

# "The VANITY CASE"

A Tale of Mystery and Love

By CAROLYN WELLS

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good view of the Heath home. Being on the north horn of the crescent shaped harbor, these houses faced south. "Toddy," said Mrs. Prentiss, as she poured the coffee, "there were queer doings at the Heath house last night." "S?" said the youth, with a perfunctory showing of interest. "Jazz?"

"No, they're not that sort. Oh, I forgot you don't know them, of course, you having arrived only yesterday. But there's a girl over there that you'll like."

"Pretty?" Toddy sat up.

"More than pretty—a vision of angelic beauty."

"Josh, Auntie, never heard you rave before!"

"She's a nice girl, too. Oh, copper and all that, but with some sense in her silly head. But I was telling you about last night."

"No, you were, but you hadn't begun."

"Well, I wish if you'll be a minute. I couldn't sleep."

"Poor old auntie, I know. It must be awful to be so wakeful."

"It's terrible, Todhunter. You've no idea what it means to lie with wide open eyes and hear the clock strike the hours and half hours all through the night!"

"No. Why have a striking clock?"

"So I'll know what time it is, stupid. Well, last night, I was prowling about my room—I do that when I just get worn out lying in bed awake."

"Yes, go on. When does the pretty girl come in?"

"Not at all. Be quiet, will you? The people next door all went to bed some time before twelve o'clock."

"No!"

"Hush. Don't be silly. And then, a little later, say, about midnight, there was a small light, a dim one, in the studio. That's the room at this end of the house."

"H'm. I suppose the pretty girl came down to the library to get a book. They always do that."

"Well, maybe. Then after a short time, there was a big light flashed on."

"Of course. The hero of the story comes down and finds girl, in bewitching negligee, with her hair down."

"Will you be still! Well, then, about one o'clock the lights all went out except for two tiny sparks, that looked like two candles."

"And probably were. The two big sparks were the girl and the man."

"Hush, I'm serious, Tod. For after that, oh—half an hour after, the big light was flashed on again, stayed on for a short time, and then went off, leaving the two little dim lights again."

"Got you. Proceed."

"Then, after another interval, comes the big light again, and then, that goes out and the two little lights stay there all the rest of the night."

"Till what time?"

"I don't know. I stopped watching and went back to bed about three. The little lights were burning then, and when I awoke it was broad daylight."

"Well, Aunt Em, I don't think you've detailed such a very astounding sequence of events after all. Lights on and off in a house, are not of unprecedented occurrence."

"No. But what were the two little lights that stayed on through all the other-ups and downs of the big lights?"

"Night lights, I suppose."

"Nonsense! I've lived next door to the Heaths since the first of May, and they never burnt night lights before."

"Always has to be a first time. But what do you want me to say? I'll agree it's amazing, alarming, terrifying—anything you wish. But I don't get it."

"That's just it, Tod. I don't get it either. I think something has happened over there."

"Do you separate the letters of your words when you write, Auntie?"

"You ought to know. I often write to you. Why?"

"Yes, I know you do. I remember now. You write half word, and then take up your pen and put it down a bit further on, to finish it."

"Well, what of it?"

"Only that it means that the writer has intuition to a marked degree. So my adored aunt, I believe your assumption is right, and something did happen next door, last night. Your intuition is doubtless correct. What do you suppose the happening was?"

Katie looked twice to be sure that it was her mistress, so strange and so changed was the face that she saw.

Then, her hands over her eyes, she stumbled her way back to the kitchen and fell into a chair there.

"What's the matter, Katie?" Cook said, curiously, and the butler came from the dining room to listen.

"Oh, Mrs. Pierce, oh, Herrick—it's the Mississ—she's—oh, I do believe she's dead."

"Dead?" Watcha talkin' about?" and Mrs. Pierce, the cook stared at the excited girl.

"She is—she is! Just you go and look—in the studio—on the floor—"

"But Mrs. Pierce and Herrick the butler had already rushed through to the studio.

"Today, you are a trial. I never know whether you're interested in what I'm saying, or just poking fun at me."

"Both, dear. That is, I'm interested in the pretty girl. Tell me more about her."

"Oh, she has yellow hair and blue eyes and a skin like peaches and cream. She's a friend of Mrs. Heath's, and I think she has been bewitched Mr. Heath. She would be a witch any man not totally blind!"

"Yes, you like her, Aunt?"

"Yes, she's a dear girl. Sort of homelike and gentle-mannered with older persons, like me. But I expect she's a hoyden among her own crowd."

"She's younger than the Heaths, then?"

"Yes; Bunny is 22. The Heaths are both over 30."

"Me for the Bunny! Why the kitten name?"

"Her name is Berenice. But she's always called Bunny."

"Oh, well, I just as lief call her that as anything. When can I see her?"

"Today, probably. They'll all be at the Greshams' this afternoon, and we'll be there, too."

"All right, but I'll hang about outside this morning, and hope to catch a glimpse of the universal charmer."

Toddy, having finished his breakfast, lighted a cigaret, as he glanced over toward the Heath house.

But he saw no sign of the occupants nor even any servants about, opening doors or windows.

And then, just as aunt and nephew rose from the table, there came to their ears a loud scream from the house next door.

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CHAPTER V

"Let's rush over!" Toddy cried, putting one leg over the porch railing.

"No, no," his aunt restrained him. "We can't do that. Harbor Gardens people are conventional and reserved. Wait until we hear something more."

The shriek had come from Katie, the Heath's parlor maid.

This capable and efficient young woman was in the habit of coming downstairs at 8 o'clock every morning.

It was Katie's duty to open windows and straighten things generally in the rooms and on the porches.

She had overslept a trifle this morning, for she had been out late indeed, she had come home from

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