Williamson Charles Norris, Williamson Alice Muriel

The Lightning Conductor Discovers America

Charles Williamson

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Williamson C.

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Содержание

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I
THE HONBLE MRS. WINSTON (NÉE MOLLY RANDOLPH) TO HER FRIEND, THE COUNTESS OF LANE

On Board SS. Evangeline,
March 15th.

Dearest Mercédes:

It will be days, also nights (worse luck, for my cabin chirps like a cricket, sings like a canary, and does a separate realistic imitation of each animal in the Zoo!), before we get to New York. But I have crochet cramp and worsted wrist from finishing a million scarfs since we sailed, so I feel it will ease the strain to begin a letter to you. I dare say, anyhow, I shan't close it till the last minute, with a P. S. to say we're arriving safely —*if* we do! One never knows nowadays. And we have on board a man who's been torpedoed twice. I hope he isn't the kind to whom everything happens in threes. By the way, he's the Ship's Mystery, and this letter can't be a complete record of the voyage unless I tell you about him. *Place aux dames*, however. There's a girl I want to tell you about first. Or had I better polish off our own family history and make a clean sweep of ourselves before beginning on anybody else? On second thoughts, I will!

Jack's getting better splendidly. I can't say he's getting *well*, for that will take a long time yet, I'm sorry to – but no, to be an Honest Injun, I'm *not* sorry. I'm glad —*glad*! He's done his "bit" – quite a large bit – for his country, and if his bones and muscles were knitting as rapidly as I knit socks for soldiers, he would insist on rushing back to do another bit. Of course he wouldn't have consented to come over here, even for the three months I've made him (figuratively speaking) "sign on for," if the doctors hadn't all said he'd be a crock for months. Even he has to admit that he may as well crock in America as anywhere else; and I've persuaded him that I can't possibly decide what to do with the place Cousin John Randolph Payton left me on Long Island without his expert advice. It may be the first time I was ever unable to decide a thing by myself, but there *must* be a first time, you know. And I'm simply purring with joy to have Jack at my mercy like this, after all I went through with him at the front. We shall celebrate a wedding day presently. Ten years married, and I adore Jack just ten times more than I did the day I exchanged a Lightning Conductor for a husband.

He does look *too* interesting since he was wounded! All the girls gaze at him as if he were a matinee idol or a moving-picture star, and naturally they don't think I'm worthy of him in the least – an opinion in which I agree. Luckily, *he* doesn't. I believe he admires me as much as I do him. And really, I'm not so bad to look at, I notice, now I've begun to live again and don't need to worry over Jack every instant. I had feared it might be necessary to own up to twenty-nine, only two years short of my real age, which would be so wasteful. But thank goodness, I see now I can safely retreat in good order back to twenty-five, and stay there for some time to come. I always did feel that if girl or woman found a nice, suitable age, she ought to stick to it!

That's all about us, I think. So, speaking of girls, I'll tell you about the one I mentioned. I want to tell you, because Jack and I are both passionately interested and perhaps a little curious. Consequently

I expect her fate and ours, as the palmists say, will be mixed together while we live on Long Island. In that case, she's sure to be served up to you toasted, iced, sugared, and spiced, in future letters, so she may as well be introduced to you now: "The Countess of Lane – Miss Patricia Moore." Nice name, isn't it? Almost as nice as yours before you were married to Monty. She has informed me, however, that she hates the Patricia part because it sounds as if she turned up her nose in pride of birth, whereas God turned it up when He made her – or else her nurse let her lie on it when she was asleep. Anyhow, it's tilted just right, to make her look like one of those wonderful girls on American magazine covers, with darling little profiles that show the long curve of lashes on their off, as well as their near, eyelid. You know that engaging effect?

I have been invited to call her "Patty," or "Pat," both of which names were in use at the French convent school she has lately left. But I think she will have to be "Patsey" for me, as to my mind it's more endearing. And "endearing" is a particularly suitable adjective for her. Constantly, when looking at the creature, I find myself wanting to hum, "Believe me, if all those endearing young charms," etc. There are simply *crowds* of them – charms, I mean. Big blue eyes under those eyelashes, and above them, too, for the under lashes are a special feature; clouds of black wavy hair; and milky-white skin such as true Irish beauties have in poems, where it's not so difficult as in real life. This girl is American, not Irish, but she's certainly the Beauty of the ship.

She is the *happiest* thing you ever saw: and apparently she's coming home (she calls it "home," though she hasn't seen America since she was ten) as a conquering hero comes marching into a blaze of glory. All the same, I'm sorry for her. I have a sort of impression – but why be a croaking raven? I really don't see why! Every prospect pleases, and there's no reason man should be particularly vile. When I allude thus flippantly to "man," I refer to Papa Moore. I suppose when one comes to analyze that "sort of an impression" the danger-note is sounded to my heart by the girl's description of her father.

Not that she calls him "father," or even "papa," or "dad." She calls him "Larry," his name being Laurence. She worships the ground he walks on, she says, which is sweet of her, as very little of it has been walked on in her neighbourhood for the last nine years.

It seems that Mamma and Larry made a runaway match, when he was twenty and a half and Mamma seventeen and a quarter. He ran from college and she ran from boarding-school. Mamma was an heiress; Larry was poor. However, he had a lovely old house on Long Island (or rather his people had it) and he came into it later when the others had kindly died: a very historic old house, according to Miss Pat. She's intensely proud of her parents' romance, and the fact that Larry is at this present time only forty-one. "Of course forty-one is *old*," she explained to Jack and me, "but not for the father of a grown-up girl, is it? It couldn't be *done* younger! And when you meet him, you'll see – why, you'll see that I look old enough to be his *mother*!"

(She had her nineteenth birthday with a present of a motor car to celebrate it, just before leaving France, and she looks sixteen. So naturally Jack and I are curious to behold Larry. If her description fits, he must be rather like the father in Anstey's "Vice Versa.")

When Pat was ten, Mamma twenty-eight, and Father thirty-one, the trio went to Europe, which I think mostly meant Paris. Mamma was taken with pneumonia after an Embassy ball, at which she was the prettiest woman, and died of her triumph. Larry didn't know what to do with the child. But some sympathetic soul who wanted to save the dear boy trouble advised him to plant his little flower in the soil of France, where he could come once in a while to see how she grew. He took the advice, and Patty was planted in a convent school, where she has stayed till now, as he never seemed ready to dig her up.

Just what Larry has done with himself meanwhile is not explained in this first chapter of the romance, which is as far as we have got. All Patty knows is that he left "*important business*" to dash over twice and see her: once when she was thirteen, once again three years later. He was "too handsome for words," and "the girls were all wild about him." Since then, nothing doing – except

letters and cheques. Apparently Larry was under the impression that once a schoolgirl, always a schoolgirl. Anyhow, he put off indefinitely the happy day when he could take his fair young daughter to reign over his home. The Mother Superior wrote when Pat was going to be eighteen, and Larry said he would come, but didn't. Patty is sure he couldn't, because "he *adores* her just as she adores him," and is dying for the time when they can be together. At last, owing to the war, all the older girls were leaving the school except Patricia Moore; so Larry's memory had to be jogged, and this time he opened his heart and sent for Pat. Dreadfully sorry he couldn't fetch her himself, but gave *carte blanche* for everything a girl could possibly want in travelling, except a father.

I told you about the high-powered French motor car. Well, there's an even higher powered French maid. She's the kind that you could describe as "and suite," without the slightest snobbishness or exaggeration, when registering your name in the visitors' book at a hotel. The car, which Larry told Pat to buy for herself as a birthday present from him, is forty horsepower, I believe; whereas I'm much mistaken if Angéle isn't about a hundred demon-power. She's geared terribly high, can "crank" herself I should imagine, and has the smartest new type of body, all glittering paint and varnish. Isn't it *nice* that her name should be Angéle? It wasn't the Mother Superior who engaged this guardian angel for Miss Moore, but the dear old Paris friend of Larry's who advised the convent in the first place. Angéle was *her* maid, taken over from a princess – an Albanian one, or something Balkanic or volcanic. The old friend is a Marquise, and my opinion is that her genius lies in finding safe harbours for incubuses (*is* there such a word, or should it be "incubi?"). Heaven knows what explosive thing may happen if the high-powered Angéle doesn't fancy her new garage and petrol.

Besides the car and the maid, Mademoiselle Patsey is bringing with her to America a regular trousseau for her début, which is to take place in the grand manner. She won't let me see Larry's photograph because it doesn't do him justice, and because she wants him to burst upon me as a brilliant surprise; but she has shown me as much of the trousseau as her stateroom and Angéle's can contain. The rest's in the hold, and forms quite a respectable cargo. If everything comes off as Patsey expects it to do (and after all, as I said, why shouldn't it?) I do think that she and her charm and her clothes are likely to dazzle New York. Nothing prettier can have happened there or anywhere for a long time.

By the way, did *you* ever hear of a Laurence Moore of Long Island, whose place is called Kidd's Pines? There may be half a directory bursting with Laurence Moores, but there can be only one with an address like Kidd's Pines. It's named after a clump of pines supposed to be a kind of landmark for treasure buried by Captain Kidd. Either the treasure is buried under the trees, somewhere between their roots and China, or the pines point to it. Can pines point? I don't see how they can, any more than a pumpkin can point; but perhaps nobody else being able to see is the reason why the treasure's never been found.

We haven't many young men on board. Most of the young men who travel are going the other way just now; and that makes our Ship's Mystery more conspicuous. One reason he's so conspicuous is because he's travelling third class. (We used to call it steerage!) Maybe you'll say that travelling third class doesn't usually make people mysterious: it makes them smell of disinfectants. Also it puts them Beyond the Pale. Not that I or any other nice woman can tell precisely what a Pale is. But anyhow, if you go third class you have to show your tongue if the least important person demands a sight of it. And if that doesn't put you beyond Pales and everything else, I don't know what does.

That's why this man deserves such extraordinary credit for being interesting and mysterious. Even if caught in the act of displaying his tongue to the doctor, I believe you'd say, should you see a snapshot: "Who *is* that man?"

Now, haven't I worked up to him well? Don't you want to hear the rest? Well, so do *we*. For we don't know anything at all, except that if we go and gaze over the rail of the first-class part of this old-fashioned tub of a ship, into the third-class part, we can generally observe a young man who looks like an Italian prince (I mean, the way an Italian prince *ought* to look) telling the steerage

children stories or teaching them games. I'm not sure if he's exactly handsome, but there must be something remarkable about him, or all the first-class passengers wouldn't have begun asking each other or the ship's officers or even the deck stewards on the first day out, the question I suggested: "Who *is* that man?"

I believe, by the by, it was a deck steward *I* asked. I've always found that they know everything. Or what they don't know they cook up more excitingly than if bound to dull facts.

I added to the question aforesaid – "Who *is* that man?" – another: "And how *does* he come to be in the steerage?"

It was the second question which got answered first. "I suppose, my lady" – (Whiffitts will anticipate the far future by calling me "my lady") – "that all his money was torpedoed."

This explanation raised such a *weird* picture (can't you see the thing happening?) that Whiffitts was obliged to begin at the beginning, and not stop till he came to the end, my eager look a prophesied mine of half-crowns.

Whiffitts simply loved telling me. It *is* nice knowing something somebody else doesn't know and is dying to! The name of the Ship's Mystery is supposed to be Storm, Peter Storm. I say "supposed," advisedly. Because it may be *anything*. They don't worry with passenger lists for third-class people; they're just a seething, nameless mass, apparently. But anything remarkable bubbles up to the top, as in the case of the alleged Peter Storm. Naturally, his fellow-passengers have nicknamed him "The Stormy Petrel."

What is he really? we wonder. A jewel shines more brightly at night, and perhaps it's the contrast between the Stormy Petrel and those "fellow-passengers" of his which makes him look so very great a gentleman, despite the fact that his clothes might have been bought at a second hand – no, a fourth or fifth hand – shop. The creature wears flannel shirts (he seems, thank heaven, to have several to change with, of different colours) and they have low, turn-over collars. Apparently all his neckties were torpedoed with his money, for he never sports one. Instead, he ties himself up in red or black silk handkerchiefs, very ancient and faded; and if you will believe me, my dear girl, the effect is most *distinguished*!

I told you that he looks as an Italian prince ought to look and seldom does; but he claims American citizenship. He sailed from New York in the *Lusitania*, and was among those saved. Far from advertising this adventure, the hero of it would apparently have kept silence if he could; but it leaked out somehow in Ireland, Whiffits doesn't quite know how. In any case, at the time of taking passage on the *Arabic* back to America, months later, paragraphs about the man's *Lusitania* experience appeared in the papers. He was catechized at the consulate when trying to get a passport for the United States, and it came out then that there was no Peter Storm on board the *Lusitania*. Our Mystery explained, however, that in the third class there was a passenger registered as "Peter Sturm." The name, according to him, was spelled wrongly at the time. Nobody has since contradicted this statement, so it has been given the benefit of the doubt. Once more the man's luck bobbed up on board the *Arabic*, where he was saved again, and behaved well, rescuing a lot of people. What he did in that way on the *Lusitania* isn't known; but the searchlight of fame was turned full upon him after the *Arabic*, and has never ceased to play around his head. By the by, the said head was wounded in the *Arabic* affair, and bears a scar which runs down over the left temple and is rather becoming. Also he got pneumonia from exposure, and lay dangerously ill for some time. Several persons whose lives he saved wanted to give him money, but he refused to accept. He was nursed at a hospital in Ireland, and when he grew strong enough he found work, in order to pay his own way to America. What he is going to turn his hand to over there he doesn't seem to know, or won't tell.

We have a real live millionairess on the *Evangeline* an American millionairess from the West somewhere, a Mrs. Shuster. She's a widow, about forty-five, common but kind. For "two twos" I believe she would adopt the Stormy Petrel. She's been in Switzerland, where people used to go to eat chocolate and see mountains, and where they now go to make proposals of peace. I believe she

made some, but nobody listened much, so she came away disappointed and fiercely determined to do good somewhere or know the reason why! She's a stout, wildly untidy woman whose mouse-coloured hair is always coming down, though it's freely dotted with irrelevant tortoise-shell combs; and whose elaborate clothes look somehow insecure, the way scree does on the side of a mountain. Her ideas leap out of her brain like rabbits out of holes, and then go scuttling away again, to be followed ineffectively by others: and her latest is benefiting the Ship's Mystery. She's sure he can't be American, because Americans don't have eyes like wells of ink, and short, close black beards like those of English or Italian naval officers. Her theory is that he's a subject of some belligerent country, who has conscientious scruples against fighting. The fact that he sailed from New York on the *Lusitania* last spring can't convince the lady that she is wrong in her "deductions," as Sherlock Holmes would say. It only complicates the mystery a little and adds ramifications.

To my mind, Mr. Storm hasn't at all the look of a man opposed to fighting. I believe he would love it. The odd thing to me is, where there's such wide opportunity on one side or the other, that he isn't doing it. And Jack thinks so, too. I do hope he isn't a spy or an anarchist, or a person who takes passage on ships to blow them up or signal to submarines or something.

Of course I haven't suggested such horrors to Mrs. Shuster; and yesterday she made up an exploring party for the steerage, so as to open communications with the desired protégé. The first officer had promised to take her, and she asked me to join them. I happened to be talking to Patsey Moore at the time, and saw by the way her eyes lighted that she was dying to go, too. So I got her included in the invitation.

It was a lovely calm day, the long level lines of the sea punctuated with porpoises, dear things like giant commas. A good many of the third-class passengers were writing letters on their knees, and the *quaintest* paper. Among these was the Man of Mystery; and Mrs. Shuster sailed up to him, billowing out in the breeze of her own enthusiasm.

"We've all heard of you," she said. "And the splendid things you did on the *Arabic*."

Actually the man blushed! He rose up politely; and as he is very tall and straight, rather thin, and extremely dark, he reminded me of a cedar towering beside one of those squat Dutch trees cut into the shape of some domestic animal.

"I really did nothing," he protested, with that guilty redness spreading over his olive face, and making him more mysterious than ever. *Because he had the air of being found out in something.* And the blush began before Mrs. Shuster got as far as mentioning the *Arabic*. It was more as if he were afraid she had met him before and recognized him.

"Well, other people are better judges of that than yourself," the dear lady contradicted him. "I, and a lot more first-class passengers, feel it's a shame you should be here. We want you to be up with *us* and – and telling us all about your adventures. The favour wouldn't be from us to you, but the other way round, if you accepted the price of a cabin. We're sure you're a gentleman – "

At that it was Patsey's and my turn to blush! It was such an awful thing to say to the man, though the poor woman meant so blunderingly well. P. and I were in the background – an easy place to be, because there's so much of Mrs. Shuster. We weren't even a chorus, because we hadn't made a sound or a gesture, and didn't intend to make one. But the colour effect was unrehearsed and unavoidable. I felt a regular blush of red to the head, as I used to say when I was small, and Pat grew scarlet as if she'd been suddenly slapped. I expected to see the forked lightning of scorn dart from those immense dark eyes of Storm's: but instead they crinkled up in an engaging smile. One glance the man gave Pat and me, against his own will I think: but it was a spontaneous combustion of his sense of humour. It struck a spark to ours, and I dared to smile also. Pat didn't quite dare, but looked relieved, though still evidently scared about what might come next, and intensely, painfully interested.

"Thank you very much," said Mr. Storm. "I'm afraid you flatter me, madam. I make no such pretension. It's kind of you to think of promoting me, but this is my place. I shouldn't feel at home

going first class, I assure you. I haven't either the manners or the clothes to make me comfortable there."

"Why, I think your manners are *beautiful*," that miserable millionairess assured him, while my mouth felt dry, and I'm sure Patsey's became arid as the Libyan Desert.

"We'll all risk that, if you'll come and entertain us with stories of your adventures. As for clothes, I can take up a collection for you from among the gentlemen of the first class. A shirt here, a coat there. They'd be delighted."

"Thank you again," responded the victim, still smiling. "But I should be – a misfit. And I haven't a story worth telling. I'm no Scherezadé. I'm very grateful for your interest, madam, but my best way of showing it is to stay where I am – and where I belong."

"You're ever so much too modest," the unfortunate lady persisted. "Isn't he, Mrs. Winston?"

I prickled all over like a cactus. "I think Mr. Petrel – I mean Mr. Storm – can decide for himself better than we can," I stammered.

He looked at me, and then beyond me at Pat. "I'm *really* grateful," he repeated.

Even Mrs. Shuster understood that the rare plant preferred to remain in the kitchen garden with the vegetables, and that she could not uproot it.

"Well," she said reluctantly, "I'm sorry you feel that way. But do let me do *something* to – to show my appreciation of your gallant conduct on the *Arabic*. You're evidently a man of education. I see that, in spite of all you say. It isn't true, is it, that you're an American?"

"Quite true, madam," he answered coolly. "Do I speak like a foreigner?"

"Not like a *foreigner*, exactly. But – well, I don't know. I must take your word for it. I guess, though, you've spent a good deal of time in other countries?"

"I've been here and there," he admitted. "I had the craze for travel in my blood as a boy." As he spoke, he smiled again, as if at some odd memory.

"I dare say you know several languages?" suggested Mrs. Shuster.

"Oh, I've picked up Russian – and a little French, and Italian, and Spanish."

"You ought to get quite a good position, then."

"I intend to try."

"But they say it's almost impossible to find work anywhere now, without influence," she went on. "Have *you* got influence?"

"None whatever, madam."

Her face brightened. She'd have been bitterly disappointed if he had answered differently! "Well, we'll see what I can do for you on land, since you won't accept anybody's assistance on water," chirped the benefactress. "With your knowledge of languages, you might help me in my Propaganda." (The way she spoke that word spelt it with a capital.)

The Stormy Petrel flushed up again, whether with annoyance or embarrassment or a mad desire to laugh, I couldn't decide. He murmured that she was very kind, but that he wouldn't trouble her. She must have many people to look after, and he would be all right in one way or another. He wasn't afraid.

"No, indeed, I'm sure you're never afraid of *anything*!" protested Mrs. Shuster, breathless with enthusiasm. But at this moment the officer who was our guide felt that the limit had been reached, even for a millionairess. He hinted that there was more to see of third-class life, and moved us on when our leading lady had offered a royal handshake to the steerage hero. She would no doubt have pinned a V. C. on his breast if she had had one handy, but was obliged to content herself with screaming out reassurances as we were torn away: "I won't forget you. I shall see you again, and suggest something *definite*."

Of course we didn't want to see more third-class life but we had to pretend to. We saw where the poor dears (Mrs. Shuster called them poor dears) slept and bathed (if at all) and ate. After a boring ten or fifteen minutes we were returning by the way we had come, when a sheet of paper blew

along the deck. It made straight for me as if asking to be saved, and I saved it; otherwise it would have fluttered into the sea.

Somebody had just begun writing on the paper with one of those blue indelible pencils such as soldiers use in the trenches. There were two or three lines along the top of the page, and they jumped right at my eyes, though of course I didn't mean to read them – "in case you don't get the wireless. You must see him and make him understand that this can't go on. Men rose from the dead in old days. What has been done before can be done again. Warn him that – "

There the sentence broke off.

I was thrilled. It was as if a door suddenly flew open in front of a dull house in a slummy street, to show for an instant a scene of splendour, and then slammed shut on your prying nose.

Of course I *knew* the paper was Storm's, and the handwriting his (a strong, educated hand) because there simply wasn't anybody else in that crowd capable of it. But, as I told you, several of the steerage passengers were taking advantage of the smooth weather to write letters; and, as it happened, our Mystery was no longer engaged in writing. He'd stuffed his pad and pencil into a pocket of his awful coat when the good ship Shuster first bore down on him under full sail. Now, on our return, he was standing at some distance pointing out porpoises to passengers and rather conspicuously not seeing us. I couldn't yell, "Mr. Storm, you've lost part of a letter you were writing!" But I thought it was the sort of letter he wouldn't want knocking about, so I said in a loud voice to our attendant officer, "Oh, somebody has dropped a sheet of paper with writing on it!"

I expected Storm to start dramatically, feel in his pocket, and perhaps claim his property with a keen glance at my face to see whether I had read anything. I intended of course to put on what Jack calls my "rag doll expression," one which I find most useful in social intercourse. But the man didn't start. He could not have helped hearing my siren hoot, but he never turned a hair or anything else. He went on pointing out perfectly irrelevant porpoises. I had to admire his nerve! For instantly I seemed to read the inner workings of his mind, and understood that he'd deliberately decided not to claim the paper. He guessed that I'd read the exciting words, and his mental message to me was: "Do what you like, my dear madam, and be d – ."

I called out again for whom it might concern, "Somebody's lost part of a letter!" but no one took any interest in the announcement, so I added, with an eye on the back of the Mystery's neck, "Well, I suppose there's no use keeping it." I crumpled the paper into a ball, and tossed it over the rail where it couldn't be missed by the eye of Mr. Storm.

"He'll be glad to know I'm not showing it about, or brooding over it like a bit of a jigsaw puzzle," I thought. But the eye I wished to catch remained glued to the porpoises, and only they could tell whether it darkened with dread or twinkled with suppressed laughter. Even Mrs. Shuster hadn't the "cheek" to try and attract the man's attention, and we returned to our own class thanking our conductor for "all the interesting things he had shown us." I wondered if he knew that while we spoke in plural we thought in singular!

"The *dreadful* old lady will never let go of that poor fellow till she's ruined all the romance, and made him a respectable paid propaganda or something!" sighed Patsey Moore when we were tucked into our deck chairs once more.

I laughed, but saw that she was quite serious, almost tragic. One of her charms is her funny English. She's lived in France and talked French so long that she has to translate herself into English, so to speak; and sometimes she has the quaintest conception of how to do it. Also she rolls her "rs"; and if the Mystery had heard himself alluded to by her as a "pr-r-opoganda" he would never have forgotten it. As for Mrs. Shuster – she mightn't have minded the Maxim gun of that long-drawn "d-r-r-*read*ful!" but her very vitals would have melted over the "old lady." Despite her largeness and oddness of appearance generally, she considers herself a *young* widow, with a personal fascination beyond that of her banking account. I, with the mellow leniency of – let me see? – twenty-six, find this pathetic. But Patsey on the sunny slope of nineteen can't even envisage my viewpoint. For her,

a woman over thirty is middle-aged. When she's forty she is old, and there's an end of it. How much the poor baby has to learn! I hope she won't do it in being outrivalled with her best young man some day, by a dazzling siren of forty-five who knows all the tricks of the trade and looks younger than any respectable woman ought to look at half that age!

March 19th.

I was interrupted there, and I seem to have done nothing else but be interrupted ever since, either by big bumpy Mrs. Shuster, or some one, or else by big bumpy waves which make me want not to write letters. At this moment Patsey is calling "Oh, *do* come and look at the Statue of Liberty! I thought I remembered her twice that size and twice as handsome!"

Dearest Mercédes, I must go at once and browbeat Jack (who's never seen the lady you know) into admiring her at pain of losing my love.

Ever your affectionate

Molly.

II
THE HONBLE MRS. WINSTON TO HER FRIEND THE COUNTESS OF LANE

Awepesha, Long Island,
March 21st.

You dear, to send us such a nice expensive cablegram! We found it waiting when we arrived. Of course the name of the place limped out of England hopelessly mutilated. But how could a British telegraph operator be expected to spell Awepesha? The name is more American than the United States, being Indian; and meaning "it calms." Belonging to Long Island, it is Algonquian of course. Don't you think that rather a nice name for a place on a shady shore by quiet waters, where fierce winds never blow, and soft mists often make you look at the world as through an opal? It's an appropriate name, too, because poor Cousin John Randolph Payton, who died and left Awepesha to me, built it after separating from a Xantippe wife who made his life a Nell.

Everything is sweet; and the large white house has the calmest face you ever saw: wide-apart eyes, and a high, broad forehead, under drooping green hair – elm hair. Jack loves it. He says I mustn't dream of selling, as he rather thought it would be wise to do, before he saw my legacy. Now his feeling is that even if we don't spend more than two months out of twenty-four at the place, we simply *must* keep it for ours. You know we were married abroad, and this is Jack's first sight of anything Colonial. When I used to talk about a house being "Colonial," it left him cold. He had an idea that to the trained eye of a true Englishman "Colonial" would mean debased Georgian. But now he admits – he's a darling about admitting things, which I hear is a rare virtue in husbands! – that there's a delicious uniqueness about an American Colonial house not to be found anywhere or in anything else the world over. It is, he thinks, as if America had spiritualized the Georgian era and expressed it in terms of airy lightness unknown to the solid Georges themselves. Of course, our home isn't *quite* the real thing, but a copy. It's forty years old, whereas Kidd's Pines – but oh, my dear, that *reminds* me! You'd never believe what has happened to that poor child, Patricia Moore, whom I "starred" in my ship's letter to you. When I wrote, she seemed on the topmost crest of the wave. "Poor" was the *last* adjective I should have selected to describe her position in life.

Compared with her, *nothing* has happened to Jack and me. All we've done since I posted that letter on the dock (waiting for the kindest pet of a custom-house man) can be expressed in three words, *veni*, *vidi*, *vici*. We came, we saw, we conquered – or anyhow took possession. It's much the same thing. But Patsey! Her world has turned upside down, and Jack and I are trying with all our wills and wits to turn it right side up again. The Mystery Man is entangled in the scheme, too, in a weird way. But I must begin at the beginning, or I shall get tangled myself.

Pat put on a smart Paris frock to land in, and meet "Larry": also hat. She looked a dream, and felt one. Every woman did her best in the clothes line (I don't mean a pun), but Mrs. Shuster transcended us all. You can't *think* what she was like in one of the new-fashioned dresses, and a close-winged hat with a long stick-out thing behind exactly the shape and size of a setting hen. You may imagine a description of Mrs. Shuster irrelevant to Patsey Moore's fate and the entangling of the Mystery Man: but you'll see in a few minutes that this is not so. Our dear millionairess had been "making up" to Pat as well as to Jack and me a good deal, for several days before landing; and you know how Jack and I just *can't* be rude to fellow human beings and take steps to shed them, no matter how we are bored. I inherited this lack of *shaden freude* from dear father, and Jack has inherited it from me. At least, he says he didn't mind how much he hurt pushing people until I softened his heart beyond repair, and turned it into a sort of cushion for any creature needing sanctuary.

When we saw the Dove of Peace (her nickname on board) preening herself in clothes which would have made the Queen of Sheba "look like thirty cents," I was weak enough to breathe the desired words of admiration. "Gorgeous" was, I think, my adjective; and it was no fib.

The poor dear was pleased, and volunteered the information that she'd "dressed up to kill" for a particular purpose.

"It's really for my protégé's sake," she explained. "I marconied my friend Mr. Caspian to meet me. You know, *the* Caspian – Ed Caspian, who's come into the Stanislaws' fortune. I think I've told you I know him *very* well?"

(She had indeed. If she'd told us once she'd told us a dozen times. I longed to say so. But one doesn't say to Mrs. Shuster the things one longs to say. She would go to bed and die if one did.)

"I've wired him to meet me at the boat, because I thought I'd interest him in brave Peter Storm," she went on. "That poor fellow's so quixotic he won't take favours from a woman. But he can't refuse a helping hand from a man like Ed Caspian."

"Have you told Mr. Storm what you're going to do for him?" I ventured to inquire.

"Not yet," said Mrs. Shuster, slowly and conspicuously covering with gloves a pair of hands more ringed than Saturn. "I thought I'd surprise him. You see, he's persuaded the authorities that he's an American (though you know what *I* think!), so he's no emigrant, but a returning citizen of the United States. That's what his passport makes him out to be. I've seen it. I asked to. He'll be getting off the ship with the rest of us, and I shall just say, 'Mr. Storm, I want you to have a little talk with Mr. Caspian, the great social philanthropist.'"

"I see!" I responded inadequately. "But I thought, judging from the newspapers, that Mr. Caspian had – er – turned over a new leaf since he tumbled into all that money."

(You've read, I suppose, Mercédes mia, about the change in the White Hope of the socialists when suddenly he found himself the tenth richest man in America? I'd never met him myself, till the day of our landing: I've been on the other side of the water so much since Jack and I were married and father died. But one has often heard of Ed Caspian, the "gentleman socialist," the shining light of settlement workers. And since this money came to him several friends have written that it was sad – or funny, according to the point of view – to see how he'd altered.)

"It's only the gutter papers that print those horrid stories," Mrs. Shuster reproached me. "Why, they say things against *Me* sometimes! They say all I do is for self-advertisement. Did you ever hear such a wicked lie? But we Public Characters have to put up with a lot. It's our martyrdom. *I* know Ed Caspian through and through. At one time – " (she blushed and bridled as only a fat woman with two or three chins can bridle, and I understood what she wished me to understand, though Ed Caspian can't be more than thirty-two, and she's perhaps forty-five) – "at one time – oh, well, he was a poor young man with noble principles, and I'm always interested in such. My poor husband left me free to do as I liked at his death, and I was able to help several institutions Mr. Caspian was working for. I've been in Europe since he got his money; but I have perfect faith in him. He's richer than I am now, by a long shot, but he used to say he'd do anything to prove his gratitude. It's up to him to prove it to-day. I sent him a long telegram from Sandy Hook, and, by the by, mentioned you and the Honble Captain Winston."

Jack is attacked with acute goosefleshitis whenever she calls him that, but I think it's pathetic, she relishes the word "Honourable" so much, and makes it sound round and fat in her mouth like a big chocolate cream. Of course, Jack and I are quite *nobodies*; but it did occur to me when in the same breath she said, "Ed would do anything," etc., and "I mentioned you," that Mr. Caspian might know about Jack's father; and that he might find it better worth while bothering to meet Lord Brighthelmston's son than merely to prove his gratitude to a benefactress no longer needed.

Well, anyhow, the not very good ship *Evangeline* steamed slowly to her wharf at an early hour of the morning, and Patsey Moore and Mrs. Shuster were two of the most excited people on board.

Jack and I expected no one to meet us, because purposely we had let no one know. So we were not desperately emotional for our own sakes. But we were for Pat's.

"In a minute we'll see Larry!" she kept exclaiming. And her cheeks were like roses and her eyes like sapphires – literally, sapphires.

We all gazed at the welcoming, waving crowd; but as the mass individualized into faces, male and female, there was nothing admirable enough for Larry. Pat gave up hope almost as willingly as a lioness in the Zoo would give up her food at half-past feeding time. But at last she had to bow to the inevitable. Larry had not materialized. She was in "M" and we were in "W," so we couldn't do as much for her as we should have liked, and for a while had to leave her to the tender mercies of her maid. It was a relief to my mind, therefore, when I saw Mrs. Shuster introducing a man – Mr. Caspian I had no doubt – to the girl. Hurrying back to "S," she saw me peering out from "W" and flew to me, breathless.

"He came, you see!" she panted. "Dear fellow! He's just the same. Not one bit spoilt. But oh, what *do* you think he's told me – about Miss Moore's father?"

"Not dead?" I breathed.

"Worse!" She stopped to pant some more. I could have shaken her.

"Don't keep me in suspense," I begged. But the lady's eyes had lit upon her protégé. "There's Peter Storm!" she exclaimed. "I've been watching for him. I was afraid he might get away without seeing me."

He certainly was in the act of getting away, though I wasn't so sure about the rest. "Mr. Storm!" she cried. "Mr. Storm!"

He was forced to turn. Mrs. Shuster beckoned. He came toward us, though not with the long strides which had been leading him in another direction. He took off his cap, bowed gravely, and murmured something about having a man to meet.

(Jack was absent on leave, searching for some one to look at our trunks.)

"Oh, Mr. Storm," said his guardian angel, "I wouldn't have missed you for anything. But I was afraid you might have misunderstood my message. I've sent for a very important man, a great friend of mine, to introduce you to – Mr. Ed Caspian. He won't be long now. But when I mentioned Miss Moore, the young lady on the ship, and pointed her out to him, he told me the most dreadful news about her father. The poor man is absolutely ruined and bankrupt and everything else that's bad; and here's this dear child with trunkfuls of clothes and a motor car to pay duty on. Mr. Caspian was *so* interested when he saw her (that shows he's as good-hearted as ever in spite of the newspapers!), and he's ready to do anything to help, even to paying all the duties."

Half-forgotten gossip hopped into my mind like a toad. Somebody had shown me a paragraph in a scandal-loving American paper about the "change of heart" Ed Caspian had undergone with his change of purse. "Oh, he can't be allowed to do anything of that sort for Miss Moore," I said quickly. "Her father must have heaps of friends who – and anyhow, *we* shall look after her. I do hope Mr. Caspian isn't telling the poor child about her father's troubles?"

"Well, he offered to break the news to her gently," confessed Mrs. Shuster, looking guilty. "I told him she was so worried about Mr. Moore not coming to the boat. I'm sure Mr. Caspian wouldn't say a word to frighten her. He's as gentle as a fawn. I always found him so. And we'll *all* do things to help dear little Miss Moore. We'll club together; I'd love to."

I hardly heard. Without a thought of answering I dashed off to the rescue of Pat. But I was conscious, as I dashed, that the Ship's Mystery had given me a look. Not a word had he spoken since Mrs. Shuster began on the subject of Patsey Moore (not that he'd had a chance), but the look was one which nobody, no matter how preoccupied, could *help* being conscious of – it was so brilliant and so strange.

On the way to Patsey I caught sight of Jack in the distance and diverged to him. "I'll get hold of a man in a minute," he said, thinking I'd grown impatient.

"Never mind a man!" I snapped. "Never mind anything!"

"Not even your hats?" he laughed.

"*Hang* my hats! Oh, Jack, Pat's father's ruined, and that Caspian creature is telling her – unless we can stop him. Do come!"

Jack came. But we were too late. The roses on Pat's cheeks were already snowed under when we hurled ourselves at "M." They both turned as we came up, she and he together. I wasted only one glance on Mr. Caspian – just enough to see that he was a small man perfectly turned out by his tailor and fairly well by his Maker: all the upper part of a blond head and face rather beautiful and idealistic, the lower part not so good, might even be a rude contradiction. Then my eyes went to Pat's, which were more sapphire-like than ever, because they glittered behind tears that she'd have died rather than let fall. By not winking she had induced the tear-vessels to take back a few, and the process would go on satisfactorily, I was sure, if nothing untoward intervened.

"Have you and Mr. Winston met Mr. Caspian?" she asked, as formally as at a school reception for teaching young girls How to Succeed in Society. Her lips were white and moved stiffly, as lips do when they are cold, though the day was mild as milk. "Mr. Caspian says he knows Larry slightly, and – and – that he's in great trouble."

"I'm awfully sorry to be a bearer of ill tidings," Ed Caspian defended himself to Jack and me, "but Miss Moore was worrying – when Mrs. Shuster introduced us – because her father hadn't come to meet her, and I thought it would perhaps be best – "

Well, I won't bother you, Mercédes, dear, with all the "we saids" and "he saids." We – that is, Jack and I – soon realized that Caspian knew what he knew about "Larry's" affairs by hearsay, or from the newspapers. He was scarcely acquainted with Larry himself: had only met him at houses of mutual friends. Laurence Moore had come a regular cropper, it seemed. Things had been faring badly with him for some time "because he was no business man, and fellows were always persuading him to go into rotten things." "But we'll see him through, Miss Moore, we'll see him through," Mr. Caspian finished up. "Don't be unhappy. And I see in the papers that the fine old house is yours and can't be sold. Your father made it over to you legally, years ago. So that's all right, isn't it?"

"Have – have things been in the papers about us?" asked Pat. The tears had been put neatly back where they belonged, without one dropping out, and she looked pitifully brave – ready for anything, no matter what. She didn't know enough about the world to resent anything Caspian had said. On the contrary, she was probably thinking he meant to be kind – showing himself a good friend of Larry's and all that. Of course I realized from the first that the instant he saw Pat the man simply snapped at her. If indeed he had the intention of helping Larry it had been born in his mind within the last fifteen minutes, and whatever he might do would be for value received. Not that it was quite fair to blame him for that. With another type of man I might have thought it thrillingly romantic that he should fall in love at first sight and resolve to save the girl's father. But with Ed Caspian it was different – somehow. You see, he used to pose as a saint, a sort of third-rate St. George, with Society for the Dragon: he was all for the poor and oppressed. I remember reading speeches of his, in rather prim language. He was supposed to live like an anchorite. Now, here was St. George turned into his own Dragon. What an unnatural transformation! He, who had said luxury was hurrying the civilized world to destruction, wore a pearl in his scarf-pin worth thousands of dollars if it was worth a cent. He had all the latest slang of a Bond Street Nut. (By the way, over here when one talks of a "nut" it doesn't mean a swell, but a youth who is what they'd call "dotty" or "bunny on the 'umph" in a London music hall.) And though his eyebrows still had that heavenly arch which must have made his early reputation, the rest of him didn't look heavenly at all.

If I'd been a sensible matchmaker, I ought to have said to myself, perhaps, "Never mind, my dear Molly, beggars mustn't be choosers. Pat is, it seems, a beggar maid. You shouldn't look a gift Cophetua in the mouth. Here he is, to be had for the taking. Encourage her to take him."

But I just *couldn't*! I wanted her by and by to marry some one tall and handsome and altogether splendid. In fact, a *Man*. And if a man were a Man, it didn't matter whether he were a Cophetua or not. So I listened quite disgustedly as Mr. Ed Caspian answered Pat's piteous question about the newspapers, and criticised his affected accent. I think he fancied it English.

"Oh, it happens to lots of the best men," he set out to console her, "to be in the papers that way. There's nothing in it! I shouldn't have noticed, had it been some chap I'd never heard of. And then, Kidd's Pines, don't you know! That's a famous place. There was a picture of it in the Sunday *Times*, and something about its history. I've always wanted to see the house. May I come down, Miss Moore? There might be ways I could help you – your father, I mean – if I could look around and study the situation. For instance, it might pay me – actually *pay* me (no question of obligations) – to lend money on the place enough to set Mr. Moore right with his creditors and enough over to begin again."

"I don't understand," said Pat.

"Oh, you *spider*!" said I, in my mind, also perhaps with my eyes. I refrained from saying it with my lips, however, because after all, you see, I was a new friend of Pat's and mustn't stick my fingers into the mechanism of her fate without being sure I could improve its working. Jack and I aren't millionaires, especially since the war broke out and all our pet investments slumped. That convalescent home for soldiers we're financing at Folkestone eats up piles of money, to say nothing of the Belgian refugees to whom we've given up Edencourt. There are fourteen families, and not less than seven children in the smallest, the largest has sixteen – the average is ten. Is your brain equal to the calculation? Mine isn't, but our purse *has* to be; for we've guaranteed to clothe as well as feed the lot for the duration of the war, and I hear we're keeping a shoe factory working double time. I felt that the most we could do in a financial way for dear Pat would be to pay duty on her car and clothes, and see that, personally, she lacked for nothing. Whatever Mr. Caspian's motives might be, I dared not choke him off on my own responsibility, and Jack said not a word. So I swallowed that "spider," but just as I was choking it down and Caspian was beginning to explain his noble, disinterested scheme, Mrs. Shuster and the S. M. (for that in future please read Ship's Mystery) bore down upon the letter "M."

For an instant I supposed that Pirate Shuster had captured Storm as a reluctant prize, but his expression told me that this was not the case. He came willingly, had even the air of leading the expedition; and his look of interested curiosity Caspian-ward was only equalled by mine at him. Remembering vividly the strange, brilliant, and puzzling glance he had thrown to me as I left him with Mrs. Shuster, I threw him one which I hoped was as brilliant and at the same time more intelligible. What I put into it was: "You're a *man*, even if you are a mystery, so do hurry up and interrupt this conversation, which has got beyond me."

Of course, I didn't dream that he could help by word or deed, but I thought if he just hurled himself blindly into the breach it would be something. By the time Mr. Caspian could renew his offer, Larry Moore might be at hand to look after his own interests and Pat's.

Mr. Peter Storm (perhaps I've mentioned this?) is tall and has therefore very long legs – soldier legs – that is, they can take prodigious strides as if they had a redoubt or something to carry in record time. Whether my glance had lassoed him, or whether he *wanted* to be introduced to Mrs. Shuster's rich friend, I couldn't tell. Anyhow, he landed among us like an arrow shot from an unseen bow, and "Jill came tumbling after." (By the way, "Jill" would be a lovely name for Mrs. S. I believe her real one is *Lily*.)

Mr. Caspian had to stop talking and turn to the newcomers; but before he stopped his explanation had got as far as "a perfectly businesslike arrangement: a mortgage on the place could be – "

I wondered if Peter Storm's ears were as quick of hearing as they were well shaped; and if so whether he would guess what was up, and take enough impersonal interest in a pretty girl far removed from his sphere to be sorry for her.

Mrs. Shuster's first words went far to answer that question. "Oh, my dear Captain and Mrs. Winston, Mr. Storm suggests the most wonderful plan. I was telling him more about poor Miss Moore's troubles – all I'd heard from Mr. Caspian – and it seems he knows about Kidd's Pines, dear Miss Patty's beautiful place which is her own in spite of all misfortunes." She stopped and giggled a little; then went on in a coy tone, with an arch glance at her tall protégé. "I had to confess that I could never believe he was an American. But now I have to. He knows too much about America not to have lived here. He says he used to keep a winter hotel in Florida, and he knows all about the business. He thinks Miss Moore might make a fortune turning Kidd's Pines into a hotel – the right kind of hotel. Isn't it a *wonderful* idea, to help her poor father? Oh, I forgot! Mr. Caspian, Mr. Storm! I was telling you about him, Eddy."

The two men acknowledged the introduction, inapropos as it was. They were the most extraordinary contrast to one another: the important Caspian in his pluperfect clothes, looking insignificant; the unimportant Storm in his junk-shop get-up, looking extraordinarily significant. *He*, an ex-hotel-keeper! It was a blow to mystery. Yet I didn't lose interest. Somehow I felt more.

"I shouldn't know how to keep a hotel, should I?" faltered Patsey, in her childlike voice.

"You'd have to get expert assistance," said the S. M.

"I asked Mr. Storm if he would be free to give advice, and – and perhaps do *more*," broke in Mrs. Shuster. "I've persuaded him to reconsider his first decision. He's now promised to begin over here as my secretary till he gets something better to do. And, dear Miss Patty, I'll be just *delighted* to come as your first guest, to bring you *luck*, if you approve of the idea. I haven't any home. I intended to live at the Waldorf and look around. But from what I hear, nobody need ever look farther than Kidd's Pines, if things there are managed the right way."

"I don't think Miss Moore will need to turn her wonderful old historic place into an inn," said Ed Caspian acidly. "I, too, have a plan, haven't I, Miss Moore? And with all respect to our friend Mrs. Shuster, it's just as practical and a good deal pleasanter than hers."

"Not mine, Eddy: Mr. Storm's," the lady hastened to disclaim responsibility at the first buffet.

"Ah, Mr. Storm's," amended Eddy, trying to look down on the S. M. (Have you ever seen a pet fox terrier or a dachshund with a bone, try to look down on a wandering collie unprovided with bone? Well!..)

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Caspian," I ventured, "but I don't see how your plan is quite as 'practical' as the other. Interest has to be paid on a mortgage, and if it can't be paid, why it's foreclosed, both in real life and Irish melodramas where the lovely heroine has the most agonizing alternatives offered her. Suppose, anyhow, we just let Mr. Storm tell us – since he's an expert – what he means by the 'right way' of turning Kidd's Pines into a hotel. Maybe he means something very special."

"I do," replied the S. M. "I mean what is called an 'exclusive' hotel – especially exclusive in its prices. If people think it difficult to get in, they'll all fight to do so." He looked at Pat. "I hope you won't think I'm pushing," he said, "I remember Kidd's Pines when I was a boy. I thought it was the most beautiful place I ever saw. I've seen a good many since then; but I still think the same."

A little colour crept back to Pat's cheeks. "Why!" she exclaimed, evidently forgetting her troubles for an instant, as Atlas might if some one lifted up the world to ease his shoulders. "Why, do you know when I first met you, I had a feeling as if I'd seen you before somewhere – a long time ago. Did we ever meet when I was a little girl? I seem to associate you with – with my father, as if you'd been a friend of his?"

"No, I was never a friend of his," said the S. M., quietly. "He wouldn't know the name of Storm from the name of Adam."

My brain worked wildly as he made this answer. I thought – perhaps I imagined it – that he looked suddenly as stormy as his name. I remembered the sheet of paper that had fluttered to me, the day we went to visit the third class – part of a letter which, rightly or wrongly, I had attributed to Peter Storm. Could it be possible that he had known about Larry Moore's wild speculations and other

foolishnesses? – that he had some hold over Moore? – that he had wanted to send him a warning which would now be too late?

There was nothing to put such wild ideas into my head, except the sudden, really *very* odd look in the man's expressive dark eyes – a look I couldn't help associating with the talk about Laurence Moore.

"But I'm a friend of the house," Mr. Storm was going on to explain. "There was a story I read once – almost the first after I learned to read and could enjoy myself with a book. It was called 'Cade of Kidd's Pines': a great tale for boys."

"Oh, and for girls, too!" cried Pat. "An uncle of mine wrote that book. It was dedicated to – "

"I've read it!" chipped in Ed Caspian, not to be outdone by any Storm. "What fellow hasn't? I've given it away for prizes to boys in mission schools. To my mind it would be a shame to make a common hotel out of such a place as Kidd's Pines."

"I don't suggest making a common hotel," said the S. M. The two gazed at each other, the S. M. with a resolutely impersonal look, Caspian with as rude a stare as his sainted eyebrows would permit. "A good thing," thought I, "that you've reconsidered and taken Mrs. Shuster's offer, for you'd never squeeze one out of Caspian even if you'd accept it – which you wouldn't!"

While I was thinking, Jack spoke. "Shall we hold a council of war?" he proposed. "You're all interested in finding some way for Miss Moore and her father out of their troubles. We're interested, too, but we must consult Mr. Moore himself before we can decide anything definite. For some reason he hasn't been able to come to the ship: a business reason probably. My wife and I are going to be neighbours of Miss Moore. We'll take her to Kidd's Pines, and if it's better for her to stay with us for a while we shall only be too happy. Anyhow, we invite you to Awepesha this afternoon; you, Mrs. Shuster – "

"And Mr. Storm, my new secretary?" she broke in coyly.

"Of course. We hope Mr. Storm will come and elaborate this interesting hotel scheme of his. I shouldn't wonder if there were something in it."

"Do I share the invitation?" asked Caspian. "Don't forget that I have a scheme, too!"

"Delighted!" said Jack, making no allusion to the latter "scheme."

When he got me alone, under pretext of going back to "W" for the examination of our luggage, we hastily counted up what money we had between us, in order to regulate Pat's affairs at the custom house without delay and without mortification to her. Even before the blow fell, she had given Jack the bills for the Paris purchases, so that he might help her calculate the sums which must be paid. "Larry always writes that he has no head for figures," she had said, "so if Captain Winston and I know what's to be done it will save time and gray matter. All poor Larry will have to do is to hand over the right change."

She spoke lightly of "change," having been brought up to know little difference between pounds and pence. Even now when the blow had fallen, and fallen hard, happiness was so much more natural to her than unhappiness that she was already cheered by our suggestions. It seemed to her that everything must soon "come right." I believe she was more anxious to comfort Larry and show him what a tower of strength she could be to him than anything else. The first thought in many girls' heads would have been: "Here's an end of my good times before they've begun!" but I'm sure there was no place in Pat's mind for her own grievances. I fancied that she'd even forgotten those dresses for the débutante who might now never "début," and the birthday car which might appropriately be named the "White Elephant." Indeed I hoped she would forget, so that Jack might pay the duty and escape protests or gratitude. But the girl had a more practical side to her nature than I'd supposed. Just as Jack and I had finished our calculations by discovering that we hadn't enough ready money to settle up with the customs for ourselves and Pat, the Stormy Petrel "hovered in the offing."

"Miss Moore asked me to find you," he said, "and ask you not to pay duty for her things, as she thinks they'd better be sold for what they'll fetch, so the Paris trades-people may be paid without worrying her father."

"My gracious!" I exclaimed. "I never thought of that! She gave my husband the bills. I took it for granted *they'd* been paid, at least!"

"It seems not," said the S. M. "I suppose the trades-folk considered Mr. Moore's name a good one. The French have an almost pathetic faith in Americans." (I wondered how he knew that!) "But," he went on more slowly, "I should have liked to suggest to Miss Moore, if I'd dared, that she ought to stick to her car if she's going to keep a hotel. It might be useful."

"Of course she must stick to it," Jack agreed, "and to her poor little bits of finery. We'll see to all that, and the Paris people shan't suffer. I'm afraid these custom-house chaps won't be keen on taking my cheque, as they don't know me, but later will do, perhaps. They won't make a fuss – "

"I can let you have a thousand dollars if it would be any good," said the surprising Storm, taking from a breast pocket of his cheap ready-made coat an ancient leather wallet, which looked as if it might have belonged to Cain or Abel.

"Oh, then all your money *wasn't* torpedoed!" I blurted out before I knew that I was thinking aloud. Then I blushed furiously and wished that the most top-heavy skyscraper in New York would fall on my head. But the S. M. only laughed. "It was not," he replied. "When a man hasn't much he sticks to what he's got a good deal closer than a brother. My savings and I escaped together."

This made him seem to me even more mysterious than before, if possible. A man travelling steerage, *plastered* with bank-notes! But, I reminded myself, he had a right to be Spartan if he liked: there was no crime in that, and if he'd *stolen* the money he wouldn't be likely to mention its existence, even for the sake of as pretty a girl as Patricia Moore.

I hardly expected Jack to accept the loan, but he promptly did, and when I saw how pleased, almost grateful, Peter Storm looked, a flash of intuition made clear Jack's tactics. Just because the S. M. was what he was, and wore what he wore, the dear boy treated him as man to man. I *do* think men are nice, don't you?.. All the same, for a minute I came near doing Mr. Storm an injustice. I suspected him of wanting Pat to hear what he had done: but no, on the contrary. He asked us both to promise that the matter shouldn't be mentioned to her.

"I've done nothing," he said. "I shall get my money back from you in a day or two." And he handed over to Jack ten one-hundred-dollar bills which I suppose went down with him in the *Lusitania* and the *Arabic*, and bobbed up again. I couldn't help seeing that when they came out they left his wallet as empty as the whale after it had disgorged Jonah. I did hope he had pennies in other pockets, or that his salary from Mrs. Shuster was going to begin in advance.

After my cousin died and left Awepesha to me, Jack and I decided to keep all the servants on, anyhow until we'd made our visit to America. That being the case, we'd wired to the house the day and probable time of our arrival in New York, and the chauffeur had come for us with a respectable elderly automobile which (as the estate agents say) "went with the place." The chauffeur was (is) elderly and respectable, too, evidently transferred by the fairy wand of Circumstance from the box-seat of a carriage to the wheel of a car. We took poor forlorn little Pat and pouting Angéle to Awepesha with us, instead of carrying them a mile farther on; and then, without waiting for half a glance at his new domain, Jack nobly undertook a voyage of discovery to Kidd's Pines.

What he found out there and the decision of the war council I must wait to tell you till my next letter. I do want this to catch the first ship bound for England, home, and beauty, otherwise you'll think me ungrateful for that ten-dollar telegram. And I'm not – I'm not!

We both send love to you and dear old Monty.

Ever your

M.

III
THE HONBLE MRS. WINSTON TO THE COUNTESS OF LANE

Awepesha, Long Island,
March 25th.

Dearest Mercédes:

I don't know whether or not I ought to take it for granted that you and Monty are hanging breathlessly on the fate of Patricia Moore; but I suppose I'm subconsciously judging you by Jack and myself. We think, talk, dream, eat, drink, nothing except her business in one form or other!

I meant to write you (about the one absorbing subject, of course) a day or two after I closed my last letter, which was a sort of "to be continued in my next" affair. But it was a case of deeds, not words. Things had to be done and done quickly. It's all rather tragic and wildly funny.

You should have seen Jack's face when he came back to Awepesha after motoring over to spy out the nakedness of the land at Kidd's Pines. It takes a lot to flabbergast Jack, as I learned when he was my "Lightning Conductor"; but he certainly did look flabbergasted this time. You know the look as well as the "feel," don't you? It makes the eyes seem wider apart and dropped down at the outer corners.

He glanced hastily about to see if I were alone. I was still in the library where he'd left me, because I didn't want to go over the house till he could go, too: and luckily I'd found enough piled-up letters and telegrams to keep me occupied.

"It's all right," I said. "Patsey's taking a walk in the garden. She's too restless to sit still. Besides, I dare say she hoped to head you off. A wonder she didn't! But perhaps she's gone down to the water to try and catch a distant glimpse of Kidd's Pines. What *has* become of the adored Larry? Did you find him?"

"I did not," said Jack. "I didn't find anybody – at least at the house."

"You didn't expect to find anybody but Larry, did you?" I asked.

"I expected to find servants."

"Good heavens! aren't there any?" I gasped.

"No. Wait till I tell you what happened. There's a porter's lodge, of course, but the gate was closed when we got there and nobody came to open it. Fortunately it was only shut, not locked. We drove in. It's a ripping place, my child. This can't be compared with it. Yet there's an air of neglect over everything. That didn't surprise me much. But when I rang the bell a dozen times without getting an answer it began to seem like a bad dream. I got tired of admiring the doorway, though it's a beauty, and you'll be mad about it; so I decided to investigate elsewhere. I tried my luck at two side entrances and then at the back. Not a sound. Not even the mew of a cat. Palace of the Sleeping Beauty! Not to be discouraged, I wandered along till I found the stables – fine big ones, and a huge garage. Locked up and silent as the grave. Farther on I discovered a gardener's house: door fastened, blinds down. I went back and told our chauffeur: Jekyll, his name is. He knew no more about Mr. Moore's affairs than we – only what he'd read in the papers; but he proposed running on to the village, and making an errand at the post-office: thought they'd be sure to be up in everything there. He bought stamps, and asked questions while he waited for change. It seems that Moore hasn't been at Kidd's Pines for a week, and yesterday there was a servants' strike. They stampeded in a body; hadn't been paid for months, but hung on hoping for the best till after the bankruptcy. Then as Moore lay low they decided the game was up."

"What a homecoming for Patsey!" I moaned. "How *are* we to tell her?"

"You won't have to, dear," she said. Which paid us out for talking at the tops of our voices in front of a long French window which I had opened. She was standing in it.

My bones turned to water, and Jack looked as if he'd been shot for treason. But there it was. She knew! And she behaved like a heroine. She wasn't even pale, as she had been when Ed Caspian broke things gently to her.

"Please don't mind," she went on, turning from me to Jack. "I didn't mean to eavesdrop at first, but when I heard what you were talking about I thought it would be no harm to listen. It would save your telling me afterward. I don't feel one bit worse than I did. Rats leave sinking ships, don't they? I always thought it stupid of them, because they might have to swim miles with waves mountains high. *I* shan't desert the ship! You've both been angels to me, but now I know that Larry isn't at Kidd's Pines just oversleeping himself. I want to go there at once to wait for him. Think, if he came home sad and tired after all his troubles, to find the house shut up like *you* found it, Captain Winston! Would you be so very kind as to let your chauffeur drive me home at once?"

"We can all three go over directly after luncheon," I suggested.

Can you picture to yourself, Mercédes, an American beauty rose suddenly transforming itself into an obstinate mule? You'd say it couldn't be done. But it can. I realized on the instant that unless I sent for wild horses to tear her to pieces, Patsey would start for Kidd's Pines within the next ten minutes, chauffeur or no chauffeur. To ask her mildly how she expected to get in would have been a waste of breath. The frail young creature was quite capable of breaking the beautiful door down with a mallet if no easier way offered!

My eyes and Jack's met. Without a word he rang, and sent word to Jekyll that he must be ready to start out again immediately. Doubtless poor Cousin John's well-regulated clockwork servants thought we'd lost our heads, for luncheon had already been put back for Jack's return, and now here we were proposing to go off without it! Yet no, not exactly without it. What could be taken with us we took in a basket: for man must eat and woman must at least nibble.

While I'd been giving hasty but apologetic orders, Pat had darted away in search of Angéle, who might, she imagined, be useful in a servantless house. I don't know how much Angéle had heard or understood, but when she appeared with fire in her eye and crumbs on her lip, I thought she looked dangerous.

We didn't say much on the way to Kidd's Pines; but inside the gates, though my heart was oppressed, I broke into admiring exclamations. My dear, there's nothing lovelier in Italy or in England! I group those two countries together in my comparison because Kidd's Pines has salient features which suggest both. The general effect of the lawns and gardens round the exquisite old house is English, or would be, if they were better kept. The tall drooping elm trees and occasional willows are vaguely English, too: but the grove of umbrella pine trees crowding darkly together on a promontory like a band of conspirators might be etched against the sky at some seaside château of Posilippo. I'm beginning to find out that this combined English-ness and Italian-ness is characteristic of Long Island, where I am even a greater stranger than Patricia Moore. And yet the most winning charm, the charm which seems to link all other charms together, is the American-ness of everything – oh, an utterly different American-ness from what most people mean when they say "how American that is!" I do wish I could explain clearly; but to explain a thing so delicate, so illusive, would be like taking a soap-bubble in your hand to demonstrate that it was round. It's an effect of imagination and climate: imagination which gave graceful lightness and simplicity to Georgian models; climate which has played Puck-tricks with elms and other stately trees of England, turning them into fairy trees while leaving the family resemblance. Why, there's something different even about the paint on those dear old frame houses in the country over here! In no other part of the world, not even in Italy, where colour is so important, could there be a yellow like the yellow paint on the ancient shingled house-front at Kidd's Pines. I suppose the white window-facings and doorway and pillars, and the green

blinds, and the frame of cathedral elms, partly account for the indescribable sweetness of that yellow. I can't liken it to anything but primroses in a forest, seen in the level, secret light of sunrise.

My ecstasies cheered Patsey a little, and I emitted some of them in French, for the benefit of Angéle, who looked about as appreciative as a Mexican horned toad.

We got into the house easily enough, by sacrificing a window-pane in the kitchen and then undoing the catch. A sweet kitchen it was, or ought to have been if the servants hadn't avenged their wrongs by leaving a lot of dishes and dish towels unwashed. We wandered about, Patsey pretending to remember this or that, and really half paralyzed with fright lest she should find that Larry had committed suicide in one of the beautiful shut-up rooms. No such horror awaited us, however, and greatly relieved in our inmost minds, we came to rest in the dining-room, where Angéle was unpacking our luncheon with her hands and poisoning it with her glances.

There were chicken salad and heavenly rolls, pickles which made me feel a child again (a thoroughly American child), chocolate layer-cake, and various other things that thrilled me with pride of the United States. While Jack and I (starved) were trying not to eat too much for sympathetic friendship, and Pat was trying to eat enough to please us, we heard a door slam in the distance. We started like burglars caught at a stolen feast. It couldn't be Angéle, because she was darkening the room with her presence. It couldn't be – but it *was*!

"Larry!" cried Pat, springing up, and making a dash for the door which she happened to face. We others turned to face it also, and saw coming in a delightful boy as happy as Pan – much happier than Pan would be in modern clothes.

"She must be mistaken," I thought. "This can't be a grown girl's father. It can't be a father of anything! Impossible it should be a ruined bankrupt. It must be some younger brother of Larry's who looks like him."

But no! "*Hello*, girlie!" the tall lad exclaimed, and held out his arms. Patsey rushed into them, and was clasped. She buried her head on the boy's shoulder, and he looked at us over the top of her head, smiling. I assure you I never saw a more engaging smile, not even Pat's own – or Peter Storm's. Theirs are quite different. Pat's is childlike and winningly ignorant of life; the Stormy Petrel's is full of unexpected gleams of humour, which lighten those mysterious eyes of an Italian prince. This youth's smile at us over his weeping daughter's hat was pagan – the joyous, carefree smile of Pan.

He patted the girl's back. "Awfully sorry I couldn't meet you," he said, in a gay and charming voice, which contradicted a statement that he could be sorry about anything: the sort of voice which you know means a light singing tenor. "I've been busy," he went on, explaining himself to us as much as to Pat, "busy winning back the family fortunes."

Pat drew herself from him to look him in the face, and beam through a few tears. "You darling!" she gasped. "I might have known it! You *have* won them back?"

"I've made a start," he modestly replied. "I'll tell you all about it. Jove! You've grown up a dashed pretty girl. We shan't make a bad-looking pair trotting around together – what? But introduce me to your friends."

Patsey did so. When the young god Pan had met us halfway and was warmly shaking hands, one saw that he wasn't quite such an ambrosial youth as he had seemed at a distance. Instead of looking twenty, he appeared at the outside twenty-eight, wavy bronze-brown hair; big, wide-open eyes of yellow-brown like cigarette tobacco; low, straight brows and lashes of the same light shade; a clever, impudent nose and a wide, laughing mouth; a pointed, prominent chin with a cleft in it. Now, can you imagine this as the description of a nineteen-year-old girl's recreant parent, a ruined bankrupt returning to a house deserted by his unpaid servants?

After his failure to meet Pat, leaving her to arrive alone and friendless (so far as he could know), with huge duties to pay and nothing to pay them with, I'd been prepared to loathe Larry. But to loathe Pan would be a physical impossibility for any one who loves the brightness of Nature. I fell a victim to the creature's charm at first glance, and I think even Jack more or less melted at the second or third.

Larry had come in hat in hand, and had burst upon us as such a surprise that we didn't notice his costume till after we'd calmed down. When Pat had pranced round him a little in a kind of votive dance, his eyes fell upon our luncheon, and he said in French that he had the hunger of seventy-seven wolves. He then approached the table to examine the food with interest, and put down his hat. It dawned upon me only at this instant that the hat was a shiny "topper"; and as he unbuttoned a smart black overcoat and threw back a white silk muffler, lo! he was revealed in full evening dress. This at two-thirty in the afternoon!.. "Curiouser and curiouser," as Alice remarked when she fell down the Rabbit Hole.

"I'm clothed like this," explained Larry, "because the house where I went last night to restore our lost fortunes was raided by the police, and I escaped by the skin of my teeth. Most of the other chaps were arrested, I saw in the papers this morning, but my usual luck was with me. I happened to hide in a place where they happened not to look – or, rather, there was a fellow who looked, but he was the right sort. A hundred-dollar-bill fixed up a get-away for me, but not till a couple of hours ago. Eyes turned the other way till I'd passed the danger zone. Then I taxied down here without waiting to eat, for I thought the poor girlie would be sure to come home to roost. All's well that ends well! Am I or am I not the 'smart guy?' I pulled a thousand dollars out of roulette last night at poor old Jimmie Follette's. Had only seventy-five to start with. The wheel gave me all the rest. I backed zero and she kept repeating. Raised my stakes whenever I won. See here, I've got the spoils on me – all but the hundred I had to shed – and twenty-five for the taxi. Let's gloat."

Chuckling, he emptied his pockets of gold and greenbacks. He was in his own eyes and in Patty's the hero of a great adventure. "What did I tell you about Larry?" she challenged us.

When he heard about the servants, he threw back his curly head and laughed. He'd been living in town, it seemed, for more than a week. "There's such a lot of red tape they tie you up in if you go bankrupt," he explained to Jack. "Never was so bored in my life! But I kept consoling myself with the thought, 'I'm sure to bob up serenely in the end. I always have and I always shall.' Now here's this money for instance. If I can make a thousand out of seventy-five, what can't I make out of a thousand? I wish I'd gone *seriously* in for roulette before. I might have known I'd win. We'll get some more servants and begin again, for this house is our castle. 'God's in His heaven, all's well with the world.'"

"But – but, Larry dear, we owe Captain Winston heaps of money for customs duty," Pat ventured, wistfully reluctant to dash his high spirits, yet goaded by conscience. "Of course I can sell the things, but meanwhile – "

"Sell nothing!" exclaimed Larry. "Now you've come home and can sign papers, we'll mortgage the place, and then we'll be on velvet."

My heart sank, because I saw Pat in her last ditch, and presently turned out of it with nowhere else to go unless she married for money. She was in such a state of rapture at recovering Larry after all her fears, that I thought she would cheerfully consent to anything he advised, but there must have been a sensible ancestor behind the girl somewhere. "Oh, I wish we needn't mortgage Kidd's Pines!" she sighed. "It is such a dear place. I'd almost forgotten – but such a rush of love has come over me for it to-day. I'd hate to risk losing it – and we might, you know. There's another plan that some kind friends from the ship thought of this morning, when – when we heard the news – about our trouble. They're coming to Awepesha to talk it over, at four o'clock this afternoon."

She turned an imploring glance on Jack, who thereupon felt forced to help her out with explanations. He stumbled a little, for fear of hurting Mr. Moore's pride; but he needn't have worried. Larry regarded the idea as the joke of the century.

"Great Scott, what a lark!" he shouted. "I can see the advertisements! 'Hiding place of Captain Kidd's Treasure in the Grounds.' What do you know about *that*? Jove, we'll have digging parties, with me for the leader!"

"You must make them *pay* for the privilege of digging," I suggested.

"Yes! We'll call it the 'Only Extra.' I like the idea of that man – Storm, did you say his name is? – of charging some high, almost prohibitive price which limits the scope of operation to millionaires, then letting them have everything they want, as if they were guests: champagne or water, the same charge. We ought to get some fun out of this – what?"

I thanked Billiken, the God of Things as They Ought to Be, that he took it that way, for, if only Larry didn't insist on managing the business himself, I saw hope of Pat's being saved.

Our chauffeur, looking more like Hyde than Jekyll after his long wait, took us all back to Awepesha in the car, after Larry had changed his telltale clothes to tweeds, and the ruined bankrupt was the life of the party. His remarks about the expression of Angéle's back (she sat in front) and his friend the Marquise's taste in female beauty were most witty and amusing, if not in the best of taste.

I forgot to tell you that Ed Caspian brought his car down to the docks to take Mrs. Shuster wherever she wanted to go – a resplendent car of the most expensive make in the world, such a car as he would have called "Moloch" in the days when his hand was against Capital. Before we'd been back very long at Awepesha it arrived, bearing the lady and her host, but not Mr. Storm. He had preferred to travel independently, it seemed, and I rather liked him for it. No sooner were the introductions and first politenesses over between the newcomers and Larry, however, than Storm appeared. I had rather expected that he would "doll himself up" – as they say in this dear land of ours – for the visit in high society; but he had made no change, not even a tall collar.

Mrs. Shuster, enraptured with Larry and in an ecstasy between these three men she could think of as "in her train," presented "Mr. Peter Storm to Mr. Moore." "A hero of the *Lusitania* and *Arabic*," she added, "and going to be my secretary."

Larry held out his hand, and, as he shook the Stormy Petrel's, stared at him. "I seem to know your face," he said. "And yet – I can't place it. Do you know mine?"

"I think if I'd ever seen it I shouldn't have forgotten," returned our Ship's Mystery. I noticed that he did not say he hadn't seen it or that he had forgotten. And I vividly recalled how Pat, too, had had the impression that Storm's eyes were familiar – associated with some memory of long ago. Neither she nor her father, however, appeared to find any double meaning in his reply.

Well, to make a long story less long, Mrs. Shuster and Mr. Caspian had put their heads together over the hotel idea. Both had taken advantage of Peter Storm's brief absence to forget that it had originated in his brain. They spoke of "our plan," and for the moment he claimed no credit, as I should have been tempted to do. It was only when they began to develop the said plan upon lines evidently different from those agreed upon with him that he roused himself.

"In thinking it over," Ed Caspian explained to Larry, "Mrs. Shuster and I have decided that the simplest thing would be for me to advance any capital necessary to start the hotel enterprise: advertising and a lot of things like that. All in a business way of course. Miss Moore can give me a mortgage – "

"I beg your pardon," the S. M. cut him off in a voice quite low but keen as a knife. "The hotel suggestion was mine, wasn't it, Miss Moore?"

"Yes," Pat assented, "it certainly was." She looked from one man to the other, puzzled and interested.

"I shouldn't have made the suggestion if I weren't more or less of an expert in such matters." Storm said this with almost aggressive self-confidence. One had to believe that he knew what he was talking about; that his apparently mysterious past included the management of hotels, and this instinctive if reluctant credence was a tribute to the man's magnetic power. He did look the last person on earth to be a hotel-keeper! Believing that he might have been one ought to have destroyed the romance attached to him, but somehow it made the flame of curiosity burn brighter.

"Don't you all think," he went on, "that the suggestor ought to have a voice in the working out of the scheme – that is, if he has anything to say worth hearing?"

"Seems to me this is a case for acts, not arguments," remarked Caspian. "It isn't good advice but money that's needed at this stage."

"Exactly," said Storm. "The question is, how is it to be obtained? I think it would be more advantageous to Mr. Moore and his daughter for a small syndicate to be formed than for them to get the capital on a mortgage. They are amateurs. They don't know how to run a hotel. They might make a failure, and the mortgage could be called in – "

"I wouldn't do such a thing!" Caspian angrily cut him short. "That's why I came forward – so they could have a friend rather than a business man – "

"It turns out awkwardly sometimes, doing business with friends," said Storm, giving the other a level look straight from eye to eye. So may a cat look at a king. So may a steerage passenger look at a millionaire if he isn't afraid. And apparently this one wasn't afraid, having only other people's axes to grind, not his own. "Forming a company or syndicate, Mr. and Miss Moore would have shares in the business, given them for what they could put into it: their historic place and beautiful house. Mrs. Shuster would take up a large group of shares, and would, I understand, become one of the first guests of the hotel, to show her confidence in the scheme. Isn't that the case, Mrs. Shuster?"

"Oh, *yes*!" she agreed. All the man's magnetic influence – temporarily dimmed by her old friend Ed in the motor car – seemed to rush over her again in a warm wave.

"Mr. Caspian is of course free to join the syndicate," continued the S. M. "But he, too, is an amateur. He may know how to live well in hotels, he doesn't know how to run them well."

"I'm not a hotel-keeper, thank heaven, if that's what you mean!" said Caspian. "But I happen to have money."

"Yes, you happen to have money," thoughtfully repeated Storm.

"Which – I suppose we may take for granted – you haven't."

"You may take that for granted, Mr. Caspian."

It was now quite evidently a duel between the two men, strangers to each other and as far apart as one pole from another, yet for some reason (perhaps unknown, only *felt*, by themselves) instinctively antagonistic. Jack and I were lost in joy of the encounter, and a glance at Pat showed me that, schoolgirl as she is, she caught the electric thrill in the atmosphere. Larry, too, was visibly interested. He'd opened a box of games on the table where rested his elbow, and taking out some packs of cards he had mechanically begun to play "Patience" – a characteristic protest of the spirit against dull discussions of business, even his own. He would like things to be nicely arranged for him, I suspected, but he couldn't be bothered with petty details. He seemed just to take it happily for granted that people ought to be *glad* to straighten matters out for a charming "play-boy" like him. The tone of the two men, however, had suddenly snatched his attention from the intricacies of Patience (a fascinating new Patience, I noticed). He was captured, but not, I felt, because of any personal concern he had in the battle. I did wonder what was passing behind the bright hazel eyes which moved from Storm's face to Caspian's, and back again.

"Well, then, if I'm to take it for granted that you've no money, where do you come in?" the late socialist was sharply demanding while my thoughts wandered.

"I don't come in," said Storm. "I act as Mrs. Shuster's secretary, and her spokesman. It seems she has no business manager, so my duties may carry me occasionally in that direction, I begin to see. If she's to have interests in this affair, I must protect them according to my judgment. My judgment tells me that they could best be protected by having an expert for a large shareholder – perhaps the largest. Such a man would have every incentive to work for the scheme's success. And I know the right man."

"You do?" Contemptuous incredulity rang in Caspian's emphasis. "Name him!" This was a challenge.

"Marcel Moncourt."

Ed Caspian laughed a short, hard laugh.

"Marcel Moncourt! Why, that man wouldn't give up his ease to manage a gilt-edged boarding-house in the country – no, not to please an emperor!"

"Maybe not," said Storm coolly. "There aren't many emperors just now a Frenchman wants to please."

"You think he'd give the preference to you!"

"Not to me. But to Mr. and Miss Moore. And" – the man glanced at his employer – "Mrs. Shuster." She flushed at the immense, the inconceivable compliment, for Marcel Moncourt, I suppose (don't you?), is as grand a *chef* as there is in the world, almost a classic figure of his kind, and a gentleman by birth, they say. Even Mrs. Shuster, who doesn't know much outside her own immediate circle of interests, had managed to catch some vague echo of the great Moncourt's fame. As for Larry, he became suddenly alert as a schoolboy who learns that the best "tuck box" ever packed is destined for him.

"Good lord!" he exclaimed. "You don't mean you can get the one and only Marcel to take charge at Kidd's Pines?"

"I know – or used to know – a person who can certainly persuade him to do so, and on very short notice," said the S. M.

"That *settles* it, then!" cried Larry. "Can you guess what I was doing? 'Ruling passion strong in death' – and that sort of thing! I was betting with myself which of you two would come out ahead in the argument and gain his point over the other. I thought – I must say – the odds were with Mr. Caspian, for gold weighs down the scales. But Marcel is worth his weight in gold. Put him in the balance, and the argument's ended. I didn't mean to take a hand in the game! I felt so confident it would work out all right either way. But with Marcel and Mr. Storm on one side, and Mr. Caspian with a gold-mine on the other, we choose Marcel – don't we, girlie?"

"Who is Marcel?" inquired girlie, thus appealed to.

Larry laughed. "She's just out of a convent," he apologized for his child's abysmal ignorance. "Marcel Moncourt, my dear," he enlightened her, "was the *making* of a millionaire, who would never have been anybody without him. Once upon a time there was an old man named Stanislaws, not particularly interesting nor intelligent except as a money grubber – oh, I beg your pardon, Mr. Caspian, I forgot he was related to you! – but he was lucky, and the best bit of luck he ever had was getting hold of this Marcel as *chef* and general manager of his establishment. No one had bothered about Mr. Stanislaws before, rich as he was, but with Marcel at the helm, he could have any one he liked as his guest, from a foreign prince or an American President to a Pierpont Morgan. Of course they all tried to get Marcel away; but he was like iron to the magnet – none of us could ever understand why. It looked almost like a mystery! When there were no more Stanislaws on earth, then, and not till then, Marcel considered himself free. He had the world to choose from; and he chose to rest. He is now a gentleman of leisure. Any one starting a hotel who could secure Marcel would be made – made! But I should have said no hope, short of a Fifth Avenue palace, if that. No more hope for us than of getting the Angel Gabriel to stand blowing his trumpet in front of the door."

"There is no hope. I'd stake my life on that," said Caspian emphatically. "When I came into my cousin's money, after the poor old man's murder and all the other tragedies, I offered Marcel a salary of fifteen thousand dollars a year to come to me. By Jove, I'd have built a house to fit him. But he wouldn't listen. Tired of work was his only excuse."

"Tired of making millionaires popular, perhaps," murmured Mr. Storm to a picture of Cousin John Randolph Payton on the wall.

Caspian's heavenly blue eyes snapped with another kind of blue fire. "I should say that no power except that of *blackmail* could induce Marcel Moncourt to take any interest, active or financial, in our scheme down here. Perhaps that is your secret?"

If I hadn't seen the steerage passenger smile when Mrs. Shuster accused him of being a gentleman and offered him cast-off clothes, I should have expected violence. He smiled much in

the same way now, to Pat's relief and Larry's disappointment. "Perhaps it is," he said. "I've always thought it must be exciting to be a blackmailer. Anyhow, it *is* my secret. If I can get – or, rather, if my friend can get – Marcel to put money and gray matter into Kidd's Pines as a hotel, Mr. Moore – Miss Moore, will you have him – and the Syndicate?"

"We would have him and the devil!" cried Larry.

Ed Caspian looked as if he suspected that having Marcel and Peter Storm might turn out much the same thing. But he was the only "No," and the "Ayes" had it.

Afterward Mrs. Shuster told me that Ed Caspian vowed to find out all about our Ship's Mystery if it took his last penny. So we may "see some fun," as Larry says.

But perhaps you've had enough of our scheme and schemers for the moment, Mercédes mia!

Ever your loving

Molly.

P. S. I suppose he *can't* be a blackmailer? He might be *anything*!

IV
PATRICIA MOORE TO ADRIENNE DE MONCOURT, HER BEST FRIEND IN THE CONVENT SCHOOL AT NEUILLY

Kidd's Pines, Long Island,
April 3d.

Ma Chérie:

J'ai beaucoup de choses à dire– oh no, I forgot – you asked me to write in English, because it would help your spelling. That was a large compliment, *mon petit choux*, but *do* look up the most difficult words in the dictionary. It would be more safe. I am trying to think in English, but I find I think faster in French still; and I need to think extremely fast now, as fast as heat lightning. *Aussi* I dream in French, about American people, which mixes me up; and one laughs when I don't get my sentences right. You must not take me for a model, though I will do all my possible, and improve as the time passes on.

As I promised, I begin a letter to you on the ship, but I cannot finish, for too many things happening and the times – I mean the weather – being so bad. Perhaps it is better I did not, for everything is different now from what we thought. Darling Larry has lost all his money, and we are in the soup. But it is a superb soup, because we have a *chef* the most famous of the world. I have almost fear to tell you his name! It is the same as yours, only that naturally he has not the "de," though he has the grand air and is richer than we when we were rich. It will look strange to you, this, that we should have an employé so wonderful when we are in ruins. But he is not an employé like others. We are as his servants. And we have him because he helps us make our house a hotel for the high world. He is not alone in helping us, my father and me. There is, besides, a band who helps. Not a band that plays music, you comprehend, but a ring – a circle of people. I have made their acquaintance on the ship, all but one who came on the *quai* when we arrived, and broke the truth of Larry. I did not cry, though I saw all my happy days we have talked of so much, you and me, fly away in smoke. I thought not of them, but of Larry, which was worse, for I had a cold fear in my heart like the lumps of raspberry ice we sometimes swallowed too large and fast on the fête days. I feared he might have suffered too much and made himself die. I can speak of that now when I know he is saved. But he did not even wish to be dead. He is brave and wonderful and has earned some of the money back at roulette. I hoped he would earn more like that, it was so easy, beginning only with a few dollars and waiting till they mounted up, and he hoped so, too. But he has had to put himself in the hands of the band who advise us, and they do not approve the roulette. It is too often raided by the police; and then you do not win quite always.

Larry is too much the charmer for a good man of affairs, and I do not know what would have become of us two if it had not been for this band. It was they who thought of the hotel. At least, it was one – a man. I cannot tell you all about him now, it would take too long a time. And, besides, what can you tell of a man when you know nothing of him unless that he makes every one march as he chooses either with some word or some look of the eyes, though he is the poorest of all and has taken work as secretary? He is named Storm. For a man he is young, though for you and me it would be an age – thirty or thirty-two, Mrs. Winston thinks. Captain and Mrs. Winston are of the band. He is Captain the Honourable. That is the way the English put their titles with the soldier part in the front. They spell it "Honble" on letters or the lists of passengers, but you do not call them by it at all, which is odd; because if not, what is its use? Mrs. Shuster (that is another of the band) says Captain Winston will be a lord some day. He is wounded and very handsome, and his wife is a beauty and a darling.

I have to call her Molly and she has made of me a "Patsey." What do you think she has done, when it burst out that Larry and I were poor as the mice of churches? She paid the *douane* for my dresses, those sweet things Madame la Marquise, your dear mother, troubled herself to choose for me. Then Molly bought them as I believed for herself, as we are much of the same form, though she is grander by some centimetres in front and at the waist. It was only on my birthday that I find they are for me! I said, "But, dear, dear cabbage, I can never wear all these when I am keeping a hotel!" She said: "Yes, you can, my cabbagette, for this hotel will be different. You and Larry are high swells and it will be a favour that people are let into your beautiful home. They will be glad of the luck to know you and they will pay for the privilege. The better you dress and the more proud you act the more will they be content and think they have the money's worth. Only the richest ones can afford to come."

That is well, perhaps, because we have not enough rooms for a grand crowd. We have twenty-five *chambres*, counting great with small, and with haste two beds are being installed in some. Each person, if you will believe me, is forced to pay at the least thirty dollars (a hundred and fifty francs) a day. It is crushing! I have thought no one would come. But they do already, though we are not yet in a state of reception. The first day when the announcement showed in the journals of New York and all other grand cities the rush began. That same night we had what Molly Winston calls sholes (or is it shoals?) of telegrams. I thought shoals were of fish only. I will copy a little of the *avis au public*. *Le voilà!*

"Monsieur Marcel Moncourt has the honour to announce that from April 1st the historic mansion of Kidd's Pines, near Huntersford, Long Island, will open under his direction as a hotel de luxe."

There was quite a lot more, explaining how Lafayette and Jerome Bonaparte, and King Edward VII when Prince of Wales had been entertained by ancestors of the present owner, Mr. Laurence Moore, who would now act as host; and that there were baths to all but five of the bed chambers. Was it not good chance that Larry had them put in? They are not paid for yet, and the plumber, with some others, has been very unkind, making Larry a bankroot – no, a bankrupt. We shall soon be rich again with all these thirties and forties and fifties and hundreds of dollars a day (we can take forty people to say nothing of servants if some of them will sleep *ensemble*), and then we can pay every one. *Aussi* the announcement spoke of the pines which have given to our place its name. There was a pirate captain named Kidd who buried gold under these trees or near, and though each of our generations since has dug hard whenever it felt poor, nobody has ever found anything, so the treasure is still there – wherever it is. Larry wanted to advertise that all might dig, male or female. Monsieur Moncourt would not permit, however. He said his name was enough, and further advertising would waste the money of the *syndicat*. He is part of the *syndicat*, and has more in it than the others. He would not come if it could not be that way, Mr. Storm told Larry. Mr. Storm has a friend who is a friend of Monsieur Moncourt's, a great friend he must be, because Monsieur M. will do anything to please him. Monsieur M. takes his salary of manager in shares. Mr. Storm does not have shares, because he, too, like us, is poor as mice who go to church – which it seems they are allowed to do in America, though I do not think we should let them in much in France. Mrs. Shuster, who has Mr. Storm for her secretary, is of the *syndicat*, and so is Mr. Edward Caspian, the man who broke the bad news for me. He is about as young as Mr. Storm, yet looks more young on account of being small and blond, with curly hair like Larry's. But he is not like Larry in other ways. Molly says he looks a combination of Lord Fauntleroy and Don Juan. I have read Lord Fauntleroy when I was a child, but not Don Juan, so I cannot judge. Do you know, *chérie*, I think he is in love with me, and Angéle thinks the same. She says it will be a good work to marry him, as he has one of the most gross fortunes of America, besides being rather *beau*, and *bon garçon*. Angéle was not nice for a time when we had no servants at Kidd's Pines, and I asked her to wash a dish. She had the air of one ready to burst. But we stayed a few days at the Winstons' place, which has been left in a will to them, and Angéle became more happy. She says Madame la Marquise often took counsel with her and sacrificed her to me that

I might have some one of experience to advise me in things of life greater than the dressing of hair. She has fallen into a devotion for Larry, and it is for his sake she wishes me to say yes if I am asked by Mr. Caspian. Well! I have not to decide till by and by, because he has not asked. For the moment I do not like him so very strongly, I cannot know why. Every one else seems to, except Mr. Storm, and a darling dog we have here, a golden collie, belonging to Larry, but like the baths, not paid for. It jumped against Mr. Caspian and frightened him so much that he wished it to be tied in a chain. We did not do it, though. I don't love men to have fear of dogs.

Mr. Caspian has come to live with us – in our hotel, I mean. Though he has the shares, if you will believe me he pays three hundred and fifty francs a day. So does Mrs. Shuster. She has a suite of bedroom and sitting-room. A good many of our rooms are like that, with curtains between. It was Larry's idea when Mamma and he were married and invited many guests.

Mr. Storm would not come to stay, though Mrs. S. wished to pay for him. She is a very rich *bourgeoise* who drops something off herself whenever she moves, if it is only a hairpin; but many time it is a worse thing. And she composes tracts about peace. She asked Mr. Storm to help her write some, but he said he knew nothing of peace, he had never had any. So you see he does what he likes, though a secretary. He has the most wonderful eyes ever seen. They haunt you as if they had looked deep into strange, sad things. You think of them at night before you go to sleep, and wonder about them, whether you have seen them long ago – and what they mean – for everybody thinks something different of him and his past, some good, some bad. He is not afraid of the collie, but pats it when he passes. And he lights up when he laughs! He has taken a room in the village near, in a little house, which he considers more suitable to him than this. Mr. Caspian, who was a socialist once, but is not now, says Mr. Storm dresses like an anarchist. He does not wish Mrs. Shuster to employ Mr. Storm, and this pleases her, because she thinks Mr. Caspian is "jealous." But figure to yourself! An old woman of forty and more!

I forgot to tell you the rest about Monsieur Moncourt. He directs the kitchen as well as the whole house, but you would not have to be ashamed of him even if you were *parents*. He does not come to our dining-room to eat, but has a little one of his own. He has gray hair, a sorrowful, dreamy face like a great artist who has lost an idea; but I suppose it is only that he is always thinking of some marvellous new *plat* to invent. He spends five days a week on Long Island and two in New York, for he has a house there of his own. I should love to go one day and see what it is like! Perhaps I shall go, with Molly.

I forgot *aussi* to tell you of the automobile you said you so much envied me. Captain Winston attended to the *douane*, and it is settled for us to keep the car as an "investment." I do not quite know who arranged this, because it was like the baths and the collie, not paid. But some one did arrange, and will be paid of course when we are making profits. I know it was Mr. Storm who said, in the *conseil de guerre* we had about the hotel, that there must be *at least* one motor to take guests on tour, and the smarter the car the better. But he could not have been the one to pay as he is the poorest of us all. Oh, I am so glad it is my *duty* to keep this darling car which was to have been my birthday present from Larry! I shall learn to drive it myself. Captain Winston will teach me. He knows how to drive all cars of every breed. Molly calls him her "Lightning Conductor." I could not wait till the chauffeur arrives.

By the way, we have a Russian count and his wife, an Austrian count and his, already all old, here. Mrs. Shuster is thrilled, and says their titles are a "draw." The trouble is the counts quarrel on politics and make snorty sounds at each other, so they have to be kept from colliding. It is I who must do this the most often, and it tears my nerves.

My pigeon, I will write again one of these days soon, when I have settled. Now I am still on my head!

Your upside down friend,

Patrice.

P. S. Larry has read this letter and says it is very bad English – shocking! But I cannot write it all over again. You will see, I shall do better next time.

V
PETER STORM TO JAMES STRICKLAND, A NEW YORK LAWYER CELEBRATED FOR HIS BRILLIANT DEFENCE OF CERTAIN FAMOUS CRIMINALS

Huntersford, Long Island,
April Something or Other.
(Why be a slave to dates?)

Dear Strickland:

Yours full of reproaches for changing my plans and upsetting yours is "duly to hand," as you'd probably phrase it yourself. What are you *for*, my dear man, except to take trouble off the shoulders of others on to your own? I ask you that! You like it. You thrive on it. With your uncanny talent for character reading, you should never have expected anything of me but the unexpected. And the whole embroglio is your fault, if you come to look at it between the eyes. I ought never to have come back from Siberia four years ago. You hauled me back. What did I do in the West and in the South? You know only too well. Yet here I am again, at your call.

You'll say you didn't call me to do what I'm doing now, but something widely different. I meant to answer the call in your way, it's true (if at all), but for reasons which have cropped up I prefer to do it in my own. You ought to be pleased at this, because I've now *definitely determined to answer the call*. I hadn't at first. I'd made up my mind no farther than to come and look into the matter you spoke of. I'm looking into it all right where I am, I assure you, though from a different angle than that proposed by you.

I don't know why you "deduce" that there's a woman in the case, for there never has been one before. There were sometimes several, I admit. But never One. Trust you to see the distinction! Have you been pumping Marcel? You may as well admit it if you have, for I shall ask him when I see him next at one of our secret meetings, and he will confess. There's nothing he can refuse me, as you have cause to know – and you know why.

I inquire as to this more from curiosity than anxiety, because I should rather like to know what is in Marcel's mind about me. I never knew he had the qualities of a detective among his many gifts. He has plenty of others! But what does it matter what he thinks, or you screw out of him? I don't mind telling you frankly that your suspicions are justified – to a certain extent. It's not a woman who is in the case. It's a girl. Is that worse or better, think you?

I'm not in love with her, but Edward Caspian is, and I am dog in the manger enough not to want him to get her. My future fate – as I expect it to be – lies thousands of hard miles away from this exquisite American child, just unfolded from the pink cotton of a French convent. I am human, however. I'm not a stone, but a man. I saw the girl on the ship, and before I heard her name something stirred in my memory. You know already what the name is, if you know anything from Marcel, or if you've put two and two together – a favourite occupation of yours, and then skilfully demonstrating that they're five!

She didn't remember me – how could she? – though she did once say something about my eyes "looking familiar." Naturally I was interested in her. And though I thoroughly enjoyed the patronage of Mrs. Shuster and some others who condescended to visit us third-class animals, I could but appreciate the delicate discrimination of Miss Moore and her friend Mrs. Winston.

I've never thought of myself as a chivalrous person. On the contrary, I'm what my life has made of me, something of the brute. But such dregs of chivalry as had settled at the bottom of my soul's cup were stirred by the news of Laurence Moore's trouble and its immediate effect upon his daughter.

I heard on the dock, and the child heard on the dock – from Caspian, who had come to meet my present employer, Mrs. Shuster. It was easy to see (knowing what we know of him now) that Caspian had decided at first sight to go for the girl, who has grown astonishingly pretty and attractive. I'm here to block his game. That's why I took on this idiotic job with Madam Shuster. It's enough to make a Libyan lion laugh! But I saw no other way of keeping near, to do the watchdog act – not being a gentleman or a millionaire like Caspian, able to live at leisure anywhere preferred.

This blooming hotel business was started to prevent Caspian getting his entering wedge into the crack of the family fortunes. He was all generosity. Wanted to lend money on a mortgage, just the sort of thing a lazy, happy-go-lucky chap like Moore would snap at. And the child couldn't be expected to look farther ahead than her father looked. Marcel was my next inspiration – a bait to decide Moore that I was not to be despised as an adviser. Now, I am the power behind the throne – very *much* behind, it's true, not in the palace of the king at all, but prodding at the throne with a thin stick through an all but invisible hole in the wall. If it's visible to any one, that one is Caspian himself, who probably realized in the hour of battle between us that I'd guessed what he was up to.

I am a type he would dislike and distrust in any case, as I think small men are apt to dislike bigger ones capable of reducing them by superior brute force if necessary. As it is, he hates me. I suppose he thinks I have designs on Miss Moore myself: "the pauper adventurer who has already taken advantage of his influence over an older woman to gain access to the heroine." Sounds like a moving picture "cut in," doesn't it? Not only does he (the self-cast hero of the picture) intend to punish the villain's impudent interference with him, but to unmask the wretch in order to thwart his designs upon the heroine. To do this, the said hero has put a detective agency on to me.

I can hear you ask sharply, "How do you know this?"

The answer is, "I *don't* know. I feel it." And the life I've led has taught me to trust my feelings. I have been like a stag in the forest who scents the unseen hunters when still very far off. If the villain, Peter Storm, is "unmasked" – well, so much the worse for him, but others will fall with his fall, we know. And the danger for me (it is a danger, I admit) only adds to the – fun.

Probably you'll mention the word "damn" or some other analogous one when you read that. "*Fun!*" you'll sneer. But my dear fellow, it expresses my point of view. I *am* having fun. I'm having the time of my life. Afterward – "let come what come may, I shall have had my day." And I'm going to fight it out on these lines if it takes all summer – unless Caspian undermines me and blows up my trenches.

The latter, by the way, are of a homely character. I lurk in lodgings at the village dressmaker's. I have one room at the back of the house, its dormer window looking over a grass plot and a chicken coop. Fortunately the cock is as morose and reserved an individual as I am myself, without my sense of humour – or else he's henpecked. He never opens his head till it's necessary to salute the sunrise; and the hens consider it bad form to boast loudly because a mere egg has been given to the world. For this accommodation I pay four dollars a week, and ten cents a day for having a rubber bath filled. Breakfast of bread, butter, and coffee is brought to my room by a timid fawn of a dressmaker's daughter who does me the honour of fearing and admiring me, I surmise. I pay twenty cents for her attendance and admiration. Mine is the simple life, but luxurious compared with many of my experiences. As to clothes, I am always Hyde, never Jekyll. It's safer. My hat is the worst thing in hats you ever beheld, though I have at times surpassed it.

You would think I ought to have plenty of leisure on my hands for the work I brought from Siberia, but I confess the girl has got between me and it. Don't waste a smile. No girl born could tempt me to what I should have to give up for her. Besides, there are a thousand other obstacles between me and love. If she wastes a few thoughts on me – as perhaps she does sometimes – it's only curiosity concerning the "Ship's Mystery." That's what they all called me on board, I heard. But there is the past, a faded yet beautiful background of early youth – one of the few really beautiful things in my life. And there is the girl, a radiant figure in the foreground.

I'm in the house at Kidd's Pines often enough, doing my secretarial work (a howl of laughter here, please!), to see pretty well all that goes on, and the demoniac joy I feel in acting as *deus ex machina* I can't express to you, because I don't entirely understand it myself. But I wouldn't be out of this for anything.

Miss Moore has been learning to drive her car. (You know about that car!) Captain Winston began to give her lessons, but cracked up, as his wounds aren't thoroughly mended yet. I had half a mind to offer my services, but thought it would add too much fuel to the fire of curiosity, so held my peace until – well, several things happened first. Among them was the coming of Castnet, the chauffeur engaged by Marcel himself – a Frenchman, too young to be mobilized, but supposed to understand a Grayles-Grice. He looked a smart fellow, and a lesson or two went off well, according to what I heard in Mrs. Shuster's room. Miss Moore sometimes comes in when I am there, with news from the front, so to speak: what new guests have arrived, what they are like, how they get on together – or don't get on; for Kidd's Pines as a hotel is already a going concern.

Three days after Castnet's arrival Miss Moore gave up having her lesson in order to give Count von Falm and his wife a spin. They happened to be the only guests – except my boss – without a car of their own, and von Falm pointedly alluded to an advertisement promising an automobile for the service of visitors. Thereupon the bomb exploded. Young Castnet, like a sprat defying a sturgeon, refused to drive an enemy of his country. The sturgeon demanded the sprat's discharge. Miss Moore sought her father. "Larry" was teaching the Russian Countess tennis, and gaily gave his daughter *carte blanche*. She, overwhelmed by responsibility, temporized. France, you see, is her second home! The Austrian was in no mood to stand half measures, and gave notice of departure. Meanwhile, Castnet departed without this ceremony, unaware that Providence was at work in his behalf. Behold Kidd's Pines with its best room empty and minus a chauffeur! But Miss Moore was undaunted. At any moment somebody else might clamour for the car. She determined to be her own chauffeur, and on the strength of her half-dozen lessons, set out alone to experiment with the forty horsepower Grayles-Grice.

That was when I met her on her second excursion, I think. I was taking a walk, and she was stranded in the middle of the "king's highway," about two miles from Huntersford. Another car equally large and powerful was drawn up almost nose to nose with the Grayles-Grice, and the road was becoming congested with vehicles of various sorts. The Grayles-Grice blocked the way. It was impossible for anything else wider than a bicycle or a skeleton to proceed in either direction; consequently you would have supposed that a big reception or an automobile race was taking place in the neighbourhood.

You can imagine what language would ordinarily, in such circumstances, have belched from the serried ranks of fiery Pierce Arrows, dashing Cadillacs, and even from peace-loving Fords; but what should you say was happening in the present instance? If you refuse to commit yourself to an opinion, it's only because you've never seen Miss Patricia Moore.

I will tell you what was happening!

All the men were out of all the cars, either helping, advising, or trying to get near enough to do one or both. The chauffeuse herself was sitting behind her wheel with the manner of a youthful queen on a throne receiving homage from courtiers. The Grayles-Grice is gray, and she was dressed in gray to match, a light pearl gray I should say it would be called. She has a complexion also like pearl, but not gray pearl. Excitement had given her a bright rosy colour. Her black hair – I don't know whether excitement makes a girl's hair curl – but anyhow hers was doing it, in little rings and spirals which fluttered in the breeze and blew across her cheeks and eyes. By the way, she has the bluest eyes I ever saw in human head. She was thanking her courtiers charmingly whenever they came within speaking distance, rolling her "r's" in a fascinating French fashion she has, and whenever a heated red man would lift his head from the open bonnet or pop up from under the car she would remark how *kind* he was, or how sad she felt that he should be having all this trouble for *her*! Then other men

for whom there was not room at the bonnet or under the capacious Grayles-Grice envied the hot red ones, and intimated (in order to get hot and red and awake sympathy themselves) that they and they alone could find out what was the matter. I should estimate that at least a dozen men had enlisted under the voluntary system, while others on the outer ring only waited their turn.

As for the stranded autos (whose number increased as the minutes went on), ladies young and old who sat desiring the return of their cavaliers looked as pleased as the wives of Circe's admirers must have looked while their male belongings were transformed into beasts.

"Why doesn't somebody roll the old thing out of the way and let us go on?" shrieked one of a carful of school teachers deserted by their chauffeur. He, from a distance, explained not too patiently that the trouble was, the thing *wouldn't* roll. I am pretty sure that not one of the men engaged was in a hurry for it to budge; for you know as well as I that all men are deeply romantic at heart, the oldest boys as well as the youngest boys – or more so. This girl looked like Romance incarnate – the face that we see in the sunrise and in our dreams – and it couldn't be often that most of these good commonplace chaps came in for such an adventure.

"Oh, Mr. Storm!" exclaimed Miss Moore when I added myself to the rank of recruits. Everybody stared at me. I felt I was not liked. "You see I've br-roken down!" she explained with the smile of a child. "The poor car won't move without ter-r-rible danger, and no one can find out what the mystery is – though they're *so good* to me!"

Perhaps she wildly hoped there might be a bond between the man of mystery and all other mysteries. It didn't seem likely that where so many men had failed I should succeed; still, I'd driven a Grayles-Grice (you remember, don't you?) and perhaps they hadn't.

"I suppose you don't know things about cars?" she questioned anxiously, as I drew nearer.

"I know some things," I admitted with due modesty. And suddenly I wanted to succeed where these others had failed. Because, though I had done some small favours for her, she hadn't known about them, so she had never thanked me except in the most casual way. I thought it would be rather nice to be thanked by her. I gazed at the Grayles-Grice, which also gazed at me from under her bonnet, and seemed to wink with her carburetor.

"How do you know she won't move?" I inquired of every one in general and no one in particular.

"The young lady begged us not to try, as it had been tried already by two gentlemen on motor bikes, who had to go on before this lot came," the school teachers' chauffeur defended the crowd's intelligence and his own. "I thought it might be a ball broken in the bearings had jammed a rear wheel, but it ain't that; so we took a squint at the differential, but it ain't that either."

"Shall we try again to give her a shove?" I suggested. "The traffic can't be held up here all night. Pretty soon it will be solid between here and New York."

"Oh, *don't* try till you find out what's the matter!" cried Miss Moore. "There was the most hor-r-r-rible noise when those two other men tried. We might be killed!"

I made her get down, and then, with a couple of bold volunteers, risked the mystic peril that lurked behind the "hor-r-rible noise," by attempting to push the car to the edge of the road.

If you will believe me, the Grayles-Grice rolled silently and smoothly as if she were on skates. In a moment she was out of the way, and the coast clear for the crowd. But no man near enough to have seen Miss Moore stirred until I had made a further discovery. The deep-rooted trouble which had defied the gray matter of all explorers proved to be nothing more or less than complete lack of gasoline. No one had thought of that, because the search had been for something serious and esoteric.

"Gas" was offered on all hands, and the G. – G., having drunk long and deep, was once more refreshed as a giant to run her course.

"Shall I drive, or will you?" I mildly asked Miss Moore.

"*Can* you?" she inquired.

"I don't think I've forgotten how. I drove a Grayles-Grice once for a year when I was down on my luck."

(You'll let that statement go unchallenged, won't you? It was the most beastly year of my life.)

We were about to start on a return journey to Kidd's Pines, with me at the helm, and quite an audience looking on, when two policemen came bumping along in a short-nosed car. They bawled out a question: Had any of us "folks" seen two fellows on motor bikes?

Miss Moore was the only one of the "folks" who had. "Do tell them I saw the men," she appealed to me. And then before I could open my lips she had (characteristically of woman) plunged into the recital herself. Her car had come to a standstill, she explained, in the middle of the road. She couldn't make it start. Two motor bicycle riders had appeared and would have passed, but she signalled them to stop. She begged the pair to push her car out of the way. At first she thought they meant to hurry on. They went past her, one on each side. But they muttered something to each other, stopped suddenly, and jumped off their machines. They were laughing together as they came running back. They said, "All right, Miss," and took hold of the Grayles-Grice as if to wheel her to the edge of the road. But then there followed a fear-r-ful bang, like a pistol shot, and Miss Moore noticed a queer smell – a little like the Fourth of July when you were a child. She was frightened, and so were the men. One of them cried out, "Something wrong here! This'll take an expert!" And the other warned her, *whatever* she did, not to let anybody who didn't understand that make of motor try to budge the wheels an inch. Then the two were obliged to go in haste because they had a ferryboat to catch. Not long after autos and autos began to stream along from both directions, and were held up because she warned every one not to move the car.

Clever dodge, wasn't it? The pair had robbed a jewellery shop window, and bagged a whole trayful of suburban engagement rings. As it happened, the police had taken up a wrong scent before they got on the right one. But had the watchdogs come along a few minutes earlier they would have found their way blocked effectively. One of the thieves had fired a torpedo in the road just behind the G. – G. to scare the chauffeuse (one of those big, fat torpedoes motorists and bicyclists sometimes use to frighten dogs) and so had secured a clear road to the nearest ferry. The policemen found the fragments of the torpedo in the dust – after I had suggested their looking for it.

That is the way I entered Miss Moore's service as temporary chauffeur, combining the duties as best I may with secretarial work for Mrs. Shuster. I'm not sure yet how the two parts are to be doubled successfully, but I'm sure of one thing: I don't mean to throw either part up at present, so there's no use in your grumbling or preaching.

Some new people have come to stay in the hotel, a jolly family of boys and girls, and a few days' motor trip is suggested, with me at the helm. The party will consist of the jolly Family, about whom more later; Miss Moore as conductress; and Captain and Mrs. Winston accompanying in their own car, as chaperons. For some extraordinary reason, which puzzles me, Mrs. S. is not going. Apropos of this excursion, I warn you, my dear friend, that you needn't fash yourself to answer my letter in a hurry. You may take time to think. Mrs. Shuster is not only willing, but anxious, for me to drive for the party. I can't imagine why. But I shall certainly *know* why, and perhaps to my sorrow, when I get back. If I hadn't taken on the job, Caspian would. He spent two days away from Kidd's Pines, and Moncourt (just back from a trip to town as I finish writing) saw him in N. Y. in a Grayles-Grice, apparently taking a lesson how to drive. (His own car is a Wilmot.) When he returned, it was without the Wilmot. Said he'd had an accident, and his auto would be laid up for a week; he hoped Miss Moore would let him avail himself of her G. – G. when necessary. He was too late, however, for this particular occasion. All arrangements had been made in his absence. I've nobly refused an extra salary; but I expect to have heaven knows how much extra fun. I bet Caspian's car will be mended unexpectedly soon, as another is booked to drive the G. – G. this time.

Yours,

P. S.

The Wilmot has arrived from New York, and doubtless will follow us like a tame dog. If my hand has not forgotten its cunning, the said dog will find itself often outdistanced.

VI
THE HONBLE MRS. WINSTON TO THE COUNTESS OF LANE

Easthampton, Long Island.
The loveliest moonlight April night.

Dearest Mercédes:

We're just beginning a short motor trip, pausing here all night because it's beautiful, and because there's a dance which Pat and a large family of girls, appropriately named Goodrich, wish to sample. To tell the truth, I shouldn't mind dancing, myself! They're going to have a quaint new thing dedicated by its inventor to Long Island. It's called the Gull Glide. But Jack did too much last week, teaching Patsey to drive her giant Grayles-Grice, and he says if he danced anything it would have to be the Shamblers' Shake. I wouldn't put my nose inside the ballroom without him; vowed I'd be bored stiff. The Goodrich girls' mother is chaperoning her brood and Pat. I made Jack "seek his bed," as the French say, but I'm on the balcony of our private sitting-room, in the moonlight, writing by an electric lamp whose shade looks like an illuminated red rose seen through silver mist. The music, which throbs up to me like heart-beats, mingles with the undertone of the sea and makes me thankful that Jack's so nice and loves me so much. Not to be loved in such music and such moonlight would make one feel one wasn't a woman!

The dance has just begun and will last hours. I've no intention of trying to sleep till it's over, because I'm sure Pat will have things to tell which really *can't* wait till morning. Things like that never can! Meanwhile I shall have time for a long letter to you – the kind you say you like to get.

This is really for Monty also, since you are now with him, helping him to get well, "Somewhere in France." Jack wanted to write a few lines to-night, to put with mine, but his arm is very lame. He said, "Tell Monty this is like old times, when he was recuperating in Davos, and I was 'Lightning Conductor' for Molly Randolph."

Good gracious, what a lot of water has run past mills and under wheels of motors since then! But luckily (since you ask us to chronicle our adventures, as Jack did for Monty in those days) we can still mix the honey of love with the lubricating oil of the machine. It will most likely be Pat's and somebody else's love, not ours, although our stock never runs dry. But you're interested in Pat's affairs, and really they *do* get more complicated and exciting every day. I shan't tell you much about them just now, but will save that part of the narrative for by and by, in case there's anything to add at half-past midnight. There generally is news from the front about that time.

Meanwhile, Monty (who is as ignorant of this country as Jack was only the other day) clamours for J.'s "impressions of America." Since Jack can't put them on paper, I will. I know all his most topographical thoughts, because he's trying them – not "on a dog" but on me, while I drive the car to save his good right arm. "The Lightning Conductor Discovering America" I call him, as everything surprises and interests him so hugely, you would think he was an "O Pioneer!" Long Island isn't your "pitch," Mercédes dear, and you don't know much about it from the inside, so to speak. You may imagine, therefore, that it's a small, sophisticated spot on the map for us to *discover*. But there's where you're wrong, my dear! It's not small and it's not sophisticated. It may look tiny on paper, but it feels far from tiny when you set forth to motor over it. It feels about the size I used to picture England before I went abroad.

Jack fancied (he dared not say so to me till he could add "I made a big mistake") that America was new and indigestible, like freshly baked bread. As for Long Island, he visioned it as a seaside suburb of New York. Now, he's so fascinated with Awepesha and its environment that he's simply

bolting history by the yard! You know, he always was keen on that sort of thing when he travelled; but like most Britishers he flattered himself that he had been *born* knowing all that was worth knowing in the history of the United States: a little about the Revolution and the Civil War, and " – er – well really, what else *was* there, you know, if you'd read Cooper and 'Uncle Tom's Cabin' when you were a boy?"

Now, he browses in Cousin John Randolph Payton's respectable library, where every book is bound like every other book in "half calf," and he sees that things began to wake up over here several hundreds of years ago. He has even discovered that an ancestor of his was one of the first important settlers of Long Island, apparently a perfect pig of a man who was horrid to innocent Indians – charming Indians who believed that Europeans meant what they said. I can't reconcile it with Jack to have had a pig for an ancestor, but he certainly had, at least one. Luckily the tendency has run out in the family ages ago.

But to turn from ancestral pigs to our Island!

Jack says the history of Long Island is the history of the whole country in miniature, like "the world seen through the little eye of a sparrow," as Emerson would have said. In fact, it's *Some* island, as Emerson would *not* have said; and of course we think our part the loveliest and historicalest of all. There's more variety in history as well as scenery on this island than in many entire *states*. You simply take your choice. You say to yourself, "Do I prefer Indian history and names? Or do I prefer the Dutch? Or does my taste run in the direction of the English? Do I want to visit the sites of Indian massacres or Revolutionary battles? Does pirate treasure lure me? Am I thrilled by the adventures of whaling-ships and their brave captains?" When you've chosen, you point your auto's nose in the direction desired. The only thing you *couldn't* find in the Island's thousand miles of glorious roads – (yes, my child, a thousand miles, to say nothing of the not so glorious ones!) – the only thing, I repeat, would be something completely modern.

That proud statement doesn't sound true, but it is. You could find plenty of new houses, the newest of the new: palaces of millionaires, middle-sized houses of middle-class people who are happier than the happiest millionaires; fantastic cottages for summer folk; cozy cottages of "commuters"; queer colonies of Italians, and even of darkies; but there isn't a foot of Long Island ground on which these palaces and houses and cottages and colonies have sprung up that isn't as historic as European soil. It's enthralling to see how intimately and neatly history here links itself with history on the other side: history of England, France, and Holland; noble names and great events. That's what delights Jack, picking up these links, and fitting them together like bits of jigsaw puzzles. He's absolutely *thrilled*, and wants to stop the car whenever we come to one of the curiously deformed old trees which still, on country roads, mark the direction of ancient Indian trails. This fad of Jack's leads to awkwardness during our present excursion, as we're part of a weird cavalcade which I'll describe to you later. But just now I *can't* let you off those trees!

The Indians of different tribes had a way of bending one of the lower boughs of a young oak chosen for the sacrifice, bending it so that it grew horizontally, pointing the way along the trail for the initiated. They would have trees done like that at regular intervals; but if you were a silly European you wouldn't know without being told what the trees meant by sticking out their elbows in that significant way; and so you would stupidly proceed to get yourself lost.

Think what those old trees could tell, if by laying your ear against their trunks you could understand the murmurous whisper inside, like secret voices behind a thick closed door! They look extraordinarily intelligent, thrusting out their long arms and crooking up their elbows, as I said. It's just as if you asked them, "How do I get to the sea?" and they, with Indian reticence, answered with a gesture instead of speech. Some of these arms have grown to such a length and thickness that they look like the bodies of animals. You can imagine little girls and boys riding on them, playing they are on horses. Or you can picture a fair maid and a man sitting side by side on one of those big, low-growing branches, as if it were a comfortable sofa. It would be a *lovely* place to be proposed to on a summer's day!

Does your respect for Long Island begin to grow? I haven't told you yet a quarter of the things that give it interest.

Our part of the Island, the eastern part, used to be harassed by British cruisers in the Revolution. Also it is the Captain Kidd part. I suppose even Monty knows about Captain Kidd? It seems that he used to be Jack's favourite pirate. When I was at the pirate-loving age I didn't care for Kidd as much as for others, because he had such respectable beginnings. Think, a Scotsman from Greenock of all places! And then he became a pirate not for the fun of flying the black flag like storybook pirates, or because he was disappointed in love, but because he cannily decided that he could gain more by turning pirate than by chasing pirates, which Lord Bellomont, the Governor of New York, had sent him out to do. Worst of all, when he was caught Kidd put the blame on his crew, and vowed that they'd forced him into evil courses. Now that we've a house on Long Island, however, I've taken Captain Kidd to my heart. He belongs more to the Moores of Kidd's Pines than to us, of course, but I value and vaunt him as a neighbouring ghost of distinction.

Both our place and Kidd's Pines are not a great distance from Shelter Island, where one lovely umbrella pine exists, under which the pirate is said to have buried his treasure in 1669. He may have emptied his pockets there one day, but that's *nothing* to what he seems to have done at Kidd's Pines. Gardiner's Island – very aristocratic and historic – isn't far off, and it was from there Captain Kidd sent word of his arrival to Lord Bellomont, whose famous syndicate he'd betrayed and made a laughing-stock by turning pirate. He had his six-gunned sloop *Antonio* in harbour there, hoping to "make good" with the authorities; but he must have guessed that there wasn't much chance for him. He must have expected the very thing to happen that did happen: to be arrested with his whole pirate crew, and sent to England in a man-o'-war. If he foresaw that event, he'd not have been silly enough to bury his treasure on Gardiner's Island, where everybody would rush to search for it the minute his back was turned, would he? No, he'd take a few of his most trusty men and make secret night expeditions in boats from Gardiner's Island to some part of the shore far enough away not to come under suspicion. Then he would have to mark the place where the treasure was buried (oh, but a treasure rich and rare, for he'd brought everything away with him when he left his stolen ship, *The Quedah Merchant*, at San Domingo!), mark it in a way not too conspicuous, but permanent, in case he had the luck ever to get free and come back. No good marking with stones, because some one might build; but what a smart idea to plant trees so valuable that nobody to whom that land was granted would want to destroy them! This is what the canny man of Greenock is supposed to have done. He'd brought the tree-slips from the south when he risked his spying expedition into northern waters. He meant to make a present of them to Lord Bellomont if the Governor were lenient: but the Governor's heart was flinty, and Captain Kidd found softer soil for the planting of his trees.

It makes a nice story anyhow, doesn't it? And Kidd's Pines as a hotel can put on five dollars a day extra at least because of the romance and glamour of that hidden hoard. By the way, it's "going some," that hotel inspiration of ours. What with history in general, buried treasure in particular, Marcel Moncourt's fame, Larry's charm and connections, and Pat's fatal fascinations, people flock to lay their money on the shrine. They're not all the right sort of people yet, but their money's good – and you can't think how amusing some of the poor pets are!

This Goodrich family I mentioned – a father, a mother, and three girls (who look as if they ought to be what I used to call "thrins") – are real darlings. They're so rich they can have everything they want, but they don't know what to want. They've always lived in Colorado close to the Garden of the Gods, and the only trips they ever took before were to the Yellowstone Park and the Grand Canyon. Consequently the scenery of the East looks to their eyes the height of miniature Japanese landscapes where you can step over the tops of the highest trees. They are built on the Garden of the Gods scale themselves, and take up so much room in a motor car that they ought to pay extra. (I *do* hope the girls may find men tall enough and brave enough to dance with them to-night!) When

Peter Storm first saw the family, he quoted the blind man in the Bible who received his sight by a miracle: "I see men as trees, walking!"

The Goodrichs aren't, however, the latest addition to the circle at Kidd's Pines. Two days before we were due to start on this little jaunt three youths we'd met on the ship turned up. They'd been "doing" the battlefields of France they told us then, seeing the "backs of the fronts" – nice boys, just out of college – and they'd hardly the price of a meal left among them, they joyously said, when we landed. Of course they were in love with Pat in a nice, young, hopeless way. They bade her good-bye forever; but when they heard of the family crash, and read that the previously Unattainable One had become chatelaine of a hotel, they begged, borrowed, or stole (or more likely pawned) things which enabled them to rally round her as clients. They could "run" only to one room for the trio, and that the cheapest in the house; but you never saw three such radiant faces, till this motor expedition happened to be mentioned.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.