

CHAPTER X

STILL A MYSTERY

The day advanced to luncheon time and Uncle John and the Weldons came back from their mountain trip. Hollywood is in the foothills and over the passes are superb automobile roads into the fruitful valleys of San Fernando and La Canada.

"Seen anything of the boy--A. Jones?" inquired Arthur.

"Yes; and perhaps we've seen the last of him," answered Beth.

"Oh. Has he gone?"

"No one knows. Patsy fed him and he went to sleep. What has happened since we cannot tell."

The girls then related the experiences of the morning, at which both Uncle John and Arthur looked solemn and uncomfortable. But Louise said calmly:

"I think Patsy was quite right. I wouldn't have dared such a thing myself, but I'm sure that boy needed a square meal more than anything. If he dies, that breakfast has merely hastened his end; but if he doesn't

die it will do him good."

"There's another possibility," remarked Uncle John. "He may be suffering agonies with no one to help him."

Patsy's face was white as chalk. The last hour or two had brought her considerable anxiety and her uncle's horrible suggestion quite unnerved her. She stole away to the office and inquired the number of Mr. Jones' room. It was on the ground floor and easily reached by a passage. The girl tiptoed up to the door and putting her ear to the panel listened intently. A moment later a smile broke over her face; she chuckled delightedly and then turned and ran back to her friends.

"He's snoring like a walrus!" she cried triumphantly.

"Are you sure they are not groans?" asked Arthur.

"Pah! Can't I recognize a snore when I hear it? And I'll bet it's the first sound sleep he's had in a month."

Mr. Merrick and Arthur went to the door of the boy's room to satisfy themselves that Patsy was not mistaken, and the regularity of the sounds quickly convinced them the girl was right. So they had a merry party at luncheon, calling Patsy "Doctor" with grave deference and telling her she had probably saved the life of A. Jones for a second time.

"And now," proposed Uncle John, when the repast was over, "let us drive down to the sea and have a look at that beautiful launch that came in yesterday. Everyone is talking about it and they say it belongs to some foreign prince."

So they motored to Santa Monica and spent the afternoon on the sands, watching the bathers and admiring the graceful outlines of the big yacht lying at anchor a half mile from the shore. The boat was something of a mystery to everybody. It was named the "Arabella" and had come from Hawaii via San Francisco; but what it was doing here and who the owner might be were questions no one seemed able to answer. Rumor had it that a Japanese prince had come in it to inspect the coast line, but newspaper reporters were forbidden to scale the side and no satisfaction was given their eager questioning by the bluff old captain who commanded the craft. So the girls snapped a few kodak pictures of the handsome yacht and then lost interest in it.

That evening they met Mrs. Montrose and the Stanton girls at dinner and told them about the boy, who still remained invisible. Uncle John had listened at his door again, but the snores had ceased and a deathlike silence seemed to pervade the apartment. This rendered them all a trifle uneasy and when they left the dining room Arthur went to the hotel clerk and asked:

"Have you seen Mr. Jones this evening?"

"No," was the reply. "Do you know him?"

"Very slightly."

"Well, he's the queerest guest we've ever had. The first day he ate nothing at all. This morning I hear he had a late breakfast. Wasn't around to lunch, but a little while ago we sent a meal to his room that would surprise you."

"Indeed!"

"Yes. A strange order it was! Broiled mushrooms, pancakes with maple syrup and ice cream. How is that for a mix-up--and at dinner time, too!" said the clerk, disgustedly.

Arthur went back and reported.

"All right," said Patsy, much relieved. "We've got him started and now he can take care of himself. Come, Uncle; let's all go down town and see the picture that drove Mr. Goldstein crazy."

"He was very decent to us to-day," asserted Flo Stanton.

"Did he ask any explanation about Maud's appearing in the picture of a rival company?" inquired Arthur.

"No, not a word."

"Did he mention Mr. Jones, who conquered him so mysteriously?"
asked Beth.

"Not at all. Goldstein confined himself strictly to business; but he
treated us with unusual courtesy," explained Maud.

They were curious to see the films of the rescue, and the entire party
rode to the down-town theatre where the Corona picture was being run.
Outside the entrance they found the audacious placard, worded just as
Goldstein had reported, and they all agreed it was a mean trick to claim
another firm's star as their own.

"I do not think the Corona Company is responsible for this announcement,"
said Uncle John. "It is probably an idea of the theatre proprietor, who
hoped to attract big business in that way."

"He has succeeded," grumbled Arthur, as he took his place at the end of a
long line of ticket buyers.

The picture, as it flashed on the screen, positively thrilled them. First
was shown the crowd of merry bathers, with Patsy and Maud standing in the
water a little apart from the others. Then the boy--far out beyond the
rest--threw up his arms, struggling desperately. Maud swam swiftly toward
him, Patsy making for the shore. The launching of the boat, the race to

rescue, Maud's effort to keep the drowning one afloat, and the return to the shore, where an excited crowd surrounded them--all was clearly shown in the picture. Now they had the advantage of observing the expressions on the faces of the bathers when they discovered a tragedy was being enacted in their midst. The photographs were so full of action that the participants now looked upon their adventure in a new light and regarded it far more seriously than before.

The picture concluded with the scene where Uncle John lifted the body into the automobile and dashed away with it to the hospital.

Maud Stanton, used as she was to seeing herself in motion pictures, was even more impressed than the others when observing her own actions at a time when she was wholly unconscious that a camera-man had his lens focused upon her.

"It's a great picture!" whispered Flo, as they made their way out of the crowded theatre. "Why can't all our films be as natural and absorbing as this one?"

"Because," said her sister, "in this case there is no acting. The picture carries conviction with a force that no carefully rehearsed scene could ever accomplish."

"That is true," agreed her Aunt Jane. "The nature scenes are the best, after all."

"The most unsatisfactory pictures I have ever seen," remarked Uncle John, "were those of prominent men, and foreign kings, and the like, who stop before the camera and bow as awkwardly as a camel. They know they are posing, and in spite of their public experience they're as bashful as schoolboys or as arrogant as policemen, according to their personal characteristics."

"Did you notice the mob of children in that theatre?" asked Patsy, as they proceeded homeward. "I wish there were more pictures made that are suitable to their understandings."

"They enjoy anything in the way of a picture," said Arthur. "It isn't necessary to cater to children; they'll go anyhow, whatever is shown."

"That may be, to an extent, true," said Beth. "Children are fascinated by any sort of motion pictures, but a lot of them must be wholly incomprehensible to the child mind. I agree with Patsy that the little ones ought to have their own theatres and their own pictures."

"That will come, in time," prophesied Aunt Jane. "Already the film makers are recognizing the value of the children's patronage and are trying to find subjects that especially appeal to them."

They reached the hotel soon after ten o'clock and found "Ajo" seated in the lobby. He appeared much brighter and stronger than the day before and

rose to greet Patsy with a smile that had lost much of its former sad expression.

"Congratulate me, Dr. Doyle," said he. "I'm still alive, and--thanks to your prescription--going as well as could be expected."

"I'm glad I did the right thing," she replied; "but we were all a little worried for fear I'd make a mistake."

"I have just thrown away about a thousand of those food-tablets," he informed her with an air of pride. "I am positive there is no substitute for real food, whatever the specialists may say. In fact," he continued more soberly, "I believe you have rescued me a second time from certain death, for now I have acquired a new hope and have made up my mind to get well."

"Be careful not to overdo it," cautioned Uncle John. "You ordered a queer supper, we hear."

"But it seemed to agree with me. I've had a delightful sleep--the first sound sleep in a month--and already I feel like a new man. I waited up to tell you this, hoping you would be interested."

"We are!" exclaimed Patsy, who felt both pride and pleasure. "This evening we have been to see the motion picture of your rescue from drowning."

"Oh. How did you like it?"

"It's a splendid picture. I'm not sure it will interest others as much as ourselves, yet the people present seemed to like it."

"Well it was their last chance to observe my desperate peril and my heroic rescue," said the boy. "The picture will not be shown after to-night."

"Why not?" they asked, in surprise.

"I bought the thing this afternoon. It didn't seem to me quite modest to exploit our little adventure in public."

This was a new phase of the strange boy's character and the girls did not know whether to approve it or not.

"It must have cost you something!" remarked Flo, the irrepressible.

"Besides, how could you do it while you were asleep?"

"Why, I wakened long enough to use the telephone," he replied with a smile. "There are more wonderful inventions in the world than motion pictures, you know."

"But you like motion pictures, don't you?" asked Maud, wondering why he

had suppressed the film in question.

"Very much. In fact, I am more interested in them than in anything else, not excepting the telephone--which makes Aladdin's lamp look like a firefly in the sunshine."

"I suppose," said Flo, staring into his face with curious interest, "that you will introduce motion pictures into your island of Sangoa, when you return?"

"I suppose so," he answered, a little absently. "I had not considered that seriously, as yet, but my people would appreciate such a treat, I'm sure."

This speech seemed to destroy, in a manner, their shrewd conjecture that he was in America to purchase large quantities of films. Why, then, should Goldstein have paid such abject deference to this unknown islander?

In his own room, after the party had separated for the night, Mr. Merrick remarked to Arthur Weldon as they sat smoking their cigars:

"Young Jones is evidently possessed of some means."

"So it seems," replied Arthur. "Perhaps his father, the scientific recluse, had accumulated some money, and the boy came to America to get

rid of it. He will be extravagant and wasteful for awhile, and then go back to his island with the idea that he has seen the world."

Uncle John nodded.

"He is a rather clean-cut young fellow," said he, "and the chances are he won't become dissipated, even though he loses his money through lack of worldly knowledge or business experience. A boy brought up and educated on an island can't be expected to prove very shrewd, and whatever the extent of his fortune it is liable to melt like snow in the sunshine."

"After all," returned Arthur, "this experience won't hurt him. He will still have his island to return to."

They smoked for a time in silence.

"Has it ever occurred to you, sir," said Arthur, "that the story Jones has related to us, meager though it is, bears somewhat the stamp of a fairy tale?"

Uncle John removed his cigar and looked reflectively at the ash.

"You mean that the boy is not what he seems?"

"Scarcely that, sir. He seems like a good boy, in the main. But his story is--such as one might invent if he were loath to tell the truth."

Uncle John struck a match and relit his cigar.

"I believe in A. Jones, and I see no reason to doubt his story," he asserted. "If real life was not full of romance and surprises, the novelists would be unable to interest us in their books."