

THE FIGUREHEAD

OF THE

"FOLLY"

Augusta Hueill Seaman

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The Figurehead of the “Folly”

By AUGUSTA HUIELL SEAMAN

THE SHADOW ON THE DIAL
THE SECRET OF TATE'S BEACH
THE ADVENTURE OF THE SEVEN KEYHOLES
BLUEBONNET BEND
THE BOARDED-UP HOUSE
THE CRIMSON PATCH
THE DRAGON'S SECRET
THE EDGE OF RAVEN POOL
THE GIRL NEXT DOOR
MELISSA-ACROSS-THE-FENCE
THE MYSTERY AT NUMBER SIX
SALLY SIMMS ADVENTURES IT
THE SAPPHIRE SIGNET
THE SLIPPER POINT MYSTERY
THREE SIDES OF PARADISE GREEN
TRANQUILLITY HOUSE
JACQUELINE OF THE CARRIER PIGEONS
LITTLE MAMSELLE OF THE WILDERNESS
WHEN A COBBLER RULED A KING
THE DISAPPEARANCE OF ANNE SHAW
A BOOK OF MYSTERIES
THE CHARLEMONT CREST
THE BRASS KEYS OF KENWICK
THE HOUSE IN HIDDEN LANE
THE STARS OF SABRA
THE MYSTERY OF THE EMPTY ROOM
THE RIDDLE AT LIVE OAKS
BITSY FINDS THE CLUE
THE FIGUREHEAD OF THE "FOLLY"

*THE FIGUREHEAD
OF THE "FOLLY"*

By

AUGUSTA HUIELL SEAMAN

Illustrated by

ELIZABETH C. TAZELAAR

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CHAPTER I

WE MAKE A DECISION

I SHALL never forget the night Mother and I made that important decision. It scarcely seems more than a year ago! Such a wild, stormy night, with rain dashing in sheets against the windows, sand beating in through every tiny crevice, and the furious sea raging beyond the dunes, out in the darkness!

It was during the Easter holidays (which happened to come in March) and I was home from boarding school for two weeks. The storm had been raging for two days, and we'd been kept very much in the house. It's impossible to tramp on the beach when the flying sand cuts you like a million needles!

I had noticed all day, ever since I'd come in with the morning mail, that Mother had seemed extremely worried and absent-minded, as if something were bothering her, something she hadn't told me about. Which is unusual for Mother! She'd been rambling about as if she couldn't decide just what to do, putting things down in the wrong places, answering questions as if her mind were a thousand miles away. Finally, after dinner, when we were sitting in the living room, listening to the shutters rattling and the howl of the storm and trying to read, I said to her:

"Something's wrong, Mum—I can see it! You haven't been like yourself all day. Won't you tell me about it?" She put down the daily paper and looked at me rather curiously.

"Yes, something *is* wrong—has been for quite a while, if you must know, Joan," she said. "I've been trying to make up my mind to tell you about it, but——"

"Is it the same old money matters?" I asked quickly, for I knew things had been in a rather bad way with us ever since the depression set in. "You needn't be afraid to discuss *them* with me, you know."

"It's that—and something more," she went on. "Things have come to such a pass that we can't go on any longer, just sliding along and economizing more and more, but still living in pretty much the same way as we've always been used to. And that's why I hate to tell you. It's going to make quite a big difference to you—provided you're willing to accept the situation."

"Oh, do go ahead, Mum, and out with it!" I begged. "*You* know I'm willing to agree to anything—provided it makes things more comfortable for you. I hate to see you so worried all the time."

"Well, here's the whole matter in a nutshell," she replied. "You've known all along that our income has been terribly cut down, but we've managed to keep this

home intact and get you through your boarding school, which you'll finish in June. But here's what you don't know: I haven't been able to pay the taxes on this big house in three years, and they're very heavy in this particular district. Each year I have hoped that things would improve so much by the next year that we could make it all up. But that hasn't happened. Now, if they are not paid in a few months, this house will be taken from us and sold—and we'll lose it. I had a notice just the other day. So you see it's pretty serious!"

It certainly was! I had no idea that things were as bad as that. We both loved this beautiful home on the dunes by the sea. It was one of the loveliest for miles along the coast. Mother had come here to live after she was married. I was born here. Daddy had died here. It was associated with all our life, and we both loved it and would have been heartbroken to have to leave it. We'd always had plenty of money to keep it up till the depression came. Then Mother dismissed all the maids but our faithful old Karen, the cook, who'd been with us the longest, and we had cut down on everything, except that Mother insisted I must finish with my boarding school and go to college afterward. She was willing to cut down on clothes and trips abroad and entertaining and everything, so that I could do that. And I'd thought everything was working out very nicely till she told me what she just had. It was a real shock!

"But isn't there something we can *do*?" I demanded. "Surely there must be *some* way out of it!"

"I'm coming to that," she went on. "It isn't entirely hopeless, but it's going to involve considerable sacrifice on our part. And I'm afraid it will be particularly hard on *you*."

"Never mind about me!" I cried. "Tell me what it is we can do!"

"It has been in my mind for some time," said Mother, taking up a book and putting it down absent-mindedly, "that we might rent this house for part of a year, at least, and probably get a very good price for it. It's right here on the ocean, in a very desirable locality, and people who come here for the spring, summer, and fall season are often anxious to rent just such a house as this. In fact, I've had several offers in the past, which I always refused. But this year, I think we shall have to do it. And a week ago, those old friends of mine, the Leveridges, made me an offer for six months—May to October—at a generous sum, and are willing to pay the whole thing at once, which is rather unusual. That will cover the taxes and a little over. So I wrote them today and accepted."

"But that's perfectly grand!" I interrupted. "What are you worrying about, Mum, if you've got it fixed so nicely? Of course, we'll have to get out and go somewhere else, but we can both stand *that*—for just six months!"

“Unfortunately, that isn’t all of it!” continued Mother. “And the rest is what I’m worrying about. I’ve had to borrow a good deal in advance on my income, and there won’t be enough next fall for you to begin your college, and I’m determined you must do that—somehow. And to do this, I’ve accepted the position as secretary to a very wealthy society woman who makes her home in Bar Harbor every summer. What I receive for that will just about cover your tuition fees and board at college. I wish I could have you with me, but that isn’t in the contract, and I do not feel I should suggest it. It will mean that we’ll have to be separated—for the first time—during vacation. It won’t be easy for either of us!”

“But what about *me*?” I almost wailed. “Where am I to be parked—after school’s over?”

“There are just two things possible.” She hesitated. “One is for you to go to Cousin Lucretia in Boston. She would be glad to have you—though I expect you won’t fancy it much!”

“Oh, Mumsy—don’t, *don’t* send me to Cousin Lucretia!” I begged wildly. “You know how I hate it! She’s so fussy and peculiar, and her house is so dark and dreary, I’d die of lonesomeness. I couldn’t stand it. I’d rather do *anything* than that! What’s the other proposition?”

“I rather thought you wouldn’t care for that, but the other may not be any more attractive,” smiled Mother. “Here it is. I have an old college friend, Miss McKeever—Elsie McKeever—who has a home in Mapleside, New Jersey. Her parents died shortly after she graduated from college and left her with a big, roomy house and very little money, so she’s made a living ever since by keeping the house as a very exclusive boarding house, with the kind of people who stay year after year. We write to each other frequently, though we meet very seldom. Lately she wrote that she had recently taken into her home a little niece of twelve, whose mother died a while ago and left no one to take care of her. She is a little crippled child, who had a serious illness in her babyhood and has never recovered the use of her legs. Of course, she is quite a care, with all her aunt’s other duties, and Miss McKeever wrote that she did so wish she could find some nice young girl who would be willing to be a companion for, and tend to, this child for a while, at least during the summer, after which she hopes to place the little thing in a good hospital for treatment. She has a trained nurse with her now, but finds it very expensive, and the nurse can, at present, do little that a strong, sensible, able young girl could not do. Also she thinks a younger companion would be pleasanter for Mary Lou. She says the child is most attractive and interesting—and lovable.

“It somehow occurred to me that this might be something *you* could do—

provided you were willing to try—so I wrote her, suggesting it as a bare possibility. And she seemed delighted with the idea. She wrote back—I just got the letter this morning—that she could pay you a moderate sum a week, and of course you would have your room and board without charge, if you would consent to come. She said Mary Lou was simply thrilled to think it might be possible that she would have a young companion. She has never been able to be with children of or near her own age. This money would help a lot toward your clothes and spending-money for college; for this year, at least, I shan't be able to do much more than pay your tuition and board. I know that you would have nice quarters and a good, kind friend in Miss McKeever, or I shouldn't consent to the arrangement. Well, there is the proposition, my dear! Think it over. You are to please only yourself in this matter."

I had sat perfectly quiet, listening to all this, and somehow I felt rather stunned with the idea. It was so different from anything I had ever done—or thought of doing! Being a companion to an invalid child—in a boarding house—among perfectly strange people! How could I ever endure it? I didn't dare let Mother see how I really felt about it, but she must have guessed.

"You don't *have* to do it, Joan, remember!" she suggested. "If you can't 'go' it, you can make the best of things at Cousin Lucretia's."

A sudden idea struck me, then.

"There's one other thing, Mother," I faltered. "I meant to tell you when I first came home. My roommate, Betty Cavanaugh, has invited me to spend a month with her at their summer place on Long Island, this year, if you'll agree. She told me to be sure to ask you. I might go to Cousin Lucretia's for a while, and then spend the rest of the time with Betty. But that wouldn't be earning me any money!" I thought Mother's face changed at this, just the tiniest bit. But she only said:

"Of course you can go to Betty's if you wish, dear. It would at least be a pleasant thing to help pass the time. As for the money, if you can get along with the clothes you have, for next fall and winter, I guess I can manage a little allowance. But you must do the deciding yourself."

And as Mother said that it suddenly dawned on me what a selfish pig I was. Trying to plan it so that I, at least, would have some good times, while Mother was working hard. And next winter she would skimp herself to death to give me spending-money and no doubt clothes too, while I was in college, and never say a reproachful word about it! I just threw myself into her lap and hugged her and sobbed:

"Oh, Mumsy dear, don't you worry another minute! I'll go and take that job and be glad of it. But I don't mind saying I'll be pretty lonesome, with not a soul I know

for a hundred miles in any direction!” And Mother gave me a big hug and said:

“I don’t mind saying I’m glad you’ve decided as you have, Joan dear. I think the experience will be rather good for you. But I’ve a little surprise for you. You won’t be as lonesome as you think, with no one you know around. And I’ll tell you why: I’ve been sort of puzzled what to do about Karen. The people that have taken this house have their own cook and maids, and she has nowhere she can go. Fortunately, Miss McKeever told me she was losing her cook and dreading trying to get a new one, and so Karen has consented to go to her for the period we’ll be away from this house. So you’ll feel sort of at home with Karen right near you, won’t you? You’ve always been very fond of her.”

At that I fairly wept with joy. Karen has been with us as long as I remember, and has always petted and babied me, and I’ve come to feel as if she were a member of the family. If Karen was to be in the same house with me, I felt I could stand anything!

Well, we talked and planned about the thing for hours, that stormy night. I asked Mother what kind of a place it was, what sort of people, etc., so that I’d know more about what I was in for. Mother said she’d never happened to be there, except once, a number of years before. But said she thought they were all more or less elderly people, and some of them rather queer, from what she’d heard, but the kind that stayed on and on in a place like that and made a home of it.

“But you’ll have Mary Lou, and you’ll probably find her companionable,” Mother ended, “and no doubt there are other pleasant young people near by, so I wouldn’t worry about it. You’ll get along!”

Before we went up to bed at last, we stood in the darkened living room, looking out at the furious storm and the wild ocean. It made my heart ache to think how long it would be before I should see it again, after I left this time, for Mother had arranged to turn over the house to its new tenants before school closed, and I was to go straight to Miss McKeever’s at Mapleside. I think Mother was feeling the same way too, for she hugged me again and whispered:

“Never mind, my dear! We’ll enjoy it all the more when we get back to it next winter!”

But I little guessed in what strange things I was going to be entangled at Miss McKeever’s before I got back to this house again!

CHAPTER II

MISS MCKEEVER'S BOARDING HOUSE

I 'VE never felt so lonely in all my life as I was that first night at Miss McKeever's. It had been such a delightful, exciting graduation day. Mother had come down from Bar Harbor the night before and stayed overnight in the hotel right near the school, and had of course been at all the graduating exercises. I had, quite unexpectedly to us both, won the English and French prizes and stood next to the highest in the class, and naturally Mother was very proud of me. I tried all the while to put out of my mind the thought that she had to take the train back to Bar Harbor that night, after taking me to Miss McKeever's. The other girls all had such lovely plans for the summer, and Betty was so hurt because I wouldn't—or couldn't—come to her, as she'd planned, and it all made things more difficult for me. But I'd made my decision long before, and I wasn't going back on it.

We reached Miss McKeever's in the late afternoon, and then Mother had to rush away. I had no time for many good-byes, and perhaps it was just as well, as that would have been too hard on us both. Her taxi drove out of sight half an hour after she had landed me there, and I was left alone, in a perfectly strange place, among perfectly strange people. And I was pretty glad Mother couldn't know how utterly forlorn I felt.

But Miss McKeever was an absolute dear! A little, gray-haired, brown-eyed woman, with a face full of worried wrinkles, but with the most charming manners, and somehow a very understanding way about her. She put her arm around my shoulder, after the taxi was out of sight, and said:

"I know exactly how you feel, my dear—just too lonesome for words, in this strange place. But let's get acquainted right away. First place, I was your mother's best friend in college. We were like sisters—and always have been. I want you to call me 'Aunt Elsie.' No 'Miss McKeever' from this minute on! And I'm going to be like a real aunt to you, if you'll let me."

"Oh, Miss McKeever—I mean—Aunt Elsie, I'll be *so* glad!" I sobbed and stuttered. "I do miss Mother horribly. I've never spent a summer away from her before. But you understand, I guess!"

"Certainly I do!" she cried. "And now let's pretend we've always known each other. I'll take you right up to your room and let you get settled, and then you shall see Mary Lou. I think you're going to like each other. She's crazy to meet you. I'm having rather a mixed-up time here in the house today, but you won't mind if things

are slightly upheaved, will you? Mrs. Rowland is on the rampage again, and dear old Mr. Doane has been having one of his spells, and that wretched little Fraser boy tried to climb down the rose trellis from a second-story window this morning and fell and broke his collar bone! The whole thing has made me more or less rattled today! Well, here we are!”

I didn't in the least know what she was talking about, just then—but I was to find out soon enough! She led me to a little room on the third floor of the big house and told me it was to be mine, and that Mary Lou's room was next door. Then she excused herself, saying it was nearly dinner time and she must hurry down to see that everything was all right, and that she would be back a little later, introduce me to her niece, and so on. And then I was left really alone.

It was a nice little room, tiny but very comfortable and prettily furnished. I took off my hat, sat down in the one big comfortable armchair and—I'll have to confess it—had a good cry! I guess Miss McKeever, or I mean “Aunt Elsie,” had known it was coming and left me alone to get it over. Afterward I somehow felt better, washed my face and bathed my swollen eyes, and set about unpacking. And presently she came back. She was good enough not to remark about my face, which certainly showed I'd been crying, but suggested that we go right in to see Mary Lou.

Of all the dears I ever *did* see, Mary Lou is the sweetest! I'll never forget that first sight of her, sitting forward in her wheel chair, her pale but beautiful little face framed in lovely curly dark hair, her enormous blue eyes fairly flaming with excitement.

“Oh, I think it was *sweet* of you to come to me!” she cried, giving me a shy, thin little hand. “I know we're going to like each other, Joan!” It was easy to see we were. I could feel it from the first moment. After her aunt had chatted a bit with us both, she left us together, saying that for this evening we could both have our dinner together up in Mary Lou's room and get better acquainted. I felt, too, that kind Aunt Elsie was planning in this way to spare me the agonies of a first meeting with all those new faces in the general dining room. And as a crowning kindness she presently sent—who but Karen herself! up with the big tray. I just fell on her neck and hugged her as if she'd been a long-lost sister! After seeing *her*, in this strange house, I felt so much less lonely and forsaken by all my own folks.

“My! but I'm glad you're going to be with me now,” chuckled Mary Lou, as we began our dinner, “instead of that old Miss Crosley. I couldn't bear her—so starchy—and fussy—and prim! Most trained nurses are nice, but she's just tiresome. She'd have gone for good today, only Boots Fraser broke his collar bone and his mother begged her to stay a few days and help with him. He's a *terrible* child!”

“Won’t you tell me a little about the people in this house?” I asked her. “You see, I’m completely strange here, and it would help a lot if I could get some idea beforehand of the folks in the place.”

“Of course I will!” cried Mary Lou delightedly. “I haven’t been here so very long myself, but I know all about them already. Some of them are awfully nice—and some awfully *queer*—and one is *both*!”

“What do you mean by that—‘one is both’?” I demanded, laughing at the odd expression.

“Well, it’s *true*!” she said, giggling a little. “I mean old Mr. Gilbert Doane. He’s Aunt Elsie’s ‘star boarder’—been with her years and years. He has the great big room over the living room. He’s both nice *and* queer! But mostly nice.”

“Oh, he’s the one your aunt Elsie told me was having ‘one of his spells’ today!” I interrupted.

“Yes, it’s awfully strange.” Mary Lou’s voice sank to an excited whisper. “He has them every once in a while. He isn’t ill, but it just seems as if something *scares* him—somehow! It always happens when he gets a letter—a certain letter! Do you know, I think there’s some *mystery* about him! I’m terribly interested in it. I love mysteries. He got one of those letters this morning at the breakfast table. Aunt Elsie said he never even opened it, but got up, sort of tottery, and went upstairs to his room and hasn’t left it since. Asked if he could have just a cup of tea and some toast for the rest of his meals today. Auntie worries a great deal about him when he gets like that. He’s such a dear old thing too—he looks like some character out of Dickens. And he’s so old. Aunt Elsie says he’s eighty-nine at least. You ought to see his room!—it’s filled with old books and ship models and one great big ship’s figurehead fastened on the wall over the mantel.”

I saw, right here, that Mary Lou was getting so excited and talking so much that she wasn’t eating any dinner, so I said:

“That’s terribly interesting, but suppose we finish our salad and dessert” (I recognized some of Karen’s delicious Danish pastry!) “and then we can go on about all these people when we’re through.”

“Now you sound like Miss Crosley!” chuckled Mary Lou, but she took the hint and finished the meal, and then I asked:

“What about the others? You’ve told me a little about old Mr. Doane. I think I’m going to like him!”

“Sure you will!” said Mary Lou. “But you won’t like Mrs. Rowland. She’s an old pest!”

“Is she the one your aunt said was ‘on the rampage’ today?” I queried.

“And *what* a rampage!” grinned Mary Lou. “She makes me think of a wasp—stinging and buzzing and making things generally disagreeable every once in a while. This morning she started by complaining about the toast at breakfast. That’s always a bad sign! Then, later, she rushed downstairs to say the plumbing was out of order in her bathroom, and made a terrible fuss. Auntie sent for a plumber and found it was only because Mrs. Rowland had let a lot of hair and matches and things go down the pipes, but that didn’t stop the old wasp scolding about it! She’s been at it ever since—one thing after another—till it’s nearly driven Auntie crazy.”

“But why does your aunt stand for it?” I demanded.

“Because Mrs. R. has one of the best rooms and pays quite a lot—and Auntie just can’t afford to have her leave. We call her the ‘Wasp,’ Auntie and I!”

“Don’t think I’m going to like that particular person!” I chuckled. “But I’ll try to keep out of her way. Who else is there here?”

“Well, there are Mr. and Mrs. Fraser—and that terrible child of theirs—‘Boots.’ I think his real name is ‘Clarence’—but nobody calls him that. His father and mother are nice, but he is certainly a nuisance. He’s into everything—every minute of the day. They’re only staying here for a while. Their house here in town burned down a couple of months ago, and they’re staying here till they’ve finished building another. Auntie won’t be sorry when they go. She says a padded cell is the only safe place for that boy!”

“I hear he had an accident today,” I remarked.

“It scared us all to death!” chuckled Mary Lou. “He tried to climb out of his bedroom window down the rose trellis. It broke, and he fell into the flower beds and howled as if he’d been murdered. But the doctor said it was only a collar bone. I guess that’ll keep him quiet for a while!”

“Well, is that the end of the list?” I wanted to know.

“Only two more,” went on Mary Lou. “One is Miss Melissa Markham. She’s a sort of middle-aged lady—very musical—and keeps to herself a lot. She has a grand piano up in her room and practices on it a good deal. Sometimes she plays for us all in the evening, on Auntie’s piano, downstairs. She plays beautifully. I love to hear her. I wish I could play the piano myself, but my legs won’t work the pedals. Miss Markham is very nice. We all like her. Then the only other one is a Mr. Conroy. He just came lately and says he is only staying for the summer. He’s a queer, dark, sort of sinister-looking man. Hardly says anything to anyone. He’s away all day in New York and only comes back at night. Auntie and I don’t like him much, and we don’t just know why. He always looks as if he were plotting something—sort of desperate—or underhand—if you know what I mean! And the funny thing is, old Mr. Doane

simply hates him—won't speak to him at all! But he never says why or makes any complaint about him. Auntie's rather puzzled about it. She says she's glad Mr. Conroy isn't going to be here long, or Mr. Doane might get dissatisfied. Now, that's absolutely all about the people here. Tell me all about yourself, won't you, Joan? That's what I'm most interested to hear!"

We spent the rest of the time talking about Mother and myself, and my school and graduation. Mary Lou was thrilled to hear that I was planning to study writing and journalism in college, and perhaps be an author later on. She said she wished the house were an interesting sort of place, so that I might have something to practice writing about, but guessed I'd find it all pretty dull there. We little dreamed, either of us, what wild excitement it was going to provide us with later, or that I *should* make it the subject of my first try at a story!

Then Aunt Elsie came up and said it was time to get Mary Lou to bed and showed me how to give her an alcohol rub and make her comfortable for the night. When she was all tucked in we went off to my room and sat there talking a long while and getting better acquainted. I told her that Mary Lou had given me a detailed account of all the boarders, and she laughed, and said:

"There isn't a thing escapes that child! She's as bright as a button. And I know she's just going to love you and your companionship. You're just the right one to be with her."

"Well, I love *her*—already!" I declared. "And after I get over this first lonesomeness, I'm going to enjoy it a lot."

"You're dead tired—that's what's the matter with you. And I want you to crawl right into bed." Aunt Elsie announced. "Good-night, my dear. You're going to be a blessing to both Mary Lou and myself."

But after I was in bed, I couldn't sleep for a long, long while. I didn't dare think of Mother, speeding farther and farther away from me through the darkness, so I tried to concentrate on the curious people that were sleeping in this same house. Somewhere I heard a piano being played very softly—a Chopin waltz, I thought—and tried to picture Miss Markham, practicing away in her lonely room. But mostly I kept thinking of strange old Mr. Doane, who looked like a character out of Dickens, and had ship models and a figurehead decorating his room. Why he haunted my thoughts, I don't know. But I fell asleep at last, wondering what was the mystery of his having a "spell" every time he received a certain unexplained letter.

CHAPTER III

DISTURBANCE IN THE NIGHT

I HAD been a week at “McKeever’s” (as everyone seemed to call it) before anything unusual happened. During that time I’d had a chance to get fairly well acquainted with everybody—that is, everyone except Mr. Conroy, with whom no one seemed well acquainted, or wanted to be, apparently. He always disappeared to his room right after dinner at night, and had an early breakfast before he left for the city in the morning, and never said three words at the table.

I found old Mrs. Rowland quite detestable, as Mary Lou had warned. When she wasn’t complaining about something, she was busily asking questions and trying to pry into one’s affairs, and her sharp, piggy little eyes seemed to fairly bore into you behind your back. I avoided her as much as I could. Anyway, Mary Lou and I led a life pretty much to ourselves, so we didn’t have to come in contact with her very often.

Miss Markham was sweet, though rather distant in manner, and so absorbed in her music, away by herself, that we didn’t see much of her either. The Frasers were nice people—he rather jolly and sociable, and she kind and pleasant, but very much occupied over the rebuilding of their home, and they had to be out quite a bit. But their young son, Boots, aged twelve, was certainly a handful! The nurse refused to stay with him after the first two days. Said he was too much for *her*—and anyway he was getting on so well that he didn’t need a nurse. If his mother could keep him quiet he’d do very well. And she went off, starchily important, to another case. But the trouble was that his mother, who’s sweet but rather ineffectual, couldn’t do a thing with him. And presently he was wandering around the house making life miserable for everyone. He was the kind of child who is forever breaking things or having accidents to himself or getting in trouble of some kind. A good-natured, jolly little wretch, with ruffled sandy hair, light blue eyes with nearly white eyelashes, and a simply impish expression. You couldn’t help but like him, even when he made you furious with his mischief. When he found I was reading aloud to Mary Lou he got to drifting in and hunching himself up on the floor to listen. And that was the only thing which kept him quiet.

But the one who interested me most of all, next to Mary Lou, was dear old Mr. Doane, whom I found just as Dickensy and delightful as Mary Lou had described him. In fact, he looked just exactly as if he had stepped out of the pages of *Martin Chuzzlewit* or *Bleak House*, and I’ve never been able to decide which of Dickens’s

characters he reminded me of most. He was slender and rather stooped, with long white hair falling in a sort of wave to his coat-collar. He always wore rather old-fashioned clothes too, with a high collar that stood up in points under his chin, and an out-of-date bow-tie. But he had the loveliest, most kindly smile, and bright, twinkling eyes, and he was sweet to me from the first moment I met him, the morning after I arrived. He seemed to have gotten over his "spell" by that time.

The first thing he said to me was that Aunt Elsie had told him my home was right by the sea, and that interested him very much, as he'd always loved it himself and had many connections with it. And that same day, when we were taking Mary Lou downstairs in her wheel chair for an airing outdoors, which I found could only be done with the help of Osgood, the colored man-of-all-work, Mr. Doane stopped us on the second floor and asked if we wouldn't like to come in and see his ship models. Which I, for one, was very glad to do, after the description I'd had from Mary Lou of his unusual quarters.

I wish I could describe that room in detail, but I'm afraid I cannot. It was the most unusual one I've ever seen. You got, first, the general impression of fairly low bookshelves all around the walls, crammed with the most fascinating volumes. On top of these bookshelves were ship models most beautifully and perfectly made, most of them of the older types of sailing vessels, square-rigged clippers, he called them, and complete down to the last detail. A sort of alcove at one side of the room was fitted up exactly like a ship officer's cabin, with a mahogany bunk fastened to the wall, and this, he said, was where he slept. Over the bunk he had had a regular porthole of brass put in.

"I wish this looked out on the sea!" he sighed, as he showed it to us. "But only the trees and the streets of this town are visible, as you see."

"I should think you would like to live right *by* the ocean," I ventured, "since you love it and ships so much."

"I dearly would," he added, "but I am troubled in my old age by an unfortunate asthmatic condition, and the sea air aggravates it very much. So my only safety is to live inland and try to pretend the sea is not far away. But come and look at my two chief treasures!"

He led us over to the mantel, and there, jutting out into the room, above the fireplace, was the quaintest ship's figurehead I have ever seen. It was the perfect figure of a woman, from about the waist up, dressed like a jester, with a gilded cap and bells on her head, and a fool's or jester's wand in her hand, tipped with little gilded bells. Her drapery was blue, a lovely pale shade, and her laughing face was beautifully carved. Mr. Doane told us that those were all the original colorings, that

he had never had it touched up.

“They knew how to do those things well, in bygone days,” he said rather wistfully. “It was the figurehead of my father’s clipper ship—appropriately named the *Folly*—and it is my chief treasure, apart from this.” He led us over to a pedestal in a corner of the room, on which stood a wonderful ship model, all by itself.

“That must be the *Folly*, isn’t it?” I cried. For there was a tiny replica of the same figurehead on the prow of the vessel.

“Yes, that is the *Folly*!” he said. “And my figurehead is all that remains of her. Do you wonder I’m proud of it? She was a beautiful clipper—one of the most beautiful ever built.”

“What happened to her?” I ventured to ask. And most surprisingly he answered: “*I do not know!*”

“But—but—” I stammered—“then how do you come to have the original figurehead?”

“That is a long story, my dear. Perhaps I shall tell it some day, perhaps never!” he muttered. “But I mustn’t keep you too long. I know little Miss Mary Lou must get outdoors while the sun is bright. Come in and see me again-any time. I have many books here that you might be interested in,” he ended. Something warned me that I’d made a mistake in asking him about the ship, and I felt rather embarrassed. So I called in Osgood, who had been waiting out in the hall, bade Mr. Doane good-bye and thanked him, and we got Mary Lou out into the garden.

“What did I *tell* you?” demanded Mary Lou in wild excitement, when we were at last alone under the trees. “I *knew* there was some mystery about him—and this makes it deeper than ever. He doesn’t know what became of the ship—and yet he has the figurehead! I don’t believe he ever told that before—not even to Auntie.”

We talked and speculated about it for quite a while. I was nearly as excited as Mary Lou. It seemed so strange—not only the fact, but his manner of telling it. Then we quieted down and I began to read *David Copperfield* aloud.

It was a peaceful, lovely June afternoon, and we were enjoying ourselves immensely, when Mary Lou gave a sudden sigh of disgust.

“Oh, here comes that old Mrs. Rowland!” she muttered. “She’s been sitting on the veranda and must have spied us out here. Good-bye to our nice afternoon!” And sure enough, she came trotting over the lawn and plumped herself down, with her eternal knitting, in the one extra chair that was out there! We had to be polite to her, and after saying a few words, I started to go on with the reading, hoping she’d take the hint and keep quiet. But that, very evidently, was not what she’d come out for.

“Does it strike you that that Miss Markham practices entirely too much—and

too late at night?" she interrupted. "I declare, I think I must have been awake till after midnight last night, listening to that clatter. She's right next door to me, you know." Her complaining made us both quite indignant, for when Miss Markham practices at night, she does so very softly, and what one *does* hear is so delightful that you wish she'd go on forever.

"I hadn't noticed it," I replied shortly. "Anyway, she can't play too much to suit *me*! I love her music."

"So do I!" chimed in Mary Lou. "I could listen to her all night." Mrs. Rowland evidently found she wasn't making much progress along this line, so presently she tried another tack.

"What do you make of that Mr. Conroy?" she next inquired of me. "He's a queer specimen—and I don't like the way he acts. Do you know, I heard a sound in the hall, *very* late the other night, it was past two, I remember—and I got up and looked out of my door, and if he wasn't out there, in his pajamas and bathrobe, walking up and down and smoking a cigarette! He muttered something about it being hot in his room and he couldn't sleep. But I didn't wait to hear an explanation—I just slammed my door shut—and I hope he took the hint. The *idea*!"

"I haven't met Mr. Conroy yet," I remarked, as icily as I could, "since I got here only yesterday. But I can't see why he shouldn't get some fresh air out in the hall if he can't sleep in his room." Mary Lou said nothing, and Mrs. Rowland sort of snorted, in disapproval of my attitude, I suppose. I tried reading aloud again, but she only began afresh after a few moments:

"Where have you been attending school, Miss Joan? I ask it because—" But suddenly, Mary Lou could stand it no longer.

"Could you wheel me around on the street, a bit, Joan?" she demanded. "My back gets so tired sitting still here all the time."

It was a good excuse to get away, and I didn't waste a minute in excusing myself to Mrs. Rowland and rushing Mary Lou out through the garden and onto the sidewalks of the shady road.

"We're going to have our troubles with her," predicted Mary Lou, darkly, and I could easily see she wasn't wide of the mark!

Two days later I had my first encounter with Boots Fraser, who had, up to that point, been confined to his room. But his nurse had left that morning, and Mrs. Fraser had gone downtown to do some shopping, leaving her son to amuse himself in his room. He was up and about, with only his left arm in a sling to relieve the strain on the broken collar bone. I was coming downstairs with Mary Lou's breakfast tray and had reached the second-story hall, which in this house is a rather large open

space like a room, with a big window, in front of which are a couch, a table, and two or three odd chairs. Sort of an upstairs sitting room. And there, if you please, was our Boots, leaning far out of the window, with no regard for his collar bone, holding in his right hand a fishing rod and dangling the line and hook down below!

“Whatever are you doing?” I gasped, for at the angle he was leaning out he would certainly land on his head on the ground below, if he went an inch farther. At that he jerked in his head and stared at me with some surprise.

“Hello! I say, who are you anyway?” he retorted. I explained, and again demanded if he were trying to break his neck.

“No, just fishing!” he grinned impishly. “Grand clothesline full of duds down there. I just nearly caught a blue shirt when you bawled me out!” The outrageous little wretch! I thought, and then suddenly realized how desperately he must be put to it for amusement if he had to take to *that*!

“Well, you’d better call it a day!” I remarked. “And if you’ve nothing better to do, come up to Mary Lou’s room in about five minutes. I’m going to begin reading a book aloud to her—*Treasure Island*—and you can come and listen, if you’ll keep quiet.”

“Hot dog!—I’ll be there with bells on!” he shouted, and half an hour later he was crouched cross-legged on the floor, eyes popping with excitement and interest, listening to a story he had evidently never heard of before. And from that moment, Boots Fraser became our devoted slave!

So the first week passed for me, at McKeever’s, and I gradually became acquainted with the entire household and was growing to love dear little Mary Lou more with every passing day. She was always so sweet and good-tempered, in spite of her ailments and handicaps. Often she suffered real pain and discomfort, but she never complained or was difficult to manage. And she was always so grateful for anything I could do for her, and above all, was so intelligent and companionable herself.

It was my eighth night in the house, when a very singular thing happened—the beginning, in fact, of all the queer things that came later.

It had been a very hot, sultry afternoon and evening, with heavy thunderclouds gathering in the west. After dinner, as it was terribly oppressive in Mary Lou’s room, I got Osgood to take her in her chair, down to the second-story hall, where there was a little breeze coming in the big window which faced south, and we sat there reading and talking a while. Presently Mr. Doane came upstairs on the way to his room, and, seeing us there, he invited us to come into his room, which got even more of a breeze, for a while. So I wheeled Mary Lou in.

He seemed delighted to have company and showed us all his ship models again, and for the first time I learned their names, and that they were replicas of those famous clippers, *Flying Cloud*, *Red Jacket*, *Rainbow*, *Montezuma*—and all the others. And he also told us a little of their interesting and exciting histories. But he did not, this time, mention anything in connection with the *Folly*, and I did not ask him anything about her either, remembering our former experience and how I'd "put my foot in it" at that time. The hot evening passed very quickly and delightfully, and at last a heavy thunderstorm broke. We watched it from the big bay window in his room, which had a nice cushioned seat all the way round it. (And in the center, I noticed that he had a big desk, which I mention here because it figured largely in our mystery afterward.) Then, after the storm was over, Osgood helped us upstairs again, and I got Mary Lou to bed.

I had a hard time getting to sleep that night. The thunderstorm, far from cooling things off, seemed to have made matters worse. My room was small and happened not to have any breeze, and I finally turned on my bed light and started writing a letter to Mother. But it was so sultry that even writing seemed impossible, so instead I read a book till I got drowsy, switched off the light, and fell asleep toward one o'clock.

It must have been about half an hour later that I awoke, hearing some sort of commotion somewhere in the house. I got up, put on my mules and a bathrobe, and opened my door to peek outside. There seemed to be talking and scurrying around and some sort of excited doings on the floor below. Fearing someone might have been taken ill, I tiptoed downstairs, and in the hall below came upon the queerest sight!

It seemed as if everyone in the house was milling around outside the door of old Mr. Doane's room, all in hastily donned bathrobes, or clothes slipped on in a hurry. Mrs. Rowland looked too funny, with her gray hair in tightly wound crimpers and a huge woolly bathrobe huddled about her!

"What's the matter?" I demanded of Miss Markham, who was standing on the outskirts, in a lovely pale lavender negligee.

"I'm not quite sure," she murmured, "but I think Mr. Doane waked up Miss McKeeper and informed her that he'd lost something. Someone had entered his room while he was out of it—and now they're hunting around to see if it can be found. I just heard the disturbance and came out a moment ago, so I'm not too certain what has happened." But if she wasn't quite sure of the facts, Mrs. Rowland had them all down pat, as you might expect, for she came bustling up to us right then and announced in a stage whisper:

“He says he’s lost an *important document*! Seems he had it on his desk, looking it over, and suddenly wanted a book he had been reading this evening and left down in the living room. He went down to get it, and was a while finding it, because someone had slipped it into the bookcase. When he got back, his room was just as usual in every other way—but the document was *gone*! He woke up Miss McKeever—and they’re both hunting for it now. He won’t let anyone else in the room! If you ask *me*, I think he’s not right in the head, poor old man!” Nobody *had* asked her—nor thought anything of the kind! Miss Markham and I quietly removed ourselves from her vicinity just as Mr. Conroy emerged from his room, his bathrobe grabbed tightly around him with one hand, rubbing his sleepy eyes with the other, and his black hair ruffled and hanging down over his forehead.

“What’s all the rumpus?” he demanded in a hoarse, sleepy voice.

CHAPTER IV

THE LOST DOCUMENT

IT seems almost impossible, but Mary Lou had slept peacefully through all the disturbance, as I found out next morning when I went in to see her before breakfast. Never heard or knew of a thing, and I had to tell her all about it. She was very annoyed at me for not waking her up when it was all going on, so I gave her as full an account as I could.

“And it didn’t come to light after all?” she demanded when I’d finished.

“No. He and Aunt Elsie finally gave up the hunt, and he consented to go to bed and search some more today. Aunt Elsie had to give him a sleeping powder to calm him down and make sure he wouldn’t be rambling around all night looking for it. The rest of us sort of dribbled away to our own rooms after a while.”

“But what in the world was it all *about*?” demanded Mary Lou impatiently. “What *was* the document, do you suppose, and why should anyone take it away from him like that—or who could it be? I think it’s all awfully mixed up!”

“So do I!” I agreed. “But I’ll tell you something else. After it was all over I went into Aunt Elsie’s room with her, and we had a long talk about it. She was so excited and upset that she couldn’t sleep—and neither could I—so we just sat there in the dark, mulling it over. She told me quite a little about old Mr. Doane and his peculiarities. He’s been here a good many years, and while he hasn’t exactly made a confidante of her—he doesn’t of anyone apparently—still, things he has said occasionally, when talking with her, have given her a little more knowledge of his affairs than perhaps even *he* realizes. I can’t remember all she said, or just the way she told it, but this is the main idea:

“Mr. Doane came from a very wealthy family. His father, way back in the clipper ship era in New York, owned a number of vessels and did a thriving import and export business, and Mr. Doane himself, who dearly loved the sea, was at one time commander of one of them. He was quite young then. After the clipper ships passed, he lived in China for a long while, carrying on his father’s business from that end. She doesn’t know what he did when he returned to this country at last, till the time he came to her, some twenty years ago, when she first turned this place into a boarding house, but he’s been with her ever since. He had that room all fixed up at his own expense and seems very contented here. Says he’s the only one remaining of his branch of the family. Aunt Elsie says she doesn’t know whether he has very much of his large fortune left, but evidently it’s enough to keep him here in comfort for the rest

of his life.

“But she thinks there must be something he never speaks about that makes him quite unhappy and upset at times—for instance, when he gets one of those mysterious letters. He gets over it, though, after a while, and seems quite peaceful. But this affair last night was something brand new, and she can’t explain it. He wouldn’t say what the document was that disappeared—just told her it was a paper, folded three times, lengthwise. He had it on his desk in the bay window, looking it over, just before he went downstairs. He wasn’t gone ten minutes, but it had completely disappeared when he got back. She suggested that it might have blown out the window, but they both realized that there hadn’t been a breath of wind—the night was so sultry—and he said, anyway, he’d put a paper-weight over it before he left the room. The paper-weight was there, just where he’d left it—but no document. And it wasn’t on the floor or anywhere, though they hunted the whole room over. He wouldn’t hear of anyone else coming in to help. He rarely asks anyone in, anyway. Aunt Elsie says it is quite unusual, his having us both there, as he has. He won’t let Boots in at all—and I can’t say I blame him for that! The young rascal would probably wreck the place and take his ship models to sail on the pond in the park!

“But the queerest thing of all, she said, was that he seemed to have a notion that someone had come into his room and taken the thing while he was downstairs! He says he left his door slightly ajar, so that the light would guide him as he came up the stairs and through the hall. The upper hall light was out. She asked who he thought could have done it—one of the boarders? He said he would make no definite accusation, but he had his own suspicions, and that was all she could get out of him. But what the thing could have been, why anyone should have wanted it, or who could have taken it, remain as much a mystery as ever!”

“Well, who do *you* think it could have been?” cried Mary Lou, all excitement over this new problem. “Let’s go over them all. Of course, you and I and Auntie are out. We know *we* didn’t do it!”

“And Boots slept through it all too,” I pointed out. “His mother said so, and added that she was thankful to pieces for it—he’d have been such a nuisance.”

“All right,” went on Mary Lou. “That accounts for him. And certainly I can’t imagine his mother or father doing such a thing.”

“Nor Miss Markham,” I added. “She looked too sweet in that pale lavender negligee. And *so* bewildered about it all! How about Mrs. Rowland?”

“I wouldn’t put it past her,” giggled Mary Lou. “She’s *such* an old Paul Pry! But somehow I don’t think it’s very likely she’d dare do such a thing, do you?”

“No, I don’t,” said I, “and the only one that’s left is Mr. Conroy.”

“Now *there’s* the one I think most likely!” whispered Mary Lou. “He looks perfectly capable of it—and Mr. Doane hates him—no one knows why!”

“But, remember, he came out of his room after all the rest of us were there,” I reminded her, “and he looked as if he’d been sleeping for a month, and was all at sea as to what ‘the rumpus’ was about, as he said.”

“That may not mean a thing!” declared Mary Lou sagely. “He might have done it and gone back to his room and just pretended he’d been asleep all the time, afterward. And his door is almost opposite Mr. Doane’s too.”

I had to admit it was a possibility, but Mr. Conroy’s utter bewilderment about the whole affair had seemed very genuine to me, and after all, I’d seen him, the night before—and Mary Lou hadn’t. However, I couldn’t stay talking any longer, as it was high time I ran down to get my breakfast and then bring up Mary Lou’s, as I generally did. So we had to postpone our discussion till later.

Mr. Doane did not come down for breakfast but had it sent to his room that morning, and I found the rest in excited discussion of the doings of the night before. Boots Fraser was frantic because he’d missed it all and whispered to me that he was going to do some hunting on his own hook, that morning, for the lost document. I warned him that he wasn’t allowed in Mr. Doane’s room, so he’d better not try anything of the sort. But he retorted, darkly, that he had his own ideas about things, and he wasn’t going to tell anyone what they were. It left me dreading what the young scamp might be up to. His mother had said he’d have to return to school the next Monday, as his collar bone was doing nicely, and I yearned for the day to come, as it would keep him out of mischief at least five hours out of the twenty-four, anyway! But Monday was still three days off.

Aunt Elsie, very sleepy and tired after our hectic night, told me that Mr. Doane was still much upset and she was very worried about him. He had refused to let the maid come in that day to give his room its usual weekly cleaning (which he always superintended himself) till he had done some more searching, and had announced that he was going to keep his door locked, every minute of the time he wasn’t there himself. Poor Aunt Elsie! I felt so sorry to think she had this added problem on her hands besides the rest of her perplexities.

The morning had cleared off, beautifully cool and delightful after the heat and storm of the night before, so Mary Lou and I elected to spend most of it in the garden, and Osgood got her out there shortly after breakfast. Fearing Boots might get into mischief, I invited him out with us to listen to some reading, but, contrary to his usual joy at the prospect, he thanked me and said he had something else to do but might join us later. His plans made me quite uneasy, and we saw him later

prowlmg mysteriously about the garden and lawn, poking into the bushes and gazing up at the windows. Later he disappeared around the other side of the house. It must have been nearly noon when he came stalking solemnly over toward where we sat, plumped himself down on the grass in his usual cross-legged position, and announced:

“Well, it’s all over but the shouting!”

“*What’s* all over?” we both demanded in the same breath.

“Precious document found and returned to owner!” he stunned us by answering.

“Are you just teasing us, Boots, or is that the truth?” demanded Mary Lou.

“I’m like George Washington—I never tell a lie!” he retorted provokingly.

“Well, for goodness’ sake! Tell us all about it!” I cried. “Who found it? Where was it—and so on?”

“Yours truly had the honor!” he announced.

“*You?*” we both gasped unbelievably.

“And why not?” he inquired. “*Some* day I expect to be known as ‘Boots Fraser, The Mystery Solver,’ and I’m going to have a program on the radio telling about my adventures. I seem to be the only one around here that does any brain work on these things.”

“If you don’t get right down to business,” I cried, “and tell us what really happened—we’ll both—well—wring your neck!” At which he grinned and continued:

“All right—here goes!—I figured it out that it was all bunk, looking around in the room for that paper—whatever it was! If anyone’d been in there after it, they’d either have taken it away with them or perhaps got scared, hearing Mr. Doane coming back, and dropped it somewhere—wouldn’t have time to put it back under the paper-weight Miss McKeever said he had over it. She told us that at breakfast, you know. So I doped it out this way: S’posing they were looking at it—maybe didn’t mean to *take* it—just look it over—’n’ heard him coming upstairs? Only just time to beat it back to their room!—But there’s something they haven’t had time to see—and they’re dying to. What would they do? If they took it with them and the place was searched afterward, they’d get in a lot of trouble. But if they dropped it out the window they might have a chance to get it later and look it over—and just leave it out there—as if it blew out accidentally—or something like that. Anyhow, that’s the dope I worked on, and I started in hunting around all over the place on the chance it had blown off somewhere, after the wind came up this morning. But I didn’t have a bit of luck.

“So that narrows me down to the space right under or around that big bay

window in Mr. Doane's room. I didn't want him to see me around there—he'd just naturally holler out to me to scat!—so I kept close to the house. You know, there's some bushes under his window, and a big wistaria vine climbing up to just under the sill. I thought the bushes would be pretty 'hot,' 'cause that's where it'd likely fall—but nothing doing. Then I began to examine the wistaria vine. That's pretty thick. I had to crawl way back of it to see much. And did *my* heart stand still when I saw a bit of white—something or other—like paper, sticking between that vine and the wall—'bout halfway up to the window!

"I tried to shake the vine, but the thing wouldn't budge. Then I tried poking it down with a long stick, but I was afraid I might tear it, that way. So finally I sneaked round to the garage and swiped a short stepladder—lucky for me Osgood was out with the car!—and I got it round there before anyone saw me. Had a job climbing up with this pesky arm in a sling, and I was dead scared for fear old Mr. Doane would look out and catch me! Wanted to do the job thoroughly before I was nabbed and shooed off it!

"Well, to make it snappy, I reached it at last and climbed down, and then I unfolded it to make sure I'd got the right article. Then I marched straight up to Mr. Doane's room and knocked at the door. The old gent called out, 'Who's there?' and when I told him he just called, 'Go away! I don't want to see anyone!' Pretty grouchy, I thought, but I didn't exactly blame him. But I hollered back that I had something I was pretty sure he'd like to see, and after a spell he unlocked the door and peeked out.

"When he saw what I had in my hand, he gasped, grabbed it, and shouted: Where did you get *this*, young man?' After I told him, he looked me over, sort of suspiciously, as if he thought I was playing a joke on him—or something—and then he said, 'Thank you! This has relieved my mind a great deal, young man.' Then he slammed the door shut—and that was that! And I ain't certain yet but what he thinks I took it, to begin with, just to get him all mussed up, and returned it before things got too hot! Oh, well—it's all in the day's work of a Mystery-Solver."

"But, Boots," cried Mary Lou excitedly, "you say you opened the thing and looked it over before you took it upstairs. *What was it?*"

"You'd never guess in a blue moon!" he answered, chewing a blade of grass. "Nothing to get all hot and bothered over, I shouldn't think. It was a *map*—an old map, drawn in pen and ink, with names or things written on it so fine you could hardly read 'em without a magnifying glass."

CHAPTER V

“CARGOES”

THE next important happening in our affair occurred about a week later, though a number of minor events took place before that. Of course, the matter of Boots Fraser finding and returning the lost document caused considerable excitement to all and sundry. It was funny, the effect it had on the various members of McKeever’s household!

His father and mother were dumfounded. I don’t believe they had ever known him to do anything useful or constructive in all his life before. They even forgave him for climbing a ladder with his collar bone still not thoroughly healed, considering the results accomplished. Aunt Elsie was also quite bowled over, as she was one of the most set in her belief that nothing good could ever come about through that boy. “The little rascal really has *brains!*” she marveled. “He’s never shown a sign of it heretofore!” And it suddenly gave me the idea that perhaps Boots Fraser might become a really useful member of society, if he only had something to do that he really *liked*—and that would mean something besides school, which he absolutely *loathed!*

Miss Markham expressed a mild surprise at his adventure, and Mr. Conroy said nothing at all, as far as I could find out. But Mrs. Rowland said plenty, and most of it was none too complimentary to Boots.

“It’s *my* opinion that little wretch knew it was there all the time!” she announced to Mary Lou and me. “Like as not *he* was the one who sneaked in and took it, to begin with!”

“But he was asleep—all through the affair,” I remonstrated.

“That’s what *he* says!” she snapped, and would hear of no other explanation. “I never could abide that child anyway!” she ended. Mary Lou and I simply kept our mouths shut and said never another word to her on the subject.

But it was old Mr. Doane’s attitude toward the affair that interested us most of all, and this we didn’t get for two or three days, as he had been so much upset by the whole thing that he kept pretty much to his room for a while. We had no further chance to talk with him until about three days later, when he came out to the garden, quite unexpectedly, and sat down to talk with Mary Lou and me. We did not volunteer anything on the subject of the lost document, as we both felt it would be more tactful not to, and he talked about indifferent subjects for quite a while. Then, much to our surprise, he himself opened up the topic we had tried to avoid.

"I am decidedly puzzled," he began suddenly, "about that young boy—I believe they call him 'Boots'—who found my lost paper the other morning. I have always considered him very much of a nuisance—almost a *dangerous* young person, in fact!—to be about this quiet house. Were it not that his stay here is to be only temporary, I should have been tempted to remonstrate with Miss McKeever about his presence here. Yet he did me an invaluable service by locating the document and seemed very modest about his really clever feat of finding and retrieving it."

"Have you had any trouble with him before this?" I couldn't help but inquire.

"I should say I *had!*" Mr. Doane declared emphatically. "When he came here first, he hadn't been in the house two days before I found him in my room one afternoon—I had just come in from a walk—and he had every one of my ship models down on the floor, some lying on their sides, and was standing on a chair trying to examine the figurehead! I'll have to admit I was speechless with indignation. Unfortunately, I have a very quick temper, and I drove him out of the room, warning him never to put foot in it again. He never did, but has been extremely annoying in a number of other ways. Yet I feel as if I could forgive it all, considering his performance the other day."

"He really isn't a bad little chap at all, at heart," I championed Boots. "He should have known better than to go into your room, much less disturb anything, but his parents don't seem to have much control over him, and perhaps he didn't know any better."

"I'm glad to hear you say so," said Mr. Doane. "I confess that for a time I thought he might have been playing a practical joke on me by taking the document while I was out, and concealing it, and then pretending to discover and return it, either to annoy me, or get the credit for finding it, or both. But I have come to the conclusion that such was not the case."

"No, that couldn't be," I hastily answered, "because his mother told us she had got up and gone into his room, which connects with hers, just about the time the thing must have happened, as she was afraid it was going to rain again, and his windows were open. He was sound asleep then—and had been all along. No, whoever it was, it couldn't have been Boots!"

There was silence for a long while after that. The bees hummed in the honeysuckle, and the robins and thrushes sang on the lawn, and Mr. Doane sat there with hands clasped on his cane, and his eyes looking faraway and a little troubled. We were both hoping madly that he might say something more about the mysterious 'lost document,' or perhaps something else connected with his mystery, and we hardly dared to breathe. But he only sighed a long sigh, after a while, and got up to

go, saying he was on his way to his usual morning walk.

A day or two after that Boots had another misadventure. He had been sent back to school on Monday, with the warning to keep out of all the athletics, and his mother thought him safe enough with that. The rest of the household breathed a sigh of relief that he was to be out of the way for at least a few hours a day, but Mary Lou and I rather missed him, for he had come to be a part of our reading hours, and we enjoyed his antics and his rowdy little comments on the doings of some of the other boarders. But his absence wasn't to be for long.

Two days later he was brought hurriedly back in a taxi, having got into a scuffle at recess with one of his schoolmates and done quite a bit of damage to his still not completely healed collar bone. He was put back to bed by the doctor and told to remain there till further notice. His lamentations at his latest calamity were quite heartrending, and it was not till Mary Lou and I had consented to spend part of each day in his room reading to him that he was at all consoled. The first morning I wheeled her in there we found him hunched up in bed, an array of tattered notebooks scattered over the rumpled bedspread, sketching away furiously on a stiff pad of paper propped up against his knees.

"What are you drawing, Boots?" Mary Lou immediately questioned him. Rather shamefacedly he exhibited a quite clever drawing of an ocean liner under full steam at sea. The drawing seemed complete, down to the last funnel, rope, and life preserver. It was really wonderfully well done, and we both enthused over it till he was quite red about the ears.

"Oh, that's nothing!" he commented. "I do a lot of this all the time—different kind of boats." And he offered us his tattered notebooks, filled with similar sketches—not all of ocean liners either, for there were warships, dreadnoughts, schooners, and sailing vessels of every description. There was even one uncompleted picture of a clipper ship.

"I never *did* finish that!" he commented ruefully. "Sort of went haywire on it because I didn't have a model or picture or anything to go by. When I first came here and heard that Mr. Doane had a lot of models in his room, I went in one day to sort of look 'em over and get a line on 'em. And he came in and found me—and did I get fired out on my neck! Oh, *boy!* Never gave me a chance to explain what I was doing, nor nothin'. I was just out—before I could even yelp!"

Mary Lou and I glanced at each other meaningly, but we did not mention that we had heard the other side from Mr. Doane himself!

"Is this your hobby, then?" I asked. "I've often wondered if you had one. Most boys seem to—collecting stamps and street signs and whatnot."

“Hobby—*nothin*!” he snorted. “It’s what I’m going to do when I grow up—marine architecture. I’m nuts about it! I beg Dad every day I live to let me leave school and start studying it, but he only says I got to go through high school and college and all that baloney first. Heck!—it makes me sick—the way I’m wasting time!”

“But I thought you said you were going to be a mystery solver and have a program on the radio!” interrupted Mary Lou.

“Oh, that’d only be in my spare time!” he retorted nonchalantly. “Marine architecture is my first, middle, and last names all the time—and don’t you forget it!” Having discovered this quite astonishing side of his character, I right away proposed that we read together one of Joseph Conrad’s books (I’d discovered the whole set of them in Aunt Elsie’s library downstairs), because he was one of the greatest writers about ships and the sea.

“Suits me right down to the ground!” cried Boots. “Never heard of the gent, but I’m all for him if that’s what he writes!” So I went down and brought back *Typhoon*, as I thought that one would be the best to begin on. And as I sat there reading to my two enthralled young invalids, who should knock at the door and ask to come in but old Mr. Doane himself!

It seems that he had come, out of the kindness of his heart, to commiserate with Boots on his latest misfortune and thank him for what he had done in retrieving his lost document. And when he had done so—much to Boots’s confusion—he asked what we were reading. I told him, and explained why we’d chosen it, and also exhibited to him some of Boots’s very clever drawings. And I’ve never seen a more curious change come over anyone’s features than happened to Mr. Doane as he looked them over. For a time he said nothing at all—just sat turning them over and examining each carefully. Then he put them down on the bed and turned to Boots.

“So *this* is what you’re interested in, young man? Not bad—not bad at all! You could improve on that clipper ship, however. Come into my room, sometime when I’m there, and you can sketch any one of them you choose, at close range.” And with that surprising announcement he said an old-fashioned “Good-day!” to us all and went out of the room. I only hope he didn’t hear our suppressed whoops of joy after he had departed.

But the most curious thing happened toward the end of that week, after three days of a hard, drenching northeaster. We had all grown tired of being shut up indoors, listening to the streaming rain and blowing wind and creaking tree branches, seeing nothing out of the windows but the sodden, dreary garden and the street running rivers of muddy water. I couldn’t help but think how fascinating it would

have been to be at home and watch the wild sea tossing, and to tramp on the beach, head down against the wind, and I tried to describe it all to Mary Lou, who had almost never been near the sea in her life, and to Boots, who only knew it through sundry trips to Atlantic City and its sophisticated boardwalk and hotels.

“I thought it was grand there—to watch the boats,” he sighed, “but it isn’t up the same alley with your place.”

Owing to the inclement weather, Miss Markham practiced incessantly; Mr. Doane, unable to take his usual walks, wandered forlornly about the house staring out of the windows at the rain-sodden scenery; Boots grew impatient and obstreperous and very hard to manage; Mary Lou began to suffer pitifully with pains in her back and legs, and, to cap it all, on the third morning Mrs. Rowland went on a concentrated rampage. Having complained bitterly that Karen’s gorgeous Danish pastries and desserts had given her indigestion, she decided to go on some strange diet of her own invention and drove Aunt Elsie nearly crazy trying to order the ingredients.

“If the weather doesn’t let up and stop getting on everybody’s nerves,” Aunt Elsie confided to me that evening, just before dinner, “I believe I’ll go mad! I wonder what I could suggest to put them all in a better humor? Oh, I know—I’ll light the open fire on the hearth in the living room this evening and ask Miss Markham if she won’t play some for us and have some light refreshments afterward. Ask them all to come in and enjoy the concert. She does that once in a while, and they all enjoy it very much. It’s such a raw, chilly evening that the fire will feel really welcome. I’ll go up right now and see if Miss Markham will oblige us.”

So it came about that we all gathered in the living room after dinner that evening—all at least, except Mr. Conroy, who said he had some business to attend to in his room but might be down after a while. Even Boots was there, having been allowed to get up that day. I wheeled in Mary Lou and put her chair close to the fire, and some of us sat on the big Chesterfield couch, drawn at one side of it. It was all very cosy and cheerful, and almost before the music had begun everyone suddenly seemed in better spirits. Old Mr. Doane, who shared the couch with Aunt Elsie and myself, seemed particularly happy, saying he dearly loved music and always enjoyed hearing Miss Markham play.

Miss Markham gave us a wonderful concert—Chopin and Brahms and Lizst and Beethoven. She must have played for an hour and a half steadily, ending with some of MacDowell’s “Sea Pieces.” Then she said she was a little tired and went to an easy chair to rest. Then old Mr. Doane spoke up:

“Doesn’t someone here sing? I think it would be a pleasant thing if we might

have some vocal music to vary our concert.”

Rather to our surprise, Mr. Fraser said he had done a bit in that line himself, in the past, though he was a little out of practice since his home had burned down and their piano and music were destroyed. But he was willing to try, if his wife would be good enough to accompany him from memory. It turned out that he had a surprisingly fine, strong baritone voice, and Mrs. Fraser, though she wasn't anywhere near the musician Miss Markham was, accompanied him without music in one or two modern songs: “The Hills of Home” and “The Last Round-Up.” Then Miss Markham said she had quite a portfolio of vocal music in her room, and would go and get it, and possibly Mr. Fraser might sing some of them to her accompaniment. We all applauded that idea heartily, and she went off to get it. While she was gone, Mr. Fraser, accompanied by his wife, sang that lovely sea chanty, “Rollin’ Home.” Even Boots, who had seemed rather bored with the rest of the performance, was wildly enthusiastic over that and demanded to know whether he would sing, “Sailing, Sailing, Over the Bounding Main,” and Mr. Fraser very cheerfully complied. While he was singing it, Miss Markham returned with the music, and shortly afterward who but Mr. Conroy drifted in. He seemed a little bit shy, and sidled over to a chair in a dark corner, just behind where I sat on the Chesterfield. And while Miss Markham and Mr. Fraser were looking over the music and discussing what he should sing, Mr. Conroy leaned over to me and murmured:

“I’m not much on this piano music, but the songs rather get me! Mr. Fraser sure has a good voice. I couldn’t resist coming down when I heard him singing.”

It was the first time, literally, that Mr. Conroy had ever addressed a single remark to me, except “Good-morning,” or “Good-evening,” and I was quite bowled over that he could be so human. I had just begun a reply when Miss Markham settled down at the piano, and Mr. Fraser began to sing some German songs of Schumann’s, and we were all silent, listening again.

“They’re all right, in their way,” remarked Mr. Fraser, after he had sung several, “but a little too sentimental for *my* choice. Give me a good he-man song like—well—‘On the Road to Mandalay!’”

“Oh, I have that right here!” interrupted Miss Markham. “Do sing it!” Which he did, and after that, “The Little Stars of Doona,” and that lovely sea poem of Masfield’s, “Trade Winds.”

All this may seem very unconnected with my story, but it really isn’t, for it led up to the very surprising thing that happened next, and that’s why I’ve told it in full. Right after Mr. Fraser had finished “Trade Winds,” Mr. Conroy suddenly spoke up:

“Since we seem rather nautical in the songs tonight, I wonder if you could sing

that thing called ‘Cargoes.’ I’ve heard it on the radio a good deal, and I like it a lot.”

“Oh, yes—that’s another by Masfield—a favorite of mine too,” agreed Mr. Fraser. “Have you that one there, Miss Markham?” She said she thought so, and finally found it and began to play. And Mr. Fraser sang it beautifully, to the lovely, lilting accompaniment that sounds like the wash of the waves:

““ *Quinquireme of Nineveh from distant Ophir,
Rowing home to haven in sunny Palestine,
With a cargo of ivory,
And apes and peacocks,
Sandalwood and cedarwood, and sweet white wine.*

““ *Stately Spanish galleon coming from the Isthmus,
Dipping thro’ the Tropics by the palm-green shores,
With a cargo of diamonds,
Emeralds, amethysts,
Topazes, and cinnamon, and gold moidores.*

““ *‘Dirty British coaster with a salt-caked smoke stack,
Butting thro’ the Channel in the mad March days,
With a cargo of Tyne coal,
Road-rails, pig-lead,
Firewood, iron-ware and cheap tin trays.’”*

Everyone applauded madly when he had finished, except, I noticed, old Mr. Doane, who sat looking thoughtfully into the fire. And Mr. Conroy said:

“That was fine. Thanks a lot! I always thought the fellow who wrote that made one mistake—he ought to have put in one more verse—about the clipper ships and their cargoes. Don’t you agree with me, Mr. Doane?”

It seemed such a simple question—and so very sensible. We all involuntarily turned toward Mr. Doane, interested to hear what he would reply. But to our utter astonishment he rose to his feet, turned toward Mr. Conroy, who was seated behind him, and stared at him in the sternest fashion for a long moment. Then he said in a perfectly *icy* tone:

“I am sorry, sir, but I have no answer to that question!” Then: “Miss Markham and Mr. Fraser, I thank you for your delightful music. Miss McKeever, if you will excuse me, I will go to my room now. I am a little overtired, I fear. Good-night to you all!” And bowing in his stately, old-fashioned manner he left the room, with rather tottery footsteps, and we heard him afterward slowly climbing the stairs.

His abrupt exit quite broke up the party. There was no more music after that, and even Aunt Elsie’s delicious fruit punch and little cakes couldn’t dispel the queer atmosphere of constraint that seemed to settle on us all after his curious reply to Mr.

Conroy.

“I’m sure I can’t understand what ailed the old chap!” exclaimed Mr. Conroy, rumpling his black hair over his forehead in a way he has. “I must have got his goat somehow, but I can’t think why!”

“His clipper ships are a tender subject with him, I guess,” murmured Miss Markham, sipping her punch in her absent-minded, far-away manner.

“Yes, but what did I *say*?” demanded Mr. Conroy excitedly. “I didn’t——”

But he got no farther, for at that moment we were all startled out of our wits by a terrible crash from the floor above!

CHAPTER VI

CONSPIRACY IN THE GARDEN

MARY LOU said afterward that it was the oddest thing to watch the expressions of the various people in that room when the crash occurred. She happened to be looking at their faces—I didn't. Most of them just looked terribly startled and alarmed, she said, but Mr. Conroy, who had been interrupted by the sound, suddenly sat up straight and clamped his lips tight, and Miss Markham sat as if turned into stone, with a glass of punch lifted halfway to her lips.

Half a minute later we all leaped from our seats and started for the door, when we heard Mr. Doane's voice calling down the stairs:

"It's all right! Please don't worry! But I should be very glad if Miss McKeever would come up for a few minutes." Aunt Elsie went right up, of course, and the rest of us drifted off to bed. Osgood came in from the kitchen and helped me up with Mary Lou, and she was so excited by it all that it was quite a while before I could get her tucked in and calmed down. When she was at last ready to go off to sleep, I slipped out to go to my own room and in the hall met Aunt Elsie.

"Come in my room a few minutes," she begged. "I'd like to talk to you." And when we were inside and the door shut she began:

"There's something awfully *queer* going on in this house, Joan! I don't understand it at all—and I'm thoroughly puzzled what to do about it."

"But what *happened*?" I interrupted. "What was the cause of that awful crash we heard? And why did Mr. Doane say it was all right and want only you to come up?"

"Well—it wasn't all right, not by any means!" she sighed. "Except that he wasn't hurt. But he said he didn't want that whole mob of people milling around his door again like they did the other night. That's why he asked me in alone. The crash was caused by his big figurehead coming loose somehow from its place above the mantel. It landed mostly on that big velvet armchair right near the fireplace, so it wasn't injured much—if any—I guess. But on its way it knocked over that great big Chinese vase he had standing near the hearth, and that was smashed to pieces!"

"What—not that gorgeous old Ming vase!" I gasped. "Why, he said that was worth a thousand dollars or more, at least! He said it was a gift once from some important Chinese dignitary to his father, and he wouldn't have parted with it for anything you could offer!"

"Nevertheless, it was smashed to flinders," declared Aunt Elsie, "and the queer

part of it was, he didn't seem to care very much as long as the figurehead was uninjured! Said it would have broken his heart if *that* had been damaged! But here's what I don't understand—how that figurehead came to fall at all! It was securely fastened to the wall by a number of heavy hooks he'd had put there when he first came. He said it had been absolutely all right in its place when he first went downstairs to hear the music, but when he came back he noticed that the figurehead was sort of askew, somehow—not hanging straight. He went over to it to see what was wrong and found it had apparently been loosened at one side and one of the hooks was loose from its catch, as if someone had been tampering with it. While he was trying to fix it, he had to loosen some of the other hooks, and suddenly the whole thing toppled out of his grasp and fell. It's pretty heavy, and he only had a chance to jump aside before it came down, smashing the vase as it fell.”

“But, Aunt Elsie, *who* could have done such a thing?” I gasped

“It beats *me!*” she declared. “And it's all the more peculiar, because he had his door *locked!* He always locks it now, when he leaves the room, since what happened the other night.”

“How about the windows?” I questioned. “Someone might have climbed in from outside.”

“You remember, I had those screens put in, just before the storm came,” said Aunt Elsie. “They hook on the inside. No one could get through them unless they cut them up in some way. And they weren't cut. Besides, it was cold and rainy, and he had his windows shut and latched. No, that's not the answer.”

“Well, if he had his door locked, then no one could get in,” I retorted. “Maybe he disturbed the thing himself, examining it, or something, before he went downstairs, and then forgot it.” But Aunt Elsie declared:

“Joan, Mr. Doane is a very old man, but there's nothing the matter with his memory, and don't you forget it! He's perfectly sound in that way. But there's something queer going on in this house, and I'm absolutely stumped to think what it can be or who is responsible for it. It's not the servants, I'm positive of that. Julia, the waitress, has been with me for years, and I trust her absolutely. Your Karen is perfectly trustworthy too. And Osgood is as honest as they come. I'd be willing to put my last dollar in his care. No, *they're* out—and besides, they'd not have the slightest motive. It's someone else in this place—and who can it be?”

“The finger of suspicion points at Mr. Conroy, I suppose!” I answered with some hesitation. “All the rest of us were downstairs all the evening except him—and his room is right opposite Mr. Doane's. And then, do you remember that queer thing Mr. Doane said to him just before he went upstairs? I've been trying ever since to

think why he acted that way.”

“It does seem curious!” mused Aunt Elsie. “Ever since Mr. Conroy first came, Mr. Doane has acted that way toward him. I don’t know why, and Mr. Doane won’t say. I think Mr. Conroy did or said something to him, just at first, that irritated him—or something. If Mr. Conroy hadn’t come so well recommended, by mutual friends, I’d try to get rid of him. But I can hardly do it now, without offending them, and besides, the money he brings in is quite necessary just at present. I can’t afford to have his room vacant. Mary Lou must go to the hospital in the fall, and it’s going to be very expensive.”

“But how *could* Mr. Conroy have got into that room, even granted that it was he?” I demanded, going back to the most bewildering question. “Unless the key to his door fits that one too.”

“Well, it doesn’t,” contradicted Aunt Elsie. “To begin with, none of the room keys are alike, and lately Mr. Doane had a special Yale lock fitted to his door, so it’s entirely different. No, the whole thing is like a Chinese puzzle!”

“What does Mr. Doane himself think about it all?” I asked, going off on another tack. “Does he suspect Mr. Conroy—and what does he want done about it?”

“He doesn’t say who he suspects,” sighed Aunt Elsie, “and he insists he doesn’t want anything done about it at present. He keeps saying, ‘Wait a while! Wait just a little while! Sometime we’ll catch that person redhanded! I am keeping watch!’ And that’s all very well, but I hate being kept in such a stew all the time—nervous and wondering what’s going to happen next.”

We went over and over the subject for an hour or more, but could make nothing further of it, so we finally separated and went to bed. But I lay awake half the night wondering about it all and felt sleepy and good for nothing when morning came and I had to get up. The weather had cleared in the night, and the next day was warm and lovely, and Mary Lou, Boots, and I made straight for the garden.

“My, it seems as if the world were made over—all new!” sighed Mary Lou, ecstatically sniffing the sweet morning air, and the scent of roses and honeysuckle all around us. But Boots, his arm still in a sling, who had brought out his sketching block and was putting the finishing touches to his clipper, was not impressed by the beauty of the day. He evidently had other things on his mind.

“Gee, I wish I knew what’s the matter with that nice old Mr. Doane!” he exclaimed. “There sure is something phony about the queer things that have been happening to him! What was all the ballyhoo about up in his room last night? I haven’t heard yet.”

I told him how the figurehead had come loose and fallen, smashing the vase, and

how no one could figure out who had been tampering with it. Immediately he was all agog, forgot his clipper sketch, and lapsed into the mystery solver once more. With brows all screwed up in a puzzled frown, he leaned toward us and sank his voice almost to a whisper:

“Sometimes I think that old chap has some sort of a mystery hanging over him!”

“So Mary Lou and I have thought for quite a while,” I agreed.

“Honest—have you?” he cried. “Say, what do you know, anyway? Miss McKeever must have told you some things. And, believe me! I’ve seen a few myself that I haven’t been saying much about. Suppose we all get on the trail—us three—and see what we can make of it? I’d like to help him if I could. He’s been jolly nice to me lately—letting me come in and sketch those clippers and all. How about it?”

“Oh, *let’s!*” exclaimed Mary Lou with shining eyes. “It would be *so* interesting—to have a mystery like this and help solve it! And we’d be helping old Mr. Doane too. I’d like that.”

Personally I was sort of skeptical about how much good we could do at that kind of thing, and I wasn’t entirely sure we ought to be meddling in Mr. Doane’s affairs. But Mary Lou seemed so excited about it, and anything that held her interest and kept her from thinking about her own sufferings and troubles being welcome, I thought it would do no harm to agree—up to a certain point. Besides, I confess I was awfully curious to hear what Boots had found out that he hadn’t told us. So I said:

“All right, Boots, it’s a go! Only no prying or poking into his room, remember, or asking him embarrassing questions, or anything of that kind! Now we’ll tell you all we know, and then you can tell us anything you’ve found out.” And, helped and interrupted by Mary Lou, I told him all Aunt Elsie had told me and what we’d seen for ourselves—so far.

Boots sat taking it all in, chewing grass blades and making idle strokes on the back of his sketch pad with his pencil. When we had finished, he tossed the pencil aside, looked up at us, and remarked:

“So that’s how the land lies, is it? You gave me a lot of dope I didn’t know before, and it fits in with one or two things I’ve come across myself!”

“Well, what *are* they?” cried Mary Lou impatiently. “We’ve told you all we know—now it’s your turn!”

I won’t try to tell the story in Boots’s own words—it would take too long and was full of his own particular variety of slang and side issues, but here’s the gist of it. He had gone to Mr. Doane’s room the morning before, during the time of the storm (he had just been allowed to get out of bed) and had asked if he might try to sketch

one of the clipper models. Mr. Doane had been reading and very pleasantly allowed him to come in and go to his work, and Boots spent a happy hour or so on a drawing of a model called the *Arethusa* that stood on the bookshelves near the door, while Mr. Doane sat reading over by the bay window. After a time Boots became tired of sketching, got up and began to ramble around, looking at the other models and the engravings and paintings of ships that were hanging on the walls. At last he came to rest before the fireplace and began to study the figurehead hung above. And suddenly deciding to sketch that too, he got his pad, sat down cross-legged on the floor in front of it, and tried to get it on paper.

When he had been at this quite a while, Mr. Doane came over to look at his work, and they began to talk about old ship figureheads in general. Evidently Mr. Doane got sore of reminiscent, having such an interested listener as Boots, and he sat down in a chair near by and began to give a long account of an old figurehead shop on South Street in New York, where figureheads used to be ordered made when he was a boy, and described how they used to make them by cutting them out of solid blocks of wood, painting and gilding them afterward. Mr. Doane said he had gone to this shop when he was a boy of fourteen and watched the man carve this very figurehead for his father's ship *Folly*. It took a whole month to make it, though most ordinary ones took only five or six days.

"But this was very special," Mr. Doane had said. "This one is different from most of the others." Boots had immediately asked him how it was different, but Mr. Doane had suddenly turned uncommunicative and replied, rather briefly, that the matter was something he did not care to explain, and began to talk of other matters. Shortly after that the lunch bell had rung and ended their conversation.

"And wouldn't I give my head," exploded Boots to us, "if I could just once examine that figurehead and see what *was* different about it!"

"Better look out, Boots," I laughed, "or he'll think you *have* been examining it! Remember what happened last night?"

"Well, he knows I wasn't in on *that*," said Boots, "since I was right in plain sight all the evening. But here's the dope!—here's where someone *else* is interested in that figurehead and tried to get a good look at it, and now we know why—*because there's something special about it!*"

"Well, who could it be, and what's special about it?" demanded Mary Lou breathlessly.

"There's something more important than that, even!" declared Boots darkly. "It's this—*did they find out?*"

CHAPTER VII

ONE MOONLIGHT NIGHT

THOUGH we did not realize it at the time, that conference in the garden marked a turning point in our adventure and mystery. Up to then, we three had been sort of passive witnesses of the beginning of a curious situation. Except for Boots having found the lost map, we had been only looking on. But from that time we were definitely involved in the affair, and things began to happen fast and furiously. How much of it was due to Boots taking a hand and organizing us into a committee of three to try to unravel the matter, or how much of it was just the natural turn of events, I cannot somehow decide. Probably it was a mixture of both. I, at any rate, had no hope of accomplishing anything very helpful at the time, but did my share more to humor Mary Lou and Boots than for any other reason. But it was singular, the way things turned out.

After lunch that same day, Mr. and Mrs. Fraser invited Aunt Elsie, Mary Lou, and myself to go for a long drive with them in their car. It was very sweet of them to do so, and I think it was mainly to give Mary Lou an outing. She seldom got anywhere outside the immediate vicinity of the house, and it was a rare treat to her. The drive was beautiful, up along the winding roads over the mountains. Aunt Elsie and I enjoyed it so much, and Mary Lou was simply speechless with ecstasy. However, several times during the ride I found myself wondering uneasily what Boots was doing with himself. He had not come along, partly because it would have made the car a little crowded, but mostly because he said he didn't want to, had other things to do. His father had made him promise solemnly that he would not get into mischief or do himself any damage. But even at that I was still uneasy, remembering our conference in the garden that morning.

However, when we got back, an hour or so before dinner, all seemed very serene, and Boots was quietly reading out in the garden. Osgood got Mary Lou into her chair and wheeled her out there, and, since the weather had turned quite hot again, Aunt Elsie said she could stay out till bedtime and I could bring her dinner to her out there. When the rest had left the three of us alone I turned to Boots and asked:

“Well, and how did *you* spend the afternoon, Boots? Must have been rather lonely for you.”

“Nope, I wasn't lonely,” he answered absently. “Been busy as a cat with a cream bottle ever since you left!”

“What doing?” I asked suspiciously, for his manner made me think he’d been up to some mischief.

“Plenty!” he replied. “And, believe me, I’ve made a bit of progress! I wonder if we’re going to be alone here for a while? I’d like to make a report about it. But I don’t want all and sundry butting in.”

“We’ll be here until dinner,” I answered. “And Mary Lou is to have hers out here. Then Aunt Elsie says we can stay here till her bedtime. It’s too hot to be in the house, and there’s a little breeze out in the garden.”

“Good!” he said. “We’ll have our meeting here, then, and it’ll give me plenty of time to report on what’s happened and plan something for tomorrow. And get this—when all’s said and done, I haven’t had such an idle afternoon. Things been going on, all rightly!”

“Well, will you please begin, Boots! I’m half crazy with curiosity!” cried Mary Lou. And I seconded the motion. Boots sat down on the grass, in his favorite cross-legged position, and began his “report,” as he called it:

“First thing I did, after you all left, was to tap on Mr. Doane’s door and ask him whether I could come in and do a clipper ship or finish my sketch of the figurehead. He didn’t look too good—sort of worried and fussed—and he said I’d have to put it off till tomorrow, as he was going out for a walk. We made a date for tomorrow morning, and I went back to my room. But I left the door open, and pretty soon I saw him go downstairs and out. It wasn’t five minutes later, just as I was strolling downstairs, when who should blow in but Mr. Conroy!”

“He *did*?” Mary Lou and I both exclaimed, and I added, “That seems queer, when he’s supposed to be in his office all day and not get back here till six-thirty!”

“You’re telling *me*!” retorted Boots. “That’s just exactly what yours truly thought. I said hello and asked if anything was the matter as I passed him, and he said he’d caught a bad cold in that rainy spell we just had and felt so rotten he had to come home from the office. Said he was going to take some medicine and go to bed for a while. He was sneezing and blowing his nose, too, so I guess that was on the level, but just the same, I had a hunch! Thinks I, ‘If you’re trying to get away with something because you think everyone may be out, you got another guess coming!’ So after he’d gone in and shut his door I sneaked back into my own room and decided I’d stay there, with my eyes and ears open, and see if anything happened.”

“Well, *did it*?” questioned Mary Lou excitedly. But just at that moment the dinner gong sounded, and Boots could only add:

“See you later—continued in our next!” I never hurried through a meal more frantically than I did that one, though I noticed that Boots was working his way

through the menu with thorough and complete absorption. And I could imagine Mary Lou stewing with impatience alone out in the garden! I decided to take my dessert out with her meal and eat it in the garden, and I found her almost wriggling out of her chair in her anxiety to hear the rest of the tale. We had to wait fifteen minutes for Boots, while the little wretch was consuming a second portion of ice cream and cake, and we almost mobbed him when at last he came strolling out to join us.

“Well, let’s see! Where was I?” he said provokingly, and Mary Lou cried:

“You were watching in your room. Go right on from there!”

“Oh, so I was,” he drawled, with a twinkle of mischief in his blue eyes. “Well, I guess—nothing much happened, and I went on downstairs!”

“Oh, Boots!” moaned Mary Lou. “Have you kept us in suspense all this time—just to tell us—*that*?” There were actual tears in her eyes.

“Oh, pipe down! You haven’t heard nothing yet! No, I was sort of kidding you—something *did* happen—while I was up there.” Mary Lou perked up again, and Boots went on:

“I had my door open just the tiniest crack, and my eye glued to it, and I didn’t see anything but an empty hall for an awful long time. Miss Markham was practicing in her room—I could hear her, but her door was shut. By and by she stopped playing the piano, and there wasn’t any sound at all. Then, you could have knocked me cold, if I didn’t see Mr. Conroy’s door open a crack, and he put his head out and looked up and down the hall! I thought he was going to come out, but he didn’t—just pulled his head in after a bit and shut his door very softly!” Mary Lou and I both sat tense with suspense during this recital, and Boots, fully appreciating the hit he was making, continued dramatically:

“You can just bet that pepped me up. I could hardly breathe, waiting to see what would happen next. I was sure he was going to come out again and get busy, but nothing of the sort happened! Instead, who should open the door and peek out but—Miss Markham! She looked all around the hall, and when she saw it was empty, seems like she decided to come out. I thought she was going downstairs; but instead of that she walked over to the window and sat down there. She had a book in her hand, and after a minute or two she opened it and began to read. I suppose her room was kind of hot, and she came out there to get the breeze.

“Well, I thinks to myself, now you’ve spoiled old Conroy’s game, lady, but just the same, I’m going to stay here and see what—if anything—happens next! And, believe me, it wasn’t three minutes later that Mr. Conroy’s door opened and out came his head. When he saw Miss Markham sitting there, he looked so scared or startled that I thought his eyes would pop out. He just stuttered, ‘Oh, I beg your

pardon—didn't know you were there.' And she seemed just as surprised herself, for she said, 'I didn't suppose *you* were home—at *this* time of day!' Then they both looked as if they didn't know what to say, and he pulled in his head and shut the door, and she took up her book and walked off to her room. And right after that Mr. Doane came back from his walk and went to his room, so that let me off the sleuthing job. I knew it wasn't any use watching there any longer that day."

"But I can't see where anything so special happened!" wailed Mary Lou, when Boots had reached this point. But I added:

"I don't agree with you, there. I think Boots stumbled on something quite important. It looks to me as if Mr. Conroy was watching to see whether the coast was clear and he could get into that room while Mr. Doane was out for his walk. Perhaps he knew Mr. Doane always takes a walk on nice afternoons, and had come home just on purpose to be there alone at that time. But Miss Markham coming out to sit there upset his plans, and after that it was too late, for Mr. Doane had come back."

"That's just how I doped it out," agreed Boots. "Now I'll go on with what I did next. Came out here and sat in the garden and tried to work out a plan of what we ought to do. And besides that, I thought it would help if I just put down on paper the things that had happened so far and that we knew about this business, so it would give us something to work from. That's the way the best detectives do it, and that's the way us mystery solvers are going to work. Here it is: I'll read it off to you."

I have that paper yet—just as Boots wrote it—and I think I'll copy it off just as he put it down. He is literally the worst speller in the world, and I don't wonder his marks in school are so bad. But his ideas are certainly clever:

1. Mr. Done has figgerhead of clipper ship folly. We think it is a mistery figgerhead and he said it has something speshiel or diferent about it.
2. The folly belonged to his father and Mr. D. says he dont no what became of it—but he has the figgerhead and thats queer just by itself!
3. Mr. D. verry much worried about sumthing—must have sumthing to do with this figgerhead. Also a map.
4. Sum one in this house knows or suspexts sumthing about it—is trying to find out about it—or sumthing—for they keep braking into his room.
5. Sum one got in their one nite and tryed to steel his map—or look at it.

6. Sum one got in last nite and did sumthing to the figgerhead. The door was locked so they must of had a key.

7. Mr. D. suspexts sum one in this house. We think it is Mr. Conroy, anyhow he acts the most suspishious—came home early today and acts like he was planning to get into that room.

8. Mr. Conroy said sumthing to Mr. D. last nite about clipper ships and Mr. D. had a cat-fit. Why?

Boots looked up at this point and said, “Well, that’s about all, I guess. Can you fellers think of anything I left out?”

“Oh, I can!” cried Mary Lou. “You didn’t say anything about the letters he gets every once in a while—that make him so upset.”

“Right-o!” acknowledged Boots. “I’ll put it down. That’s very important.” And he added:

9. Mr. D. gets a letter once in a wile that makes him pretty near hit the roof. Why? has it annything to do with this mistery?

When he had finished this item he handed the paper to me, demanding:

“Well, what about it? Pretty good working scheme—what?” I looked it over, quite appalled by his spelling, and answered:

“It sums it up pretty well, I think. But I can’t see how it’s any working scheme—and your spelling is simply terrible, Boots!”

“Oh, heck! What difference does spelling make?” he replied light-heartedly. “I haven’t got time to bother about *that*! And it’s a working scheme because every time we get one of these points cleared up we can cross it off the list. When they’re *all* crossed off we’ll know the answer. But here’s what I’ve been planning—we’ve *all* got to do some special work on this. All of us has to watch out and report anything we see or hear of that’s going to help out in this puzzle. I have plans laid already, what I’m going to do. And there isn’t any time to lose either!”

“But what can *I* do?” implored Mary Lou. “I have to stay right in this chair all the time—I can’t get around by myself like you two can!”

“You can keep your eyes open too,” advised Boots, “even if you can’t get about like Joan and me. But, anyhow, I’ve a special job for you, and it’s a pretty important one, too!”

“Oh, what *is* it?” cried Mary Lou, thrilled at the suggestion.

“It’s this—you’re going to keep a record of all that happens, from now on, so that we can always study it and remember things and put two and two together, like

they say. I got a brand-new notebook here. I never used it in school, and I'm going to give it to you to write up all our meetings in and what has happened." And he laid the notebook in Mary Lou's lap. Her eyes shone as she took it, and it was evident that the idea pleased her immensely.

"I'll do it—the best I can!" she declared. "I'll begin tomorrow and put down first all those notes you've made about the mystery, and every time anything interesting happens, I'll write that too."

"That's the idea!" crowed Boots. "We'll get the records all straight. That'll be a big help!"

"I think that's grand!" I echoed, not because I had much faith in the business, but because I was so thankful for anything that would keep Mary Lou entertained and give her fresh interest. And, as it turned out later, that record was to be a bigger help than I ever dreamed.

By that time the sun had set, and a big full moon was rising over the trees. It was very pleasant in the garden, and a cool little breeze had sprung up. I left Boots with Mary Lou for a few minutes, while I went to the house to take back Mary Lou's tray and get her a light sweater to put on. I noticed that Aunt Elsie was entertaining some friends who had dropped in for a call, on the veranda, and Mrs. Rowland was sitting alone in the living room listening to the radio. The others were in their rooms, I supposed. When I came back, Boots got up and announced:

"Well, I must be on my way. A detective can't be idle—he's got to keep moving. I'm off to see the lay of the land. So long—and keep smiling. I'll be seeing you later!" And he was off and out of sight.

We were seated under a big spreading maple tree, Mary Lou and I, about a hundred feet or so from the house. I must explain right here that Aunt Elsie's big old house was on the far edge of the town and set well back from the street in quite an extensive piece of ground. It was partly lawn with groups of trees and bushes, with a big garden at one side, and there were pleasant lawn swings and chairs scattered about in shady places, so one could always find a cool and shaded place to sit outdoors. From where we sat that night we could see some of the windows of the house, with lights on, showing their occupants were in their rooms. Among these were the big bay window in Mr. Doane's room, and another, farther along, which belonged to Miss Markham. She was practicing, and the lovely notes of the piano drifted out to us, as we chatted, or just sat still, listening.

"My, it's grand out here!" sighed Mary Lou. "I could stay here all night. My back doesn't hurt at all tonight. I wish Aunt Elsie would let us stay out till very late. It's so hot up in our rooms!"

“She said we could stay out till ten, anyway,” I reported. “I spoke to her a moment when I went in. That’s an hour later than your usual bedtime.” Presently we noticed the light go out in Mr. Doane’s room.

“He’s gone to bed, I guess,” remarked Mary Lou, “but it seems very early.” We sat quiet for a long time after that, just enjoying the stillness and beauty of the night. Mary Lou was tired, after her unusual ride that day, and I suspected was growing a little sleepy. I was beginning to get a little sleepy too, and I almost went to sleep, stretched out in a long steamer chair. But suddenly we were both electrified into wide-awakeness by a curious sound in a heavy growth of lilac bushes about fifty feet away from where we sat.

“Did you hear *that*?” whispered Mary Lou tensely.

“I certainly did,” I whispered back. “Sounded like something ripping or tearing, didn’t it? From right over in those bushes.”

“Maybe it’s Boots,” breathed Mary Lou. “Would you dare go over to see?”

“I hardly think it’s Boots,” I muttered. “He went in the house, and we’d have seen him come out, if he had. The veranda is in plain sight from here.”

“But he might have come out the kitchen door,” objected Mary Lou. “We can’t see *that*!” It was quite true, but even so, I felt a very great objection to going over and investigating those bushes and said so. “Let’s wait and see if we hear the sound again,” I ended. And we sat breathlessly listening and watching. But there was no other sound, though we waited what seemed a long while. Presently we saw Boots come strolling down the veranda steps and over toward our direction. When he got to us we both fell upon him with demands to know if he had been out in those bushes and explained why we thought so and what we had heard. He was all excitement, at once.

“Nope! I haven’t been there, haven’t been outside the house at all!” he declared, and then added, “Why didn’t you go right over and see who it was? What kind of detectives *are* you, anyway!” He was a good deal peeved with us, I could see.

“What good would it have done?” I objected. “To begin with, we thought it was probably you, and we didn’t want to spoil your game, whatever it was. And if it had been someone else, we thought we had better stay put and see if they’d come out. Anyway, if it *were* someone else, we’d only give it away that we were on the watch, if we rushed right over to investigate, wouldn’t we?” The argument seemed to calm him down, and he agreed that perhaps it was best that we hadn’t interfered, but added:

“I’m going right over there this minute and see what I can find. I can pretend I’m hunting for a ball I’ve lost—or something like that—if I find anyone there.” He

produced a flashlight from his pocket and made for the clump of distant bushes, while we held our breath, waiting for an upheaval of some sort.

But nothing out of the way seemed to happen. We heard him rustling around and saw his flashlight bobbing here and there, and presently he came back and threw himself down on the grass near us.

“Well, was anyone there? What did you find?” we demanded.

“Nobody there now, but somebody *has* been, all righty!” he announced.

“How do you know?” cried Mary Lou. Boots felt in his pocket and took out something, flashed on his pocket light, and remarked:

“Found *this*—hanging on a twig! Explains the rip you heard!” And the flashlight revealed a long, narrow strip of white cloth, like the material of a man’s shirt!

“Mr. Conroy’s?” I breathed.

“Maybe, but I don’t quite see how it’s possible,” answered Boots surprisingly. “Because I’ve been watching his room all the time I’ve been in there. And I’m dead certain he didn’t leave it. I heard him coughing and sneezing every once in a while.”

“Then who under the sun could it be?” we both demanded.

“You’re asking *me*!” replied Boots. “That’s what *you* ought to have found out!”

CHAPTER VIII

THE DAY OF THE CLIPPERS

THINGS were pretty quiet for several days, after that moonlight night in the garden. Nothing exciting happened, and poor old Mr. Doane was left to go his way in peace. Mary Lou spent much time writing up her record book, but after she'd written an elaborate account of that eventful night there seemed nothing new to put in it. Boots did an enormous amount of scouting around, when he wasn't listening to our reading, playing jig-saw puzzles with us, or sketching ships, but we got no "forrader" (as Dickens would say) with our mystery. Then I went down to the town library one hot morning to hunt up some new books to read and brought one home that started things up again.

"What's that?" demanded Boots inquisitively, eyeing a thick volume I had brought in under my arm. We were all sitting in the upper hall by the big bay window, Mary Lou, Boots, and I. It was blazing hot and breathless outdoors, and a horde of mosquitoes were inhabiting the garden, so we had taken refuge in the comparatively cool upper hall.

"It's a new book I found at the library," I answered, "and it will particularly interest *you*, Boots. It's all about old South Street in New York City. It's a street running along the East River, I think, and from what I've gathered, just glancing over it, is a history of all the famous old ships and shipping that used to go on there in former years. It's full of pictures of ships, especially clippers, and you will probably find a lot of them worth sketching. Anyway, I was in luck to get it, as it's just come in, and I brought it along."

"Good!" he exclaimed, taking it from me and beginning to skim its pages. "Looks like a pippin! Get that picture of the *Montezuma*—and here's the *Flying Cloud*! Golly, I won't do a thing but eat this up!"

He was so full of excitement and interest over it, showing us the illustrations and reading some of the descriptions, that we didn't notice old Mr. Doane, who had stepped out of his room and come up behind us. Before we knew it, he was looking, deeply interested, over Boots's shoulder.

"Forgive me!" he smiled in his courtly, old-fashioned manner. "But I was in my room with the door open, and I heard you all talking about 'South Street,' and the name intrigued me, so I came out to see what it was all about. What have you here?"

I explained about the book, and Boots handed it to him, and his blue eyes actually sparkled with excitement as he looked it over.

“This is marvelous!” he exclaimed. “This touches me deeply, for I once lived very near to South Street in my early years and know every inch of the ground. I wonder if I might be allowed to borrow the book from you, when you have all finished with it?”

“Sure thing! Take it right now!” cried Boots, generously relinquishing it. I could have hugged the youngster, for I knew he was dying to keep it and start sketching from it. “We can read it any time,” Mary Lou and I both chimed in, urging him to take it at once, and he tucked it under his arm with a lovely, “Thank you!” for us all.

“And now,” he went on, “may I suggest that you all come in and sit in my room for a while? You will find it much cooler even than this hall, as it has a draught from both directions. And we might have a pleasant chat. I have not been feeling very well for the last few days, but I am better this morning and would enjoy your company.”

We didn’t need a second invitation, and joyfully accepted his suggestion. It was a lucky day for us, for the simple little affair of that book led us quite a bit farther along the road of our mystery.

Mr. Doane’s room was semi-darkened and seemed lovely and cool and refreshing after the heat and glare outside. The odd, fascinating figurehead over the mantel stood out curiously in the comparative darkness of the room, but I missed the great Ming vase that I had been used to seeing there by the fireplace. Mr. Doane, however, did not allude to it but started in at once to talk of the new book we had discovered and tell us something about his boyhood home in lower New York.

“I wish I could adequately describe to you,” he began, “what the city was like, in that part of it particularly, in my boyhood days. Such quiet, shaded streets, and fine, dignified old homes. One would never recognize it now for the same location. I took a trip down there two or three years ago, in a friend’s car, and I confess I scarcely knew where I was—the noise, the dirt, the terrible tenements crowded with foreigners, the rush and roar of traffic! I was utterly disheartened and asked him to drive away from the region as quickly as possible. But those are the changes one must expect, with advancing years.

“My home was on Henry Street—a big old brick house on a corner, with a brick wall and garden around it. Henry Street was only four or five blocks north of South Street, and I spent many of my boyhood days rambling the East River waterfront. I knew every inch of it. The long loading docks ran right out into the river from one side of the street, just as you see in these illustrations in this book, and the great spars of the vessels stretched out over the street, as they lay in their docks, and there was always the most fascinating smell of spices and tea and foreign odors about. Even as a small boy, I found it quite thrilling.”

“Golly! that would get me, too, all right!” murmured Boots, and Mr. Doane smiled at him appreciatively.

“I believe it would, my boy,” he commented. Then he went on:

“My father was a shipowner in the China trade, and his office was in Beekman Street, near where it crosses South. That was quite a distance from where we lived, but many a day, after I grew old enough, I used to walk down there with him along the waterfront and sit about listening to the talk of ships and shipping and all sorts of marine matters. Then I would prowl about the old ship chandleries and figurehead shops and talk with the longshoremen and stevedores. When one of my father’s ships was expected home after a long voyage—that was a time of great excitement! Word would be telegraphed from Sandy Hook that one of his vessels (he had three) was approaching, and my father would usually drive us down to the Battery to see her come in. The whole family often went, and it was a sight worth seeing.

“The Battery was, in those days, still a very fashionable park and promenade for the whole city, and it was an event, when a clipper ship was reported approaching from Sandy Hook, for as many as could do so to turn out and go to see her arrival from the Battery wall. It was a magnificent sight to behold one of these stately vessels under full sail, approaching through the Narrows, nearing port through the Upper Bay, gradually dropping her lighter canvas as she came nearer her berth, and at last being towed to her dock by the busy little tugs of the harbor. And you can imagine the added thrill to me when one of these homing clippers happened to be one of my father’s own ships. After she had passed the Battery, we would drive hastily up South Street to her particular dock, and there witness the real arrival and some of the unloading.

“Many a ship came in with strange tales. Some of them had been away sometimes for a year, sometimes even more, and had often encountered strange adventures: hurricanes, threatened shipwreck, other ships wrecked or burned. Not infrequently some of the surviving passengers and crew were aboard. Those were wild, thrilling, exciting days!”

“Did your father’s ships ever have any of these adventures?” interrupted Boots, his eyes shining with interest.

“No ship ever seemed to have a thoroughly uneventful voyage, in those days,” answered Mr. Doane, “and my father’s were no exception. Most of them had their share, but in the main, his vessels were lucky. Whatever of an unfortunate nature befell them, they always seemed to get to port with their hulls and their cargoes intact. All but the *Folly*: she seemed destined to an unlucky existence from the first!”

At the mention of the *Folly* we all pricked up our ears and grew tense with the

hope that he would say something revealing about her, and this time we were not disappointed.

“I have often wondered,” I ventured, “why she was named *Folly*. It seems such a strange name for a ship!”

“There was a reason,” said Mr. Doane thoughtfully. “Perhaps this will explain it: She was built in the year 1857. It had been a period of great financial depression in the country, and there were fewer and fewer clippers being built. Steam had come to stay, and the day of the wooden sailing vessel was rapidly passing, though my father was one of the last to acknowledge or even believe it. He had not suffered greatly during the depression, and made it a practice to keep three vessels always in service. One that he had was growing old and somewhat out of date and was about to be sold, and he was looking to replace her with a new one. All his business friends advised him against another clipper, saying it was *folly* to put any more money into that type of vessel. But he was unconvinced and, out of sheer bravado, I think, had a new one started and declared he would prove his point by naming her *Folly*, and would even have an appropriate figurehead carved with which to decorate her. That is how she came by her name!

“I have never been superstitious, but it has often seemed to me that he threw a challenge in the face of Providence by naming this ship as he did, for a ‘folly’ she proved, from the day of her first voyage to her untimely end! She was away nine months on her first trip, on the return voyage of which her captain had had to deal with a first-class mutiny among his crew. Half of them were below decks, still in irons, and a valuable cargo had been so damaged by them, before the mutiny had been quelled, that practically two thirds of it was worthless.

“On her second voyage, with the same captain and officers, but a different crew, another form of trouble befell. Again on her return voyage, before she was well out of Chinese waters, she had a very nearly fatal encounter with Chinese pirates, who actually managed to board her, but were, after a pretty desperate encounter (during which several sailors and one officer lost their lives) driven off, and the *Folly* escaped. They must have managed, however, to set fire to her cargo, for it was later discovered that one of the holds was afire. It was extinguished, after great difficulty, but not before a goodly portion of the cargo had again been damaged. To add to these misfortunes, the captain’s wife, who had accompanied him on this voyage, was taken ill on the return trip, died, and had to be buried at sea. And it ended in that particular captain refusing ever to sail this vessel again.”

“How many other voyages did she sail?” inquired Boots at this point.

“Only one,” sighed Mr. Doane. “And it was her last—and from it she never

returned!”

We all held our breath! Here was the point at which he had stopped once before and refused to go on. Would he continue the story and enlighten us just a little more? I was scared stiff for fear Boots or Mary Lou might be moved to ask him some leading question and frighten him away from it. But, fortunately, they were wise enough to keep silent too! After a moment, almost as if he weren't thinking of us at all, he went on:

“She lay in drydock several months after that second trip, getting some much needed repairs, for she had also encountered some damaging storms on that trip. Then, when she was ready to sail again, came the question of finding for her another captain. None of the seasoned ones seemed willing to take the job. They were afraid of her record—even, I think, afraid of her name! And I don't know that I blame them. At last my father's nephew, his brother's son, who had had a number of years' experience as an officer in the China trade on another packet line, volunteered for the post and was welcomed joyfully. He was all the more acceptable to my father, because the ship had a special mission to undertake, on her return voyage—a secret and most important one—and my father felt far safer in entrusting it to the hands of a relative than he would have to a strange captain. On this mission the ship was to come straight from China to San Francisco, and after her stop there, on around the Horn to New York. She reached San Francisco, where the first part of this secret mission took place, made her way around the Horn, and was on her way on the long northward stretch when misfortune befell her—the third and last of her unhappy career! And now there is only this figurehead to remember her by, alas!” He sighed again and sat staring out of the window at the tree branches moving fitfully in the light breeze. The rest of us sat silent, wide-eyed, scarcely daring to breathe! Would he go on? Would he explain the mystery of that strangely recovered figurehead? We dared not ask it! Presently he roused himself once more, and, to our wild joy, continued:

“It was the year 1861, the opening year of the Civil War, and the *Folly* must have reached the coast of South Carolina when——”

At this moment a most unfortunate thing happened: the lunch gong sounded and broke the spell of our enthralling tale! Old Mr. Doane started as if waked from a dream, looked around at us all as if he had just realized we were there, shook his head, and smiled a little vaguely.

“I have been rambling, I fear!” he said as if in apology. “You must forgive an old man for his far-away reminiscences. Come in and see me another day and I will tell you other tales of the clipper ships of long ago.”

There was nothing to do for it but to thank him and wheel Mary Lou out and all

of us proceed to lunch. But as we got out in the hall Boots shook both fists at the empty air and muttered:

“Doggone that gong! I would have crowned Julia with it, if I’d been near enough!”

“Don’t blame the poor maid,” I chuckled. “But it certainly *was* unfortunate!”

“It was worse than that, it was a *crime!*” mourned Boots. “But don’t you worry, I think we can get the rest out of him yet.”

CHAPTER IX

CONFLICTING CLUES

IT was the afternoon of the day after our visit in Mr. Doane's room. Our household had been, for the time, somewhat reduced, and everything was very quiet. Miss Markham had left the day before to spend a few days in New York, as she had told Aunt Elsie, to give some radio piano concerts for which she was scheduled. It seems she was occasionally away for this purpose, either for radio work or on concert tours elsewhere. We missed her beautiful music and felt she would be very welcome when she got back. There was another absence, too, that we in no way regretted! Mrs. Rowland had gone on a week's visit to some niece in Connecticut, and we were having a happy interval. For one thing, we had the big screened porch free for our own use and rejoiced accordingly. Mrs. Rowland was always on it, using the big glider couch, and when she was there we never used the porch if we wanted any peace of mind.

On this warm afternoon Mary Lou was lying on the couch, so glad to have it instead of her usual wheel chair, and was taking a nap among the cushions. She had been busy all morning writing up an account of our momentous interview with Mr. Doane in her record book and was rather tired. Mr. and Mrs. Fraser were away for the day, Mr. Doane was out for his usual walk, and Aunt Elsie was resting in her own room. Boots was off also on some affairs of his own, and the utmost quiet seemed to prevail. I was sitting near Mary Lou, reading to myself, when Karen came out on the porch with Mary Lou's afternoon glass of milk on a little tray.

"Let's put it on the table and not wake Mary Lou yet a while," I told Karen. "She may wake any minute, but I hate to rouse her when she's having such a quiet nap." Karen put the tray down and lingered a moment to chat with me. I asked her to sit down and rest while we were alone, and she did so very thankfully. She told me that she had been very busy cleaning Miss Markham's room. It wasn't exactly her job, but Aunt Elsie wanted the room cleaned and repainted while Miss Markham was away, as it had been needing it for a long time, and this seemed a good period to get it done. Aunt Elsie had arranged with Karen to do the cleaning up and was paying her extra for it.

"But I'll be glad when this summer is over, Miss Joan," Karen confided to me, "and we get back again to your home. Miss McKeever is very nice, but it's a queer place. I sometimes wonder about the things that goes on here."

"Why, what do you mean, Karen?" I demanded, secretly curious about what she

had discovered. I knew that servants often see much that goes on which their employers never suspect.

“Well, for instance—” she hesitated—“take what happened last night. I was going up the back stairs to my room after dinner was over and things fixed in the kitchen for morning. It wasn’t quite dark yet—and when I got to the top of the back stairs on the second floor, who should I see coming out of Miss Markham’s room—you know, her door is right by them back stairs—but Mr. Conroy! I think it was queer, he coming out of that room, and she only left for the city that morning! He must have see I think it queer, for he kind of smiled and said he saw the door open and he know she was gone, so he thought he look in and see what her room was like. I say why should he care what her room was like, because you see, Miss Joan, I didn’t like it that he should be poking around, though it isn’t none of my business. But he said he knew she goes away and he thought maybe for good. So he look in her room to see is it better than his and maybe Miss McKeever let him change. He says he don’t get no breeze in his room nights and it is very hot. I tell him Miss Markham come back in a few days, she ain’t giving up her room, and he says, oh, that’s all right then—it was his mistake. So I didn’t think no more about it. It sounded all right to me.

“But, Miss Joan, this morning, when I start to clean her room, I was taking out a lot of trash she left and told Miss McKeever it could be throwed away, a big bundle of old clothes and whatever was lying all wrapped up in a corner—and afterward I look at it to see if maybe anything I could use myself. And, Miss Joan, what do I find in that lot but a *man’s shirt*—quite a nice one—only it had a big hole all down the back, like some of it had got ripped out somehow! Now, I ask you, Miss Joan, how does a man’s shirt get in among Miss Markham’s things? It ain’t none of hers, that’s certain! And all I could think of was that Mr. Conroy put it there last night, for what else does he go in there? But why should he do it? Well, I shouldn’t know—but it does look funny!”

I was stunned at this report, but for reasons Karen didn’t even guess. I agreed with her that it *did* look funny, but before we could discuss it any further or I could get any more out of Karen, Mary Lou woke up and I gave her the milk. Then Karen said she had to go in to commence preparing for dinner, and she left us. I was just about to confide what Karen had told me to Mary Lou, when Boots himself came whistling through the hall, and I called him out and told them both together, and we held a council of war.

“Can you beat *that?*” cried Boots, when I had imparted Karen’s astonishing bit of information. “Now, just let’s try to figure out what old Conroy was trying to do

when he hid that shirt in among Miss Markham's cast-off things."

"Maybe he was trying to get rid of it," I hazarded. "But why? Of course, it had a big rip in it, and it wasn't any good to him any more, but he could have thrown it away among his own trash. Why tuck it in with her things?"

"I got it!" declared Boots, who had been doing some heavy thinking. "It was a *plant*, that's what it was!"

"A 'plant'?" queried Mary Lou, wondering. "Whatever do you mean?"

"Oh, I don't mean nothing that grows," Boots informed her, perceiving that she must have taken him literally. "That means, in detective language, something that's put where it hasn't no business to be, don't you see? Just to fool people! He planted it there just to make believe it belonged to Miss Markham, in case any question ever came up about it. If somebody had heard him in the bushes that night, and heard that rip when his shirt got torn, why, they'd spot him right away, if it ever was found and there was trouble. So he goes and plants it on Miss Markham!"

"But that's nonsense, Boots!" I contradicted. "It was a *man's* shirt, and anyone would know Miss Markham doesn't own any, probably, so where does that get him?"

"I don't care!" he retorted. "That's what it was. Women *do* wear 'em sometimes, for hiking and riding. My mother does when we go to camp in the Adirondacks."

"But Miss Markham never hikes or rides!" I countered, and Boots would only reply:

"How do you know that she never does? You've only known her a few weeks." I had no reply to that, and so dropped the argument. But we speculated quite a while longer on the whole curious incident, and finally Boots announced:

"I know what I'm going to do, though. This has given me a swell idea!" But when we questioned him, he irritatingly refused to explain, and went off, leaving us to wonder whether he was going to get into any unwarranted mischief.

A short while before dinner, when we were still out on the porch, Boots came to the hall door and beckoned me inside a moment. His father and mother were also sitting out there with us, so I supposed he didn't want them to know what he was up to. When I went in I found him in the grimmest condition I had yet seen him—his hair tousled and dusty, his perspiring face streaked with dirt, and his hands simply filthy, as well as his clothes. He seemed very much excited about something.

"Look here, Joan!" he panted, "you got to help me out in something, and I just want to explain about it before Ma gets me and rushes me upstairs to clean up for dinner!"

“What *have* you been up to?” I demanded. “You look simply a sight!”

“I know it,” he declared, “but it’s all in a mystery solver’s life. I’ve been down cellar, doing some detective work. Now don’t have a cat-fit! I haven’t a chance to do any explaining just now, but I got a whole laundry bag full of stuff I got to examine, and I didn’t know what to do with it, ’cause Ma’d catch me with it if I had it in my room. So I ran upstairs and hid it in your clothes closet. I just told you, so you wouldn’t discover it first and maybe raise the roof! Will you keep it there till I can look it over, Joan? There’s a good scout!”

“Of course I’ll keep it, if you like,” I agreed. “But what is it? Did you discover anything worth while?”

“I found two things—but I tell you the dinner-bell’s going to ring any minute, and if Ma catches me looking like this I’ll probably get sent to my room right after dinner, so let me get away pronto! I’ll explain all about it this evening.” And he went racing off upstairs.

I was bursting with curiosity to go up to my room and examine that laundry bag myself, but I didn’t get a chance, as the gong rang just about two minutes later, and I had to go in to dinner and then bring out Mary Lou’s to her. While I was sitting with her as she ate hers, I told her what Boots had confided to me, and she was immediately all excitement to hear his version of the story. Shortly after that, he came out, still with a piece of chocolate cake in his hand, and demanded:

“Can’t we get Mary Lou out in the garden for a while? I got some pretty important things to discuss, and everybody’ll be swarming out here in a few minutes.”

“The mosquitoes may eat us alive!” I said. “They’ve been pretty bad today. But we can try it for a while, anyway. Go and find Osgood, and we’ll get her into her chair and down the steps.” And mosquitoes or no mosquitoes, I made up my mind that we’d have to stay there till we heard what Boots had to disclose.

They were quite as bad as we’d expected—if not worse—the mosquitoes, I mean. And we sat out under the trees, slapping and scratching, while Boots told his curious tale. It seems that the talk about the torn shirt found in Miss Markham’s room had inspired him with a brand-new idea. There might be clues to be found in the discarded trash and rubbish taken down from not only her room, but the scrap baskets of the other rooms also. And while some house-cleaning was going on, and before the rubbish got thrown away or burned up, he determined to go down cellar and look it over. The cellar stairs led down directly from the kitchen, and, fearing he might be stopped in his excursion by the maids, he made the excuse to Karen that he wanted to find some rags to clean his bicycle with, and she let him go down.

Incidentally, however, he had his empty laundry bag concealed under his sweater!

“First thing I wanted to find was that shirt!” he confided to us. “I know where there’s a line down there where Karen and Julia keep their cleaning cloths, or any kind of rags they can use that way, and I thought maybe the shirt might have been put there, seeing it was so torn up. And I was dead right!—There it was, and I didn’t do a thing but stuff it right into that laundry bag!”

“What did you want the shirt for?” queried Mary Lou wonderingly.

“I’ll tell you that later,” he answered darkly. “I got a reason.”

“There’s one thing I simply can’t understand about all this torn shirt affair!” I interrupted. “That night when we were sitting out here in the garden and heard the ripping sound, someone in this house *must* have been there in the bushes, but how did they get out so quickly afterward, without our seeing them? It was a bright moonlight night.”

“That’s easy!” retorted Boots. “That clump of bushes is thick and high and leads right along to a path that’s lined with other bushes, down toward the other end of the garden. Whoever it was slipped out on the opposite side from you, ran along, keeping hidden by the bushes, till they got to the end near the kitchen door, slipped in that way and up the back stairs. Maids had all gone to bed, so no one was around to see. Then, when I had gone downstairs—it must have been after that, or I’d have seen ’em—they slipped back into their room.”

“Yes,” I countered, “I suppose that wasn’t impossible, but how could it have been Mr. Conroy, when you say you heard him sneezing and coughing in his room all the time?”

This was a poser that even Boots couldn’t get around. And he finally had to admit that it stumped him too and that we’d have to think it out later.

“But what else did you find down cellar today?” demanded Mary Lou, growing impatient with all this argument.

“Well, I was coming to that,” replied Boots, “only you got me sidetracked. What I was looking for most, after the shirt, was where the trash and scraps from the waste baskets had been dumped. Julia cleans them out every morning when she does the rooms, and I was afraid it might all have been burned up, like they do every once in a while, in the furnace. But I was lucky! It was all lying in a big pile near the furnace door, and I suppose Osgood’ll burn it tomorrow, so I wasn’t any too soon. And the rest of my time I spent going over that trash—and *was* it some job!”

“But what were you looking for?” I queried curiously. “I can’t see what you’d expect to find that was helpful there.”

“Never can tell!” he replied. “People scribble notes and get letters or write ’em

and tear 'em up—plenty of room for detective work there. I didn't take everything I saw, of course, but I did find some scraps that looked promising—one lot especially—and I'm going to sort 'em all over tomorrow, if I can get a chance. Then I'll make a report later, if I find anything worth while. Not such a bad idea, what?"

"I don't know about that, Boots," I replied doubtfully. "Somehow I don't like this idea of going through people's cast-off letters and private correspondence, even if they *have* thrown it away. It doesn't seem honest and aboveboard—kind of mean, somehow." But Boots grew very indignant over this argument.

"Look here!" he cried hotly. "That's all applesauce! Of course it would be sneaky and rotten—if everything was all right. I wouldn't think of doing it then! But somebody in this dump is trying to do something sneaky and rotten to poor old Mr. Doane—you gotta admit *that*! And if we can help find the one that's doing it and put a stop to it all and give Mr. Doane a hand, I can't see where there's anything dishonest about using any way we can to do it, can you?"

I had to admit that I couldn't, and we let the matter drop. At that moment Aunt Elsie called from the porch that we'd better bring Mary Lou indoors, as the mosquitoes must be eating her alive, which was altogether true. But before Boots left to call Osgood, we begged him once more to tell us what he wanted with that torn shirt and got only the reply:

"Not till I do some investigating about it myself."

CHAPTER X

JIG-SAW PUZZLE

THE next morning, Boots got to work shortly after breakfast, in my room, and we saw nothing of him for a couple of hours. I had made my bed, dusted the room and told Julia she need not bother with it that day. Then I turned it over to Boots, told him to lock himself in, and he could be undisturbed to sort out his laundry bag of trash, while Mary Lou and I camped out elsewhere. It was the only place where he could be quite undisturbed. Meanwhile, Mary Lou and I settled down to read on the cool and shady screened porch, both very impatient to hear from Boots about what he had found—if anything.

We were joined presently by Mr. Doane, with a book under his arm. He sat down in one of the comfortable porch chairs and began to talk, in the delightful way he has when he's in the mood for it. Somehow it had seemed, for the past day or two, as if he were in better spirits than usual, as if something pleasant had happened to cheer him. We couldn't exactly account for it, but it was nice to see him so cheerful and happy.

"I am returning the book you so kindly loaned me," he began. "I have read it through, and it quite fascinated me. It has so much, so very much, of my old home and locality, and the atmosphere of ships and shipping in old New York!"

"Are you sure you don't want to keep it longer?" I suggested. "We can read it any time, you know."

"No, I liked it so much that I have sent for a copy," he answered. "That is a book I feel I cannot afford to be without. I hope you enjoy it as much as I do, but I fear that only those who knew the region and the conditions in those days could do that!"

He went on to talk, for nearly an hour, about old New York, as he knew it when a boy, and we listened, too fascinated even to make many comments or ask questions. He described the quiet streets, with no trolleys or automobiles—only occasional funny little horse-drawn street cars—the pretty roads up along the East River, the grand sleighing parties in the winter, the old theaters and plays, Jenny Lind when she sang at Castle Garden, and Charles Dickens on his first trip to this country. He rambled on and on, at last getting back to the subject of his beloved clipper ships, and finally told us the story of the clipper *Nightingale*, and how she was discovered to have been used as a "slaver," after an exciting capture. Just as he had finished this, Boots poked his head out of the front door and called:

“Oh, Joan, do you know where I can find any paste?” I couldn’t imagine what he wanted paste for, but I didn’t dare to ask, with Mr. Doane sitting there, so I simply told him I thought there was a tube of it on Aunt Elsie’s desk at the back of the living room, and he went off to get it.

“What is the lad up to now?” asked Mr. Doane, idly and genially, and Mary Lou and I were suddenly seized with a terrible confusion at this, the most embarrassing question he could have asked. I couldn’t imagine what he would think if we actually told him! So I only remarked that I really didn’t know myself (which was, fortunately, quite true!) and Mr. Doane went on to say:

“He is a remarkably bright young lad! I have taken quite a fancy to him. It only goes to show how mistaken one may be in a first judgment of a person’s character. Before I became better acquainted with him I had thought he was a quite incorrigible young person, without a redeeming quality that *I* could see.”

“I think the main trouble with Boots was that nobody seemed to take much interest in him—just expected him to make a nuisance of himself—and of course he did,” I suggested. “As soon as he found that Mary Lou and I liked to have him with us—and you also sort of adopted him, Mr. Doane—he stopped being at all troublesome.”

“You have certainly worked a miracle with him!” smiled Mr. Doane. “And now I must be away on my walk—and I bid you ‘good-morning’.”

He had no sooner disappeared down the path and through the gate in the hedge when Boots popped out from the hall door.

“Gee!—I thought he’d never go!” he exploded. “I got a few things to say, all right!” And he plumped himself down in the porch chair just vacated by Mr. Doane.

“What?” Mary Lou and I both cried at once. “What have you discovered?”

“Plenty!” he remarked cryptically, and proceeded to extract some curious scraps of yellow paper from his pocket, where he’d had them tied up in a none-too-clean handkerchief. But these he laid aside for a moment. Then he went on:

“But first, before I looked over the trash, I did a bit of exploring on the second floor. The painters were just going to begin on Miss Markham’s room and were covering things up with pieces of cloth—the furniture, I mean. I just strolled in there and took a look around, seeing the place was kind of public property just now. Gosh, but she has lots of musical things around—a big grand piano standing in the middle of the floor, and a funny-looking, dinky little piano of some kind, without any legs, over in one corner on a table. Queerest thing! I touched the keys, and it didn’t make any sound at all.”

“Oh, I know what *that* is!” I laughed. “It’s a clavier—an instrument with only

keys, like the piano, but no strings to make a sound. A friend of mine in school, who was studying music, had one. They use it to practice on—difficult parts that they want to go over and over and get their fingers used to. Then, when they've practiced it enough, they play it on the real piano. But it saves themselves and others the nuisance of listening to a monotonous noise gone over and over a lot of times."

"Well, I'm glad to know what it was," remarked Boots. "I couldn't think why she had such a dumb-looking piano around. But that wasn't all the music things she had. There was a good-looking, great big cabinet with a radio and victrola combined: one of the kind that's self-adjusting, or whatever you call it. Don't have to be hanging over 'em all the time changing records. That's about all was in the room—it's kind of small—except for a couch and bureau and a couple of chairs. Most all musical things."

"Well, I suppose she has the radio and victrola so she can hear other artists play, too," I commented. "All musical people like to hear how others are rendering the same things they play. But, Boots, what did you go in there for, to begin with?"

"Just to see if there were any more scraps or things lying around like Karen found," he explained, "but there weren't. Everything washed up—or covered up—ready for the painters. Then I moved on to another job I had on hand. I s'pose you'll give me the dickens for this, but I just had to check up on it. I saw a package of Mr. Conroy's wash lying outside the door of his room. It had just been delivered, and I guess Julia left it there till she could take it in. The list of things was on the outside of the paper, tucked in under the string, like the laundry always leaves it. So I just went over to it, knelt down, and gave it the once-over. And *did* I get a shock!"

"What do you mean?" I cried indignantly. "You didn't open that package and go over his laundry, did you?"

"Now, don't get all het up!" grinned Boots soothingly. "You know me! Of *course* I didn't."

"Well, what *did* you do then?" I asked wonderingly.

"Just gave a squint at the printed list," he enlightened us. "You know, that laundry always has a place on its list where it puts the number of that person's own laundry mark. I know this, 'cause Mother sends things to the same laundry. And I wanted to find out what laundry mark Mr. Conroy has. Now do you see?"

"No, we don't!" cried Mary Lou. "What did you want to know for?"

"Oh, *I* get it!" I exclaimed excitedly. "You're *clever*, Boots! You wanted to compare it with the one on that torn shirt, didn't you? *Now* I know why you wanted to look it over."

"Dead right!" said Boots. "But here's where I struck a snag, it wasn't the same

laundry mark as the one on that torn shirt!”

“It *wasn't*?” we gasped.

“No, it wasn't—and explain *that*, if you can!” said Boots mournfully. “I'm not so sure now that that shirt did belong to Mr. Conroy, unless he had it washed at another laundry. And I can't see any reason for that!”

“Well, that old shirt seems to be causing us more bother than anything else,” I remarked. “But let's leave it for consideration another time. What else did you do, Boots?”

“Now we're getting down to business!” he went on. “I locked myself in your room and started to sort over the scraps I'd brought up in the laundry bag. Most of it was no account at all, just old letters and bills and things like that, some of 'em torn up and some just crumpled up. I didn't read 'em, just glanced over 'em enough to see there wasn't anything that would interest us. But then I struck *this*, an' I knew I had something that'd be worth looking into. It was torn up so fine I don't know's we'll ever get it together right, but we're going to try!” He reached over to another chair where he had placed the handkerchief and produced it, spreading out a series of tiny torn bits of yellow paper.

“What *is* it?” we demanded curiously, for in that shape nothing was recognizable.

“It's a *telegram*!” he announced. “And nobody would tear a telegram up as fine as that, unless they didn't want anyone else to read it. Probably if there'd been a fire around the house anywhere they'd've burned it. Seeing there wasn't, they did the next best thing—tore it into fine scraps. But yours truly's going to put 'em together—if he can! That's what I wanted the paste for—going to paste 'em on another piece of paper, as near as we can fit 'em together!”

“But whose telegram was this, Boots?” I demanded. “I somehow don't think you ought to do this. Telegrams are private property, just the same as letters.”

“Oh, heck! Do we have to go over all that again?” he moaned. “We decided before that we're trying to catch the mean cuss that's trying to harm Mr. Doane, aren't we? This might give us some idea what's going on. And if it's nothing that concerns us, why, no harm's done. We can just throw it away and forget it, can't we?”

“I suppose so,” I conceded. “There certainly seems to be an emergency of some kind, and we've just happened to stumble on some of its queer points. Well, let's get at it and see what we can make of the thing. It'll be like piecing together a regular jig-saw puzzle.”

Boots brought over a small table, and we began to lay out the tiny pieces of yellow paper, but it was certainly a mess, trying to fit them together. They were all so

irregularly torn and crumpled, and we hadn't got far before we felt sure some of them were missing. Finally I suggested that we sort out all the pieces with straight edges first, as they probably formed the outside edge of the telegram sheet. The regular printed form of the telegraph company helped some too. When this outside edge was arranged properly, as far as we could get it, with bits missing, we carefully pasted them all, as close together as possible, in what seemed their order, on another sheet of paper, and proceeded to sort out the rest. It all took a long time, but we got so fascinated, working it out, that we didn't notice how the time was flying. More and more words, or parts of words, grew out of the puzzle, and Mary Lou proved cleverer than any of us at finding places for the odd scraps. Suddenly we realized that we had managed to place every piece we had, and we stared, very much puzzled, at the result.

"Can you make out what it says?" cried Boots, wild with excitement over our discovery. But Mary Lou, who had glanced up from our work just then, whispered distractedly:

"Oh, quick—*quick!* Hide everything! Here comes Mr. Doane up the path!"

CHAPTER XI

THE TELEGRAM

FOR the first and only time we'd ever known it to happen, Mr. Doane lingered about longer than we wanted to have him. He was hot and tired from his walk, and sat down in the chair Boots had politely vacated at his appearance, mopping his face with his handkerchief and commenting on the heat of the day and some slight happenings of his walk.

"I think I'll rest here a while before going upstairs," he remarked. "This is indeed a warm day, but nothing to the heat of China, as I remember it, when I spent a year or two there on business for my father." And then he began to give us a long account of his adventures in China, which would have been thrilling enough at any other time, but we were fairly squirming to get back to the much more thrilling affair of the patched-together telegram! Mary Lou had scrambled the paper together and stuffed it between the pages of a book she was reading. We could only sit and listen, while he rambled on and on. At last he came to an end and half rose to go when he spied Mary Lou's book, lying on the table. He always took an enormous interest in anything we were reading, so he reached out his hand quite naturally for it, asking what we were interested in now! My heart fairly stood still with terror, and so, I am certain did those of Mary Lou and Boots! But just at that moment the lunch gong sounded, and he put it down without further comment, saying he must hurry up to his room to wash and change his wilted collar before the meal.

"Holy cat!" muttered Boots, when he had disappeared through the hall door. "I sure thought we were lost *that* time!"

"So did I!" cried Mary Lou. "I think I'd have fainted away if he'd found that thing! Who knows but what it may belong to him?"

"And now we'll have to wait till after lunch to talk it over!" complained Boots. "Well, we'll have to live through it somehow, and I guess I'll manage to survive. I'm hungry as an elephant. Let's meet out here afterwards. Everybody'll go to their room to take a nap."

It was a long and tasteless lunch to me, though Karen had made some of her delicious potato soup and banana fritters. Boots, as usual, ate with gusto and had second helpings of everything. I never saw a boy with such an appetite—no matter what exciting thing was happening. But at last, when everyone else was out of the way, we got together again on the porch, drew out the precious telegram (Mary Lou had insisted on sitting on it all during the interval, to prevent further discovery!), and

began to study it in earnest. And this is the way the curious, broken message ran:

BE . . . IDEOUT NEX . . . UESDAY NI . . . STOP ALL
ARRANGE . . . INISH JO . . . HIS TIME STOP

We all stared with excited interest at the strange, jumbled message, wondering what it meant, and whether we could puzzle out the missing parts, and make anything out of it if we did.

“The thing to do,” decided Boots, “is to take every word we think we know and write it down in its proper place and then try to figure out the rest the best we can _____”

“Well,” interrupted Mary Lou, “there’s the word ‘be’ and then there’s ‘stop,’ two times, and ‘time’ and ‘all.’ And those are the only ones that seem to be all there!”

“That ‘stop’ probably doesn’t mean a word at all,” I suggested. “They use that in telegrams instead of a period usually. You know they can’t put in punctuation marks.”

“Right you are!” commented Boots. “We’ll just cut ‘stop’ out and say it means the end of a sentence.”

“But then we only know ‘be’ and ‘time’ and ‘all,’” complained Mary Lou. “Except—oh!—here is ‘arrange’! We ’most forgot that.” In the meantime, I had been staring at the message.

“I’m certain ‘uesday’ must be part of Tuesday.” I suddenly announced. “What else could it be?”

“Yes—and ‘nex’ must be ‘next’—what else could *that* be?” chimed in Boots. “And there we have ‘next Tuesday’ right off the bat! The ‘t’ in ‘next’ and the ‘T’ in ‘Tuesday’ are on the missing piece.”

It was growing more exciting than the most baffling crossword puzzle we had ever tried to work out. We all bent over it, breathless with just the sheer joy of getting a completed whole.

“Here’s ‘ni,’ right next to ‘Tuesday,’” said Boots, sucking the end of a very stubby pencil thoughtfully. “It’s part of a word—and the first part, too—’cause it comes right after ‘Tuesday’ without a break.”

“*Night!*” shrieked Mary Lou gleefully, and I whispered, “*Ssh*—somebody’ll hear you!” while Boots scribbled it down without a question. There couldn’t have been one, anyhow—everything was so plain there. So then we had “next Tuesday night” and that was evidently the end of a sentence, as the first “stop” came right after it.

“Now let’s go backwards,” suggested Boots, “and see if we can figure what that queer word is just before it. Let’s see—‘hideout’—that doesn’t spell ‘idiot,’ does it, girls?” Mary Lou and I burst into shouts of laughter, and Boots looked rather chagrined, while I told him how the word he had suggested was really spelled.

“I think it’s a part of some other word,” I ended. “Here’s a way I sometimes work out a crossword puzzle. Let’s begin at ‘a,’ and tack on each letter of the alphabet at the front of the word, till we come to one that makes sense. ‘A’ of course doesn’t, and neither does ‘b.’”

We went through the list till we came to ‘h,’ and then it was Boots’s turn to give a whoop of joy.

“*Hideout!*” he chortled. “We’re getting hotter and hotter! If that word isn’t a give-away, I don’t know one!”

“Yes, it is,” I agreed thoughtfully. “The thing looked innocent enough till we discovered this. But ‘hideout’ certainly has a very sinister sound, for a telegram! Now it reads, ‘hideout next Tuesday night.’ And before that, there’s a space and the ‘be,’ to begin it. The question is, is that ‘be’ a word by itself or the first part of another word?”

“Suppose,” I ventured, “that we first take it for granted it’s a word by itself—just ‘be’—and see how the thing reads? ‘Be . . . hideout next Tuesday night’——”

“How about ‘*at,*’ in between?” shouted Boots. And he rocked so hard in his excitement that he tipped his chair clear over backwards and came down in a heap on his head, making an awful clatter! Half a minute later, there came the voice of Mrs. Fraser, calling down the stairs:

“Boots! I want you to come straight up here to me. You have been making a most outrageous noise—it woke me up out of a sound sleep. Come upstairs this *minute!*” Her voice sounded very sleepy and annoyed.

“Aw—Ma!” he cried, going to the hall door. “I didn’t mean it—I just got excited about something and tipped the chair over backward!”

“I don’t care how it happened—you come up here!” she answered. And Boots, with a dejected look at us, was just about to obey when I went to the rescue.

“He didn’t really mean to be noisy, Mrs. Fraser,” I went in and explained. “I’m terribly sorry you were disturbed, but we wish you’d excuse him this time. We’ll try to be very quiet from now on!”

“Very well,” she conceded. “If you want him to stay and can make him behave, I’ll let it pass this time.” And she disappeared to resume her interrupted nap.

“Golly, but that was a near thing!” he whispered gratefully to me, as we returned to our seats. “Thanks a million, Joan. Now let’s get back to the telegram. This is

something—what? ‘Be at hideout Tuesday night.’”

“It certainly sounds pretty queer!” I agreed. “But let’s see what we can make out of the rest of it. By the way, here’s the word ‘arrange,’ which may be all of one word or part of another, like ‘arrangement’ or ‘arranged.’ Taken with the word before it, it might read, ‘All arranged,’ only there’s quite a big space between it and what we’ve got next. Maybe we’ll just have to let that part go. Here’s the next word we have, that evidently has something missing at the beginning. Shall we try it out with the letters of the alphabet, as we did the others?”

“We tried to fit everything on the ‘inish’ till we came to ‘F’ and there we had ‘finish,’” and Boots gave a very suppressed whoop of triumph. But Mary Lou objected:

“It *might* be some longer word ending that way, like ‘diminish’—or others I can’t think of!”

“It might, but it’s hardly likely,” I decided. “‘Finish’ might make sense here, but I don’t think ‘diminish’ would. Let’s suppose it’s ‘finish’ and see how it reads. ‘Finish Jo’—heavens!—that looks as if someone were going to get murdered! Whose name is ‘Jo’ or ‘Joseph’ around here?”

“Yours!” Boots almost yelled, and I had to put my hand over his mouth to suppress him. “Doesn’t it begin with ‘Jo’?” he demanded, when I had unmuzzled him.

“To be sure,” I answered a little uneasily, for the thought had rather startled me. “But it’s simply silly to imagine this has anything to do with any of *us*! Now, let’s see—Mr. Doane’s name is Gilbert, and Mr. Conroy’s is William—I saw a letter addressed to him the other day—and your father’s is what, Boots?”

“Clarence,” he answered promptly. “Same as me. And Ma’s is Jane and Miss Markham’s is Melissa, and Mrs. Rowland’s is goodness knows what, but it doesn’t matter, ’cause I’m certain she isn’t in this thing!”

“Well,” I added, “there’s Aunt Elsie and Osgood and Julia and Karen, and that accounts for everyone. So I’m inclined to think this is some part of a word, and not somebody’s name. How about trying our alphabet again—this time on the end?”

We got no further than “b” when it became almost positive that the word must be “job,” as it made complete sense—“finish job.” There was only a tiny space vacant between that and the word “his” which preceded “time.” “His time” didn’t mean much, and it was Mary Lou who made the last suggestion, of supposing a “t” before “his” and making it “this time.” And after that, there wasn’t a doubt in the world but that the end of the telegram read: “Finish job this time!” We sat back and simply gasped. The whole message could be construed, “*Be at hideout next Tuesday*”

night. All arranged” (or “all arrangements made,” or something like that). “*Finish job this time.*”

“Boots,” I stuttered, “who—who could have—sent this thing? It doesn’t seem to be signed!”

“It didn’t need to be!” he assured us. “Whoever got it knew well enough who it was from—a thing like *that!*”

“But to whom did it come?” cried Mary Lou. “The place where the name and address usually is, isn’t there at all.”

“That’s just what I couldn’t find out,” groaned Boots. “Of course, when I found these pieces, they were all mixed up with lots of other trash from everyone’s waste basket, and I couldn’t tell where they had come from. I tried to find out by asking Julia if anyone’d got a telegram lately, and she said no, not that she knew. Then I asked her if she’d seen any little scraps of yellow paper when she emptied the waste baskets the last few days, and all she said was, ‘I ain’t got time to look at all the trash I empty—and what’s more, if you’re up to some mischief, I’m going to tell your ma on you.’ So I decided I better lay off asking any more questions. But I got a good hunch it was for Mr. Conroy.”

“Very likely!” I agreed. “But the next important thing is, just *when* is ‘next Tuesday night’? This is Friday. Does it mean Tuesday of next week? The date’s missing from this thing too.”

“I think it *must* mean next Tuesday,” Mary Lou suddenly decided. “Because Aunt Elsie is always very careful about emptying the scraps and having them burned as soon as possible. I know Osgood burned a lot last Tuesday, and he hasn’t burned any since, until today, so that telegram must have come this week—unless it’s one somebody got and kept a long while.”

“People don’t do that, as a rule,” I ventured. “They’re not like letters. No, I think we can take it for granted it means this coming Tuesday.”

“Okay, then!” agreed Boots. “But here’s the biggest question of all—or two questions: Where is this ‘hideout,’ and what are we going to do about it?”

“Ha! ha! And what are we all so busy about?” cackled a sudden voice from behind us. We all jumped and turned around, to behold Mrs. Rowland, who had evidently just come home in a taxi from the railroad station. She must have walked up the path and come up the steps unnoticed by us, as we were so deeply engrossed in our mystery. It was just like her to try and be funny and startle us that way. I was the first to recover my wits. Rising and sliding a book over our papers, I said, as sweetly as I could:

“How do you do, Mrs. Rowland? This is quite unexpected. We thought you

weren't to be home till Sunday!"

"My niece was suddenly called away to help take care of a sick friend," she announced rather glumly, "so of course I had to leave. I was quite disappointed. I'm glad to find you all so cosy and busy here on the porch. You so seldom use it. I'll join you here in a few minutes, after I've seen Miss McKeever and gone to my room. I want to tell you all about my trip!" And she trotted away into the hall.

"Not if I know it!" growled Boots. "She doesn't find *us* here! Where can we beat it to, girls? The pest's back on the job. Can't we go to your room, Joan—or Mary Lou's?" But I somehow felt that, disagreeable as it might be, we couldn't be so pointedly impolite, so I said:

"It's too bad, folks, but I really think we ought to stay out here at least a little while, till she's got her trip off her chest, as Boots would say. It would look too outrageous if we all got up and vacated this place immediately, the moment she's back, especially when she almost asked us to wait." Mary Lou, looking almost tearful, had to agree, but Boots gathered up our papers and declared:

"It's all right for you two—if you can stand it!—but I'm just going to run along and tend to my knitting, studying this here telegram. Bye-bye—and keep smiling!" And he too disappeared.

And the rest of the afternoon was devoted to a long and complicated account of Mrs. Rowland's most unexciting adventures in New Haven, Connecticut.

CHAPTER XII

MR. DOANE MAKES AN OFFER

WE had no further opportunity that evening to get together on our mystery. Directly after dinner Mr. and Mrs. Fraser drove off to call on some relatives in Newark and insisted that Boots go with them. He protested long and loudly, but they were adamant, and drove him off almost speechless with annoyance at this interruption to his activities. Mary Lou and Aunt Elsie and I spent a while in the living room listening to the radio. Mrs. Rowland had returned to her usual roost on the porch glider couch, so that retreat was again cut off from us. Mr. Doane and Mr. Conroy were in their respective rooms. Presently, however, Mary Lou complained of feeling very tired and asked to go to bed, and I got her there. No sooner was she comfortably settled than she announced:

“Joan, I’m tired, but I’m not sleepy, so please give me my record book and leave my bed light on, because I’m just wild to write up all we found out this afternoon before I forget a single thing.”

I told her I thought she ought to try to go to sleep, but she replied that she was too excited to sleep and would only lie staring into the dark, so she might as well be writing till she got sleepy. And I, rather doubtfully, agreed. I said I’d go to my own room and try to write a letter to Mother, and left her. But as I reached the door she said:

“Joan, *what’s* going to happen next Tuesday night? I’m almost scared to think about it.”

“I’m sure I can’t imagine,” I replied, “and it’s something we’ve got to think over very carefully and decide what to do. But you’d better try not to worry over it at present—it might upset you.”

But after I’d gone to my room I found myself thinking so hard about it that I couldn’t turn my mind to writing letters, so I just sat by my window in the dark and went over the whole matter by myself, in a way I hadn’t given any time to before. Something about this latest development troubled me very much—it seemed so sinister and possibly even dangerous to *someone*! I felt as if we ought to talk it over with some older person and get advice about what ought to be done—if anything. Yet I couldn’t decide whom it would be best to go to. Aunt Elsie was the logical one, of course, but with all her cares and perplexities I hated to bother her, especially as there was just the off-chance that there mightn’t be a thing in it, after all.

Then I considered the fact that perhaps Mr. Doane himself ought to be told, so

that he could guard himself against anything unexpected. But he was a very old man and not at all in good health, and was worried anyway by some mysterious trouble concerning his own affairs, and I felt that, were this new threat (if it *were* a threat) to be added to his worries, it might easily cause him serious trouble, like a stroke or a heart attack or something of that sort. If I confided in the Frasers they would probably get scared to death and move out at once—and take Boots with them; and that would deprive Aunt Elsie of three paying boarders that she greatly needed. So they were out. There was no one else, for Miss Markham was away, and she wouldn't be much help anyhow. Mr. Conroy was not to be thought of, for the best of reasons, nor Mrs. Rowland, for reasons equally good though quite different. It looked as if Boots and Mary Lou and I would have to cope with the situation as best we could.

And what in the world was it all about, anyway? I tried to go over the facts and sort them out in my mind. A clipper ship that had completely disappeared, 'way back in 1861, no one knew where, after an uncompleted "secret mission." What could that "secret mission" have been? (Unanswered Question Number One!) A figurehead of that ship, now strangely decorating the wall of Mr. Doane's room. How did he come to have it if the ship had vanished? (Unanswered Question Number Two!) The figurehead was different from ordinary ones, according to Mr. Doane's own account. How did it differ and what did that have to do with the mystery? (Three and Four!) Someone else in this house knows of or is concerned in the mystery—is apparently making frequent attempts to get something from Mr. Doane's room. Who—and why? (Five and Six.) How does Mr. Conroy figure in all this? (Seven!) Who was in the bushes that moonlight night, and what is the mystery of the torn shirt, whose ownership seems so much a problem? (Eight and Nine!) Who sent that strange telegram, and who got it, and what's going to happen next Tuesday night? (Ten, Eleven, and Twelve!)

I had counted the list on my fingers—*twelve* of those questions, and not an answer to a single one of them! Finally I gave it up. It was growing late, and I left my room and tiptoed in to see if Mary Lou was still writing. Her light was on, but sleep had overcome her at last, and she had slipped down on her pillow, her notebook and pencil still clutched in her unconscious fingers. Her face looked hot and flushed, but it might have been the light, glaring right over her head, so I slipped the book and pencil away, turned out the light, and left the room without awakening her.

As I went back to my room Boots was coming up the stairs, having apparently just returned. His folks were lingering downstairs talking to Aunt Elsie.

"Hi! Joan, I want to talk to you a minute," he whispered, streaking along the hall

to my side as I stood at my room door. “I may have been dragged away tonight, but I been doing a lot of thinking while my folks were yarning away. I was just chewing over that telegram, trying to see what I could make of it. There’s one word in it that’s got me guessing good and plenty.”

“What word’s that?” I interrupted him to question.

“It’s ‘hideout!’” he said. “It’s the only word that’s going to give us any help—’cause, the way I figure it, someone’s got a hideout, around here somewhere, and that’s where they’re going to be—on Tuesday night. Now, the question is—where *is* that hideout?”

“Well, *I* haven’t the slightest idea,” I promptly replied. “And I don’t believe you have either. It might be *anywhere*.”

“Don’t you bank on that!” he declared. “Of course, we don’t know for sure, but there certainly is a ‘hideout’ right close by—and what’s more, it’s been used before. Get me, now?”

“You—you surely don’t mean—the lilac bushes?” I stammered.

“Why not?” he countered. “It’s a great thick clump, and it’s got a sort of hollow place in the middle—I know, because I’ve snooped around it myself considerable—and you couldn’t tell from the outside if anyone was in there, ’specially at night. And here’s the main thing—you can get, when you’re in there, a grand view of Mr. Doane’s window—the bay window, I mean. And I’d like to know what better place anyone’d want if they were watching *him*!”

He grinned at me triumphantly, and I had to admit that it sounded like a possibility. But just at that moment his parents came upstairs and called him to come at once and get to bed. He had only time to whisper:

“Wait till tomorrow. We’ll lay some plans then,” before he left, and I turned into my own room. But his suggestion about the “hideout,” and the near-by lilac bushes didn’t add to my peace of mind, and I had a hard time getting to sleep.

I was awakened in the dead of the night by someone calling my name, and as I struggled to consciousness I realized that it was Mary Lou. Throwing on my bathrobe I hurried to her room and turned on the light.

“Oh, Joan!” she gasped. “Isn’t it terribly *hot*? I’m nearly burning up! I’ve drunk all the water you left me—and I’m so fearfully thirsty. Do you think I could have more?” I hurried to get her some cold water from the bathroom, but I was alarmed at the way she looked: so flushed, and her forehead was burning hot. I tried her temperature with a clinical thermometer Aunt Elsie always kept on her bureau, and then I knew she was running quite a high fever. And before Mary Lou could remonstrate I had run along the hall to the farther end and called Aunt Elsie.

“I don’t know whether it’s the weather or too much excitement of some kind,” announced Aunt Elsie, when she had come in and looked Mary Lou over. “She has this fever once in a while, generally because she’s upset or excited, or something like that. Do you know anything that could have upset her, Joan?” Behind her back, as Aunt Elsie turned around to face me, Mary Lou was wildly signaling to me not to tell any of our secret. It put me in a rather hard position, for I had already convinced myself that Aunt Elsie had better not be told—at present, anyway. So I said that perhaps we had played games too hard and taken them too seriously, the last day or two, and Aunt Elsie seemed satisfied with that.

“Well, we’ll just have to slow down a bit, while this extreme hot weather lasts,” declared Aunt Elsie. “Mary Lou must do more resting and cut out the games, et cetera, till she’s over this. I don’t think it’s anything serious. We’ll give her the medicine and treatment the doctor has prescribed for these emergencies, and keep her very, very quiet. I think Boots upsets her—he’s so noisy and obstreperous. We’ll just keep Boots away from her for a day or two. If you’ll help me now, Joan, we’ll give her a cool sponge and an alcohol rub, and I’ll give her a dose of that medicine the doctor prescribed.”

We worked over her for an hour or more, and she finally fell asleep.

Next morning she was better, but not yet normal, and the question arose as to what to do with her—where she could be most comfortable. The weather was still blastingly hot, and the garden impossible because of mosquitoes. Mary Lou’s own room was like a little oven, and so were Aunt Elsie’s and mine. (In fact, all the best rooms in the house were naturally given up to the boarders!)

“She ought really to be down on the porch, lying in the glider couch,” Aunt Elsie confided to me. “But I can’t suggest to Mrs. Rowland that she vacate it for my niece, and I doubt if she’d think of it herself.”

“And even if she did,” I added, “she’d sit right around, near by, and insist on talking, and that would worry Mary Lou worse than anything I can think of.”

“Quite true,” agreed Aunt Elsie. “I know that woman, through long years of experience, and I understand exactly what you mean. I give her credit for thinking she *means* well—at times! But unfortunately her own wishes and comforts always come first. Well, let’s see—I think the best place will be the upper hall, by the big window. It’s shady there, and sometimes there’s a breeze. It’s the best we can do—and, remember, Boots *must* be kept away from her today.”

It was a morning full of complications. When I revealed the situation to Boots, he bitterly resented the fact that he would have to keep away from our vicinity.

“Aw, Joan—I won’t make a *sound*, honest, I won’t, if we can only get together!

I've just packs I want to tell you, and we ought to be getting up some sort of a plan."

"I can't help it," I insisted. "It's Aunt Elsie's orders. And besides, I'm certain it would get Mary Lou too excited again to be talking about it. I know that's what upset her yesterday (though I didn't tell that to Aunt Elsie, of course!). The thing makes *me* nervous, and I'm a perfectly well person. So you can imagine what it does to Mary Lou, who isn't. For today, anyway, you'll have to keep away. If she's all right by tomorrow—we'll see."

"But, Joan, today's *Saturday*, and we haven't but a little time left before Tuesday! What are we going to *do*?" he wailed.

"You'll just have to work something out yourself, Boots," I answered. "I've got my work cut out for me taking care of Mary Lou. That's *my* job. So you run along now, and I'll try to get some time during the day to talk to you by myself. That's the best I can do." And he departed, scowling over his fate.

Mary Lou was also very much annoyed. She wanted Boots with us, and she wanted to talk about the mystery, and I had to put my foot down on both propositions.

"We're going to read, this morning—something nice and quiet," I announced when I'd got her settled in the upper hall with her chair so adjusted that she could lie down as flat as possible. "And I've found a nice book of stories that I know you'll like." I sat down and opened the book, but Mary Lou exclaimed impatiently:

"I don't *want* to be read to! I can't think of anything but our mystery, no matter what you read—so what's the use of reading?" I had never seen her so cross and impatient, but she was still feverish, and it was all perfectly excusable. I did so want not to ruffle her the wrong way and make her worse, and I racked my brains to think of some quiet way to amuse her, if she wouldn't listen to the reading.

"Suppose we do a crossword puzzle?" I suggested, opening a whole book of them, many of which we had not solved.

"I don't want to!" she declared, and big tears began to roll down her cheeks. I was pretty nearly at my wits' end when Mr. Doane opened his door and came over to where we sat, greeting us with a quiet good-morning.

"I have heard from Miss McKeever that this little lady is not feeling so well today, and I've come out to see if I can be of any help. I notice you are sitting here trying to get a breeze, but there simply is none on this side of the house. May I make a suggestion? My room is getting quite a breeze from the other direction, and I should be glad to have you 'camp out' there, as it were. It will in no way disturb me, and perhaps I can help entertain Miss Mary Lou with some books and pictures and

quiet chat.”

We both accepted his kind offer gladly, and Mary Lou seemed considerably perked up, just to be allowed to be in the room where the mystery centered. Anxious as I was to hear something more that might be revealing, I did hope that this time Mr. Doane would say or do nothing even unconsciously to get Mary Lou excited again. However, I need not have worried.

I wheeled Mary Lou over near his breeziest window, and Mr. Doane got out some books that he thought might interest her, as they were full of pictures and not too heavy for her to hold. She began to look these over quietly, while I rambled about the room on my own, picking out attractive-looking volumes from his shelves and glancing over them. Mr. Doane himself was doing some writing at his desk. Presently I found a whole set of *Valentine's Manuals* on one of the lower shelves. They seemed to be a sort of running history of old New York City and were full of the most fascinating pictures and maps, and I sat down on the floor to browse through them more comfortably and forgot how the time was passing. Once, hearing Mr. Doane's voice, I looked up and saw that he was reading aloud to Mary Lou. And listening a moment I realized that it was Coleridge's "Rime of the Ancient Mariner" and that he was reading it extremely well.

"How appropriate—and how like him!" I chuckled to myself, noticing also that Mary Lou was listening, absorbed, but quietly and contentedly. "He's an absolute *dear*," I thought, and got out another *Valentine's Manual*. And it was right then that I stumbled, suddenly and quite unexpectedly, on one of the most important clues in our mystery!

CHAPTER XIII

BOOTS AND I HOLD A CONFERENCE

I PUT the book back in its place and noted the number of the volume. I glanced at the brass ship's clock on the shelf just above my head and saw that it was only quarter to eleven. Mary Lou was happily listening to Mr. Doane's reading and seemed quiet and contented. So, excusing myself for interrupting them, I asked:

"Will it be all right if I run out for just a little while? There's something I'd like to get done, if possible, before lunch."

"Why, certainly," smiled Mr. Doane. "Miss Mary Lou and I are having a delightful time together." So, before Mary Lou could get a chance to ask me what I was going to do I slipped out of the room.

I felt that I must see Boots immediately, if I could find him. What I had discovered in that book was so important, and he was the only one who would understand or in whom I could confide! But I had a hard time finding him. He seemed to be nowhere about the house, and Karen said she thought she had seen him going off on his bicycle somewhat earlier in the morning. If that were the case, I would just have to wait till he got back, and I had just about made up my mind I'd better return to Mary Lou when I saw him turn in at the gate and come pedaling up the path. When he saw me he flung his bicycle aside on the lawn and came racing up to the porch.

"Golly, but I'm glad you're around!" he exclaimed. "I've got to talk to you—right away!"

"Well, I've been looking for you too," I answered, "but don't talk so loud. Mrs. R. is on the glider couch, taking in everything we say."

"Let's go out and sit on the lawn under the trees," he suggested. "I know it's hot and mosquito-y, but we just can't run the risk of being overheard. I got something pretty important to tell you!"

"Same here!" I agreed. "You go out the back way, through the kitchen, and I'll stroll down around by the lawn from here. If the lady in the glider couch sees us depart together she'll be sure to come trotting out to see what it's all about." Three minutes later we were sitting out under the trees, waving our handkerchiefs about our heads to keep off the mosquitoes.

"You begin," I ordered, "because I've just made an important discovery, and we've got to talk over what's to be done about it."

"Well, I bet it's no more important than what *I* just found out!" he began. "But

here goes, anyway: I took a spin downtown on my bike, mostly to mail some letters Ma wanted to go out immediately. Then I strolled over to the railroad station for nothing much, just to see a train coming in. I always like to watch trains. And before it got there, I peeked in the door of the waiting room, for no special reason, just because I hadn't anything else to do, I guess. And if I wasn't knocked out cold to see Mr. Conroy standing by the telegraph window sending out a wire! And you can make what you like of *that!*”

“*Mr. Conroy?*” I gasped. “Why, he had his breakfast early this morning and went out to catch the 8:10 for New York, as he usually does! How did *he* get back here?”

“You’re asking *me!*” cried Boots cryptically. “But I got a line on him all right—now.”

“What do you mean?” I demanded.

“Here’s what I mean,” Boots explained. “I don’t believe he goes to New York at all—or at least not half the time. I think he just pretends he’s going for the train and then hangs around the town all day—or keeps in hiding somewhere—for goodness knows what reason! Only the other day I thought I saw someone who looked enough like him to be his twin disappearing around a corner, just as I came along. But he got out of sight so quick I couldn’t be sure. Now I *know!*”

“That doesn’t look too good, does it?” I said. “I wonder if anyone else knows it?”

“Don’t believe they do,” he replied. “Looks like he’s trying to keep it dark. What I want to know, though, is about that telegram he was sending. Wonder what that’s got to do with our affairs?”

“Well, that’s something you’re not likely to find out,” I commented. “They don’t give out information of that sort in telegraph offices. But now, I want you to listen to what *I* discovered this morning!” And I explained to him about how Mary Lou and I had come to be in Mr. Doane’s room.

“I was sitting on the floor, looking over those old copies of *Valentine’s Manual* on the bottom shelf under the ship’s clock,” I went on, “and I’d just taken out the one for the year 1863 and opened it. There was a sheet of paper, folded once, slipped in between some of the leaves, and that paper dropped out to the floor and lay open, right before my eyes. I picked it up, of course, and couldn’t help glancing over it before I slipped it back. It wasn’t a letter, or anything of that sort, it seemed to be a set of drawings of different portions of a ship, something like an architect’s plans of a house, you know. And all over the drawings there were, at intervals, queer combinations of figures and letters—like, for instance, 7B266H4, or that sort of

thing. I didn't think much about it, for a moment. I supposed it was only some plan drawings of one of Mr. Doane's father's ships, until I noticed two things: Way up in one corner were some tiny letters, which, after squinting at, I made out to be *Folly!* And then I knew that this must have been the marine architect's drawings of that ship, but——”

“Well, that's interesting, of course,” commented Boots, interrupting me, “but I don't see how it gets us anywhere!”

“Will you wait till I get through?” I exclaimed impatiently. “If that had been *all*, it would hardly have been worth mentioning. There was something else on that paper—and I've a great mind not to tell you what it was!”

“Aw, I'm sorry, Joan! I oughtn't to have butted in. Get going again, and I'll promise not to say another word till you're through!”

“Well, here it is, then,” I conceded. “Far down in another corner of the paper was some scrawled handwriting, very fine and hard to read, but this is what it said: '*Number of secret compartment will be sent by letter if possible.*' And it was signed just, '*D.*' And now I'd like to know what you make of *that!*”

If I had hoped to startle Boots, I had my reward, for he looked completely nonplussed. Then he dived into his pocket and brought out a scrubby little notebook and a stump of a pencil.

“Tell me that again!” he said breathlessly. “I want to get it down in black and white and study it over myself.” I repeated the words, while he scribbled frantically. Then he sat staring at it for several silent moments. Finally he said:

“I can't make much out of it—yet. I'll have to study over it some more. Wonder if I could get a squint at that paper myself? Maybe I could go in sometime and ask to do some sketching and then take out that 1863 volume, if I saw a good chance. The only thing I get from it now is that you said there were a lot of numbers all over the plan drawings of the ship, and this speaks of the 'number of a secret compartment.' Maybe one of those numbers was it! Oh, by the way, did that paper look new—and fresh—as if it had just been used recently?”

“No,” I said, “it looked old and wrinkled and brownish and as if it had been damp, or wet, sometime, and then dried out. The ink was blurred a little.”

“That's important!” commented Boots. “That shows it belongs to the early part of this mystery. But here's what I *don't* get—does Mr. Doane know a thing like that is just stuffed in between the pages of some old book?”

“That's just what's worrying me,” I replied. “Can it be something he's overlooked—or is hunting for—and doesn't know exactly where it is? Maybe he hasn't looked in that book for years, or perhaps he put it there some time ago and

then forgot where he did put it. And what worries me most is whether I ought to tell him about it! I didn't want to with Mary Lou there this morning, and I didn't know how to go about it, anyway. After all, it's none of my business what papers happen to be in his books! And, with that curious message on it, it might well be something he didn't want anyone to see."

"Guess we'll have to let it stay there till something else turns up, then," agreed Boots. "But you sure stumbled on something *that* trip, Joan! We knew that the ship was on a *secret* mission, and now we know it had a *secret* compartment, and something was in that compartment, you can bet your boots! Now, what are we going to do about Tuesday? That's another thing I want to talk over with you."

"Well, I want to talk it over with you, just as much, Boots!" I answered seriously. "I've been thinking a lot about that situation, overnight, and I've about come to the conclusion that it's much too serious for us three to cope with alone. We really ought to tell some older person about it and have advice—or help. If there's anything to that telegram, *something's* going to happen, and we don't know just what it may mean. For all we know, someone might be planning to do Mr. Doane some bodily harm—if it has anything to do with his affairs. Don't you agree with me?" Boots looked serious and yet not as if he quite did agree.

"Maybe you're right," he said at last, "but who would we tell? I can't think of anyone but Miss McKeever."

"And she's just the one I don't think ought to be worried about it," I countered, and told him why, and explained why I didn't think any of the others in the house would do, either.

"Then we just got to go it alone, I guess!" was all he could reply. "But how can we work it? I'm planning to be out here under these trees all that evening. They're so thick and cast such a shadow, you couldn't see anyone there, if you were in those lilac bushes. And I've about figured it out that if I see anyone in those bushes, I'm just going to sneak into the house and call up the police station on that phone connection in the butler's pantry. It'll bust things wide open, of course, if the police get around here, but I can't think of any other way out of it. Only thing is, someone ought to be watching Mr. Conroy all this time, while I'm out there, and that'll have to be *your* job, Joan. I can't figure out from that telegram whether *he's* to be out there or somebody else. He must have a pal that's in on this thing, or else there wouldn't be a telegram. But he's got to be watched, anyhow!"

"That's all very well," I exclaimed, "but I'm afraid you can't pin that job on *me*. My work is taking care of Mary Lou, and I've got to stick to that, no matter what else happens. Besides, she isn't a bit well lately, and needs me all the more. We'll

just have to think of some other person for it—or some other way to handle the thing.”

“Aw, shucks!” cried Boots. “I never thought of it that way!” And we both sat in silence for a number of gloomy minutes. Suddenly I looked at my watch and realized I’d been away from Mary Lou well over an hour. And I jumped up, putting an end to the interview.

“We’ll just have to think of some other way out,” I repeated as we separated and I raced back to my charge.

CHAPTER XIV

DEVELOPMENTS ON SUNDAY

MARY LOU was much better the next day, which was Sunday. After lunch, on Saturday, there had been a terrific thunderstorm, and the wind changed and the weather became much cooler. She took a long nap that afternoon, and woke up without any fever. And, the mosquitoes having temporarily disappeared, we spent the rest of the day out in the garden, quietly reading and playing games. Boots, with Aunt Elsie's consent, joined us toward dinner time, but no mention was made of our mystery. Mary Lou had been very curious to know why I had left Mr. Doane's room that morning, but I had decided that it was best not to let her know yet of our new discoveries, and managed to steer her successfully away from the subject. She went to bed early that night, as did both Aunt Elsie and myself, for we were all rather worn out, having lost so much sleep the night before.

I woke up next morning with a brand-new plan in my mind, so simple and so obvious that I wondered why I hadn't thought of it before. I wanted a chance to discuss it with Boots, but he went off to church and Sunday school with his parents, and there was no opportunity till afternoon. Then, when everyone else seemed to be taking their after-Sunday-dinner nap, including Mary Lou, we got together out in the garden.

"I've got a new idea, Boots," I informed him. "We were wondering, yesterday, whom we ought to take into our confidence to help us out on Tuesday night. Well, I've thought of just the right person."

"Who is it?" he demanded wonderingly.

"It's *Karen!*" I announced.

"Karen?" he repeated scornfully. "What in heck good can she do? She's only a 'squarehead' cook!"

"Boots," I retorted indignantly, "I don't like the way you allude to Karen at all! Please remember that she's been in my own family for years. She was there before I was born, and she only came here for the summer to help Aunt Elsie out and because I was going to be here too. Karen is very intelligent and trustworthy, and she thinks the world of me. She would do anything for me, and that's the only reason I suggested getting her into this."

"Aw, shucks, Joan, I'm sorry!" cried Boots contritely. "I clean forgot, for a minute, that Karen is really *your* cook and that you're quite fond of her. Gee! I guess it would be a good idea, but I don't see quite how we're going to work it."

"I've thought it all out," I retorted. "Of course, I don't think it would be wise to have Karen sit out here under the trees to watch those bushes. It might be dangerous, and even if she did see anyone, how could she get into the house to give the alarm without being seen? But here's my plan: Karen's little bedroom window faces right toward that spot where the lilac bushes are—do you realize that? She can sit at her window and watch that spot and then come right downstairs and give us a tip if she sees anything queer going on. How does that strike you?"

"Bully, except for one thing!" announced Boots after a moment's thought. "Those bushes are quite far off from the house, and if the night should be cloudy, or stormy, or if there's no moon, how's she going to see anything at that distance?"

This did indeed seem a facer, and we both looked pretty glum over it until, all of a sudden, Boots had a happy thought.

"Listen!" he exclaimed. "I think I got it! If she could watch out of that window with a pair of marine night glasses she could see most as well as if it were daylight. You know, those specially made binoculars that show up things in the dark so clearly!"

"I've never looked through any," I replied, "so I don't know much about them. But if they do what you say, it ought to be just the thing. Only, the trouble is, we haven't any night glasses, so where's that going to get us?"

"Don't you be so sure!" chuckled Boots. "My father has a fine pair, that's how I know about 'em. He uses them up in the mountains when he goes hunting. Only thing is, I'm not quite sure where they are now—since we came here. I'm pretty sure they didn't get burned up when our house went, because Dad had time to save quite a few small things like that, and I remember him saying he thought that they were packed away with some hunting things and guns in the garage. Anyhow, I'm going to hunt 'em up myself. If the worst comes to the worst, I'll have to ask Ma where they are, and that'll start her asking questions, but it can't be helped. I'll get 'em somehow. Say, Joan, I think this idea of yours is swell, only, suppose Karen doesn't want to do it?"

"I'm going to talk to her about it right now," I announced. "And you can wish me luck!"

It was Karen's Sunday afternoon out, and she was spending it in her own usual, peculiar way. As she was a stranger to the region and had no friends in the town, she seldom left the house, and usually sat on the little kitchen porch doing endless yards of tatting. She was at her post when I approached, and having made sure that Julia was away till tea-time, and no one else within hearing distance, I went in and sat down beside her. I was a little puzzled how to begin on the difficult subject, but I

decided to make an opening in this way:

“Karen, do you remember telling me about the strange way Mr. Conroy was acting the other night when you saw him coming out of Miss Markham’s room after she’d gone away?”

“I sure do, Miss Joan!” answered Karen, placidly weaving her shuttle in and out of her work. “Why do you ask me about it?”

“Because some queer things have happened since,” I explained. “It’s rather a long story, but I’d like to tell you about it.” And I retailed to her as much of the whole affair as I thought it was necessary for her to know. I did not tell her all, not about the old clipper ship part, as we knew it or suspected it, but just that something was going on that seemed to affect Mr. Doane and his affairs, and how Boots had stumbled on the torn telegram, and that we had suspected some plot was afoot that might harm Mr. Doane. Then I told her what our plans were for the coming Tuesday night and explained how we hoped she could help us by watching from her bedroom window and reporting if she saw anything amiss. And then I held my breath to hear what she was going to answer, for I did rather fear she might be unwilling to get mixed up in it. She had listened to it all in perfect silence, as was her wont, and she tatted away for several minutes after I’d finished before making any reply. At last she spoke:

“Miss Joan, I agree with you. There’s something queer going on in this house! I seen what I seen, and I know what I know—and I ain’t said a word to no one but you. But I be glad if I can help you out, and I watch by my window if you want me to. That ain’t so hard—only I don’t know how I see anything that far off when it’s so dark.”

I explained to her about the binoculars and said I’d show her how to use them if Boots could produce them. But again her remarks had got my curiosity aroused, and I asked her:

“Have you seen anything more, Karen, besides what you told me the other day?”

“I see things every once in a while that they make me think!” she remarked cryptically, and then went on to explain, “Only the other night, it is quite late, and I have to go down from my room to the kitchen because I remember I forget to put the cereal to soak overnight, like I always do. When I come upstairs at the back, softly, so I should wake no one, I hear someone tiptoeing in the hall on the second floor. I wait in the shadow by the back stairs, and I look down the hall and I see someone. I think it is that Mr. Conroy, standing over by Mr. Doane’s door, and he listen—listen-like. Then he stoop down and he run his fingers along the bottom of the

door. I don't know just what he do—but it looks like that. Then he hurry, so softly, back and shut himself in his own room! Now I ask you, Miss Joan, ain't that a queer thing to do?"

"You certainly see plenty that's queer, Karen, when you go up and down those back stairs," I commented, astonished at this new revelation. "I haven't an idea what this particular business was all about, but I suppose it's all a part of the same thing. Have you noticed anything else lately?"

"No, nothing like that," she answered, "but I'm wondering from what room that telegram come that Boots found in the cellar. Julia empty the baskets always, so I would not know. But this I do know, Miss Joan, there ain't no telegram come to this house these past three weeks. Julia goes to answer the door, and she always tell me if a telegram or a special delivery come for anyone and asks me what do I think it was. She's awful curious, Julia is!"

"I expect it came from Mr. Conroy's room, of course!" I said. "And maybe he got it somewhere else. The whole thing is a Chinese puzzle! But I must be getting back to Mary Lou now. I'm so glad we can depend on you for Tuesday night, Karen!"

"I do my best," she answered, as I hurried away.

I got a chance to relay Karen's consent and her latest bit of curious information to Boots, before I went to Mary Lou. He was lingering about the garden, waiting impatiently for me, and was properly impressed by my interview with Karen.

"Gee, but she's a peach!" he cried. "She sure does chase me out of the kitchen when I come around foraging for food, but I forgive her everything—for *this*! What do you make of this new dope about Mr. Conroy? What could he have been doing?"

"Why ask me?" I countered. "It's all a part of the same thing—something he's plotting about Mr. Doane. Don't you dare tell a word of this to Mary Lou,—do you hear me, Boots? We've got to keep her as quiet and unexcited as possible, from now until Tuesday night. She's gotten over that fever, but it may come back any time she gets too excited again. The strain of worrying about it is almost too much for *me*, and I'm perfectly healthy. Actually I'm so nervous all the time, I could yell! So imagine what it would be for her, confined to that chair as she is."

"It is tough on her," agreed Boots. "But you can bank on me—I'm as mum as an oyster!"

But I had "reckoned without my host," as far as Mary Lou was concerned! When I had got her up, after her nap, and out in the garden, and Boots had joined us, preparatory to a quiet afternoon of reading, Mary Lou suddenly sat back in her

chair, folded her hands and announced:

“You needn’t read just at present, Joan. I’ve got something to tell you both, and I’ve got to say it. If I don’t, I’m afraid I’ll get a fever again!” Wily Mary Lou! She knew this would worry me, and so I had to let her talk.

“It’s about our mystery,” she went on, when I had resigned myself to the inevitable. “I might as well talk about it, because I’m *thinking* about it all the time, and it makes me more nervous that way than if I said it right out! I promise not to get excited and to be very quiet about it, and I won’t write anything in the record book just at present, for I think that’s what makes me get more excited than anything else.”

“Well, go ahead—shoot, kid! And get it off your chest,” said Boots, after an inquiring glance at me, to which I had nodded.

“It’s about what happened in Mr. Doane’s room the other day,” she continued, “after you had left me, Joan, and gone out somewhere. He was reading ‘The Ancient Mariner’ to me when you left, and it took a while to get through it, ’cause it’s kind of a long poem. But I was awfully interested. I’d never heard it before, and it was all about a ship, long ago, and a sailor that had a dead albatross tied around his neck to punish him for having shot it. The other sailors had thought it brought the ship good luck, and they had awfully bad luck after he’d killed it. Mr. Doane read it beautifully, and after he got through we talked about it for a while, and then some more about ships and that sort of thing.

“By and by we stopped talking for a little while, and I just sat there looking around the room. Presently I said to him that of all the interesting things in the room I liked the figurehead the best, and he smiled and said he did, too. And then I did a very bold thing. I don’t know whether I ought to have, but I asked him right out if he’d finish telling me about the *Folly* and what happened to it, because he had stopped in just the most interesting part that day he began telling about it, and I’d been wondering ever since how it turned out—and how he came to have the figurehead!

“He looked kind of startled at first, and then said he hadn’t quite realized, that day, how much he was telling—he’d just sort of gone rambling on and forgot himself. But if I’d like to hear the rest he might as well tell me. And then, he *did!*” Mary Lou stopped dramatically, at this point.

“Well, go on!” I said as quietly as I could.

“All right!” smiled Mary Lou, satisfied at the hit she was making. “First he asked where he stopped off, and when I’d told him, he went on. I can’t tell it to you in just his words, but this is how it went: He said the *Folly* had got about off the coast of South Carolina, when she noticed she was being chased by a Confederate privateer.

She didn't realize at first what they wanted, or that it *was* a Confederate privateer, because the Civil War had been declared after she left San Francisco, and so she just slowed up because this privateer was hailing her. Her captain probably thought the ship was in trouble and needed help. And so, before they realized what was going on, the Confederates had come aboard with guns and things, taken her crew and officers as prisoners of war, and sailed her back to the coast. The crew and captain were put in Confederate prisons, and they never knew what became of the vessel, after that. So now you see why he said he never knew what happened to her!"

This was certainly a bit of news, and Boots and I digested it in silence, till presently he broke out with:

"That's okay, so far! But here's what I don't understand. How did he come to know all this? Did you ask him that?"

"Of course I did!" dimpled Mary Lou. "Don't you suppose I thought the same thing—right away? And then he told me that his cousin, who was the captain of the *Folly*, was taken to Libby prison in Richmond, Virginia, and some of his crew too, and they were kept there over a year. His cousin died in the prison from some disease he'd caught, because the conditions were so bad, so they never heard from him again. But one of the crew, later on, after the war was over, managed to get North somehow, and *he* came to Mr. Doane's father and told him what had happened. Only, of course, *he* didn't know what had become of the *Folly*."

"Well, that smooths *that* out!" commented Boots. "But will you tell me, then, how Mr. Doane came to have the figurehead? That's the biggest puzzle of all."

"I *had* to ask him that," Mary Lou continued, "because I just couldn't help it. He sort of hesitated a little, and then he said he might as well tell me that too and complete the story. And this is how it happened: It seems that for years after the war his father tried to find out what had happened to that vessel, and he spent a great deal of time himself and hired someone to hunt through all the ports of the South and along the Southern seacoast for it, or any news of it, but finally they decided it must have been burned or broken up, for he never could discover a thing about it. *But*—and this is a big 'but'!—finally, in the yard of an old Negro's hut, 'way down on one of the South Carolina coast islands, they discovered the *figurehead*! It was half hidden in weeds, and the old darky didn't seem to know much about it or where it had come from. Said it had been there years and years. So they paid the darky for it and took it away, and that's how it came about that he has it now, up above his mantel. Isn't that wonderful?"

"I'll say it is!" cried Boots, so excitedly that I had to quiet him down for fear

Mary Lou might catch the excitement and be ill again. And then, as calmly as we could, we talked it all over, trying to see how it fitted in with the other things we knew. It was Boots who suddenly waked up to one item that I had forgotten.

“Is that all he said about it, Mary Lou?” he suddenly questioned.

“Every bit!” she replied. “By that time Joan came back, and we didn’t talk about it any more.”

“But what about the ‘secret mission?’” he questioned. “Didn’t Mr. Doane say anything about that?”

“Not a word!” declared Mary Lou. “And of course I couldn’t very well ask him any questions about that.”

CHAPTER XV

“THE BEST LAID SCHEMES”

MARY LOU’S revelations had given us a great deal to think about. And since we were on the subject I decided that we had better tell her as quietly as possible all that we too had discovered since the night she developed the fever. She was thrilled, of course, but I told her she must absolutely not try to write anything of it in the record book, as that seemed to be the thing that was likely to upset her.

“I promise not to,” she agreed, “and I’ll try to keep it all straight in my mind, so that I can write it out later. But, tell me this—what are we going to do about Tuesday night?”

I explained to her our plan and warned her to try not to think about it, and then I ended:

“Now, we’ve talked enough about this business for today. Anything further on the subject is *absolutely forbidden!* I’m going to start reading, and I want you to listen, Mary Lou, and try to keep your thoughts away from the mystery!”

“Very well!” she sighed. “I suppose I can at least *try*.” Boots made no such promise, however, and lay on his stomach on the ground, chewing grass blades in a very absent-minded fashion, while I read aloud through the rest of the drowsy afternoon.

Nothing out of the ordinary happened that evening, and we all went to bed and had a quiet night’s rest. Mary Lou was her usual self the next day, much to my relief, for I had feared that our newest developments might have upset her, in spite of all my precautions. In the morning, after his breakfast, Mr. Conroy departed as usual, for parts unknown. We no longer gave him credit for taking the train to the city, and Boots confided to me that he was going to comb the village, on his bicycle, to see whether he could discover any trace of this silent, elusive man. He also imparted another piece of new information:

“Get *this*, Joan! I happened to take in the mail, this morning, ’cause I was on the porch early, when the postman came around. So I took the letters into the dining room and put them around at the various people’s places, like Julia usually does. And, what do you think,—there was a letter for Mr. Doane marked *South Carolina*—I forget what town—it was kind of indistinct, anyway. And you can just bet I was watching when he came down and got to that letter, because I’m willing to bet it’s that kind of letter that usually gets him all ‘het up’! I thought he was going to have a

fit, as usual, when he saw it, but you could have knocked me down with a teaspoon if he didn't smile all over when he opened it, glanced at it, and stuffed it in his pocket! Now, what do you make of *that*?"

"Must have been good news instead of bad—what else?" I answered. "I notice that he seems in an awfully good humor this morning. He hurried off for his walk earlier than usual, too. I don't understand it at all, but I'm glad if he's pleased about something. I hate to think, though, what may be going to happen Tuesday night—if it has anything to do with *him*!"

Boots was away all morning, and Mary Lou and I entertained ourselves quietly out under the trees, for the weather was still fairly cool and pleasant, and there were not many mosquitoes to bother us. But after lunch, when she was in her room taking a nap, Boots and I had another conference in the garden. He said he wanted to report to me about something he had discovered.

"I scouted all around town this morning," he began. "Nearly wore my wheel out trundling up and down first one street and another, and not a glimpse did I see of old Conroy. Then I took to looking in all the stores and public places, station, post office, etc.—no good! Finally, last thing of all, I decided to take a peek into the public library—and what do you think I saw *there*?"

"Mr. Conroy, of course," I retorted promptly.

"Sure thing, but that wasn't all!" he came back gleefully. "If you'll believe me, there was Conroy standing by the fiction shelves, looking over some books, and there was *Mr. Doane*, sitting over at a table near the big window in the reading department, deep in a magazine or something! I was so bowled over, I just beat it before either one of them saw me. Now, I ask you, Joan, *how come*?" I was rather astonished at this news, but I demanded:

"Well, why shouldn't they both be in the library at the same time, if they wanted to? There's no law against it. And maybe Mr. Doane hadn't even seen Mr. Conroy. He's rather nearsighted, you know, and it might easily be that he'd been in there reading, first, and then Mr. Conroy came in, and Mr. Doane never even looked up and saw him. It's perfectly evident that Mr. Conroy's watching him—trailing him even to the library. But what I can't understand is, why, when he's supposed to be in New York, he'd be willing to show himself so plainly in town, when Mr. Doane might stumble over him any minute in there and think it very queer."

"That's got me, too!" agreed Boots. "I can't make any sense out of that at all. Guess we'd better not tell this to Mary Lou—what?"

"No, she's got enough to keep her excited," I agreed, "and this doesn't help matters any. I'm trying to keep her as quiet as possible from now till tomorrow

night.”

Miss Markham came back that evening, just before dinner. We were all very glad to see her, for we had missed her beautiful music. All but Mrs. Rowland, who confided to me that she had never cared for music and hated that piano-banging that was going to commence again. But Mrs. Rowland was not bothered that night, at least, for Miss Markham remarked at dinner that she was very tired after her concert work, and she must have gone to bed very soon after, as we heard no sound of any music that night.

Neither Mary Lou, Boots, nor I slept at all well that night, as we were all thinking too hard and worrying too much over what was going to happen the next day. We did so hope that our plans would work out all right, and I went over and over them in my mind, as I lay tossing sleeplessly, wondering if we were doing the right thing and whether there could possibly be any hitch. I couldn't figure myself how anything could go wrong, for it was all very simple, what we planned to do. It was a mere case of keeping a careful watch, and certainly it could do no harm to give an alarm if Karen saw anyone sneaking about the bushes or grounds. They would be trespassers anyway, unless it were someone in the house, and we would have a perfect right to complain to the authorities about it. And if it *were* someone in the house—well, that person would just have to explain what he was doing, poking about in the bushes when he was supposed to be in the house, or out elsewhere on legitimate business. And there was always a chance that the telegram had had nothing to do with this place, and, in that case, of course, nothing would happen. Over and over it I went, and could see no loophole where anything could go wrong.

But the next day was to illustrate the truth of the well-known saying of Robert Burns, “The best laid schemes o' mice and men gang aft a-gley.”

Tuesday morning dawned just like any other day, and affairs of the household went forward in their usual routine. We were a bit worried because Boots had not yet located his father's night glasses, and they were a very important item in our plans. He said he had searched through all their possessions in the house the day before, and the glasses were nowhere to be found. He had then decided that they must be in a hunting bag his father kept in the garage, which had miraculously escaped the fire, as it was some distance from their house. That morning he got the key of the garage from his father and after breakfast trundled off on his wheel to see what the garage would produce. Mary Lou and I almost held our breath in suspense, all the time he was away, fearing his search might be fruitless. And it was! He came back disconsolate.

“Not a sign of it!” he groaned, throwing himself down on the grass where we sat

out under the trees. “Then I asked Ma, who was in the new house fussing around, if she could remember what became of it, and she said of course it was burned up—was in one of the bureau drawers, and Dad forgot to take it out. And of course she had to ask what in the world I wanted it for, and all that! Can you beat the luck?”

We all sat rather stunned at this setback, and Mary Lou asked feebly what we could do about it.

“Darned if I know!” moaned Boots. “Just have to get along without it, I guess. Unless Karen’s got A-Number-One eyesight she can’t see much from that window without ’em. Maybe, instead of watching from her room, we could get her to go down and sit somewhere in the garden where she couldn’t be seen but could see around those bushes. How about it?”

“I don’t think that’s a good plan at all, Boots!” I objected. “In the first place, I think it’s kind of dangerous for Karen to be out there anywhere near those lilac bushes if there’s a marauder around. He might have a gun or something, and if he thinks he’s discovered, he might be tempted to use it. And Karen’s rather bulky, you know, and can’t move fast, and could never in the world get into the house without being discovered. And that would spoil our plans, anyway, for before she could give the alarm, whoever it was would have a chance to get away.”

“Yeah, I suppose you’re right,” he sighed. “We’ll have to think of something else.” He lay with his head buried in his arms, in deep thought, while Mary Lou and I sat despairingly by. It seemed impossible that our beautiful plans could be wrecked by just the lack of those night glasses, and yet it certainly looked as if they would. Suddenly Boots raised his head and sat upright.

“I got it—I think!” he exclaimed. “How would this work? Suppose Karen and I change places? I was going to stay in my room and keep peeking through a crack in the door, watching Mr. Conroy’s room. But instead of that, we could get Karen to stay in the back hall, just by the stairs where she couldn’t be seen, and she could keep an eye on his room from there. If she sees anything queer going on, she could let you know. And I’ll sneak out and hide in that big lawn swing that isn’t so far from the lilac bushes. After dark, I could crouch down on the floor of it and nobody could see me at all. That’s a swell idea—what?”

“It’s all right about Karen,” I commented, “but I don’t somehow feel that you should be out there where it’s rather dangerous. And, anyhow, I don’t see how you could get from the lawn swing to the house without being seen. It’s a perfectly open stretch of lawn between them, and, even after dark, someone in those bushes could see you streaking across the lawn.” Boots looked crestfallen again, after my dash of cold water, and once more sank into deep thought.

“Wait up! Wait up!” he cried presently. “I got it now—sure thing! Do you all know the night watchman, Mr. Crane, that the people in this neighborhood hire to go around nights keeping an eye on their houses and grounds?”

“Never heard of him,” I said. “In fact, I didn’t know there was any private watchman around here. I thought the police took charge of that.”

“Well, there is,” retorted Boots. “This is a pretty nice neighborhood, and the people who live here are fussy about not having any burglars break in, and that sort of thing, so they hire this man to go round nights, and if he sees anything not okay, he calls the police station. I know him, because we had him, too, and I’ve often talked to him. Nice fella!—he’d do anything for me, because I gave my old bicycle to his kid when I got my new one last winter. I’ll get hold of him this afternoon and tell him, on the q.t., that I think there’s someone fussing about this house nights, sneaking in the bushes, ’cause someone was there not long ago, and I have reason to think they may be coming again tonight. He won’t ask too many questions, and I don’t want to explain the whole thing to him. But I’ll ask him if he’ll kind of linger around near this place as much as possible, and tell him that I’m going to be outside hiding myself, watching the spot. And if I see anything phony, I’m going to blow my police whistle *hard*, and he’s to come sailing in and go for those bushes—pronto—and grab the fella! Then I’ll run in the house and call up the police. You see, that won’t mean that I’ll be in any danger, and the thing simply *can’t* fall through!”

“That sounds better!” I agreed. “But why make it so complicated? Why not ask him to just stay around here himself and do the trick without your being there?”

“Don’t you see?” cried Boots. “He can’t spend *all* his time at this house—he’s paid to watch a number of them, but they’re all pretty close by here. And then, if he hung around here all the night, that’d scare away anyone who was trying to get in, and spoil the whole thing. ’Cause we want to get to the bottom of this mystery—and solve it—and we can’t do that unless this fella’s caught!” I had to agree with him there, and we spent the rest of the morning discussing our rearranged plans. I said I’d explain it to Karen after lunch, but I little dreamed that we were going to meet with another facer in that direction.

When Mary Lou had settled down for her nap, that afternoon, I went to interview Karen, where she had gone for a rest to her own room, and her first words caused me great consternation.

“I don’t know what to do, Miss Joan!” she began, before I could even state our new plan. “After lunch Mrs. Rowland comes to me and asks would I go out with her after dinner to the movies downtown. She says there’s some special show on tonight she wants to see, and she don’t like to go out alone through these dark streets, and

she pay me to go with her, and at the same time I see the show too. She did this before once, since I'm here, and I go with her. I like to do it well enough—I see a good show, only I tell her this evening I couldn't go, I got something else I must do. But she won't take no for answer, and she goes and asks Miss McKeever couldn't I go with her, and Miss McKeever come to me and she ask me please to go because she likes to keep Mrs. Rowland contented, and it would be a favor to her. She says if it's anything about the cooking I have to do, I can let it go. I didn't know what to say, Miss Joan, because you warn me not to tell anyone what you want me to do, and I don't like to disappoint Miss McKeever, so I have to say all right. But I watch when I come back, maybe, if it's all right?"

"Oh, *bother* Mrs. Rowland!" I cried distractedly. "*Why* did she have to do this just tonight? Why can't she get Julia to go with her?"

"Julia goes to the show tonight with her young man," commented Karen, "and she wouldn't go with no Mrs. Rowland—she doesn't like her!"

So that was that! Another setback to our well-laid plans. I told Karen that I supposed she'd have to go, and that she could go on watch when she came back, and explained to her where she was to be. Then I streaked it downstairs to find Boots and disclose this latest piece of hard luck.

He was wild with disappointment at the news and ready almost to scalp Mrs. Rowland! I had to remind him, finally, that it was no use raging about *her*—what we had to do now was to think up some new scheme for keeping our vigil. And I also reminded him that the thing wasn't as bad as it looked. Mrs. Rowland always went to the first show, as she probably didn't like being out late, even with Karen to protect her. And as the first show would be over at nine, they would no doubt be home soon after. And at that season of the year it didn't get really dark till after nine.

"And so," I ended, "it isn't likely that anyone would even try to get in there in the bushes till well after dark, so, after all, it isn't such a calamity. You can be around keeping an eye on Mr. Conroy till Karen gets back, and then she can take that job, and you can go outside to your hidey-hole in the lawn swing. Meantime, Mary Lou and I will sit out under the trees, in sight of those bushes, and I wager no one will venture into them while we're there. And now I think we've got everything all set. My soul, but I'm nervous! *Whatever* is going to happen?"

CHAPTER XVI
TUESDAY NIGHT

I AM beginning to learn that things seldom turn out, in life, just the way we plan them—and that Tuesday night's happenings were no exception!

Dinner seemed interminable that night, and I, for one, had absolutely no appetite, yet I had to make a pretense at eating, for the very appearance's sake. Mrs. Rowland complained bitterly about the slowness of the service and said she would probably be late to the commencement of the show. She left before dessert was served, and, I presume, routed Karen out of the kitchen to accompany her. Mary Lou was on the porch, and I gave her her dinner there. The night had turned cloudy, and was also hot and sticky, and when I proposed to get Osgood to help us out to the garden, Aunt Elsie protested.

"I wouldn't take Mary Lou out there tonight, Joan," she declared. "It is very hot, and the mosquitoes are frightful again, and it wouldn't be a bit of pleasure sitting out there. Stay here on the porch where I think most of us will sit, this evening." And in an undertone she added, "Mrs. Rowland isn't here, so things will be much more agreeable."

There was nothing I could do but comply, and I gave Boots, who had been hovering about, a desperate glance! But all the others drifted out at that moment, and disposed themselves about, as comfortably as they could, complaining about the sudden heat and wondering if there'd be a thunderstorm. The air was breathless, and no one seemed inclined to go upstairs to a hot bedroom. Even Mr. Conroy had seated himself over in a corner, saying little to anyone, but devoting himself to reading the evening paper while daylight lasted. And, as he seemed fixed for a time, Boots presently disappeared, as Mary Lou and I guessed, to keep an eye on the situation in the lilac bushes. So, for the present, our difficulties were solved.

We chatted in groups for a while, Mr. Fraser and Mr. Doane discussing the stock market and the political situation, Mrs. Fraser, Aunt Elsie, and I talking about the progress that was being made on the Fraser's new house and what its various decorations were to be like. Miss Markham sat near us but didn't join in our chat. She seemed still a bit tired and nervous, and sat looking off over the lawn and fanning herself languidly with a folded newspaper. After a while Mr. Doane, who is always the soul of courtesy, seemed to notice that she was apparently uninterested and bored and turned to engage her in conversation about her concert tour and the various phases of her work. Then she seemed to unbend a little and began to talk in

quite an animated way. And later, he too got to telling about the various great musicians he had heard in New York and elsewhere in his early years, and the rest of us just sat by and listened—even Mr. Conroy, for by that time it had grown too dark to read the paper.

Just before it was quite dark Boots came through from the back of the house, peeked out of the hall door a moment, and seeing Mr. Conroy still on the porch, promptly disappeared again, this time, I was quite certain, to secrete himself at last on the bottom of the lawn swing. He gave me a quick glance before he disappeared, and that made me certain the time had come for that part of the program to be carried out. Finally Mr. Doane said to Miss Markham:

“We have missed your music very much while you have been away. If the night were not so hot, and you so tired, I should make so bold as to ask you if you would render us a few selections on the piano. But it would be almost cruel to ask it, under the circumstances.”

I had expected that Miss Markham would refuse politely, as she didn’t usually seem to care to perform offhand at the house. And besides, she would have had every excuse not to, that particular night. But, to my surprise, she got up, saying:

“Why, of course, if you care to hear me, I should be glad to play for a while.” She went in and turned some lights on in the living room, and we all drifted in after her, I wheeling in Mary Lou, assisted by Mr. Conroy. I had expected that he might disappear upstairs, as he had once before said he didn’t care much for piano music, and I was wondering what to do about it—or how we were going to keep an eye on him, under the circumstances. But I was greatly relieved when he too came in and settled down in a chair off by a window. It looked as if our watching program was going to be very simple.

Miss Markham sat down at the piano and launched into the Chopin A-Flat Major Polonaise, and I almost forgot that we had any troubles on our minds. From that, she drifted on to the Revolutionary Étude, and it looked as if we were going to have a Chopin concert, which delighted me, as I love his music best of all. After a while Mrs. Rowland came back, took one disgusted look in at the living room door, and tramped off upstairs to bed. I slipped out to the kitchen and explained the situation to Karen and told her we probably wouldn’t need her to watch on the stairs—at any rate, not till later, in which case I would let her know. Then I hurried back to listen to the music.

But all this time, at the bottom of my mind, I was wondering desperately what was happening outside, where Boots was crouched in the lawn swing, and someone was possibly due at a “hideout” in the lilac bushes! Would the person come to keep

that rendezvous, or were we all off the track in our surmises? I also kept watching Mr. Conroy with the greatest anxiety. Was he watching and waiting too? If so, he seemed very unconcerned, listening in a quiet, absent-minded sort of fashion to the music, apparently just a bit bored, but probably preferring the comparative coolness of the living room to the hot stuffiness of his bedroom. Could it be that we were all wrong and that he had nothing to do with the mysterious telegram about “Tuesday night”?

An hour passed, and Miss Markham drifted on from one solo to another, mostly Chopin, though varied at times by bits I was not familiar with. Mary Lou had almost forgotten, I thought, in the joy of listening to the music, the anxiety with which we were supposed to be listening for another sound, and I was heartily glad it was so. Presently Mr. Doane asked Miss Markham if she cared to play Beethoven’s “Moonlight” Sonata, which was a favorite of his, and she nodded, and the liquid, swaying notes of the first movement began to drip from her fingers.

Suddenly my blood turned cold as the shrill blast of a police whistle ripped through the quiet night from somewhere outside! *It had come then—at last!*

Even in the midst of my own secret wild excitement and anxiety, I could not help but notice the curious effect the sound had on everyone in the room. Mary Lou turned positively white, and gripped the arms of her chair. The Frasers and Aunt Elsie sat up straight, open-mouthed with surprise. Mr. Doane started slightly and turned his head to glance at Mr. Conroy, who whirled around in his chair and half rose, as if to hurry from the room. Miss Markham dropped her hands from the piano keys and murmured, “What was *that?*” in a rather stifled voice. For a moment afterward there was a tense silence in the room, and then there came the sound of scuffling and shouting from somewhere on the lawn. It seemed to break the spell that had held us all for an instant, and then ’most everyone was on his or her feet and hurrying to the door! Everyone but Mary Lou, who could not move from her chair, of course, Miss Markham, who still sat as if frozen to the piano bench, and myself, who was (I’ll have to confess it!) too scared to move!

There followed an interval of the utmost confusion. I only remember that Boots and a strange man (who, I afterward learned, was the night watchman) came hurrying into the hall from the rear of the house and intercepted the others, who were hurrying out of the living room to see what had happened. There was a babel of voices, out of which we, who were left inside, distinguished that of Boots, shouting hysterically:

“He got away, darn it! I blew my whistle when I saw him sneak into the bushes, and Mr. Crane came running and grabbed him, but he squirmed loose—and got

away! Mr. Crane wants to call up the police station.”

Mary Lou and I sat stunned and speechless, scarcely daring to glance at one another. But suddenly we were horrified to see Miss Markham sway slightly, as she sat on the piano bench, and then pitch sidewise to the floor in a dead faint!

I rushed over to where she lay, calling loudly to Aunt Elsie to come at once. The others, hearing my shout, all surged into the living room, and Aunt Elsie whispered to me:

“She’s only fainted, nothing worse, I think. Probably the heat and this sudden excitement. We’ll get her around all right, but you call Osgood and get Mary Lou right upstairs and to bed. This business is going to be hard on her. Try to get her quieted down, and I’ll come up later. Oh—wait!” she added distractedly. “Osgood went home early tonight—his wife’s sick. I think Mr. Fraser will give you a hand with Mary Lou, while I help with Miss Markham!”

Mr. Fraser seemed very glad to help with Mary Lou’s chair, and together we got her upstairs to her room. His only remark during the process was, “Queer goings on tonight—seems to me!” And I was too speechless with bewilderment to make any adequate reply.

It was very hard for Mary Lou and myself to be away upstairs and out of it all, when we were really so much more deeply concerned than most of the others, but it had to be. And I suppose it *was* better for Mary Lou to get away from all the excitement.

“Oh, Joan,” she moaned, while I was getting her to bed, “do you suppose it all went wrong? There *was* someone there, just as we thought—but he got away. What’s going to happen now?” I could give her no satisfying answer to the problem, and we just had to wait for further events.

After what seemed a century, though I presume it was only about half an hour, Aunt Elsie came up and looked in on us.

“Everything’s all right now!” she explained cheerfully. “Miss Markham got over her fainting spell. Mr. Conroy and Mr. Fraser helped us lift her to the couch in the living room, and we bathed her face with ice water and administered smelling salts, and finally she came to. I gave her some aromatic ammonia, and after a while she felt strong enough to go up to her room. She said it must have been the intense heat, and that police whistle and alarm of a marauder startled her terribly. I think she’s very high-strung—most musicians are. Anyway, she’s all right. But I can’t figure out yet what was happening outdoors. We’ve never had any trespassers around here. It’s most unusual, but it’s lucky our night watchman was right on the job. It costs me quite a penny to subscribe toward his services—but it’s certainly worth it. Now,

Joan, you'd better put out this light and leave Mary Lou alone and go to bed yourself. I'm giving her this sleeping powder, and she'll go off almost immediately. Don't stay around and talk another word!"

And so I had to leave Mary Lou, but I decided to hunt up Boots, before I went to bed, and see if I could get any explanation from him about what happened. But when I got to the foot of the stairs to the next floor, I saw only Mrs. Fraser, just about to close the door of her room, and I asked her if Boots had gone to bed yet.

"Indeed he has!" she replied indignantly. "And he's going to *stay* there the rest of the night, or I'll know the reason why. The idea of his being mixed up in a dangerous affair like this! I hadn't the slightest notion he was out there in that swing, with a burglar creeping through the bushes right near him. I don't know what that child'll be up to next! Good-night, Joan. You can see him in the morning." And she went in and shut her door, leaving me alone to my ignominious and bewildered thoughts!

CHAPTER XVII

THE SECRET OF THE FIGUREHEAD

WHEN I woke next morning, I hadn't any memory of anything, for the moment, but wondered why I had such a feeling of oppression and discouragement. Then it came back to me—the failure of all our carefully laid plans for the night before! I dressed as quickly as I could, looked in on Mary Lou, and finding her still asleep, ran down to see if Boots by any chance was up yet. I found him on the porch, and we had a conference before anyone else was around. He told me the history of his last night's experience, explaining how he had waited and waited, crouched down in the lawn swing, out of sight, long after dark, getting more and more cramped and uncomfortable, and very discouraged because nothing had happened. He heard the music from the house and wondered what we were all doing and whether anyone was keeping an eye on Mr. Conroy. Then, all of a sudden, he had heard a rustling noise and could just make out a dark form slipping into the lilac bushes. He knew the time had come and that we had been correct in our surmises.

"I let him stay there a while," Boots said, "'cause I figured he probably wouldn't be up to any tricks before things kind of quieted down in the house. And I wanted him to get all settled and think everything was okay—and I was waiting for something else, too. Mr. Crane and I had it all arranged that when he went by our place he'd whistle 'Sweet Adeline' pretty loud, so's I'd know he was there. By and by I heard him coming along, whistling to beat the band, and I let out one good blast on that police whistle of mine, and then the fun began! Craney made a bee line for those lilac bushes and busted out hauling someone after him by the collar! But when they got out the man put up such a fight—and he was a husky one, too!—that Craney lost his grip on him. And the minute that happened, the fella streaked it over the lawn and down the street before you could hardly turn around! He got so far away, and so quick, that Craney figured it would be better to call up the police and get them on his trail. But I guess they never got hold of him or we'd have heard about it. He probably had a car parked somewhere near and hopped into it. We never even got a good look at his face! So that's that, and the only good it did was probably to save Mr. Doane from something—we don't know what!"

"Boots," I said, "I've come to the conclusion that it's time we told Mr. Doane about all this. Our plan of catching the marauder may have fallen through, but at least we've discovered enough now to know there *is* someone plotting something, and if

so, he certainly ought to know about it. Don't you agree with me?"

"Yep, I'm all for it now, and I think we ought to do it right away, this morning, before things go any further," he agreed. "What say we all get together in the upper hall, near his door, after breakfast, and waylay him when he goes out for his walk?"

"Just what I was thinking," said I. "And now we'd better cut this out, for I hear someone coming down to breakfast."

I was interested to see how everyone acted at the breakfast table that morning, after the affair of the night before. Miss Markham didn't come down at all, and Aunt Elsie reported that she was still feeling upset and had stayed in bed and asked that her breakfast be brought up to her. I wasn't surprised at that, as she'd had such a bad time the night before. Mrs. Rowland was all wrought up over the affair and spent much time thanking her lucky stars she and Karen had got in before it all occurred.

"It only goes to show how dangerous the streets are these days, and how wise I was to take someone with me last night," she said, over and over. Boots and I grinned at each other, but made no comment. Mr. and Mrs. Fraser said nothing about the affair, and I could see that Mrs. Fraser was still annoyed at the part Boots had played the night before. Mr. Conroy also ate in silence, and departed as usual, supposedly for the 8:10 train. But Mr. Doane seemed in an extremely cheerful frame of mind and laughed and joked with Boots and me throughout the entire meal. I had never seen him in such good spirits, but he did not refer to the doings of the previous night.

About ten o'clock, we three camped out in the upper hall and explained to Mary Lou about how we planned to waylay Mr. Doane, on his way out, and ask him for a little conference in his room. And then we sat and waited, with what patience we could muster, for him to appear.

"You do the talking for us, Joan," Boots implored. "I'm not much good at it. I think you'd be the best." And rather reluctantly, I agreed at last to do so. Presently he came out, still smiling in a pleased way, and then I screwed up my courage and rather timidly asked him if he could delay his walk for a few minutes and allow us to have a little talk with him in his room, as we had something rather important to tell him. He looked sort of surprised, but with his usual courtesy, bade us come in at once and tell him all that was on our minds. And we wheeled Mary Lou in and he shut the door and asked us to find comfortable seats. He himself sat down at his desk, clasped his hands on it, and said:

"Well, dear young friends, what is it that you have to tell me?" And then he sat back to listen.

Never in my life have I found it so hard to open any subject as it seemed that morning. Face to face with the matter, it appeared almost an unwarrantable intrusion into his affairs, and, besides that, when he seemed so cheerful and happy, I hated to tell him anything that might worry and upset him. But there was no getting out of it now that we had taken the plunge, so I launched out, rather hesitantly, and began with the night he had thought someone had entered his room and tried to take away a map from his desk, and Boots had found the thing next morning. That, at least, seemed a legitimate reason for our beginning to take an interest in the affair. After that, I found it a little easier to go on, and I outlined as much as I could of our activities up to the affair of the night before. I even showed him the torn telegram we had pieced together, which he took and examined with absorbed interest. But he made no comments and asked no questions till I had finished at last with:

“And now you know it all, Mr. Doane. I hope you don’t think we have interfered unwarrantably with your affairs. We only did it because we thought we might be able to help you in some way, and I think we must have stumbled on something last night, for it all turned out as the telegram said. Only we didn’t catch the intruder, as we had hoped to!”

After that I sat quiet, and we all waited, in breathless suspense, to hear what he was going to say. Mr. Doane said nothing for a few moments, which seemed like centuries to us, but sat looking thoughtfully at his desk and twisting his eyeglasses in his fingers. But presently he looked up at us, with one of his rare and charming smiles.

“This is all a matter of great surprise to me!” he began. “I mean, the fact that you three have been taking such an enormous, and such an intelligent, interest in my affairs, quite unknown to me, and that you have been able to do so much, so very much, really, to aid me in the adjustment of a very difficult matter. I might add right here that that matter has now, thanks to what happened last night, come to a satisfactory and most unexpected close. But I never had the slightest suspicion that you children had the least inkling of what was going on, much less, were playing such an important role in it. But, since you have, I think it is only fair that you should be admitted to the entire secret. I must make, however, just one proviso—that you will all promise to keep what I am going to tell you an absolute secret, just between the four of us. After I have told you, the reason will be apparent. Do you make this promise?”

We all solemnly nodded our heads, too deeply impressed even to open our mouths and say so, I expect, and Mr. Doane proceeded:

“I must tell you at once that you were entirely right in suspecting that there was

some mystery in my affairs and that someone else in this house was deeply and unwarrantably interested in it. You have, however, made one or two wrong guesses, which were quite natural, but I will explain that later. It all goes back, as you have surmised, to the matter of this figurehead of mine, and to that unfortunate ship, the *Folly*, lost so many years ago. Perhaps I had better tell you that part of it first, so that you will understand all that happened later.

“The matter concerns that secret mission of the *Folly*, which she was to execute by stopping at the port of San Francisco, on her last trip back from China. Her captain, my cousin David Doane, had not known of it when he left the home port of New York, but received the word in China, by letter brought on another ship which had sailed a few days later than the *Folly*. It was a commission from a California business firm to stop at the port of San Francisco and take on board, in the most secret manner possible, a shipment of gold (which was then being mined so plentifully in California), have it hidden in some obscure part of the ship, the whereabouts of which would be known only to the captain, and thence to transport it to New York and deliver it to the proper authorities. You can see how important this mission was, and how carefully the secret about it must be kept. I imagine the crew and officers were given shore leave the night it was taken aboard, and only the captain was there to receive the precious cargo and see it properly stowed away. That it was all duly accomplished, we know, through a letter dispatched overland to my father before the *Folly* set sail for New York. The letter gave no details about the location of the gold, on the ship, but merely alluded to the successful accomplishment of that part of the ‘mission.’

“You know, of course, through what I have previously told you, what really happened to the *Folly*, somewhere off the coast of South Carolina. But this my father did *not* know, for a very long time. And when the ship had become long overdue and months had passed without any news of her, he was at last forced to give her up for lost, thinking she had met storm or shipwreck somewhere at sea and gone down with all hands on board. This was no infrequent occurrence in those days, when there was no wireless system to give warning of such a disaster, and it had to be reckoned with many times by those in the shipping world. Had the *Folly* been loaded only with his own cargo, it would have been bad enough, for the insurance on her was never heavy enough to carry all the loss—and there was also my cousin David, the captain, whose life was precious to my father too. But the matter was deeply complicated by the disappearance of this gold shipment which had not been insured. Besides the heavy obligation my father felt under to the firm to whom it belonged, there was another matter which weighed even more heavily.

There were cases, in those days, where gold had been shipped on some vessel and that vessel had deliberately never arrived at its destination. The gold had been appropriated, and the vessel scuttled or abandoned near some foreign port, and her crew and officers never heard of again. It was a great temptation to be carrying such a valuable cargo, and only the most honest men could be entrusted with it.

“My father made such restitution as he could, to his friends, out of his own private fortune, but it was scarcely enough to cover more than half of the value of the gold. And while they cleared him, personally, of any connivance in a plot to get away with it, he felt that they were always suspicious of the part his nephew, the captain, might have played in the affair.

“In the meantime, as you know, the Civil War had broken out, and all thoughts were deeply occupied with that subject. And the matter of the *Folly* dropped from sight. Shortly after the war was over, an ordinary sailor came into my father’s office in New York one day with the strange tale that the *Folly* had been captured in the earliest year of the war, off the coast of South Carolina, and all her crew and officers made prisoners. The captain and officers were taken to Libby prison, and the crew to another prison nearer to where they had been captured. A few months later this man learned, through some prisoners who had been transferred from Libby prison to his own, that the captain had died of some disease contracted as a result of the terrible sanitary conditions there. What had become of the officers he did not know, nor had he the slightest idea what had happened to the ship, as he had later been transferred still farther south, for the duration of the war. At its end, he had worked his way North, and came to report to my father, in case he had never heard the news about his ship.

“Well, the years rolled on, and in the chaotic conditions after the war, all memory of the *Folly* dropped from most minds and was forgotten. But my father could never give up the idea that the hull of the ship might have, in some way, survived, and might be still concealed somewhere down on the Southern coast. And for years afterward he made frequent trips down to that section himself, and even hired a man to comb the coast, especially about South Carolina, in the hope of discovering it—possibly in use somewhere, or abandoned in one of the many creeks or inlets of that section. He found numerous such hulks, but none of them were the one he sought. At last, however, the man he employed did, by a miraculous chance, come upon this figurehead, almost hidden by weeds near the cabin of an old coast island Negro. It revealed to him two things: One was that it was evident that the superstructure of the vessel had been broken up and abandoned, or used elsewhere. This was entirely likely, as the South captured a number of such vessels at the outbreak of the war,

thinking to use them in blockade running, but soon found sailing vessels unwieldy and inadequate for it, and broke them up or left them to rot away.

“But the figurehead revealed one other secret to him that was of the utmost importance! Perhaps I told you, some time ago, that when this figurehead was made there was some special feature about it, in which it differed from most others. It had been a fancy of my father’s to have a small secret compartment fashioned in it, whose presence could not be detected by anyone not aware of its hiding place. This compartment was carefully lined and waterproofed, and it was my father’s idea that, in case of shipwreck or other threatened dangers, any important papers might be concealed in it. Figureheads of wrecked or damaged ships did occasionally escape injury and were often salvaged and kept as interesting curiosities. For this reason, he had conceived the idea of creating a hiding place in this *Folly*, thinking that sometime it might prove useful. He had revealed the secret of this hiding place to his nephew, before he left on his voyage, but I imagine it was unknown to anyone else. Therefore, when he got the figurehead back, he at once set about opening this secret compartment, in the hope that he might find something there to give him an inkling of the fate of the vessel. And he was not mistaken!

“But what he found, though of the utmost value in some ways, was of little help in another, for a reason which I will explain to you. It was a plan drawing of the hull of the vessel, with various sections and localities numbered in a strange and complicated fashion, and down in one corner was scrawled the message, ‘*Number of secret compartment will be sent by letter—if possible.*’”

At this point we three all glanced at one another significantly, for the incident of my having discovered this very paper, in his old book, was the one thing I had not thought to disclose to Mr. Doane. And as I did not want to delay his recital by mentioning it just then I said nothing, and Mr. Doane went on:

“My father studied this strange, fragmentary message for a long time and finally decided that the captain must have designed this plan of the ship, and numbered its sections, in some idle moments during the trip, to be used in just some such emergency as he actually met. How he had got it into the figurehead compartment was not quite clear, for after the vessel was boarded there would have been little or no opportunity to do so. But, in the light of more recent events, I have myself conceived the idea that the captain must have begun to suspect something radically wrong, in being hailed and held up in that manner by a strange ship, and had gotten one of his officers to conceal the paper there while he was engaged at the other end of the ship with his coming captors. At any rate, there it was, and undoubtedly some one of those complicated groups of numbers indicated the location of the gold.

“But, where was the ‘key’ to it—the letter indicating the right combination—which had never arrived? The reason for its non-arrival was simple. Either the captain had never had a chance to send such a letter, from his captivity in Libby prison, or having managed to send it, it had never been delivered in the chaos of those awful war days. The answer my father was never to know, for he passed away a few months after having recovered the figurehead, leaving the quest to me, if I cared to pursue it. I shall have to confess that the thing did not interest me for a number of years, as my life was a very busy one, carrying on the business my father had left me. Also I had the gravest doubts of the possibility that any remnant of the *Folly* still remained. It seemed a worse than useless quest. And so the years passed, and, having accumulated a comfortable fortune, I retired from business and did some extensive traveling, and at last, shortly before the recent World War, came back to this country to settle down and spend my last years in peace. My wife had died a number of years before, and, having no children or near living relatives, I decided to pick out some desirable boarding place in a suburb not too far from New York. After a number of unsuccessful experiments elsewhere, I found at last this home, and have been happy here ever since. Financially, I was very comfortably fixed, for my money was all in what seemed safe and well-paying investments, until the recent depression caused them to sink to a rather insignificant value.

“It was then that I remembered the possibility—the very *remote* possibility, as I had once thought—of the existence of the hulk of the *Folly* down in some obscure Southern coast swamp, with its precious hidden freight possibly still intact. So I decided to invest some money in trying to locate it, and hired a trustworthy agent, provided with the old ground plans of the ship, to go down and investigate every old hull or hulk he could locate. For a long time he was unsuccessful, until just recently, owing to the happy coincidence of a government Coast Geodetic Survey that was being carried on, and which my man was following with great interest. Far down in one of the deep muddy creeks, a tributary of a larger river, they had located the battered prow of a vessel sunk deeply in the mud and slime and hitherto hidden by a heavy overgrowth. From what my man could gather from the measurement of the little that was above the surface, it seemed to coincide exactly with the measurements of that part of the *Folly*. Later, he had some help in excavating a larger section, and we have now concluded, beyond a doubt, that all which remains of the *Folly* lies buried there. That the gold is still buried with her, in some well-concealed spot, I have every reason to believe, for they say her hull seems pretty intact, as much of it as they have been able to reach. Of course, this has made me very happy. So much for that part of my story.”

At this point Mr. Doane hesitated and was silent a moment or two, absent-mindedly moving a book and an inkwell about on his desk. We all sat absorbed, hardly daring to draw a breath, waiting to hear his further revelations. At last he went on:

“I now come to a difficult and very painful part of this narrative and one that has been most puzzling to me. I have been aware, for some time past, that there was someone in this house who was deeply and unwarrantably interested in my affairs.”

At this point Boots could contain himself no longer, and demanded:

“That was Mr. Conroy, wasn’t it?” Mr. Doane smiled slightly and replied:

“I know that you have thought so, all along. But I am going to give you a pretty severe shock when I tell you that it was *not* Mr. Conroy at all!”

“Then—then who *was* it?” I exclaimed.

“Someone whom you have never suspected for a moment,” said Mr. Doane gravely. “I hate to have to tell you this—but it was none other than—*Miss Markham!*”

We all sat absolutely stunned, almost unbelieving! At last I stammered:

“But—but that seems—almost impossible, Mr. Doane!”

“I know it must,” he went on. “I myself could hardly credit it at first. That was before I put the Yale lock on my door. But I had begun to discover certain traces in my room of someone having disturbed my private papers. I knew it was not the help, as they have always been perfectly trustworthy. Miss Markham had been making her home here for nearly a year before these peculiar things began to happen, and I had always thought most highly of her and enjoyed her beautiful music. But one night I awoke to realize that there was someone in my room with a flashlight, examining the contents of my desk. The person was dressed in a man’s clothes—white shirt and trousers—but for an instant the flashlight illumined the face, and I recognized it at once as Miss Markham’s. The shock was so great that I lay perfectly still and made no outcry and let her go on with her work. She found nothing there that interested her, evidently, for at length she turned toward the door and slipped noiselessly from the room.

“I lay and thought for a long time over what course I ought to take about the matter, and it suddenly dawned on me that there must be some very special reason for this woman to run such a risk. What did she know? What had she discovered about my affairs? Could it possibly be something in connection with the matter of the *Folly*? And if so, was there a clue hidden there, in her knowledge, that might help the final solution of my problem? I decided that it was worth looking into, and that I would do and say nothing, for the present, about what I had discovered. But I did,

at once, two very important things: I had a very special Yale lock put on my door, and I went to New York and secured the services of the most reliable private detective to be found. And you will probably be much surprised to learn that that detective was—*Mr. Conroy!*” Here Mr. Doane sat back and enjoyed the spectacle of our bewildered expressions.

“But—but—*Mr. Conroy?*” stuttered Boots. “Why—why, Mr. Doane—we—we thought you—*disliked* him very much. You’d hardly even speak to him!—I don’t understand!”

“That was a little ruse we adopted,” chuckled Mr. Doane, “to disguise the fact that there was any connection between us. Even Miss McKeever did not know of it. I had obtained his introduction here through some New York friends of Miss McKeever’s whom I also knew and to whom I had presented him. They were about to sail for Europe on a protracted tour, so it wasn’t likely our little trick would become known to Miss McKeever. Mr. Conroy was so fortunate as to get the room right across the hall from mine, where he had an excellent opportunity to watch what went on. I, of course, had to tell him the whole story of the *Folly* episode, and one of his duties was to discover what he could of Miss Markham’s life history and antecedents. In this he was more than ordinarily successful, and his quest produced some startling results.

“The first discovery was that ‘Miss Markham’ was not her real name but an assumed one, originally, no doubt, for her concert and radio work. Nor was she actually a ‘Miss,’ but a ‘Mrs. Daventry,’ the fate of whose husband I will tell you about later. But what startled us more than all else was that in delving further into her family history, as it was revealed by the records, her maternal grandfather had been a man named Thomas T. Harrison. And this fact was of enormous interest to me, because, from the records of the *Folly*, I had discovered that on her last voyage her first mate had been one Thomas T. Harrison, and that nothing further had ever been heard of him after the disappearance of the ship. This, you see, gave us a distinct connection, and we began to work on a theory, assuming these Harrisons to be one and the same, that it might easily be he had somehow gained some knowledge of the *Folly*’s precious cargo, possibly tried to find it himself, after the war, and later passed the knowledge on to his descendants.

“This theory was further substantiated by a report I had from my research man down in South Carolina, saying that he had recently been conscious of being consistently followed and spied upon by an unknown man who came and went at odd intervals but always seemed to bob up on his trail at the most inopportune times, when he was in the vicinity of the spot where we had located the vessel. A little

further research into Miss Markham's family history revealed the fact that she had a brother—an adopted one, it transpired, since Mr. Conroy discovered a record of his adoption papers when he had been a small infant. Here, then, was another link. It was highly likely that she and this brother were working as a team: he on the trail of the ship itself, and she up here, trying to get her hands on something else that I had in my possession. It was not difficult to simmer the thing down. What had I that she could want except that very important paper that had been found in the figurehead? And, on the other hand, if she wanted this so badly, it could only mean that she must have in *her* possession the *key*—the letter giving the secret number of the location of the gold. With the two together, they might easily be in a position to get a first chance at the loot, provided they could make a surprise visit to the more than half-submerged vessel sometime when it might not be guarded. This, of course, was only our surmise, but it turned out in the end that we were more than ninety per cent correct!

“Mr. Conroy then, working on this supposition, devoted much of his time to an attempt to locate where she kept this ‘key letter.’ We somehow felt sure she had it in her possession and that the brother did not. You must remember, of course, that she had not the slightest idea that Mr. Conroy was a detective on her trail, or that he was anything but what he had been represented: a business man, going every day to his office in New York. Nor did she suppose that I had any suspicions about her activities. In order to get more opportunity to catch her unawares, we deliberately staged one or two little affairs where we hoped to ‘catch her out,’ as it were, and give Mr. Conroy an opportunity to search her possessions for what we felt sure she had. This may seem a sort of mean advantage to take, but you must remember that she was taking a meaner one and must be caught at her own game!

“The night when I lost my map was the first one. We knew that she was probably wild to get into my room once more and make a search for the ship plan, so we arranged that I go downstairs that night on a pretended hunt for a book, making plenty of noise as I did so and leaving my door open. I had left on my desk a very finely drawn small map of a part of the Southern coast, just as a sort of ‘bait.’ It had no special significance in reference to my affairs, but it *looked* intriguing! Mr. Conroy was watching from a crack in his door, and I had no sooner got well downstairs than she opened her door, peeped out, and scurried noiselessly into my room. She scurried out again, before I got back, and then I discovered that the map was gone. Doubtless she had looked it over, decided that it might have some bearing on the affair, and dropped it out of the window, behind the vines, thinking to recover it some other time. Perhaps she thought I would not miss it that night.

“At any rate, I raised the hullabaloo I staged purposely, and, excellent actress that she is, she came out afterward with the others and appeared as mildly surprised as possible at all the upset. We had hoped that she might give herself away, but she didn’t, by so much as the flutter of an eyelash! But Mr. Conroy had been studying her, through all this, to very good purpose, as you will see later.

“On that night of our musical evening we gave her another opportunity to get in a little fine work. And we got in some ourselves!—Mr. Conroy deliberately stayed upstairs while she was playing, in order to give her room a thorough search for the precious document. And he was quite unsuccessful in that. But when she came upstairs to get some vocal music, which, if you remember, took her quite some time, he was watching from his door and saw her enter mine——”

“Wait a minute! Excuse me, please!” cried Boots, suddenly interrupting him. “But how could she, when it was locked with a Yale lock and only you had the key? We’ve always wondered about that.”

“Ah, I had forgotten to tell you of one other little trap we had laid for her!” smiled Mr. Doane. “A short time before that, one morning, I had deliberately dropped my bunch of keys in the hall directly in front of my door. Mr. Conroy and I had arranged the matter on purpose, to see whether she would take advantage of it to abstract my room key and have a duplicate made. Any locksmith can do it in half an hour. Mr. Conroy had stationed himself, that morning, at a vantage point directly opposite the shop of the only locksmith in town. I, of course, was out on my usual morning walk, which I took good care to prolong much later than usual. And, sure enough, he reported later that she had come hurrying into the locksmith’s shop, waited there evidently while the key was made, and came out later and hurried back to the house. Of course, when I got back, my keys were where I had dropped them, including my room key, but there wasn’t a doubt in the world that she now had one of her own!”

“But, forgive me, Mr. Doane,” I interrupted. “Do you mind telling us why you did this? I should think it would be just what you *wouldn’t* want—to let her have a key to your room. Wasn’t it putting yourself and your documents in more danger?”

“It would seem so, on the face of it!” he answered. “But we had other reasons for this move. In the first place, we wanted her to incriminate herself as much as possible, so that, in the event that we ever had to bring this case out into the open, we would have actual evidence to offer of her breaking into my room, having a false key made, etc. Otherwise, she might deny everything and we might have a hard time proving it in a court of law.”

“But weren’t you afraid to let her have a key to your room?” Mary Lou asked

timidly. “How could you know that she wouldn’t come in when you were out, or asleep, and—and get your papers—or do you some harm?”

“A very pertinent question!” commented Mr. Doane. “And one that is easily answered. In the first place, my document was secreted in a place where she would have never thought of looking for it—in an old volume of *Valentine’s Manual*, down on the lower shelf, there near the door—the most unlikely place in the world to keep a valuable paper and, therefore, the safest! And as for my safety at night—you did not suspect it, any of you, not even Miss McKeever, but late every night, after all the household had retired, Mr. Conroy would come over to my room and sleep on the couch here, and it would have been an extraordinary interloper that would have escaped his detection! So, you see, I was well protected. But, to go back to the night of our musicale:

“She entered my room, evidently thinking the moment a good one when everyone was engaged downstairs. Either she had forgotten about Mr. Conroy, right opposite, or thought he was out or asleep. But she had it in mind, evidently, to examine the figurehead itself, as (I now know) she knew or suspected that the plan had been once concealed there and thought I might still keep it there. But that secret hiding place is well hidden, and she didn’t have time to go into the matter very thoroughly, and she failed to refasten the figurehead securely, as I discovered later. And in replacing it, if you remember, it slipped from my grasp, fell, and broke a valuable vase. Our doubts on the matter of what she was really looking for were entirely settled by this episode, and we were more than ever convinced that she had the ‘key’ to the numbered plans in her possession.”

“Mr. Doane,” I interrupted eagerly, “please forgive one more question, right here. It’s this: I can’t understand why, when you now had proof of her breaking into your room, you didn’t report her right away to the police.”

“Ah, that is just the point!” he cried. “That was just what we were trying very hard to avoid the necessity for. Do you not see that she had in her possession (and we were by now convinced that it was in very close possession—in fact, carried about with her constantly) something that it was of vital importance for us to get possession of intact? Were she to be arrested she might suddenly destroy it, and that would end our ever having a chance to lay hold of it. You will see how right we were when I tell you what finally happened.

“When she went away on her concert tour lately, Mr. Conroy and I had a little respite from our more pressing worries and were trying to plan some new method of entrapping her. During her absence, Mr. Conroy searched her room thoroughly on the off-chance that she might have the document concealed somewhere about it.

One of those times was when Karen discovered him just emerging from there, you remember. He found nothing except the discarded torn shirt. We already knew that she had used a man's attire, at the time she first came rummaging in my desk, but we could not quite imagine how it had come to be torn up in that way. I now know from you, that it was on a night when she was out in the garden spying on me, through my lighted window, from those bushes, and Mr. Conroy was genuinely laid up with a severe cold, in his room. It shows how unsuspecting she was of being watched, that she left this incriminating article to be discarded with other unwanted pieces of apparel.

“But what we were now trying to plan was some method of getting at the hidden document, which we were certain she carried constantly about on her person. We also felt very sure we knew just where she kept it concealed. But I won't tell you that till I explain what happened later. We had no special plans for last night, and we knew nothing of the affair that was about to happen. That was where what you people had discovered and done for us actually saved the day! We were rather surprised that she remained downstairs last evening, chatting on the porch, which was so unlike her customary habit, and was willing to play for us when she was apparently so tired and exhausted with the heat. But it gave us an excellent opportunity to watch her more closely, and that is why Mr. Conroy remained downstairs also. We know now that it was because her plans were all laid: her brother, who had just come up from South Carolina, was to conceal himself that evening in those bushes, and she had deliberately arranged to keep us all in the living room that evening by playing for us—she had intended to offer to do so, if I hadn't asked her first—and thus give him a chance to get well concealed.

“Well, you all know what happened. The shrill blast of the police whistle was as great a surprise to us as it was to her, but she was quite evidently alarmed beyond measure by it, knowing what she did of what was going on outside. And when the noise and scuffling commenced and Boots's voice was heard in the hall, shouting that ‘he got away,’ the reaction was evidently too much for her. She had been under a very great strain, and before she knew what was happening she had fainted dead away! It was then that our great opportunity came, and Mr. Conroy was quick to take advantage of it.

“He kept hovering near, giving what assistance he could, while Miss McKeever and Mrs. Fraser tried to restore her to consciousness. During this process, Miss McKeever, in bathing her face and neck with cold water, removed a fairly heavy gold chain she wore around her neck. This chain had a large, old-fashioned locket attached to it, which Miss Markham always wore inside her dress, so that it was not

visible. But we had noticed that she was never without the gold chain, no matter when you saw her. Miss McKeever laid the chain and locket on the piano, while she continued to give her attention to Miss Markham. This was Mr. Conroy's long-sought chance!

"While everyone else was otherwise occupied, he quietly appropriated the locket and chain, hurried up to his room, pried open the locket with a penknife, and there, true to our conjectures, was a paper folded many times and crowded into the tiny space. Before even examining it, he had rushed downstairs and restored the chain and locket to its place on the piano, and no one was the wiser for its absence. When Miss Markham regained consciousness and was ready to go upstairs, Miss McKeever restored the chain to her neck.

"You can imagine the haste with which Mr. Conroy and I got to my room, to examine our find—and our joy, when we opened the much creased paper, to find that it was just what we had hoped: a part of a document torn from a much larger sheet, but containing only the words, '*The number of the secret compartment is K584B62—see ship's plan.*' But it told us everything we wanted to know!"

"Hooray!" cried Boots suddenly, unable to contain himself any longer.

"Yes, we can now get right to work!" agreed Mr. Doane. "But that is not all the story. We felt that we could not let the matter rest there. Miss Markham would no doubt miss her document from the locket after a while, if she hadn't already, and further trouble might ensue. We felt that we must have an interview with her and settle the matter forever. So, late last night, when all the household was asleep, we knocked at her door, roused her and asked if she would come to my room for an important interview. And, after a while she came in, white and trembling, and undoubtedly prepared for the worst.

"And I want to tell you, right here, that I am heartily sorry for that poor lady! She is by no means a deliberate criminal—far from it—and has had much to cope with and suffer. Faced with all the, to her, astounding facts of our knowledge of her activities and our espionage on her, she broke down completely and made a full confession. Perhaps you will understand her position better if I give you a little history of her life, as she told it to us. Her father and mother died when she was only seventeen, leaving her alone in the world with a little brother whom her parents had adopted as a small infant, and her mother's father, who was still alive, and with whom these two made their home. This was out in a Western city. She had great musical talent, even as a child, and was studying to be a concert pianist. But she made an early and very unfortunate marriage, and gave up her music for a number of years. Her husband was an attractive rascal, but turned out to be a very great

scamp, with clever but criminal tendencies. To make a long story short, he developed into an astute forger and counterfeiter, but was finally caught, tried, and sent to jail, for what was practically a life imprisonment.

“The shock of all this was very hard on her, but having a great deal of courage and perseverance, she left her old environment, came East, changed her name, renewed her musical studies, and finally became a fairly well-known and accomplished concert pianist. She still kept in touch with her grandfather and adopted brother who continued to live in the West. Finally her grandfather became very ill and died. She and her brother were with him at the time. In going over his papers afterward, however, they came across a strange document, written by him. It was, apparently, a confession and true account of the part he had played, in his early years, as a first officer on my father’s ship *Folly*. It detailed how, on the day of the capture, just before the boarding by the Confederates, he had, under the captain’s direction, found the opening of the secret compartment in the figurehead and had placed there a paper of whose contents he knew nothing at the time.

“Later, when he and the captain were both prisoners in Libby, and the captain was so ill that he knew he would not recover, the captain had told him the story of the gold and had given him a hastily scrawled letter to my father, containing the number of the secret compartment. He begged this man, should he be delivered from prison or manage to escape, to get it safely to my father’s hands. The officer took the letter, concealed it about his person, and promised faithfully to fulfill the request. A year or two later, he did actually manage to escape, being one of the few prisoners who got away through that famous secret tunnel they dug. He managed to get through to the North, and decided to wait till the war was over before delivering his message and letter.

“But, being evidently of not too high a moral character, he was finally overcome by the temptation *not* to deliver it, but to wait and try to find the vessel himself, if she still remained intact. After all those years, he figured, he might easily appropriate the gold, and no one would be the wiser. He even knew that the complement of his part of the ‘key’ was hidden in the figurehead, which might still be on the vessel. And he spent a considerable time himself, wandering around the coast, trying to locate it.

“Necessity, however, eventually forced him to give up his search and go to work to make an honest living. He abandoned the sea, settled in the West, married and raised his family, all of which died but the one daughter who was Miss Markham’s mother. He never made any further attempt to discover the hidden gold. In his latter years, he was troubled with a decidedly guilty conscience about his concealment of the matter, but was not brave enough, in his lifetime, to make the proper revelation to

me, as my father's heir. He did, however, write out a full confession of it, and begged his grandchildren to hunt me up, reveal the long-lost key number to me (which he had made a note of, as he had long before destroyed my cousin's original letter), and let me do what I would about it.

"Miss Markham told me that she was for immediately locating me, but her brother was suddenly inspired with another idea. Why not try to get the gold for themselves, provided he could locate the hulk of the ship? It was a prize well worth trying for, and, after all these years, why bother to rake up the past and the original ownership of the gold? And, that you may understand this quite dishonest attitude in him, I must explain another thing Miss Markham revealed to me. She had always been very fond of him, but she had realized from the first that he had a rather lax and shifty nature, due perhaps to an inherited tendency from his original parentage, of which she knew nothing. From his earliest childhood she had struggled with this trait in him, and had come to hope that it was now entirely overcome. But here it was, cropping out in a quite violent form, for which she was in no way to blame.

"She tells me that at that point they had a very serious quarrel about the matter, during which he tried to get possession of the paper on which the important disclosure was. But she was too quick for him and seized it first. In the struggle that followed the paper became torn, but she had, fortunately, managed to retain the important part. It was this that she kept, from that time, concealed in the locket which never left her immediate possession. They parted, in considerable anger, and she came East with the intention of hunting me up and restoring the paper to me. But, before she had succeeded in that, she received a letter from her brother threatening to make public all the unpleasant episode in her past married life, and the fact that her husband was now serving a long term in jail.

"This was a most dastardly piece of blackmail, and one that would have most serious consequences for her, she feared, as it might injure her career as a public artist, a career so carefully built up under an assumed name. It was the one thing he could have done that would, willy-nilly, bring her to terms, and she was finally forced to fall in with his plan to save her reputation and her career.

"This was about a year ago. And, after they had located me here, Miss Markham finally succeeded in getting herself admitted to the same house. They were in no hurry about furthering their plans, but they believed that in some way I might furnish a clue as to the whereabouts of the vessel or as to whether it had ever been discovered; and so they spent much time watching me, noting my habits, finding out where my mail came from and went to, and, when they discovered that I had the figurehead here, trying to get an opportunity to examine it. When my man down in

South Carolina began to get hot on the trail, somehow the brother must have discovered it, gone down there and begun to track him around. And then the time came to get possession of the ship's plans, which by now they did not doubt that I had. I have already told you how Miss Markham had failed in this, though she watched me continuously, and you would be surprised at the devices she had to keep me under watch, from outside the house, and elsewhere, when she was supposed to be practicing in her room."

"I was just wondering about that," interrupted Boots. "For instance, the girls say that the night they heard someone out in the bushes they were listening, at the same time, to Miss Markham playing up in her room. Now, how could that be?"

"Simple enough," explained Mr. Doane. "She had a very elaborate victrola up there, and many piano records by famous musicians. The victrola had one of the new devices, geared to play on and on, or different records in turn. All she had to do was set it going and slip out and no one would suspect that she was not in her room."

"Well, if that isn't *clever!*" grunted the astonished Boots.

"We are now nearing the end of this long story," went on Mr. Doane. "She told us that the day before she was to leave on her concert work, last week, she received a telegram from her brother saying he would be up here from South Carolina and that they would finish the affair on Tuesday night. She knew what this meant, for they had arranged it by letter some time before. He was to hide out in the lilac bushes, which retreat he had already used once or twice, in previous interviews, and she was to try to keep the household occupied elsewhere by an impromptu concert, till he was well concealed. Late that night she would admit him to the house, and they would both come to my room, get in with the key she had, and make a complete search. And, in order to insure my sleeping through it, Miss Markham had herself, just before dinner, slipped into my room while I was downstairs and dropped a sleeping tablet into my thermos bottle of fresh water that Julia always leaves there by my bed, before dinner time. It was a very clever plan. Miss Markham did not dream that it couldn't have worked out in any event, because Mr. Conroy also slept in my room, which would have upset the whole thing. But it might, had we not been sidetracked by what you children did, have resulted in one very serious outcome. Miss Markham might have had a chance, were they discovered, to destroy the precious paper in her locket, and that would have meant serious difficulty for us. So you see what an important part you played!

"I need scarcely tell you that Miss Markham is enormously relieved to have the whole thing over and done with. She was very sincere in her protestations that the whole thing was most repugnant to her, but that she was a helpless tool, caught in a

net from which she saw no way to extract herself save by falling in with her brother's wishes. We have promised her that no revelation shall be made of the part she was compelled to play, but that she must write at once and warn her brother that all has been discovered, and that it would be highly to his interest to betake himself out of this part of the country and try to lead as honest a life as he can in parts unknown. She herself is about to give up her room here and leave for California, where she has an offer of a contract to work for a prominent moving-picture concern as a musical director. It will be much the best for her own morale, to get away from this place, which has meant so many painful hours to her. I am sorry that Miss McKeever is to lose a boarder, but I shall personally see that she does not suffer for it. Mr. Conroy is also leaving shortly to go down to South Carolina and give his assistance in locating the gold in the hulk of the *Folly*. And so the story ends—most happily—thanks to the assistance of you clever children. It would have gone very hard with Miss Markham, in the end, had it not been for your intervention. And I should have been very sorry for that. For, in spite of what she tried to do, I still have a very kindly feeling toward her.”

“There's just one thing that gets me,” commented Boots, rather breathlessly, “and that is, how did she get that telegram? I've asked if any came to the house in the past week, and everyone said no. And yet there it was, torn up in fine bits in the cellar!”

“The answer to that is simple,” commented Mr. Doane. “She told us that lately she has not allowed her brother's communications to be sent to this house, as it was too dangerous. So she hired a post box in a small town a few miles away, accessible by bus, where he sent his letters. The telegram doubtless came to that town, at the railroad station, and was marked to be put in her post box. She probably destroyed it the morning before she left, and the remnants were taken down to the cellar. I imagine Mr. Conroy will be rather chagrined when he hears how you outwitted him at his own game, Boots! But it's one of the very few oversights he made, and it's lucky indeed that you were on hand to remedy it.”

At that moment the lunch gong sounded, and all four of us seemed to wake, as if out of some curious dream. And, as if by common consent, we all glanced up at the figurehead, which, in the half light of the semi-darkened room, seemed to be peering down at us in mingled laughter and curiosity.

“It almost seems as if she knows,” murmured Mary Lou. And Mr. Doane added:

“She's looked down at some curious things during her existence, but nothing, I wager, more singular than what she has looked down upon in this room!”

CHAPTER XVIII

THE PERFECT ENDING

IT hardly seems possible that it is now over a year since all those exciting things happened, and yet, the time has flown, and many important events and changes have taken place. Perhaps it would be well if I went back and gave a little outline of what took place after that marvelous morning in Mr. Doane's room, when he revealed to us the secret of the strange affair of the figurehead.

Mary Lou had another attack of fever that night, which kept her in bed for several days, but it wasn't surprising, after the tense excitement and suspense of those last days and hours. The riddle being now solved, I did not worry about it, for I knew that we could, from that time on, keep her quiet and unexcited and happy. And in a few days she was up again and never had any further trouble that way.

Miss Markham herself appeared in public after a day or so, and was her usual quiet, retired self, though she hardly touched her piano again. In the course of a week she gave Aunt Elsie notice that she was leaving permanently, to go out to California. Aunt Elsie, who as yet knew nothing about the affair, was extremely sorry to have her go, not only because of its leaving a vacant room on her hands, but because she liked Miss Markham personally and would miss her wonderful music. But Mr. Doane told her, soon after, that he had another applicant for the room and later introduced an elderly gentleman, an old crony of his, who would be glad to take it. We all liked old Mr. Bentley very much, when he came, and Aunt Elsie was happy to have the room reoccupied so soon and lose no money thereby. After Miss Markham had gone, and it was unlikely we should ever see her again, Mr. Doane gave us permission to tell Aunt Elsie all about it. And she was properly astonished at all the strange things that had been transpiring in her house, and in which we young people were involved, when she had known nothing about it! We did not confide the story to anyone else there. Mrs. Rowland was openly overjoyed at Miss Markham's departure, and remarked that *now* we could have a little peace and quiet in the house and no more "piano-thumping."

Mr. Conroy left a week or so after Miss Markham, to go South for Mr. Doane. But before he went, he and Boots struck up a curious friendship and had many long talks, and Boots confided to us that he'd gotten a lot of "pointers" from the detective on how to become a mystery solver! He and Boots had many a chuckle over how Boots had got ahead of him on the matter of the torn telegram.

And after that the summer slipped away very quietly. Mary Lou spent a great

deal of time writing up the whole account of the end of our mystery in her record book, and, in the end, it proved a very complete account of the affair. Mr. Doane himself asked permission to look it over, and was deeply interested in all the details we had not had time, or had not thought, to tell him. And later that book was to prove a blessing to *me*.

The only matter that remained to be settled was the question of the hulk of the *Folly*, down in a Southern swamp, and whether it really contained the hidden gold or not. Mr. Doane made almost daily reports to us on how the work of raising it was progressing, but it was several weeks before the work was advanced enough for the secret hidden compartment (which he told us was between the outer hull and the inner walls of the ship, in a certain section) could be brought to the surface. At last, one day, he came to us out in the garden, waving a telegram, and called out in a manner truly typical of himself:

“I am like the old philosopher, Archimedes, in his bathtub! For I can now say, with him, ‘*Eureka! I have found it!*’” And I knew without further explanation that the quest had been successful!

“Mr. Doane,” said Boots finally, after we had excitedly discussed the happy discovery, “if you don’t mind my asking, I wonder what you’re going to do with all this gold? You know the President has called in all the gold, and they probably won’t let you keep it, now you’ve found it.”

“That is very simple!” explained Mr. Doane. “I shall of course sell it at once to the government and receive its equivalent of many thousand dollars. Part of it, that part which my father did not originally cover with his own funds, I shall at once restore to the survivors or heirs of those whose original property it was. Out of the rest, I have some large expenses to pay, for the services of Mr. Conroy and the others who have been engaged in helping to salvage it. But the residue, which is still a sizable sum, will be sufficient to see me through to the end of my days. It is a rather comforting thought.”

Fall came at last, and with it the inevitable parting from the friends that had become so dear to me. Much as I longed to see Mother and get back to my own home, I felt that life would never be quite the same again without the daily contact with Mary Lou and Aunt Elsie, Mr. Doane and Boots. But I had at least the consolation of knowing that we could keep in touch by letters and occasionally meet together. And Mary Lou and I had, I was sure, established a friendship for life, as enduring as Mother’s and Aunt Elsie’s has always been.

Then we had to separate, Boots to go off to a new boarding school, Mary Lou to the hospital for treatment—a long course of it—and I to my own home and later to college. On the day I left, Mary Lou pressed a package into my hands.

“This is the record book, Joan,” she told me. “I want you to keep it, because you know, you said that sometime you were going to write a story about this mystery of ours, and the record book will help you to remember all the things that happened, just in their right order.”

I could almost have wept at her loving thoughtfulness, but I only hugged her instead and said:

“If I ever write that book, Mary Lou, it will be yours and mine together! We’ll collaborate on it. And half the proceeds, if there are any, will be yours too!” Her shining eyes told me how the idea pleased her.

“I don’t care about the proceeds!” she exclaimed happily. “But oh, think of the *wonder* of having one’s name on a book!”

This story could not end properly without my telling of a delightful reunion we had at my home by the sea, about a year after all these events happened. It was in early September. Mary Lou had spent the entire summer with Mother and me, for we had not felt obliged to give up our home that season. Her health was so immensely improved that she no longer had to use a wheel chair but could walk about quite independently, though it was feared she would always be slightly lame. Boots also had been visiting us for a week, while his parents were away on a trip. And to crown it all, Aunt Elsie and Mr. Doane were coming down from Mapleside to spend the week-end with us! Mr. Doane said he would risk having the asthma for once, in order to get one more look at the ocean, which he loved so dearly.

We four were all sitting out on the dunes, that first evening, in the sunset, watching the opalescent color of the sky and ocean, and the lazy lap of a low surf on the beach. It was all very peaceful, and suddenly Mr. Doane remarked:

“There is something I would like to tell you three children, and this seems, perhaps, as propitious a time as any to do it. To be as brief about it as possible, I want to tell you that I have recently been remaking my will. I have no kith or kin left of my own, and I had originally intended to leave the bulk of my money to some of my favorite charities. But now I have rearranged all that. For, in the interim, things have happened that have endeared certain people to me very much. To you, Joan, I have arranged to leave my books and interesting pictures, which originally I had intended to bequeath to some historical museum. To Boots will go my ship models

and the figurehead of the *Folly*, which I think he would appreciate as much as anything. And to Mary Lou will go a sum which I hope will be sufficient to cover a course of extended treatments for her health and also her education, in any line she may care to take up. This sum I have already set aside as a gift, in trust with Miss McKeever, who will administer it as she sees fit. What remains will be ample to take care of me, in the naturally few years of life I have remaining to me. I hope you will all be pleased! Do not try to thank me, for it is only a debt of gratitude that I owe for all your extraordinarily intelligent kindness and thought for me at a time when I most needed it!”

I don't to this day know what we said, or how we tried to express to him our gratitude for his lovely and most unexpected thought for us! In the embarrassment of this surprising announcement we were all pretty tongue-tied, I expect. But while we were struggling with it, a most beautiful thing happened. Boots had suddenly raised his eyes to the horizon, clapped his hand to his mouth, and exclaimed:

“Excuse me, but am I crazy—or what? Do you see what I see?”

We all looked where he pointed, and there, unbelievable as it might seem, was a marvelous *clipper ship*, her full-rigged sails picked out in the gold of the sunset, gallantly plowing her way toward the south, before a light northwest wind! It was like something out of a dream, and so appropriate that it seemed as if it *couldn't* be true. I had never seen anything like it in my life, and I too thought we must just be “seeing things!” But, Mr. Doane, who had risen to his feet and was looking at it, so it seemed, with all his soul in his eyes, smiled down at us and said:

“No, we're not ‘seeing things’ that are not there! It is very real and happens to be one of the few old clipper ships still in existence, and now the property of a writer of maritime literature and an authority on those old ships. I saw in the papers, only this morning, that she had just set sail for an extended cruise around the world, with her owner on board, and I was hoping that, as we were to be all here at the seashore, we might catch a glimpse of her on her southward course. That glimpse has certainly come at an opportune moment and has gladdened my old eyes more than anything I can express!”

We all stood there, silent, our eyes riveted on the tall masts and golden sails of that distant ship. She was fast slipping below the horizon, and presently only the upper sails were visible. It was then that Mr. Doane began to repeat, softly, but very distinctly, the lines from Masefield's lovely poem, “Sea-Fever”:

*“ I must go down to the sea again, to the lonely sea and the sky,
And all I ask is a tall ship and a star to steer her by;
And the wheel’s kick and the wind’s song and the white sail’s shaking,
And a grey mist on the sea’s face, and a grey dawn breaking!”*

When he reached the last line, every vestige of the clipper ship was gone. The sun had sunk, and a purple mist was gathering out on the horizon. We didn’t any of us speak—there seemed nothing adequate we could say. But we sat for a while longer in the growing darkness, and listened to the soft crash of the low breakers on the beach at our feet!

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Misspelled words and printer errors have been corrected. Where multiple spellings occur, majority use has been employed.

Punctuation has been maintained except where obvious printer errors occur.

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[The end of *The Figurehead of the "Folly"* by Augusta Hueill Seaman]