

SHEEP'S CLOTHING

By LOUIS JOSEPH VANCE

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CHAPTER VIII—Continued.

"Then let me see you back to your stateroom, and I'll—"

"No, I— I'd rather wait here. I must know tonight—I can't sleep without knowing—"

Admiration kindled in Quoin's regard. He liked that spirit. She had been quick to recover, quicker than the average woman would have been. "Very well," he assented.

They moved forward. Opposite the companionway Lydia paused.

"Will you be long?"

"Not ten minutes," Quoin promised. His figure momentarily eclipsed the blur of light that stood for the doorway.

Indeed it was hardly more than ten minutes when the doorway was again darkened, and Quoin came to Lydia's side.

"Was I long? I'm sorry. I had to be rather severe before they gave in—and up."

"You succeeded?" He laughed quietly. "Here it is."

Mute in astonishment, speechless with gratitude, she took the puzzle box from his extended hand.

"A crook known as Southpaw Smith—he deals left-handed—had it, together with the father and mother of all black eyes. I was almost sorry for him. 'George Traymore' is his alias on the passenger list. A tall, slender scoundrel—very, very smooth. Not that you're likely to see him before we land, if then. He'll lay very low and make the quietest getaway from the dock he can manage—"

"Mr. Quoin!" the girl interrupted in a tremulous voice.

"Yes?"

Her embarrassment was painful. "What can I say to you? Mere thanks aren't adequate."

"Please say no more. To know I've been of some use is enough. Besides," he laughed boyishly, "I've had a good time bullying Southpaw. I like that sort of thing, you know."

"I shall be always grateful—"

"Then do something to oblige me. I shan't be easy in my mind until you're safe in your room."

Transition from the gloom of the deck to the brilliantly lighted companionway was bewildering. Instinctively Quoin and Lydia paused. The girl smiled wistfully as she offered her hand.

"Good-night—and thank you with all my heart, Mr. Quoin!"

"Miss Craven,"—he retained her hand for a moment—"will you tell me one thing?"

"If I may—anything—"

His eyes searched hers jealously. "Do you know what's in that box?"

"No, Mr. Quoin! Upon my word of honor, no."

Her eyes were limpid pools of ingenuous candor. Quoin could no longer doubt. He nodded, releasing her hand.

"Thank you."

"But," she lingered, "do you?"

"I do," he admitted reluctantly.

"Not through any wish of mine. But Southpaw had only succeeded in puzzling the combination out when I interrupted. I made him put back—what he'd taken from the box. Don't worry. I've already forgotten what it was. And Southpaw won't bother you again—I promise you that."

Her eyes questioned anxiously, his smiled reassurance. With yet another good-night, Lydia turned away.

He watched her down the alleyway to the door of B75, then turned to seek his own berth, shaking his head to rid it of tormenting doubts.

Softly closing the door, Lydia as gently shot the bolt, hoping to gain her bed unquestioned. But as she moved toward it in darkness the Dowager Dragon suddenly switched on the lights and lifted from her pillow an indignant head framed in a nightcap, the most coquettishly beribboned imaginable.

"Well?" she demanded tartly. "Where have you been, if you please?"

Lydia showed her a countenance innocent of any trace of guile. "On deck," she said quietly, removing her cloak with its sprinkling of moisture that glittered like diamond dust. "The foghorn, you know—and I wasn't sleepy, anyway. It's wonderful out there, so still and dark and uncanny. You'd think almost anything could happen, and no one be the wiser."

CHAPTER IX.

"Good old town!" said Peter Traft. Removing his hat, he saluted Town with grave and affectionate respect. "Graft and all, it's one human young city!"

Intuition enabled Lydia to interpret this utterance as the invocation to the litany of your tried but true Manhattanite.

The Alsatia was trudging sedately up the bay from the Narrows. Quarantine ten minutes astern, New York looming over the port bow through a tenderly irradiated haze in whose illusion it became a city of mother-of-

THE CUSTOMS INSPECTORS AT NEW YORK TAKE A HAND AND THE SUSPICION GROWS THAT LYDIA KNOWS MORE THAN HER NEW FRIENDS SUSPECT

Synopsis—Lydia Craven, traveling under the name of Lucy Carteret, runs away from her English home to go to her father, Thaddeus Craven, in New York, who she hasn't seen in five years. Three nights out on board the steamer Alsatia, she runs plump into her father making love to Mrs. Merrilees, a young widow, engaged to marry him. Later Craven explains his mysterious conduct and supposed bachelorhood by telling Lydia he is a British secret service agent in America. He gives her a small box to keep for him. She is attacked. The box is stolen, but Quoin, a detective, recovers it for the girl.

pearl suspended between the blue of haze-veiled sky and the blue of confluent waters.

"Arthur Rackham must have colored it," Lydia mused aloud.

"Wait—this is only the overture—wait till you see it as I mean to show it to you—bridlepaths in Central park of a sunny morning, Broadway at night with a full head of steam on, South street at noon with the old sailing ships asleep in the sun and their forefeet up on the sidewalk, Fifth avenue at evening, lights like big pearls popping out through the purple dusk—"

Ostentatiously drawing a handkerchief from his cuff, Peter mopped his brows. "Beg pardon. Being poetical under forced draft is a bit exhausting."

"Your prose isn't anything to boast of. Henry James at his most arrogant was never more unintelligible."

"Oh, you'll wise up to it quick enough. But mind there'll be nothing doing in the poetry line after we're married. I know my limitations, and I couldn't stand the pace."

Here an apologetic steward caught Peter's eye. "Beg pardon, Mr. Traft, but you're wanted in the dining saloon to acknowledge your declaration."

"Thanks," said Peter sulkily. "I presume it's got to be tended to. You, too, Miss Craven."

"But I've already made my acknowledgment, Mr. Traft. I'm so sorry!"

"I wish I could believe you were!" said Peter vindictively, and went a mose way without her.

He would have been less downcast could he have guessed how soon the girl was to miss him. Alone and without distraction, imagination was haggard by the care of that wretched puzzle box. It was still safe in her possession—that was the worst of it!

Nevertheless, she had as yet said nothing to Craven about the attack in the fog, fearing lest he might insist resuming charge of the puzzle box; and so, perhaps, put himself in the way of some perils more vital even than that which had befallen her. And her father was all she had!

When they were free to stream down the gangway to the pier Craven, consigning Lydia to the care of Peter Traft, rushed off to commandeer the first available customs inspectors for himself and Mrs. Merrilees. So that it was Peter who piloted Lydia to C section, hunted up her trunk, and took her place in the rank at the chief inspector's desk; with the result that the luggage of "L. Carteret, Spinster," was quickly passed, and Peter reluctantly leaving her to pass his own impedimenta, she was at liberty to garner what diversion she might from the trials of others.

In that section her father was dutifully but persistently in optimistic endeavor to persuade his optimistic inspector that he hadn't perjured himself in his sworn declaration. Noticing Lydia's indignant interest, Craven paused only long enough to lift a furtive eyebrow and draw down the corners of his mouth, thus signifying a conviction that his troubles were wholly due to the pernicious interference of his political antagonists, even as predicted.

She returned the least of nods, indicating that the puzzle box was safe—as it was, in her suede handbag, which, dangling from her wrist by its leather strap, had quite escaped the attention of the inspector.

Then, remembering Craven's hint that it would be well not to attract too much attention to their relationship until clear of the customs, the girl turned away to kill time until her father should be free.

Over the way, in Section B, Lydia found Mrs. Beggartaff, surrounded by an array of luggage to do credit to an army corps, light of battle in her eyes, words of bitter wit upon her ready lips, in pitched combat with a graceless skeptic of an inspector.

Near by, three dock porters, two ship newsmen, half a dozen assorted citizens, and a brace of customs appraisers whose duties were immediate and elsewhere, hung in breathless interest upon the issue of the fray, one and all grinning broadly.

Lydia gathered an impression that the Dowager Dragon had found a foe-man worthy of her steel; then hurried on to Section M and Betty Merrilees.

Greeting Lydia serenely, this last resumed her conversation with her assigned inspector. "You'll find everything dutiable in the hat trunk and that big dresser trunk over there—the two upper trays—the receipted bills in the first tray—all except—necklace. I have that here," she indicated the metal box in her hands, "and the bill as well."

"Thanks, Mrs. Merrilees." The inspector looked up from her declaration in futile attempt to maintain his official imperturbability; then his eyes twinkled in a network of wrinkles. His lips twitched, and he grinned outright.

"That's all very well," said the lady impudently. "Laugh if you like! But

please do your worst as quickly as possible."

"Very well, ma'am. I'll hurry you through as fast as I can."

It became immediately apparent that the man wasn't disposed to doubt the sincerity of her conversation. The luggage she had indicated as innocent of dutiable goods he passed with the most perfunctory examination, while the millinery and other declared purchases detained him only briefly.

"Everything is quite O. K., thanks to you, ma'am. And now if you will let me have a look at that necklace. I've sent for the appraiser. He'll be along in a minute."

The box was already unlocked. Mrs. Merrilees promptly removed the leather-bound jewel case and handed it to the inspector.

Touching the spring, he let the lid fly up, exposing the pearl collar. As if dazzled, he blinked furiously. "She's a daisy!" he announced with unctious. "Finest piece of the sort that's come through this year, or I'm no judge."

Momentarily his interest shifted to the bill of the Parisian jeweler.

"Three hundred thousand francs—sixty thousand dollars," he mused aloud. "You got it cheap, ma'am, if I'm any judge."

"Nonsense!" Mrs. Merrilees retorted indignantly. "As if an American ever got anything cheap in Paris—and from Cottier's, of all places! By every right you ought to assess the duty on not more than forty thousand dollars."

"Well," the inspector suggested indulgently, "we'll just see what the appraiser says. There he is now. Hey, Charlie, step over here a minute, will you?"

In response to this hail, a slender, bespectacled young man in O section nodded assent, picked his way through the barrier of trunks, and recognizing Mrs. Merrilees, touched the vizor of a cap bearing the word "Appraiser."

"Mrs. Merrilees has declared her necklace, Charlie," said the inspector, handing over the case. "And here's the bill; but she wants you to take a slant at it for value."

Nodding again, the appraiser narrowed his eyes and surveyed the necklace with an expression of some mystification. Then he pursed his lips in a noiseless whistle, looked bewildered at Mrs. Merrilees, and stepped aside with the jewel case to a spot where sunlight, through a wide opening, threw a brilliant splash of gold athwart the tempered gloom of the pier-shed. Here he subjected the necklace to minute inspection with a magnifying glass. Finally, wearing an illegible expression, he turned back.

"It's a corking good thing," he announced in an odd tone. "We don't get many like it; but the workmanship on this is immense! Call it three hundred at the outside."

"What!" Mrs. Merrilees blazed indignantly. "Three hundred thousand dollars! Ridiculous! Look at the bill—"

"No, ma'am," the appraiser interrupted with mournful decision, "not three hundred thousand, but just three hundred dollars; duty a hundred and eighty (sixty per cent ad val.), and if you like I'll get someone else to size it up and see if maybe we can't shade that a bit."

"Wha-at!" Mrs. Merrilees almost shrieked.

"If it was real stuff I'd be sure, ma'am," the appraiser apologized; "but you can't always tell about these imitations like you can regular stones."

The whole party of friends of Mrs. Merrilees get the surprise of their lives when the customs inspectors make a certain discovery. It's all told in the next installment.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Fox Worried by Food Problem.

It is not often that the sly fox reveals to man his method of securing his daily rations; so that men of Canton Centre, Conn., who were hauling logs were quite surprised recently to see a large red fox on the hillside only about ten rods from the team. He was not the least bit disturbed. Suddenly he leaped into the air and pounced on the show. This operation was repeated several times, the fox jumping several feet into the air each time. He was doubtless trying to break through the crust and catch the mice which he heard burrowing under the snow. The hard, deep snow makes it much harder for the foxes to catch the little animals except when they are running for cover.—Hartford Courant.

Carrier Swift Flyer.

It is estimated that in calm weather a carrier pigeon can fly at the rate of 1,200 yards a minute; with the help of a moderate wind it will attain a speed of 1,540 yards, and before a strong wind 2,000 yards.

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WHEN THE CUSTOMS INSPECTORS DISCOVER THAT MRS. MERRILEES HAS BROUGHT IN A LOT OF IMITATION JEWELS THEY SUSPECT HER OF TRYING TO PLAY A SMUGGLING TRICK

Synopsis—Lydia Craven, traveling as Lucy Carteret, runs away from her English home to go to her father, Thaddeus Craven, in New York, whom she hasn't seen for five years. Three days out on board the steamer Alsatia, she runs plump into Craven, making love to Mrs. Merrilees, a young widow, engaged to marry him. Later Craven explains his mysterious conduct and supposed bachelorhood by telling Lydia he is a British secret service agent in America. She is attacked at night and a small box containing supposed valuable documents, which he has given her to keep for him, is stolen. This is recovered for her by Quoin, an amateur detective. When the party lands at New York, Lydia, carrying the small box, has no trouble passing the customs inspection. When Mrs. Merrilees declares a \$60,000 necklace, the inspector tells her it is worth about \$300—just an imitation. This information astounds them and Mrs. Merrilees raises a row.

CHAPTER X.

The silence was short-lived; but while it lasted a power of scorn played like lightning round the devoted head of the appraiser.

As for Lydia and Peter (who had just joined the group), they gaped in open amazement; while the inspector looked sorry for Charlie.

After lightning, thunder, remote, naestoso, "Are you—mad?"

"Me? No, ma'am, not a bit. It's nothing to me, you know."

"Don't quibble, if you please. I want to know whether or not you're left. You know perfectly well that necklace is worth ninety—sixty thousand dollars. Look at the bill. Inspector, be good enough to show this person Cottier's bill."

The appraiser examined the receipt with ostensible astonishment. "I don't understand this, ma'am," he faltered. "Nor I!"

"Cottier's don't deal in imitations, know," he pursued with greater confidence. "All the same, I'll stake my o' that those are fish-skin pearls, aste brillants, and—well, the settings, I admit, are genuine."

"Then your job is as good as lost; I shall file a complaint and have you discharged for incompetence."

"If you'll pardon me, I don't believe you will, Mrs. Merrilees."

"Easy, Betty!" Peter Traft interposed. "Perhaps he's right, after all."

"Be quiet, Peter. When I want your advice, I'll let you know. Certainly ought to know when I paid for that collar—"

"Then you have been shamefully heated, Mrs. Merrilees," the inspector put in.

"Quite impossible. I know real gems from articles de Paris, and I examined this necklace with the greatest care before I purchased it. Since then it has never left this box, which hasn't been out of my care an instant except when in the purser's safe."

"I'm sorry, but I know what I know. If you're the judge you think yourself, ma'am, I can only suggest that you take this to the light and—here, I'll lend you my magnifying glass."

"Thank you, I shan't require it."

With a gesture of rage, Mrs. Merrilees snatched the case from the appraiser's hands and moved toward the patch of sunlight. Before she had reached it, studying the collar attentively on the way, Lydia saw her slacken pace and falter.

One short minute in that strong glare sufficed. As pale in mystification as she had previously been with wrath, Mrs. Merrilees returned.

"I owe you an apology," she informed the appraiser in a shaking voice. "It's a palpable imitation."

The box slipped from her grasp and vent to the floor with a bump, spilling its trashy contents, and Mrs. Merrilees flopped inconspicuously to a convenient trunk—Lydia's ready arm round her shoulders.

"But, my dear!" Betty wailed. "It's perfectly preposterous!"

The appraiser looked at once bored and dubious. Peter Traft batted bewildered eyes, then with a helpful air picked up the box and replaced its contents. The inspector swung sharply round and made off, with every evidence of inspired haste, toward a distant quarter of the pier.

"Let me thank!" Mrs. Merrilees said in a stifled voice. Indenting her lower lip with a knuckle, she fastened an abstracted stare on the polished tips of her shoes.

Lydia, at a loss, found nothing to say. She couldn't decently express so great concern over the disappearance of something that had been dedicated to her on her wedding day—however remote that event. Yet she was gravely if unintelligibly distressed. Beneath her ready sympathy stirred a quaim of peculiar uneasiness.

Disturbed by the rumble of men's voices, she looked up, to find that Quoin had added himself to the group and was studiously attending to Peter's account of the counterfeit collar. Their eyes met presently, and Lydia was surprised by the look he bent upon

her, a regard somehow faintly reminiscent of their parting subsequent to her adventure of the night before last.

She favored him with her shadowy, enigmatic smile, now vaguely tinted with solicitude.

Nodding briefly, with a thoughtful air, Quoin returned his consideration to Peter and the article de Paris.

"I simply cannot understand it!" Betty declared, abandoning the puzzle as hopeless. Then, catching sight of the detective, she hailed him. "Quoin, do come here at once!" and immediately, heedless of bystanders, began to detail her perplexity in a high, querulous voice.

After a moment or two Lydia rose and joined Peter Traft. "Poor dear!" she said gently, with a slight nod to correct any possible misconception as to the object of her sympathy. "I'm so sorry for her!"

"Well," said Peter, impressively judgmatial, "of course Betty can afford to lose these trinkets by the gross; but, granted she isn't faking, it's a pretty puzzle, isn't it?"

"Faking!" Lydia echoed resentfully. "Now don't get huffy—please! Betty's a darling, and everything like that; but she's got no conscientious scruples about smuggling—none that you'd notice—and I don't mind telling you she isn't above turning a trick like this—acting up to it too. She's one wonderful young comedienne, if you don't know it."

"Turn a trick like this! What does that mean?" Lydia demanded stiffly.

"Have her dog collar duplicated in paste and fish scales, substitute it for

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abruptly to turn and examine the deputy with the eye of disfavor. "Yes?" she asked brusquely.

The deputy introduced himself. "The inspector has just informed me of this—or—unfortunate matter," he pursued. "And I thought I might possibly be able to help straighten it out."

"Kind of you, I'm sure." But the tone of Mrs. Merrilees completely belied this statement. "Have you anything to propose?"

"If I might have the privilege of a word in private—" the deputy suggested blandly.

Quoin made as if to withdraw.

"Wait, please. This is Mr. Quoin. You may have heard of him."

"Who hasn't?" the deputy returned pleasantly. "Proud to meet you, sir."

"Mr. Quoin has kindly volunteered to help me in this—outrage. Anything you wish to say he may hear."

"As you please, madam, but—" The glance of the deputy veered significantly to Peter and Lydia.

"No!" Mrs. Merrilees insisted warily. "You can have nothing to say that any of my friends may not hear."

"Then, madam—permit me to advise you, in all deference—"

"Well?"

"It will save you a great deal of trouble to produce the original collar, pay the duty on it, and—"

"Quoin!" Betty exclaimed in a tone of irritated perplexity. "What can this person mean?"

Quoin was silent.

"I don't mean," the deputy pursued, unabashed, "to be offensive; but—the inference is unavoidable. You are known to have purchased a valuable pearl collar in Paris—"

"I believe I declared it!"

"But upon examination you produce only a comparatively worthless imitation, and assert that you have been robbed of the original."

"I assert! I have asserted nothing." Mrs. Merrilees drew a long breath, closed her teeth with a vindictive snap, and reopened them to observe with withering distinctness, "Go away! You are insolent! You presume—oh, you annoy me! Do go—before I forget myself!"

"We can't assess an imitation at the value of the real necklace, of course, and yet we know that the original is coming into this country by this boat."

"Then permit me to recommend the other passengers to your attention."

"We'll do our best to overhaul them all, I promise you. But if the goods don't turn up, we'll feel reluctantly compelled to make a thorough search, not only of your luggage but of yourself as well, Mrs. Merrilees."

"Quoin!" Mrs. Merrilees appealed.

The investigator shook his head. "It's too bad; but I really don't see what's to be done about it. These people have the power to make things mighty unpleasant for you unless—"

"What, you too?" she hissed, with vast dramatic expression.

"No, no!" Quoin protested hastily. "Don't misunderstand me. I'm only afraid that, unless the necklace shows up, you'll have to submit."