

CHAPTER VI

A. JONES

There was work for the Stanton girls at the "film factory," as they called it, next morning, so they had left the hotel before Mr. Merrick's party assembled at the breakfast table.

"I must telephone the Santa Monica hospital and find out how our patient is," remarked Uncle John, when the meal was over; but presently he returned from the telephone booth with a puzzled expression upon his face. "A. Jones has disappeared!" he announced.

"Disappeared! What do you mean, Uncle?" asked Beth.

"He woke early and declared he was himself again, paid his bill, said 'good morning' to the hospital superintendent and walked away. He wouldn't answer questions, but kept asking them. The nurse showed him the book with the record of how he was saved, but she couldn't induce him to say who he was, where he came from nor where he was going. Seems a little queer, doesn't it?"

They all confessed that it did.

"However," said Patsy Doyle, "I'm glad he recovered, and I'm sure Maud

will be when she hears the news. The boy has a perfect right to keep his own counsel, but he might have had the grace to tell us what that initial 'A.' stands for, and where on earth Sangoa is."

"I've been inquiring about Sangoa," announced Arthur, just then joining the group, "and no one seems wiser than we are. There's no record of such a town or state in Mexico, or in the United States--so far as I can discover. The clerk has sent for a map of Alaska, and perhaps we'll find Sangoa there."

"What does it matter?" inquired Louise.

"Why, we don't like to be stumped," asserted Patsy, "that's all. Here is a young man from Sangoa, and--"

"Really," interrupted Beth, who was gazing through the window, "I believe here is the young man from Sangoa!"

"Where?" they all cried, crowding forward to look.

"Coming up the walk. See! Isn't that the same mysterious individual whose life Maud saved?"

"That's the identical mystery," declared Uncle John. "I suppose he has come here to look us up and thank us."

"Then, for heaven's sake, girls, pump him and find out where Sangoa is," said Arthur hastily, and the next moment a bell boy approached their party with a card.

They looked at the young fellow curiously as he came toward them. He seemed not more than eighteen years of age and his thin features wore a tired expression that was not the result of his recent experience but proved to be habitual. His manner was not languid, however, but rather composed; at the same time he held himself alert, as if constantly on his guard. His dress was simple but in good taste and he displayed no embarrassment as he greeted the party with a low bow.

"Ah," said Uncle John, heartily shaking his hand, "I am delighted to find you so perfectly recovered."

A slight smile, sad and deprecating, flickered for an instant over his lips. It gave the boyish face a patient and rather sweet expression as he slowly replied:

"I am quite myself to-day, sir, and I have come to assure you of my gratitude for your rescue of me yesterday. Perhaps it wasn't worth all your bother, but since you generously took the trouble to save me, the least I can do is to tender you my thanks." Here he looked from one to another of the three girls and continued: "Please tell me which young lady swam to my assistance."

"Oh, it was none of us," said Patsy. "Miss Stanton--Maud Stanton--swam out to you, when she noticed you were struggling, and kept you afloat until we--until help came."

"And Miss Stanton is not here?"

"Not at present, although she is staying at this hotel."

He gravely considered this information for a moment. As he stood there, swaying slightly, he appeared so frail and delicate that Uncle John seized his arm and made him sit down in a big easy chair. The boy sighed, took a memorandum from his pocket and glanced at it.

"Miss Doyle and Mr. Weldon pulled out in a boat and rescued both Miss Stanton and me, just as we were about to sink," he said. "Tell me, please, if either Miss Doyle or Mr. Weldon is present."

"I am Arthur Weldon," said that young gentleman; "but I was merely the boatman, under command of Miss Doyle, whom I beg to present to you."

A. Jones looked earnestly into Patsy's face. Holding out his hand he said with his odd smile: "Thank you." Then he turned to shake Arthur's hand, after which he continued: "I also am indebted to Mr. Merrick for carrying me to the hospital. The doctor told me that only this prompt action enabled them to resuscitate me at all. And now, I believe it would be courteous for me to tell you who I am and how I came to be in

such dire peril."

He paused to look around him questioningly and the interest on every face was clearly evident. Arthur took this opportunity to introduce Jones to Louise and Beth and then they all sat down again. Said Uncle John to the stranger, in his frank and friendly way:

"Tell us as much or as little as you like, my boy. We are not unduly inquisitive, I assure you."

"Thank you, sir. I am an American, and my name is Jones. That is, I may claim American parentage, although I was born upon a scarcely known island in the Pacific which my father purchased from the government of Uruguay some thirty years ago."

"Sangoa?" asked Arthur.

He seemed surprised at the question but readily answered:

"Yes; Sangoa. My father was a grandnephew of John Paul Jones and very proud of the connection; but instead of being a sailor he was a scientist, and he chose to pass his life in retirement from the world."

"Your father is no longer living, then?" said Mr. Merrick.

"He passed away a year ago, on his beloved island. My mother died

several years before him. I began to feel lonely at Sangoa and I was anxious to visit America, of which my mother had so often told me. So some months ago I reached San Francisco, since when I have been traveling over your country--my country, may I call it?--and studying your modern civilization. In New York I remained fully three months. It is only about ten days since I returned to this coast."

He stopped abruptly, as if he considered he had told enough. The brief recital had interested his auditors, but the ensuing pause was rather embarrassing.

"I suppose you have been visiting relatives of your parents," remarked Uncle John, to ease the situation.

"They--had no relatives that I know of," he returned. "I am quite alone in the world. You must not suppose I am unaccustomed to the water," he hastened to add, as if to retreat from an unpleasant subject. "At Sangoa I have bathed in the sea ever since I can remember anything; but--I am not in good health. I suffer from indigestion, a chronic condition, which is my incubus. Yesterday my strength suddenly deserted me and I became helpless."

"How fortunate it was that Maud noticed you!" exclaimed Patsy, with generous sympathy.

Again the half sad smile softened his face as he looked at her.

"I am not sure it was wholly fortunate for me," he said, "although I admit I have no wish to end my uninteresting life by drowning. I am not a misanthrope, in spite of my bad stomach. The world is more useful to me than I am to the world, but that is not my fault. Pardon me for talking so much about myself."

"Oh, we are intensely interested, I assure you," replied Patsy. "If some of us were indeed the instruments that saved you yesterday, it is a pleasure to us to know something of the--the man--we saved."

She had almost said "boy," he was such a youthful person, and he knew it as well as she did.

"I would like to meet Miss Stanton and thank her personally," he presently resumed. "So, if you have no objection, I think I shall register at this hotel and take a room. I--I am not very strong yet, but perhaps Miss Stanton will see me when I have rested a little."

"She won't return before five o'clock," explained Mr. Merrick. "Miss Stanton is--er--connected with a motion picture company, you know, and is busy during the day."

He seemed both surprised and perplexed, at first, but after a moment's thought he said:

"She is an actress, then?"

"Yes; she and her sister. They have with them an aunt, Mrs. Montrose, for companion."

"Thank you. Then I will try to meet them this evening."

As he spoke he rose with some difficulty and bade them adieu. Arthur went with him to the desk and proffered his assistance, but the young man said he needed nothing but rest.

"And just think of it," said Patsy, when he had gone. "We don't know yet what that 'A' stands for!"

"Arthur," suggested Louise.

"Albert," said Beth.

"Or Algernon," added Uncle John with a chuckle.

"But we haven't seen the last of him yet," declared Miss Doyle. "I've a romance all plotted, of which A. Jones is to be the hero. He will fall in love with Maud and carry her away to his island!"

"I'm not so sure of that result," observed Uncle John thoughtfully. "It wouldn't astonish me to have him fall in love with Maud Stanton; we've

all done that, you know; but could Maud--could any girl--be attracted by a lean, dismal boy with a weak stomach, such as A. Jones?"

"Even with these drawbacks he is quite interesting," asserted Beth.

"He is sure to win her sympathy," said Louise.

"But, above all," declared Patsy, "he has an island, inherited from his royal daddy. That island would count for a lot, with any girl!"