

CHAPTER XXII

MASCULINE AND FEMININE

Uncle John and the girls, after consulting together, decided to stop at the Hollywood studio and pick up Flo and Mrs. Montrose.

"It would be a shame to visit that lovely yacht without them," said Patsy; "and we were all invited, you know."

"Yes, invited by a host who is unavoidably detained elsewhere," added Uncle John.

"Still, that yacht is very exclusive," his niece stated, "and I'm sure we are the first Americans to step foot on its decks."

They were all in a brighter mood since the interview at the jail, and after a hurried lunch at the hotel, during which Maud related to the others the morning's occurrences, they boarded the big Merrick seven-passenger automobile and drove to Santa Monica Bay. Louise couldn't leave the baby, who was cutting teeth, but Arthur and Beth joined the party and on arrival at the beach Uncle John had no difficulty in securing a launch to take them out to the Arabella.

"They won't let you aboard, though," declared the boatman. "A good

many have tried it, an' come back disjointed. There's something queer about that craft; but the gov'ment don't seem worried, so I guess it ain't a pirate."

The beauty of the yacht grew on them as they approached it. It was painted a pure white in every part and on the stern was the one word: Arabella, but no name of the port from which she hailed. The ladder was hoisted and fastened to an upper rail, but as they drew up to the smooth sides a close-cropped bullet-head projected from the bulwarks and a gruff voice demanded:

"Well, what's wanted?"

"We want to see Captain Carg," called Arthur, in reply.

The head wagged sidewise.

"No one allowed aboard," said the man.

"Here's a letter to the captain, from Mr. Jones," said Maud, exhibiting it.

The word seemed magical. Immediately the head disappeared and an instant later the boarding ladder began to descend. But the man, a sub-officer dressed in a neat uniform of white and gold, came quickly down the steps and held out his hand for the letter.

"Beg pardon," said he, touching his cap to the ladies, "but the rules are very strict aboard the Arabella. Will you please wait until I've taken this to the captain? Thank you!"

Then he ran lightly up the steps and they remained seated in the launch until he returned.

"The captain begs you to come aboard," he then said, speaking very respectfully but with a face that betrayed his wonder at the order of his superior. Then he escorted them up the side to the deck, which was marvelously neat and attractive. Some half a dozen sailors lounged here and there and these stared as wonderingly at the invasion of strangers as the subaltern had done. But their guide did not pause longer than to see that they had all reached the deck safely, when he led them into a spacious cabin.

Here they faced Captain Carg, whom Patsy afterward declared was the tallest, thinnest, chilliest man she had ever encountered. His hair was grizzled and hung low on his neck; his chin was very long and ended in a point; his nose was broad, with sensitive nostrils that marked every breath he drew. As for his eyes, which instantly attracted attention, they were brown and gentle as a girl's but had that retrospective expression that suggests far-away thoughts or an utter lack of interest in one's surroundings. They never looked at but through one. The effect of Carg's eyes was distinctly disconcerting.

The commander of the *Arabella* bowed with much dignity as his guests entered and with a sweep of his long arm he muttered in distant tones: "Pray be seated." They obeyed. The cabin was luxuriously furnished and there was no lack of comfortable chairs.

Somehow, despite the courteous words and attitude of Captain Carg, there was something about him that repelled confidence. Already Maud and Patsy were wondering if such a man could be loyal and true.

"My young master," he was saying, as he glanced at the letter he still held in his hand, "tells me that any questions you may ask I may answer as freely as I am permitted to."

"What does that mean, sir?" Maud inquired, for the speech was quite ambiguous.

"That I await your queries, Miss," with another perfunctory bow in her direction.

She hesitated, puzzled how to proceed.

"Mr. Jones is in a little trouble," she finally began. "He has been mistaken for some other man and--they have put him in jail until he can be examined by the federal judge of this district."

The captain's face exhibited no expression whatever. Even the eyes failed to express surprise at her startling news. He faced his visitors without emotion.

"At the examination," Maud went on, "it will be necessary for him to prove he is from Sangoa."

No reply. The captain sat like a statue.

"He must also prove that certain pearls found in his possession came from Sangoa."

Still no reply. Maud began to falter and fidget. Beth was amused. Patsy was fast growing indignant. Flo had a queer expression on her pretty face that denoted mischief to such an extent that it alarmed her Aunt Jane.

"I'm afraid," said Maud, "that unless you come to your master's assistance, Captain Carg, he will be sent to Austria, a prisoner charged with a serious crime."

She meant this assertion to be very impressive, but it did not seem to affect the man in the least. She sighed, and Flo, with a giggle, broke an awkward pause.

"Well, why don't you get busy. Maud?" she asked.

"I--in what way, Flo?" asked her sister, catching at the suggestion implied.

"Captain Carg would make a splendid motion picture actor," declared the younger Miss Stanton, audaciously. "He sticks close to his cues, you see, and won't move till he gets one. He will answer your questions; yes, he has said he would; but you may prattle until doomsday without effect, so far as he is concerned, unless you finish your speech with an interrogation point."

Mrs. Montrose gave a gasp of dismay, while Maud flushed painfully. The captain, however, allowed a gleam of admiration to soften his grim features as he stared fixedly at saucy Flo. Patsy marked this fleeting change of expression at once and said hastily:

"I think. Maud, dear, the captain is waiting to be questioned."

At this he cast a grateful look in Miss Doyle's direction and bowed to her. Maud began to appreciate the peculiar situation and marshalled her questions in orderly array.

"Tell me, please, where is Sangoa?" she began.

"In the South Seas, Miss."

"Will you give me the latitude and longitude?"

"I cannot."

"Oh, you mean that you will not?"

"I have been commanded to forget the latitude and longitude of Sangoa."

"But this is folly!" she exclaimed, much annoyed. "Such absurd reticence may be fatal to Mr. Jones' interests."

He made no reply to this and after reflection she tried again.

"What is the nearest land to Sangoa?"

"Toerdal," said he.

"What is that, an island?"

"Yes."

"Is it on the maps? Is it charted?"

"No, Miss."

She silenced Flo's aggravating giggle with a frown.

"Tell me, sir," she continued, "what is the nearest land to Sangoa that is known to the world?"

He smiled faintly as he replied: "I cannot tell."

Uncle John had grown very uneasy by this time and he decided he ought to attempt to assist Maud. So, addressing Captain Carg, he said in a positive tone:

"We quite understand, sir, that it has been the policy of the owners of Sangoa to guard all knowledge of the island's whereabouts from the outside world, as well as the fact that its pearl fisheries are very rich. We understand that an influx of treasure-seekers would embarrass the Sangoans. But we are close friends of young Mr. Jones and have no desire to usurp his island kingdom or seize his pearls. Our only anxiety is to free him from an unjust suspicion. A foolish man named Le Drieux accuses Jones of stealing a choice collection of pearls from a lady in Austria and fleeing with them to America. He has a photograph of the real criminal, taken abroad, which curiously resembles your young master."

Here the captain turned a quick look upon the speaker and for the first time his eyes lost their dull expression. But he made no remark and Uncle John continued:

"This man Le Drieux found several choice pearls in the possession of Mr.

Jones, which he claims are a part of the stolen collection. Hence he obtained your master's arrest. Jones says he brought the pearls from Sangoa, his home, where they were found. No one here knows anything of Sangoa, so they regard his story with suspicion. Now, sir, we believe that through you we can prove he has told the truth, and so secure his release. Here is the important question: Will you help us?"

"Willingly, sir," replied the captain.

"Are you forbidden to tell us where Sangoa is, or anything about the island?"

"Yes, sir; I am forbidden to do that, under any circumstances," was the ready answer.

"Have you been to Sangoa since you landed Mr. Jones in San Francisco, some fifteen months ago?"

"Yes, sir."

"And did you bring back with you, on this trip, any pearls?"

"Yes, sir."

"Have you already disposed of them?"

"No, sir."

"Why not?"

"I am awaiting orders from my master."

"Has he been aboard since you anchored here?"

"No, sir."

"What were your instructions?"

"To anchor on this coast and await his coming."

"Well," said Mr. Merrick, reflectively, "I believe you can prove our case without telling the location of Sangoa. An exhibition of the pearls you have brought ought to convince any reasonable judge. Are there many of them in this lot?"

"Not so many as usual, sir."

"Are they very choice ones?"

"Not so choice as usual, sir."

Uncle John was greatly disappointed, but Maud exclaimed eagerly:

"Let us see them, please!"

That was not a question, but the captain rose at once, bowed and left the cabin. It was some ten minutes before he returned, followed by two men who bore between them a heavy bronze chest which they placed upon the cabin floor. Then they left the room and the captain took a key from his pocket and unlocked a secret panel in the wainscoting of the cabin. A small compartment was disclosed, in which hung another key on an iron hook. He removed this and with it unlocked the chest, drawing from its recesses several trays which he deposited upon the table. These trays were lined and padded with white velvet and when the covers were removed, the girls, who had crowded around the table, uttered cries of astonishment and delight.

"They may not be as numerous or as choice 'as usual,'" murmured Mrs. Montrose, "but they are the most amazing lot of pearls I have ever beheld."

"And did all these come from Sangoa?" Maud asked the captain.

"They represent two months' fishing on the coast of our island," he replied; "but not the best two months of the year. The weather was bad; there were many storms."

"Why, the pearls that Ajo gave us were insignificant when compared with

these!" cried Beth. "This collection must be worth an enormous sum.
Uncle John."

Uncle John merely nodded. He had been thinking, as he studied the pearls,
and now turned to Captain Carg.

"Will you come ashore and testify before the judge in behalf of
your master?"

"Yes, if he asks me to do so."

"And will you bring these pearls with you?"

"If my master orders it."

"Very good. We will have him send you instructions."

The captain bowed, after which he turned to the table and began replacing
the trays in the chest. Then he locked it, again hung the key in the
secret aperture and closed the panel. A whistle summoned the two seamen,
who bore away the chest, accompanied by the captain in person.

When they were left alone, Maud said anxiously:

"Is there anything more we can do here?"

"I think not," replied Mr. Merrick.

"Then let us get back. I want to complete my evidence at once, for no one knows when the judge will summon Ajo for examination."

They thanked the captain when he rejoined them, but he remained as silent and undemonstrative as ever, so they took their departure without further ceremony and returned to the shore.