

## CHAPTER XXI

### THE YACHT "ARABELLA"

As the party drove into town Colby said:

"It wouldn't be a bad idea for Jones to bribe that fellow Le Drieux. If Le Drieux, who holds a warrant for the arrest of Jack Andrews, issued by the Austrian government and vised in Washington, could be won to our side, the whole charge against our friend might be speedily dissolved."

"Disgraceful!" snapped Maud indignantly. "I am positive Mr. Jones would not consider such a proposition."

"Diplomatic, not disgraceful," commented the lawyer, smiling at her. "Why should Jones refuse to consider bribery?"

"To use money to defeat justice would be a crime as despicable as stealing pearls," she said.

"Dear me!" muttered Colby, with a puzzled frown. "What a queer way to look at it. Le Drieux has already been bribed, by a liberal reward, to run down a supposed criminal. If we bribe him with a larger sum to give up the pursuit of Jones, whom we believe innocent, we are merely defending ourselves from a possible injustice which may be brought about

by an error of judgment."

"Isn't this judge both able and honest?" asked Uncle John.

"Wilton? Well, possibly. His ability consists in his knowledge of law, rather than of men and affairs. He believes himself honest, I suppose, but I'll venture to predict he will act upon prejudice and an assumption of personal dignity, rather than attempt to discover if his personal impressions correspond with justice. A judge, Mr. Merrick, is a mere man, with all the average man's failings; so we must expect him to be quite human."

"Never mind," said Patsy resignedly. "Perhaps we shall find him a better judge than you are lawyer."

"He has had more experience, anyhow," said Colby, much amused at the shot.

They found, on arriving at court, that the case had already been postponed. They drove to the jail and obtained permission to see the prisoner, who was incarcerated under the name of "Jack Andrews, alias A. Jones." Maud would have liked a private audience, but the lawyer was present as well as Patsy and Mr. Merrick, and she did not like to ask them to go away.

The boy greeted them with his old frank smile and did not seem in the

least oppressed by the fact that he was a prisoner accused of an ugly crime. The interview was held in a parlor of the jail, a guard standing by the door but discreetly keeping out of earshot.

Colby first informed the boy of the postponement of his formal examination and then submitted to his client an outline of the defense he had planned. Jones listened quietly and shook his head.

"Is that the best you can do for me?"

"With my present knowledge, yes," returned the lawyer.

"And will it clear me from this suspicion?" was the next question.

"I hope so."

"You are not sure?"

"This is an extraordinary case, Mr. Jones. Your friends all believe you innocent, but the judge wants facts--cold, hard facts--and only these will influence him. Mr. Le Drieux, commissioned by the Austrian government, states that you are Jack Andrews, and have escaped to America after having stolen the pearls of a noble Viennese lady. He will offer, as evidence to prove his assertion, the photograph and the pearls. You must refute this charge with counter-evidence, in order to escape extradition and a journey to the country where the crime was committed.

There you will be granted a regular trial, to be sure, but even if you then secure an acquittal you will have suffered many indignities and your good name will be permanently tarnished."

"Well, sir?"

"I shall work unceasingly to secure your release at the examination. But I wish I had some stronger evidence to offer in rebuttal."

"Go ahead and do your best," said the boy, nonchalantly. "I will abide by the result, whatever it may be."

"May I ask a few questions?" Maud timidly inquired.

He turned to her with an air of relief.

"Most certainly you may, Miss Stanton."

"And you will answer them?"

"I pledge myself to do so, if I am able."

"Thank you," she said. "I am not going to interfere with Mr. Colby's plans, but I'd like to help you on my own account, if I may."

He gave her a quick look, at once grateful, suspicious and amused.

Then he said:

"Clear out, Colby. I'm sure you have a hundred things to attend to, and when you're gone I'll have a little talk with Miss Stanton."

The lawyer hesitated.

"If this conversation is likely to affect your case," he began, "then--"

"Then Miss Stanton will give you any information she may acquire," interrupted Jones, and that left Colby no alternative but to go away.

"Now, then, Miss Stanton, out with it!" said the boy.

"There are a lot of things we don't know, but ought to know, in order to defend you properly," she observed, looking at him earnestly.

"Question me, then."

"I want to know the exact date when you landed in this country from Sangoa."

"Let me see. It was the twelfth day of October, of last year."

"Oh! so long ago as that? It is fifteen months. Once you told us that you had been here about a year."

"I didn't stop to count the months, you see. The twelfth of October is correct."

"Where did you land?"

"At San Francisco."

"Direct from Sangoa?"

"Direct from Sangoa."

"And what brought you from Sangoa to San Francisco?"

"A boat."

"A sailing-ship?"

"No, a large yacht. Two thousand tons burden."

"Whose yacht was it?"

"Mine."

"Then where is it now?"

He reflected a moment.

"I think Captain Carg must be anchored at San Pedro, by now. Or perhaps he is at Long Beach, or Santa Monica," he said quietly.

"On this coast!" exclaimed Maud.

"Yes."

Patsy was all excitement by now and could no longer hold her tongue.

"Is the yacht Arabella yours?" she demanded.

"It is, Miss Patsy."

"Then it is lying off Santa Monica Bay. I've seen it!" she cried.

"It was named for my mother," said the boy, his voice softening, "and built by my father. In the Arabella I made my first voyage; so you will realize I am very fond of the little craft."

Maud was busily thinking.

"Is Captain Carg a Sangoan?" she asked.

"Of course. The entire crew are Sangoans."

"Then where has the yacht been since it landed you here fifteen months ago?"

"It returned at once to the island, and at my request has now made another voyage to America."

"It has been here several days."

"Quite likely."

"Has it brought more pearls from Sangoa?"

"Perhaps. I do not know, for I have not yet asked for the captain's report."

Both Uncle John and Patsy were amazed at the rapidity with which Maud was acquiring information of a really important character. Indeed, she was herself surprised and the boy's answers were already clearing away some of the mists. She stared at him thoughtfully as she considered her next question, and Jones seemed to grow thoughtful, too.

"I have no desire to worry my friends over my peculiar difficulties," he presently said. "Frankly, I am not in the least worried myself. The charge against me is so preposterous that I am sure to be released after the judge has examined me; and, even at the worst--if I were sent to



Vienna for trial--the Austrians would know very well that I am not the man they seek."

"That trip would cause you great inconvenience, however," suggested Mr. Merrick.

"I am told a prisoner is treated very well, if he is willing to pay for such consideration," said Jones.

"And your good name?" asked Maud, with a touch of impatience.

"My good name is precious only to me, and I know it is still untarnished. For your sake, my newly found friends, I would like the world to believe in me, but there is none save you to suffer through my disgrace, and you may easily ignore my acquaintance."

"What nonsense!" cried Patsy, scornfully. "Tell me, sir, what's to become of our grand motion picture enterprise, if you allow yourself to be shipped to Vienna as a captured thief?"

He winced a trifle at the blunt epithet but quickly recovered and smiled at her.

"I'm sorry, Miss Patsy," said he. "I know you will be disappointed if our enterprise is abandoned. So will I. Since this latest complication arose I fear I have not given our project the consideration it deserves."

The boy passed his hand wearily across his forehead and, rising from his seat, took a few nervous steps up and down the room. Then, pausing, he asked abruptly:

"Are you still inclined to be my champion, Miss Stanton?"

"If I can be of any help," she replied, simply.

"Then I wish you would visit the yacht, make the acquaintance of Captain Carg and tell him of the trouble I am in. Will you?"

"With pleasure. That is--I'll be glad to do your errand."

"I'll give you a letter to him," he continued, and turning to the attendant he asked for writing material, which was promptly furnished him. At the table he wrote a brief note and enclosed it in an envelope which he handed to Maud.

"You will find the captain a splendid old fellow," said he.

"Will he answer any questions I may ask him?" she demanded.

"That will depend upon your questions," he answered evasively. "Carg is considered a bit taciturn, I believe, but he has my best interests at heart and you will find him ready to serve me in any possible way."

"Is there any objection to my going with Maud?" asked Patsy. "I'd like to visit that yacht; it looks so beautiful from a distance."

"You may all go, if you wish," said he. "It might be well for Mr. Merrick to meet Captain Carg, who would prefer, I am sure, to discuss so delicate a matter as my arrest with a man. Not that he is ungallant, but with a man such as Mr. Merrick he would be more at his ease. Carg is a sailor, rather blunt and rugged, both in speech and demeanor, but wholly devoted to me because I am at present the Jones of Sangoa."

"I'll accompany the girls, of course," said Uncle John; "and I think we ought not to delay in seeing your man. Colby says you may be called for examination at any time."

"There is one more question I want to ask," announced Maud as they rose to go. "On what date did you reach New York, after landing at San Francisco?"

"Why, it must have been some time in last January. I know it was soon after Christmas, which I passed in Chicago."

"Is that as near as you can recollect the date?"

"Yes, at short notice."

"Then perhaps you can tell me the date you took possession of the Continental Film Company by entering the stockholders' meeting and ejecting yourself president?"

He seemed surprised at her information and the question drew from him an odd laugh.

"How did you learn about that incident?" he asked.

"Goldstein told Mr. Merrick. He said it was a coup d'etat."

The boy laughed again.

"It was really funny," said he. "Old Bingley, the last president, had no inkling that I controlled the stock. He was so sure of being reelected that he had a camera-man on hand to make a motion picture of the scene where all would hail him as the chief. The picture was taken, but it didn't interest Bingley any, for it showed the consternation on his face, and the faces of his favored coterie, when I rose and calmly voted him out of office with the majority of the stock."

"Oh!" exclaimed Maud. "There was a picture made of that scene, then?"

"To be sure. It was never shown but once to an audience of one. I sat and chuckled to myself while the film was being run."

"Was it kept, or destroyed?" asked the girl, breathlessly.

"I ordered it preserved amongst our archives. Probably Goldstein now has the negative out here, stored in our Hollywood vaults."

"And the date--when was it?" she demanded.

"Why, the annual meeting is always the last Thursday in January. Figure it out--it must have been the twenty-sixth. But is the exact date important, Miss Stanton?"

"Very," she announced. "I don't know yet the exact date that Andrews landed in New York on his return from Vienna, but if it happened to be later than the twenty-sixth of January--"

"I see. In that case the picture will clear me of suspicion."

"Precisely. I shall now go and wire New York for the information I need."

"Can't you get it of Le Drieux?" asked the young man.

"Perhaps so; I'll try. But it will be better to get the date from the steamship agent direct."

With this they shook the boy's hand, assuring him of their sympathy and

their keen desire to aid him, and then hurried away from the jail.