as mention that man's name to me—I'll—."

"Well, what will you do?"

"I'll call him your first husband! So, there now!"

CHAPTER XVII

MAISIE IN DANGER

Fleming Stone was not easy in his mind. Far from it. In his opinion the trouble was not lessened by Maisie's confession. It was rather increased. Since she had been the wife of Oscar Cox, she was now his widow, and that was a fact of grave importance. She was heir to his fortune—and a considerable one Stone deemed it to be. She was the legal possessor of all his property, not only by law of inheritance but, as Stone had heard, a will devised everything of which Cox died possessed to his wife.

But, Stone reflected, all this was outside his jurisdiction. Those matters must be taken up with Cox's lawyer, of course. The girl ought to go straight back to New York and attend to it.

But, and here was the thought that was wringing Fleming Stone's heartstrings, was she—could she be implicated in the murder?

Though greatly prepossessed in Maisie's favor, the detective could not overlook the palpable truth that she had motive and opportunity. She hated Cox and she was in love with Trent. She was of an impulsive and daring nature. She was willing to take her own life rather than live with Cox. Would she not then even take his life for the sake of being free to marry Trent?

The horror of the idea, the apparent impossibility of that lovely girl pursuing such a terrible course, did not strike as forcibly as it would strike one less experienced in crimes.

He had known lovely, angelic-faced women before, who had proved to be perfect devils, capable of the most ghastly crime.

And the more he thought it over, the more he could see how Maisie could have done it. He had studied closely the reports of the whereabouts of the passengers at the hour the crime was committed. He knew that some time during that half hour, Maisie had left her chair, gone to her room for a book, and then proceeded down to the dining room, getting there, he had learned from her table steward, a good bit late. Now, Cox's room was very near Maisie's, and at that time, all the stewardesses and stewards were looking over the stair rail or getting any post of vantage they might, to see the gay doings of the Fourth of July

celebration. Therefore, Maisie could have gone to Cox's room, entirely unnoticed, could have picked up the Bronze Hand from his table, and, returning the way she came, could have slipped into the Library, deserted, of course, for the moment, and could have leaned out of the window directly back of Cox's chair, and with a swift, sharp, well-aimed blow, could have left the resultant wounds which Stone had so carefully examined on the face of the dead man.

He had not the slightest doubt but that the crime had been committed in just that way, but many people beside Maisie Forman had the opportunity.

Now, the question was, who else had a motive?

So far as Stone knew, nobody. He dismissed the thought of Hudder. Unless for some secret reason of hate or revenge, the man had no motive to kill a master who was kind and generous to him. Moreover, he was pretty well certain that Hudder was engaged in assisting preparations for Cox's lunch. Though not elaborate, the midday meal of Oscar Cox was always prepared with the greatest care on the part of the deck steward, the specially chosen waiter, and Hudder himself.

And then Stone's thoughts flew to Cox.

What a strange man he was. And to think of his being really the husband of that lovely girl, who was his unwilling wife.

The detective admired Maisie, but felt that he knew her very slightly. He had had so little social life on board, that he knew few people. He was engaged on a secret mission, of which the ocean crossing represented but a small part, and he had time enough to take up this case of the Cox murder, if he chose to do so.

And he was inclined toward it, until he thought it all over and began to see that the tide of suspicion would inevitably turn in the girl's direction, as soon as the sensational facts became known. Yet they had to become known. Maisie was Cox's wife, and that could not be kept secret. Even if those who already knew it agreed not to tell, it wouldn't be right to countenance such secrecy.

And, too, if the girl was entirely innocent, the real murderer must be found, and this could only be done by accepting and acknowledging the actual conditions.

The more Stone thought about it, the more he felt that Maisie should have a lawyer. She was too ignorant of business matters to take care of her own interests. There was a big estate to be adjusted, and though the Cox lawyers would attend to everything, once the heiress was back in New York, yet she needed somebody at once to advise her and protect her interests.

Max Trent, though her *fiancée*, was no sort of business man, and while he would fight for her if necessary, he could be of no use in legal matters.

Stone made up his mind he would tell Maisie all this, and then he cast about for the right man to recommend. He felt sure Maisie would employ anyone he suggested, and the first one that came into his mind was Sherman Mason.

Here was a wise, competent man of the world, and though Maisie had said he wanted to marry her, perhaps that was an argument in favor of his being her legal adviser.

Then, too, he seemed to know all about her strange marriage, and his familiarity with conditions would certainly be helpful. If he chose to renew his proposal of marriage, that matter was in the girl's hands. If, as she said, she was already engaged to Trent, then Mason would perforce, step aside, but he seemed a man who would do all he could for the lady, even if denied her favor.

Stone concluded to sound him out at least, and went in search of him. Mason was in the smoking room, and Stone asked him to come with him to sit in an alcove, and over a highball and a cigar, discuss the question of the day.

"Are you especially interested, Mr. Stanhope?" Mason asked.

"Yes, I am," Stone replied. He had decided not to divulge his identity unless inquired of, and then not to deny it. "You see, I'm by way of being a bit of a detective, and the Captain has asked me to do what I can. Now, I've just learned the astonishing news that the young lady we call Miss Forman was—but I think you know—."

"Yes, I know," and Mason looked the detective squarely in the eye. "How did you learn it?"

"The lady told us herself."

"Let's have no mistake, now. The lady in question told you that—the relationship she bore to Oscar Cox?"

"Yes. She said she was his wife."

Sherman Mason looked thunderstruck. Not at the news, he knew that before, but at the announcement that Maisie had told it.

"How did you know it?" Stone asked, quietly.

"Cox told me himself—in a moment of confidence. He was crazy over the girl, and was gleefully looking forward to the end of the voyage, when he could openly claim her as his wife."

“He seemed to be having a contented and happy time on board.”

“Yes, that was Oscar Cox’s way. He liked young people, and he had promised not to speak to his wife, save as a casual acquaintance, all the way over. So he just made the best of it, and played round with the youngsters to pass the time away.”

“I see. And she—didn’t care for him.”

“Well, I don’t know much about that, but she couldn’t have been deeply in love with him, or she never would have made such a stipulation. Then, too, she tried to drown herself, rather than live with him.”

“Did she, really? Wasn’t that a bit of theatricalism? Do you know her well, Mr. Mason?”

“Never saw her till I met her on this boat.”

“Yet she says you have asked her to marry you.”

Sherman Mason smiled. “Mr. Stanhope, I am, naturally a squire of dames. A woman in distress appeals to my chivalry always. Especially if she is young and pretty, as Miss Forman certainly is. So I did offer her marriage, and I stand by my offer, if she cares to accept it. But while I would gladly marry her, I will tell you, it was more as an act of protection to a young woman dangerously alone, than an affair of pure romance.”

“She is dangerously alone, Mr. Mason. You have chosen just the right phrase. She is engaged to Mr. Trent, but though he adores her, he is in no sense a man of legal knowledge or business experience. He is a writer of stories, and has that detached mentality that goes with the artistic temperament. Now, I’m wondering if your chivalry would urge you to help this young woman through until she can get in touch with some lawyers who are either already in charge of her husband’s affairs, or ready to become so.”

“Why, Mr. Stanhope, I’d be glad to do anything I could, of course. But—I did not know Oscar Cox well enough to butt in on his estate or its settlement. I have heard there is a will—.”

“Yes, an informal affair leaving everything to his wife. So Miss Forman, as I shall continue to call her, is really a very great heiress.”

“Can she not go right back home, and take up the whole thing with the Cox administrators or executors—there must be some firm at the helm.”

“But, you see,”—Stone looked steadily at him, “there is yet the matter of finding the murderer of Oscar Cox.”

“Oh, that, of course. But what has the girl to do with that?”

“Don’t you see—hasn’t it struck you, that with this fortune willed to her, and having fallen in love, practically at sight, with another man—don’t you see, that it was greatly to Miss Forman’s advantage to—to have Oscar Cox out of her way?”

“Good Heavens, man!” and Mason genuinely startled, “are you—you can’t be accusing—.”

“Murders have been committed by women—or by their tools,” said Stone, quietly. “While I make no accusations, I do say the thing is not impossible, and I am sure, it will be voiced as a suspicion as soon as these marriage details become known.”

“Must they become known?”

“Mr. Mason, justice must have its way. If the young lady is guilty, even as accessory, it must be discovered. And discoveries cannot be made if previous evidence is hidden.”

“But—but it is so unthinkable! So incredible! That lovely girl—.”

“But that lovely girl has a strong, an impulsive nature. Think. She consented to marry a man she loathed. She tried to commit suicide to get away from him. She fell in love with another man and agreed as soon as her legal husband was dead, to marry him. Now, I agree that she is a lovely girl, but she is not a simple-minded young miss. She is a far-seeing woman of strong passions and indomitable courage.”

“I suppose you’re trying to prove that she could have killed that man had she chosen to do so.”

“Yes, without making any accusation, that is what I suggest. And so, I say that she needs somebody to advise her, some one with legal experience and worldly knowledge. I thought of you first, because you are more or less conversant with the conditions, but if you prefer not to get mixed up in the affair, you’ve only to say so, and I’ll ask some one else.”

Sherman Mason thought for a moment. Then he said; “Just who is at the head of all this? To whom do you report? To whom shall I report, if I look after Miss Forman’s interests?”

Stone stared at him. “I thought everybody knew there is no judge, no court on a Liner, except the Captain. He is the head of all inquiries, of all investigations. To him we all make our reports, and as to the murder case, when we reach

Liverpool he will turn it all over to the C. I. D. Scotland Yard will take hold of it, and will do what they choose in regard to the American Police. You, of course, would make your reports to the executors of the Cox estate, on your return or Miss Forman's return to New York."

"I see. Well, Mr. Stanhope, I will do what I can. By which I mean, I will take on such responsibilities as you have mentioned. I will advise Miss Forman regarding her duties and her privileges as inheritor of her husband's estate. I will look after her interests, financially and socially, for I daresay the poor girl will run a gauntlet on board this ship."

"She certainly will, but she has staunch friends in Trent, you and myself. Also, young Nash and Mr. Mallory, and, I believe, a few of the women."

"Her list is short, because she has held aloof from the first; I have often heard her stigmatized as snobbish, stuck-up and all that. I think it was entirely because she was really in an equivocal position, though no one knew it. And, I think, too, she was afraid of Cox, and dared not mix much, lest he show displeasure."

"Oh, I don't think she was afraid of Cox. I doubt if that girl is afraid of anybody or anything. But she was terribly handicapped by circumstances—and is still. Very well, Mr. Mason, will you express to her your willingness to help her in the matters we've spoken of? Will you tell her that you are doing it at my request, and that you will make it a business deal? For she won't consider your offer otherwise, and too, it is only right that you should expect and receive financial remuneration."

"Yes, that's business, and she has a large fortune," said Mason, without any hint of greed, but as one with a sense of right and justice.

So Sherman Mason went at once in search of Maisie, and found her calmly having her tea in her deck chair. Trent sat beside her, and Sally Barnes was perched on her footrest.

"Please come with me for a bit of a stroll, Miss Forman," Mason said pleasantly, as he paused in front of her, "I do want a little chat."

Something in his tone was compelling, and, too, Trent and Maisie had had a serious talk about Mason, and she deemed it wise to have the proposed chat. "Glad to," she said, cordially, and, rising, drew her scarf about her and the two walked off.

"You know," he began, as soon as they were out of the way of the crowd, "I told you you were in deep water."

“Yes, you did,” she answered, lightly. “Am I still in it?”

“You are, in deeper than ever. I understand you’ve made your marriage to Cox public.”

Maisie started, but tried to conceal any show of agitation.

“Yes,” she said, “I thought it best.”

“It was best. The mistake lay in keeping it secret at all. Why did you do it?”

“Why did I do it?” Her eyes blazed into his. “To get a respite of one more week from that man! To be free for six or seven days, at least. You don’t think I loved him, do you?”

As Stone had said, here was no bread and butter miss! This girl, this woman, with eyes aglow and cheeks aflame, was a creature of passion and storm.

“He agreed to this?”

“He had to, if I married him at all. Yes, he agreed, and he stuck to his agreement. But he was just waiting to get to Liverpool, and then he proposed to domineer over me for the rest of my life. You knew him, Mr. Mason, you know what a dictatorial, selfish man he was.”

“Yes, I know. And you preferred drowning to living with him?”

“I certainly did!”

“Until Prince Charming came along. And then—then, you concluded that Cox’s death would serve a better purpose than your own.”

Maisie stopped still and faced him. They were practically alone, no one was within hearing distance.

“Are you implying—?”

“Hush. I’m implying nothing. I’m only warning you what is going to happen. What I meant by saying you are in deep water. Can’t you see it for yourself? Don’t you know, that as soon as it becomes known that you were Cox’s wife that you are going to be accused of his death? Don’t you know that, in your innermost soul?”

She could only stare at him—frightened, dazed, almost stunned at his calm statements.

“I’m not accusing you, I’m not even asking you if you did or did not kill Cox, I’m only telling you what you’re up against. And, I’m asking you to let me help you through with it all.”

His voice had dropped to a tender cadence, and she knew, only too well, what that portended.

She knew that the man was in love with her. She had had too many men fall in love on very short acquaintance, not to recognize the symptoms.

There are some types of feminine charm that seem to impel instantaneous surrender from men, and Maisie had long since discovered that her beauty was of that class. At first, it had merely amused her. Then, it had annoyed her. Now that she had found what she knew to be the love of her life—the affection of Max Trent—the avowals of anyone else simply disgusted her.

She tried not to show this, indeed, Mason had said nothing of that sort as yet, but she knew intuitively what was coming, and she was on her guard.

Speaking in the coolest tones she could command, she returned, “Thank you Mr. Mason, you are very kind. Please tell me just what you fear for me, and just what you propose to do to assist in averting the danger.”

“Very well, I’ll put it plainly, then, I fear that you are going to be definitely accused of the death of Oscar Cox, your husband, and what I should do, would be to free you from that accusation or even suspicion.”

“You certainly put it plainly. Is it permitted to ask how you would free me?”

“By the simple process of producing the real criminal!”

“You know him, then?”

Mason gave her a long look. In it she easily read direct accusation, coupled with a willingness to turn the tide of suspicion against another.

“Mr. Mason,” she cried, “you believe me guilty!”

“I have not said so.”

“But you do, I see it in your face. And your plan is to produce another so called suspect, but one whom you know to be innocent—.”

“You astound me, child, with your intuition. But that is exactly what I do propose to do. It is all right that I should turn the tide of suspicion away from you, and then if it strikes elsewhere, let the suspect look out for himself. I would do more than that, far more, to save your beautiful neck from the gallows!”

Maisie shuddered.

“Don’t be theatrical,” she said, with a sorrowful curve on her lips. “You haven’t the slightest bit of evidence against me—.”

“Good Heavens! I’m not accusing you. I’m telling you that others will. And they won’t care for evidence—I mean clues and such things. They’ll just take the big facts. You were the unwilling wife of Oscar Cox. You fell madly in love with young Trent. You put Cox out of the way in order to be free to marry Trent. Now, don’t fly into a passion. Look at it calmly. That is what they are going to say, just as surely as that there is a sun shining in that sky! What are you going to do about it?”

Maisie looked at him with the scared look of a hunted rabbit. He had really frightened her at last, for in her heart she knew his words were true.

But she pulled herself together, and spoke bravely.

“I see the thing as you put it, Mr. Mason. I’ve no doubt that’s the way it seems to you. You’re probably right about the way I shall be looked at and talked about. But I didn’t kill Oscar Cox—.”

“You little idiot! Will you never understand? Whether you did or didn’t makes not the slightest difference to public opinion. They will conclude that you did, and they will condemn you in spite of your protestations to the contrary.”

“They can’t prove I did it, if I didn’t.”

“In the absence of any other suspect, and with the incentive you had they won’t ask for further proof. Listen, do you know why I’m saying all this to you? Because Stanhope—he’s rather a detective—asked me to.”

“Stanhope!” Maisie was thinking. Then Mason didn’t know Stanhope was really Fleming Stone. Well, probably that didn’t affect matters at all one way or another.

“Mr. Stanhope asked you to?”

“Yes, he seems to take an interest in you, and he told me that now it was known that you are Oscar Cox’s widow,” Maisie gave an involuntary start at the word, “your financial affairs ought to be attended to by somebody with legal knowledge and experience. So, he asked me to offer my services—for due and proper consideration.”

“Eh? Oh, yes, your bill will be paid. Just what will you do for me—in business ways I mean?”

“Oh, see that the will is duly looked after, that the property comes to you, and that you get all your rights in every way. That is all routine work.”

“And will you look after it?”

“Yes—for due and proper consideration. But that dueness and propriety is a matter of opinion, payment for such services as I can and may render you see.”

“What do you mean, by that?”

“I mean, that in my opinion, the due and proper payment for such services as I can and may render you, would be, not a monetary consideration, but”—his voice again sank to those soft musical cadences that Maisie dreaded, “but your own dear self.”

Mason was a handsome man, and a man of charm. His voice was pleading, his eyes shone with love-light, and had Maisie been heart-free, she might have been drawn by the fervor of his whole attitude.

But, though she disliked to give unnecessary pain, she knew this thing must be put a stop to, once for all.

“Mr. Mason,” she said, gently, “truly I appreciate the honor you do me, but I must ask you to dismiss from your mind the idea that I can ever care for you other than as a friend. I am engaged to Mr. Trent, and some day we shall be married. It may seem strange to become engaged when the man I married has so recently died but I know you understand. I married Oscar Cox under the stern necessity of saving my father from financial and social ruin. But I left Mr. Cox at the altar steps, I went home with my father and remained there until I boarded this boat. I spoke to Mr. Cox only a few times and that most casually during the days he was alive on board. Therefore, I cannot consider myself his wife, save as to the mere legality of the ceremony. And so, I have pledged myself to Max Trent with a clear conscience and a free heart, and I can never listen to words of affection from any other man.”

Her quiet, dignified speech was so full of a sense of finality, that Sherman Mason then and there gave up all hope of ever winning the girl for his own.

“Then,” he said coldly, “you may tell Stanhope or anyone else you please that my mission has failed, my offer is rejected. For that is the only consideration that would induce me to take up your case in any way. And, Mrs. Cox, I may say, further, that if you are suspected, accused and convicted of murder, remember that I was both able and willing to save you, had you accepted my terms.”

He turned on his heel and left her, with a courteous bow, but a sardonic smile.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE MAN IN THE LIBRARY

Slowly Maisie went back to her deck chair.

She had made up her mind that whatever she did, she would face the music. She would show no white feather, admit no defeat, but hold up her head and smile, at least, until circumstances should make such an attitude impossible.

She found Sally lying back in her deck chair, and that smiling young person hopped out as she saw Maisie approach.

“Well, my goodness!” she exclaimed as she took on herself the task of arranging pillows and adjusting rugs, “so you’re Mrs. Oscar Cox! My goodness!” Maisie marvelled at the rapidity with which the news had got about, not knowing that sharp ears had overheard enough of her talk with Mason to get a start and imagination and scandal mongering had done the rest.

Controlling her surprise, Maisie said, simply, “Yes, dear. Who told you?”

“Oh, it’s all over the boat. And, say, Maisie, they’re all saying that you killed him! Did you ever hear anything so ridiculous?”

“I certainly never did! You can deny it, if you hear it again.”

“That, of course. But you must know who did kill him, don’t you, Maisie? I’ve been asking Mr. Trent, and he doesn’t seem to know anything! Not a blessed thing. Oh, I say, I’ve just thought of something! You know, Mr. Cox told us that before we reached Liverpool—no, when we reached there, he’d tell us something that would give us the surprise of our lives! I’ll bet it was this news, don’t you?”

“Very likely,” Maisie returned. “We expected to tell it when we landed. We had our reasons for keeping it secret during the voyage.”

“Yes, of course,” and Sally nodded her bobbed head sagaciously. She was enjoying the excitement, and she cared little for the facts or the truth, if she could get what she called “thrills” out of it.

“And so all that jewelry was really yours!” she exclaimed. “Well, can you tie that! Isn’t it wonderful to have such exciting things happen to you!”

“Very wonderful,” said Maisie, dryly.

“And you’ve got a new stewardess, haven’t you? She’s the same one we have, and she tells us all about you. She says you cried all night last night.”

“Why, I didn’t do any such thing!” said Maisie, indignantly. Then she laughed, and turning to Trent said, “About as much privacy as the historic gold fish! Well, it doesn’t matter. But Sally, dear, don’t believe everything that’s told you, especially by servants.”

“Oh, they’re not as bad as ladies and gentlemen! You ought to hear the Campers hold forth! When Lady Amy first heard that you were Mrs. Cox, she took in enough air to float her! But it wasn’t half a jiff before she was running round in circles, telling other people, and her yarns grew bigger every song hit she made!”

“Here she comes now,” said Trent, aside. “Can you stand her, dear?”

“Yes, if you’ll help,” Maisie smiled bravely at him.

“Oh, here you are, Mrs. Cox,” said Amy Camper, as with a malicious smile, she paused at Maisie’s chair.

“Yes, here I am, Mrs. Camper, how are you today?”

“Fine. I was so surprised to hear the news about you. You don’t incline to wearing mourning, I see.”

“Oh, no one does, nowadays, Mrs. Camper,” Trent broke in, with an air of tolerance of her ignorance. “I suppose they still do, where you come from, but the cities gave it up years ago.”

It was not like Trent to stoop to caustic rudeness, but he felt it was a crisis and unless he snubbed this woman good and hard, she would make trouble for Maisie.

“I suppose anybody of fine feelings would want to show a little respect for a dead husband,” she snapped out.

“Then allow me to correct your ideas. One might respect, but the showing of it, as you express it, is old fashioned, and—er—is not done by the better informed classes. Any other little points on which you are at sea? Don’t hesitate to ask me, I’m always glad to be of service.”

Trent’s air was so bland, and his expression one of such kindly condescension, that Sally burst into peals of merriment, and rushed away to tell her crowd about it.

Her purpose was so evident, that Amy Camper flushed deeply with annoyance.

Yet she dared not give back an impertinent answer, lest she be again overmatched by the quick wit of her tormentor.

Maisie was shaking with silent laughter, as Amy abruptly departed.

“I didn’t think you could do it, Max. I didn’t know you had it in you.”

“I don’t often,” he said, with a contrite air, “but she had it coming to her.”

“She certainly did! And I’m glad you gave it to her. Now, I suppose she’ll be more viperous than ever.”

“No, I think she’s scared off, a little.”

“I hope so. Oh, dear shall we ever get to Liverpool? I’m not sure I can stand much more.”

“Cheer up, dear, the worst is yet to come!”

“I believe you!” and Maisie’s smile was a sad one.

“That is,” Max went on, “unless we can get at the murderer. Do you know, I believe Fleming Stone is on his track. He went by a few moments ago and he seemed elated, if I could judge by his expression. Have we told him everything we know, Maisie?”

“Yes—I think so. Except, there’s one thing, that I just now thought of myself. You know, Max, Muff is Dad’s nickname for me. It grew out of M. F. As a Kiddy, I used to sign myself M. F. and call it Muff. And the name stuck.”

“Why, that’s what they thought was a code word in Mason’s wireless.”

“Mason’s? I thought it was in Mr. Cox’s note he put in the ship’s mailbox.”

“It was both. I say, dear, we must tell Stone that. He ought to have every possible point that can help him.”

“Of course; let’s go and tell him, and then we must dress for dinner. I mean to look my prettiest tonight, and dance and everything.”

“Plucky girl! I’m so proud of you, Maisie, the way you carry on!”

“Only because I have you back of me. That and my offended pride. I could do ’most anything rather than let Amy Camper see me wilt.”

“She won’t. Dear, I think, too, I’ll show Stone the gloves that Sally found. They seem to me to mean nothing, but they may carry a message to him.”

“Well, get them. I’ll wait here.”

In a moment Trent returned with the gloves from his stateroom, and they went in search of Stone.

They found him alone, in a deserted corner of the deck, most of the passengers having gone to dress.

First, Trent gave him the gloves and told the story of their finding.

“I know,” said Stone, “why weren’t these forthcoming sooner? Why so chary of them?”

“Didn’t think the matter of any account,” Max said, flushing a little, for he could see the detective was deeply interested in them.

“Gloves are always interesting,” Stone said, dropping his eager air, but stuffing the gloves in his pocket. “Anything else?” for he could see Maisie had something to tell.

“Yes, Mr. Stone,” she spoke low. “I want to tell you about the word Muff. It is a name for me, though I don’t know whether it carries that meaning in the letters and messages you have found.”

“Of course it does.” Stone stared at her. “Did Mason ask you to let him look after your law business?”

She gave him a brief but complete account of the proposition Mason had made to her, and the consideration he had stipulated.

“I rather looked for that,” and Stone nodded. “Well, Miss Forman, can’t you see, that he hoped for better luck in his wooing? He sent a wireless to Frey, you know, that, as we read it, meant Cox was dead and he would take Muff with him to Italy.”

“Meaning me!” exclaimed Maisie, while Trent suppressed the ejaculation that rose to his lips.

“Yes. And furthermore, I’m inclined to think that the letter enclosed in another letter, which we found Mr. Cox had put in the ship’s mailbox, marked J. F. had an ultimate destination at your father’s house. And that ‘Muff all right,’ was an assurance of your own well being.”

“It must be as you say,” said Maisie, musingly. “Oh, Mr. Stone, you can do so much, can’t you do more? Can’t you find out who killed Oscar Cox? Unless you do, it looks pretty black for—.”

“Tut, tut! you’re not going to despair, I hope. Give me a little more time. Are

you subjected to much unpleasantness, Miss Forman?”

“Yes, she is,” Trent asserted. “But she’s as brave as they come, and if you can bring it off, and succeed in your quest, we’ll try to forget the slings and arrows that are being hurled at us. Of course, it hits Miss Forman the hardest, but I want to back her up, and buck her up all I can.”

“You do, Max,” the girl said, “if it were not for you, I’d just lay me down and dee!”

“Run along, children,” Stone said, in a kindly way, “keep up your courage, and, for Heaven’s sake if you have any more gloves or information or anything so much as a pin’s worth, do bring it to me. Don’t hide it under a bushel!”

Maisie had a difficult evening. She donned one of her smartest and most becoming dance frocks, she assumed a manner of lightness and gayety, and to look at her, one would think she had not a care in the world.

The news had swept the ship like wildfire. Everybody, almost, who spoke to her called her Mrs. Cox, and though it made her wince, she realized it was their right to do so.

Polly Nash and Hal Mallory were delightfully sympathetic, and showed it by avoiding the subject uppermost in everyone’s mind, and talking gay nonsense that helped to put Maisie more at her ease.

She was besieged by partners begging for dances, and at last went to her room, thoroughly tired out.

Trent took her for a brief good night to their tryst on the upper deck, but she dared not say much for she felt there were spies everywhere.

“If I knew what to fear, it would be easier,” she said, with a pathetic little sigh. “But this vague fear of something or somebody unknown is wearing me out.”

“My blessed Darling,” Trent whispered, “brave it out a little longer. We’ll land Sunday morning, and then, whatever happens, we’ll meet it together.”

They said good night, and Maisie went to her room. She felt more depressed than ever before. She began to despair of Stone’s success, and the way Mason had talked and the way he felt about her refusal to accept his terms, seemed to her to portend dire and immediate disaster.

But next morning she felt better and more able to cope with her difficulties. She was dressing, after her morning coffee, when a note was brought her summoning her to the Captain’s room at once.

Hastily finishing her toilette, she ran off and was not surprised to find Fleming Stone and Max Trent both there.

There was no one else present, but there was a feeling of suppressed excitement discernible, and she felt almost certain that she was about to hear something encouraging.

“I believe,” Fleming Stone said, with a quiet smile, “that it is considered claptrap and poppycock when a detective reads from some inconsequential clue, the complete description of the criminal.”

“That’s what I build stories on,” said Trent, smiling in return. “If I didn’t do that I’d make no hit at all.”

“It’s what I propose to do now,” said Stone, speaking more gravely, this time. “You see these gloves.”

He held up to view the gloves that Sally had retrieved from the women in the lower cabin.

“These,” he went on, “tell me the whole story. That is, using them in addition to the facts I had already learned. As you see, they are new gloves, apparently never worn, save on the tragic occasion of Mr. Cox’s death. I speak thus definitely, for I am sure of my deductions. They are of fine quality, tan kid, and made by one of New York’s best haberdashers. They are large size, I mean larger than the average man’s hand.”

“Yes, they’re larger than I wear,” said the Captain showing marked interest, “and I have a large hand.”

“These are the gloves worn by the Man in the Library. The man who killed Oscar Cox, by leaning out of the Library window, and striking him twice—two fearful blows—with that heavy and deadly weapon, the Bronze Hand. He wore the gloves, of course, in order that he should leave no telltale finger prints on the bronze, which he threw from him as soon as it had served his purpose. Now, the murderer, as we agreed long ago, is of a most clever and acute intelligence. He was smart enough to buy new gloves for this deed, and to buy them too large for himself, which was a fine bit of precaution.

“This is not surmise only, for you can see if you carefully note these blood stains on this glove, that the way the kid folds over, and the stains show on the folds, proves that the glove was on the hand of a man who would naturally take a smaller size.”

Maisie was content to take Stone’s word for this, but the two men looked at

the glove intently, and saw it was as the detective said.

“Of course, he wore only one glove, the right one. The other is stained where they were rolled together. The murderer’s mistake lay in his throwing the gloves overboard to windward, which he must have done, since they blew in below deck and fell at the feet of the women in the lower cabin.

“Now, from these gloves, and from other information I have picked up, I deduce the murderer of Oscar Cox to be a large, rather stout man of medium height and with hands rather small in proportion to his muscular strength. He has hair that is slightly gray, is beginning to show a hint of baldness, wears a short close-cropped moustache, has a group of small wrinkles at the outer corner of each eye, is an up-to-date and immaculate dresser, wears a seal ring, with his family crest on it and is addicted to light blue neckties.”

As he proceeded Stone smiled a little, and as his hearers grew more and more astounded, he allowed himself a slight chuckle of amusement.

But Maisie Forman did not smile.

“If that is your Man in the Library, Mr. Stone,” she said, slowly, “then the murderer—for you have described him perfectly—is Sherman Mason.”

Stone bowed in acquiescence, and the Captain struck the table sharply with his fist.

“Do you mean that?” he cried. “Do you mean that Mr. Mason killed Oscar Cox?”

“I do,” Stone said, “and I recommend that you take what action you think best, but do it promptly. He is a slippery customer, and quite capable of eluding you at Liverpool, unless carefully guarded.”

“Well, well,” and Captain Van Winkle pondered. “Sherman Mason. And the motive, Mr. Stone?”

“That I cannot state positively, but it was some matter connected with the group of swindlers—or at least crooked promoters of which Miss Forman told us. All such matters can be cleared up later. I fancy, Captain, that if you get the man in here and put him through a course of sprouts, he may be induced to confess.”

Calling a messenger the Captain sent for Mason at once.

“You didn’t really get all that from the gloves?” he said to Stone.

“Oh, no, I was just stringing you. I had made up my mind Mason was our

man, one day in the smoking room, when I noticed his acute attention to the opinions of others about the Cox case, while never voicing his own thoughts. Then when I saw the gloves, I remembered how eagerly Mason had listened when they were discussed that day, and, too, I realized how clever Mason was and how like him it would be to buy those new and large gloves as a precaution against possible discovery.”

There was a tap at the door, and instead of Mason, the man Hudder presented himself.

“Captain, sir,” he said awkwardly, “I have to tell you that Mr. Mason, is—gone.”

“Gone! What do you mean?”

“He is gone—drowned—overboard from the ship. Here, sir.”

Hudder handed out a folded note, which the Captain quickly read and then passed it to Stone, who read it aloud.

“To whom it may concern. I am tired of life, and since my love for a certain woman is unrequited, I have nothing to live for. Therefore, I am about to commit suicide by drowning. It is now three A.M. and no one will be about, on deck. I shall throw myself overboard. I make no confession or admission of any wrongdoing, and I request that my effects be sent to my home in accordance with the labels I have affixed.

“Sherman Mason.”

“Well, to my mind that’s tantamount to a confession,” said Trent. “The man knew he was in for it, and he preferred death by drowning to the electric chair.”

But to his surprise, he heard a throaty gurgle behind him, and turned to see Fleming Stone holding Hudder down by the throat and speaking in a menacing voice.

“Tell me,” he said, “tell me at once, and truly where Mr. Mason is, or you will be arrested for the murder of your master, Mr. Cox.”

For a short time, Hudder remained silent, and then at a slight manifestation of *jiu jitsu* from Stone he gave a cry of pain, and gasped. “I tell! I tell! Let me up!”

Stone let him up, and still holding him by the collar, said, sternly, “Tell, then!”

“I can’t tell—but I show.”

“Very well. Captain, this note is a fake. Mason is not overboard at all. This man knows where he is. Pardon me for taking matters so much into my own hands, but I felt sure that to strike at once was the way to manage this thing. Will you send two husky men with Hudder to bring Mason here?”

Quickly comprehending, the Captain did so, and after a time, the men returned bringing between them a very angry and red-faced, but quiet-mannered Mason.

“Well, the jig is up!” he said, as he slumped into a chair and looked about at the faces of those confronting him. “Sorry I didn’t pull it off better. Who are you, Stanhope, anyway? You’ve got my goat!”

“He’s Fleming Stone!” exclaimed Trent, unable to resist this opportunity to startle Mason.

“Oh, Lord, is that so! Well, no wonder I couldn’t get away with it. And may I ask, Mr. Stone, why you didn’t believe in my little *billet-doux*?”

“Only because it didn’t sound genuine,” Stone returned, carelessly. “A man about to kill himself doesn’t write so collectedly and casually. Anyway that’s how it struck me. Now, Mr. Mason, do you want to make a confession as to the killing of Oscar Cox?”

“An explanation, rather than a confession,” said the man, who was breathing heavily now, and seemed on the verge of collapse.

But he pulled himself together, and after a secretary had been called in he told his story.

“We were four of us, Frey, Forman, Cox and myself. We did do some crooked work, and Forman, Miss Maisie’s father, though he did nothing wrong, was made the cat’s-paw. He was our tool, and he was so innocent that we used him unscrupulously until the very end. Then, as he was in bad, and about to go under, Cox, who was the Judas Iscariot and carried the bag, turned traitor, and told Forman if he would give him his daughter, he, Cox would save Forman from all disgrace and trouble.

“The temptation was strong, and when Miss Forman learned of it, she insisted on accepting the chance to save her father. She made her stipulation for a week’s freedom on board the boat, and I daresay she did mean to kill herself rather than land at Liverpool in Oscar Cox’s care. Well, when Frey, who is the arch fiend behind the whole thing, learned of Cox’s perfidy—you see Cox had

really decamped with all the funds, except what he paid Forman—he, Frey, offered me an enormous sum of money to follow Cox and kill him. So, as you see I'm merely Frey's tool, too—merely a gunman. Yes, I killed Cox and I'm glad I did. He was all kinds of a bad man and I'd gladly killed him if only to rescue Miss Forman from his clutches. Anyway, there's all there is of it. Now, I've turned State's evidence, you want to get hold of Frey—he's the real villain of the piece. Better send a quick message Captain, and arrest him right off. You see, I thought after Cox was out of it, I could get Miss Maisie for myself—but I didn't."

Mason was a pitiable object. His gentlemanly aspect which he had worn as a garment slipped away, and he was his true self, a common, wicked criminal.

He began to talk wildly, he used bad language, and as he blurted out a terrible oath, Trent rose and drew Maisie to him, and quickly led her from the room.

"They don't need us, dear," he said, gently, as they went out to their deck chairs. "The Captain will put that terrible man where he belongs, and Stone and the Captain together will take care of the rest. Try to forget it all, for the moment, anyway, and just realize that it's all over so far as you are concerned."

And so it was. Mason was kept prisoner until he was turned over to the authorities at Liverpool. Frey was apprehended and both he and Mason later paid the extreme penalty.

But thanks to their youth and buoyancy, thanks to their love and happiness, Trent and his Maisie were able to throw off the remembrance of the voyage, and Lily Gibbs proved an efficient and satisfactory chaperon until circumstances made it convenient for the wedding to take place.

This occurred in London, and Sally Barnes insisted on being bridesmaid. After the ceremony she greeted the bride with her usual breezy air, saying:

"Now, Mrs. Trent, you can be as upstage as you like—you can't scare me!"

THE END.

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Lines between two paragraphs were scrambled on page 132, and have been corrected.

Minor printer errors have been fixed.

[The end of *The Bronze Hand* by Carolyn Wells]