

CHAPTER XXIV

PICTURE NUMBER NINETEEN

"Well, where have you been?" demanded Goldstein gruffly, as Maud Stanton entered his office the next morning in response to a summons from the Continental manager. "What made you run away yesterday? Don't you know such things make us lots of trouble and cost us money?"

"I'm not worrying about that," replied Maud, as she composedly sat down opposite the manager.

Goldstein glared at her, but he was cautious.

"You're a fine actress, Miss Stanton, and you're popular on the films," he said, "but if you cannot attend to business we are paying you too much money."

"Indeed!"

"No other firm could afford to give you so much, you know that; and the only reason we are so extravagant is because you are one of our features."

"Am I to take this as a dismissal?" she asked carelessly.

"Dismissal!" he cried, holding up his hands. "Of course not. Who is talking of dismissal? But I owe a duty to my firm. Such actions as yours, in running away from rehearsals, must have a--a--reprimand. Not severe; I am not so angry as grieved; but a reprimand is your due--and that fly-away sister of yours is just as bad."

"We went to assist your president--Mr. Jones--to establish his innocence of the awful charge made against him," she explained.

"Bah. You can't do that. No one can save him," he replied, with triumph and satisfaction mingled in his tone.

She looked at him thoughtfully.

"You seem pleased with the idea that he is guilty, Mr. Goldstein."

"I am glad he is caught. What is Jones to me? An interloper! A boy who gets money, buys stock, and then interferes with a business he knows nothing about. You are a professional, Miss Stanton. You know how we, who are in the game, have won our knowledge of it by long experience, by careful study, by keeping the thousand threads of the rope of success twisted tightly together. Any fool could buy this business, but only an expert could run it successfully. You know that. So I am glad this interfering boy is wiped off the slate forever."

"But he isn't!" she protested. "You still have this boy to reckon with, Goldstein. When he is examined by the judge he will be set free, for all the evidence is in his favor and there is ample proof that he is not the man they are after. And that reminds me. There is a negative here that was made at the directors' meeting in January, a year ago, which shows Mr. Jones taking control of the Continental."

"I have never seen it," he said, shaking his head.

"It is here, though, and I want a positive printed at once, and mounted on a reel, so it can be exhibited before the judge. Have Alfred get it out of the vault."

"Why should I do that?" he inquired, frowning.

"Because, if you refuse, Mr. Jones is quite likely to find another manager. No other firm would pay you so much as you are getting here. You know that."

He grinned with delight at the thrust, then grew solemn.

"You are sure he will go free?"

"Positive," returned Maud. "He doesn't really need that film, but it would be good policy--excellent policy--for you to produce it."

"Alfred!" called the manager. "Bring me the stock book."

He ran his finger down the pages.

"January--eh--eh--"

"January twenty-sixth," she said.

"Here it is: 'Special of Annual Meeting, C.F.M. Co.--280 feet.--No. 19,'
Get number nineteen out of the vault, Alfred."

While the young man was gone he relapsed into thought. Maud waited patiently.

"You see," resumed the manager abruptly, "I am making more money for the Continental than I get paid for. That is because I know how. It is not good business to cut down the profits; therefore I should be paid a bigger salary. Miss Stanton, you're a friend of young Jones, who controls this company. You might talk to him about me."

"I will," she said.

"You might say I know every trick of the trade. Tell Jones how all the other film makers are crazy to get me. But say how I refuse more money because I believe our directors will wake up to my value and raise my salary. That sounds pretty good, eh?"

"It sounds remarkable."

"And it's no dream. Ah, here comes Alfred."

The clerk laid upon the table a round box coated with paraffin to exclude the air. A tag was attached to the box, describing its contents.

"Number nineteen. Quite right. Take it to the printing room and tell McDonald to make me a copy as quickly as possible. Tell him to let me know when it's dry and ready to run."

As the clerk disappeared Maud said:

"I needn't wait, I suppose?"

"No. Werner wants you at the rehearsal of 'The Love of a Princess.'
Before you go home to-night I'll call you in to see the run of number nineteen. Then you may take the film to Jones--with my compliments."

At five o'clock, when she was dressing to go home, Maud was summoned to the little "dark room" where all films are exhibited, trimmed and tested before being sent out. She took Aunt Jane and Flo with her and they found Goldstein already waiting and the operator standing by his machine.

The scene was short and not very exciting, although of interest in the

present crisis. It showed the interior of the hall where the stock-holders' meeting was held, and began with the assembling of the members. Two or three pompous individuals then seated themselves facing the others, and the proceedings began. A slim boy on a back bench arose and said something. Panic was at once written on the faces of the former officers. They gesticulated; their lips moved rapidly. The boy, easily recognized as A. Jones, advanced and displayed a lot of papers, which were carefully examined. He then took the president's chair, the former officers fled in disgust and the throng of stockholders wildly applauded. Then the light went out, the machine stopped, and Goldstein opened the door to let in light and air.

"It was the same kid, all right," he remarked. "I had never seen this film run before, but it shows how Jones called the turn on the old officers in great shape. I wonder where he got all the money?"

Maud secured his promise to send an operator to town, to exhibit the film before the judge, whenever he might be required. Then she went to her hotel fully satisfied that she had done all in her power to assist A. Jones of Sangoa.