

RUTH FIELDING TREASURE HUNTING



ALICE B. EMERSON

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**RUTH FIELDING
TREASURE
HUNTING**



ALICE B. EMERSON



**SHE WAS ALREADY DIGGING BESIDE THE
METAL BOX. [Page 201](#)**

Ruth Fielding Treasure Hunting

OR
A MOVING PICTURE THAT
BECAME REAL

BY
ALICE B. EMERSON
AUTHOR OF "RUTH FIELDING OF THE RED MILL," "RUTH
FIELDING ON THE ST. LAWRENCE," ETC.

ILLUSTRATED



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BY ALICE B. EMERSON

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RUTH FIELDING TREASURE HUNTING

CHAPTER I UNCLE JABEZ IS STUBBORN

“There are just two times when a leaky roof needs mending, Niece Ruth,” said Jabez Potter of the old Red Mill with a touch of his usual grim humor.

“Indeed, Uncle?” returned Ruth Fielding, smiling quietly over the sewing in her lap.

“And what are those two occasions, pray?”

“When it rains and when it don’t rain.” The miller chuckled. “But the difference is, it can’t be mended when it rains, while it can be mended when the weather’s dry.”

“But there will be other dry days, Jabez Potter,” spoke up little old Aunt Alvirah from her chair by Ruth, under the great elm in the door-yard of the mill farmhouse on the bank of the Lumano River. “Ben——”

“Now, don’t you interfere, Alvirah,”
broke in the miller, yet not crossly, for
he was never cross with his old housekeeper.
“Ben’s got his own work to do. He got as far
as he could with the job. He built the
scaffolding up there, and set the ladders in
place.”

2

He pointed as he spoke to a ladder which rested against the eaves-trough of the farmhouse itself, and which was connected with the gristmill, and then to the longer ladder that was firmly set upon the farmhouse

roof, at its peak, making it possible for a more or less agile person to reach the much higher roof of the mill proper.

“Yes, them slates is up there, and they’ve got to be set in place before another shower. There’s one thing sure about a gristmill, and you both ought to know it. It’s got to be kept dry.”

“I am afraid you will fall, Uncle Jabez,” said Ruth Fielding, not without real anxiety in her voice.

“You’ll get sunstruck, Jabez Potter!” cried the little old woman, beginning to rise carefully from her chair by the aid of her stick. “Oh, my back! and oh, my bones! I do wish you could make him stop it, my pretty.”

“You know nobody can stop Uncle Jabez when he is once determined,” said Ruth. “And he almost always is determined.”

“I know—I know,” agreed the old woman, watching the miller begin to

mount the lower ladder. "It's a task to get him to do anything at all out of the common. It certain sure is. Say, my pretty, is he going to help you do what you want to do in business?"

"I don't know, Aunty. I am working on him," and Ruth laughed. But she became grave the next moment. "I don't know how it will turn out. But he can help me if he will—and he is already half convinced that the moving picture business is a big thing. But he calls it a gamble, and Uncle Jabez never gambled in his life. He has always invested in perfectly safe securities. You know that."

"Dear me, child, I wish I had his wealth. I'd give it all to you to-morrow," said Aunt Alvira.

"I know you would, you dear," returned the girl, smiling fondly at her. "But then, you are not a Potter. And if Uncle Jabez had owned your generous disposition perhaps he would not be a rich man."

“And nobody—but Jabez himself—knows just how rich he is,” sighed Aunt Alvirah. “And him declaring only yesterday,” she added, with sudden sharpness, “that he can’t afford to buy one o’ them automobiles.”

Ruth was amused again. “No,” she said. “He did not say just that, Aunt Alvirah. He didn’t say he couldn’t afford to buy one; he said he couldn’t afford to keep one. Quite a different matter, I assure you.”

“Well—Here comes one now!”
exclaimed the little old woman, who was
looking down the road toward Cheslow.

4

But Ruth’s gaze was following the motions of the miller who had now reached the roof of the mill, having climbed the second ladder. Ben, the hired man, had made a plank walk along the roof just below the ridge board on this side of the peaked roof to the small scaffolding where the leak was. Ben would have finished his job, putting in the new slates, when he returned from town where he had gone with the mules and a load of grain.

But impatient and stubborn Uncle Jabez would not wait.

It was a hot July day. There was not a breath of air stirring and the sun beat down fiercely upon the Red Mill and all that surrounded it. The shade of the great elms in the farmhouse yard was grateful indeed.

“Oh, it’s that nice Helen Cameron and her pretty car,” the old woman added, almost childish in her admiration of the smoothly running motor-car. “She’s coming here, my pretty. Perhaps she will take us for a drive.”

“I hope she will, Aunty,” said Ruth soothingly, “as you are so fond of automobiling.”

But she only glanced at the coming machine. The dust stirred by the swiftly turning wheels of the motor-car drifted sluggishly away behind it—like the tenuous wake of a ship’s propellers at sea.

5

Ruth’s gaze turned again to the mill roof and

the miller now on his knees on the scaffolding, beginning to place the new slates. But when Helen Cameron arrived Ruth could no longer look at Uncle Jabez.

“Here we are!” cried Helen, who was a dark-haired, dark-eyed girl with a ready tongue and a ready laugh. “Isn’t it hot? Why! I believe it is hotter driving than it is standing still. How cool you look there in the shade, you two.”

“Come in here,” said Ruth. “Your horse will stand.”

Helen shut off the engine and jumped out of the car. Aunt Alvira smiled at her.

“Maybe it is too hot to travel in an open car,” she admitted. “Oh, my back! and oh, my bones! Come sit down, Helen. The cool of the day is the best time for riding, I do guess.”

“And you guess just right,” declared the girl, coming in briskly and stopping beside Aunt Alvira’s chair long enough to stoop and

press her fresh lips to the old woman's wrinkled cheek. "You look fine to-day, Aunty."

"And I am fine," declared the old woman vigorously. "I'm a long way from being as bad off as Methuselah. I'm seventy-odd, while he was nine hundred and sixty-nine, I believe."

"No!" exclaimed Helen. "Was that his age? I always thought that was his telephone number. Well, Ruth, how goes the new picture?"

6

"Oh, my dear," said her chum, with a little shrug, "you are looking much too far in advance. It isn't a picture yet."

"Well, then, what do you call it?"

"I don't even call it," and Ruth laughed outright. "It is not yet titled—not even with a working title. I've had an idea——"

"But you had that idea—and a perfectly

scrumptious one—when we were at the Thousand Islands. And we’ve been home more than a week.”

“My dear,” sighed Ruth, “I am at my wits’ end. I believe I have a fine background for a story, and the main thread of the plot, too. I can get Wonota and her father——”

“Dear me, Ruth, do you really believe in the possibilities of our little Indian princess as a screen star?”

“I have every faith in her if she is given the right part and is coached by me. Why! Even Mr. Hooley, the director, says so. But Mr. Hammond has lost faith—or he has too many other irons in the fire, or something.”

Ruth spoke rather hopelessly. Helen looked at her with thoughtful sympathy. She suspected, too, what her chum’s main trouble was.

“Is it money?” she asked softly.

7

“That is the main thing in picture making, my

dear,” admitted Ruth more lightly. “Money is essential. And the sort of feature picture I want to make can’t be started until I have at least a hundred thousand dollars behind me.”

“My goodness!”

“I know it is a lot of money. And it may be that no such amount need be spent. But I have had Mr. Hooley help me make what they call the studio estimate (which is always large enough, you may believe), and we have both agreed that, considering possible emergencies, breakdowns, retakes, salaries and hotel expenses, chartering boats of sufficient size, and buying outright some old hulk that must be wrecked——”

“Goodness me!” interrupted her chum, almost wild-eyed, “it sounds as though you were going to bring about a general cataclysm.”

“Mere detail,” said Ruth, waving her hand. “When you see a house burned or a railroad train wrecked on the screen nowadays, believe me, it is the real thing. It costs money

—not as much as it seems to cost, or as it is advertised to cost, perhaps. But it costs a plenty. And the idea I have is a costly one. I will not make the ordinary five-reel program picture. There is no money in that for anybody but the big producers who have stock companies on salary, and who turn them out just as a factory turns out tailor-made frocks.

“Besides,” said the young and ambitious motion picture maker, “I must think of my star and of my own reputation. Wonota has made two big pictures—‘Bright-eyes’ and ‘The Long Lane’s Turning’. If she makes one with me it must be even a better and bigger picture than the two she made with the Electrion Film Corporation.” 8

“But will Mr. Hammond——”

“Mr. Hammond is one of the best friends I ever had,” said Ruth, with enthusiasm. “And he wishes Wonota well, too. But he is perfectly willing I should take Wonota and her father, Chief Totantora, off his hands. In

fact, I shall borrow them—and Director Hooley, too—if I make this picture I have in mind. But, Helen, I shall really direct the picture myself. I want my own way about every little detail, and only by combining the character of director and producer can I do that.”

“Dear me, Ruth!” Helen said, “it sounds big.”

“It is a big thing—if I can do it.”

“And I can see it will be a big disappointment if you can’t do it.”

Ruth nodded, wordlessly. Helen looked at her thoughtfully.

“Ruth,” she said, “perhaps I might help you—with Tom.”

Her friend shook her head vigorously.

“No, no! I don’t want friendly help. I want business help. Out and out business. That is my motto. No sentiment. If the money is lost, it is lost. I have told Uncle Jabez that

——”

“Goodness, Ruth!” gasped Helen, almost laughing in her surprise, “you don’t really think of trying to get Mr. Potter to back you? Never!”

“Yes, I do. And—listen Helen!—I believe I have almost succeeded.”

“Never!”

“‘Never’ is a most significant negative,” said Ruth. “But Uncle Jabez——”

“And you scorn sentiment?” interrupted Helen, in amazement. “You won’t let Tom and me help you?”

“Let me tell you,” her chum said with some emphasis, “if I get Uncle Jabez to back me there will not be an iota of sentiment about it. I have got to convince him that it is a sound business proposition, even if there is an element of speculation in it.”

“Well!”

“Uncle Jabez draws a perfectly clear line between investment and speculation. He has obtained most of his fortune through investments, I grant you. But he is not averse to speculating when the chance of big returns seem reasonably sure.”

“I declare!” ejaculated Helen, emitting 10 another long breath. “I never thought your uncle, who is a regular miser—excuse me, Ruth! But it is well known. I never thought he would do anything for you that might cost him real money. He never has. He appears in altogether a new light to me now. Let me look at him.”

She stepped briskly out from under the elm and looked up at the roof of the mill.

“He must have had a change of heart,” she giggled suddenly. “Maybe it shows on the outside—Ruth! There is something the matter with him!”

Ruth did not rise from her chair. She continued placidly sewing.

“Don’t try to make fun, dear. Poor Uncle Jabez——”

“Ruth! Come here! What is it?”

Helen was not in fun. She was looking upward at the roof, to which Uncle Jabez had climbed, with a startled expression of countenance. And her cry was earnest.

Even Aunt Alvira was startled. She began to rise from her chair again with her always reiterated moan of “Oh, my back! and oh, my bones!” But Ruth jumped and ran into the hot sunshine.

“Look at him!” cried Helen again.

Uncle Jabez was no longer kneeling at work. He had fallen over on his side and half his body had slipped off the scaffolding. Something serious had certainly occurred up there on the roof of the Red Mill. 11

“Where’s Ben?” cried Aunt Alvira. “Get Ben!”

But Ruth told her that Ben was in Cheslow. There was no other man around the Red Mill, or within call. Aunt Alvira cried to Helen to go in her car for some neighbor. Ruth had, however, already run to the foot of the first ladder.

“What are you going to do, Ruth?” cried Helen. “You can never climb up there.”

“I can! I will!” gasped the girl, already scrambling up the lower rungs of the ladder. “He may slip off and come tumbling down long before you can get any man here.”

“You’ll fall! You’ll break your neck, Ruth Fielding!” wailed her chum.

But Ruth kept right on up the first ladder, and scrambled off to the roof of the kitchen ell.

CHAPTER II

AN IDLE DAY

Excited as she was, Ruth Fielding had not lost her usual sense of caution. Uncle Jabez Potter's serious need on the roof of the Red Mill called for instant help; but Ruth stopped long enough on the ell roof of the farmhouse, having climbed one ladder, to discard the sports skirt that retarded her free movements.

"Oh, Ruth!" shrieked Helen again from below.

"Take care, my pretty!" wailed Aunt Alvira, and then rose with her usual murmur of "Oh, my back! and oh, my bones!" to hobble out into the sunshine, the better to see what Ruth was doing.

Ruth started up the second, and longer, ladder in her bloomers and found herself much less

trammeled. But the ladder wobbled threateningly, although she knew Ben, the hired man, had placed it as firmly as a ladder could be placed. It was the length of the ladder that made it spring so.

She was a clear-headed and athletic girl. 13 She had never shrunk from a hard task when it faced her. Indeed, Ruth, from the very time the reader first meets her in the initial volume of this series, entitled “Ruth Fielding of the Red Mill,” had proved herself a remarkably courageous person.

As an orphan she had come to her great-uncle’s mill and home, and Jabez Potter had taken her in “out of charity” as he at first grudgingly expressed it. Many a time since that long-past occasion the miserly miller had admitted (secretly if not openly) that he had been amply repaid for giving Ruth shelter.

Helen Cameron and her twin brother, Tom, had been Ruth’s first young friends in this neighborhood. With Helen she had attended Briarwood Hall and, later still, Ardmore

College. While the Great War was on both Ruth and Helen were in France and did more than their bit for humanity in the Red Cross service.

But before Ruth had gone to France and since she had returned, her heart and mind had been firmly fixed upon motion picture making. She had achieved no little success in writing scripts for pictures and, of late, had helped direct them.

She had, only the week before, returned from a seven-weeks' sojourn at the 14 Thousand Islands, where she had been engaged, with a company from the Alectrion Film Corporation studios, in making a picture in which an Indian girl whom Ruth had befriended played a prominent part.

In this story, "Ruth Fielding on the St. Lawrence," the young woman had been more than ever convinced that if she was to make the kind of pictures she desired to make, she must have a free hand. Although Mr. Hammond, the president of the Alectrion

Corporation, was her friend and had always treated her liberally, he now had so many irons in the fire that Ruth began to feel that she was merely one of his “hired hands.”

As she had just now said to Aunt Alvira, her uncle’s old housekeeper, and to Helen, her chum, she wished to have her own producing company and to feel that her word was to be final in the making of the pictures she wrote. She had the germ of a splendid idea for a feature film in her mind, she wanted to use Wonota, the Osage Indian girl in it. All she lacked was the financial backing that such an undertaking must have.

Thoughts of the picture and her financial situation were quite driven out of Ruth’s mind, however, by Uncle Jabez Potter’s peril on the roof of the old mill. He had fainted up there in the sun—or something even more serious had happened to him—and there was nobody near who could help the old man but Ruth.

The quivering of the long ladder to the

peak of the mill roof made Ruth ascend very carefully. But she continued to look up and told herself over and over that the ladder would bear her weight a dozen times. At last she reached the roof and scrambled up on the board that Ben had laid to the scaffold where Uncle Jabez had been at work.

The old man lay with his legs half over the edge of the scaffold. She saw now that his position was more secure than she had thought. And before she reached him the old man began to move again, struggling to sit up.

“Uncle Jabez! Uncle Jabez! Wait!” cried Ruth. “Let me help you.”

“I calkerlate somebody’s got to help me,” muttered the miller. “Ruth, that you? I declare I can’t scurce see a thing. Guess your Aunt Alvirah was right. That sun struck me right in the pit of the stomach, seems so. All went black before my eyes. I don’t see how I am going to get down off’n this roof, Niece Ruth.”

“I am going to help you, Uncle Jabez,” the girl said confidently. “This sun is awful!”

There was no use in telling him now 16 that he had been warned. Nor was Ruth one of those “I-told-you-so” people. Besides, the old miller was in no condition to be scolded for his folly.

She helped him to his feet, but he was very uncertain on them, and for a minute or two Ruth feared she could not get him along the narrow plank to the top of the ladder. If he pitched off the board she knew she could not hold him, although he was not a heavy man.

If Uncle Jabez was stubborn in one thing, he was in all. He was determined to get down to the ground, and he did so. But he confessed that he never would have made it without his niece’s help!

From the ell roof of the house Ruth called impatiently to Helen to get into her car and go for the doctor. Uncle Jabez was too confused in his mind to veto the command,

although at another time he would have thought instantly of the expense of the doctor's visit.

He really had suffered a slight sunstroke. His age and physical condition doubtless had something to do with his present misfortune—and that the physician stated in so many words when he arrived. He had warned the miller more than a year before that he should retire from active work; and the fact that he had not done so added greatly to the danger of his present attack.

In any case, within a few hours it became evident to all about him that the old man would not be able to attend to business of any kind or to exert himself physically to any degree for a long time to come.

17

Aside from the alarm Ruth felt because of the miller's misfortune, there was a personal thought that rasped her mind continually. The matter of getting Uncle Jabez to back her financially in the making of her first

independent picture had gone by the board.

He was forbidden to think of business. The mill would be run by Ben for a while, or until the present contracts were filled and the grain on hand made into flour or meal. Then the Red Mill, for the first time in many generations, would be shut down and—perhaps—the stones would never turn again.

In spite of her sympathy for Uncle Jabez and her fears for his future, Ruth Fielding could not keep her thoughts from dwelling on her own ill-fortune. The accident at this time seemed to be a calamity for her.

Tom Cameron was like his sister Helen —“as like as two peas in a pod,” Aunt Alvira Boggs often said. He had the same black hair and black eyes and the clear, olive complexion that was a legacy from his half-Spanish mother now long since dead. As Helen had intimated to Ruth, he had, too, his share of their mother’s fortune and would have been glad to aid Ruth in her desire for a producing company had the girl of the Red

Mill been willing to accept such help.

The latter, however, had a strong and deep-rooted objection to accepting any such help from any such quarter!

Not that Ruth did not consider Tom Cameron almost as much her chum as she did his sister. Indeed, it was exactly in that character that Ruth wished to think of Tom and have Tom think of her.

Even before the war Tom had shown Ruth that he considered her the one girl in the world for him. He could not seriously see any other girl as a possible mate for life. And, secretly, Ruth would have been greatly disappointed if Tom had turned to any other girl.

But she would not become engaged to him. She did not believe in long engagements. And now, with the war finished six months and more before, she began to feel very strongly that there was something wrong with Tom Cameron.

She had thought him ambitious in those early days when they used to have their enthusiastic talks about the future. Mr. Cameron was a dry goods merchant in Boston. He had but recently opened a branch in New York, and it was an important situation Tom might step into, and learn to fill. But since he had come back from France after the armistice, Tom seemed only to dilly-dally and shirk his job.

He was shirking it not a little one day, and instead of working was lounging along Front and South Streets, in New York City, watching the tramp steamships being laden and viewing the long bowsprits of the great four and five-masted ships thrust almost into the driveway of the water-front streets.

There is always color and a certain bustle along the wharves. And, here and there, a silent, empty, roofed dock will yawn, offering shade on a hot day, with a faint, "smelly" breath of river air sucking up from the open end of the dock.

Having walked far, and the sun being hot, Tom entered one of these inviting tunnels and strolled to the very end from which he could see all four of the bridges that span the East River, as well as the varied traffic thereon, and the serried banks of warehouses and other tall buildings on either side of the stream.

Tom had been walking to get away from his own thoughts. Unfortunately, he had found the thoughts quite up to his mark in pedestrianism. They had kept in step with him!

Suddenly it was his luck—he was afterward sure it was good luck—to spy the hoop-shouldered figure of a man on the opposite side of the dock, sitting on a soap-box. The stranger's back was toward Tom, but the latter saw that there was room for two to sit on that box. He walked across the broad dock and said, "Hello!"

20

The other looked up, and Tom first saw a weather-beaten, deeply lined face that

belonged to a man well past the half-century mark. It was a shrewd face, too, but not cunning. Though the eyes were surrounded by those wrinkles that always mark the eyes of a mariner, there was a trusting light in their watery depths that aided in forming Tom's opinion that here was an old fellow whose long life at sea and acquired fund of sea-lore had not deprived him of a certain simplicity that was inherent.

The man was whittling a soft pine block into the shape of a little toy, and several untouched similar blocks, as well as partly finished toys, were in a basket at his feet.

No! At his foot! For the man's right leg, sticking straight out before him as he sat on the box, ended in a wooden stump, painted green and with a brass ferrule on it. The old toy maker was a cripple.

"Ahoy, mate!" was his reply to Tom's cheerful greeting. "Was you looking for some little knickknack to take home to the missus, or mebbe the kiddies?"

“Do I look as old as all that?” laughed Tom. “I’m not married yet, and no chance of it. Do you make these for a living?” he added. 21

“Well, it helps out. I got a pension. I’ve made ’em down here and peddled ’em along the wharves ever since I got my timber-toe. I was always handy with my knife.

“If I hadn’t been,” he added practically, “I’d have lost more’n my leg that time in Portygee Pedro’s joint at Nassau. They flung down a heavy mahogany bar onto me and pinned me by the foot and ankle to the floor. There I lay and fought ’em off—a gang of six black-faced rascals—till the coppers come, broke in the door, and rescued of me.”

Tom Cameron’s eyes began to sparkle. He looked aside at the man curiously. Whether he was entirely truthful or not, here was a fellow who could spin a real yarn of adventure if he would.

“This surely is my lucky day,” thought Tom.

CHAPTER III

A TALE OF TREASURE

Tom Cameron first of all indicated his desire for several of the toys the man had in his basket, besides the one he was completing in his hand. Tom did this with premeditation. Any man may have his softer side.

“So you did not get that wooden leg from falling from aloft—or having it bit off by a shark?” the young fellow advanced, smiling at the mariner.

“No, sir. You’re mighty right I didn’t. I got me that timber-toe after that row in Portygee Pedro’s place in Nassau. And a nasty time that were, sir, if you’ll believe me.”

“I’ll believe you if you’ll tell me about it,” answered Tom. “You can’t scare me.”

“I see, mate. You want to be amused, do you?” said the toymaker.

“I like to hear adventures. I’ve had some myself, but I haven’t the gift of language and can’t talk about them.”

“Aye, aye,” said the other understandingly. “Lots of you young fellers seen more adventure over there in Europe than the ordinary sailor sees in a lifetime. But it’s different.”

23

“You bet it’s different!” exclaimed Tom. “I’ve seen some fighting—and some close-up work when we used to smoke Fritz out of his dug-outs. But how about this row in Portygee Pedro’s? You say there were six against you?”

“Six. Black ones, too. Them that didn’t have black faces had black hearts. Them Bahamas spongers and wreckers are bad eggs—believe me.”

“This did not happen recently?” said Tom,

settling himself to enjoy the yarn.

“Thirty years ago. Nassau and the Bahamas have changed since then they tell me. She warn’t no winter resort for rich people in them days. She was just a little, half-caste town, with as many pirates in her—small-fry pirates—as there was in Blackbeard’s day or the times of Sir John Morgan. Believe what I’m a-telling of you.

“I was a young and hot-headed man in them days, Mister. Not the old hulk you see me now. Nothing like stumping around on a timber-toe to make a man cry small. In them old days I’d gone up against an army single-handed, I was that confident of my own powers. And brash! Say! I faced a buckoo mate, single-handed, and licked him on his own deck. That I did.”

The old man shook his head thoughtfully, grinned, and, flashing a sidewise glance at Tom, added:

24

“That’s how I come to be footloose and alone

in Nassau that time. After turning the mate of the *Peachtree*, square-rigger, inside out I had to slip overboard after dark and beat the sharks to the shore.

“I was beachcombing two weeks, and nothing come my way that I wanted to sign up with. You see, I didn’t dares’t go to the agents, for they all knowed about my fight with Bully Trevan of the *Peachtree*.

“I fell in with a little, cross-eyed Spaniard, as dark in his face as he was in his ways. But I thought he was just cap’n of a trading schooner, called the *Cap-a-pie*. Gosh, man! she could sail. I liked her shape when I first seen her drift into the harbor before just a sigh of wind.

“Well, I had a smattering of navigation and was handy with my fists, as I tell you. I shipped with this Spaniard, thinking he was an innocent trader. I’d ought to knowed better, however, when we sailed in the dead of night and without no papers.

“The Spaniard, Captain Gomez—which is just as common a name among them as Smith is among English folks—come out from shore at the last minute, when we’d tripped the anchor and had the sheets loosened, and he brought with him a thundering heavy chest that we hoisted aboard in the boat. There was a smart breeze, and we got away without arousing the port officers.

“I was as innocent as a babe at first. Sure I was. I knowed there was trading goods in the hold and provisions in the lazaret, and expected we’d go drifting along among the islands, picking up sponges (which is a stinking cargo, if you ask me) and shell and such clutter. But good money in ’em, mind you.

“But Cap’n Gomez didn’t do no trading while I was with him—no, sir! After he got that chest stowed in his own cabin, he just sailed in and out among the keys looking for something, I didn’t know what. By and by I come to the conclusion he was looking for a

likely and lonesome key for some partic'lar purpose, and I begun to smell a rat.

“I soon figgered there warn't nobody in his secret but the two mulattoes who had come off with him in the small boat—and they bunked forward with the crew. They was mebbe in his secret, but they weren't his friends. I could see that, too.

“Well, one evening we come to what 26 Captain Gomez had likely been looking for. I marked the island well. There's landmarks you couldn't miss, and in a rough way I got the position of the ship from the shot we'd taken at the sun that noon. But I kept it to myself.

“We dropped anchor for the night. The skipper passed out rum to all hands, and drank himself. So did the two mulattoes. But them three drank out of another bottle. I stood at the rail and tipped my rum overboard, willing enough for the fishes to be doped, but not for me!”

“He wanted to put you all to sleep, did he?”
said the listener.

“You get it, sir. That was his game. When I see the crew getting dopy, I pretended to do the same, and I camped right down on the deck as I always did. You couldn’t have hired me to sleep below. I’d been eat up by bugs!

“Well, ’long about midnight Gomez and his two men brought the chest up and swung out the boat. Gomez come and kicked me in the ribs to make sure I was asleep for fair. I was,” and again the old sailor winked at Tom.

“I see,” observed the latter.

“They went ashore. I slipped down to the captain’s cabin and got his night-glass. I could see ’em carry the chest up the beach and into the patch of that spiky pampas grass, or whatever they call it, that covered that end of the island under the palms. They was gone three hours.

“When they come back I had returned

the night-glass to its beackets and was still asleep. So was every other soul aboard. In the morning we up anchor and sailed for Jamaica.

“We stayed idle there a week and he got rid of the mulattoes—somehow. I never asked how. I didn’t want to know,” pursued the old sailor. “Then he picked a quarrel with me and give me the sack. I reckon he suspected me. Anyway, he sailed without me and I was on the beach again.

“But I was mighty interested in the game by then, sir. I worked my way back to Nassau on a fruit boat. I could have gone on to the States, but I had it in my mind to find out what Gomez had done at Nassau, where that chest come from, and what was in it.

“I got a whole cargo of news when I landed—more’n I expected. Gomez lay in an undertaker’s shop—shot dead on the dock the day before I landed. Nobody knowed by who or what for. I could guess.

“But I wanted to go back of it all; and after a

time, looking in the papers and asking some questions at a runner's joint, I heard tell of a big robbery the very night the *Cap-a-pie* had left Nassau the last time—the time I sailed with her as mate.

“A private bank owned by one of Gomez's countrymen had been cleaned out of the very last peso in the strong-box. Hard cash, sir—hard cash. And Gomez had been the banker's personal friend.

28

“That Gomez would have robbed his grandmother, let alone his friend. I figured he had got the depositors' money and jewels and such in that chest, and the chest had been buried on the lonesome key I was telling you about.”

“And you went back and dug it up?” asked Tom, with a smile.

The toymaker stopped whittling and looked at him. He shook his head.

“You reckon I'd be here on this dock, if I

had?" he demanded. "I'd be livin' up on that Riverside Drive and riding around in one o' them big autos that you see around town. That would ha' been me, mate."

"I see," repeated Tom, nodding. "Well, why didn't you?"

"'Cause I was set upon by them six I told you about. They was most of 'em members of Gomez's old crew. But the mulattoes warn't among 'em. I always believed Gomez had put them out of the way before he was shot hisself."

"And the secret died with the three?" said Tom.

"All but my part of it. I knowed the island. I had the figgers on it. Some of that old crew of the *Cap-a-pie* thought mebber I had a map of the place where the buried treasure was."

29

"Oh! A map?" said Tom, thinking that the matter was coming to a familiar outcome.

“And you want to sell that map?”

The old man chuckled. He favored Tom with another very shrewd glance.

“I didn’t need no map. I got it all in my head, and I ain’t never set it down on paper. No, sir! Them fellers that pitched onto me at Portygee Pedro’s searched me to the skin, and would have killed me in the bargain if I hadn’t got my second wind and fought ’em off with my knife,” he made a savage jab with it in the air, “until the coppers broke in the door.”

“I went to the hospital, got gangrene in my leg, and had to have it sawed off. Then I got back to New York by the help of the Seaman’s Union. And I’ve been just half a man all these years,” and the old man shook his head.

He had finished the toy. Tom gathered up the several articles he had purchased and paid for them. Then he hesitated and finally drew a crisp ten dollar note from his wallet.

“Here,” he said. “That story is worth something, too. Take this, old man, and thank you for the entertainment.”

“I’m blamed if you ain’t the liberalest 30
gent that I ever came across!”
exclaimed the old sailor. “Just for that I’ll draw you a map of that place, showing you the location of the island, and send it to you. What’s your address, Mister?”

Tom was not sure that this was not opening a way for the old fellow to reach him and perhaps make some further claim on his generosity. But he was interested and was curious to see what kind of map the man could produce.

So he gave the old toymaker a card with his New York business address upon it, shook hands with him, and strolled back to the office. On his desk he found a letter from his sister.

The letter was a long one, and among other things it told of Uncle Jabez’ illness, and of

how that illness had brought to an abrupt conclusion Ruth's effort to get the old miller to back her in producing the motion picture she wished to make. Helen had much to say about this.

Tom thought it over, had a long conference with his father, and went up to Cheslow for the week-end. He thought something of importance might come of his visit at this time.

CHAPTER IV

THE GROWTH OF AN IDEA

Those who had known Jabez Potter for long must, like Tom Cameron, have felt surprise at the change in his appearance. The vigorous old miller had suddenly become haggard, worn, and—although not senile—certainly weaker of mind as well as of body than he had been.

He talked for a while with the young ex-soldier. But the doctor had at last impressed Uncle Jabez with his real condition. He must rest. And business worries of any kind were forbidden him.

“It’s mighty tough on you, Ruth,” Tom said, when the young people were together. “Helen says that Uncle Jabez was about ready to go into partnership with you to back the production of your picture.”

“So he was,” sighed Ruth. “Poor man!”

“Poor Ruth!” exclaimed Helen promptly. “I should think you’d quarrel with Fate.”

“I don’t know that that would do any good,” said her chum, with a smile. “I have some money, and with what Uncle Jabez might have been encouraged to put in, I would have risked making the picture.”

32

“You need at least a hundred thousand dollars?” asked Tom reflectively.

“I should not dare start it without knowing where I could get that amount at least if I should need it.”

“Let Helen and me go in with you,” said Tom.

“No. It is too much of a gamble,” said Ruth. “And besides, I will not sponge on my friends,” she added resolutely.

But, of course, they knew that was not exactly her reason for dismissing their offer

without consideration. They knew her too well to insist, however. Helen had already warned Tom that Ruth was determined upon this point.

“What is your idea, anyway?” asked Tom. “Helen and I are not rival producers, so you can safely tell us.”

“Of course I will tell you. Helen knows the germ of the story already,” said Ruth frankly. “It is vague yet; but it deals in my mind with buried treasure. You know everybody is interested in the romance and possibilities of treasure trove.”

“Buried treasure!” exclaimed Tom, with a quick laugh. “Good! I am interested in that myself. Here’s a pirate story I heard the other day—and you can have it for what it is worth, although it cost me ten dollars.”

Laughingly, yet with some earnestness, he told the girls about the wooden-legged man and his story of the supposed treasure chest. His sister was excited, but it was Ruth

Fielding herself who showed the deeper interest.

“Why, Tom Cameron, what a perfectly splendid thing!” she cried.

“Let’s get up a searching party and go and find that buried chest,” giggled Helen.

“Do you mean that, too, Ruth?” asked the amused young man.

“No. It was just a yarn, of course. And how those old sailors can spin them! But don’t you see the beautiful possibilities in the tale?”

“Oh! Ah! I see!” said Tom. “For the movies?”

“Oh, Ruthie!” actually squealed Helen, “will you use the story? Then Tom is really a scenario writer.”

“I haven’t written it. And it is that old fellow’s story, not mine. He might write for the screen.”

Ruth laughed and shook her head. “No, no. You miss the point that your wooden-legged man has no ‘heart interest’ in his story—none at all. It would never do for moving pictures—not just as he told it.”

“She means the usual mush they have to put into screen stories to satisfy crazy girls,” said Tom loftily.

34

“I like that!” began Helen, but Ruth interposed.

“Do let me explain,” she pleaded. “I had an idea about finding treasure in the Antilles. I have the skeleton of a plot. But I can see that by using some of the things that old sailor told Tom I can make a better story. Some of those things he told you——”

“The time he lay out on the deck at night, making believe he was doped, and the cross-eyed Spaniard and the two mulattoes took the treasure chest ashore!”

“That is one scene. And how he watched

them go up through the bayonet-grass, carrying the chest to its burial place. And—and——”

“And that bully fight in Pedro’s joint where six of them fell on him and he fought them off with his knife! He can use a knife, too! You know it just by watching him,” cried the now enthusiastic Tom.

“Don’t! Don’t!” begged Ruth, stopping her ears. “Don’t tell me anything more than you have until I have managed to digest the story. It is a big idea. I meant to take a company to the Bahamas, anyway, to make my picture. And we will make our headquarters at Nassau. Hotels are open there in summer, even if the sightseers and tourists are not on the spot. Sea pictures can be taken there all the better in the summer. We’ll find a small island——”

35

“Say!” gasped Tom, “that old fellow is going to make me a map of the island where the treasure chest was hidden.”

“Magnificent!” cried Helen. “And we’ll hunt around and find the buried chest while Ruthie is shooting her picture.”

“It—it is a great idea,” stammered Tom.
“And see how it has grown. Ruth, we must make the picture! It will be a great one.”

But Ruth was shaking her head. Her face had fallen into sober lines. She spoke sorrowfully.

“Poor Uncle Jabez! He might really have helped me. But, whether your sailor was telling you a true story or just a wild yarn, Tom, it is really of no use to me. I can’t make a picture without money—a lot of money. And a lot of money is not within my reach.”

CHAPTER V

THE MYSTERIOUS SUMMONS

The R.F.D. mail carrier, coming out from Cheslow, stopped at the Red Mill at about eleven o'clock each week day morning. On Monday he halted as usual, and Sarah, Aunt Alvira's helper, ran out to accept the mail instead of letting the man put it in the box on the post which Ben had set up by the roadside.

There were a number of letters for Ruth, but when she sorted them there was none that held the first element of surprise, save one. All the others were either from friends or upon business which she knew about.

But one letter had printed in the corner "Abraham Mole, Counselor at Law" with an address on lower Broadway in New York. Ruth had never heard of Mr. Mole, she had

no personal business with a lawyer, and therefore the letter offered something to pique her curiosity. She neglected the other letters to tear open Mr. Mole's envelope.

Uncle Jabez was comfortably
ensconced in a rocking chair under the 37
big elm. Aunt Alvira was in her low chair beside him. They made a delightfully quaint picture, and before she dipped into the strange letter, Ruth looked over the top of it from her stand on the porch, and smiled at the miller and his housekeeper.

“Bless them!” she murmured. “They have both led busy lives. I wonder if, when I am their age, I shall be able to rest and take it easy——

“Bless *me!*” she ejaculated the next moment, for her gaze had dropped to the lawyer's letter and scanned the first lines:

“*My dear Miss Fielding:—*

“Pursuant to instructions from a client, I write to inform you that there has been placed in my hands the sum of one hundred thousand dollars, the same to be put at your disposal under hereinafter stated conditions, for the production of certain moving pictures to be written and directed by yourself. I understand that your experience in this field of endeavor has been made amply convincing to my client’s mind, and of that I have nothing to say. My share in this matter is to incorporate a company with the ends stated above in view, to get your signature to certain agreements and contracts relating thereto, and to receive your instructions upon these several points. If you will call on me at your convenience, these and the following matters will, I have no doubt, be amicably arranged.”

The typewritten letter went on concisely and in legal phraseology to state the details of the proposition, and it was signed in a crabbed hand, “Abraham Mole.” 38

Now, Ruth Fielding had never heard of Mr.

Abraham Mole, nor did he tell her his client's name. Naturally her surprise and wonder were boundless.

"Listen to this! What do you suppose it means?" she cried, charging off the piazza and reaching Uncle Jabez and Aunt Alvira in two bounds.

"Oh, my back! and oh, my bones!" groaned the little old woman. "What's happened now, my pretty?"

"What's to do, Niece Ruth?" demanded the miller, startled.

She thrust Mr. Abraham Mole's letter into the old man's hand. He fumbled for his spectacles, took them out of their silver case, and adjusted them upon his beaklike nose, all the time muttering:

"What's to do? What's to do?"

"Is—is it bad news, my pretty?" quavered Aunt Alvira.

“I—I don’t know!” gasped Ruth. “It’s wonderful news, anyway. But whether it can be true—or what it means——”

She stopped, watching Uncle Jabez with growing suspicion as he read the first paragraph. Did the miller know something already about this wonderful offer that was being made to Ruth? The latter tried to think. Could Uncle Jabez have brought this thing about?

But if ever the old miller’s face had shown wonder and innocent amazement within Ruth’s experience, it was right now. He had been smoking, and he dropped the pipe upon the ground without noticing it.

“For the land’s sake!” he stammered. “A hundred thousand dollars for to make a picture? It sounds crazy!”

“But Uncle Jabez!” cried Ruth, “isn’t it wonderful?”

“Seems like somebody’s got a lot of money

to risk in a gamble,” he complained.

“But who?”

“You ain’t got no idee?” he asked her, with curious sharpness.

“What does it matter?” cried Aunt Alvirah.
“You’ve got some friend that is willing to trust you.”

“Alviry means ye shouldn’t look a gift
horse in the mouth,” chuckled the
miller.

40

“But—but I don’t know what to do. I don’t know what to say. It seems too wonderful to believe,” Ruth reiterated.

“There’s one thing you can do, I calkerlate,” said the old man soberly.

“What is that, Uncle Jabez? You advise me.”

“You’d better pack off to New York and see this Abraham Mole, like he says. Maybe you’ll learn more that way than by standing

there wondering about it.”

“But suppose he won’t tell me who furnishes the money?” asked the girl, in a worried tone. “He speaks of incorporating a company. In that case the backer may keep his name hidden from me.”

“He might,” admitted Uncle Jabez. “But what’s the odds? It’s the money you want, not the name of the feller that puts it up. The lawyer will like enough look after his client’s business. You ain’t got to worry about anything but yourself. See that they don’t sew you up in a sack, that’s all, Niece Ruth. Better get a lawyer of your own to see that your interests in the corporation are secure.”

“But I don’t know a lawyer,” said Ruth.

“Ask Mr. Cameron, my pretty,” said Aunt Alvira. “He will know a good lawyer.”

“You’re coming out real smart for an old woman, Alvira,” said Uncle Jabez dryly. “I shouldn’t wonder if that was a good

idee.”

“I will see this Mr. Mole first. Perhaps it is all right,” Ruth said.

“Go get your things on and pack your bag,” said Uncle Jabez. “I reckon I can spare Ben to drive you to town.”

“Helen will be along with Tom pretty soon. He is going down to New York to-day,” Ruth said. “I can go down with him and come back to-morrow after I have seen the lawyer.”

“Oh, my pretty! It will take you away from home again,” sighed the housekeeper.

“Business first; pleasure afterward,” said the miller grimly. “Go on with you, Niece Ruth. It looks like too good a chance to neglect. Strike while the iron’s hot.”

This was good advice, Ruth knew. She ran into the house, and in three-quarters of an hour was out again, dressed for the journey, bag in hand. Up the road she saw a car

coming. She was only just in time, for in a minute Helen's big car slowed down and stopped at the gate.

"Why, Ruth!" called Helen, "where are you going?"

"I am going to New York with Tom,"
replied Ruth, running down to kiss Aunt Alvira and brush the miller's cheek with her lips. "Wait for me." 42

"Goodness me!" gasped Helen, "what's happened now?"

"The greatest thing you ever heard of," Ruth replied, running out of the gate to climb into the tonneau. "I'll tell you all about it. Good-by, Aunty! Good-by, Uncle! I'll be back tomorrow night if nothing happens, and if I can't come I'll send you a message."

"Good-by, my pretty!" returned Aunt Alvira, smiling at the girl. "Don't let anything happen to you."

“Do tell us what it means, Ruth Fielding!” exclaimed her chum. “It must be something about your picture. Is it?”

“The most wonderful thing in the world, Helen!” cried Ruth.

“Let’s hear it,” said Tom. “I hope it’s good news, Ruth,” he added.

So, leaning over the back of the front seat while the motor-car whirred away toward Cheslow, the excited girl told them of the summons she had received and gave Tom the letter to read.

CHAPTER VI

MR. ABRAHAM MOLE

Tom emitted a whistle of surprise, but Helen had to keep watch of the road ahead. She was quite as much interested in Ruth's wonderful news, however, as her brother.

"Who do you suppose Abraham Mole is?" demanded Helen, without turning her head.

"I have no idea," rejoined her chum.

"I hope it isn't some April-fool joke—something an enemy is putting over on you, Ruth," Tom said soberly.

"Oh!" gasped Ruth. "If it's that——"

"I don't believe it!" Helen cried, and now she flashed a glance of encouragement over her shoulder at her chum. Then she smiled aside

at Tom. “Who ever heard of an April-fool joke in July? You’re out of season, Tommy-boy.”

“That is all right,” pursued Tom, shaking his head. “But Ruth has bitter rivals. They have tried to make her trouble before. But we shall hope this offer is O.K.”

So he, as well as Helen, urged Ruth to accept the seemingly heaven-sent chance to do what she had been longing to do for weeks. 44

Mr. Cameron had taken an apartment in New York, and he occupied this when he was not in Boston or at the Outlook, near the Red Mill, his country home. Tom wanted to take Ruth there to stay over night. But she refused the kind offer and insisted on going to a hotel. She had been at that hotel before.

On the way to the city they had discussed this wonderful offer that had come to her, shrouded with so much mystery, until, as Tom said, they had picked the bare bones of

it.

If Ruth had suspected that the Camerons—the father, or the twins—were connected with the offer to back her production company, she was disabused of this small doubt before Tom left her. He was as eagerly interested in the matter—and in Ruth’s embryonic plans—as Helen herself, and quite as guilelessly.

Tom said he would ask his father about a lawyer who was trustworthy and who had studied corporation laws, and would telephone Ruth the name and address of such an attorney before bedtime.

Ruth had some telephoning on her own account to do when she was settled in her hotel room. First of all, she called Mr. Hammond at his club and after a time got in touch with him. 45

She asked the president of the Alectrion Film Corporation bluntly what he knew about the offer that had been made her by Abraham Mole? As bluntly, Mr. Hammond declared he

did not know a thing about it and asked for particulars.

Ruth read him the first paragraph of the lawyer's letter and believed, by the exclamations of utter surprise at the other end of the wire, that her friend was really a stranger to the proposition.

“Grab it, Miss Ruth! Grab it!” exclaimed Mr. Hammond. “Of course, the sum suggested would scarcely be enough to back a big enterprise. But it is a beginning. It should make at least one picture. Cut your garment according to your cloth.”

“I mean to do that—if I accept,” Ruth told him.

“Don't let it get away from you. Be sure you hold the management of the production in your own hands, that is all. That is what you need. I believe in you, I do indeed. And paddling your own canoe will be a fine experience. Go to it, and good luck!”

Ruth made some further inquiries and requests, to all of which Mr. Hammond handsomely agreed. Wonota, the Indian girl, and her father had been doing small parts in a picture at the Alecrion studio outside the city and were living near the studio. Ruth could have them under the agreement formerly talked over between Mr. Hammond and her.

The producer was so much her friend that he even agreed to release Mr. Hooley for her first picture, if Ruth got the backing she expected. It was all well. When the girl finally sat down at the desk in her room to write certain letters, she was convinced that she really was on the road at last to her great object.

Later Tom Cameron called up and gave her the name and address of a lawyer who would look out for her interests if the new plans came to a head. Mr. Cameron would call that lawyer on the telephone in the morning and introduce Ruth and her business to his personal attention.

Ruth by this time was not unused to business matters. She was independent and sensible. Her experience, for a girl so young, had been considerable. She was puzzled by the mysterious offer that had been made to her by Mr. Abraham Mole, but she knew exactly what she intended to do if the offer seemed reasonable and just.

She had no intention of allowing anybody, no matter how much money was supplied her, to get hold of her picture after it was made and obtain the lion's share of the profits from its distribution.

She knew not only how to make pictures; she knew as well how they were distributed, and on what terms. And she had already had sufficient screen publicity to make an impression upon the magnates in the moving picture business.

47

Until she had interviewed Mr. Mole, however, she could learn nothing more about it, nor could she make any further plans. So she went to bed and slept until morning.

At ten o'clock she left the subway station nearest the number on Broadway printed upon Mr. Mole's letter-head, and easily found the building. The elevator took her to the ninth floor, on which Mr. Mole had his offices.

It did not seem to be a very busy place. There was an elderly clerk, a junior clerk, and a stenographer. A door beyond the rail was marked "Private." She asked to see Mr. Mole and sent in her card.

The lawyer came out himself to greet her. He was a withered but dapper, brisk little man, of uncertain age but with marked intelligence in his countenance. Ruth was confident that she had never seen him before, and he certainly was surprised to see her.

"How do you do?" he said, eyeing her sharply. "Are you Miss Fielding?"

"Yes, Mr. Mole."

"Miss Ruth Fielding?" he repeated.

She handed him the letter he had written her. He looked at it, nodded, and invited her into his office. He placed a chair in juxtaposition to his own at the flat-topped desk and when she was seated, took his own chair.

“Your age—er—rather, your lack of age, surprised me,” he said pleasantly. “I expected a somewhat older business woman. I understand that you have already had much success in the making of these moving pictures. My client seems to be quite satisfied that your experience is sufficient in that line to encourage—er—my client to enter into this business agreement with you.”

“Who is your client, may I ask?”

“Why, yes; you may ask,” said Mr. Mole, smiling. “But let us put that aside for the moment. I am instructed to put the whole matter clearly before you, get your opinion upon it, and then we will go into further particulars if it seems necessary.”

“I see,” said Ruth directly. “If I accept this really wonderful offer that has been made me, your client will appear personally in the matter?”

“I should not say that, my dear young lady. I could not say that—for *sure*. As far as my present instructions go, my client has given me no permission to use—er—my client’s name.”

His hesitation to state the sex of “his client” puzzled Ruth more than ever. She began to suspect that it was not a man at all. But what woman did she know—what wealthy woman—who could possibly have come to her assistance?

49

“Well,” she said with a sigh, “let us talk.”

“Let me talk,” corrected Mr. Mole precisely, finding some papers to which to refer. “You may ask questions afterward. Ahem! ‘In re Miss Ruth Fielding’s picture corporation.’ Here it is. Now——”

And he went on, clearly and pleasantly, to put the business of the proposed incorporation of a company before her. Ruth was to choose the name by which the incorporated company should be known. She should be president of the company. Mr. Mole and his chief clerk were to be named as the other principal officers.

“You see,” he explained, “my client’s name is not to appear officially in the matter.”

A certain auditing bureau was to attend to the books; a certain trust company was to handle the funds; everything seemed, as far as Ruth could see, to be planned upon a perfectly fair and businesslike foundation.

In addition, it was assured that Ruth Fielding should have an entirely free hand in the expenditures connected with the making of any picture the new corporation should finance. She was to supply, of course, a tentative estimate of the cost of production and was to keep within that stated sum if possible; but she need not feel herself bound

to skimp at any point if more money was needed, as far as the working capital of the company might go.

Altogether there was nothing that seemed unfair about the offer as Mr. Mole calmly put it before her. Only—that secrecy about the name of the backer. It seemed that Ruth must indicate her acceptance of the offer before she could learn the identity of her partner in the enterprise; and Mr. Mole would not assure her that even then the mysterious partner would come forward.

“It is a very hard condition,” Ruth said at last. “It does not seem possible that it can be, and yet it may be some person with whom I would not care to have business dealings.”

“In what way, may I ask?” asked Mr. Mole blandly.

“Suppose it is somebody with whom I have had past experiences in some way and have learned to doubt, to fear?”

“Have your business experiences led you to meet many such individuals?”

“No-o.”

“Then I would not worry about that,” said the lawyer briskly. “Think of all your enemies who might wish to do you a good turn. I never had that kind of enemy myself,” and he laughed lightly.

“No. I suppose not. But—but suppose it is somebody who wishes to entangle me in an agreement and use my prestige and experience in the moving picture business, only to trick me out of my share in the end?”

51

“I can see that you are a natural story writer, Miss Fielding. Your imagination does you credit,” said the lawyer dryly.

“Don’t laugh. Mr. Hammond, with whom I have worked, as big a man as he is in the industry, has had his troubles. There was that Bilby.”

“Yes? And Bilby?”

“Well, of course, he is being held for trial as an opium smuggler,” Ruth admitted.

“I can assure you,” Mr. Mole told her, still smiling, “that my client is not that sort of person. I may go farther and say that my client is not an enemy. A friend. Yes, I should call my client an exceedingly good friend of yours, Miss Fielding.”

There seemed to be no way of getting the lawyer to be more explicit. He was quite evidently bound to silence as to the identity of the person offering the use of the hundred thousand dollars. And to refuse it—providing all the details were fair to her—would be suicidal.

After another hour’s talk Ruth arose to leave the office, the agreement having been made that the contracts and papers of incorporation should be sent to the other lawyer whom Mr. Cameron had recommended and who would act as Ruth’s

personal attorney.

“I will gladly avail myself of the privilege of working in conjunction with Mr. Hope,” said Mr. Mole with satisfaction. “You have wisely chosen a lawyer who knows corporation laws from a to izzard. I feel sure we shall get on famously. If there is no hitch you will be able to begin making your plans for this picture—which I understand is to be photographed at a distance—in about a week. Good-day, Miss Fielding.”

Ruth went out of the offices with a feeling that she was out of her depth. His last words pointed to the fact that the mysterious backer knew almost as much of her plans as she did herself!

CHAPTER VII IN PREPARATION

Ruth was able to see Mr. Hope, whose office was not far from that of Mr. Mole, before luncheon. He undertook to act as her attorney and spoke as highly of Mr. Mole as Mr. Mole had of him.

The girl of the Red Mill began to feel that she was walking on air. The great chance had come to her. The thing she wanted most was within her grasp. There was still opportunity for her to withdraw, however, and she felt the need of talking over the particulars with somebody.

Who more willing than Tom Cameron to advise her? She telephoned for Tom and met him in one of the large downtown restaurants for lunch.

“Chess Copley is in town,” was Tom’s first words. “He thought Helen was here, or like enough he would have gone to Cheslow first. I tell you, that young man has got a serious crush on Helen.”

“He is a nice boy,” said Ruth emphatically.

54

“Sure. ‘Lasses’ is all right,” agreed Tom, giving Copley his schoolboy nickname. “But he isn’t just the fellow I thought Sis would even be interested in.”

“Of course, no boy is really good enough for Helen,” said Ruth placidly.

“I don’t know. Sis is all right. But she is not stuffed so full of virtues as Aunt Alvirah’s cakes are of plums, believe me.”

“I think I am glad I have no brother—but you, Tom,” and Ruth sugared that statement with a smile. “You have been awfully good to me——”

“Huh!” exclaimed Tom, looking somewhat startled.

“Yes, you have. You have always tried to advise me right. And I want to tell you all about the Fielding Film Company, Incorporated, and you must tell me just what to do.”

“Oh! That is it, is it?” Tom returned, apparently with relief. “Shoot, then. You shall have my undivided attention.”

“Oh, no! I want you to eat, too,” Ruth said roguishly. “I am sure you can devour food and my story at the same time and still help me to decide.”

“I am yours to command,” said Tom, and for the next few minutes gave his attention strictly to the menu-card.

When they had ordered, he squared his elbows, leaned over the table, and said:

55

“You may fire when you are ready, Gridley.”

Ruth, eagerly but not excitedly, repeated the gist of her interview with Mr. Abraham Mole. Likewise that with Mr. Hope. She could not complain of any lack of interest on Tom's part—not even when the food came to the table. He drank it all in, and his eyes sparkled.

“Bully! *Bully!*” he ejaculated, under his breath. “Why, Ruth, that’s the finest thing I ever heard. It is just what you have wanted _____”

“But I don’t know who he is!” wailed the girl.

“Who who is?”

“The man who is putting up the money.”

“Huh!” exclaimed Tom. “You don’t know that it is a man, according to what you have told me. Maybe it’s some woman. But what does that matter?”

“Of course it matters. I—I——Tom Cameron! Tell me truly. Is it Helen?”

“Goodness, no! I am sure it is not,” said Helen’s brother promptly. “Helen’s funds are tied up, anyway. I know about her money just as I know about my own, Ruth.”

“Then I am all at sea,” sighed Ruth.

“Being at sea, then, stick in your paddle and work the boat,” advised Tom, 56 smiling. “It is the big chance. You’ve got to take it, Ruth. You have been wanting it right along. Mr. Hope will see that they don’t put anything over on you. If he sees the smallest loophole for them to wriggle through, he’ll stop it up instanter. Oh! I know Hope.”

“Do you know Mr. Mole, Tom?” cried Ruth, with sudden suspicion.

“Never saw him in my life. Never even heard his name. That is, not until you showed me that letter. But I know Hope, of course. He handles most of the governor’s New York business, and naturally keeps an eye on my affairs, and Helen’s.”

“I declare!” exclaimed Ruth in despair, “it is the greatest mystery——”

“Are you going to spend your time worrying about that?” demanded her friend. “You’ve got your chance. Take it. That is the best advice I can give you. Put yourself in the hands of Hope. He’ll fix it all up for you. No matter how much of a mole that other lawyer is, he’ll not undermine Hope. Take my word for it.”

“Really, I’m not afraid of that, Tom,” confessed Ruth Fielding. “The Fielding Film Company seems to be an assured fact right now. It is only the mystery that bothers me.”

“Forget it!” exclaimed the slangy Tom. 57
“You should worry and get an aerated brain! Care killed the cat. And all those other new and old saws that apply to the present case. Sure, Ruth! you are not afraid?”

“Afraid of what?” she asked, with some acerbity.

“Afraid to tackle the job?”

“You are insulting, Tom.”

“I thought I was,” said Tom, with satisfaction. “I never knew you to dodge a duty or fear consequences when you were once started on a thing. My dear girl, *start.*”

“I believe I will. I must go home and talk —No! I cannot talk with Uncle Jabez. Not to bother him, at least. I must tell him when I go back to-night, either that it is settled, or that I have refused the offer.”

“You won’t refuse?” cried Tom.

“No. I will not. I will chance it. I am going to make an arrangement with Mr. Hammond to get Mr. Hooley and Wonota and Chief Totantora some time next week. And I will go home and work hard on my story. That yarn the old sailor told, Tom, gives just the color I needed to make the picture plausible. Have you heard from him again?”

“Heard from whom?”

“The sailor. He was going to send you a map of that island.”

“Shucks!” laughed Tom. “That was just his talk. I doubt that there is such an island in the Bahamas.” 58

“Well, I am going there to make this picture—to Nassau, at least. So, I am rather interested in details. Now I must go, for I have a lot to do before train time.”

“I called Helen up on long distance, and she will meet you at the station,” were Tom’s last words as they separated.

Ruth realized, if never before, that Tom and Helen Cameron were the very best and closest friends she had. Nothing she could do or say would be for long criticized by either of the twins.

Yet here was a mysterious somebody who had done something that the twins could not

do. Ruth was positive of that. Somebody had stepped in at just the right hour to make her dream come true.

“Whoever it is—he or she,” murmured Ruth as the train bore her back to Cheslow, “I will do my very best to bring the donor of the money ample returns. I will make a big and profit-producing picture. I’ll put the best there is in me into it. I will! I *will!*”

This vow was not idly spoken, if spoken 59 only in her mind. And the vista of possibilities that opened before her spurred her thought to reflection upon a dozen different threads of the new opportunity that confronted her.

The Fielding Film Company! Plain, direct, and with the necessary advertising “punch.” She meant to make the name of Ruth Fielding on the screen an important asset of the new organization. It would indicate, too (Ruth did not lack shrewdness), that the producing company was governed by her, and by no other. All publicity must naturally advertise

Ruth Fielding when the corporation was thus named.

She did not arrive at Cheslow until very late in the evening. But the hooded lights of the Cameron car showed the girl of the Red Mill her way across the station platform. Helen was in the tonneau and the Cameron chauffeur at the wheel.

“There you are, Ruthie! Tom said you would surely come on this train. Do get in here and tell me all about it.”

CHAPTER VIII

THE START

That Helen Cameron had a distinct and enthralling interest in everything Ruth did, or was about to do, during the next few days was easily believed by those who knew her. Although Ruth had refused to allow the twins to aid her in the undertaking of establishing herself as a moving picture producer, Helen forgave her chum that, and showed in every way that she was Ruth's sincere and anxious well-wisher.

Ruth's plans for the forthcoming production were entered into by Helen quite as cheerfully as in former times. First of all, she was determined to accompany Ruth and her picture company to Nassau, or wherever else they might decide to go.

“And, believe me, I'll get up a good crowd to

go along,” she cried. “Why, Ruthie, the Copley girls will be just crazy to go.”

“I don’t know but that you will all be 61 crazy if you do go,” observed Ruth dubiously. “I understand that only one good hotel is open at Nassau. It is between seasons. None of the regular line steamers are running at this time of year. From what I can learn, our best chance, for freight and all, is to charter a schooner at Miami and keep it in commission as long as we remain on location. An auxiliary schooner, I mean.”

“What is good enough for you is surely good enough for me—and Jean and Sara Copley, to say nothing of Chess.”

“But I don’t consider it good enough for me at all,” laughed Ruth. “Only I must and shall put up with such accommodations as are to be obtained.”

“So can we.”

“You’ll get more than enough of it.”

“And besides,” added Helen, “we’ll divide the expense with you. That’ll help.”

“Well, it is an object, I admit. If you girls don’t increase the expense.”

“Now, don’t be pessimistic. We’ll have a grand time.”

“By the way, Chess is in town. Tom says so,” Ruth remarked.

“I know it—and no thanks to Tommy-boy,” rejoined Helen boldly. “The girls will be back there next week, too.”

“Why!” cried Ruth, with interest, “I thought they remained on Copley Island in the St. Lawrence for the entire summer?”

“So they do—did—until this year. Suddenly—and since we were up there at the Thousand Islands, Ruth—some emergency arose in Mr. Copley’s business affairs which takes him over to Europe. Mrs. Copley wishes to see the district he is going

to, for she was often there before the war. She will accompany him. They sail next week, and the house at Copley Island will be closed.

“Chessleigh and Jean and Sara will have to make other plans for the summer. I have already warned them that I will make their plans—that I have something wonderful in store for them,” and Helen laughed roguishly.

“You are the greatest girl!” rejoined Ruth. “You are always planning things for everybody else.”

“Don’t say they are not nice things, Ruthie,” said Helen lightly. “And I believe it will be fine for us all to go to the Bahamas together in the off season. Just to wear sweaters and rubber-soled shoes and Panama hats. Simple, healthy, and——”

“Hot!” exclaimed Ruth. “It is the coast fever season. We shall have to beware.”

“What! Beware in those palm-fronded isles?” scoffed Helen.

“You mean mosquito-froned isles, don’t you?” said Ruth grimly. “I shall consider screen cloth and citronella my best friends down there.”

“Practical Ruthie—as ever!” ejaculated Helen. “Well, it is understood. Chess Copley and the two girls are sure to go. And there’s Ann Hicks.”

“Oh! Ann’s at Cape May.”

“And on the tiptoe for flight. She says Uncle Bill’s maiden sisters are two of the most trying ladies she ever met. She can do nothing to suit them and they openly call her ‘that cowgirl’!”

“Why, that is a shame,” said Ruth angrily. “There must be something wrong with those old aunts. Ann is just as nice as she can be, if she is blunt.”

“I’ve written Ann to meet us in New York for a new adventure. She will be there next week if she has to walk.”

“You certainly have gone ahead and planned things.”

“That is my forte,” said Helen proudly. “I can tend to everybody’s business but my own— Tom admits that. Oh! And of course Tommy-boy will go with us.”

“Now, Helen!” exclaimed Ruth, her face falling.

“What is the matter with Tom?” asked Tom’s sister, with sudden exasperation.

“He should remain at work with your father. You know that well enough. You will utterly ruin Tom. He is getting to be as irresponsible as you are yourself.”

64

“I like that!” exclaimed Helen, in a tone that showed she did not like it at all. “Tommy-boy is all right.”

“He certainly is. When he is in his right place,” replied Ruth, with a smile. “But his right place is at Cameron Brothers’ offices.

Since your father opened his New York branch he is especially needed. You know it.”

“I don’t see—Why! you don’t carp about Chess Copley running about and having a good time.”

“I have explained that before,” said Ruth quietly. “It is the dull season in real estate. And Chess earned his vacation this year if never before. Why, one of his commissions last spring was eight thousand dollars.”

“Money!” exclaimed Helen, in fiery mood. “That is all you think of. You are becoming as big a miser as Uncle Jabez.”

“Now, now!” said Ruth softly. “Say all you want to about me but don’t talk about poor Uncle Jabez when he is so stricken.”

Helen flung her arms around Ruth’s neck and, with tears, kissed her.

“I am a hateful old thing!” she declared penitently. “But you are too hard on

Tommy-boy. And you used to be just as proud of him as I am.”

“I am just as mindful of Tom’s good points now as ever I was,” Ruth declared warmly. “I consulted him right away when I had seen the lawyers the other day. I never have forgotten, and never shall forget, that Tom would have helped me start my producing company had I let him.”

“And you should have let him!”

“No. I would rather have a stranger for my backer. I want the arrangement to be strictly business.”

“But it isn’t!” cried Helen, smiting her hands together in delight. “You say yourself it must be somebody who knows you well and who knows what your hopes and plans are.”

“But I know it is neither you nor Tom,” replied Ruth. “That is a sure thing. Oh!” she added suddenly. “There is Ann!”

“Where? *Where?*” shouted Helen craning her head out of the window. “I don’t see her.”

“Come back in here, you headlong girl!” exclaimed Ruth, clutching her chum. “I mean to say that it might be possible for Ann to be my unknown backer. She has lots of money, I know. A hundred thousand would be only a drop in the bucket to the Hicks fortune.”

“If it is, Ruth,” promised Helen, “I’ll worm it out of her.”

It did not seem, however, as the days advanced, and busy days they were for Ruth Fielding, that she was to discover the identity of the person who had come to her assistance. The agreement for the incorporation of the Fielding Film Company was made, and Ruth went to New York and, under Mr. Hope’s direction, signed the papers.

66

The chief parties to the agreement were Mr. Abraham Mole and Ruth herself. It was plain that the mysterious investor trusted Mr. Mole

implicitly. The latter acted for his superior in every particular. Ruth could now go ahead with her arrangements, even to the expenditure of money, and Mr. Hope encouraged her to consider the Fielding Film Company an actual fact.

The headquarters of the new corporation were for the present to be in Mr. Mole's offices, and Mr. Mole's clerks would attend to the correspondence.

Meanwhile Helen Cameron was getting her pleasure party together. The Copleys had come down from the Thousand Islands and Mr. and Mrs. Copley had sailed for France. Ann Hicks had come up from Cape May—and she did not have to walk!

“Although,” declared Ann, “I shook the dust of the Auntie Bascom's house off my feet when I left. No more for me. Never again! Living with two old-maid aunts is the bad cowboy's idea of where he is going to when he dies!”

“Oh, how perfectly wicked!” cried Sara Copley with delight.

“Any wickedness can be forgiven if it is original enough,” declared Jean, her sister, who was the most modern of moderns—or thought herself to be.

Ann opened her eyes wide. “Wicked?” she repeated. “How do you girls get that way? If you want to meet anybody really wicked, you ought to get acquainted with ‘Bad Bill from Bildad, Montana.’ He would really surprise you.”

Her meaning missed its mark. The Copley girls were pleasant girls; but they did not wholly understand Ann Hicks. Nor were they sure that they understood Ruth. Helen—in her up-bringing and home environment, at least—was more conventional, and the Copley girls could judge Helen by their own familiar standards.

Outside of their own well-understood social classification the Copley girls were somewhat

at sea. They were not socially nor intellectually adventurous. At this time Ruth herself was much too entangled in business affairs to know how anything else was being conducted. She ran back to the Red Mill once to bid Aunt Alvira and Uncle Jabez good-bye. The miller was no better, and he seemed only mildly interested after all in Ruth's new venture. He seemed forgetful, too, of some things she had told him.

“I don't know but he's fast breakin' up, my pretty,” said Aunt Alvira softly to Ruth. “Oh, my back! and oh, my bones! This old world of sin and suffering is pretty near past for him and me, after all. And maybe Jabez Potter will go first.” 68

“Neither of you is going!” Ruth cried cheerfully. “Don't talk that way, Aunt Alvira. You have always been the most cheerful person around the house here. Don't spoil your record.”

She tried to leave them in good spirits; but the old people could not fail to feel the girl's

absences more and more. And this time she was about to embark on a long journey.

The next day the company boarded the train for Florida. Together, the pleasure party and the picture company chartered a car. As Chessleigh Copley said, some of the men of the crowd “slopped over” into the ordinary Pullman coach next ahead of the private car. And Totantora, the Osage chief, refused to bury himself in a berth and sat up all night, or stood, upon the rear platform of the train.

Wonota was glad indeed to be again with her white friends. Helen as well as Ruth always treated the Indian maid as one of themselves. The Misses Copley had soon fallen into the same kindly attitude at the Thousand Islands. Ann Hicks, who had seen enough of the ordinary reservation Indian squaw to be distrustful of Wonota at first, soon learned that the young screen star was a very nice girl indeed.

69

That they left New York without Tom Cameron as one of the party was a subject for

much comment upon the part of the Copleys, and even with Ann Hicks. But it was understood that business had kept Helen's brother in the North and that he would surely follow the party to Nassau.

Ruth Fielding, however, confessed secretly to Chess that she hoped Tom would behave himself and stay in the United States.

“A drygoods business cannot be run successfully by absent treatment, and the sooner Tom realizes that, the better,” Ruth declared.

She wanted Tom to settle down. Her whole heart was set upon the realization of her desire that the ex-captain should make something of himself. Why? She hardly dared to answer that question, even to herself. She wanted to do so many, many things before she settled down herself!

CHAPTER IX

A GROUND SWELL

Under instructions from Ruth, Mr. Mole had chartered a schooner then lying at a dock at Miami and, all things considered, the *Marybell* was not a bad bargain. She had been originally built as a sailing yacht, but was perhaps twenty years old and somewhat battered as to paint and patched as to canvas.

Captain Bontelle was a blowsy southern fisherman in a shabby blue suit and a yachting cap as shore-going outfit, and he was waiting at the hotel when the party from New York arrived.

He seemed a little perturbed when he learned that "R. Fielding," head of the company he was to transport to Nassau, was a girl.

"Though women have got so smart

nowadays,” he drawled, “that I reckon we’ll be votin’ for one for president next time—or mebbe the time after that. My woman runs a boarding house herself right here in Miami, and she made more money last winter out o’ you No’theners that come down here than I made with the *Marybell*, and that’s a fact.

“Well, now, Miss Fielding—or is it Missus?”

71

Ruth laughingly told him she was unmarried.

“That so? Well, I reckon we can get along all right. I got a small cargo for Nassau—had it engaged before I heard from that lawyer. It won’t interfere with the goods you got, and I’ll make the party as comfortable as can be in the cabin. Leastways, the womenfolk. The men will have to bunk as best they can. ’Twill be a full company.”

“It is not a long voyage, is it?” Ruth asked.

“Not if the wind’s fair.”

“But you have an engine, I understand?”

“Mighty spry little engine, too,” said Captain Bontelle. “But I sometimes have trouble with her. She’s a bit finicky at times. But with good weather I’ll bring you to Nassau in two or three days. Can you start early in the morning?”

“Whenever you say, Captain Bontelle.”

“Send your boxes and bags aboard then, from the station. No use payin’ two express charges,” said the skipper. “I’ll send my boy up to tell you in the morning an hour before we sail. That right?”

It seemed to be. The girls were desirous of seeing the town that evening, and Chess Copley found some motor-cars for hire and treated the whole party—or those who would go—to a ride about the town and on some of the beautiful roads outside. 72

It was Mr. Hooley who went to the dock and looked the *Marybell* over. When Ruth

returned with the merry party of sight-seers the director took her aside with rather a quizzical smile on his face.

“You didn’t see the schooner, did you, Miss Fielding?” he asked.

“No. Isn’t it all right?”

She was immediately a little worried. Perhaps she had left too much to chance. For the time she had forgotten that all the responsibility of this venture—even to the smallest details—was on her shoulders. This was no such trip as she had taken before.

“Well, I’ve been down here before. Helped to make some under-sea shots for ‘The Fathomless Depths’—that big serial the Graphoscope people made a few years ago. I know something about these old arks.”

“Oh! is the *Marybell* an old ark?” cried Ruth.

“Well, she’s kind of tarry,” and the director laughed. “But she’ll do if it is pleasant

weather. But if a squall comes up and she gets to pitching, I am afraid these society buds will get rather nipped.”

“Don’t scoff at my friends,” laughed Ruth. “The Copley girls are not used to roughing it, I know. But Miss Cameron has been everywhere I have; and Miss Hicks can ride a bucking bronco.”

73

“And the *Marybell* will buck some if it comes on to blow. I have seen her rig before.”

“Do you think it is unwise to go in her to Nassau?” asked Ruth bluntly.

“Not at all. She is as good a craft as we can get. Roomy, and probably sound. But I fancied your friends would want to back out if they realized what she really might turn out to be in bad weather.”

“Better they should not know, then,” said Ruth soberly. “When they are out on the bosom of the deep it will be too late for them to back out.”

“We will hope that that bosom will be placid,” said Hooley. “Otherwise——”

Ruth kept this matter to herself. She did not want to break up Helen’s party, and she feared Jean and Sara Copley might be deterred from going if they knew beforehand just how inconvenient the old schooner was.

As it turned out, the doubtful ones no more than the members of the picture company who were used to roughing it, had a sight of the schooner until they were turned out early in the morning to go aboard. There was a thick fog over the town—rather a surprise at this time of year—and when the party walked down to the dock it was almost impossible to see much of the harbor, or even much of the schooner. 74

“Such a wet day!” complained Jean Copley. “Sha’n’t we wait till it clears up?”

“No, no!” exclaimed Helen. “We have promised to interfere in no way with the business of the Fielding Film Company. So

we must not hold back now, Jean.”

Their baggage was already aboard. How their bags were stowed, and where, they must find out later. The girls—including Wonota—were hurried down into the cabin to get them out of the way of the crew of black boys who ran barefooted and shouting about the deck.

It was only half illuminated down there; and it did smell tarry. But Ruth promised that as soon as the schooner was at sea they would take possession of the deck and enjoy the trip to the full.

Captain Bontelle and his mate had given up their two little cabins to the women, as well as the open berths in the main cabin. Undoubtedly the captain would do his best for them.

When the schooner was away from the dock they heard the exhaust of the engine begin to pop, and then the wallowing of the propellers. They moved through the flat water with some speed. But they did not

soon leave the fog behind.

There was a ground swell outside, and it grew heavier as the *Marybell* pursued her course. Worst of all, the fog did not lift. The old schooner seemed to act just like a blind and ancient hound seeking a scent across a roughly plowed field.

When the bows of the schooner began to lift and they climbed the broken swell of the sea, the Copley girls and Ann Hicks clung to each others' hands and moaned in unison. When, having capped the summit of the roller, the *Marybell* plunged lumberingly down again into the ever-deepening trough, the same trio shuddered and expressed both by gesture and speech their lack of confidence in the stability of their own stomachs.

Nor were they alone. Mother Paisley, for whom Ruth had arranged a part in her picture (for the old-time actress was an invaluable chaperon), had immediately lain down upon coming aboard and remained speechless and quiet. She had warned the younger women of

what was likely to follow. She had crossed the ocean from England on a sailing ship when craft propelled by steam were not common, and Mrs. Paisley would never forget that experience.

“What do you think about being rocked in the bosom of the deep?” demanded Mr. Hooley, poking his head in at the companionway and catching Ruth’s eye and attention.

76

“If it would only clear up so that we could see,” sighed Ruth.

“It is going to be worse. This swell is not the aftermath of a storm—it is the forerunner. I only hope the engine won’t give out. Captain Bontelle expresses some doubt about it himself.”

“Oh!”

“Can’t be helped. If we’re in for a bad time, it will have to come. No going back now and—so far—we’re going forward. Let’s hope for

the best.”

This, Ruth thought, was not very comforting. She neglected to repeat Mr. Hooley’s pessimistic speech to the other girls.

CHAPTER X

PITCH AND TOSS

As hour after hour slowly dragged by the Copley girls and some of the women members of Ruth's picture company began to complain. Why had the captain started in such a storm? Why had he not waited at Miami until the fog, at least, was dissipated?

"I am afraid we shall have to leave it to him," said Ruth. "Captain Bontelle knows the sea and particularly his schooner better than we do. Perhaps we are frightened over nothing."

"You admit you are frightened yourself, Ruth Fielding!" cried Jean Copley.

"Not exactly. But I am troubled, I admit. It is not as pleasant a voyage as I had hoped for."

"Give me a chance on an outlaw mustang and

I know what to do,” muttered the girl from Silver Ranch. “But such pitching and tossing as this beats any crazy bronco I was ever on.”

“Now Ann Hicks, don’t you complain!”
exclaimed the girl of the Red Mill. “It
might be lots worse.”

78

“Maybe, Ruth. I am not a judge,” admitted the Western girl, shaking her head. “But there is an awful gone feeling inside of me, and I confess I expect the worst.”

Helen was more cheerful than most of the company in the cabin. She was a good sailor and had not crossed the ocean several times for nothing. At least, she made no open complaints.

Ruth realized that could she get her party on deck, it would not seem so bad. But the fog only cleared after noontime to give place to a strong gale. Spray flew over the laboring schooner, from bowsprit to rudder post. The deck was no place for a pleasant promenade.

The Copley girls, like Mrs. Paisley, took to their berths. Wonota had scarcely ever seen the sea before. But she seemed less disturbed by the storm than most of the others.

“There should be no fear in our hearts,” she told Ruth. “Such things are soon over. They either end quietly, or end everything for us. We cannot change the course of events.”

“I know you are a fatalist,” Ruth said. “But there is a more cheerful way to look at things, don’t you think so, Wonota?”

Wonota smiled suddenly. “They told me so in the mission schools on the reservation. But I have my doubts when I see my white sisters give up hope so soon.”

79

“Pshaw, Wonota!” interposed Helen Cameron. “They don’t give up hope at all. They are merely unused to roughing it. Those Copley girls would bear actual death and disaster more equably than they do a little discomfort. But I do not suppose there is any real danger, do you, Ruth?”

Before her friend could reply there was a sudden cessation of the throbbing of the propellers that had incommoded them ever since they had left Miami.

The schooner pitched and rolled worse than before. They heard the black boys thudding about the deck and the squeal of blocks and tackle as the canvas was spread.

“But what do you suppose it means?” Helen demanded. “Is Captain Bontelle going to depend upon the sails when he has a perfectly good engine?”

Unfortunately it proved that the captain of the *Marybell* did not have a “perfectly good engine.” He had expressed some doubt of its stability to Ruth before. The mechanism had broken down and they had to put sail on the schooner until the engine could be repaired.

The vessel heaved and pitched more as night drew near. Those who were already ill could feel no worse than they did. The more robust of the company in the cabin

felt their faith slipping.

“Why doesn’t he put back to Miami if his engine can’t be fixed?” Ann Hicks demanded.

But Ruth knew the answer to that. The gale was off shore and the *Marybell*—though sound in every timber—might not beat back against the hurricane. They had been given to understand that the weather in these regions at this time of year was most equable. Captain Bontelle would certainly not have ventured out of the harbor had he known this storm was coming.

Sudden and fatal gales sometimes whip these summer seas, and the *Marybell* had without doubt fallen in with one. The night settled down and the schooner continued to pitch and toss, pitch and toss, in a way to shake the faith of even Ruth Fielding herself.

She did not know how the men were getting on; but she was quite sure the feminine members of the “pleasure party” as well as

the girls working for her were all in that state where “nothing much mattered.”

They were for the most part hopeless and helpless. Ann Hicks was trying to write a farewell message to her Uncle Bill Hicks which she proposed to seal in a bottle and throw overboard at the moment the ship went down!

At the very hour when the fading afternoon seemed to presage wreck and disaster for the *Marybell* and all aboard her, Tom Cameron picked up the last bunch of mail brought to his desk for the day and shuffled the letters to see if there was anything among them that could not be postponed until the morning. 81

For Tom was very weary of his job. The correspondence of a firm like Cameron Brothers is not likely to be very absorbing to a young fellow who has not the least taste for the business, and very little aptitude for it.

Tom managed to suit his father; but he was

well aware that no other employer would be so lenient with him as the elder Cameron had been. Since Tom's uncle, Mr. Harvey Cameron, had died, the remaining partner had carried on the business single-handed. It was a fact that he had hoped for Tom's aid when Tom came to maturity.

But Mr. Cameron had no hallucinations about his son's fitness for the work. He knew as well as Tom did himself that drygoods was not Tom's line. It was not wholly that the war had changed Tom. Merely, the young man's development through the war had been away from the sober, uneventful life of a merchant.

There was a letter personally addressed to Tom in that bunch of mail—the writing being of a straggly, ill-formed kind that puzzled him. He gave his attention to it with curiosity. 82

But when he slit the envelope with the paper-cutter and drew forth the enclosure it proved to be no letter at all. On a once-folded piece of stiff paper was a drawing in India ink—the

outline of something that looked a good deal like a crab with a well-defined pair of pincer-like claws.

“What under the sun is this?” muttered Tom, and began to study the lines and the unevenly formed words printed at various angles around about the main drawing. “Palme grove,” “Coral heep,” “Rock pile,” “Sandy beech,” and at one end of the sprawling figure, a more enticing phrase: “Dig about here for chist.”

“My good gracious!” ejaculated the young man with a sudden accession of interest. “It’s the old fellow’s map of the treasure island! What a lark!”

CHAPTER XI

AT WORK AT LAST

Chess Copley stumbled in at the companionway door and slid down the steps to the curtains that were hung for privacy at their foot, floundering a good deal like some sea-monster that had just come aboard. A swishing wave broke angrily against the slide he had closed behind him.

“Are you still alive down here?” he asked Helen and Ruth who seemed to be the only members of the party on their feet—and they were hanging on grimly to the rail.

“So far nobody has passed away,” admitted Helen. “But Jean and Sara have both stated that they would welcome death.”

“Yes,” he agreed, “the sting has sort of gone out of death after you have tried to balance

yourself on this blundering old tub for a while. They tell me that you can overcome seasickness by balancing yourself properly on the deck—give to the pitch and sway of the vessel, as it were.”

“Oh!” said Ruth doubtfully.

84

“Yes. Sounds easy, doesn’t it? For an hour,” Chess declared, “I have been up there trying to do the balancing act. When the bowsprit tries to stab the clouds I lean forward until my forehead pretty nearly grazes the deck. Then when she kicks up astern, I lean back until I expect my head to bump. When she rolls I’m likely to get a cauliflower ear, batting it on the rail. Tell you, this *Marybell* is some tub!”

“Ungrateful!” scoffed Helen. “Why don’t you get out and walk?”

“Gladly. Will you take a stroll with me?” he asked soberly.

“Oh, I couldn’t think of it. It is much too wet;

and I have no mackintosh or overshoes,” replied Helen. “But tell us—is there no good news?”

“Sure. That’s what I came below for. A message from Captain Bontelle.”

“What is it?” cried Ruth and Helen in unison.

“Captain Bontelle says for you all to go to bed. He’ll get the engine fixed by morning.”

Chess grinned broadly as he wobbled on the lower step of the ladder. At least, he could be cheerful in the face of discomfort.

“It is a pretty rough experience for some of the crowd,” Ruth said. “I am sorry we could not get another boat.”

“But this is no place to swap boats—in the middle of the ocean,” said Chess.

85

“And I fancy we’re safe enough.”

“They don’t all believe that,” giggled Helen suddenly. “There is Ann who declares she will never go back to the States again if we

do reach Nassau until she can go in an oxcart. The ‘mighty deep’ is too much for Ann.”

“And it is mighty deep right here, I understand,” said Chess, as he turned to go out upon deck again. “No wading ashore from here.”

He waited for the schooner to roll to starboard, pushed open the slide, and darted out and closed it before the craft rolled back, dipping up what seemed to be half the Atlantic Ocean and spilling it across the pitching deck.

That night was an uneasy one for the passengers aboard the *Marybell*, if not for her crew. The accommodations outside the cabin were very inadequate. The men actors in the party were not happy. The forecastle was close and crowded, and the black boys having given up those quarters to some of the troupe, were constantly dodging down for their things, thus adding to the unpleasantness of the situation. The deck, for all the pitching and rolling of the schooner, was the better

place after all, and those who were not down flat on their backs with sea-sickness remained there.

“Believe me,” said one of the actors, 86
“before I went into the movies I made some awful ‘one-night stands’ out on the road, but I’ve seen more mean times since I acted before the camera than I ever dreamed there could be! I’d rather play stock for the rest of my life in some lonely village miles from Broadway.”

“At about one-quarter the salary and a change of program every week, eh?” said Hooley, with a laugh.

“That’s all right, too. Money isn’t everything. And I never cared for the strenuous life. I like peace and quiet, I do.”

The general concern before morning, however, was not so much fixed upon the discomforts of the voyage as upon the possibility that its end might be disastrous. The old *Marybell* sprung a leak and the clank

of the hand-pumps was just about as cheerful (Chess Copley pointed this out) as the Sexton's song, "I Gather Them In."

The engine was completely out of fix. This Captain Bontelle admitted. They must depend entirely upon the sails to make Nassau, and the wind was unfavorable. Dawn broke over a tumultuous sea without another sail or a streak of smoke in sight, and nothing but a few seabirds drifting about, lending to the seascape an additional dreariness.

Ruth insisted upon coming up on deck when daylight came, and Helen accompanied her. They were well wrapped up, and in spite of Captain Bontelle's scowling objections they established themselves with Chess and Mr. Hooley in a place where they could cling to the lubber lines that crisscrossed the deck.

87

"At least," Helen said, "we can jump overboard if the old thing turns turtle."

"Cheerful!" observed Chess. "How do Sara

and Jean take it down below?”

“Believe me, Chessleigh,” Helen told him solemnly, “they are not taking anything. Sara has made her will several times over and Jean has quite passed out and refuses to speak at all.”

“And Ann!” laughed Ruth. “Poor Ann has fished a lariat out of her hand baggage (maybe she expected to lasso whales with it from the deck) and had used the rope to lash herself into the berth.”

“A lariat in her hand baggage!” gasped Chess. “What sort of wild woman have you brought along, Ruth?”

The girls laughed.

“Ann’s all right.” replied Ruth. “The lariat is a fine horse-hair rope which her father made, and Ann never lets it get far from her. She is awfully proud of it. What I’m concerned about now is the use she’s made of it. If the schooner should go down,

Ann would never be able to reach the deck at all.”

“She is no worse off at that than the others,” Helen declared. “Nothing would rouse them—not even Gabriel’s trump.”

Nobody ever really properly sympathized with the seasick unfortunate until he was ill himself in the same way. So the small group that had gathered on deck were prone to laugh at the others and figuratively pat themselves on the back because they were so much better off.

But were they really so much better off? At least those below need not see how very much patched the old canvas of the *Marybell* was and how clear the water was that was pumped up from the hold.

“If this were really a blow,” began Mr. Hooley, but here Helen demanded to know what he presumed to call it.

“Not a real gale, Miss Cameron. Believe me!

if we were on one of the steamers that ply these waters in the winter we would not even consider it a capful of wind. *If* it were a gale, I should consider that we were in something of a hole. They are trying to pump the whole Atlantic through her seams.”

“I noticed that the bilge cleared out an hour ago,” said Chess gravely.

“What does that mean?” asked Helen, somewhat puzzled.

89

“It means that the schooner is leaking like a sieve,” said Ruth promptly. “We may have to take our turn at the pumps.”

“How perfectly grand!” ejaculated Helen. “We are really in danger, then?”

“Can you beat ’em?” demanded Mr. Hooley. “Why, these ladies have no care for their lives at all.”

“Pooh! I was close to the firing line in France—once,” said Helen promptly. “It takes

something to stir the nerves of a real American young woman, Mr. Hooley. I fancy we are quite as safe here as we would be in many other situations. Don't try to scare us."

"Far be it from me!" disclaimed Hooley.

"But, for my own part, I shall be as glad to see Nassau as Columbus undoubtedly was."

"What do you mean?" asked Chess. "Nassau wasn't there then."

"The island was; and they say it's the spot Columbus first sighted. Though, if that is so, he must have been blindfolded when he sailed past the Bermudas."

"You're going strong on information, Hooley," replied Chess laughingly.

There was coffee served—black and strong; but there was not much chance for breakfast. To have brought steaming food into the cabin would, Helen declared, have been "cruelty to dumb animals. And the party below certainly is dumb!"

Captain Bontelle had completely given up working with the engine. The schooner blundered on under canvas while he confessed to Ruth that he had “done give up the plaguey contraption till he could get a regular mechanic to look at her—if there was such a one at Nassau.”

There were in Ruth’s party, however, those who knew more or less about motors. Besides Chess Copley and Mr. Hooley, there were several others who drove cars. The camera men were all-around mechanics as well. They became interested in the crippled engine, especially when it seemed that the schooner was bound to make very hard weather of it to Nassau.

“Let’s have a look at the innards of the thing,” Chess suggested, and after promising Captain Bontelle to make good any extra damage they might do, the young men, in spite of the pitching of the schooner, began to overhaul the mechanism.

“I feel like,” drawled the captain to

Ruth, “after giving up my cabin to women that I might as well give up my ship to land-lubbers. Anyhow with these new-fangled motor-engines and such, a land-lubber is just as good a man at sea as a seaman.

“Now, I’m a seaman—sailed in sailin’ vessels all my life long. I know it takes longer to get from Miami to Nassau by sail than it does by engine; yet I vote for sail every time.”

“And you seem to have your way this time, Captain Bontelle,” said Ruth rather sharply.

“’Twould seem so,” admitted the skipper of the *Marybell* complacently.

“But I want you to understand that I hired for the Fielding Film Company this schooner with an auxiliary engine, and you are supposed to transport us about just as rapidly as circumstances will allow. If your engine cannot be put in perfect condition when we reach Nassau, I shall consider the schooner crippled and shall break the contract and hire

another boat.”

“What? Why, you can’t do that, Miss,” he cried. “The British courts down there at Nassau won’t allow it.”

“But the American courts at Miami will,” Ruth told him confidently. “And it is before the Miami court the matter will be decided. Now, don’t let me have to speak of it again, Captain Bontelle. I have too much at stake in this venture to allow you—or anybody else—to retard me. Time is precious.”

The boys’ attempt on the engine proved surprisingly successful. The machinery was all right; it was the captain that was wrong!

92

“He is as innocent as a two-year-old kid,” said Chess, with disgust, when the beat and throb of the engine and propellers shook the *Marybell* again. “Nothing much really the matter with that cat’s-cradle he calls an engine. If it was cleaned up and kept clean, it would run all right. This fellow is the most

careless person I ever saw. He couldn't keep the rust off a pair of pincers."

The schooner nosed into Nassau (it was still foggy) the next morning. Some hours before, with a smoothing sea, the cabin inmates had begun to creep out on deck. The island—such glimpses as they could get of it—was a charming sight. The city itself soon attracted their attention.

"Just about the size of Mudlark, Montana," Ann Hicks said. "I hope there is a restaurant that can supply real food. When did I eat last?"

"No doubt Captain Bontelle made money on us," laughed Ruth. "On the meals, I mean. None of us ate up much of his food on the *Marybell!*"

"Wait till I get ashore," groaned Ann. "I'll eat grass!"

But she did not. Their rooms at the hotel were engaged, and the

caravansary proved to be an up-to-date house with a good chef and splendid service. Two hours after they landed the whole party were at mid-day dinner and thoughts of illness and unpleasantness aboard the schooner were relegated to the background.

The fog was fast dissipating, and when they went out of doors and up to the higher ground, the view of sea and shore spread before their eyes was a tempting one indeed.

Circumstances having been such while they were coming over from Miami that no conference could be held about the script, Ruth, Mr. Hooley, his assistant and the camera men and “props” held a serious conclave between dinner time and supper. The whole picture was whipped over and the subordinates took notes and planned for the production.

First of all an island must be found that could be photographed in its entirety from the deck of the schooner, as well as in parts, for the film. The story called for certain physical

conditions in this island, and the next morning, while the schooner's engine was being put in first-class shape by local mechanics, Mr. Hooley and some of the others went in a motor-launch to find a key which would serve the picture company's purpose.

Meanwhile Ruth and Wonota had some special rehearsals. As a Carib maid enslaved by a Spanish buccaneer, the Indian girl had a much more exacting part than she had ever been given before. But Ruth expected a good deal of Wonota. 94

In the first place, the girl of the Red Mill had gained a full understanding of the Osage maiden's nature and capabilities. Although she was happy enough of disposition, there was a tragic strain in Wonota's nature that Ruth could use to the very best advantage in this picture. She meant to bring out this thing in the Indian girl's character and, if she could, put it over on the silver sheet.

In any case, Ruth looked forward now to a

strenuous six weeks or so, and she hoped that nothing untoward would interfere with the work of making the first production in which she could claim screen publicity in the character of both producer and director.

CHAPTER XII

ALONG THE CORAL STRAND

Cuba is called the “pearl of the Antilles”; but almost every island of all the varied groups making up the West Indies is a gem in calm weather. As the *Marybell*, her exhaust now never missing a pop, sailed among the palm-set islands and low, barren keys of the Bahamas, the view the party obtained of near and distant broken bits of coral strand and rocky reef, with here and there a swaying cluster of palms, was entrancing.

The island Mr. Hooley, with the camera men’s aid, had selected, on which most of the scenes of the picture were to be made, was some twenty miles from Nassau, and to the south of that city. It was a good-sized piece of coral, sand and broken rock, with a number of palm trees and wastes of bayonet-grass and the like. Some wild fruits grew there, too.

The pleasure seekers were delighted with the beach and the shady groves. It was a spot to delight the eye, and promised to their northern-born minds a plurality of adventure.

“Why, we may find pearl-oysters and marine monsters—even ambergris—along this strand,” Helen declared. “I am not so sure that we are wise to make our headquarters at the hotel in Nassau. Perhaps we should set up tents here, as well as your company, Ruth.”

96

“One thing—aye, two, saith the preacher!—will be found here,” Chess Copley warned.

“What are they, Old Mortality?” demanded Helen.

“Mosquitoes and sand-fleas. Believe me _____”

“I don’t want to believe you,” cried Helen.
“Let us forget the unpleasant things——”

“Sure! Until they begin to sting and bite,”

rejoined Chess, with a grin.

But the pleasure seekers had a delightful time that day, at least. When night approached one of the men brought over a big motor-launch that Chess had engaged, and the visitors—as distinguished from the workers—went back to the hotel.

A camp had been set up on the shore for the picture company; but the feminine members of the party preferred to sleep in the *Marybell's* cabin. They escaped the night-singing insects in that way, for the schooner was anchored, bow and stern, some little distance from the shore.

Ruth was devoting all her thought now to the picture-work. Although she did not feel that imperative demand for haste which had been the overpowering thought when she was working for Mr. Hammond, she realized that time was a big factor in the taking of the scenes. Every day lost added to the cost of the picture. She must show herself economical as well as efficient. The more so

that she did not know the person who was backing her in this venture.

This mystery was in the back of her mind all the time. To have been given the opportunity to spend money just as she pleased in the making of the film was all right, of course; but she must make a good showing to retain the confidence of whoever had put up that hundred thousand dollars.

More than ever before, responsibility weighed upon Ruth. Yet, it had an inspiring effect upon her mind. She was practically her own mistress. At least, nobody would interfere with her ideas—or with her expenditures, indeed, until the film was completed and ready for distribution.

Her scenario was fully prepared and the continuity writer whom she had hired in New York had made a working script that even Mr. Hooley pronounced a good one. But, of course, a picture has to be built rather than written. There would be many changes from the first form, as Ruth very well knew, and

she must keep her mind fixed on her story all the time.

They had chosen a working title for it: 98 “Treasure Trove”; whether this would be retained or another one chosen, was a matter for future decision. The costumes were much more simple than those used in Mr. Hammond’s picture made at the Thousand Islands a few weeks before. Yet, in the prologue, the dress of the pirates and the Caribs had to be according to the plates Ruth had looked up in the public library during her week’s stay in New York.

The principals had their parts to study. The extras were to be found at Nassau, and on the third day the actors were brought over in a motor-launch for their first rehearsing. The backgrounds for the several important scenes first to be made were selected.

Nor was anything left to chance. The scenes in question were photographed as “stills” first of all, and Ruth and Mr. Hooley examined them minutely. At times it was arranged for

certain objects to be added to the “sets.” Sometimes these were small trees in the more open spaces, or clumps of brush. Sometimes painted canvas “rocks” were set up so skillfully that the spectator when the film was screened would never detect what was real and what was “faked.”

These things being arranged, the company went actually to work. In two days more, with the long hours of sunshine, several of the chief scenes of the picture were shot. This was always done in duplicate, and sometimes three cameras were used, that the scene might be taken from different angles.

99

While Ruth and her company were so busy, the pleasure party fished, explored, sailed among the islands near by, and picked up souvenirs galore. Captain Bontelle, with his usual air of soberness, declared to Ruth that he did not believe he could ever get the *Marybell* back to Miami with that cargo of coral and shell the party proposed to take with them to the United States.

Both the schooner's hull and her engine had been put in good shape at Nassau, and Ruth now did not feel any fear as to the *Marybell's* seaworthiness. They were pretty comfortably ensconced at night in the schooner's cabin, too; but on Saturday afternoon they went back to Nassau to spend the rest day at the hotel.

It was not until then that any incident of real importance occurred following the arrival of the Fielding Film Company at the Bahamas. Everything had gone so smoothly, considering, that Mr. Hooley said he had begun to knock wood whenever he thought of it.

Ruth had not been an hour at the hotel, and had only got into fresh attire, when one of the smiling, dark-skinned bellboys came to the door. He bore a rather soiled card on his tray.

“Dhe gent'm, he wait for you in dhe corridor below, Mess,” said the bellboy, as the surprised girl took the card from his tray.

“What can this be? Are we going to be taken up by society in Nassau?” Ruth observed wonderingly to Helen, who was sitting by.

“What is the matter?” the other girl demanded.

Ruth read the printing on the card:

Amerigo Gion
Sponges and Shell
Nassau

“That looks more like a business than a social call,” observed Helen, having likewise read the card.

“Wants to see me in the foyer,” said Ruth.
“What do you suppose? I don’t want to buy any sponges, nor yet shell.”

“I bet it is a film hound who wants to act before the camera,” chuckled Helen. “You are a producer at last, my dear. The movie bugs are fluttering around your light.”

“I have my doubts about this,” said Ruth, and

started out of the room at once.

Downstairs she found a dirty little man in the usual linen clothes of the native. He wore low shoes, but no socks, although his bow was courtly and his smile as broad as that of the bellboy's.

“Ah, it is to be regretted, Señorita,” he said huskily. “It is the Señor R. Fielden I would weesh to speak wi’.”

101

“I am R. Fielding,” Ruth assured him. “I am the manager of a picture company. What is your business with me?”

“No, no! You can not mean a lady is in charge of this so beeg business?”

“I am in charge. What do you wish?” Ruth asked bluntly.

She did not like the looks of the little man and was more brusque than she otherwise might have been.

“It is so bad—that,” he murmured. “Between

gentlemen—ah! So easy to do business. But wi' ladees—eh?"

"You might try to do business with me—if you have any to state," Ruth told him, without sitting down.

"Then I must ask. Is it your companee that takes the pictures on the Pirate Key?"

"'Pirate Key'? Is that the name of the island?"

"Ah yes. It is so. Called that from many, many years ago, Señorita, when there were real pirates in these seas."

"Well, what about it?"

"I sorry to tell you, Señorita Fiel-den," said the little man, twinkling as to eyes and teeth, "that I have dhe lease of Pirate Key. It is mine for so many years—you understand? I must be paid for dhe use you make of Pirate Key. You understand?"

Ruth was surprised, but she thought she

understood. This was a “hold up”—an attempt to obtain money from the picture company for the use of a location. It is not altogether an unknown occurrence in the moving picture world.

“Indeed?” Ruth said calmly. “What do you regard the use of the island worth—provided you can prove to me that you have any right to payment for it?”

“Ah, Señorita! I have dhe lease, I assure. And for the island’s use I must have ten thousand dollars—a modest sum, ees eet not? Thees moving picture companies, they make so much—ees eet not?”

The little, dirty man smiled again and made another sweeping bow.

CHAPTER XIII

TOM MAKES A DECISION

Tom Cameron was deeply interested in Ruth Fielding's picture making venture, as well as in everything else that concerned the girl of the Red Mill. He wanted to leave the city when the company started for the Bahamas, and perhaps nothing but Helen's advice had stayed him.

But the map of the crab-shaped island that had come to him through the mail led Tom into puzzling himself further about the work that he supposed was even then being carried on at or near Nassau. He knew Ruth and her company would select an island on which to film her picture. It might be this very island of which the wooden-legged man had drawn such a convincing map.

That night Tom got out maps and charts and

compared the marks of latitude and longitude upon the queer map he had received with the actual printed diagrams. The spot at which the “treasure island” was located was actually but a few nautical miles from Nassau.

“Either that old pirate is fooling me, and is fooling me good, or else he really has in mind an actual island of the group. That being the case, the rest of his story may not be so crazy, after all.”

104

This idea once fixed in Tom’s mind, he became more and more eager to join the party making a picture in the Bahamas. The morning following he escaped from the office drudgery and went down along the wharves again. He hunted for the old toymaker everywhere, and finally asked questions in some of the queer old shops and sailors’ gathering places along Front and South Streets.

Everybody whom he spoke to seemed to know the man with the wooden leg; they called him by several names, and knew all

about him. Except one thing. They did not know where he was at present to be found. Nobody knew where he lodged.

Tom gave it up at noon. The old sailor seemed to have kept his promise and furnished Tom with the map of the island, and then had disappeared as completely as though he had sunk himself off the dock.

“Maybe he did not want to be questioned. Maybe it is a fake,” the young man told himself. “But, I declare! I want to see if there is such an island at the point this map indicates. And this sort of island, too.”

If he had had any interest at all in his work, it was lost to him now. When he came back to the offices he found one of the clerks sitting at his desk trying to clean up the accumulated mail that had come to Tom’s department.

105

“Good boy!” the son of the proprietor exclaimed. “I won’t forget this, Kaltar. It’s very good of you.”

“Yes,” said Kaltar dryly. “So your father seemed to think, Mr. Cameron. He told me to take over your work, and he wishes to see you in his office.”

Tom went off cheerfully. An interview with his father never troubled Tom. Here was a father and son, diametrically opposed in business likes, but who understood each other perfectly.

“Well, my son,” said Mr. Cameron smilingly, “it is getting pretty hard to stick to the quill and inkhorn, eh?”

“Dad,” said Tom almost desperately, “I’d go a far way for you, and you know it. But I’d rather be waiting to go over the top any hour of the day than to be shackled to a desk and chair.”

“It doesn’t wear off at all—that distaste for the desk?” asked the elder Cameron, somewhat wistfully.

“It grows worse, Dad.”

“I expect you are hankering to be off south, too?”

“Naturally.”

106

“But that young lady, Miss Fielding?” and Mr. Cameron laughed. “She is a harsh task-mistress, Tom.”

“I’ll say she is!” agreed the young man warmly.

“Are you sure——”

“Surer than ever, Dad.”

“Well,” sighed his father, “I guess it is something we cannot control. And Ruth is a dear girl. You couldn’t do better, Tom.”

“Not in a thousand years!”

“We are agreed on that, then,” said Mr. Cameron, smiling at his son’s emphasis. “And you may as well go on and join your sister and the others. But you need an excuse to satisfy Ruth, I fancy.”

At this Tom put forward the map of the crab-like island and told Mr. Cameron about the wooden-legged toymaker and his story of the buried chest. The drygoods merchant laughed.

“That is more in your line than in mine, Tom. You’d better start another company and call it, ‘Romance, Incorporated.’ Count me out of this, and do what you like. I fancy you will do me about as much good down there in the Bahamas as you will here in these offices.”

“Well, sir, I believe I’ll take a chance,” his son said reflectively.

His father laughed again. “I never thought you would be so afraid of a girl, Tom—and one you have known all your life.”

107

“No? Let me tell you. Ruth can make a fellow feel mighty small and insignificant if she wants to. And, don’t forget, she is a real business woman now, at the head of a company of her own.”

“Yes. I understand all about that,” his father said dryly. “Still, it seems to me that I would display a little pluck myself, Tom. Maybe she will think all the more of you if you show more of that independence which these modern girls themselves claim to possess.”

Tom shook his head rather hopelessly. “Well, Dad, I am going to telephone for a reservation and I’ll start for the South—with this map as an excuse—to-night,” he said slowly. “I’ll take a chance.”

CHAPTER XIV

TOM GOES SOUTH

Tom got his reservation, packed a couple of bags and walked to the Pennsylvania station, there being no taxicab handy. Besides, he wanted the exercise. Office work had begun to make him feel stale.

When he arrived at Miami he left his luggage in the station and refused to consider a hotel for even one night. He wished to follow the picture making party just as promptly as possible.

A brief letter from Helen, written before they boarded the *Marybell*, had reached Tom, but the mails were slow in getting from the Bahamas at this time of year, and before he left New York no further word had come from his twin sister or anybody else in the party gone before.

At this time of year the chartering of a boat at Miami was a less difficult and less costly matter than it might have been in the winter. When Tom made inquiries he immediately had his choice of a dozen big and swift motor-boats, perfectly seaworthy, their skippers quite anxious for a summer job. A run to Nassau was a small matter. There had been a nasty, foggy storm at sea; but it was all over now and fair weather was likely to prevail for weeks.

Tom made a fairly shrewd bargain, sent a black boy for his bags, and by mid-afternoon was aboard the *Trumpeter*, a launch that had taken his eye from the first because of its roominess and stable lines.

It was not a speed boat by any means; it could carry a number of people comfortably; and Tom looked forward to its being made use of while he was among the islands for pleasure parties and the like. He knew what Helen would expect of him.

They sailed with the skipper and a boy, Tom

agreeing to stand watch and steer the boat if necessary. He had convinced Skipper Isling that he knew something about motor-boating.

Tom sailed for Nassau on the afternoon when Ruth was destined to face Mr. Amerigo Gion—he of the smiles and dirty hands—in the corridor of the hotel. The sponger’s demand of ten thousand dollars for the picture company’s use of the abandoned island which had been picked out for filming, and where the Fielding Film Company had already set up its camp, was considered at first by Ruth as merely an impudent attempt to swindle her.

“Are you making this demand seriously, Mr. Gion?” she asked with asperity.

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“Ah, yes, Señorita. Eet ess quite true. I lease dhe island. She ess mine—mine!

“If you want any such ridiculous sum for its use, Mr. Gion, I can tell you right now that you will not be paid.”

“Do not say that Señorita,” he said, bowing again but showing his teeth less pleasantly. “It would bitterly hurt me to be oblige’ to t’reaten you wit’ dhe law.”

“I do not believe there is any law here that would force us to pay you such a sum if we continue to use the island. And at that,” added Ruth composedly, “we will get our things off it early on Monday and go to some other island.”

“Ah no, Señorita. One could not hear of *that*.”

“What do you mean?” demanded Ruth quickly.

“I should have to say, Señorita, dhe tents, and dhe stores, and all cannot be taken from dhe island until my claim, eet ess satisfied. Ees eet not?”

“It certainly is not!” exclaimed Ruth angrily. “I shall find a lawyer at once and see——”

He gestured despairingly, but still spoke softly.

“No, no, Señorita. Eet will not do. I know my rights and I know the courts here. The matter will tak’ long time to adjust. So! You cannot touch dhe things you have put off on dhe island. Eet ess impossible. If you do not agree, the troub’ must come.” He shrugged his shoulders as he turned away. “I have tol’ you. It must be so. Ten thousand—or dhe troub’.”

Ruth went in search of Mr. Hooley.

“Never heard of such a thing,” declared the director. “But you never can tell. These fellows down here must have a dilated idea of what a moving picture company will stand. Ten thousand fiddlesticks! I guess not!”

“What shall we do?”

“Break camp if necessary and find another island—one that is not leased by a miserable sponge fisher. These fellows used to be

wreckers; before that, their ancestors were pirates. Guess the trait has descended to the present generation.”

“But if he has any legal right on his side?”

“I’ll try to find that out for you. The hotel manager ought to be able to give me a line. But probably nothing can be done until Monday. They shut up here pretty tight over Sunday.”

Ruth wanted to discuss the point with Chess Copley, and she went in search of him. But while she had been talking with Mr. Hooley, Chess and the girls had gone motoring. They did not come back to the hotel again until late—too late to have any discussion about the untoward situation that night.

112

Meanwhile Mr. Hooley had obtained the name and address of a lawyer in whom the hotel manager had confidence. But he could not be seen before Monday morning.

“He tells me,” said the director, “that the sponge fisher may have some sort of right to the island as far as the sponge crop goes—or whatever they call it. But these little islands are supposed to be free to anybody to use, as long as the user doesn’t carry the island away bodily.”

“I believe it is just a swindle,” Ruth declared.

“Undoubtedly. We can go to some other island—although it is too bad to do that, for we have used a good deal of film in taking stills of the principal scenes already. Some of them are dandies. And we will have to fake a good many of the future scenes to make them coincide with the locations already made.”

“I know that. And this Amerigo Gion declares we can take nothing from the island if we do not pay him.”

“He’s a dog in the manger,” said Hooley. “Tell you, Miss Fielding, we can take the old *Marybell* to-morrow and get everything aboard.”

“On Sunday?”

“Humph! Such things have been done,” the director said grimly.

“But I would rather not,” Ruth told him. “Let us wait and see. I don’t mean to give up the island at all if I can help it. If the fellow would take a hundred dollars——”

“There is a long step back from ten thousand to one hundred,” Hooley rejoined, with doubt in his tone.

“True enough. And he must have some foundation for his demand or he would not dare make it. Oh, me! Being the manager of a business like this is not all sugar and cream.”

“You have said a big word there, Miss Fielding. But cheer up. We’ll beat the fellow somehow.”

Ruth went to bed, however, without feeling at all sure of this. She was a long time in getting to sleep. And after she had thought, and

thought, and planned and planned—and quite to no purpose—her last waking thought was:

“I wish Tom was here—just for an hour. He could advise me. He always has.”

CHAPTER XV

THE DIRECT WAY OF DOING IT

Tom Cameron arrived in the *Trumpeter* Sunday evening. He marked the *Marybell* at anchor in the roadstead and presumed his friends were at the hotel, where they had engaged rooms by wireless before starting from New York.

But he did not expect to find Ruth and his sister, to say nothing of the Copleys and the remainder of the party, in the state of excitement they were in when he arrived at the hotel. They were grouped with most of the members of the picture company on one of the porches. Ruth was the first to spy and recognize Tom as he stepped out of the taxicab.

“For pity’s sake, here’s Tom!” she cried.
“What has happened?”

“Nothing seems to have happened to him,” drawled Chess Copley.

“Tom!” shrieked Helen and darted away to meet him.

To tell the truth, Ruth wanted to follow her example. But caution stopped her. Although she was delighted to see Tom she did not want him to know just how delighted she was.

115

He was, to her mind and just at this moment, heaven-sent.

The greetings were soon over, and then Helen, Ruth and Chess got Tom off in a corner of the veranda to hear and tell all the news. Naturally Señor Amerigo Gion came prominently into the conversation, and almost at once.

“And the fellow may have some right, Tom,” Chess said bluntly. “Anyway, he’s taking the high and mighty attitude.”

“With Ruth?” demanded the newcomer grimly.

“Oh, not with me personally, Tom,” said the girl. “But he is making the Fielding Film Company, Incorporated, trouble already.”

“While Ruth was waiting to see a lawyer tomorrow,” grumbled Chess Copley, shaking his head, “Gion sailed over there to that island to-day in his sloop, went ashore with his gang, and drove off the watchman and the darkies with him.”

“You don’t mean it?”

“And the watchman had a gun,” said Chess with disgust. “I don’t know what he thought a gun was for.”

“And you mean to say he—Gion—
says he is going to keep the stuff?”
asked Tom.

116

“The film we have already made is there,” said Ruth despairingly. “Besides several

thousand dollars' worth of supplies.”

“And not a cop in sight?” asked Tom, with a grin. “What we need here is some military police, Sergeant.”

“Right you are, Captain,” agreed Chess.

But Tom realized that the situation was tragic. If the sponge fisherman did nothing worse, he might destroy the picture company's goods and chattels.

“And what brought you down here so unexpectedly?” asked Chess, blunderingly.

“Yes, Tom, what brought you?” repeated Helen wickedly, and looking aside at Ruth.

“The *Trumpeter*,” answered Tom placidly.

“What's that?” Helen demanded. “There has no steamer come in.”

Tom explained about the launch. “And we may have use for it. I've engaged Skipper Isling for a month, at least. But, fooling aside,

a very serious matter started me off from New York.”

“Humph!” said his sister. “I guess so.”

“That’s right! Even Dad said it was serious.” He drew forth his wallet and found the envelope with the drawing of the treasure island in it. “Look here, folks. You, too, Ruth. See what you think this is?”

117

It was Ruth, after all, who made the first sensible comment. Helen and Chess were inclined to be frivolous.

“Why, Tom, isn’t it the map of an island?” the girl of the Red Mill asked.

“Right you are.”

“It must be the map that old wooden-legged man promised you.”

“That’s what it is.”

“It looks like a crab—see the claws?” Helen giggled.

“It looks a good deal like the key we are working on,” Ruth said promptly.

“So it does,” agreed Chess Copley.

Tom looked confounded. He rubbed his head hard, “mussing up his pretty curls,” his sister said, and stared at the paper with a new interest.

“Suppose it is?” he muttered. “What do they call it?”

“What does the old sailor call it?” Chess asked.

“Nothing but ‘the treasure island.’ He didn’t name it,” said Tom.

“I know its name!” exclaimed Ruth. “That Amerigo Gion called it ‘Pirate Island.’”

“By George!” exclaimed Tom. “She’s well named, anyway. Do you suppose it can be the same?”

118

“Why not?” cried Helen in delight. “Oh,

grand! We're going to have a real adventure."

"At the expense of the Fielding Film Company?" demanded Ruth, with warmth.

"Never fear, Ruthie," said Tom. "We'll pull you out of it all right. Shan't we 'Lasses?"

"Bet you!" agreed Copley.

"If this map is one of that island," Tom proceeded thoughtfully, "maybe that old sailor told the truth."

"What old sailor?" asked his sister.

"My wooden-legged friend. The buried chest. You know. And maybe this Gion you tell about knows of the chest too."

"Why didn't he go after it before?" demanded Chess promptly.

"How do I know? But he claims to have leased the island from the authorities, and he may be searching the key for the buried chest."

“My goodness, Ruth! It is ‘treasure trove,’ sure enough,” gasped Helen. “And to think!” she added wailingly. “We were wandering about that place all the week and never as much as dug once for the chest.”

Chess was studying the map. He exclaimed:

“I’m blessed if I don’t believe it is the same island! Seems to me I remember some of these landmarks the old fellow has noted. Say! I want to go ashore there again.”

119

“Oh, we’ll go ashore, ‘Lasses,” Tom said, nodding confidently.

The young men bade the girls good-night and left the hotel. Tom’s plan was instantly complete. He told Chess about it as they went down to the quay, where the *Trumpeter* was moored, and Copley agreed with him in every point.

Skipper Isling was smoking on the stringpiece of the deck and the two young men sat down by him and Tom explained

about the trouble the captain of the sponge fishing sloop was making the film company.

“I know these half-breeds,” growled the Miami man. “They are a lot of scalawags.”

“They have got to be put off that island,” said Tom.

“Nothing easier,” agreed the skipper.

“While our friends are fooling around with courts and such here in Nassau, that Gion may do some damage to the goods over there,” Tom added.

“You said it. Run ’em off,” returned Isling.

“We’ll show ’em how they did it in the army,” chuckled Chess.

“I get you,” returned the skipper of the *Trumpeter*, grinning. “I was in the army myself.”

Chess glanced up suddenly with a startled exclamation. A tall figure

stood like a statue just behind them.

“Hey! Who’s this?” demanded the skipper of the *Trumpeter*. “One of those spongers?”

But Tom merely glanced over his shoulder, laughed, and held the other two in their seats.

“Just the man we want,” he said. “How, Totantora!”

The Indian chief said something in his own tongue, and Tom replied, for he understood the language. Then in English:

“Want to get into a little private war, Totantora? Something doing.”

“Whatever my captain want,” said the Indian quietly. “Here am I.”

“You are the fellow we’re looking for!” exclaimed Chess. “Do you know, I never thought of him! The four of us ought to be able to do something for Ruth.”

“I’ll say so,” agreed Tom, with confidence.

CHAPTER XVI

UNCERTAINTY

Ruth was sorry that she had been unable to speak to Tom in private about the trouble that threatened her picture making by the sponge fisher, Amerigo Gion. She respected Tom's advice—when he was serious. And it did seem as though he had not taken the matter quite as seriously the night he arrived at Nassau as she wished.

She had slept but restlessly for two nights and did not get up Monday morning feeling very much refreshed. She had hoped the *Marybell* would be under way at an early hour with all the workers aboard and headed for the island where the filming of "Treasure Trove" had been begun. There was, however, a hitch in this plan.

The previous afternoon, as was told Tom

Cameron on his arrival at the hotel, the watchman left upon Pirate Island and the two negroes with him returned to Nassau in their little “kicker” and reported their treatment by Skipper Gion and his ragamuffin crew.

Both Ruth and Director Hooley had 122 reprimanded this fellow; but scolding him did not mend matters. The island had been given up to the sponge fishers without a struggle. And Ruth was not at all sure that Gion had any rights at Pirate Island, or to it, that should be respected.

Possession, however, is nine points of the law in most countries, and in most civil cases. Giving up the island to Gion was a mistake, the girl of the Red Mill was very sure.

Thus, arising on Monday morning, in no very cheerful mind, Ruth realized that precious time must be wasted while they made an attempt to get a lawyer and learn from him the legal state of their case against Amerigo Gion.

Ruth was not much impressed by the point Tom had made the evening before: that Gion might be aware of the old story of the buried chest upon the key and that the map Tom had brought down from New York showed the very island on which the picture company was working. The matter of the hidden treasure was all a joke to the girl.

But she wanted to see Tom, and he had disappeared. Helen did not know where he was; and soon they discovered, through the chambermaid, that Tom's bed had not been slept in.

At this discovery Helen became much more troubled than Ruth. She began to run about, asking everybody they knew what had become of her brother; and it was not long before she learned that still another important person was missing. Chess Copley had not appeared at breakfast, and Sara and Jean knew nothing of his whereabouts.

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“Well,” drawled Ann Hicks, “this having a brother is not an unmitigated blessing, is it?”

What do you suppose has become of those two boys? Been kidnapped?”

They could not trace the young man, and Ruth decided to depend upon Mr. Hooley and such help as he could give her. But she was disappointed in Tom.

It did seem as though he were becoming more and more unpractical and undependable all the time! For him to go off on some junket at this time—and to take Chess Copley with him—hurt Ruth.

At the hour of nine she went with Mr. Hooley to the office of the lawyer whom the hotel manager had recommended. They found nobody there but a linen-garbed, barefooted clerk, or office boy. Mr. Paladrome was expected—yes. But the boy did not know how soon.

“These folks certainly take it easy,” growled Hooley. “Wish that manager had sent us to a lawyer with a real Johnny-Bull name, like Smith——”

“Or Hooley?” laughed Ruth.

124

“Yep. I ought to have asked for somebody who matriculated in Merrie Hengland, I suppose.”

But Mr. Paladrome, when he arrived, proved to be a much nicer man than they had feared. He could not, however, blow Ruth’s trouble away with a single breath.

“The man Gion may have some legal standing. Islands are leased for various terms to sponge fishermen, shell collectors and turtle catchers. But the leases as a usual thing merely cover the sea pelf named in the business of the lessees. It would not cover treasure trove,” and the lawyer smiled.

“It will take some time to look up the lease and to learn something about Amerigo Gion. I will do this for you as quickly and cheaply as anybody, Miss Fielding.”

“But can we do nothing meanwhile? That man has practically stolen our goods over

there on Pirate Island.”

“Oh, as for that, I would sail over there in my schooner if I were you, with a show of force, and demand the right to resume operations or, if he refuses, to gain possession of my goods. And be sure to warn him that the courts will hold him responsible for any damage done to your property whether he proves a case of trespass or not.”

Ruth and the director departed without very much hope of an immediate settlement of the difficulty. The law, Ruth felt, was an irritating business, to say the least.

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At the hotel Ruth found mail from home. Several Cheslow friends, as well as acquaintances in New York, had written to her. There was a long letter from Mr. Abraham Mole, dealing with the finances of the picture concern. But just now these details did not greatly interest Ruth.

From Cheslow and the Red Mill came a

labored epistle from Sarah, the housemaid, and another from Ben, Uncle Jabez's hired man. They both reported that the miller had had a turn for the worse ten days before, and although the doctor said he was not really in danger, neither Sarah nor Ben seemed to feel much hope that the old man would recover. Aunt Alvira's hands were too cramped for her to write much, but she had added a line to Sarah's letter, addressed to "her pretty."

These letters rather dismayed Ruth. She was so far away from the Red Mill if anything should happen. It worried her to think that so many miles of land and water separated her from the invalid and from helpless Aunt Alvira.

Ruth's troubles and difficulties were thickening, it seemed, hourly. When she came to get her company aboard the *Marybell* for the purpose of sailing to Pirate Island to make her demand upon Amerigo Gion, she discovered that another person was missing. Wonota had said nothing to Ruth before about it, nor did the Indian girl seem

much disturbed; but Totantora was not on hand.

“The Chief Totantora has not been seen, Miss Ruth, since last evening. I have made inquiries,” Wonota said placidly.

“But where *is* he? You don’t seem disturbed in the least.”

“No, Miss Ruth. I am not what you call ‘scared.’ Chief Totantora is well able to take care of himself.”

“But let me tell you, his not being on hand when I want him is something I did not bargain for,” said Ruth, much ruffled in temper.

She might well be. There was excuse for it. Too many things were going absolutely wrong for the girl of the Red Mill to be her usual calm self. The strain of her manifold troubles began to show in her manner and speech. And when she got aboard the *Marybell* she found still another difficulty.

“I tell you what ’tis, Miss Fielding,” drawled the captain of the *Marybell*. “I don’t reckon I can take you-all over to that island to-day.”

“Why not? What has happened to the schooner now?” demanded the New England girl with some asperity.

127

“Well, now, you know how them spongers drove off the watchman and my niggers? ’Tain’t reasonable. I didn’t hire out my schooner nor my crew for no private war. I sh’d say not!”

“Captain Bontelle,” said the excited girl, “do you mean that you are going to raise objections and barriers every time I want you to do your plain duty?”

“Ain’t raisin’ nothing—and don’t mean to,” declared the skipper. “But I don’t reckon on goin’ over there and lettin’ them fellows shoot my head off.”

“If the watchman you supplied had been possessed of an iota of pluck, those fellows

would not be on the island and we would not be in any trouble. Why didn't he shoot and scare Gion and his men off?"

"Well, now, Miss Fielding," drawled Captain Bontelle, "I don't know as the man ought to be blamed—no, ma'am! You see, I gave him a rifle, but I didn't trust him with ammunition."

"What!"

"No," drawled Bontelle with confidence. "And you see I was right. I didn't want to have any murderin' done. And him not having cartridges, there wasn't any murderin' done. You see that?"

Ruth studied the captain with great disgust. "I am not sure you are not playing a game with me, Captain Bontelle," she declared. "And if I find that you deliberately played into the hands of that sponger I will make you pay for it! In any case, you will get up your anchor at once and start for Pirate Island. I won't hear any more

objections.”

Captain Bontelle went about the carrying out of her orders with great deliberation. But even his ability to kill time could not keep the propellers from driving the *Marybell* through the placid sea at fairly decent speed. All the time Ruth was wishing that Tom was aboard. She could not understand how he had come to desert her right in the very beginning of trouble.

The low-lying coral strand with its fringe of palms appeared. Ruth and Helen viewed it more sharply than before. They remembered the map Tom had shown them, and it really did seem as though Pirate Island was somewhat the shape of the map the wooden-legged man had drawn and sent to Tom Cameron.

Suddenly Ann Hicks set up a loud cry:

“Oh look at that! There is something doing. It looks as if some of the Bar-Ex boys were trying to shoot up that island.”

The *Marybell* was still too far away for the sound of firing to be heard. But from various spots about the island puffs of white smoke burst into view, denoting the presence of gunmen in hiding. There seemed to be a fairly lively little war going on at Pirate Island!

Off the southern claw of the island a small and slatternly looking sloop lay anchored. A small skiff was drawn up on the yellow strand. Far away, at the other end of the island, Ruth saw a motor-launch of some size, likewise stranded upon the sand.

The puffs of gunfire moved southerly along the island. Bursting from a small jungle just above the site of the movie camp came several tatterdemalion figures, evidently in great haste to reach the skiff.

“Look!” cried Helen. “The pirates have fallen out and are fighting among themselves. Shades of Blackbeard and Sir John Morgan! Which side shall we take up with, Ruthie? I’m just as excited as I can be.”

Helen's diagnosis of the case did not seem to Ruth, however, to be quite correct. The men running down the beach were all looking back at the patches of brush and bayonet-grass which hid those who fired the weapons. Another fusillade of shots followed, and this time those aboard the schooner heard the sharp reports of the pistols.

"It's a real war," commented Mr. Hooley. "Somebody has got after that bunch of spongers, sure enough."

The propellers were driving the *Marybell* nearer and nearer to the cove, where she usually anchored. The party lined her rail, staring in much excitement at what was going on ashore. But none of them was as much excited—and this was quite plain—as the ragged fellows on the beach.

130

Suddenly there rose on the air a long, eerie, scarcely human cry, cutting through the tropical stillness most amazingly—a yell that was fairly blood-curdling. Some of the girls covered their ears to shut it out. Mother

Paisley gave voice to a terrified ejaculation.

“Talk about a Piute war whoop!” Ann Hicks shouted. “What do you suppose is the matter there? Something has broken loose.”

But Ruth and Helen turned sharply on Wonota. Both demanded together of the Indian girl:

“Is it your father?”

“That is the Osage war whoop—not the Piute,” said the Indian girl calmly. “My father, Miss Ruth, is there. He will drive away those bad men, without a doubt.”

CHAPTER XVII

THE SEARCH FOR TREASURE

The ragamuffin sailors along the sands seemed to be more terrified by Totantora's war whoop than by the pistol shots that now recommenced. Three of them had reached the skiff, where it was stranded, and pushed it off. Ruth recognized one of these as Gion.

The captain of the sloop and the other two tumbled in and paddled madly for the sponger, which lay not far off the beach. The others arrived at the edge of the sea and stood there, yelling.

On the instant four more figures burst from the jungle. Three of them started on the run for the group of sponge fishermen; the fourth walked sedately after them.

"Hi, hi!" shouted Ann Hicks, aboard the

Marybell. “Here’s the army. What do you know about those boys? And Totantora, too!”

The *Marybell* was now so near the shore that it was possible to distinguish the features of the pursuing party. Hooley suggested that it would be difficult to recognize the spongers because they seemed never to have washed their faces. 132

But the features of the three who charged the shrieking group on the strand possessed unmistakable American characteristics—and their actions expressed unmistakable American initiative.

Tom, Chess, and a stranger dressed in a semi-nautical uniform, landed decisively upon the squawking sponge fishers. They did not scatter the frightened crew; they merely ran them into the surf.

“Oh! Oh!” gasped Helen, with delight. “See Tom, will you?”

“Why! I never! What can Chess mean?”

demanded Sara Copley. "I should think he would hate to touch those horrid fellows."

"Is he really fighting with them?" was Jean's question.

"Oh, no. Not at all," scoffed the delighted Ann. "They are holding a pink tea, I shouldn't wonder. Oh! what a fine kick-off that was!"

"Yes! Hurrah for Tom!" cried Helen, again cheering for her twin.

Ruth did not express her feelings after her first outcry. But she watched the bloodless though decisive battle as closely as anybody aboard the *Marybell*. In five minutes after the battling men had burst into view the crew of the sloop were clear of the beach, and, either swimming or in the skiff, were making madly for the anchored craft.

"If your watchman had had a few cartridges, Captain Bontelle," Ruth said dryly, "you see what would have

happened yesterday. We don't need the courts down here. Just a little American spirit."

"It's piracy—that's what it is!" declared the captain. "Them fellows will get us all into trouble. I reckon I know that Isling fellow. I didn't know he was down here with his *Trumpeter*. He's a bad man."

"Take it from me," said Jim Hooley, who overheard this, "he's a good man."

"At least he is a man," was Ruth's comment.

The crew of the sloop had evidently decided to accept defeat—for the time being, at least. They hauled up the anchor and sailed away. When Ruth in the first boatload of picture workers reached the shore they were met by a grinning trio who hailed them with delight, and by the dignified Osage Indian.

"Too bad you weren't here earlier," said Chess. "Just a little coaxing, a few blank cartridges and Totantora's yell was all that

was needed. That fellow may have a lease on the island, but he didn't seem to be so sure of it after we started popping in the bushes and he heard the war whoop."

Tom, however, had something more significant to say to Ruth when they were alone.

134

"They were up to something, that is sure. I don't know but they are hunting something besides shell and sponges around here. They had taken spades from your tents and have been digging in several places."

"Goodness, Tommy! Do you really think there is something buried here on this island?" asked Ruth, with more surprise than interest.

"Don't know. But the captain of that sloop—what did you say his name was?"

"Amerigo Gion."

"Well, he gave us a harangue when we first

jumped on them that sounded as though he meant to fight.”

“But he didn’t.”

“No. But he may later. I don’t think we have seen the last of him. How about the lawyer you saw?”

Ruth explained that the matter of the sponger’s lease was being looked up.

“We will hurry with our work, and if the weather remains fair I sha’n’t leave the island myself until the picture is completed.”

“It’s rather a barren place to live on,” objected Tom.

“We are fairly comfortable at night aboard the schooner. And the sun is wonderful. Of course, it is too late to do anything to-day—thanks to that rascal. But we will begin work again to-morrow morning.”

“I’ll stay, too. I can run Helen and the others

back and forth from Nassau in the *Trumpeter*. Less said about the buried chest, the better, I fancy.”

But the tale of the map and the sailor’s story had got abroad already. Perhaps Chess had been imprudent about it. At any rate, all that week, while the picture company was at work, the visitors became an enthusiastic party of treasure hunters.

Even the Copley girls blistered their hands with spade and pick. The island began to be as pockmarked as an old seine float. They dug everywhere along the sandy wastes where the digging was easy. And the number of strange things unearthed kept the whole party excited, although the only thing found of any value was a half-buried five-gallon can of gasoline.

“Take it from me,” Chess chuckled, “that was not buried by any pirate. In the days of the pirates such stuff was not known.”

Ruth, as she had declared she would,

remained at the island. Señor Paladrome sent word that there was a lease in existence in the name of Amerigo Gion which gave him certain rights to the island for a term of years. This was not the season for gathering shell or sponges, however, and his reason for objecting to the presence of the moving picture people could not be easily explained save that Gion thought he could make money out of the Yankees.

The slatternly sloop did not reappear near Pirate Island for several days, and as the lawyer advised Ruth to hold on and let the matter be brought into court, the young president of the picture company put that trouble out of her mind.

There were sufficient other important matters to keep Ruth busy and anxious. The scenes did not always go smoothly. Wonota and her father were faithful in the performance of their parts. As much could not be said for all the other actors.

Unfortunately, with the pleasure seekers

about, some of the actors were better pleased to play with them than to attend strictly to business. And not a few were inclined to try to take advantage of Ruth's good nature. A woman at the head of the company was a sufficiently novel situation to encourage these unfaithful ones to scamp their work.

Before this week was ended it became necessary for Ruth to call the company together and read to them the contract they had all signed. She pointed out that although the picture was not yet half done, she had the right to discharge those who were inattentive. Only a very few re-takes would be necessary if she sent some of them back to the United States. 137

“But rather than see my picture spoiled I will do that,” she said firmly. “I demand loyalty and the best there is in you in every particular. If you can't give me your best I don't want you at all.”

She did not point out any particular person as deserving her reprimand, but those whom the

cap fitted evidently put it on. After that she had less trouble in rehearsing the scenes.

But money was being spent at an extravagant rate. Ruth realized that the studio estimate would scarcely cover the final cost of taking the picture. She felt sure that without direct loss, after the film was made, the sum spent would still be well within the capital of the new company; yet, how would her backer feel if she returned to New York with this one film only and the bulk of the hundred thousand dollars spent? This apprehension was ever in Ruth's thought. Once or twice of late the thought had flashed through her mind that Totantora might be the unknown backer in her enterprise. The Osage tribe was rich, and Wonota, pleased with her part as a movie actress and eager to advance in the work, might have induced her father to put up the money. Then a glance at the seemingly stolid Indian chief and the thought of Wonota's straightforward and simple, childlike character would lead the girl to brush the thought aside as absurd.

She found Tom a helpful companion, as he always was. And she was glad that he did not insist on interfering with the trend of her thought. For Ruth was absorbed in business these days and left it to Helen and Chess Copley, for instance, to go mooning about the shore on the starlit nights.

Ruth had no mind to tease her chum about this situation. She told Helen on one occasion, however, that she believed Tom was better fitted for motion picture production than he seemed to be for selling drygoods.

“Why don’t you take him into partnership in the movie business, then, Ruth?” asked Helen, impishly.

“No, my lady,” returned her friend. “I think you are more likely to take a partner than I am. Besides, I have my own production company now and it is a close corporation.”

“Really,” drawled Helen, smiling wickedly. “But you can’t even guess who your partner

is.”

“At least,” laughed Ruth, “I am sure it is not you nor Ann. And I cannot think it is Uncle Jabez. I had thought of Totantora, but that’s foolish. I wonder, after all, if Mr. Hammond doesn’t know more about it than he was willing to tell me?”

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“Fancy!” Helen repeated in her drawling tone. “To back a rival concern?”

“Well, I don’t know. He has always been a pretty good friend to me. And he would not touch this picture himself. Dear me, I do not blame him! I had no idea, much as I knew of the picture making business, that there could be so many trials to endure.”

“It is too bad, Ruthie,” Helen said, with more sympathy.

“Well, I want——There! Mr. Hooley is signaling. They are ready to try to shoot that scene. And if they don’t get it right this time I’ll fly into what Aunt Alvirah calls ‘a

conniption’!”

But neither her face nor manner displayed impatience when she arrived at the location and took the camp chair set for her directly between the two cameras which were to record the action.

It was an important and trying scene. She had been over it with the principals several times already. This part of her story should throb with sentiment and a tinge of tragedy. She was confident that the close-ups of Wonota’s features would show the tragic phase. That was easy for the Indian girl.

But when it came to registering love, 140
love for a sweetheart, Wonota was more than likely to fail. Wonota was, after all, an unsophisticated girl. In addition, she was called upon to express an emotion that the women of her nation seldom express save in actions.

Helen had once said in her joking way:
“Believe me, Ruth, the board of censors will

never accuse Wonota of being a vamp.”

Ruth, however, felt that the Indian girl was going to fail in putting over the strongest scene in the picture if she could not be somewhat more effective in her love making. She had labored with her star for days in preparation for this particular scene.

“Begin, now, where Shenstone peers through the shrubbery and sees Cara facing Hernando. Mr. Giles, a little more to the left. You are hiding Wonota. Your face turned to the left, Mr. Giles. That is it. Now, begin.”

The scene dragged. Although the principals were all letter perfect the action lacked spontaneity. They went over it again and again. Where another director—even Mr. Hooley—would have flown into a rage and given the whole crowd a tongue-lashing, Ruth was patient and courteous.

But finally she got up and walked about a little, leaving the actors in their places. The camera men and Mr. Hooley’s

assistant, who was aiding Ruth, were getting weary of waiting. Sometimes an angry altercation, like a good fight, may clear the atmosphere.

But that was not Ruth's way. She tried to get at the psychological phase of the trouble. She knew it did not all lie with Wonota; yet she felt that the Indian girl, in the character of Cara, the Carib, failed—and failed wofully!

Finally she turned and called Wonota over to her. She talked earnestly with the Indian girl for some minutes. Wonota's face seldom expressed passing emotion, therefore the observers could not tell whether Ruth was praising or blaming the Indian maid.

“Come, now!” exclaimed the young director, going briskly back to her chair.

“We are going to shoot the scene—right off the reel this time. Take your places. Be careful, Mr. Giles, about hiding Wonota's face—all the time, remember. When you burst out of the brush, Mr. Paling, remember

to face the camera. Now!

“Ready? . . . Action! . . . Camera! Go!”

There is such a thing as rehearsing a scene too frequently. It makes the performers stale, like an over-trained athlete. The scene started off with a dash. When Cara turned to meet her rescuer, her tragic face melted, lit up wonderfully, and she moved toward Shenstone, the hero, with such a look of adoration that Mr. Hooley, who stood behind the cameras, fairly gasped.

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“Gad!” he ejaculated, when Ruth had snapped her fingers and the cameras ceased clicking. “I never was able yet to get a look like that into the girl’s face. Wonota is a wonder, Miss Fielding.”

“She is going to be, in time,” declared Ruth, in triumph.

“How did you do it? What did you say to her?” begged Helen, in a whisper, as the assistant held up the number board before

first one and then the other camera. “You did something to stir her up, Ruthie.”

The latter laughed a little. But she sighed in weariness, too.

“Wonota loves just one person in this world above and beyond anybody and anything else. You know that,” she told her chum.

“Her father?” cried Helen.

“Yes. Chief Totantora. I have seen that same look on her face on occasion when she gazes at him. I told her to put Totantora in Paling’s place—to imagine her father was her rescuer and stood before her in this scene.”

“And she did it!” Then Helen looked closely at her chum. “You are working too hard, my dear. Why don’t you drop it all for a while?”

“With expenses going on—like—like a gas meter?” gasped Ruth.

“Well, you need it. We are going to have a dance Saturday night at the

hotel. You'd all better knock off work and come over to Nassau with us."

But Ruth felt that she could not do that. The barometer was falling and Captain Bontelle predicted a storm. Certain aspects of a storm had to be photographed as part of the wreck scenes which were to be embodied in "Treasure Trove."

For once Ruth considered it her duty to remain at her task over Sunday so as to be sure that these details were properly filmed if the opportunity arose.

The pleasure seekers went back to Nassau in the *Trumpeter* Saturday noon, taking with them those members of the picture company who would not be needed on the island. Nothing much might be done over Sunday; but those remaining would be on hand if the atmospheric conditions for taking storm scenes arose.

Ruth had no intuition of what was to happen on the island between that hour and Monday

morning, when her friends expected to return.

CHAPTER XVIII

TOM'S IDEA

That was a busy afternoon on Pirate Island after the “idlers,” as Helen had named the pleasure party, had left for Nassau. Broken clouds rolled above the horizon to the westward, and toward these fortresses of mist the sun traveled majestically. But it remained “good shooting,” as the camera men called it.

As yet the old craft that Ruth and Mr. Hooley expected to buy at Nassau and have towed out to sea to be wrecked and sunk, had not been decided on. They had been careful about making inquiries for a useless craft; for although there were plenty of such wrecks, the owners would surely hold them for high prices if they knew the moving picture company wished to purchase.

The sun finally went down behind a storm-

tossed mass of cloud that “shot” to perfection. No real storm could ever be so realistic and dramatic as the representation of this aspect of the sky.

Captain Bontelle said there would be bad weather on the morrow; but as long as the wind came from the west or south he was in no fear for his *Marybell*. An hour’s warning would let him put her into Nassau. 145

Ruth saw that the schooner had begun to rock on the ground swell—that forerunner of a storm that she had cause to fear—and she decided to remain ashore for the night, sleeping on a cot and fighting sand-fleas. Wonota and two of the other girls were with her in the tent. Undoubtedly her chum, Helen, and the other idlers had a fine time at the hotel dance.

She was not much disturbed by envy of them. Especially, when she was so much engaged in the work she loved. A dozen dances would not have enticed Ruth Fielding away from “Treasure-Trove” at this point.

The Sunday morning broke rather bleakly. There was no fog this time; and it was not cold at all. But the palms were bent by the whistling wind as though they might bend too far and snap. The sand was driven sharply across the island. New dunes were being swiftly formed, and here and there eddies of the gale scooped out hollows. Half the surface of the island seemed to be in motion.

“Tell you what,” Mr. Hooley said, laughing, “those treasure hunters ought to be here now. The wind is doing their digging for them.”

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However, the treasure seekers did not come to Pirate Island that day—that is, none came but Tom. He appeared soon after breakfast in the *Trumpeter*, with Skipper Isling, whom Ruth had already learned to like. He was a different kind of sailor from Captain Bontelle.

Ruth had no intention of doing any general work on this Sunday—the day of rest. But it would have been worse than foolish to omit

picturing the clouds and sky for the storm effects in “Treasure Trove” when nature set the scene so lavishly for the picture-makers.

Tom Cameron came ashore with the skipper and crew of the *Trumpeter* as some of the shots were being made.

“Great time in the city last night, Ruth,” Tom said.

“Is that so? A nice hop, was it?”

“Hop? Oh, bless me! I forgot the dance. Something more than that, I’ll say!” and Tom offered a reminiscent grin as he caressed a mark on his cheekbone that Ruth had not previously observed.

“What is that, Tom?” she asked.

“What’s what?”

“That bruise on your face? Or is it a cut?”

“Souvenir of the time I speak of.
Saturday night I met your friend

Amerigo Gion, and his gang on the street.”

“Oh, Tom!” cried Ruth, much disturbed. “Did —was there a fight?”

“I’ll say so!” declared Tom, with energy. “Talk about that wooden-legged man’s fight with the pirates in Portuguese Pedro’s place! He had only six on him. There must have been eight or ten of those spongers pitched on to me. But it was in the open street, and that gave me a chance. You should have had a camera there.”

“But where was Chess—and the others?”

“I went down the street after dinner for something,” explained Tom more seriously. “Rather lively in Nassau on Saturday night. There was a noisy group on one corner and I started to push through. I came face-to-face with Gion.”

“Oh Tom!”

“Believe me, it was some shindig while it

lasted. I didn't have a thing but my fists; but that gang was so eager to hit me that they hit each other trying to reach my head. I broke away from them after a minute, backed up against a wall and held 'em off till the gendarmes came. 'Bobbies,' maybe I should say. Anyway, what passes for 'the finest' in Nassau.

“Gion and his crowd evaporated while the police were asking me what I meant by coming down here and raising a Yankee disturbance. But I spotted a Tommy I'd seen somewhere Over There, who had a job on the police force, it seemed, and the minute he recognized me he took my part. So I did not have to go to the guardhouse——”

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“Why! How unfair!” cried Ruth. “Dear me! Isn't there any righteous law down here?”

“I guess the law hasn't much to do with it. There is a tough gang of sea bandits hanging about the lower quarters of Nassau, especially in the summer, when business isn't very good. In the winter they prey on the tourists;

in the summer they have to prey on each other,” and Tom laughed.

“Can’t blame the police for not wanting to get into trouble with them. They all carry knives—and use ’em.”

“Oh, Tom, you might have been stabbed!”

“But I wasn’t. One thing I want to warn you about, however, Ruth. Gion hasn’t got through. He’ll come here again when he thinks the time is ripe.”

“Oh, dear! What for?” cried the girl. “He cannot believe there really is treasure buried on this island?”

“He believes there is treasure buried in the moving picture business,” replied her friend. “And he is not the only one who has that hallucination. He will not press his claim in court—I don’t believe. He is probably shy of the courts, just as Mr. Paladrome says. But he will come back, if only to try to bother you.”

“Perhaps,” Ruth said rather weakly, “we would better try to buy him off.”

“Wow! A hold-up for ten thousand dollars? Pirates aren’t in it,” cried Tom.

“He would take a good deal less, I am sure.”

“I wouldn’t offer him ten cents. Chess and I will stand guard to-morrow and every day thereafter. And at night Skipper Isling and some other good fellow can be paid to make an armed patrol of the beach here. Those chaps are not to be trusted ashore on the island at all.”

“I feel that is so, Tom,” agreed Ruth, and returned to the cameras.

Tom had an idea of his own—one that had been working in his mind for some time. Whenever he approached Pirate Island in the launch he was reminded of this thought.

The idea was that the map drawn for him by the wooden-legged man in New York was

not, after all, so much like the contour of this island on which Ruth and her company were at work. There were many crab-shaped islands, with claws and all, among the smaller Bahamas. Andros, one of the larger of the group, was shaped more like a squid—or like Long Island.

There were safe moorings inside the
halfspread capes of the crablike keys. 150
The coral insects seemed to follow a certain plan in building the reefs that made these almost land-locked harbors such as the one at Pirate Island.

Tom, however, saw that the landmarks suggested on his map were not situated as similar piles of coral and trees were found on Pirate Island. Of course, thirty years was a long time for the wooden-legged man to have remembered the exact formation of the treasure island; but if there was any truth in his story at all Tom was inclined to believe that the map held a pretty close resemblance to the spot where the old sailor had seen the chest of money carried ashore and buried.

While Skipper Isling and the boy were ashore watching the camera men picturing the sea and cloud effects, Tom pushed out to the launch again, moored the small boat at the buoy, and got the engine into action. He waved his hand at Isling, who looked up to see what Tom was doing, and as the latter began to circle the island the skipper of the *Trumpeter* gave him little further attention.

With the map weighted down on the seat beside him, Tom steered the launch around the northern end of the island and came down the west side. He realized that the wind was rising rapidly and that a gale seemed to be on the way from the Caribbean. The trees on the island were whipping about like wands. Tom expected to see some of them snap off.

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He was not at all disturbed by the rising wind and waves, however. He knew the *Trumpeter* was seaworthy. And he was interested in the plan that had taken possession of his thought.

He was now confident that this was not the

island indicated by the map, although he had got from Captain Bontelle the fact that the latitude and longitude of Pirate Island was not many points off the indicated situation of the treasure island. But there were a dozen similar islands within a few miles.

Tom ran down past the extremity of Pirate Island where the camera men were at work, and started directly for the nearest group of palm trees which he saw waving and gyrating in the murky distance.

CHAPTER XIX

THE FATE OF THE SLOOP

The interest of the party ashore on Pirate Island in the attempts of the camera men to shoot tumbling surf without getting a bit of the shore in the picture and to fasten upon the lens a representation of the threatening clouds, was so great and so continuous that none of them noticed Tom Cameron's disappearance with the *Trumpeter*.

There was another object on the sea—approaching the island from the direction of Nassau—that finally attracted the gaze of some of the party. Skipper Isling pointed it out to Ruth.

“There's that sloop, ma'am,” he said. “I wonder her rotten canvas don't blow away.”

“The spongers?” cried Ruth in some alarm.

“It’s all right, ma’am. I reckon they won’t come ashore if we don’t want ’em. What with Bontelle and his crew,” nodding toward the *Marybell*, “we should be able to handle a dozen offscourings like them.”

The schooner was still anchored off the southern claw-cape of the island. And now, when she looked in that direction, Ruth saw that there was some activity on her deck. The crew were running about as though they were making preparations against the blow.

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But her attention was recalled almost at once to the approaching sloop which Isling had said was Gion’s craft. The swells had now grown mountainous, and when the sloop plunged into the valley between two of them only half the length of her masts were visible from the shore of the island.

There was still sufficient sun to make photographing possible. Only a part of the heavens were overcast. But even a land-lubber could have told that a storm was imminent.

“Oh, dear!” exclaimed Ruth to Mr. Hooley, “I am afraid we are going to have a stormy week. And we’ve no proper studio to work in. It will add to the cost immensely,” and she sighed.

“You begin to talk just like a real picture producer,” he said, grinning. “I thought you were first an artist, Miss Fielding.”

“I am not so much of an artist that money means nothing to me,” she returned. Then: “Look at that boat pitch, Mr. Hooley,” pointing to the craft approaching the island.

“I’ve been looking at her,” the director rejoined. “Do you know, it looks to me, Miss Fielding, that Gion’s old sponger is in trouble.”

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“Goodness! Can that be so?” cried Ruth.

“See those sails—what you can observe of them? Look like tattered clothing—a regular hobo outfit. Say! Where has Tom Cameron gone?” he asked suddenly.

“He went out alone in the *Trumpeter*. But he will be back. I am anxious about that sloop, Mr. Hooley.”

“If I was aboard of her I should be anxious myself,” agreed the director, who had been more closely watching the pitching craft. “There goes her mainsail—what there was left of it.”

“Oh! Do you suppose they are in actual danger?”

“Looks so.”

“What a chance for a picture! We must shoot that, Mr. Hooley,” cried Ruth. “Don’t miss it.”

He ran at once to the group of camera men and Ruth followed. They had all noted the situation of the slatternly sloop and, like Ruth, appreciated the film value of the scene.

“Get that, Johnson!” commanded the young director. “It is in perspective, of course. We

can't get close-ups of it. But shoot! I don't care if you get five hundred feet of it. It may save us wrecking a ship for the purpose. Don't you think so, Mr. Hooley?"

"Surest thing you know, Miss Fielding."

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The next half hour was a busy time on the shore of the key. And it was a busy and exciting time on the blundering sloop, as well. She had got into a current that swept around the northern end of Pirate Island, and when the imperiled crew spread her ragged sails to try to beat off the reefs, the wind tore the rotten canvas from the boltropes.

The party of moving picture enthusiasts hurried along the sands to a point nearer to the floundering sloop. They forgot both the *Trumpeter* and the *Marybell*.

Had the launch been at hand something might have been done for the sloop and her crew. It might have been possible to tow the former off the rocks. But Tom and the *Trumpeter*

had disappeared to the southward two hours before.

On board the *Marybell* Captain Bontelle had stowed everything in anticipation of the coming storm. It might be that a hurricane was approaching. At least, the wind had risen already to the degree of a gale and the schooner bounced about at the end of her anchor chains in an unpleasant fashion.

The *Marybell's* commander gave little heed to what threatened the strange sloop. Nor did he trouble himself about those ashore. Fearing that his anchor chains might part, without signaling the moving picture people who had hired him and his schooner, Captain Bontelle catted his anchors and spread a hand's breadth of mainsail and the jib.

The schooner paid off swiftly, heading toward Nassau. Before the camera men were ready to shoot the endangered sloop at the far end of the island, the *Marybell* was scuttling away toward the safe roadstead of Nassau at a fast rate of speed.

Mr. Hooley and the camera men had little thought for anything but the big scene they were picturing. But Ruth Fielding lost sight of the fact that perhaps fate was giving her five hundred feet or more of film that would practically cost her nothing. If that sloop went to pieces on the rocks she would not have to purchase and wreck a similar craft for her picture. But she had suddenly comprehended that the sloop was fated—one with any powers of observation at all could not doubt!

The shifting gale and the strong current were doing their worst to the sloop. Her crew were clinging to the lower rigging. It was plain that the rudder was smashed. They could not get any sail on her. The moment they tried to do so the canvas was torn away. Staggering on, ever drawing nearer to the coral reefs, the sloop seemed to fight as desperately as a live thing!

Ruth turned to sweep the western edge of the island with her gaze. Where had Tom gone in the *Trumpeter*? The palms clashed together and weaved in a demon's

dance, while here and there spadefuls of sand were sucked up into the air and whirled dizzily across the island.

Ruth began to wonder if there were not to be some danger of her own party getting into difficulties. The sloop and her crew were not alone threatened. She looked eastward. It was then she saw that the *Marybell* was already several miles from Pirate Island. They were abandoned here on the little island.

A great shout arose from the group about the cameras. Ruth whirled to look in the direction of the sloop again. She was in time to see the unfortunate craft cast up bodily by the sea upon a coral reef. The crash of the wreck's impact did not reach Ruth's ears because of the direction of the wind, but the spray did not hide the fact that the sloop was split in twain. Her crew was in a very serious plight.

CHAPTER XX

THE TIDAL WAVE

The camera men at this juncture became more interested in the wreck than in operating their cameras. The crowd of picture workers trailed down to the edge of the sea opposite the split sloop, all eager to lend aid to the castaways.

Isling directed the attempt to rescue Gion and his men. The crew of the sloop found themselves in waist-deep water when they were cast overboard, and the surges were so strong that they had to fight for a footing on the coral reef.

A lifeline was formed by the men ashore and, clinging to each other's hands, they managed to reach the danger point. The sponge fishers were passed back to the strand, one by one, until the last man—Amerigo Gion himself—

was saved from the waves.

“We ver’ much fear death that time,” gasped the captain of the wrecked sloop. “And my boat—she ees lost.”

“That’s the surest thing you ever said,” 159 observed Skipper Isling. “But I reckon you were wantin’ to come ashore, anyway?” and he grinned.

“Not in thees way,” sputtered Gion. “You tak’ my island, and now the sea, she tak’ my boat.”

“And a good thing for us,” Mr. Hooley said to Ruth, aside. “I believe it will save the cost of wrecking a ship of your own.”

“Oh! we will make it right with the poor man,” Ruth said, at once feeling sympathy for those who had been her enemies.

“Don’t be too free with your offers of help,” grumbled Hooley. “The sloop was nothing but a tub, anyway. And remember, this Gion

didn't mean you any kindness."

"Does that matter—now?" returned the girl.

"Wait and see what he tries to do to you in the courts," advised the other sagely.

The men from the wreck were somewhat bruised, but none of them was seriously injured. The whole party started for the encampment near the middle of the island. It was then that the gale seemed to increase with a rapidity that was startling.

A hut that had been built by the picture company suddenly collapsed. Then one of the smaller tents, torn from its guy ropes, was swept high in the air and went away to sea like a huge bird.

"Hang on to your hair!" yelled Skipper Isling. "Where's Cameron gone with my boat? He'll get into trouble next."

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Ruth had momentarily forgotten about Tom. But she was anxious for many things now.

She wished with all her heart that the whole party was back at Nassau. There was danger threatening on every hand.

When they reached the camp the men set about strengthening the fastenings of the remaining tents. But the women were forced to sit down in the sand to keep from being blown down. Such a wind Ruth, at least, had never experienced before.

Suddenly, standing up to look westward across the island, Ruth uttered a cry. It was taken up by others and everybody scrambled upright, the girls clinging to each other, amazed at what they saw.

It should have been low water at this hour, but the waves still swept far up the strand. And approaching the island, but several miles away, a greater wave than any marched majestically onward.

“A tidal wave!” shouted Ruth. “Boys! Mr. Johnson! We must get that!”

Its crest curved in a white wreath. The nearer surface of the sea seemed suddenly sucked out to meet this tidal wave.

“*Good-night!*” shouted one of the camera men. “We’ll sure get our feet wet now.”

“That wave will wash clean over us!”
gasped another.

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But Mr. Johnson and his assistants had been spurred to action by Ruth’s command. It was altogether too great a chance to be lost, and they realized the value of it as well as their director. Seldom has a moving picture camera been trained upon such a manifestation of nature as this.

Majestically, yet swiftly, the high wave swept onward. In the very face of it, and well aware that they would be ultimately overwhelmed by the very thing they photographed, the camera men worked their machines as coolly as though they were in a New York studio!

Ruth was frightened, but she did not lose her

head. Wonota, who was of the party, came quickly to her side.

“I can swim, Miss Ruth. I will look out for you,” said the Indian girl.

At the northern end of the island the palm trees suddenly began to fall, uprooted by the gale which seemed to increase as the tidal wave advanced. None of the members of the party from the North had ever seen such a manifestation of nature’s savage elements as this.

Finally the camera men were forced to stop their work.

“Down on the ground!” shouted Skipper Isling. “Take hold of hands. Grab anything! Keep together!”

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His commands were obeyed. Indeed, there was nothing else to do but to try to cling close to the ground and await developments.

Wonota lay beside her benefactor, clinging

tightly to Ruth's hand. Totantora squatted just before the two girls, as though to cast back the sea if it surged over the sand-plain toward them.

The weeping of the other women in the party was pitiful. There was not a soul of the group—man or woman—that was not shaken by the imminent catastrophe.

Yet, while the tidal wave advanced swiftly toward Pirate Island, Ruth thought of somebody besides herself—of somebody who was not present.

Where was Tom? Where had he gone in the *Trumpeter*? What fate had overtaken him? Tom's peril was first and foremost in the girl's mind.

The time of waiting for disaster to arrive was counted by seconds. The cameras were scarcely lifted down and the imperiled men and women had scarcely cast themselves upon the ground at Skipper Isling's warning when the roar of the advancing wave

drowned every other sound.

Ruth raised her head and shoulders sufficiently to see over the sand-plain toward the west. She saw the water sucked away from the island completely, leaving the bottom of the sea bare for yards and yards beyond the usual low-water mark.

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Jagged coral rocks, beds of treacherously waving seaweeds, even sea-monsters of a size and kind never seen alive above the tide, for a few seconds were revealed to the light of day. Then the huge wave rolled in, its white-crested summit curling and sparkling in the sunlight, for the sky was not as yet entirely overcast with clouds.

Thunderously the wave advanced. It overran the shore and swept onward across the island. Its height was less as it advanced than the frightened party had feared.

At the highest point upon the island, where the camp had been established, the wave was scarcely four feet high—and it was broken at

that.

Totantora, Isling, Jim Hooley, and some of the other men had leaped to their feet when the wave came in-shore, and they seized and held those of the endangered company who might have been swept away with the tide. Johnson and his men clung to the cameras in their water-proof sacks.

But all were submerged. They found themselves sprawling, panting, coughing and weeping, when the wave was gone—scarcely realizing how they could have been saved from being completely drowned in that awful moment.

On the tide swept, on either side of the island, and when they recovered they saw the battered wreck of the sloop tossing on the summit of the curling wave. 164

Amerigo Gion broke out in loud lamentation again; although why he should consider the disaster to his sloop greater now than before was hard to understand.

“I am a ruined man!” he wailed. “I have the luck of Satan! All—all I have in thees worl’ now is gone.”

“Don’t worry, man,” advised Skipper Isling, calmly. “You’ve got your breath yet, haven’t you? Come on, you fellows. See if we can pick up the leavings. Gee! Everything is soaked for fair.”

It was a fact that everything in and about the encampment was in a saturated state. But the camera men had saved the films. Inside the tents and under the collapsed shacks, the supplies and costumes and other things were in a mess.

The island itself presented a forlorn appearance. There was scarcely a tree left upright. The wind seemed to have abated with the passing of that phenomenal wave, but the outlook was depressing.

In addition, the party was marooned. There was no craft of any kind in which they could get back to Nassau.

This last soon became the principal topic of conversation with all the party. To Ruth's quick mind, now that the catastrophe was over, the fact that Nassau could not be reached at once was tragic.

"That five hundred feet you shot, Mr. Johnson?" she questioned, accosting the chief camera man. "Are you sure it is good?"

"Just as sure as ever I was in my life before the celluloid was developed, Miss Fielding," he assured her.

"Can you set that hut up again, make a dark room, develop the strip, and let me see it?"

"Great Scott, Miss Fielding! To-night? In this mess?"

"That is just what I mean."

"It is a good, big contract—I'll tell the world! Can't we wait till we get to Nassau?"

"Do you realize what we have got in that half reel, Johnson?" asked the girl.

“Huh? Why, yes. Good stuff. You might use it in the picture——”

“I haven’t space for a tidal wave in my story. And I don’t want it.”

“Then—then it’s not any use to you?”
stammered Johnson.

“You get me two good developments of what the cameras shot while that wave was coming in,” Ruth told him earnestly. “Even one good strip. With some of the shots of sky and sea you took earlier, before the sloop went ashore, I’ll send this tidal wave stuff off to the North just as quickly as possible. Don’t you see what it means, Johnson?”

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“Oh, my hat!” ejaculated the camera man. “I get you, Miss Fielding. News stuff, eh? And a big thing. Why, the Intercontinental would pay—pay——Well a heap! I get you.”

“Then do your best. I don’t know how we’ll get it to Nassau. From there we can get it in a

speed boat to Miami and send it to New York by registered post. It shouldn't take more than three days before the picture of this tidal wave is being shown in the big houses in New York. Do your part well, Johnson, and if I put it over you shall have five hundred bonus."

"You are talking to the right man now, Miss Fielding!" exclaimed the camera man, with satisfaction. "I can use five hundred, just as easy!"

But the desertion of Captain Bontelle, Ruth realized, was a tragic fact. There was not a craft of any kind left upon the island—not even a skiff with oars! How would she be able to get this great piece of news-film, taken by her orders in the face of such difficulties, over to Nassau and from thence to the States before it became stale, or before some independent camera man, loafing about the West Indies, should have sent North something of the same kind?

Ruth was very well aware of the news

value of this picture of the tidal wave. There was not likely to be anything so good put out by anybody else. But, after all, it was timely and must be sold quickly.

It meant, if she could put it over, a large addition to the treasury of the Fielding Film Company, Inc. It would counterbalance much of the extra cost—the unexpected cost—of her picture, “Treasure Trove.” And surely, if she could do this, that unknown backer of hers, thought of whom so frequently troubled Ruth, must approve.

It was true the whole shivering party chattered continually about the chance of somebody coming out from Nassau to look for them. Ruth’s wishes trended in the same direction; but her reason for desiring rescue was two-fold.

If Johnson’s developed prints were promising she hoped to start them North at once. But she was gazing southward! It had swept in upon her mind again that Tom Cameron had disappeared in that direction. What had

become of him, alone in the motor-launch,
when the tidal wave had ravished these seas?

CHAPTER XXI

THE SIGNAL OF DISTRESS

Tom Cameron and the *Trumpeter* did not return to Pirate Island that terrible day of the tidal wave. As the wind decreased the overcast sky grew darker and darker, and finally, about nightfall, a terrific shower broke over the island and beat everything left standing flat to the ground—including the unfortunate human beings marooned there. But Johnson and his helpers had got the hut upright again and well braced so that it withstood this tempest.

The tents were no shelter from this tempest. Of course, every one of the party had been submerged in the sea when the wave rolled across the island; but this flagellation of the tropical rainstorm was worse. The rain positively beat upon them so that it hurt!

The tents did not stand up for long under the terrific downpour. Guy ropes were snapped and center poles and stays gave under the weight and fierceness of the fall of rain.

The unfortunates could but lie down, 169 cover heads and faces as best they might, and suffer the pelting storm. Luckily it did not last more than an hour. But if their state had been miserable before, what of their plight after the shower had passed?

Beaten and sore, saturated, it seemed, to the bone, Ruth and Wonota and the other girls cowered together for comfort and companionship. The men were quite as miserable. But the camera men kept at work inside the hut and Ruth was comforted on learning that the first prints of the tidal wave promised to be excellent.

There was no fire, and no means of making one. Not a chip of dry fuel on the island; the gasoline stove that had been set up for cooking was utterly wrecked. They could not use the gasoline on hand for fuel when there

was no stove.

The rain was past, but the black tropic night shut down upon the island. The super-heated sands (for the storm had not been a cold one) began to steam. Where the jungle had been was now a pulpy mass of vegetation which, when the sun rose on the morrow, would soon decay and throw off a miasma that was sure to bring fever.

Ruth had heard of this “coast fever” and its debilitating effect upon Northerners unused to the climate. Since they had come to the Bahamas the girl of the Red Mill had preached in season and out to her mates that they must ward off both chill and fever.

Now she wondered what would be the result of this awful drenching and the night exposed to the steam of the swamp. This anxiety, added to her fear for Tom’s safety, made the girl very miserable indeed.

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She had come South with such great hopes—such a secure feeling for the future and all it

might bring her! With the backing she had obtained for her picture production company, Ruth felt that nothing really could betide her but good fortune.

The news received not long before from the Red Mill of Uncle Jabez's relapse had greatly depressed her. The opposition of this sponger, Gion, to her use of the island, had likewise lowered the tone of the girl's mind.

All the little troubles of the week that was past and the very fact that they had got to that point in the picture making where her mind should be utterly free of minor anxieties if she would do her best in the part of directing the action of the picture—these facts had brought forcibly to Ruth's mind one significant conclusion:

She labored, after all, under a great disadvantage. To direct and write the picture was really all the labor she should undertake. To manage other affairs of the corporation was too much—too much! She should be able to throw upon the shoulders of

some trustworthy person everything else when she was so deeply engaged in the production itself.

During this last week Tom had been a great aid to Ruth. She had remarked on this fact to his sister, and Helen had made some good-natured fun of her because of the admission.

Ruth realized that Tom's help was exactly what she lacked when it came to making affairs run smoothly. It was not enough for her to have a moneyed backer in the business of making pictures; she should have an active partner rather than a silent partner.

And in this connection, Tom's disappearance in the motor-launch before the tidal wave, and his non-appearance now, filled the girl's mind with fears and discouragement. If anything had happened to Tom what should she do? Had she been alone she would have given way to her despair in a storm of weeping.

Such another black night Ruth never

remembered to have seen. It seemed as though the clouds were almost within touch overhead, did she but stand and reach her hand upward. This feeling was depressing in the extreme.

Even the picture they had secured of the tidal wave did not cheer her, for the difficulties of getting it to New York just now, in the darkness, loomed large.

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The wind had entirely passed. Close, fetid, unpleasant odors already began to rise from what had been the jungle and floated across the rain-whipped sands to the party at the wrecked camp.

Hour after hour dragged by. Ruth wondered what her friends at Nassau and the members of the moving picture company remaining there thought about the party on the island. Would they fear for the safety of those at Pirate Island, or did they suppose that the island had been out of the line of the passing hurricane?

Suddenly Skipper Isling rose with a shout. A light glimmered out on the heaving sea, in the direction of Nassau Island. It rose and fell with the waves, but was approaching Pirate Island swiftly.

“Ahoy!” yelled Isling. “Come on, boys! Shout again! They must hear us. They are looking for us.”

Everybody shouted—even the girls and Gion’s men. An answering hail came down to them as the light danced nearer. Ruth recognized Chess Copley’s voice at last. She knew that the approaching craft must be the motor-boat they had previously hired at Nassau. For a minute she had hoped it would prove to be Tom and the *Trumpeter*.

“Ahoy the island!” cried Copley’s voice again. “Are you all safe?”

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“Is Nassau safe?” demanded Skipper Isling. “Or are you all that’s left of it?”

“Flood rose into the streets a way, but not

much damage done around on that side of the island,” Chess returned. “Can’t you show a glim there?”

“What with?” was Hooley’s demand. “We’ve been some feet under water, boy, and we don’t feel as though we were out of it yet.”

The slow moving motor-boat ran upon a sand-bar—a bar that was not there before the tidal wave had crossed the island—and Chess leaped into the sea and waded ashore. Instantly Gion and his men made a rush for the launch.

“Hey!” yelled Isling. “Get back there, you! Women first! What do you think this is—a free-for-all soirée? Get back!”

He swung his fists. Chess swung the boathook he had brought ashore. Hooley and some of the others joined forces with them and drove the spongers back again.

“The launch will hold only the women,” cried Chess. “What is the matter with those

fellows?”

“It’s just the breed they are,” replied Isling sharply. “Get the girls away quick, Mr. Copley. The rest of us are safe enough until morning. Then let the *Marybell* come after us. Ugh! Wonder what’s become of my *Trumpeter*?”

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Ruth desired to solve that mystery, too. But she went aboard the launch with one cheerful prospect before her at least—and it was a big one. Johnson had completed his development of those several hundred feet of film that pictured the advance of the tidal wave and much of the destruction that had enveloped Pirate Island.

She took many feet of the storm scenes along, likewise. She believed that a good film cutter and title man could make a full reel (a thousand feet) of the news feature. One good thing, perhaps, might develop from this disaster—something that must surely increase her prestige in the motion picture world and, she hoped, please whoever it was that backed

the Fielding Film Company.

On the way to Nassau Ruth took Chess into her confidence about the disappearance of Tom Cameron. They then and there agreed to start out on a voyage of search and discovery as quickly as morning came, if the weather was propitious.

Before morning the clouds were dissipated. The hurricane was only a memory, but there were many reminders of its fierceness even on the island on which Nassau was situated.

Before going to bed Ruth had instructed Captain Bontelle to make ready to return to the Pirate Island in the morning if it was pleasant, and she arranged for Mr. Hooley to take a gang of workmen over to see what could be done toward straightening out the encampment.

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There were several newspaper men at Nassau and at least one commercial motion camera man. Ruth learned that the wireless was loaded with news stories of the storm. But

she managed to get off code messages to several of the big news feature agencies that make a business of supplying the motion picture theaters with weekly and semi-weekly news reels.

In addition, the girl sent a message to Mr. Abraham Mole apprising him of what was on the way. She trusted one of her own men to take both the tidal wave film and her written instructions to Mr. Mole, on a fast boat that started for Miami with newspaper correspondents at daybreak.

This being all that she could do in that matter, and trusting it would all come out right, the girl could then give her mind fully to that which had fed her personal anxiety throughout the terrible night.

With Helen and Chess she boarded the motorboat again as soon as breakfast was over, and they set forth to scour the seas south of Pirate Island for the lost launch and Tom. They did not go in the direction of Pirate Island, and left Nassau well ahead of

the *Marybell*.

The *Trumpeter* was a big boat for one man to manage. Would Tom have comprehended his danger in season to get her into some safe harbor and go ashore himself? 176

There was a long chain of islets southward of the Pirate Island and among those (for the channels were deep) the searchers wound their way all the forenoon. On the larger islands were half ruined settlements at which they made inquiries when they saw any sign of life about them at all.

But nobody had seen Tom Cameron or a motor-launch with but a single occupant. When the storm came up the day before all these folks had run for the higher ground, expecting the wave which followed the wind. A dozen launches might have sailed past, therefore, without being spied by the natives.

Helen was very much frightened; but as usual when anything really serious was the trouble, she was very calm and quiet. Ruth's attitude

in storm and stress was no more confident than her chum's.

Both girls were discouraged. The owner of the motor-boat would have given up the search by noon; but Chess would not hear of this.

“Tom came down this way, we know. He must be somewhere—and the *Trumpeter*, too. I do not believe he is drowned and the boat lost. But undoubtedly he has got into some difficulty and cannot get back with the boat. We'll look until we find him.”

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Such was the young New Yorker's statement, and against his reason the motor-boat owner kept on. It was two o'clock when they sighted another island lying quite by itself—an island which was of rocky formation at one end. There were several tall palms upon it, yet standing after the gale.

“Look! There's a signal! A flag!” Helen cried. “Don't you believe it means that

somebody is cast away there?”

They all spied the fluttering pennant upon one of the palm trees, fastened at some distance up its stem.

“Golly me!” exclaimed Chess Copley as the boat drew nearer, “that’s somebody’s shirt, tied there by the sleeves. I guess that gale was pretty fierce yesterday if it blew the shirt off some poor fellow’s back!”

Ruth and Helen were too anxious to be beguiled by this amusing suggestion. They were desirous of knowing, however, to whom the shirt belonged.

CHAPTER XXII

THE DESERT KEY

As the motor-boat drew nearer to the deserted looking island Ruth was smitten with the thought that it was shaped a good deal like Pirate Island on which they had been making the picture. Yet one end of it—the rocky end—was entirely different in contour from that island.

It looked so familiar that Ruth got up and stared eagerly from the fluttering shirt upon the palm tree to the pile of rocks that marked its southern end.

Here was the contour of the island mapped by the wooden-legged sailor with whom Tom Cameron had talked on the New York dock—the island on which the sailor declared the chest of stolen money had been buried.

There were two well-defined clawlike capes within which was a safe mooring for a much larger vessel than the motor-boat. The searching party ran into this cove. But they saw no sign of the *Trumpeter*.

“Just the same, we will search the island thoroughly,” Chess declared, preparing to take the girls ashore in the tender. “I don’t believe that shirt hitched itself up there in the tree. No, I don’t!”

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They got ashore and started directly for the group of palms from one of which the signal fluttered. Not a sign of life appeared along the beach or inland as they advanced. Even the hermit crabs had been washed away by the tidal wave. Here and there, however, débris had been piled up that had evidently been scraped off the ocean’s bottom when the tidal wave scoured the shallow places along the island shore.

There were sea-plants like nothing the Northerners had ever seen. There were crushed animals of the sea-horse kind. Pieces

of coral of lovely shades lay high and dry upon the sands.

“We may be wasting our sympathy on the desert air,” said Chess. “Tom may be already back at Nassau, safe and sound. We have only scanned a small part of the group this morning.”

“He started down this way yesterday,” Ruth said with stubbornness. “I saw him go. And he was no longer in sight when the tidal wave came, that is sure. See! What’s that yonder?”

They saw a broken staff above the line of sand dunes on the western shore of the island. The girls started forward on the run, leaving Chess to follow as he pleased.

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But he was not far behind the two chums. He saw that the broken staff looked very much like the pennant mast of a motor-boat.

They reached and mounted the dune. Away before them sloped the yellow sands to the line of low water. And with her nose high on

the strand and her stern almost awash in the sea lay the *Trumpeter*. It was evident that the tidal wave had picked her up bodily and flung her here—perhaps a wreck.

The sea had risen completely over her and her cockpit was full of water. There appeared to be nobody aboard—nor was there any sign of a human being along this shore of the island.

Two hundred yards to the north was the grove of palms. Several had been uprooted, as those had been on Pirate Island. Perhaps the roots of the others were more deeply fixed in the soil. The one on which the shirt was fixed was not the only tree which had escaped disaster.

The trio of searchers approached the grove with no little anxiety. Tom had been alone in the motor-boat, therefore he must have tied that signal to the palm tree himself.

Where was he now? Chess shouted. The girls took up the cry and their voices rang out clearly across the sands.

There was no reply. Not a sound but the seabirds' cries responded to their call. The lonesomeness of the island began to depress the three. Where had Tom gone after he made this attempt to attract attention by the signal on the palm tree?

Ruth suddenly darted forward. She leaped over a fallen tree and disappeared behind a brush clump. Her voice came back to Helen and Chess with startling clearness:

“He’s here! Oh, Helen! Chess! Here is Tom!”

The others ran after Ruth. She had knelt down and not until they rounded the top of the fallen palm did Chess and Helen see her.

In a hollow in the sand lay Tom, only half dressed, his face scratched and with streaks of dried blood on it and upon his hands and arms. He had evidently suffered exceedingly in the storm and during the night that had followed it. He was unconscious, but breathed heavily and muttered as he twisted his head about in the sand.

“Fever!” gasped Helen, despairingly. “He is delirious! Oh, Ruth! What shall we do?”

“It is worse than fever,” returned the latter. “Or rather, it is something besides fever. Look at this poor arm, Chess.”

“What is the matter with it? Oh, what *is* the matter?” cried Helen, hysterically.

Chess had dropped to his knees on the other side of the suffering Tom. He touched the twisted arm gingerly.

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“It is broken,” he said. “Poor chap! But if there is nothing else the matter with him _____”

Tom’s lips parted. They were already parched with fever. He muttered in a dull tone:

“This is the place. This is the place.”

“You hurt him when you touch it,” cried Helen. “Oh, don’t, Chess!”

“I don’t think he feels much,” said Copley.

“He’s out of his head, all right.”

“Somebody must touch that arm—and as soon as we can get him here. Chess, you go back to Nassau for a doctor—a surgeon. We had better not try to move him until the doctor comes.”

“Guess you are right, Ruth.”

“Bring everything we shall need. And food and a tent. Helen and I will stay here with him. Be brave now, Helen,” for Tom’s sister had quite broken down and was sobbing bitterly. “I think the fever is more serious than any damage to his bones. If he had been badly hurt he would not have been able to get ashore.”

“That is right, too,” said Chess more cheerfully, rising. He patted Helen’s shoulder. “Cheer up, Nell. I’ll have a doctor here before night. Tom will be all right.”

“Hurry now,” commanded Ruth. “We shan’t know what to do for him until

the doctor comes.”

“But I don’t know about leaving you two girls alone here,” objected the young man.

“Leave us your pistol, Chess,” said Helen. “I know you’ve got it with you.”

“So I will,” said he, producing his automatic pistol. But he put it into Ruth’s hand. “Of course, nobody will disturb you here. And we’ll be back as soon as we can.”

“Leave us the keg of water!” cried Ruth after him. “There may be no fresh water here.”

In ten minutes Chess was back with the water and a pair of blankets. He left the girls to make Tom as comfortable as they could, and a few moments later they heard the exhaust of the motor-boat as it got under way on the other side of the island.

The girls spread one of the blankets in the shade of the palm trees and half lifted, half dragged, Tom Cameron to it. He muttered

and thrashed about a good deal, and although he often opened his eyes and stared at them it was evident that he did not recognize either his sister or Ruth.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE SECRET

The afternoon dragged by. Ruth had enough to think about to put out of her mind her picture and all that was connected with it.

What was going on at the island where the encampment had been wrecked, scarcely troubled her at all. "Treasure Trove" might remain uncompleted forever; the Fielding Film Company might become bankrupt; everything might go completely to smash! The unknown backer who had come forward so strangely to help her in this new production seemed very remote.

Nothing really mattered but Tom's physical condition. She tried to cheer Helen; but her own heart was burdened with heavy dread.

Suppose anything really should come to Tom

that was fatal? Suppose his strong young body lying there on the blanket under the palm tree should gradually waste away? Suppose he never arose again in health and strength?

Much as Ruth had criticized Tom and his seeming deficiencies in the past few months, she felt no spirit of criticism now. If Tom was in danger—as she feared he was—Ruth felt that she would never again be able to give her mind to her chosen work. 185

Making pictures was not the most essential thing in the world, after all. She felt, indeed, as though her devotion to the work would be positively wrong while Tom was ill.

She sat beside him and held his feverish hand while Helen lay down on the other blanket and tried to sleep. There was not much that was comforting for the two girls to say to each other. And all the time the restless young man gabbled of things to which, at first, Ruth paid little attention.

His repeating over and over again, “This is the place,” finally caused Ruth to wonder what it could be he was talking about—what it was that worried him so much in his delirium.

They had found Tom’s canvas coat in the sand, and in the buttoned inside pocket was his wallet. She got this, while Helen was dozing in the shade, and searched it for the map of the treasure island the wooden-legged sailor had made for Tom.

Ruth suspected what had brought Tom down this way in the launch before the storm. He had been talking about the buried treasure chest previous to his leaving her and the rest of the picture makers at Pirate Island on Sunday. 186

She studied the map with renewed interest. In approaching this desert island upon which Tom had been cast, she had noted that it seemed much more like the sailor’s map than the other island, and it was smaller.

The palm trees seemed standing in the very spot marked on the map. There was the heap of rocks at the other end of the island. And along the backbone of it was the jungle of bayonet-grass indicated by the sailor.

“Queer if Tom should have stumbled upon the right island, after all. But why should he be so troubled by the idea?” she thought.

When Helen awoke Ruth showed her the map again and told her what she believed was worrying Tom.

“Why should he care about a chest full of gold?” said Tom’s twin wearily. “We have money enough.”

“But you were searching that other island eagerly enough for the treasure,” Ruth observed, with a faint smile.

“That was only in fun, Ruth. I can’t bother about such things now,” said Helen, “and I don’t see how you can.”

Ruth was not vexed by this reply. But when Tom said other things that began to puzzle her she refrained from saying anything to Helen about them.

They kept Tom's broken forearm swathed in bandages saturated with seawater, and bathed his head frequently. Ruth would have given a good deal for ice and an icebag. Would Chess and the doctor bring everything possible to aid in alleviating the young fellow's suffering? That was Ruth's particular worryment as the afternoon waned and evening approached.

Helen kept running to a high point on the ridge to look out over the sea, hoping to spy the coming launch. So Ruth continued to hear a good deal more of Tom's wanderings than his sister did.

There were some things he muttered that began to take hold upon Ruth Fielding's mind much more sharply than the thought of the old sailor's map and what it might lead to. Like all patients in a similar mental state,

Tom's mind seemed to wander from subject to subject, and be utterly beyond his control.

He talked sometimes of his army life. He again was adrift on the damaged aeroplane on which he had made his exciting journey over the battlelines in France and Belgium. Then he was back at school at Seven Oaks Academy, with all the boys he had known and loved in those early days.

Ruth knew so much of Tom's private life and his associations, that he could scarcely speak of anything in these wanderings that she did not quickly catch his meaning and understand what his mind recalled.

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But now and then he said something that keenly excited her. She came near to crying out and calling to Helen to come and listen, too. But she thought better of that when Tom had said for a second time something about "Abraham Mole." The name of the lawyer who represented Ruth's unknown backer in the moving picture business naturally spurred

Ruth's curiosity.

Tom knew Mole's name, of course. Ruth had told him all she knew about the lawyer. But why should the delirious young fellow say:

"I told her I didn't know Mole—that I never saw him. It's not a lie."

This was jumbled up with more talk about the treasure island and the map. Until Tom had repeated the phrases several times Ruth did not place much significance upon them.

But as time passed, and his mutterings, either loud or faint, seemed to go over and over again the same form of words, the girl of the Red Mill grew very curious—she became excited.

At length, when Helen had run to the top of the hill for perhaps the twentieth time, she shouted aloud and waved her hand to Ruth. But the latter would not leave Tom's side. Just then the young fellow was clinging to her hand muttering certain words that she

was very anxious to distinguish.

“Somebody’s coming!” shrieked Helen from her eminence. “A whole boatload of folks! I see Chess! He’s waving!”

With Chess Copley and the doctor came Skipper Isling and his boy to see what could be done with the stranded *Trumpeter*. They had been picked up at the other island, along with Mr. Hooley and Wonota. The latter had become much alarmed about Ruth.

But there was no person to be alarmed about now, save Tom Cameron. The company retired a little while the surgeon examined the injured young man and set the broken arm and put it in splints.

Tom’s condition was serious, but not, perhaps, dangerous. His exposure over night and lying in the hot sun for several hours afterward had brought on the fever. As Ruth had expected, the medical man thought it would be better not to move the patient for several days, as long as he could be made

comfortable on the island.

Chess had neglected bringing nothing essential for the care and shelter of the patient and the two girls. A roomy tent was set up, cots brought from the boat, with a portable stove and supplies. In two hours a camp was established under the palms.

Skipper Isling and his boy would remain, camping in the *Trumpeter*, which they had already begun to pump out. The stranded motor-boat was not injured much, but she would have to be dug out of the sand, and that would take time.

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The surgeon promised to come daily to the island if Helen would arrange for his transportation back and forth, and these details were agreed upon. Meanwhile Mr. Hooley gained Ruth's attention for a brief but important conference.

"That storm certainly did us a lot of damage," he told the young president of the film company. "But we have cleared up the camp

and reset the tents. They say there may not be such another storm for a year.”

“I hope not!” cried Ruth.

“So say we all of us! With your permission I shall prepare to go on with the picture; but it will take a week to get ready for any further shots. One thing we can congratulate ourselves on, Miss Fielding.”

“And that is?”

“We don’t need to wreck any vessel. That old sloop did the business for us. I have had those scenes developed and you ought to see them! Great! Great!” cried the director with enthusiasm. “All as good as those of the tidal wave, I assure you.”

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“What about Gion and his men?”

“They were taken off this noon by another sponger or a fisherman. Went back to Nassau. What he intends to do—if anything—about his case of trespass against us, I don’t know, I

am sure.

“But you had better have the island and the new camp guarded night and day. If we can once get going again it will not take long to finish the picture. If—if you can give your attention to it, Miss Ruth.”

Ruth nodded; but she did not promise anything on that point. To Ruth’s mind the picture of “Treasure Trove” was not now of nearly so much importance as something that was happening right here on this island where she had found Tom Cameron.

CHAPTER XXIV

WHAT THE TIDAL WAVE CAST UP

Tom was better in the morning. The girls had taken turns in watching beside his cot during the slow hours of the tropic night, while Chess, rolled in a blanket, lay just outside the half-open flap of the tent.

Ruth chanced to be on duty when the unfortunate young man first came to himself, opened his eyes, and stared around him. He seized Ruth's hand with a grip that hurt.

"Ruth! Is it you?" he whispered. "Gee, this is the place!"

"So you have been telling us, Tommy-boy," said Ruth lightly. "You mean this is the island the sailor made the map of?"

"Yes. I recognized it right away. And that

pile of rocks and the plantation of bayonet-grass. Then that storm—Gee! how did you get here?”

“In a motor-boat, Tom, with Helen and Chess.”

“Of course. You would come after me. Ouch! That arm hurts——”

“It is broken, Tom.”

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“That’s the second time,” he remarked.

“Well, it might be worse. Nothing worse than that happened?”

“Not to you. You have had some fever. Don’t talk much now——”

“Hold on! There is one big thing wrong with me.”

“What is that, Tom?”

“I must have forgotten to eat for an awfully long time. I’m as hollow as an empty tub. What’s the chance for something eatable? I

could even stand monkey-meat again.”

“Let go my hand, Tom, and I’ll get you some gruel.”

“Gruel! Gee! I could wolf a porterhouse steak and onions.”

“And you just now said you would welcome canned corned beef, such as you had in the army.”

“Ungrateful, am I not? Never mind. I’ll get well faster if you give me something stronger than gruel.”

“Wait till the doctor comes and gives his verdict.”

“A doctor?” gasped Tom. “Then I must be bad off.”

But when Dr. Mangan arrived about noon it seemed that Tom was not so bad off, after all. The physician declared that undoubtedly good nursing would bring the patient around very shortly. He would not

come over from Nassau himself again, unless the fever returned.

“These young army men are as hard as nails and as tough as rubber,” Dr. Mangan declared. “Keep him cool, don’t feed him too much no matter how he grumbles over it, let him sleep under a mosquito bar at night. After that storm we had Sunday the insect pests will begin to arrive again, and some of them are doubtless poisonous. You Northerners ought to keep out of these islands during the summer.”

With her mind relieved—for the time, at least—about Tom, Ruth could contemplate other matters. The production of the picture began to loom up as a most important subject for thought. And the news film she had sent to New York—what of that? No marconigram had come from Mr. Mole regarding it.

She had her notebook with her, and in it was jotted down the expenses of the production of “Treasure Trove”—as near as she could figure them—to the present time.

This week of “resting,” in which not a foot of film could be made, was costing more money than she wanted to think of. It would probably equal what they would save by not being obliged to buy and wreck a boat. For a new reason now, Ruth desired to keep the cost of production at as low a figure as possible.

Never before had the fact that she had 195 an “unknown backer” of her production, worried Ruth so much as at this time. After all, she was not independent. She had thought that she would be so when once her company was incorporated. But it was not so.

It was not alone the idea of “making good” that obsessed her. She realized that there would be times when matters private and poignant might arise between her and the picture making. And what then? How could she keep faith with the backer of the Fielding Film Company, Inc., at such times?

Had Tom proved to be seriously hurt, or doomed to an extended illness, she would

have had to choose between the finishing of “Treasure Trove” and the nursing of her old and dear friend. She knew very well in which direction her heart would have forced her.

And, besides, there were other thoughts that made the girl of the Red Mill very grave. To give up one’s independence and one’s theories is not an easy thing to do. Some things that Tom, in his delirium, had murmured over and over again, had finally become so significant that Ruth could not ignore them, or consider them absurd.

“And I have been trying to make poor Tom take up with a business that he is no more fitted for than I would be to run a lodging house, for instance. Lodging houses are necessary, but they are out of the field of my talents. And how about drygoods being out of Tom’s field?” murmured the girl.

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Nobody had undertaken to dictate to Ruth herself when she made her choice in life and ventured into the field of picture making. Not even Uncle Jabez had really obstructed her

attempt.

“Poor Tom!” concluded Ruth, sighing. “He was not born to a yardstick and a counter—nor a pen and a desk, either. No. I should not treat him as though he was all wrong because he runs away from Cameron Brothers.

“And *now!*” Her voice broke. She flushed warmly. Something connected with Tom’s wanderings in the realms of delirium while the fever troubled him came again into Ruth’s thought.

“What shall I do? I wish I had never started the picture. I am not independent at all. That hundred thousand dollars, furnished by—by the person unknown—hampers me rather than helps me. That is, it hampers my independence. I am not independent at all!” she repeated.

Her gaze wandered off across the stretch of sand and torn-up verdure. The tidal wave had not surged over this island in its entirety, for some parts of it were much

higher than the remainder.

Ruth saw something sticking out of the sand not far in advance—the square corner of what looked like a box. It was not, however, the treasure chest that Tom’s old sailor had talked about, Ruth told herself, as she advanced, with a smile. It was not big enough for that.

That it was something interesting, however, she saw at once. It appeared to be an almost cubical box of some metal that had turned green from the action of the sea water. It was encrusted with oysters and other shell-fish. Some of these hung their shells open and were dead; but the box had not long been out of the sea.

“Cast up by the tidal wave—it must have been,” thought the girl, hurrying on to the spot. “It is treasure trove, true enough! What can it be?”

CHAPTER XXV

A NEW PARTNERSHIP

Chess Copley and Helen Cameron were supposed to be watching over the sick one; but it is to be feared that they somewhat neglected Tom just at this time. Tom was getting along pretty well anyway. He was presumably asleep, and the two had something very important to tell each other.

Anyone would have known it was important—the chiefest thing in the world, indeed—if he could have seen the way they looked at each other. Chess gazed upon Helen as though he really thought he might be deprived of his eyesight at any moment and so never see her again; while the girl looked back into ‘Lasses’ countenance as though he were the very first young man she had ever taken notice of and as if he were really wonderful.

This mutual admiration had been going on ever since Ruth had left the tent under the palms to wander along the beach of the island, which Tom was so confident was the one of which the wooden-legged old sailor had drawn the map.

199

Now, when Ruth began to call to them to “bring a spade! A spade!” the absorbed couple kept right on looking into each other’s eyes without understanding for a moment that there was any world outside their own world of romance. They were utterly unconscious of the seabirds’ cries, let alone Ruth’s shrieks. They did not see her waving her cap and dancing up and down in the sun.

“I—I can’t wait another minute to—to tell you,” stammered Chess, “that—that you are—are just the nicest girl, Helen, I—I ever knew. Do you know, I’m awfully fond of you!”

“Are you, Chess?” murmured Helen. “I—I— Well, you can’t be too fond of me, you know, Chess dear, for I am fond of you, too.”

“Goodness!” sighed the young man, “isn’t it wonderful?”

“Wonderful!” agreed Helen.

At this minute something actually did arouse them from their contemplation of each other and their future bliss. A wild-eyed, hoarse-voiced figure appeared staggering in the doorway of the tent. Tom’s flushed face, contorted with fear, confronted the two.

“Don’t you hear her? She’s in danger! Ruth! Ruth!”

Chess sprang to seize the feverish fellow. Helen turned to gaze in the direction Ruth had wandered. She immediately understood what her chum was shouting for.

200

“Oh, go back and lie down, Tommy-boy,” she said. “Ruth is all right. She wants a spade—that’s all. There is one here.”

Chess had urged Tom back to bed. But Helen

could not leave him to run to Ruth's aid without drawing the flaxen-haired youth aside and telling him again in a whisper how very "wonderful" she thought he was.

Helen picked up the spade and strolled across the sands toward her chum. She took her time about it. Nothing in this world could ever be so important as the matter which at present filled her mind.

"What is the matter with you, Ruthie?" she drawled. "Something bit you?"

"Yes! Of course! And I want to kill it with a spade," exclaimed the other girl, with some exasperation. "What is the matter with you that you are so slow?"

She grabbed the spade from Helen's hand. The latter said in the same dreamy way:

"Oh, Ruthie! I want to tell you—the most wonderful thing has happened."

"Maybe that is so," said Ruth. "Look here.

Did you ever see the like?”

She was already digging beside the metal box that was embedded in the sand. Helen displayed only mild curiosity.

201

“What is it?” she asked.

“I don’t know. But I am going to find out. It has been recently cast up by the sea—you can tell that.”

“Oh, yes. And I want to tell you,” went on Helen, “just the most wonderful thing that’s happened. You’d never guess it.”

“Yes?” returned Ruth. “What has happened?”

But she did not give Helen all the attention the latter thought her chum should show. Helen looked at her with some disappointment.

“Why, Ruthie,” she murmured, “I thought you would be awfully excited.”

“I am!” cried Ruth, making the sand fly.

“But—but you don’t appear to be. I know I should be awfully interested if you were getting engaged.”

“Getting *what?*” demanded Ruth.

“Getting engaged.”

“I’m not! I’m getting——” she heaved at the corner of the box and it finally gave and turned over. A padlocked, hinged cover was revealed. “Glory!” shouted Ruth. “It’s a real box! It must be——”

“I declare!” exclaimed Helen, “you take more thought for that old box than for me. Why, Ruthie! Chess wants me to *marry him.*”

202

“Is—that—so?” retorted Ruth, panting. “Have you just found it out, you poor thing? Why, I knew that two months ago—and more. Has he just got around to telling you?”

But after all Ruth was truly sympathetic. She dropped the spade and threw her arms about

her chum.

“Oh, Helen! You foolish—dear—sweet girl! I thought you were fighting poor Chess off all the time. And he is such a nice boy.”

Helen dropped a wee little tear upon Ruth’s cheek; but she was laughing, after all.

“I—I was afraid he wasn’t ever going to get around to asking me, Ruthie,” she whispered.

“Oh, my dear! Up at the Thousand Islands I could have told you——”

“Ye-es,” interrupted Helen. “But I wanted Chess to tell me—and he has at last. Now, you and Tom understand each other so well.”

But Ruth seized the spade again at that. She would not listen to such hints, even from her chum.

They had to get Chess, after all, to help carry the shell-encrusted box to the camp. It was filled with something “besides wind,” he very quickly announced. When Chess showed

some interest in Ruth's discovery, of course Helen did too.

"Perhaps it is filled with sand," she said.

203

"Oh, say not so!" cried Ruth, beginning to laugh again. "It must be something very precious. Look at the mighty padlock."

"Let me tell you, that is a hand-wrought lock—and an ancient one. Ruth, you may have unearthed something of consequence."

"Of course I have, Chess," announced Ruth demurely. "I am making 'Treasure Trove,' so why should I not find treasure trove? How shall we get into it?"

"Have to pry off the cover. No other way. Couldn't pick that padlock in a thousand years," declared Chess.

But they had no means of prying the cover off. The spade would not do, and they had to wait until the return of the motor-boat to get a

proper tool. During this wait Tom got much interested in the treasure box. Helen and Chess, however, wandered away hand in hand, and forgot entirely for the time being about any treasure cast up by the sea.

“Of course, there must be something in the box, Tom,” Ruth said.

“It’s not the chest of money the old sailor told me about.”

“Why, Tom, of course not. *That* was buried only thirty years ago or so. 204
Look at that strange old lock—and even the shells on the box. It has been in the water for ages!”

“That is true. Many a Spanish treasure ship—those old galleons—were sunk in these waters. And neither the British nor the buccaneers got all the gold and precious stones shipped for Spain aboard the ill-fated barks.”

“This box may have been flung overboard

when the galleon was attacked by pirates,” suggested Ruth.

As it chanced, they could not get the box open until the following day; and by that time Tom was up and about. The skipper of the motor-boat brought a pinch-bar from town. But he did not know what it was going to be used for. On Tom’s advice, the discovery of the strange metal box was hidden from everybody but the four friends.

It was quite a ceremony when the box was opened. Chess wielded the bar, and after considerable trouble wrenched loose the cover at the hinges. Marvelous were the contents of the box when displayed to the four pairs of eyes!

Tarnished coins of both gold and silver; rusted trinkets; broken chains of prayer-beads, most beautifully carved; several crosses and images in gold so pure that they could be bent like pewter; and underneath all, another casket of silver containing a good handful of uncut stones—rubies, sapphires,

and others—with a few great pearls.

Really, none of the quartette had believed there was anything of real value in the box. Even Ruth had merely made believe she thought so. And this astonishing discovery affected them all. Even the engagement of Helen and Chess took second place—for the time being, at least.

205

“You are rich, Ruth!” cried Helen. “Just think! Without working for it, you are rich. I bet there is more than a hundred thousand dollars’ worth of stuff in that box.”

“I—I can make my own pictures now, for sure!” gasped Ruth.

“You are already doing that,” laughed Tom. “Haven’t you got your own picture company?”

Ruth looked at him steadily. The other two slipped out of the tent to hold hands again and consider each others’ countenances. Tom’s gaze began to waver before Ruth’s

accusing look.

“Tom Cameron,” she said, “I have found you out.”

“Found me out?”

“You are the guilty party. You are the ‘unknown’. I don’t know how you did it, but I believe you made arrangements through Mr. Hope for Mr. Abraham Mole to incorporate our company, and *you* supplied the capital. Oh, Tom! how could you?”

“Huh! By just drawing a check. 206
Nothing else, I assure you,” he said airily. “My investments had materialized and I had the cash. You needed it, and, Ruth, I did want to get into something besides the drygoods business. I hate it! And the moving picture game just suits me.”

“No,” she said waveringly. “I—I cannot let you do it, Tom. This treasure I have found, and the money I know the tidal wave picture will bring—it—it makes me independent. I

will buy you out——”

“Not much you won’t!” shouted Tom heatedly. “Don’t you think it! I am a partner in the Fielding Film Company, Incorporated, and you are not going to freeze me out of it.”

“Tom——”

“I mean what I say,” he declared. “You can’t be so mean, Ruth. I am just getting my hand in. It is great fun. And you know yourself that I can help you, Ruth.”

He said this last pleadingly. Ruth knew it was true. She nodded understandingly, and somehow their hands met and clung, too. There was something besides a business understanding in that handclasp.

Though Tom’s arm remained in a sling for some weeks, he was not kept from aiding in the completion of “Treasure Trove.” And long before it was finally “shot” the two partners were confident that nothing the girl

had ever written promised to be such a success on the screen.

Perhaps it was fortunate that Helen and Chess were so absorbed in each other for the rest of their stay at Nassau, and that Ann Hicks and the Copley girls had other interests; for Ruth and Tom could give their friends small attention.

Somehow, the spark of enthusiasm that had been lacking in the development of the scenes heretofore now appeared in the acting of the company as well as in the work of the young director. Ruth's radiant spirits swept all before her. She was proving, in more ways than one, her fitness for the situation she had been given as president of the Fielding Film Company. She had handled some very serious situations with a firmness and boldness that would have delighted Mr. Hammond, for instance, could he have been on the spot.

Nor was the inspiration of the news-reel of the tidal wave one of the smallest things Ruth

accomplished while she was treasure hunting. News came back from Mr. Mole that he had sold the rights to the reel for a large sum. After the film was cut and titled and assembled, a showing had been arranged for the buyers of certain news syndicates. The price obtained was even more than Ruth had hoped and she delighted Johnson, the chief camera man, with the promised five hundred dollars bonus.

At about this time, too, more good news came from the North. Another letter from Aunt Alvira and Sarah assured the girl that the miller's condition had improved and that he was eager to hear the particulars of her venture in the Bahamas.

208

“Better write him direct, my pretty, for it will please him,” Aunt Alvira had laboriously written. “He is awful interested in your work. And if he gets around again like old times (as I most know he will) your Uncle Jabez will be right behind you on another venture—if you need him. I’m sure of it.”

Ruth read this to Tom and smiled upon him. “Shall we take in another partner, Tom?” she asked.

“I shouldn’t be jealous of Mr. Potter,” confessed the young fellow. “But it looks just now, Ruth, as though we wouldn’t need more capital. I tell you ‘Treasure Trove’ is going to make us a young fortune. You see!”

“Ruth has all the luck,” complained Ann Hicks, but not a carping critic at that. “Look at the rest of us—digging over that whole old island and not even turning up a ten-cent piece. Beats all!”

Nor did they, even when they had searched the key Tom believed to be the one of which he had the map, find a single valuable thing. The chest of money the wooden-legged man declared he saw buried must have been removed from its hiding place before Ruth and her friends came to the Bahamas!

There were no more troubles to divert Ruth’s

mind from the picture making. Before the Nassau courts (if they ever did) got around to calling the Fielding Film Company to answer a civil suit by Amerigo Gion, "Treasure Trove" was finished and the whole party were off to the United States.

Enthusiasm is a poor criterion, of course, when it comes to the final decision on even a work of art. But they all believed that the picture made in the Bahamas was one of the best ever filmed.

"It will be a knock-out," declared Chess.

"Let me tell you, young man," said Tom severely, "the proof of the pudding is in the eating thereof, not in chewing the pudding-bag string. Wait till it is assembled and titled and the distributors give us their opinion."

However, to wait for that would have occupied some weeks. The very day they arrived in New York a private showing of the film just as it had been made was viewed by Mr. Hammond and some other men in the

business whom Ruth knew and whose opinion she valued highly.

When they came out of the projection room after nearly three hours of watching the flicker of the film, Mr. Hammond gave this opinion:

210

“Miss Ruth, I always said you had it in you to put over a big thing. You’ve done good work for me in the past. But this tops ’em all—everything we have done together. You are a born producer. This is going to make some of the big fellows sit up and take notice. It’s great!”

When they were alone again Ruth and Tom looked at each other—happy and content. Their hands met in a warm clasp.

“What did I tell you, Ruth?” breathed the young man almost with awe. “You’re a wonder.”

“But I never could have done it without your help, Tom,” was her answer.

THE END



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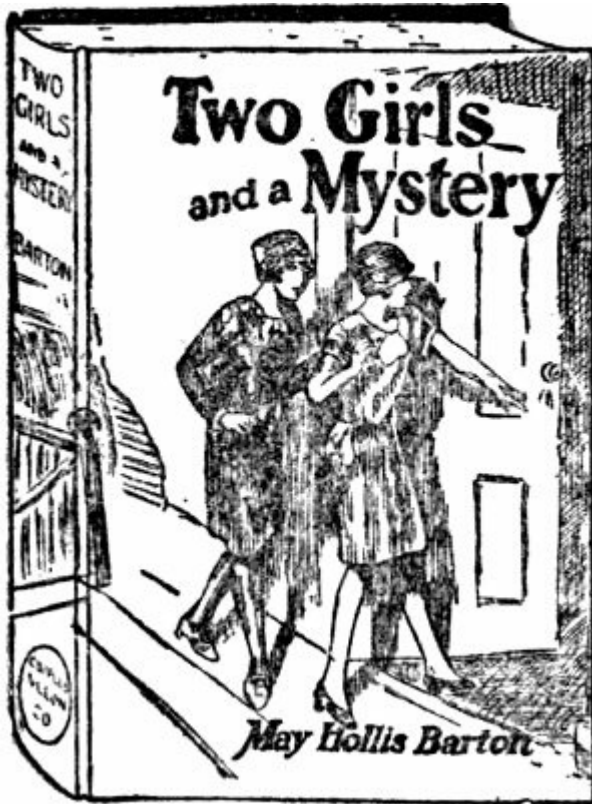
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[The end of *Ruth Fielding Treasure Hunting*
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