SHEEP'S CLOTHING

By LOUIS JOSEPH VANCE

LYDIA IS VASTLY AMUSED BY PETER TRAFT'S WHIMSICAL WAY OF MAKING LOVE, BUT SHE IS MORE SERIOUSLY IMPRESSED WITH THE PERSONALITY OF QUOIN WHO SEEMS TO HER THE TYPICAL YANKEE

SYNOPSIS.—A well-bred young Englishwoman, nervous and suspicious, finds when she boards the steamer Alsatia, bound from Liverpool to New York, that her stateroom mate is Mrs. Amelia Beggarstaff, a fascinating, wealthy American widow of about sixty years. The girl introduces herself as Lucy Carteret and says she is going to America to meet her father. Lucy's behavior puzzles Mrs. Beggarstaff, who is vastly surprised to find the girl in possession of a magnificent necklace, stolen from a museum some time previously and passes the news on to her friend, Quoin, a private detective on board. Lucy, dressing it the dark in her stateroom, hears a mysterious conversation between two men just outside her window and recognizes one of them as Thaddeus Craven, her father, whom she hasn't seen for five years. She confesses to Mrs. Beggarstaff that she is in reality Lydia Craven. The girl discovers her father and young Mrs. Merriless, a charming widow, engaged to be married. Mrs. Merriless is bewildered for a moment because Craven had always posed as a bachelor, but she and Lydia like one another. Craven tells Lydia he secretly represents the British government in the United States. Peter Traft falls in love with Lydia and Mrs. Merrilees displays a magnificent necklace which she says she's going to give Lydia for a wedding present.

CHAPTER VII.

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Mrs. Beggarstaff was right, who herself admitted that she was always right: Lydia was a very happy girl. She had, indeed, never been so happy since those memorable days when Craven's rare, capricious, and always unexpected appearances in England had invariably signalized his amazing sprees of paternal indulgence—frolics from which, as from the nirvana of fairy tales, one emerged in childish demoralization to renew acquaintance with the hard and grimy facts of life as lived in Mrs. Grummle's Bloomsbury lodging house, or with the chilly routine of the Misses Stint's Select Academy for Daughters of Gentlemen.

She lived those days in delicious excitement. She would be a strange girl of twenty had her imagination not quickened to the romance inherent in the words secret agent. To think herself the object of stealthy surveillance, as daughter and confidante of a past master of devious diplomacy; to think she must ever keep her courage bright in the shadow of nameless dangers, be forever jealous of the great secret, comport herself always warily—in these persuasions lay delight as deep and abiding as that of a girl playing the mischief at her first bal masque.

Not infrequently she would catch Craven regarding her with his dark and quizzical smile; and then she would flush and smile spiritedly in return, thrilled to think he read her thoughts and understood.

One circumstance alone flawed the perfect jewel of her happiness—the second and final disappearance of her sardonyx cameo.

The first time Lydia had missed it it had turned up safe and sound before bedtime in its place on top of the chest of drawers. But the next day it vanished again and finally. And though for a time her hope ran high that the finder would return the trinket in view of the rather heavy reward posted by Craven, when nothing of the sort happened she felt forced to accept the hypothesis that the clasp had worked loose when she had been lounging beside the rail, delivering the brooch to the sea.

In her new relationship with her father Lydia found several friendships that, however young, promised permanence.

For one, Mrs. Beggarstaff had unquestionably taken a fancy to Lydia, which the girl was quick to divine and reciprocate with a frank and—if undemonstrative—real affection. And the Dowager Dragon was daily wasting much time in amiable bickering with Craven about his daughter's future, openly discountenancing his intention to make Lydia part of his menage; at least until there should be a second Mrs. Craven to keep his house in order—and its master, into the bargain.

"Though," she once amended acridly in the presence of Mrs. Merrilees, "as for that, to my taste, Betty's altogether too frivolous to make a proper duenna. Mark my words, Tad, just as soon as that pretty featherweight head finds out life with you is not one round of pleasure, she's going to cut loose and lead you a dance that won't leave a breath in your fat little body. And then what will become of the child?"

"Oh, blow your meddling!" Craven retorted with entire good humor. "You forget the 'child' is of age—or will be in another six months. She can take care of herself. If it turns out she can't, I give you permission to use your well-known arts of moral suasion and nag her until she's mad enough to hitch up as companion to a saw-toothed destroyer of reputations like yourself."

"She could do far worse," the Dowager Dragon sniffed; "and will—if I let you have your way."

"Which is just what is going to happen. Lydia and I understand each other, my home's the place for her, and there she goes, straight from the steamer."

When he had detached his fiancee and departed, the Dowager Dragon took up the thread of her discourse with Lydia.

"It's up to you, my dear," she announced. "I mean to say, it's for you to decide. I warn you you'll never be happy. Tad's not old enough to be a father. For that matter, he's not old enough to be a husband. He's heedless, irresponsible, as flighty as Betty Merrilees. He never has grown up, and he never will. He's Peter Pan, with all the innocence expurgated."

Here the Dowager Dragon paused and, receiving no response, regarded with suspicion the object of her solicitude. "What are you smiling at, pray?" she demanded in dudgeon. "Do you think I'm merely blustering for your amusement?"

"I beg your pardon," Lydia said meekly, hastening to erase a smile; the idea of the chief agent of Downing Street in America being heedless, irresponsible and flighty having proved too much for her sense of the ridiculous. "You made me think of something funny. But please, Mrs. Beggarstaff, don't say any more. The thing is quite settled; and you don't know how stubborn he is—and I'm his daughter!"

The frown of the Dowager Dragon relaxed, and a crusty smile succeeded. "So be it! I sha'n't contend with you or Tad another minute. But when you see your mistake, remember, my home is always open to you. You're a cheerful snippet, and not a bit hard to look at, and I believe I could grow quite fond of you. Now promise you'll come, if ever you're in trouble. You owe me that consolation at least—if only for being graceful in defeat."

Lydia promising lightly, a placated Dowager Dragon consented to let the subject drop.

Then there was Mrs. Merrilees, who bade fair to prove the sister more than the stepmother, the girl friend more than either, who, once Craven had wheedled her out of her resentment of his putatively negative and innocent deception, seemed to find in Lydia just one more reason for being fond of Craven and viewing with confidence their life after marriage. Though vain and avid of admiration, she seemed incapable of any sort of mean emotion, and was as generous as the good sunlight. An adorable creature!

Peter Traft, the third of three newfound friends, was a riddle Lydia couldn't read, but found endlessly diverting. Publicly sentimental about Lydia, brazenly seeking every opportunity to seclude her with himself, once this was accomplished, he flouted sentiment, ridiculed the world (including himself), and kept her in a state of amusement that precluded discouragement of his eccentric wooing.

"I want you to know me as I really am," he informed her on one occasion. "If I should seem as sober-sided and solemn as your next adorer, you'd marry me in ignorance of my true character."

"But I haven't the slightest intention of marrying you, Mr. Traft."

"That's a fine line," he commented admiringly. "What you heroines of modern fiction would do without it heaven only knows! It's certain our novelists don't, or they'd invent something less stereotyped. But you mustn't forget it really means nothing in the first chapters. Along about page three hundred and twenty-one it's a signal either for the clench or for the bouncer."

"I do wish you'd talk sensibly in language I can understand."

"As for the language, if it cramps your style, Miss Craven, believe me, I'll slip the rollers under it and give it the gate! But as for talking sensibly—not I, not while sparring for wind and trying to figure how I stand with you. It wouldn't be fair to snare your affections with the impression that the architect of my dome used any building material more substantial than funny-bones."

"Do you mean me to understand you're incurably frivolous?"

"Rather!"

"Isn't it a pretty poor recommendation for a suitor to advance?"

"Do you think so?" He appeared to ponder this gravely. "But I can't see that. Think how deadly life would be with a man who took everything seriously—himself, for instance, and

"But I Haven't the Slightest Intention of Marrying You, Mr. Traft."

the candidate for president on the Prohibition ticket, and Lloyd George, and—ah—the Anti-Woman Suffrage movement. There's only one thing I'm ready to promise to take seriously. Now pretend you don't get me!"

"You are quite, quite hopeless!"

"Wrong again: I was never more hopeful. First thing you know you'll be lying awake nights wondering if I can possibly be as silly as I sound, and thinking what a pity 'tis if true; and when you come to that stage, it'll be all over but the rice and old shoes and Niagara Falls!"

"Certainly you must be an incurable optimist!"

"You think so? I say, that's an awfully good sign! You're thinking about me already!"

But of the four it was Quoin who most impressed Lydia's impressionable imagination. His seemed an individuality rarely simple and straightforward, to which latency and indirection must be altogether foreign. He was, Lydia understood, a criminal investigator of unusual attainments; yet he utterly lacked every idiosyncrasy of the "great" detective of fiction. He was a long, lank man, with a thin face of strong features. His wide, thin lips drooped quizzically at their corners. And his eyes were dark and, normally, deep with humorous expression. To Lydia's notion he was the Yankee type incarnate, but without that uncouthness she had been bred to expect.

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Because the Alsatia, groping her blind way at half-speed through wrappings of fog ever more opaque, persisted in making night hideous with her unearthly whoop of warning, the concert all but fell flat. Only Craven's inexhaustible enthusiasm saved the function.

When it was over Lydia, announcing her intention of going to bed, delayed only to say good-night to Peter Traft on the upper companionway landing, near the doorway to the port side of the boat deck. One-half of this double door was open. Beyond it was nothingness—a flat wall of gray but feebly tinted with artificial light.

Then, descending to the promenade deck, she turned aft to her stateroom, and was about to enter when she heard her name called in Craven's voice, and—since she had left him only a few minutes before the center of an animated group in the music room—with pardonable surprise she discovered the man coming swiftly toward her from the after part of the ship.

"Just to say good-night!" he explained hastily, folding his daughter in the tenderest of embraces; and then in a rapid whisper, "Meet me on deck—this deck—to port—fifth stanchion aft from the door—in an hour. If anyone seems to be watching you, go back!" And again aloud, "Good-night, dear child, good-night!" he murmured fondly, releasing her, and hurried forward.

Almost without her knowledge the knob turned in Lydia's grasp; and when she found herself alone in that dark stateroom her hands trembled so with excitement that for a moment she fumbled in vain for the switch.

Watch for startling developments described in the next installment—something big coming!

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

ONCE BUSY CITY NOW QUIET

Wisby Has Little to Show That It Was at One Time Liveliest Place of Its Size in Europe.

To the eastward of Sweden, in the inhospitable Baltic, lies the great island of Gothland, with its capital of Wisby. Little visited and little known, Wisby is one of the most interesting cities of northern Europe. It is in the track of half the Russian and Scandinavian sea commerce, but few ships make the land today in which was once the busiest of northern harbors.

Land at Wisby and you find a quiet little city with ivy-covered houses and gardens of roses, going about its unimportant affairs in an atmosphere of placid calm. It takes a considerable effort of the imagination to call up a picture of the times when Wisby was to the Baltic and the North sea what Venice in the height of her power was to the Mediterranean. Wisby in those days was the wealthiest and liveliest city of its size in Europe.

The men of Wisby seem to have been traders from the beginning. Back in the ancient Norse chronicles there is mention made of Wisby galleys that went all over the known globe and traded the treasures of the Levant with Norse kings. Today they are still digging about in a desultory fashion on the island in search of historical relics and the shovels bring up coins of all the ancient nations—coins of old Britain, of barbarian Russia, of the numberless German states, of France and Spain and north Africa. Wisby gathered the gold of every land with her venturous trading keels, in times when a little business trip had as much romance and danger as the forays of a knight errant fighting over his lady's eyebrow.

Dignity and Impudence.

A trawler one evening came into a port where lay at anchor a destroyer flotilla. She dropped her "hook" foul of the first and second ships and the efforts of the officer of the watch on the leading ship to move her were fruitless.

On the matter being reported to the commodore he went aft and hailed the intruder.

"Hullo, there. You're foul of my billet, and you must clear out and anchor elsewhere. I'm in command of this flotilla—who are you?"

Back came the answer, appealing in its audacity and disregard of service convention:

"Ah'm the Star o' Bethlehem—and Ah've set fo' th' night."—London Opinion.

Troubles Were His Own.

One day after shoveling the snow from the sidewalk for two hours little Patsy, who lived right next door to Kerrigan, began to cry. "What's the trouble, my little man?" said Kerrigan. "A bad tramp come along and stole the snow shovel from the boy next door." "Well, my lad, it's a very nice thing to be sympathetic," said Kerrigan, "but you mustn't worry so over other people's affairs." "It isn't that," said the boy. "I'm crying because he didn't steal my shovel, too."

Embarrassing Mistake.

"I guess I'll keep away from the music room hereafter," said Mr. Cumrox.

"Don't you care for music?"

"Yes. But not all kinds. I try to be classical to please the family. The other day when we were giving a concert, I broke in ahead of time and rapturously applauded the piano tuner."

Difficult.

"Is your daughter studying music?"

"I wouldn't exactly call it studying," replied Mr. Cumrox. "She makes so much noise about it, I don't see how she can possibly get her mind on the subject."—Washington Star.

Getting the News.

"Why do you encourage that incessant talker, Mrs. Gaddy, to come here?"

"Well, I save that much on subscription to a daily newspaper."—Exchange.

Why She Left Him.

Mrs. Bridey—Want to dine out again? Why do you prefer hotel food to home cooking?

Her Husband—At the hotel I can always look at the menu and see what I am eating.—Boston Transcript.