An Adventure Story for Girls

The Cruise of the O-Moo

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Adventure Stories for Girls

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CONTENTS

THE CRUISE OF THE O MOO

CHAPTER I
A MYSTERIOUS TAPPING

Lucile Tucker stirred in her berth, opened her eyes drowsily, then half-framed a thought into a whispered: “What was that?”

The next instant she sat bolt upright. She had heard it again, this time not in a dream. It was a faint rat-tat-tat, with a hollow sound to it as if beaten on the head of a barrel.

She strained her ears to catch the slightest sound but now caught only the constant lash-lash of the flag-rope as it beat the mast of the yacht, the O Moo, a sure sign of a rising storm.

She strained her eyes to peer into the darkness to the right of her; she wanted to see her two companions who should be sleeping there to make sure they were still with her. She could not see; the shutters were tightly closed and there was no moon. The place was dark; black as soot.

She stilled her breathing to listen again, but caught only the lash-lash of that flag-rope, accompanied now and then by the drumlike boom of canvas. The storm was rising. Soon it would be lashing the waves into white foam to send them crashing high above the breakwaters. She shivered. A storm aboard ship had always frightened her.

Yet now as she thought of the term, “aboard ship,” she shrugged her slim shoulders. Her lips parted in a smile as she murmured:

“The cruise of the O Moo.”

Suddenly her thoughts were broken in upon by the repetition of that mysterious

sound of a rat-tat-tat.

“Like a yellow-hammer drumming on a hollow tree,” was her unspoken comment, “only birds don’t work at night. It’s like—like someone driving—yes, driving tacks. Only who could it be? And anyway, why would they drive tacks into our yacht at midnight.”

The thought was so absurd that she dismissed it at once. Dismissing the whole problem for the moment, she began thinking through the events which had led up to that moment.

She, with Marian Norton, her cousin—as you will remember if you chance to have read the account of their previous adventure as recorded in the book called “The Blue Envelope”—had spent the previous year on the shores of Behring Straits in Alaska and Siberia. There they had been carried through a rather amazing series of thrilling adventures which had not been without their financial advantages, especially to Marian.

Lucile’s father had been, when she had left her home at Anacortes, Washington, a well-to-do salmon fisherman. She had felt no fear of lack of money for further schooling. The two girls had therefore planned to study during this present year, Lucile at a great university situated near the shore of Lake Michigan and Marion in a renowned school of art in the same city.

But fortune plays rude tricks at times. They had returned to find that Lucile’s father’s fortune had been dissipated by an unfortunate investment in fish-traps for catching a run of sock-eyed salmon, a salmon run which failed, and that Marian’s father had grub-staked a “sure-winner” gold mine which had panned out not enough gold to pay for the miner’s “mucklucks” (skin-boots).

So Marian had given up the major portion of the money paid to her by the Ethnological Society for her sketches and Lucile had abandoned all hope of receiving money from her father for a university education. They had not, however, given up their plans for further schooling.

“Have to live carefully and not spend an extra cent,” had been Marian’s way of summing up the situation. “And we can make it all right. Why, just look at the price for rooms at the university.” She referred to a catalogue in her hand. “Twenty-three dollars a term. That is less than two dollars a week. We could pay that. Rooms outside the university certainly can’t be any more—probably not as

much.”

Lucile smiled now as she recalled this bit of crude reasoning.

They had hurried on to the university with their little checking accounts. They had had—

But here again Lucile started and sprang half out of her berth. Came again that mysterious rat-tat-tat.

“What can it be?” she whispered. “Marian! Florence! Wake up. Someone is—”

These last words, uttered in a whisper, died on her lips. The other girls slept on. What was the use of waking them? Couldn’t be anything serious. And if it were, what could they do at this mad hour of night? Suppose they routed out old Timmie, keeper of the dry dock, what could he do? It was black as jet out there.

So she reasoned, and, having settled back between her blankets, began again the recalling of events.

They had arrived in the city by the lake to be completely disillusioned. All university rooms had been reserved for months ahead. So too had all outside rooms which might be had for a reasonable price. To pay the price demanded for such rooms as were available had been impossible. They faced the danger of being obliged to return to their homes, and this, to such girls as they were, was a calamity unthinkable.

Just at this critical moment, the O Moo had shown her masts above the horizon. She was a trim little pleasure yacht, thoroughly equipped for living on board. She belonged to a wealthy doctor named Holmes, a life-time friend of Lucile’s father.

“She’s in dry dock down about two miles from the university,” he had told the girls. “You’re welcome to live in her for the winter. Canvas over her now but you can prop that up here and there, I guess. Make a snug place to camp, I’d say. Cabin’s about ten by thirty and there’s everything you’d need, from an eggbeater to an electric range. There’s electric lights and everything; valve-in-the-head motor supplies ’em. Go on; live there if you want to; keep house and everything. Pretty stiff walk to the U. But there’s the lagoon in winter, with good skating a mile and a half of the way. What say—want to try it? Old Timmie, the keeper of

the dry dock, will see that nobody bothers you. There's some Chinamen living in a barge out there, some fishermen in a smack and a young chap in a gasoline schooner. Guess they are all peaceable folks, though. Might get another girl or two to go in with you. Plenty of room. We live on board her two months every summer, two families of us, six in all."

If the girls had been captivated at once by this novel plan, once they had climbed aboard the yacht, they had been thrilled and delighted at the sight which met their eyes.

"She—she's a regular little floating palace!" Lucile had stammered.

"Tut! Tut!" Mr. Holmes had remonstrated, "not quite a palace, though comfortable enough, and not floating at all, at the present moment."

"It will be a cruise—the winter cruise of the O Moo," Lucile had exclaimed in delight.

Had she but known how real these words would be to her some time hence —"The winter cruise of the O Moo"—she might have shuddered with fear and been sorely tempted not to accept her new home.

The power of divination was not one of her talents, so, with Marian at her side, she had proceeded to lift the heavy canvas which enshrouded the yacht's deck, and, having crept ...

A truly wonderful cabin it was, all done in dark oak, with broad panels of green canvas along the walls, equipped with heavy oak tables and heavily over-stuffed chairs and lounges. It presented the appearance of a splendidly furnished but rather eccentric living room.

Here at one end the touch of a lever sent an electric range springing up from the floor. A second lever lowered a partition between this suddenly improvised kitchenette and the living room. Two cupboards to the right of this kitchen displayed dishes and cooking utensils. The opposite wall furnished a table which folded up when not in use. Behind this was a fully equipped kitchen cabinet.

"Convenient when in use, out of the way when not needed," had been the doctor's only comment.

This kitchen was forward. Aft were to be found four double berths. Modeled after the upper berths of a Pullman sleeper, these gave the maximum of comfort and when folded up occupied no space at all.

“It’s wonderful!” had been the most the girls could say. “And, oh! Doctor Holmes, we’ll pay you rent for it. You surely must allow us to do that,” Marian had exclaimed.

“Nonsense!” the good doctor had exclaimed. “Worked my way through school myself. Know what it means. All I ask is that you pass the good work on to some other fellow who needs a boost when you are through with school and making money.”

So here they were, and had been for two months, all comfortably established in the cabin of the O Moo.

Dr. Holmes had suggested that they might be able to accommodate another girl. They had become acquainted with Florence Huyler, a freshman in the physical culture department, and had decided at once that she was just the girl to join them.

Florence had not waited for a second invitation and here she was sleeping in the berth to Lucile’s right. Just why she should have seemed most fitting as a companion for such an adventure I can best tell you as events progress.

The long hike back and forth to the university and the art school had been a bit tiring at first, but in time they had come to enjoy it. Then winter had come and with it ice on the lagoon. Only yesterday they had had their first wonderful race over its shining surface. Her recollections came slower and slower and she was about to drift off into a dream when there came again that strange rat-tat-tat.

Once more she sat bolt upright to peer into the darkness; once more she asked herself the questions: “What can it be? Should I waken Marian and Florence?”

She did not waken them. To do so would seem, she thought, a trifle silly. The yacht stood upon a car with iron wheels which rested on a track raised five feet above the ground by a stout trestle work. The sides of the yacht towered above this trestle. Altogether the deck of the yacht was fully twenty feet from the ground. They ascended and descended by means of a rope ladder. This ladder, at the present moment, lay on the deck. No one could enter their cabin unless he

were possessed of a ladder and any person attempting this would at once be detected and might be arrested for it, so why be afraid?

But, after all, that sound was puzzling. She wanted to know what it meant. For some time she contemplated slipping on her dressing-gown to creep out on deck and peer over the side. But the wind was chill and still rising. The flag-rope was whipping the mast with ever-increasing fury.

“Cold out there,” she thought with a shiver. “Glad the O Moo is in dry dock and not on the water!”

A sudden thought brought a new fear. Of a whole line of schooners and yachts on that track in the dry dock, the O Moo was the one closest to the water. What if she should slip back into the water and be driven out into the lake! Lucile shivered again. Then she smiled. How absurd. Did not a heavy cable hold her in place? Were not the wheels of the car, on which she rested, blocked? How then could she glide back into the lake?

Fortunately, it did not occur to her that this very tap-tap-tapping might be the knocking of a hammer which was driving those blocks from their positions before the wheels of the car.

Since this thought did not come to her and, since the tapping did not come again, she at last snuggled down among the blankets and fell asleep.

Hardly had she wakened in the morning before she recalled this strange incident of the night. Hurriedly slipping into a middy suit and slippers, she raced up the short gangway and across deck, tossing the rope ladder over the side. The next moment she might have been seen walking slowly about the hull of the yacht. She was searching for traces of the strange tapping.

Having passed along the south side, she climbed through the trestle and made her way along the north side. She was about to conclude that the night’s experience had been purely an imaginary one when a white spot near the prow attracted her attention.

She caught her breath as her hand reached for it. It was a square bit of paper held in place by four tacks which had apparently been driven into the hull with great deliberation.

“That explains the tapping,” she whispered to herself. “Sure had their courage right along with them. Thought we’d be afraid to interfere, being just girls, I suppose. Wonder what it is.”

She reached up and pulled the paper free from the tacks. As soon as she had it in her hand she realized that written on it was a message. She read it—read it twice—then stood there staring.

The paper was of a peculiar rice-straw variety. The words were written in a strangely artistic fashion. Fine as the tracing of a woman’s pen, each letter stood out distinct, done in curves of wonderful perfection, the work of a master penman.

But she did not pause to admire the handwriting; it was the meaning of the words that startled her as she read:

“You must not stay here. You shall not stay. I have said it.”

It was signed only with a crosslike figure, a bizarre sketch that might well have represented the claw of a bird—or a dragon, Lucile added with a little intake of breath.

“I must show the girls,” she exclaimed, and nimble as a squirrel, was away over the trestle and up the rope ladder.

When the other girls had heard Lucile’s story and had read the note they were more astonished than alarmed.

“Huh!” exclaimed Florence, gripping an iron rod above her and lifting her full hundred and sixty pounds easily with one hand. “Who’s telling us whether we can stay here or not?”

“I’d say they better not let you get near them,” smiled Lucile.

Florence laughed and, releasing her grip on the rod, sat down to think.

“Doesn’t seem possible it could be anyone living in the other boats,” she mused. “I’ve seen that young man they call Mark Pence, the fellow who lives in the gasoline schooner, just once. He seems to be decent enough.”

“And the old fishermen,” put in Marian, “I hired two of them to pose for some sketches last week. Nice old fellows, they are; a little rough but entirely harmless. Besides, what difference could it make to them whether we live here or not?”

“There’s the Chinamen who run a little laundry in that old scow,” said Lucile thoughtfully, “but they are the mildest-mannered of them all, with their black pajama suits and pigtails.”

“And that’s all of them, except Old Timmie and his wife,” said Florence, rising and pressing the lever which brought the electric range into position. “And as for Timmie, I’d as soon suspect my own father.”

“We’ll tell him about it,” said Lucile. “He might help us.”

They did tell Timmie, but he could throw no light on the subject. He appeared puzzled and a little disturbed, but his final counsel was:

“Someone playing a practical joke on you. Pay no attention to it. Pay no attention at all.” The girls accepted his advice. Indeed, there was nothing they could do about it.

“All the same,” was Lucile’s concluding word, “I don’t like it. Looks as if someone in this vicinity were doing something they should not do and were afraid we’d catch them at it. I for one shall keep an eye out for trouble.”

The other two girls agreed with her, and while they did not alter their daily program in the least, they did keep a sharp lookout for suspicious characters who might be lurking about the dry dock.

CHAPTER II
THE BLUE FACE IN THE NIGHT

Lucile need not have kept an eye out for trouble. Trouble was destined to find her and needed no watching. As she expressed it afterward: “It doesn’t seem to matter much where you are nor what you are doing, if you are destined for adventures you’ll have them.”

But the thing which happened to her on the following evening, though doubly mysterious and haunting in its character, appeared to have no connection whatever to the incident of the note.

The storm which had been rising all night had lulled with the morning sun, but by mid-afternoon was raging again with redoubled fury. Sending the spray dashing high above the breakwaters, it now and then cast a huge cake of ice clear of the water’s tallest crest and brought it down upon the breakwater’s rim with the sound of an exploding cannon. Carrying blinding sheets of snow before it, the wind rose steadily in force and volume until the most hardy pedestrian made headway against it with the greatest difficulty.

When Lucile left the university grounds to face east and to begin forcing her way against the wind to the yacht, night had fallen. “Dark as it should be at seven—woo! what a gale!” she shivered, as buttoning her mackinaw tightly about her throat, she bent forward to meet the storm.

For a half hour, her body beaten and torn by the wind, her face cut by driving sleet, she fought her way onward into the night. She had reached the shore of the lake and was making her way south, or at least thought she was. So dense was the darkness that it was with the utmost difficulty that she kept her directions.

“Wish—wish I had tried getting a place to stay nearer the university,” she half

sobbed.

As if in answer to these words, the storm appeared to redouble its fury. Seizing her with its whirling grip, it carried her in a semicircle, to land her at last against a stone wall. So great was the force of her impact that for the moment she lay there at the foot of the wall, only partly conscious of what was going on about her.

When at last she was able to rise, she knew that she had completely lost her way.

“Might as well follow the wall,” she thought desperately. “Little more sheltered here. Bring me to some place after a time.”

The fury of wind and snow continued. At times she fancied she felt the spray from waves dampen her cheeks. She heard distinctly the break of these waves —“Against the wall,” she told herself, shuddering as the thought came to her that she might suddenly reach the end of this wall and be blown into the lake.

“Anyway I can’t stay here,” she muttered. “Too cold. Face is freezing, I guess.”

She paused to remove a glove and touch her cheek. The next instant she was rubbing it vigorously. “Frozen all right. Have to get in somewhere soon.”

Just at that moment her heart leaped wildly. For a moment the drive of snow had slackened. In that moment, a great, black bulk loomed up at her right.

“Some building,” she thrilled, and at once doubled her efforts to escape from the storm and reach this promised shelter.

As, still hugging the wall, she came closer to the looming structure, she saw that it showed not a single gleaming light. The next moment her lips parted in an exclamation of dismay:

“The old Spanish Mission! No one there—hasn’t been for years.”

Once she had forced her mind to sober thought, she realized that she had no reason to hope for anything better. There were but four structures on that mile of park-front on the lake all deserted at this time of year: a broad, low pavilion; a huge, flat bath-house; a towering castle, relic of a great fair once held on these grounds, and this Spanish Mission, which never had been a real mission, but

merely a reproduction of one dating back into other centuries, a huge wooden hull of a thing.

Resembling a block-house, with its narrow windows and low doors, it had always stirred Lucile's curiosity. Now she was about to seek shelter in it, or at least in the lee of it. It was deserted, empty, fast falling into decay, a mysterious, haunty place. Yet, so buffeted by the storm was she, so frightened by the onrush of the elements, that she felt quite equal to creeping through some opening into its vast emptiness should an opening appear.

And an opening did offer her opportunity to test her nerve. It was a window, the glass shattered by the storm. Her heart beating wildly, she squeezed through into the inky blackness. On tiptoe, she made her way down the wall to the right. She was obliged to feel for every step. There was not a ray of light.

"Some big hall," she decided. After she had moved along for a space of forty feet or more she whispered: "The chapel!" Her heart skipped a beat. "Imagine being in a deserted chapel on such a night!"

Suddenly overcome with the thought that she might stumble into an altar or a crucifix, she halted and stood there trembling. She had always felt a great awe for such things.

She stood there until her legs ached with the strain of holding to one position. Then she pushed on slowly. Suddenly she brushed against something. Recoiling in fright, she stood there motionless.

At last she had the courage to bend over and put out a hand. To her intense relief, she found that she had come upon a bench standing against the wall. Having tested its strength, she sat down. Leaning back, she rested.

"That's better," she breathed. "The storm will soon be over. Then I'll get out of here and go to the yacht."

The drive of the wind, the chill of the storm had made her drowsy. The night before her sleep had been disturbed. As she sat there her head drooped more and more. It began nodding, then suddenly came up with a jerk.

Again she was awake! She would not fall asleep, she told herself. Would not. Would not!

Yet, in three minutes she was nodding again. This time her chin sank lower and lower, until at last it rested on her breast, which moved slowly up and down in the rhythmic breathing of one who sleeps.

How long she slept would be hard to tell. So natural was her awaking that she did not realize that she had been asleep at all.

Yet she sensed that something about the place was different. A vague uneasiness stole over her.

Once she had opened her eyes, she knew what it was. There was light—a strange light, somewhere in the room; a dim, almost imperceptible illumination pervaded all.

As she turned her head, without moving in her seat, she with difficulty suppressed a scream.

At the far end of the room was an apparition, or so at least it seemed.

“A blue face! A face of blue fire. It can’t be.” She rubbed her eyes.

“And yet it is.” Her mind did all the talking. Her lips were numb. It is doubtful if she could have spoken had she dared to. But this was no time to speak.

She did not believe in ghosts, yet there was a face, an illumined face; an ugly face, more fiendish than any she had ever seen. Appearing alive, it rose from the center of a decaying table standing before an altar. Beside the altar, revealed by the pale, bluish light which the face appeared to shed about it, were two tarnished candlesticks and back of it, against the wall, hung a crucifix.

Completely paralyzed by the sight of this blue face in the night and by its awesome surroundings, she sat there quite motionless.

The light of the blue face appeared to wax and wane, to come and go like the faint smiles that often pass over a child’s face.

Lucile was suddenly seized with the notion that the face was looking at her. At the same time there came the question: “Is there light enough to reveal my face?” She glanced down to the floor, then breathed a sigh of relief; she could not see her own feet. Silently drawing her scarf over her face, covering all but

her eyes and hiding her hands beneath her coat, she sat there hardly daring to breathe.

She did not have long to wait for, out of the darkness into the pale blue light, there stole three figures. Whether these were men or women, monks, nuns or devils, she could not tell, so closely were they enshrouded in robes or coats of black cloth.

They knelt before the blue face and remained there motionless.

To quiet her nerves, Lucile began to count. She had reached one hundred, when, for fear she would lose all control of herself and scream or run, she closed her eyes. She had counted to one thousand before she dared open them again.

When she did so she found another surprise awaiting her. The kneeling figures were gone. Gone, too, was the face; or at least, it was no longer illumined. The place was dark as a dungeon. Strangely enough, too, the wail of the storm had subsided to a whisper. Only the distant boom of breakers told her that a terrific blizzard had passed over the lake.

Rising without a sound, she tiptoed her way along the wall. Reaching the window, she leaped out upon the ground and was away like a flash. With knees that trembled so they would scarcely support her, she ran for a full half mile before she dared slow down and look back. The snowstorm was over, the moon half out. She could see for some distance behind her, but all she saw was a glistening stretch of snowy landscape. Then she made her way thoughtfully to the dry dock.

Once on board the O Moo she told the other girls nothing of her adventures; merely said she had been delayed by the storm. But that evening as she attempted to study, she would now and then give a sudden start. Once she sprang up so violently that she upset her chair.

“What in the world is the matter?” Marian demanded.

“Nothing, just nerves,” she said, forcing a smile, but she did not attempt to study after that. She went and curled up in a huge, upholstered rocker. Even here she did not fall asleep, but sat staring wide-eyed before her until it was bedtime.

They had all been in their berths for fifteen minutes. Florence had dozed off

when she was suddenly wakened by a hand on her arm. It was Lucile.

“Please—please!” she whispered. “I can’t sleep alone to-night.”

Florence put out a strong hand and drew her up into the berth, then pulled the covers down over them both and clasped her gently in her arms.

Lucile did not move for some time. She had apparently fallen asleep when she suddenly started violently and whispered hoarsely:

“No! No! It can’t be; I—I don’t believe in ghosts.”

At the same time a great shudder shot through her frame.

“Tell me about it,” whispered Florence, holding her tight.

Then, in halting, whispered sentences, Lucile told of the night’s adventure.

“That’s strange!” whispered Florence. “Reminds me of something an aged sailor told me once, something that happened on the Asiatic side of the Pacific. Too long to tell now. Tell you sometime though. Doesn’t seem as if there could be any connection. Surely couldn’t be. But you never can tell. Better turn over and go to sleep.”

Relieved of half her fear by the telling of the story, Lucile fell asleep and slept soundly until morning.

CHAPTER III
LUCILE'S QUICK ACTION GAS

You must not imagine (and you might well be forgiven for doing so, if you have read the preceding chapters) that the experiences of the three girls whose lives are pictured here were a series of closely crowded thrilling adventures. It was not the case that no sooner was the curtain run down on one mysterious happening than the stage was set for another. Few lives are like that. Adventures do come to us all at times and we face them for the most part bravely. Some amuse and entertain, others startle and appall, but each teaches in its own way some new lesson of life.

Adventures taken from the lives of others bring to us the greatest ratio of entertainment, but it is our own exciting and mysterious adventures that we speak of most often when we are clustered on the deck of some vessel or gathered about a camp fire.

While not many pages of this book may be devoted to the everyday school life of these girls, they had it just the same. Florence and Lucile strolled the campus as other girls strolled. They cut classes at times. They passed difficult examinations with some credit. They reveled in the grandeur of the architecture of the buildings of the university. They thrilled at the thought that they were a part of the great throng that daily swarmed from the lecture halls, and were somewhat downcast when they came fully to realize their own insignificance when cast into such a tossing sea of humanity.

Marian, the artist, also had her everyday rounds to make. She caught the 8:15 car downtown five days in the week to labor industriously with charcoal and brush. She saw her Alaskan sketches, which had been praised so often and so highly, picked to pieces by the ruthless criticism of a competent teacher, but she rallied

from her first disappointment to resolve for better work in the future. She began to plan how this might be accomplished.

Florence, Marian and Lucile were plain, ordinary, normal girls, yet in one respect they were different from others; at least Lucile and Marian were from the first, and Florence, being the strongest, most physically capable of them all, soon caught their spirit. They had about them a certain fearless outlook on life which is nearly always found in those who have spent many months in the far North—an attitude which seems to say, “Adventure and Trouble, I have met you before. I welcome you and will profit by and conquer you.”

Two or three rather ordinary incidents in their life on board the O Moo prove that the life they lived there was, on the whole, a very simple, normal life, yet they also illustrate the indisputable fact that the simplest matters in the world, the casting of a tin can off a boat for instance, may be connected with some interesting and thrilling adventure.

As to that particular tin can, Marian bought it at a grocery store along with twenty-three other cans, filled with some unknown contents and sold at the ridiculously low price of eight cents per can. The reason that the price was so low and the contents unknown was that the labels had, during the process of handling, been accidentally torn off. The cans had been sent on to the retailer and were sold in grab-bag lots of two dozen each.

“You see,” the obliging grocer had explained, “there may be only corn or peas in them. Very well, they are even then worth twelve cents a can at the very least. But then again there may be blackberries in thick syrup, worth thirty or forty cents a can. Then what a bargain!”

“Well, girls,” Marian exclaimed when she had finished telling of her bargain and they of exclaiming over it, “what shall we have for dinner to-night? Loganberries in thick syrup or sliced pineapple?”

“Oh, pineapple by all means!” Florence exclaimed.

“Good enough for me,” smiled Lucile.

“All right. Here goes.” Marian stabbed one of the unknown quantities with the can-opener, then applied her nose to the opening.

“Corn!” she exclaimed in disgust.

“Oh, well,” consoled Florence, “we can eat corn once. Lucile doesn’t care for it, but she can have something else. Here’s a bowl; pour it out in that. Then open the loganberries. They’ll do.”

Again the can-opener fell. Again came the disgusted exclamation, “Corn!”

Lucile giggled and Florence danced a hornpipe of joy. “That’s one on you, Marian, old dear,” she shouted. “Oh, well, just give us plain peaches. They’ll do.”

“Here’s one that has a real gurgly sound when you shake it,” said Lucile, holding a can to her ear and shaking hard. “I think it’s strawberries.”

When Marian opened that can and had peered into it, she said never a word but, walking to the cabin door, pitched it, contents and all, over the rail and down to the crusted snow twenty feet below. There it bounced about for a time, spilled its contents upon the ground, then lay quite still, a new tin can glistening in the moonlight. But watch that can. It is connected with some further adventure.

“Corn! Corn! Corn!” chanted Marian in a shrill voice breaking with laughter. “And what a bargain.”

“But look what I drew!” exclaimed Lucile, pointing to a can she had just opened.

“Pineapple! Sliced pineapple!” the others cheered in unison. Then the three cans of corn were speedily forgiven. But the empty can lay blinking in the moonlight all the same.

The other affair, which occurred a few days later, might have turned into a rather serious matter had it not been for Lucile’s alert mind.

Lucile had what she styled a “bug” for creating things. “If only,” she exclaimed again and again, “I could create something different from anything that has been created before I know I should be supremely happy. If only I could write a real story that would get into print, or discover some new chemical combination that would do things, that would be glorious.”

From these words one is not long in concluding that Lucile was specializing in

English and chemistry.

The yacht afforded her exceptional opportunities to pursue her study of chemistry out of regular school hours, for Dr. Holmes, who devoted much time to delving into the mysteries of organic chemistry, had installed in a triangular space at the back of the cabin a perfectly equipped laboratory. Here, during the days of the summer tour, he spent much of his time. This laboratory he turned over to Lucile, the only provision being that she replace test-tubes, retorts and other instruments broken during the course of her experiments.

Here on many a stormy afternoon, and often long into the night, she worked over a blue flame, concocting all manner of fluids and gases not required by the courses she was taking.

“If only I could create—*create*!” she whispered to herself over and over. “Memory work I hate. Imitation I like only because it tells me what has been done and helps me to discover what has not been done. But to create—Oh—Oh!” She would at such times grip at her breast as if her heart were paining her at the very excitement of the thought.

On one particular afternoon, she did create something—in fact she created a great deal of excitement.

She had taken down a formula which Dr. Holmes had left in a notebook.

“Looks interesting,” she whispered to herself. She had worked herself up, that day, to a feverish heat, to a point where she would dare anything.

As she read a closely written notation beneath the formula, her eyes widened. “It is interesting,” she exclaimed. “Tremendous! I’ll make it. Wouldn’t dare try it on anyone, though.”

“Better have a gas mask,” she told herself after a moment’s thought. Digging about in a deep drawer she at last took out a strange canvas bag with a windpipe-like attachment. This she hung upon a peg while she selected the particular vials needed.

After that she drew the gas mask over her head and plunged into the work.

“Ten grains,” she murmured; “a fluid ounce; three drams; three fluid ounces;

heat this in a beaker; add two drams—”

So she went on mumbling to herself in her excitement, like some witch in a play.

“Too bad! Too bad! Won’t hold it,” she mumbled at last, after waiting for her concoction to cool. “Won’t go in one vial. Have to use two.”

Having filled one thin glass vial and closed it with a glass-stopper, she was in the act of filling the second when the half-filled vial slipped from her hand and went crashing to the tile floor.

“Oh! Help!” she uttered a muffled scream, and, before she realized what she was doing, threw the door leading into the main cabin wide open. Before her, regarding her in great astonishment, were Marian and Florence. For a few seconds they stood there, then of a sudden they began to act in the most startling manner. Jumping up and down, waving their arms, laughing, screaming, they vaulted over tables, knocked chairs end-over-end and sent books and papers flying in every direction.

Having recovered her power of locomotion, Lucile dashed for the outer door. This she flung wide open. Then, watching her chance, she propelled her two delirious, dancing companions out into the open air.

There, for a moment, she was obliged to cling to them lest they throw themselves over the rail, to go crashing to the frozen earth below.

In another moment it was all over. The two wild dancers collapsed, crumpling up in heaps on the deck.

“Oh, girls, I’m so sorry. I really truly am.” Lucile’s mortification was quite complete, in spite of the fact that she was fairly bursting with a desire to laugh.

“What—what—made us do that?” Florence stammered weakly.

“Gas, a new gas,” answered Lucile. Then, seeing the look of consternation on the girls’ faces, she hastened to add, “It’s perfectly harmless; doesn’t attack the tissues; works on the motor nerves like laughing-gas only it gets all the muscles excited, not just those of the face.”

“Well, I’ll say,” remarked Marian, “you really created something.”

“I only wish I had,” said Lucile regretfully, “but that chances to be a formula worked out by Dr. Holmes. I merely mixed it up. The bottle slipped from my hand and smashed on the floor—I didn’t aim to try it out on you.”

After the cabin had been thoroughly aired, the three girls went back to their work. As Lucile put the laboratory in order she noted the vial containing the remainder of the strange fluid. Having labeled it, “Quick action gas,” she put it away on the shelf, little dreaming that she would find an unusual use for it later.

It was two weeks after Lucile’s mysterious experience in the old Mission building. Things had settled down to the humdrum life of hard work and faithful study. On Saturday night two girls from the university dormitories skated down the lagoon and walked down the beach to spend the evening at the “ship,” as they called it.

They were jolly Western girls. The five of them spent a pleasant evening popping corn, pulling candy and relating amusing incidents from their own lives. At eleven the visitors declared that they must go home.

“Wait, I’ll go a piece with you,” suggested Florence, reaching for her skates.

At the end of the lagoon the three put on their skates. Florence’s were on first, for she wore a boyish style which went on with a clamp.

Gliding out on the ice, she struck out in a wide circle, then returned to the others. Just as they came gliding out to meet her, she fancied she caught a movement in the branches of some shrubs at the left which grew down to the edge of the ice. For a second her eyes rested there, then she was obliged to turn about to join her companions.

It was a glorious night; the skating was wonderful. Keen air caressed their cheeks as they shot over the glistening surface to the tune of ringing steel. Little wonder she forgot the moving bushes in the joy of the moment.

Florence was a born athlete. Tipping the scale at one hundred and sixty, she carried not a superfluous ounce of fat. Four hours every day she spent on the gym floor or in the swimming pool. She was equipping herself for the work of a physical culture teacher and took her task seriously. She believed that most girls could be as strong as boys if they willed to be, and she proceeded to set a shining example.

It was on her return trip that she was reminded of the moving bushes. Catching the distant ring of skates, she saw a person dressed in a long coat of some sort coming rapidly toward her.

The channel where they would meet was narrow. Some instinct told her to turn back, to circle the island and to reach the nearest point to the yacht that way. Whirling about, she set herself going rapidly in the other direction.

“Now that was a foolish thing to do,” she told herself. “Probably someone saving a long walk by putting on his skates, same as I’m doing. Might embarrass him to have me turn about that way.”

She was getting in some long, strong strokes now. There were few who could gain on her when she chose to exert herself.

She rounded the point of the island with a swift curve, then went skimming down the other side. Without further thought of the lone skater, she was nearing her goal and had gone into a long slide when, of a sudden the clip-clip of skates again came to her ears. It was hardly necessary for her to turn about to make sure that the stranger in the long coat had also rounded the island.

For a second she glided on, uncertain what course to take. It was nearing midnight. She was alone on the lagoon, a long way from any habitation. A stranger was following her; why, she could not tell. To throw off her skates and gain the bank before he came up was impossible. She decided, without being greatly alarmed about it, again to circle the island and, if necessary, take a spin the whole length of the lagoon.

CHAPTER IV
TRAPPED IN THE OLD MUSEUM

Florence had little fear for the outcome of this rather amusing adventure. She had been trailed over the ice by possible admirers before. She did not care to allow this one to catch up with her, that was all. She would skim along down to the far end of the lagoon where, a mile and a half away, the dome of the old museum loomed, a black bulk in the dark. She would then make the broad turn which this end of the lagoon afforded. She would have a clear mile and a half in which to put forth her best efforts. Surely she could outdistance the stranger and, with skates off, be away over the slope and down the beach toward the O Moo before he had reached this end of the lagoon once more.

Saving her strength on the down trip, keeping an even distance from the mysterious skater, she glided onward toward the old museum.

Just as she neared the broad end, where she was to make the turn, she glanced back. At that very moment, the flash of a powerful automobile lamp on the park drive a half mile away fell full upon the stranger’s face.

A little cry escaped her lips. This was no mere youthful enthusiast. His was the face of one whom few would trust. At that very moment his visage was twisted into an ugly snarl which said plainer than words:

“Now, young lady, I have you!”

“Why!” she whispered to herself, “that might be the face of a murderer!”

At that same instant, there flashed through her mind the note of warning tacked on the schooner. Perhaps this was the man who had placed it there.

In her consternation, she missed a stroke. One skate struck a crack in the ice; the clamp slipped; the skate went flying; disaster impended.

Florence was not a person to be easily defeated. One instant she had kicked the remaining skate from her foot and the next she was racing away over the glistening ice. She stumbled and all but fell. But, gaining courage from the near-by sloping bank, she plunged on.

Now she was ten yards away, now five. The metal cut-cut of skates behind her grew louder. Redoubling her efforts, she at last flung herself upon the snowy slope, to climb on hands and knees to the crest, then to race across a level space and gain the sheltering shadows of the museum.

It had been a hard struggle. For a few seconds she leaned panting against the wall. One skate was still in her hand. Without thinking why, she tucked this skate into the belt of her coat.

Her mind was in a whirl. What should she do? She was not safe here. For the man to remove his skates and scale the bank required but a moment. They were alone in the frozen park, a mile from any protection she could be sure of. She was not a good runner.

“No,” she whispered, “I couldn’t do it.”

She chanced to glance up, and her lips parted in a suppressed exclamation. There was a window open above her. True, it was some fifteen feet up, but there was an iron grating on the window beneath it.

“If only the grating is not rusted out,” she murmured hopefully, and the next instant she had reached the ledge of brickwork and was shaking the railing vigorously.

“It’ll hold I guess.”

Up she went like a monkey climbing the side of a cage. At the top of this grating there came an agonizing second in which she felt herself in danger of toppling over before she gained her balance on the window ledge above. Her splendid training served her well. She threw herself across the stone casing and, for a few seconds, lay there listening.

Hardly had she dropped noiselessly to the floor, some three feet below, than she heard the thud-thud of hurrying footsteps on the hard-packed snow. Holding her breath, she crouched there motionless, hoping beyond hope that she might hear those footsteps pass on around the building.

In this hope she was disappointed. Like a hound who has lost his scent, the man doubled back, then paused beneath her window.

The girl's heart raced on. Was she trapped? The man, she felt sure, would, somehow, gain access to the building. Nevertheless, she might escape him.

The building had once been a museum, the central building of a great world exposition. No longer used as a museum, it stood there, an immense, unused structure, slowly dropping into decay. The floor on which she had landed was really a broad balcony with a rusty railing at its edge. From where she crouched she could see down into the main floor where stretched, twining and inter-twining, mile upon mile of rooms and corridors.

Slipping out of her shoes, she buttoned them to her belt, then stole noiselessly along the balcony. Moving ever in the shadow of the wall, she came to a rusty iron stair. Here she paused.

Would the stair creak, give her away? The man might at this moment be in the building on the ground floor. Yet, on this narrow balcony, she was sure sooner or later to be trapped. She must risk it.

Placing one trembling foot on the top step, she allowed her weight to settle upon it. There followed no sound. Breathing more easily, she began the descent. Only once did her heart stand still; a bit of loose plaster, touched by her foot, bounded downward.

She dared not pause. The die was cast.

Once on the ground floor, she sprang across a patch of light and found herself in the shadows once more.

Moving with the greatest possible speed, yet with even greater caution, avoiding bits of plaster, rustling papers and other impediments in her course, she made her way along a wall which to her heightened imagination seemed to stretch on for a mile.

Once as she paused she thought she caught the sound of heavy breathing, followed by a dull thud. “Must have come in through my window,” she decided, and, indeed there appeared to be no other means of access; all the ground floor doors and windows were either heavily shuttered or grated.

“These shutters and gratings,” she told herself, trying to still the fear in her heart by thinking of other things, “are relics of other days. Here millions of dollars worth of relics, curios, and costly jewels were once displayed. Mounted animals and birds, aisle after aisle of them, rooms full of rich furs and costly silks, jewels too in abundance. They’re all gone now, but the shutters are still here and I am trapped. There’s only one exit and that guarded. Well, perhaps another somewhere. Anyway, I can wait. Daylight drives wolves to their dens. If only I can reach the other balcony!”

She had been in the building in the days of its glory, and had visited one of the curators, a friend of her mother. There were, on this other balcony, she remembered, a perfect labyrinth of rooms—cubbyholes and offices. Once she gained access to these she probably would be safe.

But here was another stair. She must go up.

Only partially enshrouded in darkness, it might betray her.

Dropping on hands and knees, she began to climb. A bit of glass cut her stocking. She did not notice that. A crumpled sheet of paper fluttered away; that was maddening. A broad patch of light from far above her head threw her out in bold relief for a second. For a second only. Then, leaping to her feet, she raced down the balcony and again entered the shadows.

Pressing a hand to her breast to still her heart’s wild beating, she listened intently.

Did she hear? Yes, there could be no mistake, there came a soft pit-pat, the footsteps of a person walking on tiptoes.

“Like one of those mounted tigers come to life,” she thought with a shudder.

Slowly she moved along the wall. If only she could reach a door! If she only could!

But that door was a distance of some fifty yards away. Could she make it?

Stealthily she moved forward. Stopping now and then to listen, she caught as before the stealthy pit-pat of footsteps. Once some object rattled on the floor and she heard a muffled exclamation. Then she caught a creaking sound—was he mounting the stair? Had the banister creaked?

Now she was twenty yards from the door, now ten, now five, and now—now she gripped its casing. Excitedly she swung around, only to find herself facing a rusted square of steel. The labyrinth of rooms was closed to her. She was trapped on a narrow balcony with no way to turn for escape.

As she crouched there trembling, her hand touched something cold—her skate. Here was hope; if the worst came to worst, here was a formidable weapon and she was possessed of the power to swing it.

Cautiously she drew it from her belt, then crouching low, gripping the small end, she waited.

Came again the pit-pat-pit-pat. He was on the balcony, she felt sure of that now. Her hand gripped the skate until the blade cut through the skin, but still she crouched there waiting.

* * * * * * * *

When Florence failed to return, Marian and Lucile might have been seen pacing the floor while Marian pretended to study and made a failure of it.

“I think we should go out and look for her,” said Lucile.

“Probably just a bit overcome by the wonderful skating in the moonlight,” answered Marian, in what was intended as an unworried tone, “but we’ll go down to the lagoon and have a look.”

“Wait just a moment,” said Lucile as she disappeared inside her laboratory. When she returned, something beneath her coat bulged, but Marian did not ask her what it might be.

After dropping down the rope ladder they hurried along the beach and across the park to the lagoon. From the ridge above it they could see the greater part of the

lagoon’s surface. Not a single moving figure darkened its surface. For fully five minutes they stood there, looking, listening. Then Marian led the way to the edge of the ice.

By the side of a clump of bushes she had spied something.

“What’s that?”

“Pair of men’s rubbers,” replied Lucile kicking at them.

For a full moment the two stood and stared at one another.

“She—she isn’t down here,” said Lucile at last. “Perhaps we had better go up and look among the boats.”

Silently they walked back to where the hundred boats were looming in the dark, their masts like slender arms reaching for the moon. As they rounded a small schooner, they were startled by a footstep.

“Don’t be afraid. It is only I,” called a friendly voice. “Out for a stroll in the moonlight. Wonderful, isn’t it?”

Marian recognized the young man of the schooner, Mark Pence. She had talked with him once before. He had helped her home with her two dozen cans of labelless fruits and vegetables. Having liked him then, she decided to trust him now, so in a few well-chosen words she confided their fears for their companion’s safety.

“Shucks!” said the boy. “That’ll be all right. She’ll show up all right. Probably went farther than she intended. But—sure, I’ll take a turn with you through our little village of boats. Be glad to.”

They wandered in and out among the various crafts. Scarcely a word was spoken until they came to the great black bulk of the scow inhabited by the Chinamen.

“I’ll rout ’em out. Might know something,” said Mark.

He knocked several times but received no response. He was about to enter when Lucile whispered:

“Wait a minute. Were—were you in the war?”

“A trifle. Not to amount to much.”

“Know how to use a gas mask?”

“Well, rather. Six seconds is my record. Know that old joke about the ‘quick and the dead,’ don’t you? I was quick.”

Lucile smiled. She was holding out an oblong package fastened to a strap, also a small glass bottle.

“Take—take these,” she whispered nervously. “You can’t tell about those folks. Break the bottle if they go after you, then put on the mask. It’s pretty powerful gas but does no permanent injury.”

Mark smiled as he slipped the strap over his shoulder. “Nonsense, I guess,” he murmured, “but might not be. Just like going over the top, you never can tell.” He drew a small flashlight from his pocket, then pushed the door open.

He was gone for what to the girls seemed an exceedingly long time. When he returned he had little enough to tell.

“Not a soul in the place, far as I could see,” he reported. “But, man, Oh, man! It’s a queer old cellar. Smells like opium and chop-suey. And talk about narrow winding stairs! Why, I bet I went down—” He paused to stare at the scow. “Why that tub isn’t more than ten feet high and I went down a good twenty feet. Rooms and rooms in it. Something queer about that.”

The girls were too anxious for Florence’s safety to give much attention to what he was saying.

“Well, we are greatly obliged to you,” said Lucile, taking her bottle and gas mask. “I guess there’s nothing to do but go back to the yacht and wait.”

With a friendly good-night they turned and made their way back to the O Moo.

CHAPTER V
A CATASTROPHE AVERTED

As Florence crouched in the dark corner of the deserted museum, many and wild were the thoughts that sped through her mind. Could she do it? If worse came to worst, could she strike the blow? She had the power; the muscles of her arm, thanks to her splendid training, were as firm as those of a man. Yes, she had the power, but could she do it? There could be no mincing matters. “Strike first and ask questions after,” that must be her motto in such an extremity. There would be ample opportunity. A beast always hunts with nose close to the ground. The man would be a fair mark. The skate was as perfect a weapon as one might ask. Keen and powerful as a sword, it would do its work well. Yet, after all, did she have the nerve?

While this problem was revolving in her mind, the pit-pat of footsteps grew more and more distinct. Her heart pounded fearfully. “He’s coming—coming—coming!” it seemed to be repeating over and over.

Then, suddenly, there flashed through her mind the consequences of the blow she must strike. The man must be given no chance to fight; one blow must render him unconscious. Whatever was done must be done well. But after that, what? She could not leave him alone in this great, deserted shell of a building. Neither could she await alone his return to consciousness. No, that would never do. She would be obliged to seek aid. From whom? The police, to be sure. But then there would be a court scene and a story—just such a story as cub reporters dote on. She saw it all in print: “Three girls living in a boat. One pursued by villain. An Amazon, this modern girl, she brains him with her skate.”

Yes, that would make a wonderful news story. And after that would come such publicity as would put an end to their happy times aboard the O Moo. That

would mean the end of their schooldays, just when they were becoming engrossed in their studies; when they had just begun to realize the vast treasures of knowledge which was locked up in books and the brains of wise men and which would be unlocked to them little by little, if only they were able to remain at the university.

The whole thing was unthinkable. She must escape. She must not strike the blow. There must be another way out. Yet she could think of none. Before her was an iron railing, but to go over this meant a drop of twenty feet. Beyond her at the end of the balcony, towered a brick wall; at her back, an iron door. To her left there sounded ever more plainly the pit-pat of tiptoeing feet.

“I must! I must!” she determined, her teeth set hard. “There is no other way.”

And yet, even as she expected to hear the shift of feet which told of a turn on the balcony, some ten feet from where she cowered, the pit-pat went steadily forward. She could not believe her ears. What had happened?

Then on the heels of this revelation, there followed another: The sound of the footsteps was growing fainter. Of a sudden the truth dawned upon her: The man was not on the balcony. He had not ascended the stairs. He was still on the floor below. Her sense of location had been distorted by the vast silence of the place. She was for the moment safe.

A wave of dizziness swept over her. She sank into a crumpled heap on the floor. Reviving, she was seized with an almost uncontrollable desire to laugh, but, clenching and unclenching her hands, she maintained an unbroken silence. At length, her nerves in hand once more, she settled down to watchful waiting. With eyes and ears alert, she caught every new move of the prowler.

As the sound of his footsteps died away in the distance, she settled herself to calmer thoughts. This place she was in was a vast cathedral of gloom. When the moon went under a cloud, blotting out the broad circle of light which fell from the vaulted dome, the darkness was so profound that she felt she must scream or flee.

Yet there was something magnetic about the place. She might have been held there even though she were not pursued. It was a place to dream of. Some twenty-eight years before a hundred thousand people in a single day had passed in and out along the aisles of this vast structure. That had been in the days of its

glory. All—the rich, the poor, the cultured, the illiterate, the laborer, the street gamin—had peered at the marvels displayed between its walls. And now—now two beings haunted its vast corridors, the one pursuing the other. How strange life was!

A whiff of wind sweeping over the main floor sent a whirl of waste paper flying in circles halfway to the ceiling. Two tiny red eyes peered at her at a safe distance—then another and another.

“Rats,” she whispered. “Three of them.”

The pit-pat of feet became distinct again. Putting out her hand to grip the skate, she discovered that her fingers were too stiff for service. She had grown cold without sensing it. Rubbing her hands together, she warmed them. Her limbs too had grown stiff. Rising silently, she went through a series of exercises which sent the blood coursing through her veins.

“Must get out of here some way,” she told herself, “but how?”

Then suddenly she thought of the girls. They would be anxious about her, might come out to seek her, only to fall into a trap.

A trap? She thought of Lucile, slim, nervous. Lucile hovering as she had in the corner of that old Mission on that other night; thought too of the things Lucile had seen there; admired the nerve she had displayed.

But what did it all mean? She could but feel that it all was connected in some way; the note of warning tacked to the schooner; Lucile’s experience in the Mission and her present one, all fitted together in one.

What was it all about? Were they innocently checkmating, or appearing to checkmate, some men in their attempt to perform some unlawful deed? Were these persons moonshiners, gamblers, smugglers, or robbers living in the dry dock? If so, who were they?

Again the sound of footsteps grew indistinct in the distance.

“Ought to be getting out of here,” she told herself. “Getting late—horribly late and—and cold. The girls will be searching for me. There’s an open window over there to my right. Terribly high up, but I might make the ground though.”

She listened intently, but caught no sound. Then stealthily, step by step, she made her way toward the window.

Now she was fifty feet away from it, now thirty, now ten. And now—now she dropped silently to the floor and crept to the opening. There was no glass; she was glad of that. Flattening herself out, she peered over the sill to the void below.

“Terribly far down. Easily thirty feet!” she breathed. “Two gratings; rotten too, perhaps. Ground frozen too.”

She reached far down and, gripping the top of the nearest window grating, threw all her strength into an effort to wrench it free.

“That one’s strong enough,” she concluded; “but how about the other?”

Again she lay quite still, listening. In the distance she fancied she caught the pit-pat again.

“Better try it while I’ve got a chance,” she decided.

With the care and skill of a trained athlete she swung herself over the window sill, clung to the grating with her toes; dropped down; gripped the grating with her hands; slid her feet to the grating below; tested that as best she could; trusted her weight to it; swung low; touched the ground; then in her stocking-feet sped away toward the nearest street.

Arrived at a clump of bushes which skirted the street, she sat down and drew on her shoes. Then with a loud “Whew!” she crossed the street and made her way toward the O Moo over a roundabout but safe route, which led her by the doors of closed shops and beneath huge apartments where some of Chicago’s thousands were sleeping.

Her mind, as she hurried on, was deep in the mystery and full of possible plans as to the uncertain future.

“I suppose,” she mumbled once, “we should give up the O Moo. Most people would say it was a wild notion, this living on a ship, but what’s one to do? No rooms you can pay for, and who would give up a university education without a fight? What have we done? What are these people bothering us for anyway?

What right have they? Who are they anyway?”

This cast her into deeper reflections. The face she had seen was not that of Mark Pence. Whether it was one of the Orientals living on the scow, or one of the fishermen living in their fishing smack, she could not tell. She had never seen the fishermen. Even Marian had seen but two of them.

“Might not be any of these,” she concluded with a shrug. “Might have been some night prowler who will never come back.”

* * * * * * * *

The two girls in the cabin of the O Moo had waited an hour. Lucile had fallen half-asleep. Marian had lifted a trap door and had started the small gasoline-driven generator which furnished them light and heat. The engine was racing away with a faint pop-pop-pop, when Lucile sat up suddenly.

“Marian,” she exclaimed, “what did that boy say about the scow those Chinese people live in?”

“Why,” said Marian, wrinkling her brow, “he said something about going down twenty feet.”

“That seems strange, doesn’t it?” Lucile considered for a moment.

“Yes, but then it was a winding stairway. Probably he isn’t used to that kind. Perhaps he just thought it was farther down than it really was. I—”

“What was that?” exclaimed Lucile, starting up. There had come a muffled sound from below, barely heard above the pop-pop of the engine.

In a second Marian had stopped the generator. Each girl strained her ears to listen. It came again, this time more distinct; tap-tap-tap, a pause, then a fourth tap.

“Florence!” exclaimed Lucile springing for the door.

Three taps, a halt, then a tap was the signal for lowering the rope-ladder.

A moment later Florence was being dragged into the cabin and ordered to give

an account of herself.

“Sit down,” she said. “It’s rather a long story. When I’m through you’ll very likely be for leaving the O Moo in the morning, and I’m not so sure but that is the right thing to do. The cruise of the O Moo,” she laughed a bit uncertainly, “gives some indication of turning out to be an ill-fated voyage.”

With Lucile and Marian listening intently Florence told her story.

“Florence,” said Lucile, when she had finished, “do—do you suppose that has anything to do with the old Mission affair I told you about?”

“Or the warning tacked on our hull?” suggested Marian.

“I don’t know,” said Florence thoughtfully, “It might. The point really is, though, are we leaving in the morning?”

She was answered by an emphatic:

“No! No!”

“Do you know,” said Lucile a few moments later as she sipped a cup of hot chocolate and nibbled at a wafer, “I peeped into that room in the old Mission yesterday. The shutter had been replaced but I could see through the cracks. There really wasn’t anything on the table. The candles and crucifix were there, but nothing on the old table—not anything at all. I—I must just have imagined that face.”

“I’m not so sure,” said Florence mysteriously.

“Oh!” exclaimed Lucile suddenly, “You were going to tell me the story that face reminded you of—the story told by an old seaman.”

“I will,” said Florence, “but not to-night. Just look,” she sprang to her feet, “it’s after three o’clock and to-day is already to-morrow.”

CHAPTER VI
THE BLUE GOD

As Florence returned from her lectures the following afternoon she passed across the end of the lagoon.

Once she had found her skate, lost on the previous night, and thrust it into the bag with her books, she glanced up at the ragged giant of a building which lay sleeping there on its blanket of snow. She felt an almost irresistible desire again to enter and roam about its deserted corridors.

Walking to the corner beneath the broken windows, she glanced to the right and left of her, allowed her gaze to sweep the horizon, then, seeing no one who might observe her actions, she sprang upon the edge of the wall, scaled the grating with the agility of a squirrel, tumbled over the upper window sill and found herself once more inside.

In spite of the fact that it was now broad daylight and would be for an hour, she found her heart fluttering painfully. The experiences of the previous night were all too freshly burned on the tissues of her brain.

As she tiptoed down the balcony, then dropped from step to step to the main floor below, the unpleasant sensations left her. She found herself walking, as she had some years before as a child, in the midst of a throng, exclaiming at every newly discovered monster or thing of delicate beauty. The treasures had long since been removed to newer and more magnificent quarters, but the memory of them lingered.

She was wandering along thus absorbed when her foot touched something. Thinking it but a stray brick or crumbling bit of plaster, she was about to bestow upon it only a passing glance when, with a sudden exclamation, she stooped and

picked it up.

The thing at first sight appeared to be but a bundle of soiled silk cloth of a peculiar blue tint. Florence knew, however, that it was more than that, for when her toe had struck it, she had thought it some solid object.

With trembling fingers she tore away the silk threads which bound it, to uncover a curious object of blue stone shaped like a short, squat candlestick. Indeed, there were traces of tallow to be seen in the cuplike hollow at the top of it.

“Looks like it might be blue jade,” she told herself. “If it is, it’s worth something __”

The whisper died on her lips. A thought had come to her, one which made her afraid of the gathering darkness, and caused her to hastily thrust the thing into the pocket of her coat and hurry from the building.

That night, after the dinner dishes were washed, Florence, who had been fumbling with something in the corner, suddenly turned out the lights. Scratching a match, she lighted the half of a candle which she had thrust into the candlestick she had found in the museum.

“Gather round, children,” she said solemnly.

Placing the candle on the floor, she sat down tailor-fashion before it.

“Gather round,” she repeated, “and you shall hear the tale of the strange blue god. It is told best while seated in the floor as the Negontisks sit, with legs crossed. It is told best by the dim and flaring light of a candle.”

“Oh! Good!” exclaimed Lucile, dropping down beside her.

“But where did you get the odd candlestick?” asked Marian as she followed Lucile. “What a strange thing it is; made of some almost transparent blue stone. And see! little faces peer out at you from every angle. It is as if a hundred wicked fairies had been bottled up in it.”

All that Marian had said was true, and even Florence stared at it a long time before she answered:

“Found it in the old museum. Probably left behind when the displays were moved out. I ought to take it down to the new museum and ask them, I guess.”

There was something in Florence’s tone which told Lucile that she herself did not believe half she was saying but she did not give voice to those thoughts. Instead she whispered:

“Come now, let us have the story of the blue god.”

“As the old seaman told it to me,” said Florence, “it was like this: He had been shanghaied by a whaler captain whose ship was to cruise the coast of Arctic Siberia. So cruel and unjust was this captain that the sailor resolved to escape at the first opportunity. That opportunity came one day when he, with others, had been sent ashore on the Asiatic continent somewhere between Korea and Behring Straits.

“Slipping away when no one was looking, he hid on the edge of a rocky cliff until he saw the whaler heave anchor and sail away.

“At first it seemed to him that he had gone from bad to worse; the place appeared to be uninhabited. It was summer, however, and there were solman berries on the tundra and blueberries in the hills. There were an abundance of wild birds’ eggs to be gathered on the ledges. The meat of young birds was tender and good; so he fared well enough.

“But, not forgetting that summer would soon pass and his food supply be gone, he made his way southward until at last he came within sight of the camp fires of a village.

“It was with much fear that he approached these strangers. He found them friendly enough, ready to share food and shelter with him providing he was willing to share their labor.

“You wouldn’t care to hear of his life among these natives. Only the part relating to the blue god is of importance.

“He found that these people worshipped a strange god, or idol. This idol was a very ugly face carved out of a block of solid blue jade. When being worshipped it was always illumined by some strange light which caused it to appear to smile and frown at alternating intervals.”

Lucile leaned over and gripped the speaker's arm. "See how the faces in the candlestick smile and frown," she shuddered.

Florence smiled and nodded, then proceeded with her story:

"Little by little, as these people who called themselves Negontisks, who lived in skin tents and traveled in skin boats as the Eskimos do, and are considered by some to be the forefathers of the Eskimos, came to have confidence in the seaman, they told him the story of the blue god.

"So ancient was this god that not the oldest man in the village could recall the time when it had first been accepted as their god. They did know, however, that one time when there were but five villages of their tribe, and when all these villagers had joined in a great feast of white whale meat and sour berries, on a slope at the foot of a great mountain a huge rock had come rattling down from the cliffs above and, passing through their midst, had crushed to death five of their number.

"As is the custom with most barbaric tribes, these people considered that anything which had the power to destroy them must be a god. This rock, which proved to be of blue jade, became their god. And that they might have it ever with them as they traveled, that it might protect them and bring them good fortune, they carved from it five hollow faces, like masks. One of these was taken by each village. Then they went their way.

"From that day, so the story goes, the Negontisk people were greatly prospered. They found food in abundance. No longer were there starving times. They had children in numbers and all these lived to grow to manhood.

"As the tribe grew, they wished to create new villages. They returned to the place of the rock for new gods, only to find that the rock had vanished.

"Their medicine men explained that, being a god, the rock had the power of going where it pleased. So there could be only five blue gods. But the people lived on and prospered.

"As the years passed, many cruel practices grew up in connection with the worship of these gods. Some of them are so terrible that the old seaman would not tell me of them. One, however, he did tell; that was that all the illuminations of the gods were held in a tent made of many thicknesses of skins. Only men

were permitted to be present during the illumination. The life of a woman or child who chanced to look into the tent at such a time must be sacrificed. Their blood must be spilled before the face of the blue god. Very strange sort of"—she broke off abruptly, to exclaim:

"Why, Lucile, what makes you tremble so?"

"Nothing, I guess." Lucile tried to smile but made a poor attempt at it. "It—it's ridiculous, I know," she stammered, "but you know I saw a blue face illumined and I am a girl, so—"

"Nonsense! Pure nonsense!" exclaimed Marian. "You are in America, Chicago. This story comes from Siberia. Probably not one of those tribesmen has ever set foot on the American continent, let alone in Chicago. And if they did, do you suppose for a moment that our authorities would allow them to continue to perform these terrible religious rites?"

Florence was silent.

Suddenly Lucile whispered:

"Listen! What was that?"

For a moment the room was silent. Only the faint tick-tick of the clock in the wall disturbed the stillness. Then, faintly from outside there sounded a sort of metallic jingle.

"Someone out there, below," whispered Marian. "He has kicked that tin can I threw out there; the third can of corn, remember?"

The answer was a faint "Ah." Then again all was silence.

Two or three moments had elapsed when there came a faint scratching sound, seemingly upon the side of the yacht.

"Last time," said Marian, setting her teeth tight, "he got away with his note tacking. This time he shall not."

Tiptoeing down the room without the least sound, she climbed upon her berth, which was made up for the night. By propping herself upright on her knees she

could just see through a small, circular window. This window was directly opposite the opening made by propping up the canvas.

Florence had placed herself between Marian and the candle. No light fell upon Marian to betray her presence. When one is in a dark room at night, he may peer into the moonlit outer world without being seen. Marian had poised there motionless for a full moment when, without altering her position other than turning her head, she whispered:

“Lucile, bring me that bottle of gas.”

Understanding at once what bottle was meant, Lucile tiptoed down the length of the room, managed to open the laboratory door without noise, then put her hand to the shelf where the “Quick Action Gas” was kept.

With this in her hand she returned to Marian. She whispered as she passed it up to her:

“Be careful not to drop it in here. It would drive us all out and we’re hardly dressed for that.”

Shrugging her shoulders beneath her dressing gown, Marian placed the bottle on the blankets, then reached for the catch which kept the window closed. This window was seldom opened and she was not sure but that the unused hinges would give out a rusty squeak. In this case her purpose would be thwarted. She could but try.

Catching her breath, she turned the handle, then gave a slight pull. To her immense relief, there came no sound as the window swung inward. Seizing the bottle, she brought her hand even with her head, then sat poised there quite motionless as if impersonating the statue of a hand-grenade thrower.

Then, suddenly, her whole body became tense. The hand holding the bottle flew back. It shot forward.

CHAPTER VII
THE MYSTERY DEEPENS

When they saw Marian's hand go back for the throw, the two other girls, their fear overcome by curiosity, sprang silently to a position beside their companion.

What they saw made them draw back in fright. Two rounds of a ladder extended above the outer rim of the boat. Above the last round appeared a face. This face, though almost completely hidden by a heavy muffler, was undoubtedly that of a man.

Before they had time to move, however, they saw the bottle of liquid gas strike the top rail and burst. The liquid spattering over the man's face and clothing, brought forth a sharp exclamation. The next instant, seeming to struggle against an invisible foe, he made desperate attempts to dismount from his lofty position. In this he was partially successful. He disappeared from sight. But the next moment there came the thud of a falling body. The ladder was still in position. The three girls held their breath.

"He fell," said Lucile in a tremulous whisper.

"I only hope he—"

"No you don't!" Lucile interrupted. "No one wishes a person seriously injured." Lucile shuddered.

"Well, anyway he wasn't," said Florence, "for there he is. The gas is working splendidly."

The man was dancing about below, swinging his arms and shouting madly.

“Like a drunken man,” whispered Marian, with a frightened laugh.

“He’ll be over it in a minute,” said Lucile. “Liquid’s all over his clothes—keeps evaporating and getting into his lungs.”

True to Lucile’s prophecy, the man, a few moments later, having calmed down, appeared to pause to consider. It was evident that he wavered between two opinions. Twice he started in the direction of the ship, each time sending cold chills creeping up Lucile’s spine.

“We have no more gas,” she whispered.

“Make it sulphuric acid this time!” Marian whispered savagely.

“No! No! You couldn’t!” Lucile shuddered.

Pausing each time, the man turned back. The second time he wheeled about and, racing madly down the beach, disappeared beyond a long line of pleasure boats.

“Well,” said Florence, gathering her dressing gown about her and springing through the window, “we have a ladder. Looks like a good one.”

“It *is* a good one!” she exclaimed a moment later, “a brand new one. We’ll show it to Timmie. Perhaps it will serve as evidence to trap the rascal.”

“Speaking of rascals,” said Marian a few moments later as they sat looking at one another in silence, “what do you think is the meaning of all this?”

“Perhaps he came for the blue candlestick,” Lucile suggested.

“How could he?” demanded Florence. “How would he know we had it? What would he want of it? It’s only a curio. Belongs to the museum, I guess. Anyway, I’ll see to-morrow. I’m going to take it to the new museum and show it to one of the curators, a Mr. Cole. I met him at a party on the campus a short while ago.”

Suddenly Lucile sprang to her feet, then rushed to the other end of the room.

“Wha—what’s the matter?” demanded Marian.

“Going to prepare some more gas,” Lucile called back over her shoulder.

“Nothing like having a little chemist in the family these days. Gas is almost as useful in times of peace as it was in the days of war.”

Next morning Marian showed the ladder to the aged dry dock keeper.

“No,” he said after examining it carefully, “I never saw that before. It’s new and not very heavy. Probably bought for the purpose and carried here. You say you didn’t see the man’s face?”

“Not much of it.”

“Wouldn’t recognize him?”

“Probably not.”

“Well, I’ll go round and see the folks close to here that sell ladders, but I guess it won’t be any use. There’s too many places where you can get ladders in a big city like this. He might ’a’ stole it too. Mighty queer!” He shook his head as he walked away.

That same day Florence wrapped the blue candlestick carefully in tissue paper, snapped three rubber bands about it, then made her way with it to the surface line where she took a car for down town. She kept a close watch to the right, to the left and back of her for any signs of being followed. She scrutinized the faces of those who entered the car with her and even cast a glance behind the car to see if there chanced to be a taxi following.

Truth was, the events of the last hours had played havoc with her nerves. The candlestick in her possession was like the presence of some supernatural thing. It haunted her even in the day, as a thought of ghosts in a lonely spot at night might have tormented her.

It was with a distinct sense of relief that, after leaving the car and passing over a half mile of board-walk, she entered the massive door of the new museum.

For a moment, after entering, she permitted her eyes to roam up and down its vast, high-vaulted corridors, to catch the echo of voices which came murmuring to her from everywhere.

She saw the massive pillars, the polished floors, the miles of glass cases, then a

distinct sense of sorrow swept over her, a feeling of pity for the ragged giant of a building out by the lake front which had once housed all these treasures of beauty, antiquity and wealth.

“Temporary! Temporary” kept running through her mind. “Too hastily built and of poor material. Now it is abandoned to decay. Life is like that. That’s why one should struggle to lay foundations, to prepare one’s self for life. For eighteen years, without education, one may be good enough. Then, like the old museum, one is cast aside, abandoned to decay.”

As these thoughts swept through her mind she resolved more strongly than before, that, come what might, she would continue her battle for a university education.

Suddenly recalling her mission, she asked the attendant to tell her where she might find Mr. Cole.

“Mr. Cole’s office,” said the man courteously, “is in the left wing, third floor. See those stairs at the other end of this hall?”

“Yes.”

“Take those stairs. Go to the third floor. At the last landing go straight ahead. His door is the fourth to your right.”

“Thank you,” and Florence hurried on her way.

A moment later she was knocking at the door of the great archaeologist’s studio.

“Why, it’s Miss Huyler!” he exclaimed as he opened the door to her. “Come right in. What may I do for you?”

Ruthaford Cole was one of those rare men who have studied their subject so thoroughly and who have traveled so widely in search of further knowledge that they have no need to assume a false air of importance and dignity to make an impression. Under middle age, smooth-shaven, smiling, he carried the attitude of a boy who has picked up a few facts here and there and who is eager to learn more.

But show him a bit of carving from the Congo and he is all smiles; “Oh! Yes, a

very nice bit of modern work. Good enough, but done to sell to traders. Possesses no historical value, you know."

A bit of ivory from the coast of Alaska, rudely scratched here and there, a hole torn out here, an end broken off there, browned with age, is presented and he answers, his face lighting up with genuine joy, "Now there is really a rare specimen. Handle of a bow-drill; made long before the white man came, I'd say. Tells stories, that does. Each crudely scratched representation of reindeer, whale, wolf or bear has its meaning."

That was the type of man Cole was. Frank and friendly to all, he gave evidence in an unassuming way, of a tremendous fund of knowledge.

Now, as Florence unwrapped the blue candlestick, he watched the movement of her hands with much the same look that a terrier wears when watching his master dig out a rat. Once the candlestick was in his hand, he held it as a merchant might a bit of costly and fragile china-ware.

Florence smiled as she watched him. She had hoped he would say at first glance: "Why, where did you chance to find that? It was lost from one of our cases while we were moving! We believed it stolen." Florence had had quite enough of adventure and mystery. She was convinced that holding this trophy she was sure to experience more trouble.

Mr. Cole did not do the expected thing. What he did was to turn the candlestick over and over. A look of amazement spread over his usually smiling face.

"No," he murmured, "it can't be."

Two more turns. He held it to the light. "And, yet, it does seem to be."

Stepping to a door which led to a balcony, with an absent-minded "Pardon me," he disappeared through the door, but Florence could still see him. As he held the thing to the light, turning, turning, and turning it again, the look of amazement grew on his face.

As he re-entered the room, he exclaimed:

"It is! It most certainly is! I am astounded."

Motioning Florence to a seat he dropped into the swivel chair before his desk. For a moment he sat staring at the candlestick, then he asked:

“Would you mind telling me where you found this?”

“In the old museum.”

“The old museum!”

“Yes, I thought you might have lost—”

“No, no,” he interrupted, “we never possessed one of these. There is one in the Metropolitan Museum. It’s the only one I ever saw save one I chanced upon on the east coast of Russia. I tried to buy it from the natives. They would not name a price. Decamped that very night; utterly disappeared. Thought we might steal it, I suppose. Suspicious. Superstitious lot.

“The question is,” he said after a moment, “now you have it what are you going to do with it?”

“Why,” smiled Florence, “return it to the owner if—if he can be found.”

“The owner,” Cole’s eyes narrowed, “I fancy will not call for it. I have reason to believe that were you to advertise your find in the papers he would not venture to call for it. And yet,” he said thoughtfully, “it might be worth trying.”

He sat for a long time in a brown study.

“Miss Huyler,” he said abruptly, “this is a strange affair. I am not at liberty, at the present moment, to tell you all I know. One thing is sure: it is not safe for you to be carrying this thing about, for in the first place it is valuable, and in—”

“Valuable? That?” exclaimed the girl.

“Quite valuable. Well worth stealing. I’d almost be tempted myself,” he smiled. “But there is another reason why it is not safe. I am not at liberty to tell you. But if you will trust me with it, I will place it in one of the gem cases. Our gem room is guarded day and night. It will be safe there, and neither it nor you will be safe if you keep it. By the way,” he broke off suddenly, “what is your address?”

Florence gave the address of a friend where her mail was left.

“You live there?”

“No, but no mail is delivered where I do live.”

“Where can that be?” he asked in some surprise.

“In a boat,” she smiled. “In a pleasure yacht. Oh, it’s not afloat,” as he looked at her in astonishment.

“Might I ask the name of the boat and the location?” he half apologized. “Someone might wish to visit you. It will be proper and very important that he should. Otherwise I would not ask.”

“The O Moo,” answered Florence quietly. “Foot of 71st Street.”

She rose to go. He grasped her hand for a second, looking as if he would like to say more, then bowed her out of the door.

As she entered the corridor, she was conscious of a strange dizziness. It was as if she had spent the better part of a night poring over an absorbing story. She had come to the museum to rid herself of the blue candlestick and the mystery attached to it. The candlestick was gone but the mystery lay before her deeper and darker than ever.

CHAPTER VIII
A STRANGE GAME OF HIDE-AND-GO-SEEK

The next short chapter in the story of the mystery of the blue candlestick followed closely upon Florence's visit to the new museum.

It was on the following morning, as she and Lucile were strapping up their books preparatory to leaving the O Moo, that they heard a sudden loud rapping on the hull of the yacht.

"Who can that be?" exclaimed Lucile.

"I'll see," said Florence racing for the door.

Much to her astonishment, as she peered down over the rail she found herself looking into the blue eyes of a strapping police sergeant.

"Florence Huyler?" he questioned.

"Ye—yes," she stammered.

"How do I git up?" he asked. "Or do you prefer to come down? Gotta speak with you. Nothin' serious, not for you," he added as he saw the startled look on her face.

With trembling hand Florence threw the rope ladder over the rail. As the officer set the ladder groaning beneath his weight, questions flew through her mind. "What does he want? Will he forbid us living in the O Moo? What have we done to deserve a visit from the police?"

Then, like a flash Mr. Cole's words came back to her: "Someone else may wish

to talk with you.” That someone must be this policeman.

“Will you come in?” she asked, as the officer’s foot touched the deck.

“If you please.”

“You see,” he began at once, while his keen eyes roamed from corner to corner of the cabin, “my visit has to do with a bit of a curio you found lately.”

“The blue candlestick?” suggested Florence.

“Exactly, I—”

“We really don’t know much—”

“You may know more than you think. Now sit down nice and easy and tell me all you do know and about all the queer things that have happened to you since you came to live in this here boat.”

Florence seated herself on the edge of her chair, then told in dramatic fashion of her adventures in the old museum.

“Exactly!” said the officer emphatically when she had finished. “Queer! Mighty queer, now, wasn’t it? And now, is that all?”

“Lucile, my friend here, had a rather strange experience in the Spanish Mission. Perhaps she’ll tell you of it.”

Lucile’s face went first white, then red.

“Oh, that! That was nothing. I—I went to sleep and dreamed, I guess. You see,” she explained to the officer, “I had been out in the storm so long, I was sort of benumbed with the cold, and when I got inside I fell asleep.”

“And then—” the officer prompted with an encouraging smile.

“It won’t do any harm to tell,” encouraged Florence.

Stammering and blushing at first, Lucile launched into her story. Gaining in confidence as she went on, she succeeded in telling it very well.

When she came to the part about the blue face, in his eagerness to drink in every detail the officer leaned forward, half rising from his chair.

“Hold on,” he exclaimed excitedly. “You say it was a blue face?”

“Yes, blue. I am sure of that.”

“Blue like the candlestick?”

“Why, yes—yes, I think it was.”

“Can’t be any mistake,” he mumbled to himself, as he settled back in his chair. “It’s it, that’s all. Wouldn’t I like to have been there! All right,” he urged, “go on.”

Lucile finished her story.

“And is that all?” he repeated.

“All except something that happened the night Florence was caught in the old museum and didn’t get home,” said Lucile, “but what happened wasn’t much. You see, we went out to search for her, and a boy named Mark Pence, who lives in a boat here too, joined us. We couldn’t rouse anyone at the old scow where the Chinamen live, so he went in. He didn’t find anyone, but when he came out he said it was such a queer sort of place. He said there was a winding stairway in it twenty feet high. But I guess he doesn’t know much about winding stairways, because the scow is only ten feet high altogether. So the stairs couldn’t be twenty feet deep, could they?”

The officer, who had again half risen from his chair, settled back.

“No,” he said, “no, of course they couldn’t.”

But Florence, who had been studying his face, thought he attached far greater importance to this last incident than his words would seem to indicate.

“Well, if that’s all,” he said rising, “I’ll be going. You’ve shed a lot of light upon a very mysterious subject; one which has been bothering the whole police force. I’m from the 63d street station. If anything further happens, let me know at once, will you? Call for Sergeant Malloney. And if ever you need any protection by

day or night, the station's at your service. Good day and thank you."

"Now what do you think of that?" said Florence as the officer's broad back disappeared beyond the black bulk of a tug in dry dock.

"I—I don't know what to think," said Lucile. "One thing I'm awfully sure of, though, and that is that living on a boat is more exciting than one would imagine before trying it.

"I wish," said Lucile that night as she lay curled up in her favorite chair, "that I could create something. I wish I could write a story—a real story."

Then, for a long time she was silent. "Professor Storris," she began again, "told us just how a short story ought to be done. First you find an unusual setting for your story; something that hasn't been described before; then you imagine some very unusual events occurring in that setting. That makes a story, only you need a little technique. There must be three parts to the story. You look about in the story and find the very most dramatic point in the narrative—fearfully exciting and dramatic. You begin the story right there; don't tell how things come to be happening so, nor why the hero was there or anything; just plunge right into it like: 'Cold perspiration stood out upon his brow; a chill ran down his spine. His eyes were glued upon the two burning orbs of fire. He was paralyzed with fear'."

Florence looked up and laughed. "That ought to get them interested."

"Trouble is," said Lucile thoughtfully, "it's hard to find an unusual setting and the unusual incidents.

"After you've done two or three hundred words of thrill," she went on, "then you keep the hero in a most horrible plight while his mind runs like lightning back over the events which brought him to this dramatic moment in his career. Then you suddenly take up the thrill again and bring the story up to the climax with a bang. Simple, isn't it? All you have to do is do it; only you must concentrate, concentrate tremendously, all the while you're doing it."

For a long while after that she lay back in her chair quite silent, so silent indeed that her companions thought her asleep. But after nearly an hour she sprang to her feet with sudden enthusiasm.

"I have it. Three girls living in a yacht in dry dock. That's an unusual setting.

And the unusual incident, I have that too but I shan't tell it. That's to be the surprise."

The other girls were preparing to retire. Lucile took down her hair, slipped on a loose dressing-gown, arranged a dark shade over her lamp, then, having taken a quantity of paper from a drawer and sharpened six pencils, she sat down to write.

When she commenced it was ten by the clock built into the running board at the end of the cabin. When she came to an end and threw the last dulled pencil from her it was one o'clock.

For a moment she shuffled the papers into an oblong heap, then, throwing aside her dressing-gown and snapping off the light, she climbed to her berth and was soon fast asleep.

But even in her dreams, she appeared to be experiencing the incidents of her story, for now she moved restlessly murmuring, "How the boat pitches!" or "Listen to the wind howl!" A moment later she sat bolt upright, exclaiming in a shrill whisper, "It's ice! I tell you it's ice!"

Marian was the first one up in the morning. It was her turn for making toast and coffee. As she passed Lucile's desk she glanced at the stock of paper and unconsciously read the title, "The Cruise of the O Moo."

Gladly would she have read the pages which followed but loyalty to her cousin forbade.

"To-day," said Lucile at breakfast, "I am going to have my story typed, and next day I shall take it to the office of the Literary Monthly."

"I hope the editor treats you kindly," smiled Marian. "You must remember, though, that we are only freshmen."

But Lucile's faith in her product, her first real "creation," was not to be daunted. "I did it just as Professor Storris said it should be done, so I know it must be good," she affirmed stoutly.

That night Lucile spent an hour working over the typewritten copy of her story. Tracing in a word here, marking one out there, punctuating, comparing, rearranging, she made it as perfect as her limited knowledge of the story writing

art would permit her.

“There now,” she sighed, tossing back the loose-flung hair which tumbled down over her shapely shoulders, “I will take you to ye editor in ye morning. And here’s hoping he treats you well.” She patted the manuscript affectionately, then stowed it away in a pigeon-hole.

If the truth were to be told, she was due for something of a surprise regarding that manuscript. But all that lay in the future.

Florence and Marian were away. They had gone for a spin on the lagoon before retiring. She was alone on the O Moo. Tossing her dressing-gown lightly from her she proceeded to put herself through a series of exercises such as are calculated to bring color to the cheek and sparkle to the eye of a modern American girl.

Coming out of this with glowing face and heaving chest, she threw on her dressing-gown and leaped out of the cabin and into the moonlight which flooded a narrow open spot on deck.

Away at the left she saw the ice on the lake shore stand out in irregular piles. Here was a huge pile twenty feet high and there a single cake on end. There was a whole forest of jagged, bayonet-like edges and here again pile after pile lay scattered like shocks of grain in the field.

“For all the world like the Arctic!” she breathed. “What sport it would be to play hide-and-go-seek with oneself out there in the moonlight.”

She paused a moment in thought. Then, clapping her hands she exclaimed, “I’ll do it. It will be like going back to good old Cape Prince of Wales, in Alaska.” Hastening inside, she twisted her hair in a knot on the top of her head, drew on some warm garments, crowned herself with a stocking-cap, and was away toward the beach.

Since the O Moo was on the track nearest to the shore, she was but a moment reaching the edge of the ice which, packed thick between two breakwaters, lay glistening away in the moonlight. Here she hesitated. She was not sure it was quite safe. The wind had been blowing on shore for days. It had brought the ice-packs in. Under similar conditions in the Arctic, the ice would have been solidly frozen together by this time, but she was not acquainted with lake ice; it might

be treacherous.

“Pooh!” she exclaimed at last. “Wind’s still onshore; I’ll try it.”

Stepping out upon the first flat cake, she hurried across it to dodge into the shadow of a towering pile of broken fragments.

“Catch me!” she exclaimed joyously aloud. “Catch me if you can!”

She had reverted to the days of her childhood and was playing hide-and-go-seek with herself. First behind this pile, then that, she flitted in the moonlight like a ghost. On and on, in a zigzag course, she went until a glance back brought from her lips an exclamation of surprise: “How far I am from the shore!” For a moment she stood quite still. Then the startled exclamation came again.

“That cake of ice tips. It moves! I must go back.”

Springing from the cake, she leaped upon another and another. She had just succeeded in reaching a spot where the rise and fall of the ice in response to the swells which swept in from the lake, was lessening, when something caused her heart to flutter wildly.

Had she seen a dark form disappear behind that ice-pile off to her right?

In an instant she was hugging the shadow of a great, up-ended cake. No, she had not been mistaken. Out of the silence there came the pat-pat of footsteps.

“What can it mean?” she whispered.

Locating as best she could the position of the intruder, she sprang away in the opposite direction. She was engaged in a game of hide-and-go-seek, not with herself, but with some other person, a stranger probably. What the outcome of that game would be she could not tell.

CHAPTER IX
SOMEONE DROPS IN FROM NOWHERE

Pausing to listen whenever she gained the protecting shadow of an ice-pile, Lucile caught each time the pit-pat of footsteps. This so terrified her that she lost all knowledge of direction, her only thought to put a greater distance between herself and that haunting black shadow.

Suddenly she awoke to her old peril. The ice beneath her was heaving. Before her lay a dark patch of water. In her excitement she had been making her way toward open water. With a shudder she wheeled about, and forcing her mind to calmer counsel, chose a circling route which would eventually bring her to the shore.

Again she dodged from ice-pile to ice-pile, again paused to hear the wild beating of her own heart and the pit-pat of the shadow's footfalls.

But what was this? As she listened she seemed to catch the fall of two pairs of feet.

In desperation she shot forward a great distance without pausing. When at last she did pause it was with the utmost consternation that she realized that not one or two, but many pairs of feet were dropping pit-pat on the ice floor of the lake.

As she dodged out for another flight, she saw them—three of them—as they suddenly disappeared from sight. One to the right, one to the left, one behind her, they were closing in upon her.

There was still a space between the two to right and left. Through this she sprang, only to see a fourth directly before her. As she again dodged into a sheltering shadow she nerved herself for a scream. The girls were away, but

someone, Mark Pence, the fishermen, old Timmie, might hear and come to her aid.

But what was this? She no longer caught the shuffle of moving feet. All was silent as the tomb.

For a moment she hovered there undecided. Then she caught the distant, even tramp-tramp of two pairs of heavy, marching feet. Glancing shoreward, she saw two burly policemen, their brass buttons gleaming in the moonlight, marching down the beach. It had been the presence of these officers which had held her pursuers to their shadowy hiding-places.

If she but screamed once these officers would come to her rescue! But she had, from early childhood, experienced a great fear of policemen. When she endeavored to scream, her tongue clung to the roof of her mouth. And so there she stood, motionless, voiceless, until the officers had passed from her sight.

* * * * * * * *

While Lucile was experiencing the strange thrills of this terrible game out on the lake ice, Florence and Marian were witnessing mysterious actions of strange persons out on the lagoon.

In spite of the lateness of the hour, there were a number of persons skating on the north end of the lagoon, so the two girls experienced no fear as they went for a quarter-mile dash down the southern channel which lay between an island and the shore. At the south end of the lagoon the channel, which became very narrow, was spanned by a wooden bridge.

This bridge, even in the daytime, always gave Marian a shock of something very like fear, for it was here that a great tragedy ending in the death of a prominent society woman had occurred.

Now, as she found herself nearing it, preparing for a long skimming glide beneath it, she felt a chill shoot up her spine. Involuntarily she glanced up at the bridge railing. Then she gripped Florence’s arm tightly.

“Who can that be on the bridge at this hour of the night?” she whispered.

“Probably someone who has climbed up there to take off his skates,” said

Florence with her characteristic coolness.

“But look! He’s waving his arms. He’s signaling. Do you suppose he means it for us?”

“No,” said Florence. “He’s looking north, toward the edge of the island. Come on; pay no attention to him. Under we go.”

With a great, broad swinging stroke she fairly threw her lighter partner across the shadow that the bridge made and out into the moonlight on the other side.

Marian was breathing quite easily again. They had made half the length of the island on the return lap, when she again gripped Florence’s arm.

“A sled!” she whispered.

“What of it?” Florence’s tone was impatient. “You are seeing things to-night.”

The sled, drawn by two men without skates, was passing diagonally across the lagoon. It was seven or eight feet long and stood a full three feet above the ice. The runners, of solid boards, were exceedingly broad.

“What a strange sled,” said Marian as they cut across the path of the two men.

“Sled seems heavy,” remarked Florence. “At least one would think it was by the way they slip and slide as they pull it.”

They had passed a hundred yards beyond that spot when Florence turned to glance back.

“Why! Look!” she exclaimed. “There’s a man sitting on the ice, back there a hundred yards or so.”

“One of the men with the sled?”

“No, there they go.”

“Some skater tightening his strap.”

“Wasn’t one in sight a moment ago. Tell you what,” Florence exclaimed; “let’s circle back!”

Marian was not keen for this adventure, but accompanied her companion without comment.

Nothing really came of it, not at that time. The man sat all humped over on the ice, as if mending a broken skate. He did not move nor look up. Florence thought she saw beside him a somewhat bulky package but could not quite tell. His coat almost concealed it, if, indeed, there was a package.

“Two men drawing a strange sled,” she mused. “One man on the ice alone. Possibly a package.” Turning to Marian she asked:

“What do you make of it?”

“Why, nothing,” said Marian in surprise. “Why should I?”

“Well, perhaps you shouldn’t,” said Florence thoughtfully.

There was something to it after all and what this something was they were destined to learn in the days that were to follow.

* * * * * * * *

Out among the ice-piles between the breakwaters, cowering in the shadows too frightened to scream, Lucile was seeing things. Hardly had the policemen disappeared behind the boats on the dry dock than the dark figures began to reappear.

“And so many of them!” she breathed.

She was tempted to believe she was in a trance. To the right of her, to the left, before, behind, she saw them. Ten, twenty, thirty, perhaps forty darkly enshrouded heads peered out from the shadows.

“As if in a fairy book!” she thrilled. “What can it mean? What are all these people doing out here at this ghostly hour?”

Suddenly she was seized with a fit of calm, desperate courage. Gliding from her shadow, she walked boldly out into the moonlight. Her heart was racing madly; her knees trembled. She could scarcely walk, yet walk she did, with a steady determined tread. Past this ice-pile, round this row of up-ended cakes, across this

broad, open spot she moved. No one sprang out to intercept her progress. Here and there a dark head appeared for an instant, only immediately to disappear.

“Cowards!” she told herself. “All cowards. Afraid.”

Now she was approaching the sandy beach. Unable longer to restrain her impulses, she broke into a wild run.

She arrived at the side of the O Moo entirely out of breath. Leaning against its side for a moment, she turned to look back. There was not a person in sight. The beach, the ice, the black lines of breakwaters seemed as silent and forsaken as the heart of a desert.

“And yet it is swarming with men,” she breathed. “I wonder what they wanted?”

Suddenly she started. A figure had come into sight round the nearest prow. For an instant her hand gripped a round of the ladder, a preparatory move for upward flight. Then her hand relaxed.

“Oh!” she breathed, “It’s you!”

“Yes, it is I, Mark Pence,” said a friendly boyish voice.

“I—I suppose I should be afraid of you,” said Lucile, “but I’m not.”

“Why? Why should you?” he asked with a smile.

“Well, you see everyone about this old dry dock is so terribly mysterious. I’ve just had an awful fright.”

“Tell me about it.” Mark Pence smiled as he spoke.

Seating herself upon the flukes of an up-ended anchor she did tell him; told him not alone of her experience that night, but of the one of that other night in the Spanish Mission.

“Do you know,” he said soberly when she had finished, “there *are* a lot of mysterious things happening about this dock. I don’t think it will last much longer, though. Things are sort of coming to a head. Know what those two policemen were here for?”

Lucile shook her head.

“Made a call on the Chinks, down there in the old scow. Came to look for something. But they didn’t find it. Heard them say as much when they came out. They were mighty excited about something, though. Bet they thought it was mighty strange that there was a stairway in that old scow twenty feet deep.”

“Are—are you sure about that stairway?”

The boy’s reply was confident:

“Sure’s I am that I’m standing here.”

Lucile protested:

“But most folks don’t use circling stairways much. They don’t know—”

“I do though. I work in a library. There are scores of circling stairways among the stacks and I know just how high each one is.”

“It *is* queer about that stairway,” Lucile breathed. “I must be going up. I’m getting chill sitting here.”

“Well, good-bye.” Mark Pence put out his hand and seized hers in a friendly grip. “Just remember I’m with you. If you ever need me, just whistle and I’ll come running.”

“Thanks—thanks—aw—awfully,” said Lucile, a strange catch in her throat.

Her eyes followed him until the boat’s prow had hidden him; then she hurried up the rope-ladder and into the cabin. She was shivering all over, whether from a chill or from nervous excitement she could not tell.

The other girls came in a few moments later. For an hour they sat in a corner, drinking hot chocolate and telling of their night’s adventures. Then they prepared themselves for the night’s rest.

For a long time after the others had retired, Florence sat in a huge upholstered chair, lights out, staring into the dark. She was thinking over the experiences of the past few weeks, trying to put them together in a geometric whole, just as an

artist arranges the parts of a stained glass window.

“There’s Lucile’s experience in the old Spanish Mission,” she mused, “and my own in the museum. Then there’s Mark Pence’s visit to the old scow and the circular stairway. Then there’s the blue candlestick. It’s rare, mysterious and valuable. Why? The police are interested in it. Why? Then there’s the police-sergeant’s visit, and Lucile’s experience on the ice, and the two policemen visiting the old scow, and there’s that man on the bridge to-night, the two with the sled and the one sitting on the ice. It’s all mysterious, so it ought all to fit together somehow.”

For a long time she sat wrapped in deep thought. Then she started suddenly.

“Blue!” she whispered. “The face Lucile saw in the Mission was blue, illuminated and blue. In the story the old seaman told me the face of the god of the Negontisks was illuminated and blue. The candlestick I found was blue. What should be more natural than that a blue jade candlestick should be made in which to set a candle with which to illumine the blue god? Blue jade is valuable. A ring or stickpin set with a small piece of it is costly. That makes the candlestick both costly and valuable. All that,” she sighed, “seems to hang together.”

Again she sat for a time in deep thought.

“Only,” she breathed at last, “who ever heard of a tribe of Negontisks in America, let alone here in Chicago? Try to imagine a hundred or more near-savages, with no money and no means of transportation but their native skin-boats, traveling eight thousand miles over land and sea and ending up in Chicago. It can’t be imagined. It simply isn’t done. So there goes my carefully arranged puzzle all to smash.”

Throwing off her dressing-gown, she climbed into her berth, listening to the flag-rope lashing the mast for an instant, then fell fast asleep.

CHAPTER X
THE REAL CRUISE BEGINS

Next morning Florence was skating down the lagoon, deep in thoughts of the mysterious events of the past few days. So deeply engrossing were these thoughts that she did not see what lay before her. Suddenly her skate struck some solid obstacle. She tripped, then went sprawling. Her loosened skate shot off in another direction.

“That’s queer,” she murmured as she sat up rubbing her knees.

Glancing back over the way she had come, she saw nothing more than a circular raised spot which had formed when water had sprung up through a hole in the ice.

“That’s strange,” she mused, and rising, she hopped and glided back to the spot.

“Someone must have cut a hole in the ice,” she reflected, “though what they’d do it for is more than I can see. We youngsters used to do that to get a drink when we were skating on a little prairie pond, a long way from nowhere. But here the ice is fourteen inches thick and there’s a drink of water to be had for the asking up at the skate house.”

As she glanced down at the spot, another strange circumstance surprised her. “What makes that spot look so much bluer than the other ice?” she asked herself.

As she examined it more closely she saw that this patch of blue had a very definite outline, but rough and jagged, like the edges of a piece of cloth haggled by a child who is just learning to use a pair of scissors.

Having recaptured her fugitive skate, she clamped it to her foot and was about to

go on her way when another startling fact arrested her.

“Why, that,” she thought, “is just about where that man was sitting last night; the one Marian and I saw who had apparently dropped in from nowhere.”

So struck with the discovery was she that she skated over to the edge of the ice where the sled drawn by the two strangers had left the snow. There she took good notice of the direction in which the sled had been going when it came upon the ice.

Turning about, she skated backward with her eyes on the track made by the sled runners. She was endeavoring to retrace the sled over the ice where no tracks were visible, in an effort to prove that the sled had arrived at the point on the ice where the hole had been cut when it turned and struck off at another angle.

So successful was she in this that she all but fell over the rise in the ice a second time.

“That’s that,” she murmured. “Now for something else.”

Skating rapidly to the end of the lagoon nearest the dry dock she circulated about until she discovered the spot at which the sled had left the ice.

Again guiding herself by the course taken by the sled, she skated backward and in a short time found herself once more beside the spot in the ice where the hole had been cut.

“That proves something,” she told herself, “but just how much I can’t tell. But I’ll leave that to study out to-night. Must hurry on or I’ll be late to my lecture.”

“That sled track went toward the dry dock,” she told herself a few moments later. “To-night when I go home I’ll try to trace it out and see where it went.”

Lucile was home early that day. Marian had not gone to school at all. She had stayed on the beach making sketches of the ice-jam on the lake front.

“I’ll be going out again to-night,” she told Lucile. “Wind’s shifted. It’s offshore now and rising. There are certain effects of lights and shadows which you get on the rim of a body of fresh water which you don’t in the sea ice. Sea ice is white, dull white, like snow. Fresh water ice is blue; blue as the sky sometimes. I want

to catch it before it blows out again. But what brings you home so early, Lucile?"

"Cut my lecture. Headache," she explained, pressing her temples. "Nothing much though. And, Marian," she exclaimed suddenly, "what do you think? That story!"

"Did he take it?"

"The editor of the Literary Monthly? No, better than that."

"Could anything be better than that?"

"Lots of things."

"What *is* better?"

"Listen," declaimed Lucile, striking a mock dramatic attitude. "He said, the literary editor did, that it was too good for his *poor little publication*! Fancy! 'His poor little publication!' My story too good! My story! A freshman's story!" She burst into sudden laughter, but stopped abruptly and sat down pressing her temples and groaning: "My poor head!"

"You never can tell about it—about stories," said Marian. "Heads either. You'll have to go to bed early to-night and get a good night's sleep. There's been entirely too much excitement on board these last few nights."

"He said," Lucile went on, "that the Literary Monthly didn't pay for stories. Of course I knew that. And he said that he thought I could sell my story; that he thought it was good enough for that. The technique was not quite perfect. There was too much explanation at the beginning and the climax was short, but the theme and plot were unusual. He thought that would put it over. He knew exactly the place to send it—'Seaside Tales,' a new magazine just started by a very successful editor. He knows him personally. He gave me a letter of introduction to him and I mailed the story to him right away. So you see," she smiled folding her arms, "I am to be an authoress, a—a second George Eliot, if you please!"

"But Seaside Tales is published right down town. Why did you mail it?"

"Do you think," said Lucile in real consternation, "that I would dare beard that lion of an editor in his den? The editor of a real magazine that pays genuine

money for stories? Why I—I'd die of fright. Besides, one does not do it. Really one doesn't."

"What was your story about?" asked Marian suddenly.

"Why, I—I wasn't going to tell, but I guess I will. It was about three girls living on a yacht in a dry dock. And, one night in a storm the yacht broke loose on the dry dock and went out into the water. Then it drifted out to sea. Then, of course, they had to get back to land. Wasn't that dramatic?"

"Yes, very!" smiled Marian. "Goodness! I hope it never happens to the O Moo! Just think! Not one of us even knows how to start the engine."

"I mean to have Dr. Holmes show me the very next time he and Mrs. Holmes come down."

"He'll think you're crazy."

"Maybe he will. But you never can tell."

That was one time when Lucile was right; in this queer old world you never can tell.

When Florence returned from the university the shades of night were already falling. There was, however, sufficient light to enable her to follow the track of the sled she had seen the night before. This track led straight across the park to the beach, then along the beach in the direction of the dry dock. A few hundred yards from the dry dock it turned suddenly to the left and was at once lost among the tumbled masses of ice, where no trace of it could be found.

"Sled might be hidden out there," she mused.

For a time she contemplated going out in search of it. When, however, she realized that it was growing quite dark, and recalled Lucile's unpleasant experience of the night before, she decided not to venture.

"If they come back to the beach again," she told herself, "I can pick up their tracks in the snow farther down."

Walking briskly, she covered the remaining distance to the spot on the beach

opposite the O Moo.

“Not yet,” she whispered, and climbing over the trestle she made her way on down the beach. Her eyes were always on the ground. Now she climbed a trestle, now walked round an anchor frozen into the sand, but always her eyes returned to the tracks in the snow. Tracks enough there were, footprints of men, but never a trace of a sled leaving the ice.

She had gone a considerable distance when she became conscious of some person not far away. On looking up she was startled to note that she had reached a point opposite the great black scow where the Orientals lived.

At the end of the scow stood a man. His face disfigured by a scowl, he stood watching her. He was dressed in the black gownlike garb of the Chinese. He wore a queue. There was, however, something strange about his face. She fancied she had seen him somewhere before, but where she could not tell.

Then the man moved out of the light that shone on him from a window and was swallowed up by the shadows.

“No use going farther,” she told herself. “If the sled belongs on the dry dock somewhere it would be the easiest thing in the world for two persons to lift it on their shoulders and carry it in from the ice. That would throw one completely off the trail.”

Turning, she retraced her steps along the beach to the trestle work on which the O Moo rested, then swinging about to the right she made her way to the yacht’s side.

Once on deck, she made certain that the other girls were aboard, then retraced her steps to the deck’s side, where she pulled down the canvas and tied it securely. For a moment she stood listening to the lash of ropes on the mast. The canvas covering bulged and sagged. Cool air fanned her cheeks.

“Going to be a bad storm,” she told herself. “Offshore wind, too. All the ice will go out to-night, and everything with it that isn’t tied down.” When all was tight on deck she slipped into the cabin.

Lucile, who ate very little dinner that night, retired early. Marian studied until nine-thirty. The clock pointed at eleven when Florence, with a sigh of regret, put

down her psychology to prepare for sleep.

“Whew!” she breathed, “what a storm! Listen to the canvas boom! Like a schooner at sea! Hope it doesn’t tear the canvas away. Hope it doesn’t—”

She did not finish the sentence. The thought which had come to her was too absurd.

Once snugly tucked in her bed, she found her mind returning to the morning’s discovery. What did that new ice on the lagoon mean? Why had the hole been cut? Why was the ice blue? Did the sled and the man sitting on the ice the night before have anything to do with it? Did the man cut that hole? If so, why?

He might, she told herself, have had something to conceal, some valuables, stolen diamonds or gold. But how could he hope to recover it if he dropped it through a hole in the ice. The water beneath the ice was always murky and there was a strong current there. Anything dropped beneath that ice would be lost forever.

She remembered the two policemen whom Lucile had seen on the beach that same night. Perhaps those two men had been running from the officers, trying to conceal something. But how had the man come there on the ice? Perhaps—she started at the thought—perhaps this man rode there beneath the sled. The runners had been extraordinarily broad. A man could easily ride between them. The thought gave her a start.

She thought of Lucile’s experience in the old Mission, and of her own with the blue candlestick. Perhaps, she told herself, they dropped the blue god through the ice.

Then she smiled at herself. How could the blue god be in Chicago? If it were they would never drop it in the water beneath the ice where it could never be recovered. Yet why had the ice been blue? Why—

She fell asleep, to listen in her dreams to the lash of ropes, the boom of canvas and to dream of riding a frail craft on a storm-tossed sea.

It would be difficult to determine just why it is that one knows how long he has slept, yet we very often do know. One wakens in the middle of the night and before the clock strikes the hour he says to himself, “I have slept three hours.”

And he is right.

When Florence awoke that night she knew she had been asleep for about five hours. It was dark, pitch dark, in the cabin. The storm was still raging.

“Just listen,” she murmured dreamily, “One could easily imagine that we were out to sea.”

There was a tremendous booming of canvas and a lashing sound which resembled the wash of the waves, but this last, she told herself, was the ropes beating the mast. She had dozed off again when some strange element of the storm brought her once more half awake.

“One would almost say the yacht was pitching,” she thought as in a dream, “but she’s firmly fastened. It is impossible. She—”

Suddenly she sat up fully awake. She had moved a trifle closer to the porthole. Her head had been banged against it.

“It *is* pitching!” she exclaimed in an awed whisper.

Her mind whirled. What had happened? Was the storm so violent that the O Moo was being rocked from side to side on her trestle. Would she soon topple over, to go crashing on the frozen sand? Or had they in some way been blown out to sea?

This last seemed impossible. She thought of the block beneath the wheels of the car on which the O Moo stood, then of the strong cable fastened to her prow.

“It *is* impossible!” she muttered.

There was one way to prove this. She proceeded to apply the test.

Turning a screw which held her porthole closed, she swung the metal framed glass wide open.

Instantly she slammed it shut. She had been soaked with a perfect deluge of water.

Her heart stopped beating. She tried to shout to the other girls, but her tongue clung to the roof of her mouth. There could no longer be any doubt concerning

the nature of the catastrophe which had come over them. How it had happened, she could not even guess. This much she knew: *They were afloat.*

“Girls! Girls!” Her own voice shouted to her like that of a ghost, “Marian! Lucile! Wake up! We’re afloat! The O Moo’s adrift!”

Marian groaned; sat up quickly, then as quickly fell back again. Her head had collided with a beam.

“What—what’s the matter?” she stammered.

There came a low moan from Lucile: “I’m so sick.”

“Seasick. Poor child,” said Florence.

“No—no, not that.” Lucile’s voice was faint. “It’s my head—it’s splitting. I can’t raise it. I—I’m afraid it’s going to be—be—bad.”

Florence leaped to the floor. Her feet splashed into a thin sheet of water which washed about on the carpet. The cold chill of it brought her to her senses. They were afloat.

Someone had cast them adrift. Was that someone on deck at this moment or had he merely cut the cable, removed the blocks and allowed the wind to do the rest? This must be determined at once.

Hastily dragging some rubbers on her benumbed feet, she splashed her way to the door. Having made sure that this was securely locked, she went to each window and porthole, fastening each as securely as possible. This done, she fought her way to Lucile’s berth and, steadying herself with one hand, placed the other on Lucile’s brow.

An exclamation escaped her lips. The forehead was burning hot. Lucile had a raging fever.

“If I had the coward who cut us loose,” she cried through clenched teeth, “I—I’d kill him!”

CHAPTER XI
A MYSTERIOUS ADVENTURE

There are people who cannot sleep during a storm. It sets their nerves a-tingle, sets wild racing thoughts crowding through their minds and leaves them sleeplessly alert. It is as if a thousand wild witches rode on every mad rush of the wind, their shrill voices screaming in each blast, their fingers rattling at every windowpane and their breath puffing at the flickering light.

Mark Pence could not sleep during that storm. Rocking every schooner, yacht and yawl on its cradle of trestlework, it went racing out over the lake, carrying every movable object with it. After many vain attempts to close his eyes, he at last rose and drawing on his clothes, said to himself:

“I’ll go out and fight with it for a time. After that I may be able to sleep.”

“Whew! What a whooper!” he exclaimed as the wind, slamming the door after him, blew him half-way to the beach. Grappling with the wind, as one grapples a wrestling mate, he stooped low, then shot forward.

“Like springing against a volley-ball net.” He shrieked the words in wild defiance of the wind.

Then, steadily, step by step, he fought his way toward the nearest schooner. Having gained the lee of it he paused a moment for breath.

The storm came in gusts. Now in a blinding fury of snow, it blotted out everything about him. Now there was a lull. The wind appeared to pause to regain its breath. At such times as this his eyes penetrated the space before him.

“Don’t look quite right over there,” he grumbled. “Something the matter with the

sky line. Not enough boats, one would say!”

He had regained his breath. For a moment he debated the advisability of venturing further into the storm. Finally he buttoned his coat collar tighter as he muttered:

“Go over and see.”

As he moved from his position of safety there came another gust. More furious than any that had gone before, it threatened to lift him from the earth and hurl him into the lake. But, stooping low, all but crawling, he made headway and, just as the lull came, gripped the top rail of the trestle on which the O Moo had rested.

Hardly had he seized it than his hand slipped and he went sprawling.

“That’s strange!” he muttered, “Awful slippery!”

Removing one glove, he felt of the other.

“Grease!” he muttered in blank astonishment. “Somebody’s greased that track.”

Then, with the suspicion of treachery dawning upon him, he glanced up at the spot where the O Moo should have been.

“Gone!” he exclaimed. “The O Moo’s gone! And six hours ago, she was here. I’d swear it. Saw it with my own eyes. Light in the window. Girls there. Now she’s gone and the girls with her. Gone in such a storm! What madness!” Again he thought of the greased track. “No! No! What treachery!”

From his pocket he drew a flashlight. He meant to examine that track. It had been heavily greased all the way down to the water. That the iron wheels of the car on which the O Moo had rested had passed down the track, there could be no doubt. Mingled with the grease there was much iron rust.

Drawing from his pocket a used envelope, he scraped a quantity of the grease into it, then replaced the envelope.

“Evidence,” he said grimly. “Might not be worth much; might mean a lot.”

The wind was roaring again. Clinging to the trestle, he waited its passing.

“Gone!” he exclaimed. “Gone out to sea! It’s those Chinks. What beasts! I’ll get them! Go after them in just another minute. Then I’ll make them help me launch my schooner to go in search of that O Moo. Three girls! Not one of them knows how to start the engine. Girl called Marian told me so. And in such a storm! Got to make sure though! Got to get all the evidence I can!”

Again he fought his way against the wind until he came to the point where the heavy blocks had held in place the wheels of the truck beneath the O Moo. These had been fastened by strong cleats. Hard, silent work had been required to loosen them. Throwing the light upon the blocks, he examined them carefully.

On the side of one he discovered a peculiar mark. The wood, flattened out under pressure for a space of some four square inches, was raised in the very center in two narrow lines, each an inch long. These lines crossed one another.

“Take it home. More evidence, perhaps.”

Having fought his way up to the place where the cable had been fastened he examined the loosened end without discovering anything peculiar about it.

“That’s all I can do here,” he decided. “Now for the rescue. Got to have help. Old Timmie’s not much good—too old. Fishermen all gone up the coast to fish through the ice. Chinks all there are left. Make ’em help undo what they’ve done. If they won’t come, I’ll fetch ’em!”

During a lull in the storm he returned to his schooner. There he deposited the “evidence,” then throwing a small, cloth-strapped case over his shoulder and thrusting a bottle into his pocket he again ventured out into the storm. This time he turned his face toward the scow inhabited by the Orientals.

* * * * * * * *

Hardly had Florence, standing by the side of Lucile’s berth, hurled out her fiery denunciation of the wretch who had cast their yacht afloat than the O Moo gave a sudden lurch which threw her to the floor.

Pandemonium broke loose. There came a crash of glass from the laboratory. Out of the darkness a bulk loomed at her. As she attempted to rise the thing

appearing to spring at her, knocked her down. Then some other thing buried her deep.

The thing that had struck her was a heavy chair. She was buried beneath the blanket and mattress from her own berth.

As she attempted to extricate herself it seemed that the entire contents of the cabin played leapfrog over her head. Careening like a deserted airship the O Moo appeared to plunge prow first down an endless abyss, only to climb laboriously up on the other side.

This did not last for long. There was no engine going, no driving power. Suddenly she slipped into the trough of a huge wave and wallowed there helplessly, while tons of rushing water swept across her deck.

“The engine!” gasped Florence. “It should be started.”

Struggling to free herself, she thought of Lucile.

“May have been thrown from her berth,” she groaned.

Groping about she found Lucile’s berth, clung there while the yacht gave a wild, circling lurch, then felt for her sick companion.

Clinging to the rail of her berth, Lucile lay there silently sobbing.

Securing two blankets, Florence twisted them into ropes, then bound them across Lucile, one at her knees, the other at her chest.

“That’ll hold you,” she whispered hoarsely.

Starting across the cabin to the electric switch, she was caught again and thrown off her feet. She collided with something. That something put out two arms which encircled her. The two of them fell to the floor, then rolled half the length of it.

Having regained her breath, Florence put out a hand. She touched a garment. She knew by the feel of it that it was Marian. “Thank goodness!” she said, “you’re still here—and alive.”

In the midst of all this catastrophe, Marian began to giggle. “It’s too absurd!” she exploded. “I’ve traveled on the Arctic and Pacific, real oceans, and come here and have a mere lake kick up such a rumpus!”

“But, Marian,” Florence expostulated, “it’s serious. These winter lake storms are terrible. The ship may go to the bottom any moment. It wasn’t built for this. And there may be ice, too. One crack from ice and she’d burst like an eggshell. C’mon, we’ve got to get lights. Gotta start the engine.”

Dragging Marian to her feet, she made her way along the wall to the light switch.

There came a sudden flood of light which brought out in bold relief the havoc wrought by the storm. Tables, chairs, lounge, writing paper, notebooks, shoes, garments of all sorts, were piled in a heap forward. The heavy carpet was soggy with water.

One glance revealed that. The next instant the lights flickered and went out.

“Have to find a candle,” said Florence soberly. “Water on the battery wires. Caused a short circuit. We can’t hope to use electricity. Ought to get engine started some way. Got to get a candle. You just—”

“Watch out!” screamed Marian, as she leaped toward a berth.

The O Moo had suddenly shot her prow high in air. The entire contents of the cabin came avalanching down upon them.

* * * * * * * *

Having made his way, in the midst of the storm, to the door of the scow on the dry dock occupied by the Orientals, Mark Pence paused to arrange the cloth strap carefully over his shoulder and to feel in his pocket. Then he beat loudly upon the door.

As he had expected, he received no answer.

Without further formalities he put his knees to the door and gave it a shove. The flimsy lock broke so suddenly that he was thrown forward. Losing his balance, he plunged headforemost down a short flight of stairs.

With a low, whispered exclamation he sprang to his feet. Putting his ear to the wall, he listened. There were sounds, low grunts, slight shuffling of feet. It was uncanny. A cold perspiration stood out on his brow. “Danger here,” he whispered as he once more adjusted the cloth strap.

The corridor in which he was standing was dark, but a stream of blue light poured out from beneath a door to his right.

“Hey! You! Come out of there!” he shouted.

Instantly bedlam followed. Doors were flung open. A glaring blue light flooded all.

“O we-ee-ee! O wee-ee-ee,” came from every side.

A knife flashed before him. Springing back, he tripped over something, then suddenly plunged downward. He had fallen down the circular stairway. After a wild dizzy whirl, he reached bottom with a bump.

Immediately he was on his feet. His hand gripped the bottle. It was dark down here; dark as a dungeon.

“Got to get out of here,” he whispered. “Whew! What a lot of them! Twenty or thirty! No use hoping for help from them. Fool for thinking I could. Got to get out and find help somewhere else—and get out quick. Be coming down.”

Drawing something from the case slung across his shoulder, he pulled it down over his face. It was a gas mask, his old war mask, recharged.

Gripping the bottle in his pocket, a bottle of Lucile’s quick action gas, he began to climb the stairs.

He had made two-thirds of the distance when, sensing someone close to him, he threw his flashlight open.

Right before him, grinning fiendishly, a knife between his teeth, was a giant Oriental. Mark did not wait for the attack he knew was coming. He drew back his arm. When it swung forward his hand held the bottle of gas—he sent it crashing against the iron post.

The Oriental sprang back up the stairs. Following him closely, Mark made a dash for the door. All about him sounded wild exclamations.

“Gas getting in its work,” he muttered, darting among the writhing bodies. He reached the foot of the short stairs which led to the outer door. Now his hand was on the knob. And now the door flew open. He was free.

But what was this? Just as he made a dash for it, the gruff voice of someone very near him shouted:

“Here they come. Nail ’em. There’s the first one. Got a mask on. Get him!”

That was all he heard, for a stunning blow crashed on his head; he staggered, fell, then all was dark.

CHAPTER XII
THE O MOO RIDES THE STORM

Florence and Marian lay clinging to the bare springs of a berth. They had made that point of safety before the avalanche of furniture, books and bric-a-brac had reached their end of the cabin. They were enduring discomforts beyond description. The yacht was now pitching from side to side in an alarming fashion. The wires of the spring on which they rested cut their tender flesh. Their scant clothing was saturated with cold water. The cabin had grown cold. Since the burning of the electric fuses, there was no heat. They were chilled to the bone, yet they dared not move. The heavy furniture, pitching about as it did, was a deadly menace. Here, above it all, they were safe.

As Florence lay there, benumbed with cold, suffering agonies of suspense, listening to the thud and smash of furniture, the rush and crush of waves that washed the deck, awaiting the crash which was to be the final one, only one question occupied her mind: How and when would the final moment come? She dared not hope that the O Moo would ride such a storm safely.

“Would the O Moo,” she asked herself, “turn turtle in the trough of a wave and, floating, mast down, would she hold them there to drown like rats in a cage? Or would some giant wave stave her in to sink to the bottom like a water-soaked log?”

An answer was postponed. The O Moo rode bravely on. They were in the worst of it; she was sure of that. “Ought to get the engine started,” she told herself. “Then we could cut the waves; ride them, not wallow along in a trough.”

She half rose to attempt to reach the engine room.

“No use,” she groaned; “no light. If we fool around with gasoline and a candle

we'll blow the whole thing up."

But even as she thought this, she became conscious of a dim light. What could it be? She sat up quickly, then she uttered a hoarse laugh.

"First gray streak of dawn," she muttered. Then she thought of Lucile.

"Stay where you are," she said to Marian. "I'm going to try to get to Lucile."

By the aid of the feeble light she saw her opportunity to vault over a careening chair and to make a dash for it. A second later she was at Lucile's side.

"Lucile!" she said softly. "Lucile!"

The girl's eyes were closed. A sudden fear seized Florence and her heart stood still a beat. Was Lucile asleep, unconscious, or—or was she dead?

* * * * * * * *

Over in the darkness and storm by the old scow, Mark Pence was slowly regaining consciousness. At first he imagined that a tiny train of cars was running about on the top of his head. This illusion vanished. He felt something hard in his mouth—tried to think what it was. He had been gagged! That was his first thought. No, that wasn't it. He was breathing through the thing. The mouthpiece to his mask! That was it. He had kept it in his mouth.

He was fully conscious now but did not attempt to sit up. Footsteps were approaching. He heard a voice.

"They got away," a man's voice grumbled.

"All but one. Drunk, that's what they was. You can't hardly shoot drunk men."

The first voice retorted:

"No, you can't."

"Well, anyway, we got one; the one with the mask. Didn't hit him hard. He ought to be coming round."

Mark tried to discover the meaning of all this. The place had been raided. The

Orientals had escaped. They had swarmed out yelling like mad men probably. The quick action gas would make them act as if under the influence of liquor. Probably they had tumbled the raiders over. But who were these raiders?

He did not have long to wait for the answer. A rough hand dragged the mask from his face. He looked up into the frank blue eyes of a burly policeman.

“You’re comin’ round. Sit up. Why, you’re no Oriental! You’re a white kid. What you doin’ here?”

Mark sat up and told them what he had been doing.

“That quick action gas now,” laughed one of the men, “wouldn’t be bad stuff for the police force now and again.”

Suddenly Mark made an effort to rise. He had thought of the plight of his friends on the O Moo.

“You—you’ll help me launch my schooner!” he exclaimed.

“What’s the idea?”

“Why you see those girls in the O Moo don’t know how to start their engine. Somebody’s got to bring them in.”

“What’s your schooner?”

“The Elsie C.”

“That turtle shell? You’d be committin’ suicide to go in her. You come along with us. We’re holdin’ you as a material witness and—and to prevent you from committing suicide by trying the lake in that shell.”

Reluctantly Mark obeyed.

“Can’t something be done?” he demanded desperately.

“Not before morning. Not much then, probably. How’d you find a yacht blowin’ round loose in this whirlin’ bag of snow?”

* * * * * * * *

There is a bottom to every depth, a state of darkness which cannot be exceeded, a limit even to despair. As Florence looked upon Lucile's closed eyes she reached the bottom; experienced the utter darkness; found the limit of despair.

And then a strangely joyous thing happened.

Lucile's eyes opened. She smiled faintly. Strange to say, in the midst of this tumult, she had merely fallen asleep.

Florence took a new and firmer grip on hope.

"How—how do you feel?" she stammered.

"I think I am better," Lucile whispered. "Where are we?"

"We're all right," said Florence quickly. "Day is breaking. The storm will go down as the sun rises. They'll be after us in a tug. In a few hours we'll be back on the dock?"

She said all this very quickly, not knowing how much of it she believed herself, but feeling quite sure that Lucile ought to believe it. Just then a chair, pitching across the floor, caught her behind the knees and sent her sprawling.

The very shock of this set her blood tingling. "Believe we could do something about the furniture now it's getting light," she told herself.

"Marian," she called, "come on down and let's see what we can do to save things. We're ruined as it is. No more university for us. It will take all the money we have to put this cabin back into condition. But we might as well save what we can."

A table came lurching at her. She caught it as if it were a piece of gymnasium equipment. Then rescuing a water-soaked sheet from the floor she tied the table to a hand-rail.

Marian joined her in pursuit of the cabin furnishings. It really grew into quite a game. If a chair came at them too viciously they were obliged to vault over it and bring up an attack from the rear. If a whole platoon of tables and chairs leaped at them in the same second, they took to the cots.

Little by little order was restored. When a survey had been made it was found that one table was broken to splinters, two chairs had broken legs and numerous books and pictures had been utterly ruined.

“It might have been worse,” said Florence cheerfully.

“Yes,” agreed Marian, “We might have gone to the bottom. I do believe the storm is letting up.”

She attempted to look out of a porthole. Daylight had come. Snow had ceased falling but a heavy fog was driving over the turbulent waters.

“Fine chance of anyone finding us,” Marian whispered.

“Sh!” Florence warned as she shook a finger at Lucile’s berth, then aloud: “Boo! but I’m cold. Where are our clothes?”

Marian pointed mournfully at a mass of soggy rags in the corner. “No!” she exclaimed suddenly, “no, not all. We put our evening skirts and middies and slippers in the hammock of our berths. And,” she shouted joyously, “they are there still.”

After some desperate struggles at keeping their balance and dressing at the same time, they found themselves warmly clad and immediately matters took on a different aspect.

“I believe,” ventured Florence, “that we might get the generator going. There’s just one place where water would cause a short circuit and that can be dried out by a candle. Then we can put in a new fuse and that little old friend of ours will be chug-chugging as well as ever. Not that I feel any need of heat,” she mocked with a shrug and shiver, “but you know the supplying of warmth to our homes has become a social custom.”

Having taken a candle from a drawer she lighted it, lifted a trap door and descended to the generator. She was relieved to note that the O Moo had shipped very little water.

“She’s a dandy staunch little craft,” she sighed. “It’s a pity to have abused her so. I’d like to have a hand on the person who turned her loose.”

For a quarter of an hour she worked patiently on the generator; then there came a sudden pop-pop-pop and the hardy little machine was doing its work once more.

At once a drowsy warmth began to creep over the cabin.

The storm was really beginning to abate. Waves no longer washed the deck. The O Moo rose high, to fall low again as great, sweeping swells raced across the surface of the lake, but she did not pitch and toss.

Marian brought the electric range up from its hiding. After wiping it dry, she made toast and tea. The first she gave to Lucile. Then, after seeing her eyes close once more in sleep, she shared a scant breakfast with Florence.

“Things are looking better, don’t you think?” she sighed. “I am really beginning to think we’ll get out of this alive. Won’t that be wonderful?”

“Those questions,” smiled Florence, “must be answered one at a time, but I have faith that they will both be answered and that we’ll be back in the dear old city for Christmas.”

“Christmas?”

“Two weeks off. Next week is final exams. We’ve just got to be back for them.”

“In that case let’s have a look at the engine.”

A half hour later the two girls, dressed in greasy overalls, their hair done in knots over their heads, their hands black with oil, might have been seen engaged in the futile attempt to unravel the mysteries of the small gasoline engine, which, in other days, had been used to propel the O Moo when the wind failed to fill her sails.

“We might be able to sail her home,” suggested Marian.

“Might,” said Florence.

Risking a look out on deck, she opened a door. Her eyes swept the space before her. Her lips uttered a low exclamation:

“Gone! Mast, canvas, everything. We can’t sail home, that’s settled.”

* * * * * * * *

Mark Pence, after his strange adventures at the old scow, was marched off to the police station, where he was allowed to doze beside the radiator until morning.

Soon after daybreak he was motioned to a desk, where a sergeant questioned him closely regarding his knowledge of the events of the night and of the Orientals who lived in the old scow.

He was able to tell little enough and to explain next to nothing. When he had told of the disappearance of the O Moo, of the grease on the tracks, of the sample he had saved and of the block of wood with the cross embossed upon it, the officer proposed that they should together make a trip to the beach and go over the grounds.

“But these friends of mine? These girls in the O Moo?” he protested.

“Oh! That!” exclaimed the sergeant. “What could you do? That was reported to the life-saving station hours ago. Best thing you can do is to help us track down the rascals who played such an inhuman trick on your friends.”

“What could have been their motive?” demanded Mark suddenly.

“That,” said the officer, “is a mystery which must be cleared up. We think we know. But you never can tell. Are you ready? We’ll have a cup of coffee before we go.”

A half hour later Mark found himself standing once more before the old scow. In the broad light of day it had lost much of its air of mystery. The door had been left open and had been blown half full of snow. Having climbed over this pile of snow, they entered the hallway and descended the narrow, circular stairs.

A hasty search told them that the place was deserted. A careful examination revealed the fact that the bottom of the scow had been cut away; that a cellar had been dug beneath it, then walled up with cement.

“Regular underground den,” the officer exclaimed. “Must have been a swarm of them.”

“Twenty or thirty, I guess,” said Mark absent-mindedly. He had picked up a

clumsily hand-forged ax.

“Guess I’ll take that along,” he said presently.

In another room he found a large iron pot one-third full of a peculiar grease.

“That settles it,” he murmured. “Come on over to my schooner.”

They went to his schooner. A comparison of his sample of grease with that in the iron pot left no doubt as to who had greased the track over which the O Moo had glided to the water. The ax he had brought from the scow had a cross on one side of it, cut no doubt with a chisel when the steel was still hot. The cross embossed on the wood exactly fitted in the cross on the side of the ax.

“They drove the ax in to pull the nails,” Mark explained. “Then when the cleats didn’t give way, they used something to pry the ax loose. That’s how the ax came to leave its mark.”

“You’d have thought the noise would have wakened your friends,” said the officer.

“There was a wild storm. Couldn’t hear anything.”

“Well,” said the sergeant, yawning as he rose, “that fixes something definitely on them. That’s what we’ve been trying to do for some time. Next thing is to catch them.”

“But why did they do it?” insisted Mark.

“Well,” replied the sergeant, “since you’ve helped us and I know you won’t go blabbing, I’ll tell you what we think.”

It was a long story, a story so absorbingly mysterious that Mark started when he looked at the clock and saw that a whole hour had been consumed in the telling of it.

“So that’s that,” smiled the officer as he rose to go. “Tell your lady friends on this O Moo if you like but not anybody else. They’ve got a right to know, I guess, and they’ll keep quiet about it until the thing’s settled for good and all.”

CHAPTER XIII
LAND AT LAST

Florence stood upon the deck. The storm had swept it clean. She was clinging to a hand rail at the side of the cabin. The water was still rolling about in great sweeping swells. Fog hung low over all. Strain her eyes as she might, she could see but a hundred yards. The boat, she discovered, had no horn or siren attached to it.

“If only we had one,” she told Marian, “we could keep it going. Then, if anyone is searching for us, he would be able to locate us by the sound.”

She stood there trying to imagine where they were, and what was to be the next scene in their little drama. All efforts to start the engine had been futile. There are a thousand types of gasoline engines. Marian had at one time managed a small motor on Lucile’s boat but that one had been of quite a different type.

“’Tisn’t any use,” Marian had sighed at last. “We can’t get it going.”

So there Florence stood thinking. Marian was in the cabin preparing some hot soup for Lucile. Lucile’s condition was much improved. She was sitting up in her berth. That much was good. But where were they and whither were they bound?

They had gone over their supplies and had found in all about eight pounds of flour and part of a tin of baking powder, three pounds of sugar, a half pound of coffee and a quarter pound of tea, two tins of sardines, a few dried prunes and peaches, two glasses of preserves and a few other odds and ends. Beside these there were still twelve cans of the “unlabeled and unknown” vegetables and fruit.

“I hope,” Marian had smiled, “that they are all corn. One can live much longer on corn than on pineapple.”

“But we can’t live long on that supply,” Florence had said soberly. “Something has just got to happen. And,” she had added, “perhaps it won’t. If it were summer, things would be different, for at that time of the year the lake is dotted with vessels. But now they are all holed up or in dry dock. Only now and then one ventures out. We may have been blown out a long way from shore too; probably were.”

She was thinking of all this now. At the same time her eyes were squinting, half closed. She was trying to pierce the fog.

Suddenly she started. Had she seen something off to the left? A whitish bulk rising out of the fog?

She could not be sure. Well aware that one’s eyes play tricks on him when out at sea, she looked away, then turned her gaze once more to the left.

“Gone!” she muttered. “Never was there at all.”

Again she struck that listless, drooping pose which gave her whole body rest.

“But no,” she murmured, “there it is again. They have come for us. They have found us!”

She wanted to scream, to tell the other girls that help was near, but “No, no!” she decided, “not too soon. It might not be. If it is, they’ll see us. The O Moo stands well out of the water.”

To still her wildly beating heart, she allowed her gaze to wander off to the right.

Instantly she blinked her eyes.

“It can’t be,” she exclaimed, then, “Yes it is—it is! Another.”

Turning once more to the left, she found still another surprise. Two of them off there.

Fear began to assail her. Her forehead grew cold. Her hands trembled. Was it,

after all, a false hope?

She had but a moment to wait. Then she knew. The fog had lifted slightly. She could see farther, could tell what was closing down upon them.

The shock was too much for her. She sank limply to the deck. It was as if she had been wandering in a fog on a rocky hillside searching for sheep, had thought she saw them coming out of the fog, only to discover that the creatures she saw were prowling wolves. The white bulks on the surface of the water were not boats searching for them but cakes of ice. And these, there could be no doubt about it, were fast closing in upon the O Moo. With the water still heaving, this meant danger—might indeed mean the destruction of their craft.

“I ought,” she struggled to her feet, “I ought to tell the girls.”

Yet she did not tell them. What was the use? she reasoned. There was nothing to do but wait, and that she could do very well alone.

There is something awe-inspiring about the gathering of great bodies of ice which have been scattered by a storm. They come together as if each had a motor, an engineer and a pilot on board. And yet their coming is in absolute silence. If one cake chances to touch another, the contact is so slight that there is no sound.

And so they assemble. Coming from all points of the compass, they reunite as a great fleet might after a mighty and victorious battle.

The O Moo chanced to be in the very midst of this particular gathering. As Florence watched she was thrilled and fascinated. Now the surface was a field of blue cloth with a white patch here and there. Now the white covered half, now two-thirds, now three-fourths of the field. And now a cake brushed the hull of the yacht ever so gently.

Suddenly she realized that a strange thing had happened. The water which had been rolling had ceased to roll.

“The ice did that,” she whispered. “Perhaps it’s not dangerous after all.”

She watched until the cloth of blue had been almost completely changed to one of white, then burst into the cabin.

To her unbounded surprise, she found her companions sitting on Lucile's berth with wrapt attention staring out of the window.

"Isn't it wonderful!" whispered Lucile.

"I—I thought it would be terribly dangerous," said Florence.

"Not now," said Marian. "It may be if we come to shore and the wind crowds the ice, but even then we'll be safe enough. We can escape over the ice to shore. Only," she added thoughtfully, "in that case the O Moo will be crushed. And that would be too sad after she has carried us through the storm so bravely."

Florence still looked puzzled.

"You see," smiled Marian, "Lucile and I have been in the ice-packs on the Arctic, so we know. Don't we, old dear?" She patted Lucile on the shoulder.

"Uh—huh," smiled Lucile as she settled back on her pillow.

Ice, as Marian had said, is quite a safe convoy of the sea until some shore is reached.

For twenty-four hours they drifted in the midst of the floe. Now a sea gull came soaring and screaming about the yacht. And now he went skimming away, leaving them to the vast silence of the conquered waters. Fog hung low over the water and the ice. No long-drawn hoot of a fog horn, no shrill siren's scream greeted their anxious ears. A great silence hung over all.

Then Florence, who was standing on deck, noticed that, almost inperceptibly, the fog was lifting. She had been thinking of the last twenty-four hours. Lucile, who was much better, had left her berth and was sitting on one of the upholstered chairs. Marian was trying for the hundredth time to start the engine.

As Florence thought this through, she found herself at the same time wondering what the lifting of the fog would mean to them. Had they, after all, drifted only a short distance from the city? Would they be able, once the fog had cleared, to distinguish the jagged shore which the city's sky line cut out of the blue? Would there be some boat nearer than they had dreamed? Or had they really drifted a long way? Would they look upon a shoreless expanse of water or would the irregular tree-line of some unknown shore greet them?

The fog was slow in passing. She was eager for the unveiling of this mystery. Impatiently she paced the deck.

Then, suddenly, she paused, shaded her eyes, and looked directly before her. Was there some, low, dark bulk appearing off there before the very course the ice was taking?

For a long time she could not be sure. Then with a startled exclamation she leaped to the door of the cabin crying:

“Girls! Marian! Lucile! Look! Land! Land ahead of the ice-floe.”

Marian came racing out on deck, followed more slowly by Lucile. For a moment they all stood there looking.

“It’s land all right,” said Marian at last, “but not much land. A little sandy island with a great many small evergreen trees growing on it, I should say.”

“Or perhaps a point,” suggested Lucile hopefully. “You see, if it’s a point we can go back just a little way and find people, people with plenty of food and—and everything.” Lucile had had quite enough of this adventure.

“It’s better not to hope for too much,” smiled Marian, “‘Hope for the best, be prepared for the worst,’ is my motto. And the worst!” she exclaimed suddenly, “is that the ice will begin to buckle and pile when it touches that shore.”

“And it will crush the O Moo,” said Florence with a gasp.

“Yes, unless,” Marian was studying the situation carefully, “unless we can escape it.”

For a moment she said no more. Then suddenly:

“Yes, I believe we could. There are pike-poles in the cabin. Florence, bring them, will you?”

Florence came back presently with two stout poles some twelve feet long. These were armed with stout iron hooks and points at one end.

“You see,” explained Marian rapidly, “we are much nearer the fore edge of the

floe than to either side or to the back, and up there some forty feet there is a narrow channel reaching almost through to the edge. All that is necessary is that we crowd the ice to right and left a bit until we reach that channel, then draw the O Moo through it. If we reach the sandy shore before the floe does, the worst that can happen is that the O Moo will be driven aground but not crushed at all, and the best that can happen is that we will find some sort of little harbor where the yacht will be safe until the wind shifts and the ice goes back out to sea."

"But can we move that ice?" Florence's face showed her incredulity.

"It's easier than it looks. Come on," ordered Marian briskly. Throwing the rope ladder over the side, she sprang down it to leap out upon a broad ice pan.

Florence shuddered as she followed. This was all new to her.

Marian had said that it was easy, but they did not find it so. True, they did move the O Moo forward. Inch by inch, foot by foot, fathom by fathom she glided forward. But this was accomplished only at the cost of blistered hands, aching muscles and breaking backs.

All this time the ice-floe was moving slowly but surely forward. Now it was a hundred fathoms from the shore, now fifty, now thirty. And now—

But just at this moment the yacht moved out into the open water before the floe. At the same time Marian caught sight of a narrow stream which cut down through the sandy beach some fifty yards from the point where they had broken through.

"If only we can make that channel," she panted. "If the water's deep enough all the way to it, we can. Or if the floe doesn't come too fast."

Florence, who thought she had expended every ounce of energy in her body, took three long breaths, then, having hooked her pole to the prow of the O Moo, began to pull. Soon Marian joined her on the pole and together the girls struggled.

By uniting their energies they were able to drag the reluctant O Moo length by length toward the goal.

Once Florence, having entrusted her weight to a rotten bit of ice, plunged into

the chilling waters. But by Marian's aid she climbed upon a safer cake and, shaking the water from her, resumed her titanic labors. Twice the hull of the O Moo touched bottom. Each time they were able to drag her free.

At last with a long-drawn sigh they threw their united strength into a shove which sent her, prow first, up the still waters at the mouth of the stream.

There remained for them but one means of reaching shore—to swim.

With a little "Oo-oo!" Marian plunged in. She was followed closely by Florence.

Twenty minutes later they were in the cabin of the O Moo and rough linen towels were bringing the warm, ruddy glow of life back to their half-frozen limbs. The O Moo was lying close to the bank where an overhanging tree gave them a safe mooring.

As Florence at last, after having drawn on a garment of soft clingy material and having thrown a warm dressing gown over this, sank into a chair, she murmured:

"Thanks be! We are here. But, after all, where is 'here'?"

CHAPTER XIV
“A PHANTOM WIRELESS”

It was night, dark, cloudy, moonless night. Florence could scarcely see enough of the sandy beach to tell where she was going. She had, however, been over that same ground in the daytime, so she knew it pretty well. Besides, she wasn’t going any place; just walking back and forth, up and down a long, narrow stretch of hard-packed and frozen sand.

She was thinking. Walking in the darkness helped her to think. When there is nothing to hear, nothing to see and nothing to feel, and when the movement of one’s feet keeps the blood moving, then one can do the best thinking. Anyway that was the way this big, healthy, hopeful college girl thought about it. So she had wrapped herself in a heavy cape and had come out to think.

They had been ice-locked on the island for thirty-six hours. The ice had crowded on shore for a time. It had piled high in places. Now the wind had gone down and it was growing colder. It seemed probable that the ice would freeze into one solid mass, in which case they would be locked in for who knows how long.

The water in their little natural harbor had taken on something of a crust. It was possible that the boat would be frozen into the stream.

“Not that it matters,” she told herself rather gloomily. “We can’t start the engine and as long as we can’t it is impossible for us to leave the island; only thing we can do is wait until someone discovers our plight or we are able to hail a boat.”

They were on an island; they had made sure of that first thing. She and Marian had gone completely around it. It wasn’t much of an island either. Just a wreath of sand thrown up from the bottom of the lake, it could scarcely be more than three miles long by a half mile wide. The stream they had entered, running

almost from end to end of it, drained the whole of it. The highest point was at the north. This point was a sand dune some forty feet high. Their boat was moored at the south end. The entire island, except along the beach, was covered with a scrub growth of pine and fir trees. As far as they could tell, not a single person had ever lived on the island.

“It’s very strange,” Marian had said when they had made the rounds of it. “It doesn’t seem possible that there could be such an island on the lake without summer cottages on it.”

“No, it doesn’t,” Florence had answered. “What an ideal spot! Wonderful beaches on every side. Fishing too, I guess. And far enough from land to enjoy a cool breeze on the hottest day of summer.”

Though they had constantly strained their eyes in an endeavor to discover other land in the distance, they had not succeeded.

“Probably belongs to someone who will not lease it,” said Florence at last.

So here she was trying to think things through. There was danger of a real catastrophe. The food in their pantry could not possibly last over ten days. Then what? As far as she knew, there was not a thing to be eaten on the island. It was possible that fish could be caught beneath the lake ice or in their stream. She meant to try that in the morning.

“What a plight to put one in!” she exclaimed. “Who could have done it and why did they do it?”

This question set her mind running over the mysterious incidents which, she could not but believe, had led up to this present moment.

There had been Lucile’s seeing of the blue face in the old Mission, her own affair with the stranger in the museum; the blue candlestick; the visit to Mr. Cole in the new museum; Lucile’s frightful adventure on the lake ice; the incident of the two men with the sled on the ice of the lagoon and the single man sitting on the ice; then the spot of blue ice discovered next day.

“Blue ice!” she exclaimed suddenly, stopping still in her tracks. “Blue! Blue ice!”

Florence frowned, as she considered it.

A new theory had come to her regarding that spot of blue ice on the lagoon, a theory which made her wish more than ever to get away from this island.

“Ho, well,” she whispered at last, “there’ll probably be a thaw before we get back or those men will come back and tear it up. But if there isn’t, if they don’t then—well, we’ll see what we’ll see.”

She was still puzzling over these problems when a strange noise, leaping seemingly out of nowhere, smote her ear.

It was such a rumble and roar as she had heard but once before in all her life. That sound had come to her over a telephone wire as she pressed her ear to the receiver during a thunderstorm. But here there was neither wire nor receiver and the very thought of a thunderstorm on such a night was ridiculous.

At first she was inclined to believe it to be the sound of some disturbance on the lake, a sudden rush of wind or a tidal wave.

“But there is little wind and the sea is calm,” she told herself.

She was in the midst of these perplexities when the sound broke into a series of sput-sput-sputs. Her heart stood still for a second, then raced on as her lips framed the word:

“Wireless.”

So ridiculous was the thought that the word died on her lips. There was no wireless outfit on the yacht; could be none on the island, for had they not made the entire round? Had they not found it entirely uninhabited? Whence, then, came this strange clash of man-made lightning? The girl could find no answer to her own unspoken questions.

After a moment’s thought she was inclined to believe that she was hearing the sounds created by some unknown electrical phenomena. Men were constantly discovering new things about electricity. Perhaps, all unknown to them, such isolated points as this automatically served as relay stations to pass along wireless messages.

Not entirely satisfied with this theory, she left the beach and, feeling her way carefully among the small evergreens, came at last to the base of a fir tree which capped the ridge. This tree, apparently of an earlier growth, towered half its height above its fellows.

Reaching up to the first branch she began to ascend. She climbed two-thirds of the way to the top with great ease. There she paused.

The sound had ceased. Only the faint wash-wash of wavelets on ice and shore, mingled with the mournful sighing of the pines, disturbed the silence of the night.

For some time she stood there clinging to the branches. Here she caught the full sweep of the lake breeze. She grew cold; began to shiver; called herself a fool; decided to climb down again, and was preparing to do so, when there came again that rumbling roar, followed as before by the clack-clack-clack, sput-sput.

“That’s queer,” she murmured as she braced herself once more and attempted to pierce the darkness.

Then, abruptly, the sound ceased. Strain her ears as she might she caught no further sound. She peered into the gloom, trying to descry the wires of an aerial against the sky-line, but her search was vain.

“It’s fairly spooky!” she told herself. “A phantom wireless station on a deserted island!”

Ten minutes longer she clung there motionless. Then, feeling that she must turn into a lump of ice if she lingered longer, she began to climb down.

“I’ll come back here in the morning and have a look,” she promised herself. “Won’t tell the girls; they’ve troubles enough.”

She made her way back to the yacht and was soon in her berth fast asleep.

It was with considerable amusement that she retraced her steps next morning. There could not, she told herself, be a wireless station of any kind on that island. A wireless station called for a home for the operators and there was no such home. She and Marian had made sure of that.

“But then what was it?” she asked herself, “What could it have been?”

She climbed the tree, this time up to its very top, then, turning, shaded her eyes to gaze away the length of the island.

“Just as I thought,” she murmured. “Nothing. Just nothing at all.”

It was true. There could be no wireless tower. If there had been she could have seen it. What was more, there certainly was no house on the island. Had there been, she could not have failed to detect its roof from her point of vantage.

There was no house and no wireless station, yet, as she looked her lips parted in an exclamation of surprise.

She was witnessing strange things. Toward the other end of the island something was moving in and out among the drifting ice-cakes. This, she made out presently, by the flash of a paddle, was some sort of a boat.

“And it is,” she breathed. “No—no it can’t be! Yes, it is, it’s an Eskimo kiak!”

At once she thought of the Negontisks. Could it be possible that they had stumbled upon a secret home of some of these people?

As if in answer to her question, the strange manipulator of this queer craft drew the kiak on shore, then, skipping hurriedly along the beach and up a sandy ridge, suddenly put two hands on something and the next instant dropped straight down and out of sight.

Florence caught her breath sharply. She clutched the fir boughs in the fear that she would fall.

Then, realizing that she might be plainly seen if anyone chanced to look her way, she began hastily to descend.

“He might come out of his igloo and see me,” she told herself.

That the thing the person had entered was an igloo she had no reason to doubt. Igloos go with kiaks and are built beneath the earth.

“But,” she said suddenly, “the other girls will know a great deal more about

those things than I do. I must tell them at once. We will hold a council of war."

CHAPTER XV
THE ISLAND'S SECRET

Twenty-four hours after Florence's mysterious discovery, the cabin of the O Moo was pervaded by a quiet and studious atmosphere. Lucile, who was quite herself again, was mastering the contents of a book devoted to the study of the technique of short story writing. Florence was delving into the mysteries of the working of the human mind. Marian was doing a still life study in charcoal.

One might conclude that by some hosts of good fairies the yacht had been spirited back to its place on the dry dock. This was not, however, the case. The O Moo was still standing in the little stream on the sandy island. Its position had been altered a trifle. It had been poled out into midstream and there anchored. This precaution the girls had felt was necessary. In case the Negontisks attempted to board the yacht it would give those on board a slight advantage. It is difficult to board a yacht from kiaks.

That the strange persons who lived in holes beneath the sand dunes were these wild natives they did not doubt. "For," Marian had reasoned, "who else in all the wide world would live in such a manner?"

"Yes, but," Florence had argued, "how did they ever get to the shores of Lake Michigan anyway?"

The question could not be answered. The fact remained that there were people living beneath the ground on this island and that the girls were afraid of them, so much afraid that they were not willing, voluntarily, to expose themselves to view.

This was why they were remaining aboard the O Moo and studying rather than attempting to catch fish. "Might as well make the best of our time," Florence had

reasoned. To this the others had agreed but when she went on to say that she somehow felt that they would be back at the university for final exams, they shook their heads.

The food supply was growing lower with every meal. Six cans of the unknown fruits and vegetables had been opened and with all the perversity of unknown quantities had turned out to be fruit, pleasing but not nourishing.

“There’s some comfort in knowing that there are other people on the island, at that,” Lucile had argued. “They’ve probably got a supply of food and, rather than starve, we can cast ourselves upon their mercy.”

“How many of them do you suppose there are?” Marian suddenly looked up from her book to ask.

“Only saw one,” answered Florence, “but then of course there are others.”

“Strange we didn’t see any tracks when we went the rounds of the island.”

“Snowed the night before.”

“But people usually have things outside their igloos; sleds, boats and hunting gear.”

“Not when they’re in hiding. There might be fifty or a hundred of them. Nothing about an igloo shows unless you chance to walk right up to the entrance or the skylight. And we didn’t. We—”

She broke off abruptly as Lucile whispered. “What was that?”

She had hardly asked the question when the sound came again—a loud trill. It was followed this time by a musical:

“Who-hoo!”

“I never heard a native make a sound like that,” exclaimed Lucile, springing to her feet.

“Nor I,” said Marian.

“Sounds like a girl.”

Throwing caution to the wind the three of them rushed for the door.

On reaching the deck, they saw, standing on shore, a very short, plump person with a smiling face. Though the face was unmistakably that of a white girl, she was dressed from head to toe in the fur garments of an Eskimo.

“Hello there,” she shouted, “Let down the gang plank. I want to come aboard.”

“Haven’t any,” laughed Florence. “Wait a minute. You climb out on that old tree. We’ll pole the yacht around beneath it, then you can drop down on deck.”

“What a spiffy little cabin,” exclaimed the stranger as she entered the door and prepared to draw her fur parka off over her head. “I wasn’t expecting company. When did you arrive?”

“Came in with the ice-floe,” smiled Marian.

“Are—are you a captive?” asked Lucile suddenly. “And—and do they make you live with them?”

“Captive? Live with whom?” the girl’s eyes were big with wonder.

“The Negontisks.”

“The what?”

“The Negontisks.”

“Why, no, child. Of what are you dreaming? I never saw a Negontisk, let alone living with them. Heard of them though. Please explain.”

She bounced down into one of the overstuffed chairs with a little sigh of “Oh! What delicious comfort! You don’t know how strange it is to live like an Eskimo. It’s trying at times, too.”

It took a great deal of explaining for Lucile to make the reasons for her questions clear to the stranger. In the meantime, Florence had an opportunity to study their visitor.

“Very small, not weighing over ninety pounds, very vivacious, decidedly American and considerably older than we are,” was her final analysis.

“Why! My dear!” the little lady cried when Lucile had explained. “You may put your mind quite at ease. Besides yourselves I am positively the only person on the island. What’s more,” she smiled, “I have in my igloo oodles and oodles of food, enough for all of us for six months to come.”

The three girls fairly gasped in their relief and delight. It was with the greatest difficulty that they refrained from embracing the visitor.

“I suppose,” said the stranger, “that you would like to know how it comes about that I am living here on this island all by myself; and, above all things, in an igloo. Well, you see, my uncle owns this island. He is a retired Arctic trader. For twenty years he lived on the coast of the Arctic—made a huge fortune in furs and whale bone. Then he came back to the city to live.

“Well, you see,” she sighed after a pause for breath, “he had lived in igloos on the Arctic coast for so long that he wasn’t satisfied with the cave he lived in on the shores, in the noisy city. So what does he do but buy this little island and have a wonderful little igloo built beneath one of its sand dunes?

“Of course he doesn’t live in his igloo all the time; just comes over when he wishes to. This winter he is spending in Florida so he lent his igloo to me.

“I graduated from the university last year. And I wanted to write a book, a book about the vanishing race—the Eskimo. Sort of an Eskimo Ramona, don’t you know.

“I had never been in Alaska but my uncle had told me about it. Nights and nights he talked about nothing else, so I knew enough to make a book. All I needed was the atmosphere. I thought I could get that best by coming out here and living in his igloo all by myself, paddling about in a kiak, fishing through the ice and all that. So that,” she laughed, “is how I came to be here.”

The three girls stared at her with looks of wonderment in which was mingled not a little joy. Had she been a fairy come down from some magic kingdom to render them a great service she could hardly have been more welcome.

“Oh!” she cried, bouncing up from her chair, “You shall all go to my igloo. We

will have dinner together there and—and why don't you bring along a few of your things, prepared to stay all night? You'll hardly be leaving to-night. No, of course you won't. Ice won't let you."

"It's not alone the ice," said Florence soberly. "We don't know how to start our motor."

"Oh! Those motors! There now!" she exclaimed "I've never told you my name. It's Marie Neighbor. What are yours?"

The girls told her.

"Motors are a real bother," she said, returning to her original subject. "Uncle has had six or eight of them in all, on cars, yachts and all that. Not one of them was like any other one. I puzzled my poor old head nearly off over them but I always succeeded in making them go. They're worse when there's no gas. Once I tried a pint of ether and some moth balls instead of gas. That came near being my last experiment. The cylinder exploded. Perhaps I can help you with your engine. Let's have a look."

Florence led the way to the engine room and there switched on a light.

Marie studied the motor for a moment.

"But my dear," she exclaimed at last, "this wire should be fastened there and that one here. You have them crossed. That will never do. Hope you haven't ruined your batteries. But never you mind, I have a set down at the igloo."

"Now about the timer. That screw's loose there. Off time of course. Why, there's nothing the matter with the motor; not really. We'll have it going in a moment."

She gave the balance wheel a turn. There followed a sucking sound. A second turn brought a similar result; the third elicited a loud explosion and the fourth threw the engine into such a spasm of coughing as set the whole yacht a-tremble.

"There you are," she exclaimed triumphantly. "I told you there wasn't anything the matter." She touched a lever. The engine stopped. Then she reached for a handful of waste with which to clean her dainty fingers.

"Now," she said, "shall we go over to the igloo? I think the wind is changing.

The ice may be going out to-night. In that case you may be wishing to leave in the morning. The yacht will be all right here. No one about and no chance for her to go out of the river. Throw a line out and tie her to the shore. That'll make her doubly safe."

Delighted with this strange and efficient hostess, the girls went about the task of making the ship snug, then, having each gathered up a small bundle of clothing, went ashore.

"By the way," said Marie, "if you don't mind I think I'd like to go back to the city with you. I'll work my passage as chief engineer."

"That would be splendid!" said Florence enthusiastically. "I've been worrying about the engine. We might get it going and not be able to stop it."

"And might stop it and not get it going again," laughed Marie. "Well, I'm glad that's arranged. A friend had promised to come after me, but I was talking to him night before last and he told me his boat had sprung a leak. Didn't think he could come."

"You were talking with him?" cried Marian.

"Yes, radio, don't you know. Oh! I didn't tell you. I have a radiophone for short-distance work. Uncle insisted on my having it; thought I wouldn't be safe without it. When I wish to talk to shore all I have to do is to hoist up my two portable towers, key up my instrument and start right in jabbering away. I have the wireless too, and can talk to my uncle way down in Florida."

Florence took a long breath. "So this," she told herself, "is the explanation of the phantom wireless."

"By the way," said Marie, "your friends must be anxious about you. Of course they must be. I'll get my little talking machine going as soon as we are at the igloo and you may tell them all your troubles; also assure them you'll be home to-morrow or the next day."

"Oh! How can we thank you?" cried Lucile.

"Don't have to," laughed their hostess. "It doesn't cost me anything and I'm to get a free passage home for it."

“Talking about things being free,” she said pointing to the splendid little evergreens all about them. “See all those trees! They really should be thinned out. They’re free for the asking. Yet there are ten thousand homes in the city where there will be no Christmas tree this year. What do you say we cut down two or three hundred of them and take them along? We can play Santa to that many families anyway.”

“I think it’s a fine idea,” said Lucile.

“So do I! So do I,” said the others in unison.

“Well then that’s all settled. And now for a lark. Watch out; here’s the entrance to the igloo. Just take a look down, then we’ll get up the towers and start talking across empty space to the poor tired old city,” laughed Marie.

CHAPTER XVI
AN UNEXPECTED WELCOME

“It’s an exact reproduction of an igloo!” exclaimed Lucile.

The three girls, following the example of their hostess, had dropped through a hole some three feet square, had poised for an instant upon a board landing, to drop a second three feet and find themselves in a small square room. Leaving this room, they had gone scooting along a narrow passageway, to drop on their knees and crawl through a circular opening into a room some twenty feet square.

“Why!” exclaimed their hostess, “have you seen an igloo somewhere?”

Lucile smiled. “Marian and I spent a year on the Arctic coast of Alaska and Marian has lived most of her life in Nome on Behring Sea.”

“Why then,” Marie Neighbor’s face was a study, “then I’m just a—a—what do you call it? a chechecko, I guess—beside you.”

“Oh, no, nothing like that,” smiled Marian.

“Anyway you’ll help me with my book, won’t you? I have it only a third finished. After dinner I’ll read that to you and you may tell me frankly whether it’s any good or not.”

“I tried a story once myself,” said Lucile with a laugh.

“How did you come out with it?”

“Haven’t come out yet, but I’m really crazy to get back to the city and find out about it. I mailed it to the editor of ‘Seaside Tales’.”

The igloo was heated by genuine seal-oil lamps and over these Marie cooked her food. The pots and kettles were of the antique copper type traded to Eskimos by Russians long before the white man reached the Arctic shore of Alaska. The food cooked in this manner over a slow fire was declared to be delicious.

“And now,” said their hostess, when the dishes had been washed and put away, “I’ll introduce you to my alcove bedroom.”

Drawing aside a pair of heavy deerskin curtains she revealed a platform some six by eight feet. This was piled high with skin rugs of all descriptions. White bearskin, Russian squirrel, red fox and beaver rivaled one another in softness and richness of coloring.

“You see,” she explained, “it’s sort of a compromise between the narrow shelf of the Eskimo igloo and the broader sleeping room of the Chukches of Siberia.”

Lucile and Marian were fascinated. It took them back to the old days of Cape Prince of Wales, of East Cape and Siberia.

“Tell you what,” exclaimed Lucile. “We’ll all get fixed nice and comfy for going to sleep, then we’ll spread ourselves out in the midst of all those wonderful rugs and you may read your book to us.”

“Yes, and you’ll be asleep in ten minutes,” laughed Marie.

“No, no! No we won’t,” they all exclaimed.

“Then it’s a bargain.”

A few moments later filmy pink and white garments vied in color and softness with the rugs of Arctic furs while Marie in a well modulated tone read the beginning of the story of Nowadluk, the belle of Alaska. The three companions were quite content to listen. The ways of life seemed once more very good to them. Their friends had been notified by radiophone of their safety. They were to return to-morrow or the day after. The wind had changed. The ice was already beginning to scatter.

Now and then Lucile or Marian would interrupt the reader to make a suggestion. When the end had been reached they were unanimous in their assurance that it promised to be a wonderful story. Their only regrets were that more of it was not

completed.

A half hour later Lucile and Marian were asleep. Florence and Marie were talking in whispers. Florence had been relating their strange and weird experiences while living aboard the O Moo.

“So that’s why you thought I was held captive by the Negontisks?” Marie chuckled.

“But really,” she said presently, “there *were* some of those people in Chicago. May be yet, but no one knows.”

“Tell me about it,” Florence breathed excitedly.

“I don’t know a great deal about it, only they were brought over from Siberia for exhibition purposes during a fair in Seattle. From there they were brought to Chicago by a show company. The company ran out of money and disbanded. The Negontisks were thrown upon their own resources.

“They were getting along one way or another when it was discovered that they were worshipping some kind of idol.”

“A blue face,” whispered Florence breathlessly.

“Something like that. It was believed that in their religious rites they resorted to inhuman practices. The government looked into the matter and decided to deport them. But just when the officials were preparing to round them up, they found that the last one of them had vanished—vanished as completely as they might had the earth opened up and swallowed them.

“That was two or three years ago. The papers were full of it. I think there was a reward offered for their capture. But I believe they never found a trace of them or their blue god.”

“Oh!” whispered Florence, suddenly sitting up among the robes. “Oh, I do hope the ice is gone by morning!”

“Why? Aren’t you happy here?”

“Yes, but I want to get back to the city—want to awfully. You see, I think I know

where the blue god is and I want to go and find it."

It was the afternoon of the second day following the night spent in the igloo before they were able to leave the island. Ice still blocked their path, that first day, so they had spent the whole day piling the deck of the O Moo high with Christmas trees. Since fate had been kind to them in landing them on the hospitable shores of this island they had been glad to do this much toward the happiness of others.

The lake could never have appeared more lovely. Its surface, smooth as a mirror, reflected the white clouds which drifted lazily overhead. The sun, sending its rosy reflections over all, made each tiny wavelet seem a saddle on the back of a fairy horse of dreamland. Across this dreamland the O Moo cut her way.

Now they were nearing the city. For some time they had been seeing the jagged line of sky scrapers. Now they could catch the outline of the beach by the dry dock. Toward this they pointed the prow of the O Moo. A wireless telephone message had made known to Dr. Holmes the probable hour of their arrival. Old Timmie would doubtless be prepared to get the O Moo back upon her trestle.

"But what makes the shore all around the dock look so black?" puzzled Lucile.

Just then there came a succession of faint and distant pop-pop-pops.

"Someone coming to meet us," Lucile decided, pleased at the thought.

Then there came another set of poppings, another and another, all in slightly different keys.

Now they could see the gasoline launches coming toward them. Seeming but sea gulls for size at first, they grew rapidly larger.

"Six of them," murmured Marian. "I didn't know we had that many friends."

Their amazement grew as three other boats put out from shore. Then Lucile, who had been studying the beach exclaimed:

"I do believe that black spot about the dry dock moves. It seems to contract and expand, to waver backward and forward. You don't think it could be—be people?"

“Why no, of course—yes! I do believe it is!” cried Marian.

“It’s the newspapers,” exclaimed Florence. “They’ve published a lot of nonsense about our silly adventure and all those people have come down to see us come in.”

“And the people in those motorboats are reporters,” groaned Marian. “It’s the last of our life on the O Moo.”

“That’s over anyway,” said Lucile. Her face was very sober. “By the time we’ve paid for having this yacht put back in order, I figure we’ll have about enough money left to buy soup and crackers for examination week and a ticket home. Good-bye old university!”

“Ho! Well,” laughed Florence, “no use being gloomy about it. No use being gloomy about anything. Life’s too long for that. Let’s make up what we’ll tell the reporters. They won’t print the truth anyway, so we might as well tell them plenty.”

“Tell them what you like,” said Marie Neighbor, “only please don’t give them the location of my island. I don’t want them to come out there bothering me.”

“We’ll guard your secret, never worry,” smiled Lucile.

When the reporters’ boats swarmed about them, the girls told as little as they could, but when later Dr. Holmes came on board with three official reporters, they gave them the true story of their adventures.

They were shown their own pictures on the front pages of all the papers and were assured that nothing but their adventure had been talked of since their disappearance.

A woman had come on board with the reporters, a trim, matronly woman in a tailored suit. At her first opportunity she drew Florence to one side to talk with her long and earnestly.

“The cabin of the O Moo is a wreck,” Marian said to Dr. Holmes. “But really, Mr. Holmes, you may trust us to put it back into perfect shape if it takes our last penny. You may send upholsterers and decorators over as soon as the O Moo is in dry dock.”

“Tut—tut!” exclaimed the good doctor. “Don’t let that trouble you. That’s all provided for.”

“Oh, no! Really you must let us pay for all that.”

“Did it ever occur to you,” his eyes were twinkling, “that the O Moo might be insured?”

“In—insured!” Marian’s knees gave way. The news was too good to seem true.

“Then, then we can stay?”

“In school, yes, but on the O Moo, probably not. Too much publicity, you see. University people would object and all that, don’t you know. But then, cheer up. I fancy the lady dean is telling Florence of something which will interest you all.”

“In the meantime,” he exclaimed, “we are not getting ashore. Yo-ho, Timmie,” he cupped his hands and shouted, “bring on the rowboats and tackle. Let’s get her brought in.”

CHAPTER XVII
HOT WATER AND A GHOST

It was night. The crowd that had screamed its welcome to the returning O Moo and her crew was gone. A great truck loaded high with Christmas trees had departed with Marie Neighbor bouncing about on top of it.

The three girls were in the cabin of the O Moo. This, they were sure, was to be their last night on board. The lady dean had told Florence that a flat belonging to the university, three rooms, kitchenette and bath, was at their disposal. The rent seemed terribly high to them, but someway they must meet it, since the dean had looked very sternly adown her nose and said, “Of course this sort of thing cannot be gone on with. The university would be scandalized. Besides, there is no telling what may happen to you if you remain here.”

“Of course,” Lucile said with a long face as the three of them discussed the matter, “she says it’s a very nice apartment but it can’t be half as nice as—”

“As the O Moo,” Florence put in. “Of course not. Nothing ever can be.”

“Oh, well,” Marian sighed, “I guess we’ll have to do it. But I do think the old O Moo is a dear. I shouldn’t like anything better than rambling through a whole summer with her almost anywhere on the Great Lakes.”

Since this was to be their last night they determined to make the most of it. They had Mark Pence in for hot chocolate and vanilla wafers. They told him of their adventures and he spoke modestly of his own.

“So you see,” he said, going back to the very beginning of the story as he now knew it, “when these Negontisks found out they were going to be deported they hunted out an unscrupulous Chinaman who transformed them into people of his

own race. That wasn’t hard. They were Orientals anyway. All he had to do was to provide them with black sateen suits and artificial pigtails and the transformation was complete.

“Then the Chinaman saw a chance to make a lot of easy money. He put them to work in his laundry—virtually made slaves of them. Fixed up that old scow for them secretly and made them sneak back and forth to work during the night.

“That lasted for a time, then the greedy old Chinaman suddenly disappeared. Negontisks sacrificed him to the blue god, like as not. Served him right too.

“But that was where the police took up the trail. The savages knew there was trouble coming. They thought you were a plant—that you were set here to spy on them. They’d been betrayed by some woman before, it seems. When they couldn’t get rid of you by frightening you, they decided to cut you loose in a storm.”

“And now—” began Florence.

“Now they’ve vanished. Not a trace of them has been seen since that night.”

“Not a trace?”

“Not one.”

“Why then,” exclaimed Florence leaping to her feet, “I invite you all to a ghost hunt. A ghost hunt for a blue god.”

“Anything for a last nighter,” agreed Lucile.

“For this type of ghost hunt,” said Florence, “one needs an ax and two kettles of boiling water.”

“I’ll provide the ax,” volunteered Mark.

“And we the boiling water,” chimed in Marian and Lucile in unison.

It was a strange little procession that stole from the shadow of the O Moo a short time later. Florence led the way. She was profoundly silent. Lucile and Marian followed, each with a tea kettle of boiling water carefully poised at her side.

Mark, as a sort of vanguard, brought up the rear with his ax. Now and then Mark let forth a low chuckle.

“Sh!” Marian warned. “You might disturb her serious poise.”

Straight away toward the end of the lagoon Florence led them. Once on the surface of the lagoon her course was scarcely less certain until she had reached a point in the center of the broad, glistening surface.

“Should be right about here,” she murmured.

Snapping on a flashlight she moved slowly backward and forward, studying the ice beneath the circle of intense light.

“Cold place for a ghost,” whispered Mark.

“Ten thousand people have skated over it and cut it down. Can’t tell. Maybe it’s gone,” Florence said under her breath, but still she kept up the search.

“Water’s getting cooled off in the kettles. Ghost won’t mind it at all,” whispered Mark.

Pausing on tiptoe for a moment, Florence fixed her eyes on a certain spot. Then, bending over, she brushed the ice clear of frost.

“There!” she announced. “There! That’s it.”

“Right here,” she pointed, motioning to Mark. “Cut here. No—let me have the ax. You might go too deep.”

With measured and cautious swings she began hacking a circle in the ice some two and a half feet in circumference.

Mark’s amusement had vanished. Curious as the others, he bent over and watched in awed silence. Eight inches of solid ice had been chipped up and thrown out when they began noticing its peculiar blueness.

“Like a frozen tub of blueing,” whispered Marian.

“Sh!” warned Lucile.

“Now, let’s have the water.”

Florence took one of the teakettles and poured the hot water into the hole she had cut.

As they stood there staring with all their eyes, they thought they made out the outline of something.

“Like a dream picture on the movie screen,” whispered Marian.

Lucile pinched her arm.

“A face,” came from Mark.

Suddenly Lucile gasped, wavered, and all but sank down upon the ice.

“The face!” she cried in a muffled scream. “The horrible blue face.”

“I thought it might be.” Florence’s voice was tense with emotion.

She poured the second kettle of water into the hole.

The pool of water was blue, but through it there appeared the dim outlines of an unspeakably ugly face.

With trembling fingers Florence tested the water. Twice she found it too hot. The third time she plunged in her hand. There followed a sound of water being sucked up by some object. The next instant she placed on the ice, within the circle of light, a strange affair of blue stone.

Covering her eyes Lucile sprang back shuddering. “The blue face! The terrible blue face.”

Marian and Mark stared curiously.

Florence straightened up. “That,” she said with an air of great satisfaction, “is the marvelous and much-sought blue god.”

“Oh! Ah!” came from Marian and Mark. Lucile uncovered her eyes to look.

“Perfectly harmless; merely a blue jade carving. Nevertheless a thing of some

importance, unless I miss my guess," said Florence. "I suggest that we take it to the police station."

"To-night?" exclaimed Marian.

"Oh, yes! Right now!" demanded Lucile through chattering teeth. "I could never sleep with that thing on board the O Moo."

Arrived at police headquarters, they asked for their friend, the sergeant. When he came out, his eyes appeared heavy with sleep, but once they fell upon the thing of blue jade it seemed that they would pop out of his head.

"It ain't!" he exclaimed. "It is! No, it can't be."

Taking it in his hands he turned it over and over, muttering to himself. Then, "Wait a minute," he said. Handing the blue face to Florence, he dashed to the telephone.

There for a moment he quarreled with an operator, then talked to someone for an instant.

"That," he said as he returned, "was your friend, Mr. Cole, from down in the new museum. He lives near here. He's coming over. He'll tell us for sure. He knows everything. Sit down."

For ten minutes nothing was heard in the room save the tick-tock of a prodigious clock hung against the wall. From Florence's lap the blue god leered defiance to the world.

Suddenly a man without hat or collar dashed into the room. It was Cole.

"Where is it?" he demanded breathlessly.

"Here." Florence held out the blue face.

For a full five minutes the great curator studied the face in silence. Turning it over and over, he now and again uttered a little cry of delight.

Florence, as she watched him, thought he could not have been more pleased had a long-lost son been returned to him.

“It is!” he murmured at last. “It is the blue god of the Negontisks.”

“See that!” exclaimed the sergeant, springing to his feet. “I told you he’d know. And that’s the end of that business. The whole gang of ’em was caught in Sioux City, Iowa, last night, but they didn’t have the blue god. They’ll be deported.”

“Will—will you give it back to them now?” faltered Lucile.

“Give it back?” he roared. “I’d say not! You don’t know what crimes have been committed in the name of the blue god. No! No! We’ll not give it back. If they must have one when they get to where they’re going they’ll have to find a new one.”

“Sergeant,” said Cole, “I’d like to speak with you, privately.”

“Oh! All right.”

The two adjourned to a corner, where for some time they conversed earnestly. The sergeant might be seen to shake his head emphatically from time to time.

At last they returned to the group.

“I have been trying,” said Cole thoughtfully, “to persuade the sergeant to allow you to sell the blue god to our museum. It is worth considerable money merely as a specimen, but he won’t hear to it; says it’s sort of contraband and must be held by the police. I’m sorry. I’m sure you could have used the money to good advantage.”

“Oh, that’s all right—” The words stuck in Florence’s throat.

“Hold on now! Hold on!” exclaimed the sergeant, growing very red in the face. “I’m not so hard-hearted as I might seem. There’s a reward of five hundred dollars offered for the arrest and conviction—or words to that effect—of this here blue god. Now you girls have arrested him and before Mr. Cole he’s been convicted. All’s left is to make out the claims and I’ll do that free gratis and for nothing.”

“Five hun—five hundred dollars!” the girls exclaimed.

The sergeant stepped back a pace. It was evident that he was in fear of the

embarrassment which might come to him by being embraced by three young ladies in a police station.

“I—I’ll lock him up for the night,” he muttered huskily and promptly disappeared into a vault.

“Well, I guess that’s all of that,” breathed Florence. “Quite a thrilling night for our last on the O Moo.”

“Not quite all,” said Cole. “There’s still the blue candlestick. The state makes no claims upon that. In the name of the museum I offer you two hundred dollars for it. How about it?”

“Splendid! Wonderful!” came from the girls.

“All right. Come round in the morning for the check. Good-night.” He disappeared into the darkness.

“We—we’re rich,” sighed Lucile as they walked toward the O Moo, “but you know I have a private fortune.”

She drew a letter from her pocket and waved it in air. “One hundred dollars for my story. Hooray!”

“Hooray!” came from the rest.

“Of course,” sighed Lucile, “the editor said the check would spoil me for life, but since the story was worth it he was bound to buy it. Regular fatherly letter, but he’s a dear and the check is real money.”

“To eat has a more pleasant sound than to sleep,” said Florence when they were once more in the cabin of the O Moo. “What do you say to lamb chops, french fried potatoes, hot coffee and doughnuts?”

“At two in the morning?” grinned Mark.

“What’s a better time? All in favor, say ‘aye.’ The ayes have it.”

“There are a few things I don’t yet understand,” said Lucile as they sat enjoying their repast.

“And a lot that I don’t,” added Mark. “Miss Florence Huyler, the pleasure’s all yours.”

“Well,” said Florence, “it was about like this: The Negontisks were living in that old scow. Instead of three or four sleepy old Chinamen, there were twenty or thirty near-savages skulking about this dry dock. Being afraid of us, they tacked a note of warning to our yacht. When we didn’t leave they decided to frighten us or kill us, I don’t know which. They chased me into the old museum and tried to surround Lucile among the ice-piles. Lucile’s seeing the blue face in the old Mission was of course an accident; so too was my finding the blue candlestick. That man who chased me lost it. When other plans failed they decided to set us adrift, which they did.”

“But the blue god frozen in the ice?” questioned Marian.

“You remember the two men with the sled and the one man who appeared to come from nowhere? Well, I guess he was dropped off the sled with the blue god, a jug of blue water, and an ax. He cut a hole in the ice and, after covering the blue god with blue water left it to be frozen in. I stumbled upon the spot next morning. Little by little I guessed what was hidden there and how it was hidden.”

“Seems strange they never came back for it,” said Lucile.

“Police were too hot on their tracks,” declared Mark. “They didn’t dare to.”

“And that,” said Florence, “is the story of the blue god. Quite an exciting episode. To-morrow we enter upon the monotonous life of modern city cave dwellers. Good-bye to romance.”

“Well,” said Mark, “you never can tell.”

He rose. “I must bid you good-night and good-bye. I work in the ‘stacks’ of your great university library. Come to see me there sometime. Perhaps I might dish up a bit of excitement for you, you never can tell.”

He bowed himself out of the cabin. Fifteen minutes later the cabin was dark. The cruise of the O Moo was at an end.

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Transcriber's Note

- Obvious typographical errors were corrected. Non-standard spellings and dialect were left unchanged.
- Promotional material was relocated to the end of the book, and the list of books in the three series was completed using other sources.
- Standardized the ship name "O Moo", variously spelled "O'Moo" and "O-Moo" in promotional material.
- Added an ellipsis on page 14 indicating where a line or two was apparently omitted in the printed edition.

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