Frank Baum

# Aunt Jane's Nieces Out West

CHAPTER ICAUGHT BY THE CAMERA"This is getting to be an amazing old world," said a young girl, still inher "teens," as she musingly leaned her chin on her hand."It has always been an amazing old world, Beth," said another girl whowas sitting on the porch railing and swinging her feet in the air."True, Patsy," was the reply; "but the people are doing such peculiarthings nowadays.""Yes, yes!" exclaimed a little man who occupied a reclining chair withinhearing distance; "that is the way with you young folks--alwaysconfounding the world with its people.""Don't the people make the world, Uncle John?" asked Patricia Doyle,looking at him quizzically."No, indeed; the world could get along very well without its people; butthe people--""To be sure; they need the world," laughed Patsy, her blue eyestwinkling so that they glorified her plain, freckled face."Nevertheless," said Beth de Graf, soberly, "I think the people havestruck a rapid pace these days and are growing bold and impudent. The lawappears to allow them too much liberty. After our experience of thismorning I shall not be surprised at anything that happens--especially inthis cranky state of California.""To what experience do you allude, Beth?" asked Uncle John, sitting upstraight and glancing from one to another of his two nieces. He was agenial looking, round-faced man, quite bald and inclined to be a triflestout; yet his fifty-odd years sat lightly upon him."Why, we had quite an adventure this morning," said Patsy, laughingagain at the recollection, and answering her uncle because Bethhesitated to. "For my part, I think it was fun, and harmless fun, atthat; but Beth was scared out of a year's growth. I admit feeling alittle creepy at the time, myself; but it was all a joke and really weought not to mind it at all.""Tell me all about it, my dear!" said Mr. Merrick, earnestly, forwhatever affected his beloved nieces was of prime importance to him."We were taking our morning stroll along the streets," began Patsy, "whenon turning a corner we came upon a crowd of people who seemed to begreatly excited. Most of them were workmen in flannel shirts, theirsleeves rolled up, their hands grimy with toil. These stood before abrick building that seemed like a factory, while from its doors othercrowds of workmen and some shopgirls were rushing into the street andseveral policemen were shaking their clubs and running here and there ina sort of panic. At first Beth and I stopped and hesitated to go on, butas the sidewalk seemed open and fairly free I pulled Beth along, thinkingwe might discover what the row was about. Just as we got opposite thebuilding a big workman rushed at us and shouted: 'Go back--go back! Thewall is falling.'"Well, Uncle, you can imagine our dismay. We both screamed, for wethought our time had come, for sure. My legs were so weak that Beth hadto drag me away and her face was white as a sheet and full of terror.Somehow we managed to stagger into the street, where a dozen men caughtus and hurried us away. I hardly thought we were in a safe place when thebig workman cried: 'There, young ladies; that will do. Your expressionwas simply immense and if this doesn't turn out to be the best film ofthe year, I'll miss my guess! Your terror-stricken features will make aregular hit, for the terror wasn't assumed, you know. Thank you very muchfor happening along just then.'"Patsy stopped her recital to laugh once more, with genuine merriment, buther cousin Beth seemed annoyed and Uncle John was frankly bewildered."But--what--what--was it all about?" he inquired."Why, they were taking a moving picture, that was all, and the workmenand shopgirls and policemen were all actors. There must have been ahundred of them, all told, and when we recovered from our scare I couldhear the machine beside me clicking away as it took the picture.""Did the wall fall?" asked Uncle John."Not just then. They first got the picture of the rush-out and thepanic, and then they stopped the camera and moved the people to a safedistance away. We watched them set up some dummy figures of girls andworkmen, closer in, and then in some way they toppled over the big brickwall. It fell into the street with a thundering crash, but only thedummies were buried under the debris."Mr. Merrick drew a long breath."It's wonderful!" he exclaimed. "Why, it must have cost a lot of money toruin such a building--and all for the sake of a picture!""That's what I said to the manager," replied Patsy; "but he told us thebuilding was going to be pulled down, anyhow, and a better one built inits place; so he invented a picture story to fit the falling walls and itdidn't cost him so much as one might think. So you see, Uncle, we are inthat picture--big as life and scared stiff--and I'd give a lot to see howwe look when we're positively terror-stricken.""It will cost you just ten cents," remarked Beth, with a shrug; "that is,if the picture proves good enough to be displayed at one of those horridlittle theatres.""One?" said Uncle John. "One thousand little theatres, most likely, willshow the picture, and perhaps millions of spectators will see you andPatsy running from the falling wall.""Dear me!" wailed Patsy. "That's more fame than I bargained for. Domillions go to see motion pictures, Uncle?""I believe so. The making of these pictures is getting to be an enormousindustry. I was introduced to Otis Werner, the other day, and he told mea good deal about it. Werner is with one of the big concerns here--theContinental, I think--and he's a very nice and gentlemanly fellow. I'llintroduce you to him, some time, and he'll tell you all the wonders ofthe motion picture business.""I haven't witnessed one of those atrocious exhibitions for months,"announced Beth; "nor have I any desire to see one again.""Not our own special picture?" asked Patsy reproachfully."They had no right to force us into their dreadful drama," protestedBeth. "Motion pictures are dreadfully tiresome things--comedies andtragedies alike. They are wild and weird in conception, quite unreal andwholly impossible. Of course the scenic pictures, and those recordinghistorical events, are well enough in their way, but I cannot understandhow so many cheap little picture theatres thrive.""They are the poor people's solace and recreation," declared Mr. Merrick."The picture theatre has become the laboring man's favorite resort. Itcosts him but five or ten cents and it's the sort of show he canappreciate. I'm told the motion picture is considered the saloon's worstenemy, for many a man is taking his wife and children to a picturetheatre evenings instead of joining a gang of his fellows before the bar,as he formerly did.""That is the best argument in their favor I have ever heard," admittedBeth, who was strong on temperance; "but I hope, Uncle, you are notdefending the insolent methods of those picture-makers.""Not at all, my dear. I consider the trapping of innocent bystanders tobe--eh--er--highly reprehensible, and perhaps worse. If I can discoverwhat picture manager was guilty of the act, I shall--shall--""What, Uncle?""I shall hint that he owes you an apology," he concluded, rather lamely.Beth smiled scornfully."Meantime," said she, "two very respectable girls, who are not actresses,will be exhibited before the critical eyes of millions of stupid workmen,reformed drunkards, sad-faced women and wiggling children--not indignified attitudes, mind you, but scurrying from what they supposed wasan imminent danger.""I hope it will do the poor things good to see us," retorted Patsy. "Tobe strictly honest, Beth, we were not trapped at all; we were the victimsof circumstances. When I remember how quick-witted and alert that managerwas, to catch us unawares and so add to the value of his picture, I canquite forgive the fellow his audacity.""It wasn't audacity so much as downright impudence!" persisted Beth."I quite agree with you," said Mr. Merrick. "Do you wish me to buy thatfilm and prevent the picture's being shown?""Oh, no!" cried Patsy in protest. "I'm dying to see how we look. Iwouldn't have that picture sidetracked for anything.""And you, Beth?""Really, Uncle John, the thing is not worth worrying over," replied hisniece. "I am naturally indignant at being drawn into such a thing againstmy will, but I doubt if anyone who knows us, or whose opinion we value,will ever visit a moving picture theatre or see this film. The commonpeople will not recognize us, of course."You must not think Beth de Graf was snobbish or aristocratic because ofthis speech, which her cousin Patsy promptly denounced as "snippy." Bethwas really a lovable and sunny-tempered girl, very democratic in hertastes in spite of the fact that she was the possessor of an unusualfortune. She was out of sorts to-day, resentful of the fright she hadendured that morning and in the mood to say harsh things.Even Patricia Doyle had been indignant, at first; but Patsy's judgmentwas clearer than her cousin's and her nature more responsive. She quicklysaw the humorous side of their adventure and could enjoy the recollectionof her momentary fear.These two girls were spending the winter months in the glorious climateof Southern California, chaperoned by their uncle and guardian, JohnMerrick. They had recently established themselves at a cosy hotel inHollywood, which is a typical California village, yet a suburb of thegreat city of Los Angeles. A third niece, older and now married--LouiseMerrick Weldon--lived on a ranch between Los Angeles and San Diego, whichwas one reason why Uncle John and his wards had located in this pleasantneighborhood.To observe this trio--the simple, complacent little man and his two youngnieces--no stranger would suspect them to be other than ordinarytourists, bent on escaping the severe Eastern winter; but in New York thename of John Merrick was spoken with awe in financial circles, where hismany millions made him an important figure. He had practically retiredfrom active business and his large investments were managed by hisbrother-in-law, Major Gregory Doyle, who was Miss Patsy's father and solesurviving parent. All of Mr. Merrick's present interest in life centeredin his three nieces, and because Louise was happily married and had nowan establishment of her own--including a rather new but very remarkablebaby--Uncle John was drawn closer to the two younger nieces and devotedhimself wholly to their welfare.The girls had not been rich when their fairy godfather first found them.Indeed, each of them had been energetically earning, or preparing toearn, a livelihood. Now, when their uncle's generosity had made themwealthy, they almost regretted those former busy days of poverty, beingobliged to discover new interests in life in order to keep themselvesoccupied and contented. All three were open-handed and open-hearted,sympathetic to the unfortunate and eager to assist those who neededmoney, as many a poor girl and worthy young fellow could testify. In alltheir charities they were strongly supported by Mr. Merrick, whoseenormous income permitted him to indulge in many benevolences. None gaveostentatiously, for they were simple, kindly folk who gave for the purejoy of giving and begrudged all knowledge of their acts to anyone outsidetheir own little circle.There is no doubt that John Merrick was eccentric. It is generallyconceded that a rich man may indulge in eccentricities, provided hemaintains a useful position in society, and Mr. Merrick's peculiaritiesonly served to render him the more interesting to those who knew himbest. He did astonishing things in a most matter-of-fact way and actedmore on impulse than on calm reflection; so it is not to be wondered atthat the queer little man's nieces had imbibed some of his queerness.Being by nature lively and aggressive young women, whose eager interestin life would not permit them to be idle, they encountered manyinteresting experiences.They had just come from a long visit to Louise at the ranch and afterconferring gravely together had decided to hide themselves in Hollywood,where they might spend a quiet and happy winter in wandering over thehills, in boating or bathing in the ocean or motoring over the hundredsof miles of splendid boulevards of this section.Singularly enough, their choice of a retreat was also the choice of ascore or more of motion picture makers, who had discovered Hollywoodbefore them and were utilizing the brilliant sunshine and clearatmosphere in the production of their films, which were supplied topicture theatres throughout the United States and Europe. Appreciatingthe value of such a monster industry, the authorities permitted thecameras to be set up on the public streets or wherever there was anappropriate scene to serve for a background to the photo-plays. It was nounusual sight to see troops of cowboys and Indians racing through thepretty village or to find the cameraman busy before the imposingresidence of a millionaire or the vine-covered bungalow of a more modestcitizen. No one seemed to resent such action, for Californians admire themotion picture as enthusiastically as do the inhabitants of the Easternstates, so the girls' "adventure" was really a common incident.CHAPTER IIAN OBJECT LESSONIt was the following afternoon when Uncle John captured his casualacquaintance, Mr. Otis Werner, in the office of the hotel and dragged themotion picture man away to his rooms to be introduced to his nieces."Here, my dears, is Mr. Werner," he began, as he threw open the door oftheir apartment and escorted his companion in. "He is one of thosepicture makers, you'll remember, and--and--"He paused abruptly, for Beth was staring at Mr. Werner with a frown onher usually placid features, while Patsy was giggling hysterically. Mr.Werner, a twinkle of amusement in his eye, bowed with exaggerateddeference."Dear me!" said Uncle John. "Is--is anything wrong!""No; it's all right, Uncle," declared Patsy, striving to control a freshconvulsion of laughter. "Only--this is the same dreadful manager whodragged us into his picture yesterday.""I beg your pardon," said Mr. Werner; "I'm not a manager; I'm merely whatis called in our profession a 'producer,' or a 'stage director.'""Well, you're the man, anyhow," asserted Patsy. "So what have you to sayfor yourself, sir?""If you were annoyed, I humbly apologize," he returned. "Perhaps I wasunintentionally rude to frighten you in that way, but my excuse lies inour subservience to the demands of our art. We seldom hesitate atanything which tends to give our pictures the semblance of reality.""\_Art\_, did you say, Mr. Werner?" It was Beth who asked this and therewas a bit of a sneer in her tone."It is really art--art of the highest character," he replied warmly. "Doyou question it, Miss--Miss--""Miss de Graf. I suppose, to be fair, I must admit that the photographyis art; but the subjects of your pictures, I have observed, are far fromartistic. Such a picture, for instance, as you made yesterday can havelittle value to anyone.""Little value! Why, Miss de Graf, you astonish me," he exclaimed. "Iconsider that picture of the falling wall one of my greatesttriumphs--and I've been making pictures for years. Aside from itsrealism, its emotional nature--'thrills,' we call it--this pictureconveys a vivid lesson that ought to prove of great benefit to humanity."Beth was looking at him curiously now. Patsy was serious and veryattentive. As Uncle John asked his visitor to be seated his voicebetrayed the interest he felt in the conversation."Of course we saw only a bit of the picture," said Patsy Doyle. "What wasit all about, Mr. Werner?""We try," said he, slowly and impressively, as if in love with histheme, "to give to our pictures an educational value, as well as torender them entertaining. Some of them contain a high moral lesson;others, a warning; many, an incentive to live purer and nobler lives.All of our plots are conceived with far more thought than you maysuppose. Underlying many of our romances and tragedies are moralinjunctions which are involuntarily absorbed by the observers, yet of sosubtle a nature that they are not suspected. We cannot preach except bysuggestion, for people go to our picture shows to be amused. If wehurled righteousness at them they would soon desert us, and we would beobliged to close up shop.""I must confess that this is, to me, a most novel presentation of thesubject," said Beth, more graciously. "Personally, I care little for yourpictures; but I can understand how travel scenes and scientific oreducational subjects might be of real benefit to the people.""I can't understand anyone's being indifferent to the charm of motionpictures," he responded, somewhat reproachfully."Why, at first they struck me as wonderful," said the girl. "They weresuch a novel invention that I went to see them from pure curiosity. But,afterward, the subjects presented in the pictures bored me. The dramapictures were cheap and common, the comedy scenes worse; so I kept awayfrom the picture theatres.""Educational pictures," said Mr. Werner, musingly, "have proved afailure, as I hinted, except when liberally interspersed with scenes ofaction and human interest. The only financial failures among the host ofmotion picture theatres, so far as I have observed, are those that haveattempted to run travel scenes and educational films exclusively. Thereare so few people with your--eh--culture and--and--elevated tastes, yousee, when compared with the masses.""But tell us about \_our\_ picture," pleaded Patsy. "What lesson can thatfalling wall possibly convey?""I'll be glad to explain that," he eagerly replied, "for I am quite proudof it, I assure you. There are many buildings throughout our largercities that were erected as cheaply as possible and without a singlethought for the safety of their tenants. So many disasters have resultedfrom this that of late years building inspectors have been appointed inevery locality to insist on proper materials and mechanical efficiencyin the erection of all classes of buildings. These inspectors, however,cannot tear the old buildings down to see if they are safe, and paint andplaster cover a multitude of sins of unscrupulous builders. Usually thelandlord or owner knows well the condition of his property and in manycases refuses to put it into such shape as to insure the safety of histenants. Greed, false economy and heartless indifference to the welfareof others are unfortunately too prevalent among the wealthy class. Noordinary argument could induce owners to expend money in strengthening orrebuilding their income-producing properties. But I get after them in mypicture with a prod that ought to rouse them to action."The picture opens with a scene in the interior of a factory. Men, girlsand boys are employed. The foreman observes a warning crack in the walland calls the proprietor's attention to it. In this case the manufactureris the owner of the building, but he refuses to make repairs. Hisargument is that the wall has stood for many years and so is likely tostand for many more; it would be a waste of money to repair the oldshell. Next day the foreman shows him that the crack has spread andextended along the wall in an alarming manner but still the owner willnot act. The workmen counsel together seriously. They dare not deserttheir jobs, for they must have money to live. They send a petition to theowner, who becomes angry and swears he won't be driven to a uselessexpense by his own employees. In the next scene the manufacturer'sdaughter--his only child--having heard that the building was unsafe,comes to her father's office to plead with him to change his mind andmake the needed repairs. Although he loves this daughter next to hismoney he resents her interference in a business matter, and refuses. Herwords, however, impress him so strongly that he calls her back from thedoor to kiss her and say that he will give the matter further thought,for her sake."As she leaves the office there is a cry of terror from the factory andthe working people come rushing out of the now tottering building. Thatwas when you two young ladies came walking up the street and were draggedout of danger by the foreman of the shop--in other words, by myself. Theowner's daughter, bewildered by the confusion, hesitates what to do orwhich way to turn, and as she stands upon the sidewalk she is crushed bythe falling wall, together with several of her father's employees.""How dreadful!" exclaimed Patsy."Of course no one was actually hurt," he hastened to say; "for we useddummy figures for the wall to fall upon. In the final scene the bereavedfather suddenly realizes that he has been working and accumulating onlyfor this beloved child--the child whose life he has sacrificed by hismiserly refusal to protect his workmen. His grief is so intense that noone who follows the story of this picture will ever hesitate to repair abuilding promptly, if he learns it is unsafe. Do you now understand thelesson taught, young ladies?"Mr. Werner's dramatic recital had strongly impressed the two girls, whileUncle John was visibly affected."I'm very glad," said the little man fervently, "that none of my money isin factories or other buildings that might prove unsafe. It would makemy life miserable if I thought I was in any way responsible for such acatastrophe as you have pictured.""It seems to me," observed Patsy, "that your story is unnecessarilycruel, Mr. Werner.""Then you do not understand human nature," he retorted; "or, at least,that phase of human nature I have aimed at. Those indifferent rich menare very hard to move and you must figuratively hit them squarely betweenthe eyes to make them even wink."They were silent for a time, considering this novel aspect of the picturebusiness. Then Beth asked:"Can you tell us, sir, when and where we shall be able to see thispicture?""It will be released next Monday.""What does that mean?""It means that we, as manufacturers, supply certain agencies in all thelarge cities, who in turn rent our films to the many picture theatres.When a picture is ready, we send copies to all our agencies and set aday when they may release it, or give it to their customers to use. Inthis way the picture will be shown in all parts of the United States onthe same day--in this case, next Monday.""Isn't that very quick?""Yes. The picture we took yesterday will to-night be shipped, allcomplete and ready to run, to forty-four different centers.""And will any picture theatre in Hollywood or Los Angeles show it?""Certainly. It will be at the Globe Theatre in Los Angeles and at theIsis Theatre in Hollywood, for the entire week.""We shall certainly see it," announced Uncle John.When Mr. Werner had gone they conversed for some time on the subject ofmotion pictures, and the man's remarkable statement concerning them."I had no idea," Beth confessed, "that the industry of making pictures isso extensive and involves so much thought and detail.""And money," added Uncle John. "It must be a great expense just toemploy that army of actors.""I suppose Mr. Werner, being a theatrical man, has drawn the long bow inhis effort to impress us," said Patsy. "I've been thinking over some ofthe pictures I've seen recently and I can't imagine a moral, howeverintangible or illusive, in connection with any of them. But perhaps Iwasn't observant enough. The next time I go to a picture show I shallstudy the plays more carefully."CHAPTER IIIAN ATTRACTIVE GIRLOn Saturday they were treated to a genuine surprise, for when the omnibusdrew up before the hotel entrance it brought Arthur Weldon and hisgirl-wife, Louise, who was Uncle John's eldest niece. It also brought"the Cherub," a wee dimpled baby hugged closely in the arms of Inez, itsMexican nurse.Patsy and Beth shrieked in ecstasy as they rushed forward to smother"Toodlums," as they irreverently called the Cherub, with kisses. Inez, ahandsome, dark-eyed girl, relinquished her burden cheerfully to the twoadoring "aunties," while Uncle John kissed Louise and warmly shook thehand of her youthful husband."What in the world induced you to abandon your beloved ranch?" inquiredMr. Merrick."Don't ask me, sir!" replied Arthur, laughing at the elder gentleman'sastonishment. He was a trim young fellow, with a clean-cut, manly faceand frank, winning manners."It's sort of between hay and grass with us, you know," he explained."Walnuts all marketed and oranges not ready for the pickers. All ourneighbors have migrated, this way or that, for their regular wintervacations, and after you all left, Louise and I began to feel lonely. Soat breakfast this morning we decided to flit. At ten o'clock we caughtthe express, and here we are--in time for lunch. I hope it's ready,Uncle John."It was; but they must get their rooms and settle the baby in her newquarters before venturing to enter the dining room. So they were late forthe midday meal and found themselves almost the only guests in the greatdining hall.As they sat at table, chatting merrily together, Arthur asked:"What are you staring at, Patsy?""A lovely girl," said she. "One of the loveliest girls I have ever seen.Don't look around, Arthur; it might attract their attention.""How many girls are there?""Two; and a lady who seems to be their mother. The other girl is pretty,too, but much younger than her sister--or friend, for they do notresemble one another much. They came in a few minutes ago and are seatedat the table in the opposite corner.""New arrivals, I suppose," remarked Uncle John, who from his positioncould observe the group."No," said Patsy; "their waitress seems to know them well. But I've neverbefore seen them in the hotel.""We are always early at meal time," explained Beth, "and to-day thesepeople are certainly late. But they \_are\_ pretty girls, Patsy. For once Iconcur in your judgment.""You arouse my curiosity," said Arthur, speaking quietly, so as not to beoverheard in the far corner. "If I hear more ecstatic praises of thesegirls I shall turn around and stare them out of countenance.""Don't," said Louise. "I'm glad your back is toward them, Arthur, for itpreserves you from the temptation to flirt.""Oh, as for that, I do not need to turn around in order to see prettygirls," he replied."Thank you, Arthur," said Patsy, making a face at him. "Look me over allyou like, and flirt if you want to. I'm sure Louise won't object.""Really, Patsy, you're not bad to look at," he retorted, eyeing hercritically. "Aside from your red hair, the pug nose and the freckles, youhave many excellent qualities. If you didn't squint--""Squint!""What do you call that affection of your eyes?""That," she said, calmly eating her dessert, "was a glance ofscorn--burning, bitter scorn!""I maintain it was a squint," declared Arthur."That isn't her only expression," announced Uncle John, who loved theselittle exchanges of good-humored banter. "On Monday I will show you Patsyas a terror-stricken damsel in distress.""Also Beth, still more distressful," added Patsy; and then they toldLouise and Arthur about the picture."Fine!" he cried. "I'm deeply gratified that my own relatives--""By marriage.""I am gratified that my secondhand cousins have been so highly honored.I'd rather see a good moving picture than the best play ever produced.""You'll see a good one this time," asserted Patsy, "for we are thestars.""I think that unscrupulous Mr. Werner deserves a reprimand," said Louise."Oh, he apologized," explained Beth. "But I'm sure he'd take the sameliberty again if he had the chance.""He admits that his love of art destroys his sense of propriety,"said Patsy.As they rose from the table Arthur deliberately turned to view the partyin the other corner, and then to the amazement of his friends he coollywalked over and shook the elder lady's hand with evident pleasure. Nextmoment he was being introduced to the two girls. The three cousins andtheir Uncle John walked out of the dining hall and awaited Arthur Weldonin the lobby."It is some old acquaintance, of course," said Louise. "Arthur knows atremendous lot of people and remembers everyone he ever has met."When he rejoined them he brought the lady and the two beautiful girlswith him, introducing Mrs. Montrose as one of his former acquaintances inNew York, where she had been a near neighbor to the Weldons. The girls,who proved to be her nieces instead of her daughters, were named Maud andFlorence Stanton, Maud being about eighteen years of age and Florenceperhaps fifteen. Maud's beauty was striking, as proved by Patsy'sadmiration at first sight; Florence was smaller and darker, yet verydainty and witching, like a Dresden shepherdess.The sisters proved rather shy at this first meeting, being content toexchange smiles with the other girls, but their aunt was an easyconversationalist and rambled on about the delights of Hollywood andsouthern California until they were all in a friendly mood. Among otherthings Mrs. Montrose volunteered the statement that they had been at thehotel for several weeks, but aside from that remark disclosed little oftheir personal affairs. Presently the three left the hotel and droveaway in an automobile, having expressed a wish to meet their new friendsagain and become better acquainted with them."I was almost startled at running across Mrs. Montrose out here," saidArthur. "After father's death, when I gave up the old home, I lost trackof the Montroses; but I seem to remember that old Montrose went to thehappy hunting grounds and left a widow, but no children. I imagine thesepeople are wealthy, as Montrose was considered a successful banker. I'llwrite to Duggins and inquire about them.""Duggins seems to know everything," remarked Louise."He keeps pretty good track of New York people, especially of the oldfamilies," replied her husband."I can't see what their history matters to us," observed Patsy. "I liketo take folks as I find them, without regard to their antecedents orfinances. Certainly those Stanton girls are wonderfully attractive andladylike."But now the baby claimed their attention and the rest of that day waspassed in "visiting" and cuddling the wee Toodlums, who seemed to knowher girl aunties and greeted them with friendly coos and dimpled smiles.On Sunday they took a motor trip through the mountain boulevards and ontheir way home passed the extensive enclosure of the Continental FilmCompany. A thriving village has been built up at this place, known asFilm City, for many of those employed by the firm prefer to live close totheir work. Another large "plant" of the same concern is located in theheart of Hollywood.As they passed through Film City Uncle John remarked:"We are invited to visit this place and witness the making of a motionpicture. I believe it would prove an interesting sight.""Let us go, by all means," replied Arthur. "I am greatly interested inthis new industry, which seems to me to be still in its infancy. Thedevelopment of the moving picture is bound to lead to some remarkablethings in the future, I firmly believe.""So do I," said Uncle John. "They'll combine the phonograph with thepictures, for one thing, so that the players, instead of being silent,will speak as clearly as in real life. Then we'll have the grand operas,by all the most famous singers, elaborately staged; and we'll be able tosee and hear them for ten cents, instead of ten dollars. It will be thesame with the plays of the greatest actors.""That would open up a curious complication," asserted Louise. "The operaswould only be given once, before the camera and the recorder. Then whatwould happen to all the high-priced opera singers?""They would draw royalties on all their productions, instead ofsalaries," replied Arthur."Rather easy for the great artists!" observed Patsy. "Oneperformance--and the money rolling in for all time to come.""Well, they deserve it," declared Beth. "And think of what the publicwould gain! Instead of having to suffer during the performances ofincompetent actors and singers, as we do to-day, the whole world would beable to see and hear the best talent of the ages for an insignificantfee. I hope your prediction will come true, Uncle John.""It's bound to," he replied, with confidence. "I've read somewhere thatEdison and others have been working on these lines for years, andalthough they haven't succeeded yet, anything possible in mechanics isbound to be produced in time."CHAPTER IVAUNT JANE'S NIECESThe picture, which was entitled "The Sacrifice," proved--to use Patsy'swords--"a howling success." On Monday afternoons the little theatres areseldom crowded, so Mr. Merrick's party secured choice seats where theycould observe every detail of the photography. The girls could not waitfor a later performance, so eager were they to see themselves in a motionpicture, nor were they disappointed to find they were a mere incident inthe long roll of film.The story of the photo-play was gripping in its intensity, and since Mr.Werner had clearly explained the lesson it conveyed, they followed theplot with rapt attention. In the last scene their entrance and exit wastransitory, but they were obliged to admit that their features werereally expressive of fear. The next instant the wall fell, burying itsvictims, and this rather bewildered them when they remembered that fullyhalf an hour had elapsed while the dummies were being placed in position,the real people removed from danger and preparations made to topple overthe wall from the inside of the building. But the camera had beeninactive during that period and so cleverly had the parts of the picturebeen united that no pause whatever was observable to the spectators."My! what a stuffy place," exclaimed Louise, as they emerged into thelight of day. "I cannot understand why it is necessary to have thesemoving picture theatres so gloomy and uncomfortable.""It isn't necessary," replied Uncle John. "It's merely a habit thebuilders have acquired. There seemed to be a total lack of ventilation inthat place.""No one expects much for ten cents," Arthur reminded him. "If thepictures are good the public will stand for anything in the matter ofdiscomfort.""Did you notice," said Patsy, slowly, "how many children there were inthat theatre?""Yes, indeed," answered Beth. "The pictures seem to be an idealamusement for children. I do not suppose they can understand all thedramas and love stories, but the pictures entertain them, whatever thetheme may be.""They are not allowed to go unless accompanied by a parent or guardian,"Arthur stated; "but I saw a group of eleven under the care of onecheery-looking old lady, so I suppose the little ones evade the law inthat way."On Tuesday forenoon they drove to the office of the Continental FilmManufacturing Company and inquired for Mr. Werner. Every approach to theinterior of the big stockade was closely guarded in order to prevent thecurious from intruding, but Werner at once hurried out to greet them andescorted them into the enclosure."You are just in time," said he, "to witness one of the scenes in ourgreat picture, 'Samson and Delilah.' They're getting it on now, so youmust hurry if you want to see the work. It's really the biggest thing ourfirm has ever turned out."They passed a group of low but extensive frame buildings, threadingtheir way between them until finally they emerged within a large openspace where huge frames covered with canvas were propped up in broaddaylight and apparently in great disorder. Huddled here and there weregroups of people wearing Oriental costumes of the Bible days, theirskins stained brown, the make-up on their faces showing hideously in thestrong light. A herd of meek donkeys, bearing burdens of faggots, wastethered near by."Follow me closely," cautioned their guide, "so you will not step overthe 'dead line' and get yourselves in the picture.""What is the 'dead line'?" inquired Uncle John."The line that marks the limit of the camera's scope. Outside of that youare quite safe. You will notice it is plainly marked in chalk."They passed around to the front and were amazed at the picture disclosedby the reverse of the gaunt, skeleton-like framework. For now wasdisplayed Solomon's temple in all its magnificence, with huge pillarssupporting a roof that seemed as solid and substantial as stone andmortar could make it.The perspective was wonderful, for they could follow a line of visionthrough the broad temple to a passage beyond, along which wasapproaching a procession of priests, headed by dancing girls andmusicians beating tomtoms and playing upon reeds. The entire scene wasbarbaric in its splendor and so impressive that they watched itspellbound, awed and silent.Yet here beside them was the motion-picture camera, clicking steadilyaway and operated by a man in his shirt-sleeves who watched the scenewith sharp eyes, now frowning and now nodding approval. Beside him attimes, but rushing from one point to another just outside the chalk-marksthat indicated the "dead line," was the director of this production, whoshouted commands in a nervous, excited manner and raged and tore his hairwhen anything went wrong.Something went very wrong presently, for the director blew a shrill blaston his whistle and suddenly everything stopped short. The camera manthrew a cloth over his lenses and calmly lighted a cigarette. Theprocession halted in uncertainty and became a disordered rabble; but thedirector sprang into the open space and shouted at his actors andactresses in evident ill temper."There it is again!" he cried. "Five hundred feet of good film, ruined bythe stupidity of one person. Get out of that priest's robe, Higgins, andlet Jackson take your place. Where's Jackson, anyhow?""Here," answered a young man, stepping out from a group of spectators."Do you know the work? Can you lead that procession into the temple sothey will leave room for Delilah to enter, and not crowd her off theplatform?" asked the director.Jackson merely nodded as he scrambled into the priest's robe which thediscomfited Higgins resigned to him. Evidently the bungling actor was indisgrace, for he was told to go to the office and get his pay and then"clear out."So now the procession was sent back into the passage and rearranged inproper order; the signal was given to begin and in an instant the camerarenewed its clicking as the operator slowly revolved the handle thatcarried the long strip of film past the lenses. The musicians played, thegirls danced, the procession slowly emerged from the passage.This time it advanced properly and came to a halt just at the head of thestaircase leading up to the entrance to the temple."Delilah!" shouted the director, and now appeared a beautiful girl whomade a low obeisance to the chief priest."Why--goodness me!" cried Patsy. "It's--it's Maud Stanton!""Nonsense!" returned Arthur, sharply; and then he looked again and drew along breath; for unless it were indeed the elder niece of Mrs. Montrose,there must be two girls in the world identically alike.Mr. Werner settled the question by quietly remarking: "Of course it'sMaud Stanton. She's our bright, particular star, you know, and the publicwould resent it if she didn't appear as the heroine of all our bestpictures.""An actress!" exclaimed Arthur. "I--I didn't know that.""She and her sister Flo are engaged by us regularly," replied Werner,with an air of pride. "They cost us a lot of money, as you may imagine,but we can't afford to let any competitor have them."If Arthur Weldon felt any chagrin at this, discovery it was not in theleast shared by the others of his party. Beth was admiring the younggirl's grace and dignity; Patsy was delighted by her loveliness in thefleecy, picturesque costume she wore; Louise felt pride in the fact thatshe had been introduced to "a real actress," while Uncle John wonderedwhat adverse fortune had driven this beautiful, refined girl to posebefore a motion picture camera.They soon discovered Florence Stanton in the picture, too, among thedancing girls; so there could be no mistake of identity. Mrs. Montrosewas not visible during the performance; but afterward, when Samson hadpulled down the pillars of the temple and it had fallen in ruins, whenthe "show" was over and the actors trooping away to theirdressing-rooms, then the visitors were ushered into the main office ofthe establishment to meet Mr. Goldstein, the manager, and seated by thewindow was the aunt of the two girls, placidly reading a book. She lookedup with a smile as they entered."Did you see the play?" she asked. "And isn't it grand and impressive? Ihope you liked Maud's 'Delilah.' The poor child has worked so hard tocreate the character."They assured her the girl was perfect in her part, after which Mr.Merrick added: "I'm astonished you did not go out to see the playyourself."She laughed at his earnestness."It's an old story to me," she replied, "for I have watched Maud rehearseher part many times. Also it is probable that some--if not all--of thescenes of 'Samson and Delilah' will be taken over and over, half a dozentimes, before the director is satisfied.""The performance seemed quite perfect to-day," said Uncle John. "Isuppose, Mrs. Montrose, you do not--er--er--act, yourself?""Oh. I have helped out, sometimes, when a matronly personation isrequired, but my regular duties keep me busily engaged in the office.""May we ask what those duties are?" said Louise."I'm the reader of scenarios.""Dear me!" exclaimed Patsy. "I'm sure we don't know any more than wedid before.""A 'scenario,'" said the lady, "is a description of the plot for aphoto-play. It is in manuscript form and hundreds of scenarios aresubmitted to us from every part of the country, and by people in allwalks of life.""I shouldn't think you could use so many," said Beth."We can't, my dear," responded the lady, laughing at her simplicity. "Themajority of the scenarios we receive haven't a single idea that is worthconsidering. In most of the others the ideas are stolen, or duplicatedfrom some other picture-play. Once in a while, however, we find a plot ofreal merit, and then we accept it and pay the author for it.""How much?" inquired Arthur."So little that I am ashamed to tell you. Ideas are the foundation ofour business, and without them we could not make successful films; butwhen Mr. Goldstein buys an idea he pays as little for it as possible, andthe poor author usually accepts the pittance with gratitude.""We were a little surprised," Uncle John ventured to say, "to find youconnected with this--er--institution. I suppose it's all right; but thosegirls--your nieces--""Yes, they are motion picture actresses, and I am a play reader. It isour profession, Mr. Merrick, and we earn our living in this way. To befrank with you, I am very proud of the fact that my girls are popularfavorites with the picture theatre audiences.""That they are, Mrs. Montrose!" said Goldstein, the manager, a leanlittle man, earnestly endorsing the statement; "and that makes them thehighest priced stars in all our fourteen companies of players. Butthey're worth every cent we pay 'em--and I hope ev'rybody's satisfied."Mrs. Montrose paid little deference to the manager. "He is only a detailman," she explained when Goldstein had gone way, "but of course it isnecessary to keep these vast and diverse interests running smoothly, andthe manager has enough details on his mind to drive an ordinary mortalcrazy. The successful scenario writers, who conceive our best plays, arethe real heart of this business, and the next to them in importance arethe directors, or producers, who exercise marvelous cleverness in stagingthe work of the authors.""I suppose," remarked Arthur Weldon, "it is very like a theatre.""Not so like as you might imagine," was the reply. "We employ scenery,costumes and actors, but not in ways theatrical, for all our work issubservient to the camera's eye and the requirements of photography."While they were conversing, the two Stanton girls entered the office,having exchanged their costumes for street clothes and washed the make-upfrom their faces, which were now fresh and animated."Oh, Aunt Jane!" cried Flo, running to Mrs. Montrose, "we're dismissedfor the day. Mr. McNeil intends to develop the films before we doanything more, and Maud and I want to spend the afternoon at the beach."The lady smiled indulgently as Maud quietly supported her sister'sappeal, the while greeting her acquaintances of yesterday with her sweet,girlish charm of manner."A half-holiday is quite unusual with us," she explained, "for it is thecustom to hold us in readiness from sunrise to sunset, in case ourservices are required. An actress in a motion picture concern is theslave of her profession, but we don't mind the work so much as we dowaiting around for orders.""Suppose we all drive to the beach together," suggested Mr. Merrick. "Wewill try to help you enjoy your holiday and it will be a rich treat to usto have your society.""Yes, indeed!" exclaimed Patsy Doyle. "I'm just crazy over this motionpicture business and I want to ask you girls a thousand questionsabout it."They graciously agreed to the proposition and at once made preparationsfor the drive. Mrs. Montrose had her own automobile, but the partydivided, the four young girls being driven by Mr. Merrick's chauffeur inhis machine, while Uncle John, Arthur and Louise rode with Mrs. Montrose.It did not take the young people long to become acquainted, and the airof restraint that naturally obtained in the first moments gradually woreaway. They were all in good spirits, anticipating a jolly afternoon atthe ocean resorts, so when they discovered themselves to be congenialcompanions they lost no time in stilted phrases but were soon chatteringaway as if they had known one another for years.CHAPTER VA THRILLING RESCUE"It must be fine to be an actress," said Patsy Doyle, with enthusiasm."If I had the face or the figure or the ability--all of which I sadlylack--I'd be an actress myself.""I suppose," replied Maud Stanton, thoughtfully, "it is as good aprofession for a girl as any other. But the life is not one of play, byany means. We work very hard during the rehearsals and often I havebecome so weary that I feared I would drop to the ground in sheerexhaustion. Flo did faint, once or twice, during our first engagementwith the Pictograph Company; but we find our present employers moreconsiderate, and we have gained more importance than we had in thebeginning.""It is dreadfully confining, though," remarked Florence, with a sigh."Our hours are worse than those of shopgirls, for the early morning sunis the best part of the day for our work. Often we are obliged to reachthe studio at dawn. To be sure, we have the evenings to ourselves, but weare then too tired to enjoy them.""Did you choose, this profession for amusement, or from necessity?"inquired Beth, wondering if the question sounded impertinent."Stern necessity," answered Maud with a smile. "We had our living toearn.""Could not your aunt assist you?" asked Patsy."Aunt Jane? Why, she is as poor as we are.""Arthur Weldon used to know the Montroses," said Beth, "and be believedMr. Montrose left his widow a fortune.""He didn't leave a penny," asserted Florence. "Uncle was a stock gambler,and when he died he was discovered to be bankrupt.""I must explain to you," said Maud, "that our father and mother were bothkilled years ago in a dreadful automobile accident. Father left a smallfortune to be divided between Flo and me, and appointed Uncle George ourguardian. We were sent to a girls' school and nicely provided for untiluncle's death, when it was found he had squandered our little inheritanceas well as his own money.""That was hard luck," said Patsy sympathetically."I am not so sure of that," returned the girl musingly. "Perhaps we arehappier now than if we had money. Our poverty gave us dear Aunt Jane fora companion and brought us into a field of endeavor that has proveddelightful.""But how in the world did you ever decide to become actresses, when somany better occupations are open to women?" inquired Beth."Are other occupations so much better? A motion picture actress is quitedifferent from the stage variety, you know. Our performances are allprivately conducted, and although the camera is recording our actions itis not like being stared at by a thousand critical eyes.""A million eyes stare at the pictures," asserted Patsy."But we are not there to be embarrassed by them," laughed Flo."We have but one person to please," continued Maud, "and that is thedirector. If at first the scene is not satisfactory, we play it again andagain, until it is quite correct. To us this striving for perfection isan art. We actors are mere details of an artistic conception. We have nowbeen in Hollywood for five months, yet few people who casually notice usat the hotel or on the streets have any idea that we act for the'movies.' Sometimes we appear publicly in the streets, in characteristiccostume, and proceed to enact our play where all may observe us; butthere are so many picture companies in this neighborhood that we are nolonger looked upon as a novelty and the people passing by pay littleattention to us.""Were you in that picture of the falling wall?" asked Beth."No. We were rehearsing for 'Samson and Delilah.' But sometimes weare called upon to do curious things. One night, not long ago, a bigresidence burned down in the foothills back of our hotel. At thefirst alarm of fire one of the directors wakened us and we jumpedinto our clothes and were whisked in an automobile to the scene ofthe conflagration. The camera-man was already there and, while wehad to dodge the fire-fighters and the hose men, both Flo and Imanaged to be 'saved from the flames' by some of our actors--notonce, but several times.""It must have been thrilling!" gasped Patsy."It was exciting, at the moment," confessed Maud. "One of the picturesproved very dramatic, so an author wrote a story where at the climax agirl was rescued from the flames by her lover, and we took our time toact the several scenes that led up to the fire. The completed picture wasa great success, I'm told.""Those directors must be wonderfully enterprising fellows," said Beth."They are, indeed, constantly on the lookout for effects. Every incidentthat occurs in real life is promptly taken advantage of. The camera-menare everywhere, waiting for their chance. Often their pictures prove ofno value and are destroyed, but sometimes the scenes they catch are veryuseful to work into a picture play. A few weeks ago I was shipwrecked onthe ocean and saved by clinging to a raft. That was not pleasant and Icaught a severe cold by being in the water too long; but I was chosenbecause I can swim. Such incidents are merely a part of our game--a gamewhere personal comfort is frequently sacrificed to art. Once Flo leapedover a thirty-foot precipice and was caught in a net at the bottom. Thenet was, of course, necessary, but when the picture was displayed herterrible leap was followed by a view of her mangled body at the bottom ofthe canyon.""How did they manage to do that?" asked Patsy."Stopped the camera, cut off the piece of film showing her caught by thenet, and substituted a strip on which was recorded Flo's body lying amongthe jagged rocks, where it had been carefully and comfortably arranged.We do a lot of deceptive tricks of that sort, and sometimes I myselfmarvel at the natural effects obtained.""It must be more interesting than stage acting.""I believe it is. But we've never been on the stage," said Maud."How did you happen to get started in such a queer business?"inquired Patsy."Well, after we found ourselves poor and without resources we beganwondering what we could do to earn money. A friend of Aunt Jane's knew amotion picture maker who wanted fifty young girls for a certain pictureand would pay each of them five dollars a day. Flo and I applied for thejob and earned thirty dollars between us; but then the manager thought hewould like to employ us regularly, and with Auntie to chaperon us weaccepted the engagement. The first few weeks we merely appeared among therabble--something like chorus girls, you see--but then we were givensmall parts and afterward more important ones. When we discovered our ownvalue to the film makers Auntie managed to get us better engagements, sowe've acted for three different concerns during the past two years, whileAunt Jane has become noted as a clever judge of the merits of scenarios.""Do both of you girls play star parts?" Beth inquired."Usually. Flo is considered the best 'child actress' in the business, butwhen there is no child part she makes herself useful in all sorts ofways. To-day, for instance, you saw her among the dancing girls. I dothe ingenue, or young girl parts, which are very popular just now. I didnot want to act 'Delilah,' for I thought I was not old enough; but Mr.McNeil wanted me in the picture and so I made myself took as mature aspossible.""You were ideal!" cried Patsy, admiringly.The young girl blushed at this praise, but said deprecatingly:"I doubt if I could ever be a really great actress; but then, I do notintend to act for many more years. Our salary is very liberal at present,as Goldstein grudgingly informed you, and we are saving money. As soon aswe think we have acquired enough to live on comfortably we shall abandonacting and live as other girls do.""The fact is," added Flo, "no one will employ us when we have lost ouryouth. So we are taking advantage of these few fleeting years to make haywhile the sun shines.""Do many stage actresses go into the motion picture business?"asked Beth."A few, but all are not competent," replied Maud. "In the 'silent drama'facial expression and the art of conveying information by a gesture is ofparamount importance. In other words, action must do the talking andexplain everything. I am told that some comedians, like 'Bunny' andSterling Mace, were failures on the stage, yet in motion pictures theyare great favorites. On the other hand, some famous stage actors can donothing in motion pictures."On their arrival at Santa Monica Mr. Merrick invited the party to be hisguests at luncheon, which was served in a cosy restaurant overlookingthe ocean. And then, although at this season it was bleak winter backEast, all but Uncle John and Aunt Jane took a bath in the surf of theblue Pacific, mingling with hundreds of other bathers who were enjoyingthe sport.Mrs. Montrose and Uncle John sat on the sands to watch the merry scene,while the young people swam and splashed about, and they seemed--as MissPatsy slyly observed--to "get on very well together.""And that is very creditable to your aunt," she observed to Maud Stanton,who was beside her in the water, "for Uncle John is rather shy in thesociety of ladies and they find him hard to entertain.""He seems like a dear old gentleman," said Maud."He is, indeed, the dearest in all the world. And, if he likes your AuntJane, that is evidence that she is all right, too; for Uncle John'sintuition never fails him in the selection of friends. He--""Dear me!" cried Maud; "there's someone in trouble, I'm sure."She was looking out across the waves, which were fairly high to-day, andPatsy saw her lean forward and strike out to sea with strokes ofremarkable swiftness. Bathers were scattered thickly along the coast, butonly a few had ventured far out beyond the life-lines, so Patsy naturallysought an explanation by gazing at those farthest out. At first she waspuzzled, for all the venturesome seemed to be swimming strongly andcomposedly; but presently a dark form showed on the crest of a wave--astruggling form that tossed up its arms despairingly and thendisappeared.She looked for Maud Stanton and saw her swimming straight out, but stilla long way from the person in distress. Then Patsy, always quick-wittedin emergencies, made a dash for the shore where a small boat was drawn upon the beach."Come, Arthur, quick!" she cried to the young man, who was calmly wadingnear the beach, and he caught the note of terror in her voice andhastened to help push the little craft into the water."Jump in!" she panted, "and row as hard as you ever rowed in allyour life."Young Weldon was prompt to obey. He asked no useless questions but,realizing that someone was in danger, he pulled a strong, steady oar andlet Patsy steer the boat.The laughter and merry shouts of the bathers, who were all unaware that atragedy was developing close at hand, rang in the girl's ears as shepeered eagerly ahead for a sign to guide her. Now she espied MaudStanton, far out beyond the others, circling around and diving into thiswave or that as it passed her."Whoever it was," she muttered, half aloud, "is surely done for by thistime. Hurry, Arthur! I'm afraid Maud has exhausted all her strength."But just then Maud dived again and when she reappeared was holding fastto something dark and inanimate. A moment later the boat swept to herside and she said:"Get him aboard, if you can. Don't mind me; I'm all right."Arthur reached down and drew a slight, boyish form over the gunwale,while Patsy clasped Maud's hand and helped the girl over the side. Shewas still strong, but panted from her exertions to support the boy."Who is it?" inquired Patsy, as Arthur headed the boat for the shore.Maud shook her head, leaning forward to look at the face of the rescuedone for the first time."I've never seen him before," she said. "Isn't it too bad that I reachedhim too late?"Patsy nodded, gazing at the white, delicate profile of the young fellowas he lay lifeless at her feet. Too late, undoubtedly; and he was a mereboy, with all the interests of life just unfolding for him.Their adventure had now been noticed by some of the bathers, who crowdedforward to meet the boat as it grounded on the beach. Uncle John, alwayskeeping an eye on his beloved nieces, had noted every detail of therescue and as a dozen strong men pulled the boat across the sands, beyondthe reach of the surf, the Merrick automobile rolled up beside it."Now, then!" cried the little man energetically, and with the assistanceof his chauffeur he lifted the lifeless form into the car."The hospital?" said Patsy, nodding approval."Yes," he answered. "No; you girls can't come in your wet bathing suits.I'll do all that can be done."Even as he spoke the machine whirled away, and looking after it Maudsaid, shaking her head mildly: "I fear he's right. Little can be done forthe poor fellow now.""Oh, lots can be done," returned Patsy; "but perhaps it won't bring himback to life. Anyhow, it's right to make every attempt, as promptly aspossible, and certainly Uncle John didn't waste any time."Beth and Florence now joined them and Louise came running up to ask eagerquestions."Who was it, Patsy?""We don't know. Some poor fellow who got too far out and had a cramp,perhaps. Or his strength may have given out. He didn't seem very rugged.""He was struggling when first I saw him," said Maud. "It seemed dreadfulto watch the poor boy drowning when hundreds of people were laughing andplaying in the water within earshot of him.""That was the trouble," declared Arthur Weldon. "All those people wereintent on themselves and made so much noise that his cries for help couldnot be heard."The tragedy, now generally known, had the effect of sobering the bathersand most of them left the water and trooped to the bathhouses to dress.Mrs. Montrose advised the girls to get their clothes on, as all wereshivering--partly from nervousness--in their wet bathing suits.They were ready an hour before Mr. Merrick returned, and his long absencesurprised them until they saw his smiling face as he drove up in his car.It gave them a thrill of hope as in chorus they cried:"Well--Uncle John?""I think he will live," returned the little man, with an air of greatsatisfaction. "Anyway, he's alive and breathing now, and the doctors saythere's every reason to expect a rapid recovery.""Who is he?" they asked, crowding around him."A. Jones.""A--what?" This from Patsy, in a doubtful tone."Jones. A. Jones.""Why, he must have given you an assumed name!""He didn't give us any name. As soon as he recovered consciousness hefell asleep, and I left him slumbering as peacefully as a baby. But wewent through his clothes, hoping to get a trace of his friends, so theycould be notified. His bathing suit is his own, not rented, and the name'A. Jones' is embroidered on tape and sewn to each piece. Also the key tobathhouse number twenty-six was tied to his wrist. The superintendentsent a man for his clothing and we examined that, too. The letters 'A.J.'were stamped in gold on his pocketbook, and in his cardcase were a numberof cards engraved: 'A. Jones, Sangoa.' But there were no letters, or anyother papers.""Where is Sangoa?" inquired Beth."No one seems to know," confessed Uncle John. "There was plenty of moneyin his pocket-book and he has a valuable watch, but no other jewelry.His clothes were made by a Los Angeles tailor, but when they called himup by telephone he knew nothing about his customer except that he hadordered his suit and paid for it in advance. He called for it three daysago, and carried it away with him, so we have no clue to the boy'sdwelling place.""Isn't that a little strange--perhaps a little suspicious?" askedMrs. Montrose."I think not, ma'am," answered Mr. Merrick. "We made theseinvestigations at the time we still feared he would die, so as tocommunicate with any friends or relatives he might have. But after hepassed the crisis so well and fell asleep, the hospital people stoppedworrying about him. He seems like any ordinary, well-to-do youngfellow, and a couple of days in the hospital ought to put him upon hisfeet again.""But Sangoa, Uncle; is that a town or a country?""Some out-of-the-way village, I suppose. People are here from every crackand corner of America, you know.""It sounds a bit Spanish," commented Arthur. "Maybe he is from Mexico.""Maybe," agreed Uncle John. "Anyhow, Maud has saved his life, and if it'sworth anything to him he ought to be grateful.""Never mind that," said Maud, flushing prettily with embarrassment as alleyes turned upon her, "I'm glad I noticed him in time; but now that he isall right he need never know who it was that rescued him. And, for thatmatter, sir, Patsy Doyle and Mr. Weldon did as much for him as I.Perhaps they saved us both, while your promptness in getting him to thehospital was the main factor in saving his life.""Well, it's all marked down in the hospital books," remarked Uncle John."I had to tell the whole story, you see, as a matter of record, and allour names are there, so none can escape the credit due her--or him.""In truth," said Mrs. Montrose with a smile, "it really required four ofyou to save one slender boy.""Yes, he needed a lot of saving," laughed Flo. "But," her pretty facegrowing more serious, "I believe it was all Fate, and nothing else. Hadwe not come to the beach this afternoon, the boy might have drowned; so,as I suggested the trip, I'm going to take a little credit myself.""Looking at it in that light," said Patsy, "the moving picture man savedthe boy's life by giving you a half-holiday."This caused a laugh, for their spirits were now restored to normal. Tocelebrate the occasion, Mr. Merrick proposed to take them all into LosAngeles to dine at a "swell restaurant" before returning to Hollywood.This little event, in conjunction with the afternoon's adventure, madethem all more intimate, so that when they finally reached home andseparated for the night they felt like old friends rather than recentacquaintances.CHAPTER VIA. JONESThere was work for the Stanton girls at the "film factory," as theycalled it, next morning, so they had left the hotel before Mr. Merrick'sparty assembled at the breakfast table."I must telephone the Santa Monica hospital and find out how our patientis," remarked Uncle John, when the meal was over; but presently hereturned from the telephone booth with a puzzled expression upon hisface. "A. Jones has disappeared!" he announced."Disappeared! What do you mean, Uncle?" asked Beth."He woke early and declared he was himself again, paid his bill, said'good morning' to the hospital superintendent and walked away. Hewouldn't answer questions, but kept asking them. The nurse showed him thebook with the record of how he was saved, but she couldn't induce him tosay who he was, where he came from nor where he was going. Seems a littlequeer, doesn't it?"They all confessed that it did."However," said Patsy Doyle, "I'm glad he recovered, and I'm sure Maudwill be when she hears the news. The boy has a perfect right to keep hisown counsel, but he might have had the grace to tell us what that initial'A.' stands for, and where on earth Sangoa is.""I've been inquiring about Sangoa," announced Arthur, just then joiningthe group, "and no one seems wiser than we are. There's no record of sucha town or state in Mexico, or in the United States--so far as I candiscover. The clerk has sent for a map of Alaska, and perhaps we'll findSangoa there.""What does it matter?" inquired Louise."Why, we don't like to be stumped," asserted Patsy, "that's all. Here isa young man from Sangoa, and--""Really," interrupted Beth, who was gazing through the window, "I believehere \_is\_ the young man from Sangoa!""Where?" they all cried, crowding forward to look."Coming up the walk. See! Isn't that the same mysterious individual whoselife Maud saved?""That's the identical mystery," declared Uncle John. "I suppose he hascome here to look us up and thank us.""Then, for heaven's sake, girls, pump him and find out where Sangoa is,"said Arthur hastily, and the next moment a bell boy approached theirparty with a card.They looked at the young fellow curiously as he came toward them. Heseemed not more than eighteen years of age and his thin features wore atired expression that was not the result of his recent experience butproved to be habitual. His manner was not languid, however, but rathercomposed; at the same time he held himself alert, as if constantly on hisguard. His dress was simple but in good taste and he displayed noembarrassment as he greeted the party with a low bow."Ah," said Uncle John, heartily shaking his hand, "I am delighted tofind you so perfectly recovered."A slight smile, sad and deprecating, flickered for an instant over hislips. It gave the boyish face a patient and rather sweet expression as heslowly replied:"I am quite myself to-day, sir, and I have come to assure you of mygratitude for your rescue of me yesterday. Perhaps it wasn't worth allyour bother, but since you generously took the trouble to save me, theleast I can do is to tender you my thanks." Here he looked from one toanother of the three girls and continued: "Please tell me which younglady swam to my assistance.""Oh, it was none of us," said Patsy. "Miss Stanton--Maud Stanton--swamout to you, when she noticed you were struggling, and kept you afloatuntil we--until help came.""And Miss Stanton is not here?""Not at present, although she is staying at this hotel."He gravely considered this information for a moment. As he stood there,swaying slightly, he appeared so frail and delicate that Uncle Johnseized his arm and made him sit down in a big easy chair. The boy sighed,took a memorandum from his pocket and glanced at it."Miss Doyle and Mr. Weldon pulled out in a boat and rescued both MissStanton and me, just as we were about to sink," he said. "Tell me,please, if either Miss Doyle or Mr. Weldon is present.""I am Arthur Weldon," said that young gentleman; "but I was merely theboatman, under command of Miss Doyle, whom I beg to present to you."A. Jones looked earnestly into Patsy's face. Holding out his hand hesaid with his odd smile: "Thank you." Then he turned to shake Arthur'shand, after which he continued: "I also am indebted to Mr. Merrick forcarrying me to the hospital. The doctor told me that only this promptaction enabled them to resuscitate me at all. And now, I believe itwould be courteous for me to tell you who I am and how I came to be insuch dire peril."He paused to look around him questioningly and the interest on everyface was clearly evident. Arthur took this opportunity to introduce Jonesto Louise and Beth and then they all sat down again. Said Uncle John tothe stranger, in his frank and friendly way:"Tell us as much or as little as you like, my boy. We are not undulyinquisitive, I assure you.""Thank you, sir. I am an American, and my name is Jones. That is, I mayclaim American parentage, although I was born upon a scarcely knownisland in the Pacific which my father purchased from the government ofUruguay some thirty years ago.""Sangoa?" asked Arthur.He seemed surprised at the question but readily answered:"Yes; Sangoa. My father was a grandnephew of John Paul Jones and veryproud of the connection; but instead of being a sailor he was ascientist, and he chose to pass his life in retirement from the world.""Your father is no longer living, then?" said Mr. Merrick."He passed away a year ago, on his beloved island. My mother diedseveral years before him. I began to feel lonely at Sangoa and I wasanxious to visit America, of which my mother had so often told me. Sosome months ago I reached San Francisco, since when I have been travelingover your country--my country, may I call it?--and studying your moderncivilization. In New York I remained fully three months. It is only aboutten days since I returned to this coast."He stopped abruptly, as if he considered he had told enough. The briefrecital had interested his auditors, but the ensuing pause was ratherembarrassing."I suppose you have been visiting relatives of your parents," remarkedUncle John, to ease the situation."They--had no relatives that I know of," he returned. "I am quite alonein the world. You must not suppose I am unaccustomed to the water," hehastened to add, as if to retreat from an unpleasant subject. "At SangoaI have bathed in the sea ever since I can remember anything; but--I amnot in good health. I suffer from indigestion, a chronic condition,which is my incubus. Yesterday my strength suddenly deserted me and Ibecame helpless.""How fortunate it was that Maud noticed you!" exclaimed Patsy, withgenerous sympathy.Again the half sad smile softened his face as he looked at her."I am not sure it was wholly fortunate for me," he said, "although Iadmit I have no wish to end my uninteresting life by drowning. I am not amisanthrope, in spite of my bad stomach. The world is more useful to methan I am to the world, but that is not my fault. Pardon me for talkingso much about myself.""Oh, we are intensely interested, I assure you," replied Patsy. "If someof us were indeed the instruments that saved you yesterday, it is apleasure to us to know something of the--the man--we saved."She had almost said "boy," he was such a youthful person, and he knew itas well as she did."I would like to meet Miss Stanton and thank her personally," hepresently resumed. "So, if you have no objection, I think I shallregister at this hotel and take a room. I--I am not very strong yet, butperhaps Miss Stanton will see me when I have rested a little.""She won't return before five o'clock," explained Mr. Merrick. "MissStanton is--er--connected with a motion picture company, you know, and isbusy during the day."He seemed both surprised and perplexed, at first, but after a moment'sthought he said:"She is an actress, then?""Yes; she and her sister. They have with them an aunt, Mrs. Montrose, forcompanion.""Thank you. Then I will try to meet them this evening."As he spoke he rose with some difficulty and bade them adieu. Arthur wentwith him to the desk and proffered his assistance, but the young man saidhe needed nothing but rest."And just think of it," said Patsy, when he had gone. "We don't know yetwhat that 'A' stands for!""Arthur," suggested Louise."Albert," said Beth."Or Algernon," added Uncle John with a chuckle."But we haven't seen the last of him yet," declared Miss Doyle. "I've aromance all plotted, of which A. Jones is to be the hero. He will fall inlove with Maud and carry her away to his island!""I'm not so sure of that result," observed Uncle John thoughtfully. "Itwouldn't astonish me to have him fall in love with Maud Stanton; we'veall done that, you know; but could Maud--could any girl--be attracted bya lean, dismal boy with a weak stomach, such as A. Jones?""Even with these drawbacks he is quite interesting," asserted Beth."He is sure to win her sympathy," said Louise."But, above all," declared Patsy, "he has an island, inherited from hisroyal daddy. That island would count for a lot, with any girl!"CHAPTER VIITHE INVALIDThe girls intercepted Maud Stanton when she returned to the hotel thatevening, and told her all about A. Jones. The tale was finished longbefore that dyspeptic youth had wakened from his slumbers. Then they alldressed for dinner and afterward met in the lobby, where Uncle John toldthem he had arranged to have a big round table prepared for the entireparty, including a seat for A. Jones, who might like to join them.However, the young man did not make his appearance, and as they troopedinto the dining room Patsy said resentfully:"I believe A. Jones is in a trance and needs rolling on a barrel again.""He probably found himself too weak to appear in public," replied FloStanton. "I'm sure if I had been all but drowned a few hours ago, I wouldprefer bed to society.""I'm astonished that he summoned energy to visit us at all," declaredMrs. Montrose. "He may be weak and ill, but at least he is grateful.""Jones seems a vary gentlemanly young fellow," said Mr. Merrick. "He is abit shy and retiring, which is perhaps due to his lonely life on hisisland; but I think he has been well brought up."As they came out from dinner they observed the porters wheeling severalbig trunks up the east corridor. The end of each trunk was lettered:"A. Jones.""Well," said Beth, with an amused smile, "he intends to stay a while,anyhow. You'll have a chance to meet him yet, Maud.""I'm glad of that," answered Maud, "for I am anxious to calculate theworth of the life I helped to save. Your reports are ambiguous, and I amundecided whether you are taking the boy seriously or as a joke. Fromyour description of his personal appearance, I incline to the belief thatunder ordinary circumstances I would not look twice at Mr. Jones, buthaving been partly instrumental in preserving him to the world, Inaturally feel a proprietary interest in him.""Of course," said Flo. "He's worth one look, out of pure curiosity; butit would be dreadful to have him tagging you around, expressing hiseverlasting gratitude.""I don't imagine he'll do that," observed Patsy Doyle. "A. Jones strikesme as having a fair intellect in a shipwrecked body, and I'll wager ahatpin against a glove-buttoner that he won't bore you. At the same timehe may not interest you--or any of us--for long, unless he developstalents we have not discovered. I wonder why he doesn't use his wholename. That mystic 'A' puzzles me.""It's an English notion, I suppose," said Mrs. Montrose."But he isn't English; he's American.""Sangoese," corrected Beth."Perhaps he doesn't like his name, or is ashamed of it," suggestedUncle John."It may be 'Absalom,'" said Flo. "We once knew an actor named Absalom,and he always called himself 'A. Judson Keith.' He was a dignified chap,and when we girls one day called him 'Ab,' he nearly had hysterics.""Mr. Werner had hysterics to-day," asserted Maud, gravely; "but I didn'tblame him. He sent out a party to ride down a steep hill on horseback, aspart of a film story, and a bad accident resulted. One of the horsesstepped in a gopher hole and fell, and a dozen others piled up on him,including their riders.""How dreadful!" was the general exclamation."Several of the horses broke their legs and had to be shot," continuedMaud; "but none of the riders was seriously injured except littleSadie Martin, who was riding a bronco. The poor thing was caught underone of the animals and the doctor says she won't be able to work againfor months.""Goodness me! And all for the sake of a picture?" cried Patsyindignantly. "I hope you don't take such risks, Maud.""No; Flo and I have graduated from what is called 'the bronco bunch,' andnow do platform work entirely. To be sure we assume some minor risks inthat, but nothing to compare with the other lines of business.""I hope the little girl you mentioned will get well, and has enough moneyto tide her over this trouble," said Uncle John anxiously."The manager will look after her," returned Mrs. Montrose. "Our peopleare very good about that and probably Sadie Martin's salary will continueregularly until she is able to work again.""Well," said Beth, drawing a long breath, "I suppose we shall read allabout it in the morning papers.""Oh, no!" exclaimed Maud and added: "These accidents never get into thepapers. They happen quite often, around Los Angeles, where ten thousandor more people make their living from motion pictures; but the public isprotected from all knowledge of such disasters, which would detract fromtheir pleasure in pictures and perhaps render all films unpopular.""I thought the dear public loved the dare-devil acts," remarkedArthur Weldon."Oh, it does," agreed Mrs. Montrose; "yet those who attend the picturetheatres seem not to consider the action taking place before their eyesto be real. Here are pictures only--a sort of amplified story book--andthe spectators like them exciting; but if they stopped to reflect thatmen and women in the flesh were required to do these dangerous feats fortheir entertainment, many would be too horrified to enjoy the scenes. Ofcourse the makers of the pictures guard their actors in all possibleways; yet, even so, casualties are bound to occur."They had retired to a cosy corner of the public drawing room and wereconversing on this interesting topic when they espied A. Jones walkingtoward them. The youth was attired in immaculate evening dress, but hisstep was slow and dragging and his face pallid.Arthur and Uncle John drew up an easy chair for him while Patsy performedthe introductions to Mrs. Montrose and her nieces. Very earnestly the boygrasped the hand of the young girl who had been chiefly responsible forhis rescue, thanking her more by his manner than in his few carefullychosen words.As for Maud, she smilingly belittled her effort, saying lightly: "Iknow I must not claim that it didn't amount to anything, for your life isvaluable, Mr. Jones, I'm sure. But I had almost nothing to do beyondcalling Patsy Doyle's attention to you and then swimming out to keep youafloat until help came. I'm a good swimmer, so it was not at alldifficult.""Moreover," he added, "you would have done the same thing for anyone indistress.""Certainly.""I realize that. I am quite a stranger to you. Nevertheless, my gratitudeis your due and I hope you will accept it as the least tribute I can payyou. Of all that throng of bathers, only you noticed my peril and came tomy assistance.""Fate!" whispered Flo impressively."Nonsense," retorted her sister. "I happened to be the only one lookingout to sea. I think, Mr. Jones, you owe us apologies more than gratitude,for your folly was responsible for the incident. You were altogether tooventuresome. Such action on this coast, where the surf rolls high andcreates an undertow, is nothing less than foolhardy.""I'm sure you are right," he admitted. "I did not know this coast, andfoolishly imagined the old Pacific, in which I have sported and playedsince babyhood, was my friend wherever I found it.""I hope you are feeling better and stronger this evening," said Mr.Merrick. "We expected you to join us at dinner.""I--I seldom dine in public," he explained, flushing slightly. "Mybill-of-fare is very limited, you know, owing to my--my condition; and soI carry my food-tablets around with me, wherever I go, and eat them in myown room.""Food-tablets!" cried Patsy, horrified."Yes. They are really wafers--very harmless--and I am permitted to eatnothing else.""No wonder your stomach is bad and you're a living skeleton!" assertedthe girl, with scorn."My dear," said Uncle John, gently chiding her, "we must give Mr. Jonesthe credit for knowing what is best for him.""Not me, sir!" protested the boy, in haste. "I'm very ignorantabout--about health, and medicine and the like. But in New York Iconsulted a famous doctor, and he told me what to do.""That's right," nodded the old gentleman, who had never been ill in hislife. "Always take the advice of a doctor, listen to the advice of alawyer, and refuse the advise of a banker. That's worldly wisdom.""Were you ill when you left your home?" inquired Mrs. Montrose, lookingat the young man with motherly sympathy."Not when I left the island," he said. "I was pretty well up to thattime. But during the long ocean voyage I was terribly sick, and by thetime we got to San Francisco my stomach was a wreck. Then I tried to eatthe rich food at your restaurants and hotels--we live very plainly inSangoa, you know--and by the time I got to New York I was a confirmeddyspeptic and suffering tortures. Everything I ate disagreed with me. SoI went to a great specialist, who has invented these food tablets forcases just like mine, and he ordered me to eat nothing else.""And are you better?" asked Maud.He hesitated."Sometimes I imagine I am. I do not suffer so much pain, but I--I seemto grow weaker all the time.""No wonder!" cried Patsy. "If you starve yourself you can't grow strong."He looked at her with an expression of surprise. Then he asked abruptly:"What would you advise me to do, Miss Doyle?"A chorus of laughter greeted this question. Patsy flushed a trifle butcovered her confusion by demanding: "Would you follow my advice?"He made a little grimace. There was humor in the boy, despite hisdyspepsia."I understand there is a law forbidding suicide," he replied. "But Iasked your advice in an attempt to discover what you thought of my absurdcondition. Now that you call my attention to it, I believe I \_am\_starving myself. I need stronger and more nourishing food; and yet thebest specialist in your progressive country has regulated my diet.""I don't believe much in specialists," asserted Patsy. "If \_you\_ do, goahead and kill yourself, in defiance of the law. According to commonsense you ought to eat plenty of good, wholesome food, but you may be sodisordered--in your interior--that even that would prove fatal. So Iwon't recommend it.""I'm doomed, either way," he said quietly. "I know that.""\_How\_ do you know it?" demanded Maud in a tone of resentment.He was silent a moment. Then he replied:"I cannot remember how we drifted into this very personal argument. Itseems wrong for me to be talking about myself to those who arepractically strangers, and you will realize how unused I am to thesociety of ladies by considering my rudeness in this interview.""Pshaw!" exclaimed Uncle John; "we are merely considering you as afriend. You must believe that we are really interested in you," hecontinued, laying a kindly hand on the young fellow's shoulder. "You seemin a bad way, it's true, but your condition is far from desperate.Patsy's frankness--it's her one fault and her chief virtue--led you totalk about yourself, and I'm surprised to find you so despondentand--and--what do you call it, Beth?""Pessimistic?""That's it--pessimistic.""But you're wrong, sir!" said the boy with a smile; "I may not be elatedover my fatal disease, but neither am I despondent. I force myself tokeep going when I wonder how the miserable machine responds to my urging,and I shall keep it going, after a fashion, until the final breakdown.Fate weaves the thread of our lives, I truly believe, and she didn't usevery good material when she started mine. But that doesn't matter," headded quickly. "I'm trying to do a little good as I go along and notwaste my opportunities. I'm obeying my doctor's orders and facing thefuture with all the philosophy I can summon. So now, if you--who havegiven me a new lease of life--think I can use it to any better advantage,I am willing to follow your counsel."His tone was more pathetic than his words. Maud, as she looked at the boyand tried to realize that his days were numbered, felt her eyes fillwith tears. Patsy sniffed scornfully, but said nothing. It was Beth whoremarked with an air of unconcern that surprised those who knew herunsympathetic nature:"It would be presumptuous for us to interfere, either with Fate or withNature. You're probably dead wrong about your condition, for a sickperson has no judgment whatever, but I've noticed the mind has a gooddeal to do with one's health. If you firmly believe you're going to die,why, what can you expect?"No one cared to contradict this and a pause followed that was growingawkward when they were all aroused by the sound of hasty footstepsapproaching their corner.CHAPTER VIIITHE MAGIC OF A NAMEThe newcomer proved to be Goldstein, the manager of the Continental.His face was frowning and severe as he rudely marched up to the groupand, without the formality of a greeting, pointedly addressed theStanton girls."What does it mean?" he demanded in evident excitement, for his voiceshook and the accusing finger he held out trembled. "How does it happenthat my people, under contract to work for the Continental, are workingfor other firms?"Maud paled and her eyes glistened with resentment as she rose and facedher manager. Florence pulled her sister's sleeve and said with a forcedlaugh: "Sit down, Maud; the man has probably been drinking."He turned on the young girl fiercely, but now it was Arthur Weldon whoseized the manager's arm and whirled him around."Sir, you are intruding," he said sternly. "If you have business withthese ladies, choose the proper time and place to address them.""I have!" cried Goldstein, blusteringly. "They have treated meshamefully--unprofessionally! They have played me a trick, and I've theright to demand why they are working for a rival firm while in my pay."Mrs. Montrose now arose and said with quiet dignity:"Mr. Goldstein, you are intruding, as Mr. Weldon says. But you have saidso much to defame my nieces in the eyes of our friends, here assembled,that you must explain yourself more fully."The manager seemed astonished by his reception. He looked from one toanother and said more mildly:"It is easy enough for \_me\_ to explain, but how can the Stantons explaintheir conduct? They are under contract to act exclusively for theContinental Film Company and I pay them a liberal salary. Yet onlyyesterday, when I was kind enough to give them a holiday, they went downto the beach and posed for a picture for our rivals, the CoronaCompany!""You are mistaken, sir!" retorted Arthur. "The young ladies were in ourcompany the entire afternoon and they did not pose for any picturewhatever.""Don't tell me!" cried Goldstein. "I've just seen the picture down town.I was going by one of the theatres when I noticed a placard that read:'Sensational Film by Maud Stanton, the Queen of Motion Picture Actresses,entitled "A Gallant Rescue!" First run to-night.' I went in and saw thepicture--with my own eyes!--and I saw Maud Stanton in a sea scene,rescuing a man who was drowning. Don't deny it, Miss," he added, turningupon Maud fiercely. "I saw it with my own eyes--not an hour ago!"After a moment's amazed silence his hearers broke into a chorus oflaughter, led by Flo, who was almost hysterical. Even A. Jones smiledindulgently upon the irate manager, who was now fairly bristling withindignation."The Corona people," remarked Arthur Weldon, "are quite enterprising. Idid not know they had a camera-man at the beach yesterday, but he musthave secured a very interesting picture. It was not posed, Mr. Goldstein,but taken from life.""It was Maud Stanton!" asserted, the manager."Yes; she and some others. A man was really drowning and the brave girlswam to his rescue, without a thought of posing.""I don't believe it!" cried the man rudely.Here A. Jones struggled to his feet."It is true," he said. "I was the drowning man whom Miss Stanton saved."Goldstein eyed him shrewdly."Perhaps you were," he admitted, "for the man in the picture was aboutyour style of make-up. But how can you prove it was not a put-up job withthe Corona people? How do I know you are not all in the employ of theCorona people?""I give you my word.""Pah! I don't know you.""I see you don't," returned the youth stiffly."Here is my card. Perhaps you will recognize the name."He fumbled in his pocket, took out a card and handed it to the manager.Goldstein looked at it, started, turned red and then white and beganbobbing his head with absurd deference to the youth."Pardon, Mr. Jones--pardon!" he gasped. "I--I heard you were in ourneighborhood, but I--I did not recognize you. I--I hope you will pardonme, Mr. Jones! I was angry at what I supposed was the treachery of anemployee. You will--will--understand that, I am sure. It is my duty toprotect the interests of the Continental, you know, sir. But it's allright now, of course! Isn't it all right now, Mr. Jones?""You'd better go, Goldstein," said the boy in a weary tone, and satdown again.The manager hesitated. Then he bowed to Maud Stanton and to the others,murmuring:"All a mistake, you see; all a mistake. I--I beg everybody's pardon."With this he backed away, still bowing, and finally turned and beat ahasty retreat. But no one was noticing him especially. All eyes wereregarding the boy with a new curiosity."That Goldstein is an ill-bred boor!" remarked Uncle John in anannoyed tone."I suppose," said Maud, slowly, "he thought he was right in demanding anexplanation. There is great rivalry between the various filmmanufacturers and it was rather mean of the Corona to put my name onthat placard.""It's wonderful!" exclaimed Patsy. "How did they get the picture, doyou suppose?""They have camera-men everywhere, looking for some picture worth while."explained Mrs. Montrose. "If there's a fire, the chances are a camera-manis on the spot before the firemen arrive. If there's an accident, it isoften caught by the camera before the victim realizes what has happened.Perhaps a camera-man has been at the beach for weeks, waiting patientlyfor some tragedy to occur. Anyway, he was on hand yesterday and quietlyran his film during the excitement of the rescue. He was in rare luck toget Maud, because she is a favorite with the public; but it was not fairto connect her name with the picture, when they know she is employed bythe Continental."Young Jones rose from his chair with a gesture of weariness."If you will excuse me," he said, "I will go to my room. Our littleconversation has given me much pleasure; I'm so alone in the world.Perhaps you will allow me to join you again--some other time?"They hastened to assure him his presence would always be welcome. Patsyeven added, with her cheery smile, that they felt a certainproprietorship in him since they had dragged him from a watery grave. Theboy showed, as he walked away, that he was not yet very steady on hisfeet, but whether the weakness was the result of his malady or his recenttrying experience they could not determine."What staggers me," said Maud, looking after him, "is the effect his namehad on Goldstein, who has little respect or consideration for anyone. Whodo you suppose A. Jones is?""Why, he has told us," replied Louise. "He is an islander, on his firstvisit to this country.""He must be rather more than that," declared Arthur. "Do you rememberwhat the manager said to him?""Yes," said Beth. "He had heard that A. Jones was in this neighborhood,but had never met him. A. Jones was a person of sufficient importanceto make the general manager of the Continental Film Company tremble inhis boots.""He really did tremble," asserted Patsy, "and he was abject in hisapologies.""Showing," added Flo Stanton, "that Goldstein is afraid of him.""I wonder why," said Maud."It is all very easy of solution," remarked Arthur. "Goldstein believesthat Jones is in the market to buy films. Perhaps he's going to open amotion picture theatre on his island. So the manager didn't want toantagonize a good customer.""That's it," said Uncle John, nodding approval. "There's no great mysteryabout young Jones, I'm sure."CHAPTER IXDOCTOR PATSYNext morning Uncle John and the Weldons--including the preciousbaby--went for a ride into the mountains, while Beth and Patsy took theirembroidery into a sunny corner of the hotel lobby.It was nearly ten o'clock when A. Jones discovered the two girls and cametottering toward them. Tottering is the right word; he fairly swayed ashe made his way to the secluded corner."I wish he'd use a cane," muttered Beth in an undertone. "I have thefeeling that he's liable to bump his nose any minute."Patsy drew up a chair for him, although he endeavored to prevent her."Are you feeling better this morning?" she inquired."I--I think so," he answered doubtfully. "I don't seem to get back mystrength, you see.""Were you stronger before your accident?" asked Beth."Yes, indeed. I went swimming, you remember. But perhaps I was notstrong enough to do that. I--I'm very careful of myself, yet I seem togrow weaker all the time."There was a brief silence, during which the girls plied their needles."Are you going to stay in this hotel?" demanded Patsy, in her blunt way."For a time, I think. It is very pleasant here," he said."Have you had breakfast?""I took a food-tablet at daybreak.""Huh!" A scornful exclamation. Then she glanced at the open door ofthe dining-hall and laying aside her work she rose with a determinedair and said:"Come with me!""Where?"For answer she assisted him to rise. Then she took his hand and marchedhim across the lobby to the dining room.He seemed astonished at this proceeding but made no resistance. Seatedat a small table she called a waitress and said:"Bring a cup of chocolate, a soft-boiled egg and some toast.""Pardon me, Miss Doyle," he said; "I thought you had breakfasted.""So I have," she replied. "The breakfast I've ordered is for you, andyou're going to eat it if I have to ram it down your throat.""But--Miss Doyle!""You've told us you are doomed. Well, you're going to die with afull stomach.""But the doctor--""Bother the doctor! I'm your doctor, now, and I won't send in a bill,thank your stars."He looked at her with his sad little smile."Isn't this a rather high-handed proceeding, Miss Doyle?""Perhaps.""I haven't employed you as my physician, you know.""True. But you've deliberately put yourself in my power.""How?""In the first place, you tagged us here to this hotel.""You don't mind, do you?""Not in the least. It's a public hostelry. In the second place, youconfided to us your disease and your treatment of it--which was reallynone of our business.""I--I was wrong to do that. But you led me on and--I'm so lonely--and youall seemed so generous and sympathetic--that I--I--""That you unwittingly posted us concerning your real trouble. Do yourealize what it is? You're a hypo--hypo--what do they callit?--hypochondriac!""I am not!""And your doctor--your famous specialist--is a fool.""Oh, Miss Doyle!""Also you are a--a chump, to follow his fool advice. You don't needsympathy, Mr. A. Jones. What you need is a slapstick.""A--a--""A slapstick. And that's what you're going to get if you don'tobey orders."Here the maid set down the breakfast, ranging the dishes invitinglybefore the invalid. His face had expressed all the emotions fromamazement to terror during Patsy's tirade and now he gazed from her firm,determined features to the eggs and toast, in an uncertain, helpless waythat caused the girl a severe effort to curb a burst of laughter."Now, then," she said, "get busy. I'll fix your egg. Do you want moresugar in your chocolate? Taste it and see. And if you don't butter thattoast before it gets cold it won't be fit to eat."He looked at her steadily now, again smiling."You're not joking, Miss Doyle?""I'm in dead earnest.""Of course you realize this is the--the end?""Of your foolishness? I hope so. You used to eat like a sensible boy,didn't you?""When I was well.""You're well now. Your only need is sustaining, strengthening food. Icame near ordering you a beefsteak, but I'll reserve that for lunch."He sipped the chocolate."Yes; it needs more sugar," he said quietly. "Will you please butter mytoast? It seems to me such a breakfast is worth months of suffering. Howdelicious this egg is! It was the fragrance of the egg and toast thatconquered me. That, and--""And one sensible, determined girl. Don't look at me as if I were amurderess! I'm your best friend--a friend in need. And don't choke downyour food. Eat slowly. Fletcherize--chew your food, you know. I knowyou're nearly famished, but you must gradually accustom yourself to aproper diet."He obeyed meekly. Patsy's face was calm, but her heart beat fast, with athrill of fear she could not repress. Acting on impulse, as she had, thegirl now began to consider that she was personally responsible forwhatever result might follow this radical treatment for dyspepsia. Hadshe been positive it \_was\_ dyspepsia, she would never have daredinterfere with a doctor's orders; but she felt that the boy needed foodand would die unless he had it. He might die from the effect of thisunusual repast, in which case she would never forgive herself.Meantime, the boy had cast aside all fear. He had protested, indeed, buthis protests being overruled he accepted his food and its possibleconsequences with philosophic resignation and a growing satisfaction.Patsy balked on the third slice of toast and took it away from him. Shealso denied him a second cup of chocolate. He leaned back in his chairwith a sigh of content and said:"Bless the hen that laid that egg! No dainty was ever more delicious. Andnow," he added, rising, "let us go and inquire the address of a goodundertaker. I have made my will, and I'd like to be cremated--it's somuch nicer than the old-fashioned burial, don't you think?""I'll attend to all that, if you wish," she replied, trying to repress ashudder as she followed him from the room. "Do you smoke?""I used to, but the doctor forbade it; so I gave it up entirely.""Go over to that stand and buy a cigar. Then you may sit beside Beth andme and smoke it."The girl did not wholly approve of smoking and had often chided UncleJohn and her father and Arthur Weldon for indulging in the habit; butthis advice to young Jones was given in desperation, because all the menof her family stoutly affirmed that a cigar after a meal assisteddigestion. She resumed her former seat beside Beth, and her cousinquickly read the anxiety on her face."What did you do, Patricia?""I fed him.""Did he really eat?""Like a starved cat.""Hm-m-m," said Beth. "What next, I wonder?"Patsy wondered, too, the cold shivers chasing one another up and down herback. The boy was coming toward them, coolly puffing a cigar. He did notseem to totter quite so much as before, but he was glad to sink into aneasy chair."How do you feel?" asked Beth, regarding him curiously."Like one of those criminals who are pampered with all the good thingsof life before being led to the scaffold.""Any pains?"He shook his head."Not yet. I've asked the clerk, whenever I signal him, to send someone tocarry me to my room. If I'm not able to say good-bye to you, pleaseaccept now my thanks for all your kindness to a stranger. You see, I'mnot sure whether I'll have a sudden seizure or the pains will come ongradually.""What pains?" demanded Patsy."I can't explain them. Don't you believe something is bound to happen?"he inquired, nervously removing the ash from his cigar."To be sure. You're going to get well."He made no reply, but sat watching Beth's nimble fingers. Patsy was tooexcited to resume her embroidery."I wonder if you are old enough to smoke?" remarked Beth."I'm over twenty-one.""Indeed! We decided you were about eighteen.""But we are not Spanish in Sangoa.""What are your people?""Formerly all Americans. The younger generation are, like myself Isuppose, Sangoans by birth. But there isn't a black or yellow or brownman on our island.""How many inhabitants has Sangoa?""About six hundred, all told."There was silence for a while."Any pains yet?" inquired Beth."Not yet. But I'm feeling drowsy. With your permission I'll lie down andtake a nap. I slept very little last night."He threw away his cigar, which he had smoked nearly to the end, andrising without assistance, bowed and walked away."Will he ever waken, I wonder?" said Beth softly."Of course," declared Patsy. "He has crossed the Rubicon and is going toget well. I feel it in my bones!""Let us hope," responded Beth, "that Ajo also feels it in his bones,rather than in his stomach."CHAPTER XSTILL A MYSTERYThe day advanced to luncheon time and Uncle John and the Weldons cameback from their mountain trip. Hollywood is in the foothills and over thepasses are superb automobile roads into the fruitful valleys of SanFernando and La Canada."Seen anything of the boy--A. Jones?" inquired Arthur."Yes; and perhaps we've seen the last of him," answered Beth."Oh. Has he gone?""No one knows. Patsy fed him and he went to sleep. What has happenedsince we cannot tell."The girls then related the experiences of the morning, at which bothUncle John and Arthur looked solemn and uncomfortable. But Louisesaid calmly:"I think Patsy was quite right. I wouldn't have dared such a thingmyself, but I'm sure that boy needed a square meal more than anything. Ifhe dies, that breakfast has merely hastened his end; but if he doesn'tdie it will do him good.""There's another possibility," remarked Uncle John. "He may be sufferingagonies with no one to help him."Patsy's face was white as chalk. The last hour or two had brought herconsiderable anxiety and her uncle's horrible suggestion quite unnervedher. She stole away to the office and inquired the number of Mr. Jones'room. It was on the ground floor and easily reached by a passage. Thegirl tiptoed up to the door and putting her ear to the panel listenedintently. A moment later a smile broke over her face; she chuckleddelightedly and then turned and ran buck to her friends."He's snoring like a walrus!" she cried triumphantly."Are you sure they are not groans?" asked Arthur."Pah! Can't I recognize a snore when I hear it? And I'll bet it's thefirst sound sleep he's had in a month."Mr. Merrick and Arthur went to the door of the boy's room to satisfythemselves that Patsy was not mistaken, and the regularity of the soundsquickly convinced them the girl was right. So they had a merry party atluncheon, calling Patsy "Doctor" with grave deference and telling her shehad probably saved the life of A. Jones for a second time."And now," proposed Uncle John, when the repast was over, "let us drivedown to the sea and have a look at that beautiful launch that came inyesterday. Everyone is talking about it and they say it belongs to someforeign prince."So they motored to Santa Monica and spent the afternoon on the sands,watching the bathers and admiring the graceful outlines of the big yachtlying at anchor a half mile from the shore. The boat was something of amystery to everybody. It was named the "Arabella" and had come fromHawaii via San Francisco; but what it was doing here and who the ownermight be were questions no one seemed able to answer. Rumor had it thata Japanese prince had come in it to inspect the coast line, but newspaperreporters were forbidden to scale the side and no satisfaction was giventheir eager questioning by the bluff old captain who commanded the craft.So the girls snapped a few kodak pictures of the handsome yacht and thenlost interest in it.That evening they met Mrs. Montrose and the Stanton girls at dinner andtold them about the boy, who still remained invisible. Uncle John hadlistened at his door again, but the snores had ceased and a deathlikesilence seemed to pervade the apartment. This rendered them all a trifleuneasy and when they left the dining room Arthur went to the hotel clerkand asked:"Have you seen Mr. Jones this evening?""No," was the reply. "Do you know him?""Very slightly.""Well, he's the queerest guest we've ever had. The first day he atenothing at all. This morning I hear he had a late breakfast. Wasn'taround to lunch, but a little while ago we sent a meal to his room thatwould surprise you.""Indeed!""Yes. A strange order it was! Broiled mushrooms, pancakes with maplesyrup and ice cream. How is that for a mix-up--and at dinner time, too!"said the clerk, disgustedly.Arthur went back and reported."All right," said Patsy, much relieved. "We've got him started and now hecan take care of himself. Come, Uncle; let's all go down town and see thepicture that drove Mr. Goldstein crazy.""He was very decent to us to-day," asserted Flo Stanton."Did he ask any explanation about Maud's appearing in the picture of arival company?" inquired Arthur."No, not a word.""Did he mention Mr. Jones, who conquered him so mysteriously?"asked Beth."Not at all. Goldstein confined himself strictly to business; but hetreated us with unusual courtesy," explained Maud.They were curious to see the films of the rescue, and the entire partyrode to the down-town theatre where the Corona picture was being run.Outside the entrance they found the audacious placard, worded just asGoldstein had reported, and they all agreed it was a mean trick to claimanother firm's star as their own."I do not think the Corona Company is responsible for this announcement,"said Uncle John. "It is probably an idea of the theatre proprietor, whohoped to attract big business in that way.""He has succeeded," grumbled Arthur, as he took his place at the end of along line of ticket buyers.The picture, as it flashed on the screen, positively thrilled them. Firstwas shown the crowd of merry bathers, with Patsy and Maud standing in thewater a little apart from the others. Then the boy--far out beyond therest--threw up his arms, struggling desperately. Maud swam swiftly towardhim, Patsy making for the shore. The launching of the boat, the race torescue, Maud's effort to keep the drowning one afloat, and the return tothe shore, where an excited crowd surrounded them--all was clearly shownin the picture. Now they had the advantage of observing the expressionson the faces of the bathers when they discovered a tragedy was beingenacted in their midst. The photographs were so full of action that theparticipants now looked upon their adventure in a new light and regardedit far more seriously than before.The picture concluded with the scene where Uncle John lifted the bodyinto the automobile and dashed away with it to the hospital.Maud Stanton, used as she was to seeing herself in motion pictures, waseven more impressed than the others when observing her own actions at atime when she was wholly unconscious that a camera-man had his lensfocused upon her."It's a great picture!" whispered Flo, as they made their way out of thecrowded theatre. "Why can't all our films be as natural and absorbing asthis one?""Because," said her sister, "in this case there is no acting. The picturecarries conviction with a force that no carefully rehearsed scene couldever accomplish.""That is true," agreed her Aunt Jane. "The nature scenes are the best,after all.""The most unsatisfactory pictures I have ever seen," remarked Uncle John,"were those of prominent men, and foreign kings, and the like, who stopbefore the camera and bow as awkwardly as a camel. They know they areposing, and in spite of their public experience they're as bashful asschoolboys or as arrogant as policemen, according to their personalcharacteristics.""Did you notice the mob of children in that theatre?" asked Patsy, asthey proceeded homeward. "I wish there were more pictures made that aresuitable to their understandings.""They enjoy anything in the way of a picture," said Arthur. "It isn'tnecessary to cater to children; they'll go anyhow, whatever is shown.""That may be, to an extent, true," said Beth. "Children are fascinated byany sort of motion pictures, but a lot of them must be whollyincomprehensible to the child mind. I agree with Patsy that the littleones ought to have their own theatres and their own pictures.""That will come, in time," prophesied Aunt Jane. "Already the filmmakers are recognizing the value of the children's patronage and aretrying to find subjects that especially appeal to them."They reached the hotel soon after ten o'clock and found "Ajo" seated inthe lobby. He appeared much brighter and stronger than the day before androse to greet Patsy with a smile that had lost much of its former sadexpression."Congratulate me, Dr. Doyle," said he. "I'm still alive, and--thanks toyour prescription--going as well as could be expected.""I'm glad I did the right thing," she replied; "but we were all a littleworried for fear I'd make a mistake.""I have just thrown away about a thousand of those food-tablets," heinformed her with an air of pride. "I am positive there is no substitutefor real food, whatever the specialists may say. In fact," he continuedmore soberly, "I believe you have rescued me a second time from certaindeath, for now I have acquired a new hope and have made up my mind toget well.""Be careful not to overdo it," cautioned Uncle John. "You ordered aqueer supper, we hear.""But it seemed to agree with me. I've had a delightful sleep--the firstsound sleep in a month--and already I feel like a new man. I waited up totell you this, hoping you would be interested.""We are!" exclaimed Patsy, who felt both pride and pleasure. "Thisevening we have been to see the motion picture of your rescue fromdrowning.""Oh. How did you like it?""It's a splendid picture. I'm not sure it will interest others as much asourselves, yet the people present seemed to like it.""Well it was their last chance to observe my desperate peril and myheroic rescue," said the boy. "The picture will not be shown afterto-night.""Why not?" they asked, in surprise."I bought the thing this afternoon. It didn't seem to me quite modest toexploit our little adventure in public."This was a new phase of the strange boy's character and the girls didnot know whether to approve it or not."It must have cost you something!" remarked Flo, the irrepressible."Besides, how could you do it while you were asleep?""Why, I wakened long enough to use the telephone," he replied with asmile. "There are more wonderful inventions in the world than motionpictures, you know.""But you like motion pictures, don't you?" asked Maud, wondering why hehad suppressed the film in question."Very much. In fact, I am more interested in them than in anything else,not excepting the telephone--which makes Aladdin's lamp look like afirefly in the sunshine.""I suppose," said Flo, staring into his face with curious interest,"that you will introduce motion pictures into your island of Sangoa,when you return?""I suppose so," he answered, a little absently. "I had not consideredthat seriously, as yet, but my people would appreciate such a treat,I'm sure."This speech seemed to destroy, in a manner, their shrewd conjecturethat he was in America to purchase large quantities of films. Why,then, should Goldstein have paid such abject deference to thisunknown islander?In his own room, after the party had separated for the night, Mr. Merrickremarked to Arthur Weldon as they sat smoking their cigars:"Young Jones is evidently possessed of some means.""So it seems," replied Arthur. "Perhaps his father, the scientificrecluse, had accumulated some money, and the boy came to America to getrid of it. He will be extravagant and wasteful for awhile, and then goback to his island with the idea that he has seen the world."Uncle John nodded."He is a rather clean-cut young fellow," said he, "and the chances are hewon't become dissipated, even though he loses his money through lack ofworldly knowledge or business experience. A boy brought up and educatedon an island can't be expected to prove very shrewd, and whatever theextent of his fortune it is liable to melt like snow in the sunshine.""After all," returned Arthur, "this experience won't hurt him. He willstill have his island to return to."They smoked for a time in silence."Has it ever occurred to you, sir," said Arthur, "that the story Joneshas related to us, meager though it is, bears somewhat the stamp of afairy tale?"Uncle John removed his cigar and looked reflectively at the ash."You mean that the boy is not what he seems?""Scarcely that, sir. He seems like a good boy, in the main. But his storyis--such as one might invent if he were loath to tell the truth."Uncle John struck a match and relit his cigar."I believe in A. Jones, and I see no reason to doubt his story," heasserted. "If real life was not full of romance and surprises, thenovelists would be unable to interest us in their books."CHAPTER XIA DAMSEL IN DISTRESSThe day had not started auspiciously for the Stanton sisters. Soon afterthey arrived at the Continental Film Company's plant Maud had wrenchedher ankle by stumbling over some loose planks which had been carelesslyleft on the open-air stage, and she was now lying upon a sofa in themanager's room with her limb bandaged and soaked with liniment.Flo was having troubles, too. A girl who had been selected by theproducer to fall from an aeroplane in mid-air had sent word she was illand could not work to-day, and the producer had ordered Flo to preparefor the part. Indignantly she sought the manager, to file a protest, andwhile she waited in the anteroom for an audience, Mr. A. Jones of Sangoacame in and greeted her with a bow and a smile."Good gracious! Where did \_you\_ come from?" she inquired."My hotel. I've just driven over to see Goldstein," he replied."You'll have to wait, I'm afraid," she warned him. "The manager is busyjust now. I've been wiggling on this bench half an hour, and haven't seenhim yet--and my business is very important.""So is mine, Miss Flo," he rejoined, looking at her with an oddexpression. Then, as a stenographer came hurrying from the inner room, hestopped the girl and said:"Please take my card to Mr. Goldstein.""Oh, he won't see anybody now, for he's busy talking with one of ourproducers. You'll have to call again," she said flippantly. But even asshe spoke she glanced at the card, started and turned red. "Oh, pardonme!" she added hastily and fled back to the managerial sanctum."That's funny!" muttered Flo, half to herself."Yes," he said, laughing, "my cards are charged with electricity, andthey're bound to galvanize anyone in this establishment. Come in, MissFlo," he added, as Goldstein rushed out of his office to greet the boyeffusively; "your business takes precedence to mine, you know."The manager ushered them into his office, a big room with a busy aspect.At one end were two or three girls industriously thumping typewriters;McNeil, the producer, was sorting manuscript on Goldstein's own desk; ayoung man who served as the manager's private secretary was poring over avoluminous record-book, wherein were listed all the films ever made bythe manufacturers of the world. On a sofa in a far corner reclined theinjured "star" of the company, Maud Stanton, who--being half asleep atthe moment--did not notice the entrance of her sister and young Jones."Sit down, Mr. Jones; pray sit down!" exclaimed Goldstein eagerly,pointing to his own chair. "Would you like me to clear the room, so thatour conversation may be private?""Not yet," replied the boy, refusing the seat of honor and taking avacant chair. "Miss Stanton has precedence, and I believe she wishes tospeak with you."Goldstein took his seat at the desk and cast an inquiring glance at Flo."Well?" he demanded, impatiently."Mr. Werner has ordered me to do the airship stunt for his picture,because Nance Holden isn't here to-day," began the girl."Well, why annoy me with such trifles? Werner knows what he wants, andyou'll do as well as the Holden girl.""But I don't want to tumble out of that airship," she protested."There's no danger. Life nets will be spread underneath the aeroplane,"said the manager. "The camera merely catches you as you are falling, sothe thing won't be more than twenty or thirty feet from the ground. Nowrun away and don't bother. I must speak with Mr. Jones.""But I'm afraid, Mr. Goldstein!" pleaded the girl. "I don't want to go upin the aeroplane, and these stunts are not in my line, or what I wasengaged to do.""You'll do what I tell you!" asserted the manager, with markedirritation. "I won't stand for any rebellion among my actors, and you'lldo as Werner orders or you'll forfeit your week's pay."Here Maud half rose from her sofa to address her employer."Please, Mr. Goldstein," she said, "don't make Flo do that fall. Thereare plenty of other girls to take her place, and she--""Silence, Miss Stanton!" roared the manager. "You'll disrupt alldiscipline if you interfere. A nice time we'd have here, if we allowedour actors to choose their own parts! I insist that your sister obey myproducer's orders.""Quite right, Goldstein," remarked young Jones, in his quiet voice."You've carried your point and maintained discipline. I like that. MissFlo Stanton will do exactly what you request her to do. But you're goingto change your mind and think better of her protest. I'm almost sure,Goldstein, from the expression of your face, that you intend to issueprompt orders that another girl must take her place."Goldstein looked at him steadily a moment and the arrogant expressionchanged to one of meek subservience."To be sure!" he muttered. "You have read my mind accurately, Mr. Jones.Here, Judd," to his secretary, "find Werner and tell him I don't approvehis choice of Flo Stanton as a substitute for Nance Holden. Let's see;tell him to put that Moore girl in her place."The young fellow bowed and left the room. McNeil smiled slyly to himselfas he bent over his manuscript. Jones had gone to Maud's side to inquireanxiously after her injury."I don't imagine it will amount to much," she said reassuringly. "Mr.Goldstein wants me to rest quietly until this afternoon, when our newphoto-play is to be produced. I'm to do the leading part, you know, andhe thinks I'll be able by that time to get through all right."Goldstein overheard this and came toward them, rubbing his hands togethernervously."That seems unwise, Miss Maud," objected Jones. "To use your foot sosoon might make it much worse. Let us postpone the play until someother time."Goldstein's face was a study. His body twitched spasmodically."Oh, Mr. Jones!" he exclaimed; "that's impossible; it wouldn't do atall! We've been rehearsing this play and preparing for its production forthe last two weeks, and to-day all our actors and assistants are here andready to make the picture. I've already postponed it four hours--untilthis afternoon--to favor Miss Stanton, but, really--""Never mind the details," interrupted the boy. "I do not consider MissStanton able to do her work to-day. Send her back to her hotel at onceand order the play postponed until she is able to attend."Goldstein was greatly disturbed by this order, issued quietly but in atone of command that brooked no opposition. Again he glanced shrewdly atthe young man, and in the manager's face astonishment and fear wereintermingled."Sir," he said in repressed tones, for he was really angry and had beenaccustomed to wield the power of an autocrat in this establishment, "youare placing me in an embarrassing position. I am expected to make everyday count, so that the Continental may pay a liberal profit to itsowners. To follow your instructions would burden us with an enormousexpense, quite useless, I assure you, and--""Very well. Incur the expense, Goldstein.""All right, Mr. Jones. Excuse me a moment while I issue instructions forthe postponement."McNeil rose and faced the manager."Are you really going to postpone this important play?" he demanded, in avoice of wonder.Goldstein was glad to vent his chagrin on the producer."No insolence, sir!" he roared. "Come with me, and," as he dragged McNeilto the door and paused there, "if you dare lisp a word of what you'veoverheard, I'll fire you like a shot!"When they had left the room Maud said with a puzzled air:"I can't understand your power over Goldstein, Mr. Jones. He is adictator--almost a tyrant--and in this place his word is law. At least,it was until you came, and--and--""Don't try to understand it, Miss Stanton," he answered in a carelessmanner. "Do you think you can manage to crawl to the automobile, or shallwe carry you?""I'll bet Goldstein has murdered someone, and Mr. Jones knows all aboutit!" exclaimed Flo, who had been an interested witness of the scene.Maud stood up, with her sister's support, and tested her lame ankle."It still hurts a little," she said, "but I can manage to hobble on it.""Get your sister's wraps," the boy said to Flo, "and we'll send herstraight home.""I expect Goldstein will dock my salary, as well as fine Flo," remarkedMaud musingly, as she waited for her hat and coat. "He obeyed you verymeekly, Mr. Jones, but I could see a wicked glitter in his eye,nevertheless.""I am sure the manager will neither dock nor fine either of you," hereplied reassuringly. "On the contrary, you might sue the company fordamages, for leaving that lumber where you would fall over it.""Oh, no," she returned, laughing at the idea. "We have signed contractswaiving any damages for injuries sustained while at work on the premises.We all have to do that, you know, because the business is hazardous atits best. On the other hand, Mr. Goldstein has a physician and surgeonalways within call, in case of accident, and the service is quite free toall the employees."He nodded."I know. But the fact that you signed such a contract, under compulsion,would not prevent the court from awarding damages, if you sustained themwhile on duty.""This hurt is nothing of importance," she said hastily. "In a day or twoI shall be able to walk as well as ever."Flo came running back with Maud's things. Aunt Jane followed, sayingthat if Maud was to go to the hotel she would accompany her and takecare of her."I've examined the ankle," she said to young Jones, "and I assure you itis not a severe strain. But it is true that she will be better off in herown room, where she can rest quietly. So I will go with her.""How about Miss Flo?" asked the boy."Flo is very self-reliant and will get along to-day very nicely withoutme," replied Mrs. Montrose.Mr. Goldstein entered, frowning and still resenting the interference ofthis Mr. A. Jones of Sangoa. But he ventured no further protest nor didhe speak until Maud, Flo and Aunt Jane had all left the room."You're not going, Mr. Jones?" he asked."Only to see Miss Stanton started for home. Then I'll come back and havea little talk with you.""Thank you, sir."CHAPTER XIIPICTURES, GIRLS AND NONSENSE"Well, Aunt Jane," said Maud Stanton, when their car was rolling towardthe hotel and the girl had related the remarkable interview in theoffice, "what do you think of Ajo now?""He is certainly an amazing young man," was the reply. "I cannot in anyway figure out his connection with Goldstein, or his power over the man.The Continental Film Manufacturing Company is a great corporation, withheadquarters in New York, and Mr. Goldstein is the authorized head andmanager of the concern on the Pacific coast. I understand his salary isten thousand a year. On the other hand, young Jones has only been in thiscountry for a year, coming from an insignificant island somewhere in theSouth Seas, where he was born and reared. Much of the time since hearrived in America he has been an invalid. Aside from this meagerinformation, no one seems to know anything about him.""Putting the case that way makes it all the more remarkable," observedMaud. "A big, experienced, important man, cowed by a mere boy. WhenGoldstein first met this callow, sallow youth, he trembled before him.When the boy enters the office of the great film company he dictates tothe manager, who meekly obeys him. Remember, too, that A. Jones, by hisinterference, has caused a direct loss to the company, which Goldsteinwill have to explain, as best he may, in his weekly report to the NewYork office. A more astonishing state of affairs could not be imagined,Aunt Jane!""The puzzle will solve itself presently," said the lady. "Abnormalconditions seldom last long."Maud passed the day in bed, quietly reading a book. Her injury was reallyslight and with rest it mended rapidly. Patsy and Beth came in to see herand in the conversation that ensued the girls were told of the latestmystery surrounding A. Jones."It is surely queer!" admitted Miss Doyle, impressed and thoughtful."Uncle John and Arthur were saying this noon, at lunch, that Ajo was ahelpless sort of individual and easily influenced by others--as witnesshis caving in to me when I opposed his doctor's treatment. Arthur thinkshe has come to this country to squander what little money his father lefthim and that his public career outside the limits of his little islandwill be brief. Yet according to your story the boy is no weakling but haspower and knows how to use it.""He surely laid down the law to Goldstein," said Maud."He is very young," remarked Beth, ignoring the fact that she was herselfno older, "and perhaps that is why we attach so much importance to hisactions. A grown-up man is seldom astonishing, however eccentric he mayprove to be. In a boy we expect only boyishness, and young Jones hasinterested us because he is unique."After a little the conversation drifted to motion pictures, for bothPatsy and Beth were eager to learn all about the business details of filmmaking, which Maud, by reason of her months of experience, was able toexplain to them in a comprehensive manner. Flo came home toward evening,but had little more to tell them, as the day had passed very quietly atthe "studio." Jones had remained closeted with the manager for a fullhour, and it was remarked that after he had gone away Goldstein wassomewhat subdued and performed his duties less aggressively than usual.Maud's visitors now left her to dress for dinner, at which meal she wasable to rejoin them, walking with a slight limp but otherwise recoveredfrom her accident. To their surprise, young Jones appeared as they wereentering the dining room and begged for a seat at their table. Uncle Johnat once ordered another place laid at the big round table, whichaccommodated the company of nine very nicely.Ajo sat between Patsy and Maud and although he selected his dishes withsome care he partook of all the courses from soup to dessert.The morning interview with Goldstein was not mentioned. Ajo inquiredabout Maud's hurt but then changed the subject and conversed upon nearlyeverything but motion pictures. However, after they had repaired to thehotel lobby and were seated together in a cosy, informal group, Patsybroached a project very near to her heart."Beth and I," said she, "have decided to build a Children'sPicture Theatre.""Where?" asked Uncle John, rather startled by the proposition."Here, or in Los Angeles," was the reply."You see," explained Beth, "there is a crying need for a place wherechildren may go and see pictures that appeal especially to them and are,at the same time, quite proper for them to witness. A great educationalfield is to be opened by this venture, and Patsy and I would enjoy thework of creating the first picture theatre, exclusively for children,ever established in America.""You may say, 'in the world,'" added Arthur. "I like this idea of yours,girls, and I hope you will carry it out.""Oh, they'll carry it out, all right," remarked Uncle John. "I've beenexpecting something of this sort, ever since we came here. My girls,Mr. Jones," he said, turning to the young man, "are always doing somequaint thing, or indulging in some queer enterprise, for they're arestless lot. Before Louise married, she was usually in these skirmisheswith fate, but now--""Oh, I shall join Patsy and Beth, of course," asserted Louise. "It willmake it easier for all, to divide the expense between us, and I am asmuch interested in pictures as they are.""Perhaps," said Patsy musingly, "we might build two theatres, indifferent parts of the city. There are so many children to be amused. Andwe intend to make the admission price five cents.""Have you any idea what it costs to build one of these picture theatres?"asked Arthur."We're not going to build one of 'these' theatres," retorted Patsy. "Manyof the dens I've been in cost scarcely anything, being mere shelters. Thecity is strewn with a lot of miserable, stuffy theatres that no one canenjoy sitting in, even to see a good picture. We have talked this overand decided to erect a new style of building, roomy and sanitary, withcushioned seats and plenty of broad aisles. There are one or two of thisclass already in Los Angeles, but we want to make our children's theatresa little better than the best.""And the expense?""Well, it will cost money, of course. But it will be a great delight tothe children--bless their little hearts!""This is really a business enterprise," added Beth gravely.Uncle John chuckled with amusement."Have you figured out the profits?" he inquired."It really ought to pay, Uncle," declared Patsy, somewhat nettled by thisflaccid reception of her pet scheme. "All the children will insist onbeing taken to a place like that, for we shall show just the picturesthey love to see. And, allowing there is no money to be made from theventure, think of the joy we shall give to innumerable little ones!""Go ahead, my dears," said Uncle John, smiling approval. "And, if yougirls find you haven't enough money to carry out your plans, come to me.""Oh, thank you, Uncle!" exclaimed Beth. "But I feel sure we can managethe cost ourselves. We will build one of the theatres first, and if thatis a success we will build others.""But about those films, made especially for children," remarked Arthur."Where will you get them?""Why, there are lots of firms making films," replied Patsy. "We canselect from all that are made the ones most suitable for our purpose.""I fear you cannot do that," said Mrs. Montrose, who had listened withwonder to this conversation. "There are three combinations, or 'trusts,'among the film makers, which are known as the Licensed, the Mutual andthe Independents. If you purchase from one of these trusts, you cannotget films from the others, for that is their edict. Therefore you willhave only about one-third of the films made to select from.""I thought money would buy anything--in the way of merchandise," saidLouise, half laughing and half indignant."Not from these film dictators," was the reply."They all make a few children's pictures," announced Maud Stanton. "Eventhe Continental turns out one occasionally. But there are not nearlyenough, taken all together, to supply an exclusive children's theatre.""Then we will have some made," declared Patsy. "We will order some fairytales, such as the children like. They would be splendid in motionpictures.""Some have already been made and exhibited," said Mrs. Montrose. "Thevarious manufacturers have made films of the fairy tales of HansAndersen, Frank Baum, Lewis Carroll and other well-known writers.""And were they successful?""Quite so, I believe; but such films are seldom put out except atholiday time.""I think, Beth," said Patsy to her cousin, in a businesslike tone, "thatwe must organize a company and make our own films. Then we can getexactly what we want.""Oh, yes!" replied Beth, delighted with the suggestion. "And let us getMaud and Flo to act in our pictures. Won't it be exciting?""Pardon me, young ladies," said A. Jones, speaking for the first timesince this subject had been broached. "Would it not be wise to considerthe expense of making films, before you undertake it?"Patsy looked at him inquiringly."Do you know what the things cost?" she asked."I've some idea," said he. "Feature films of fairy tales, such as youpropose, cost at least two thousand dollars each to produce. You wouldneed about three for each performance, and you will have to change yourprogrammes at least once a week. That would mean an outlay of not lessthan six thousand dollars a week, which is doubtless more money than yourfive-cent theatre could take in."This argument staggered the girls for a moment. Then Beth asked: "How dothe ordinary theatres manage?""The ordinary theatre simply rents its pictures, paying about threehundred dollars a week for the service. There is a 'middleman,' calledthe 'Exchange,' whose business is to buy the films from the makers andrent them to the theatres. He pays a big price for a film, but is ableto rent it to dozens of theatres, by turns, and by this method he notonly gets back the money he has expended but makes a liberal profit.""Well," said Patsy, not to be baffled, "we could sell several copies ofour films to these middlemen, and so reduce the expense of making themfor our use.""The middleman won't buy them," asserted Jones. "He is the thrall of oneor the other of the trusts, and buys only trust pictures.""I see," said Uncle John, catching the idea; "it's a scheme to destroycompetition.""Exactly," replied young Jones."What does the Continental do, Maud?" asked Patsy."I don't know," answered the girl; "but perhaps Aunt Jane can tell you.""I believe the Continental is a sort of trust within itself," explainedMrs. Montrose. "Since we have been connected with the company I havelearned more or less of its methods. It employs a dozen or so producingcompanies and makes three or four pictures every week. The concern hasits own Exchange, or middleman, who rents only Continental films to thetheatres that patronize him.""Well, we might do the same thing," proposed Patsy, who was loath toabandon her plan."You might, if you have the capital," assented Mrs. Montrose. "TheContinental is an immense corporation, and I am told it has more than amillion dollars invested.""Two millions," said A. Jones.The girls were silent a while, seriously considering this startlingassertion. They had, between them, considerable money, but they realizedthey could not enter a field that required such an enormous investment asfilm making."I suppose," said Beth regretfully, "we shall have to give upmaking films.""Then where are we to get the proper pictures for our theatre?"demanded Patsy."It is quite evident we \_can't\_ get them," said Louise. "Therefore we maybe obliged to abandon the theatre proposition."Another silence, still more grave. Uncle John was discreet enough to saynothing. The Stantons and Mrs. Montrose felt it was not their affair.Arthur Weldon was slyly enjoying the chagrin visible upon the faces ofMr. Merrick's three pretty nieces.As for A. Jones, he was industriously figuring upon the back of anenvelope with a stubby bit of pencil.CHAPTER XIIIA FOOLISH BOYIt was the youthful Sangoan who first broke the silence. Glancing at thefigures he had made he said:"It is estimated that if twenty picture theatres use any one film--copiesof it, of course--that film will pay for its cost of making. Therefore,if you build twenty children's theatres, instead of the one or two youoriginally proposed, you would be able to manufacture your own films andthey would be no expense to you."They gazed at him in bewilderment."That is all simple enough!" laughed Arthur. "Twenty picture theatres attwenty thousand dollars each--a low estimate, my dears, for such as yourequire--would mean an investment of four hundred thousand dollars. Afilm factory, with several producing companies to keep it busy, and allthe necessary paraphernalia of costumes and properties, would mean amillion or so more. Say a million and a half, all told. Why, it's a merebagatelle!""Arthur!" Severely, from Louise."I advise you girls to economize in other ways and devote your resourcesto this business, which might pay you--and might not," he continued,oblivious to stony glares."Really, Mr. Jones," said Beth, pouting, "we were not joking, but inreal earnest.""Have I questioned it, Miss De Graf?""Mr. Jones was merely trying to show you how--er--er--how impracticalyour idea was," explained Uncle John mildly."No; I am in earnest, too," said the boy. "To prove it, I will agree toestablish a plant and make the pictures, if the young ladies will buildthe twenty theatres to show them in."Here was another suggestion of a bewildering nature. Extravagant asthe offer seemed, the boy was very serious. He blushed a little as heobserved Mr. Merrick eyeing him earnestly, and continued in anembarrassed, halting way: "I--I assure you, sir, that I am able tofulfill my part of the agreement. Also I would like to do it. Itwould serve to interest me and keep me occupied in ways that are notwholly selfish. My--my other business does not demand my personalattention, you see."To hear this weak, sickly youth speak of investing a million dollars ina doubtful enterprise, in spite of the fact that he lived on a far-awayisland and was a practical stranger in America, set them all tospeculating anew in regard to his history and condition in life. Seeingthat the boy had himself made an opening for a logical query, UncleJohn asked:"Do you mind telling us what this other business is, to which you refer?"A. Jones moved uneasily in his chair. Then he glanced quickly around thecircle and found every eye regarding him with eager curiosity. He blushedagain, a deep red this time, but an instant later straightened up andspoke in a tone of sudden resolve."Most people dislike to speak of themselves," he said, "and I am noexception. But you, who have kindly received me as a friend, after havinggenerously saved me from an untimely death, have surely the right toknow something about me--if, indeed, the subject interests you.""It is but natural that we should feel an interest in you, Mr. Jones,"replied Mr. Merrick; "yet I assure you we have no desire to pry into yourpersonal affairs. You have already volunteered a general statement ofyour antecedents and the object of your visit to America, and that, Iassure you, will suffice us. Pardon me for asking an impertinentquestion."The boy seemed perplexed, now."I did not consider it impertinent, sir. I made a business proposal toyour nieces," he said, "and before they could accept such a proposal theywould be entitled to know something of my financial standing."For a green, inexperienced youth, he spoke with rare acumen, thought Mr.Merrick; but the old gentleman had now determined to shield the boy froma forced declaration of his finances, so he said:"My nieces can hardly afford to accept your proposition. They are reallyable to build one or two theatres without inconveniencing themselves,but twenty would be beyond their means. You, of course, understand theywere not seeking an investment, but trying, with all their hearts, tobenefit the children. I thoroughly approve their original idea, but if itrequires twenty picture theatres to render it practical, they willabandon the notion at once."Jones nodded absently, his eyes half closed in thought. After a briefpause he replied:"I hate to see this idea abandoned at the very moment of its birth. It'sa good idea, and in no way impractical, in my opinion. So permit me tomake another proposition. I will build the twenty theatres myself, andfurnish the films for them, provided the young ladies will agree toassume the entire management of them when they are completed."Dead silence followed this speech. The girls did some rapid-fire mentalcalculations and realized that this young man was proposing to investsomething like fourteen hundred thousand dollars, in order that theymight carry out their philanthropic conception. Why should he do this,even if he could afford it?Both Mr. Merrick and Arthur Weldon were staring stolidly at the floor.Their attitudes expressed, for the first time, doubt--if not positiveunbelief. As men of considerable financial experience, they regarded theyoung islander's proposition as an impossible one.Jones noted this blank reception of his offer and glanced appealingly atPatsy. It was an uncomfortable moment for the girl and to avoid meetinghis eyes she looked away, across the lobby. A few paces distant stood aman who leaned against a table and held a newspaper before his face.Patsy knew, however, that he was not reading. A pair of dark, glisteningeyes peered over the top of the paper and were steadfastly fixed upon theunconscious features of young Jones.Something in the attitude of the stranger, whom she had never seenbefore, something in the rigid pose, the intent gaze--indicating bothalertness and repression--riveted the girl's attention at once and gaveher a distinct shock of uneasiness."I wish," said the boy, in his quiet, firm way, yet with much deferencein his manner and tone, "that you young ladies would consider my offerseriously, and take proper time to reach a decision. I am absolutely inearnest. I want to join you in your attempt to give pleasure to children,and I am willing and--and able--to furnish the funds required. Withoutyour cooperation, however, I could do nothing, and my health is such thatI wish to leave the management of the theatres entirely in your hands, aswell as all the details of their construction.""We will consider it, of course, Mr. Jones," answered Beth gravely. "Weare a little startled just now, as you see; but when we grow accustomedto the immensity of the scheme--our baby, which you have transformed intoa giant--we shall be able to consider it calmly and critically, anddecide if we are competent to undertake the management of so manytheatres.""Thank you. Then, I think, I will excuse myself for this evening andreturn to my room. I'm improving famously, under Dr. Doyle'sinstructions, but am not yet a rugged example of health."Patsy took his hand at parting, as did the others, but her attention wasdivided between Ajo and the strange man who had never for a momentceased watching him. Not once did the dark eyes waver, but followed eachmotion of the boy as he sauntered to the desk, got his key from theclerk, and then proceeded to his room, turning up one of the corridorson the main floor.The stranger now laid his newspaper on the table and disclosed hisentire face for the first time. A middle-aged man, he seemed to be,with iron-gray hair and a smoothly shaven, rather handsome face. Fromhis dress he appeared to be a prosperous business man and it wasevident that he was a guest of the hotel, for he wandered through thelobby--in which many other guests were grouped, some chatting andothers playing "bridge"--and presently disappeared down the corridortraversed by young Jones.Patsy drew a deep breath, but said nothing to the others, who, whenrelieved of the boy's presence, began to discuss volubly hissingular proposal."The fellow is crazy," commented Arthur. "Twenty picture theatres,with a film factory to supply them, is a big order even for amulti-millionaire--and I can't imagine this boy coming under that head.""He seemed in earnest," said Maud, musingly. "What do you think,Aunt Jane?""I am greatly perplexed," admitted Mrs. Montrose. "Had I not known of theconquest of Goldstein by this boy, who issued orders which the manager ofthe Continental meekly obeyed, I would have laughed at his proposition.As it is, I'm afraid to state that he won't carry out his plan to theletter of the agreement.""Would it not be a rash investment, ma'am?" inquired Uncle John."Frankly, I do not know. While all the film makers evade any attempt todiscover how prosperous--financially--they are, we know that withoutexception they have grown very wealthy. I am wondering if this youngJones is not one of the owners of the Continental--a large stockholder,perhaps. If so, that not only accounts for his influence with Goldstein,but it proves him able to finance this remarkable enterprise. Hedoubtless knows what he is undertaking, for his figures, while notaccurate, were logical.""Of course!" cried Patsy. "That explains everything.""Still," said Uncle John cautiously, "this is merely surmise on our part,and before accepting it we must reconcile it with the incongruities inthe case. It is possible that the elder Jones owned an interest in theContinental and bequeathed it to his son. But is it probable? Remember,he was an islander, and a recluse.""More likely," said Beth, "Ajo's father left him a great fortune, whichthe boy invested in the Continental stock.""I have been told," remarked Aunt Jane thoughtfully, "that Continentalstock cannot be bought at any price. It pays such enormous dividends thatno owner will dispose of it.""The whole thing is perplexing in the extreme," declared Arthur. "The boytells a story that at first seems frank and straightforward, yet hisstatements do not dovetail, so to speak.""I think he is holding something back," said Beth; "something that wouldexplain all the discrepancies in his story. You were wrong, Uncle John,not to let him speak when he offered to tell you all.""There was something in his manner that made me revolt from forcing hisconfidence," was the reply."There was something in his manner that made me think he was aboutto concoct a story that would satisfy our curiosity," said Louisewith a shrug.Uncle John looked around the circle of faces."You are not questioning the young fellow's sincerity, I hope?" said he."I don't, for a single second!" asserted Patsy, stoutly. "He may have aqueer history, and he may not have told us all of it, but Ajo is honest.I'll vouch for him!""So will I, my dear," said Uncle John."That is more than I can do, just at present," Arthur frankly stated. "Myopinion is that his preposterous offer is mere bluff. If you acceptedit, you would find him unable to do his part.""Then what is his object?" asked Maud."I can't figure it out, as yet. He might pose as a millionaire and agenerous friend and philanthropist for some time, before the truth wasdiscovered, and during that time he could carry out any secret plans hehad in mind. The boy is more shrewd than he appears to be. We, by chancesaved his life, and at once he attached himself to us like a barnacle,and we can't shake him off.""We don't want to," said Patsy."My explanation is that he has fallen in love with one of usgirls," suggested Flo, with a mischievous glance at her sister. "Iwonder if it's me?""It is more likely," said Louise, "that he has discovered Uncle John tobe a very--prosperous--man.""Nonsense, my dear!" exclaimed that gentleman, evidently irritated by theinsinuation. "Don't pick the boy to pieces. Give him a chance. So far hehas asked nothing from us, but offers everything. He's a grateful fellowand is anxious to help you girls carry out your ambitious plans. That ishow I read him, and I think it is absurd to prejudge him in the way youare doing."The party broke up, the Stantons and Weldons going to their rooms. Bethalso rose."Are you coming to bed, Patsy?" she inquired."Not just now," her cousin replied. "Between us, we've rubbed UncleJohn's fur the wrong way and he won't get composed until he hassmoked his good-night cigar. I'll sit with him in this corner andkeep him company."So the little man and his favorite niece were left together, and he didnot seem in the least ruffled as he lit his cigar and settled down in abig chair, with Patsy beside him, to enjoy it.CHAPTER XIVISIDORE LE DRIEUXPerhaps the cigar was half gone when Patsy gave a sudden start andsqueezed Uncle John's hand, which she had been holding in both her own."What is it, my dear?""The man I told you of. There he is, just across the lobby. The man withthe gray clothes and gray hair.""Oh, yes; the one lighting a cigar.""Precisely."Uncle John gazed across the lobby reflectively. The stranger's eyes rovedcarelessly around the big room and then he moved with deliberate stepstoward their corner. He passed several vacant chairs and settees on hisway and finally paused before a lounging-chair not six feet distant fromthe one occupied by Mr. Merrick."Pardon me; is this seat engaged, sir?" he asked."No," replied Uncle John, not very graciously, for it was a deliberateintrusion.The stranger sat down and for a time smoked his cigar in silence. He wasso near them that Patsy forbore any conversation, knowing he wouldoverhear it.Suddenly the man turned squarely in their direction and addressed them."I hope you will pardon me, Mr. Merrick, if I venture to ask aquestion," said he."Well, sir?""I saw you talking with Mr. Jones this evening--A. Jones, you know, whosays he came from Sangoa.""Didn't he?" demanded the old gentleman.The stranger smiled."Perhaps; once on a time; allowing such a place exists. But his lastjourney was here from Austria.""Indeed!"Mr. Merrick and Patsy were both staring at the man incredulously."I am quite sure of that statement, sir; but I cannot prove it, as yet.""Ah! I thought not."Patsy had just told her uncle how she had detected this man stealthilywatching Jones, and how he had followed the boy when he retired to hisroom. The present interview had, they both knew, something to do withthis singular action. Therefore Mr. Merrick restrained his indignation atthe stranger's pointed questioning. He realized quite well that the manhad come to their corner determined to catechise them and gain whatinformation he could. Patsy realized this, too. So, being forewarned,they hoped to learn his object without granting him the satisfaction of"pumping" them."I suppose you are friends of this Mr. A. Jones," was his next remark."We are acquaintances," said Mr. Merrick."Has he ever mentioned his adventures in Austria to you?""Are \_you\_ a friend of Mr. Jones?" demanded uncle John."I am not even an acquaintance," said the man, smiling. "But I aminterested in him, through a friend of mine who met him abroad. Permit meto introduce myself, sir."He handed them a card which read: "ISADORE LE DRIEUXImporter of Pearls and Precious Stones 36 Maiden Lane, New York City.""I have connections abroad, in nearly all countries," continued the man,"and it is through some of them that I have knowledge of this youngfellow who has taken the name of A. Jones. In fact, I have a portrait ofthe lad, taken in Paris, which I will show you."He searched in his pocket and produced an envelope from which hecarefully removed a photograph, which he handed to Uncle John. Patsyexamined it, too, with a start of surprise. The thin features, the largeserious eyes, even the closely set lips were indeed those of A. Jones.But in the picture he wore a small mustache."It can't be \_our\_ A. Jones," murmured Patsy. "This one is older.""That is on account of the mustache," remarked Le Drieux, who wasclosely watching their faces. "This portrait was taken more than ayear ago.""Oh; but he was in Sangoa then," protested Patsy, who was reallybewildered by the striking resemblance.The stranger smiled indulgently."As a matter of fact, there is no Sangoa." said he; "so we may doubt theyoung man's assertion that he was ever there.""Why are you interested in him?" inquired Mr. Merrick."A natural question," said Le Drieux, after a moment of hesitation. "Iknow you well by reputation, Mr. Merrick, and believe I am justified inspeaking frankly to you and your niece, provided you regard my statementsas strictly confidential. A year ago I received notice from my friend inAustria that the young man had gone to America and he was anxious Ishould meet him. At the time I was too busy with my own affairs to lookhim up, but I recently came to California for a rest, and noticed thestrong resemblance between the boy, A. Jones, and the portrait sent me.So I hunted up this picture and compared the two. In my judgment they areone and the same. What do \_you\_ think, sir?""I believe there is a resemblance," answered Uncle John, turning thecard over. "But here is a name on the back of the photograph: 'JackAndrews.'""Yes; this is Jack Andrews," said Le Drieux, nodding. "Have you everheard the name before?""Never.""Well, Andrews is noted throughout Europe, and it is but natural heshould desire to escape his notoriety by assuming another name out here.Do you note the similarity of the initials? 'J.A.' stand for JackAndrews. Reverse them and 'A.J.' stand for A. Jones. By the way, whatdoes he claim the 'A' means? Is it Andrew?""It means nothing at all," said Patsy. "He told us so.""I see. You caught him unprepared. That isn't like Jack. He is alwayson guard."Both Patsy and Uncle John were by this time sorely perplexed. They had afeeling common to both of them, that the subject of this portrait and A.Jones were two separate and distinct persons; yet the resemblance couldnot be denied, if they were indeed the same, young Jones had deliberatelylied to them, and recalling his various statements and the manner inwhich they had been made, they promptly acquitted the boy of the chargeof falsehood."For what was Jack Andrews noted throughout Europe?" inquired Mr.Merrick, after silently considering these things."Well, he was a highflier, for one thing." answered Le Drieux. "He wasknown as a thorough 'sport' and, I am told, a clever gambler. He had afaculty of making friends, even among the nobility. The gilded youth ofLondon, Paris and Vienna cultivated his acquaintance, and through them hemanaged to get into very good society. He was a guest at the splendidvilla of Countess Ahmberg, near Vienna, when her magnificent collectionof pearls disappeared. You remember that loss, and the excitement itcaused, do you not?""No, sir; I have never before heard of the Countess of Ahmberg orher pearls.""Well, the story filled the newspapers for a couple of weeks. Thecollection embraced the rarest and most valuable pearls known to exist.""And you accuse this man, Andrews, of stealing them?" asked Uncle John,tapping with his finger the portrait he still held."By no means, sir; by no means!" cried Le Drieux hastily. "In fact, hewas one of the few guests at the villa to whom no suspicion attached.From the moment the casket of pearls was last seen by the countess untiltheir loss was discovered, every moment of Andrews' time was accountedfor. His alibi was perfect and he was quite prominent in the unsuccessfulquest of the thief.""The pearls were not recovered, then?""No. The whole affair is still a mystery. My friend in Vienna, a pearlmerchant like myself, assisted Andrews in his endeavor to discover thethief and, being much impressed by the young man's personality, sent methis photograph, asking me to meet him, as I have told you, when hereached America.""Is his home in this country?""New York knows him, but knows nothing of his family or his history. Heis popular there, spending money freely and bearing the reputation of anall-around good fellow. On his arrival there, a year ago, he led a gaylife for a few days and then suddenly disappeared. No one knew what hadbecome of him. When I found him here, under the name of A. Jones, thedisappearance was solved.""I think," said Uncle John, "you are laboring under a serious, ifsomewhat natural, mistake. The subject of this picture is like A. Jones,indeed, but he is older and his expression more--more--""Blase and sophisticated," said Patsy."Thank you, my dear; I am no dictionary, and if those are real words theymay convey my meaning. I feel quite sure, Mr. Le Drieux, that the storyof Andrews can not be the story of young Jones."Le Drieux took the picture and replaced it in his pocket."To err is human," said he, "and I will admit the possibility of my beingmistaken in my man. But you will admit the resemblance?""Yes. They might be brothers. But young Jones has said he has nobrothers, and I believe him."Le Drieux sat in silence for a few minutes. Then he said:"I appealed to you, Mr. Merrick, because I was not thoroughly satisfied,in my own mind, of my conclusions. You have added to my doubts, I mustconfess, yet I cannot abandon the idea that the two men are one and thesame. As my suspicion is only shared by you and your niece, inconfidence, I shall devote myself for a few days to studying young Jonesand observing his actions. In that way I may get a clue that will set alldoubt at rest.""We will introduce you to him," said Patsy. "and then you may questionhim as much as you like.""Oh, no; I prefer not to make his acquaintance until I am quite sure,"was the reply. "If he is not Jack Andrews he would be likely to resentthe insinuation that he is here trading under a false name. Good night,Mr. Merrick. Good night, Miss Doyle. I thank you for your courteousconsideration."He had risen, and now bowed and walked away."Well," said Patsy. "what was he after? And did he learn anything fromus?""He did most of the talking himself," replied Uncle John, looking afterLe Drieux with a puzzled expression. "Of course he is not a jewelmerchant.""No," said Patsy, "he's a detective, and I'll bet a toothpick to a matchthat he's on the wrong scent.""He surely is. Unfortunately, we cannot warn Ajo against him.""It isn't necessary, Uncle. Why, the whole thing is absurd. Our boy isnot a gambler or roysterer, nor do I think he has ever been in Europe.Mr. Le Drieux will have to guess again!"CHAPTER XVA FEW PEARLSThe next morning Patsy, Beth and Louise met in earnest conference overthe important proposition made them by young Jones, and although UncleJohn and Arthur Weldon were both present the men took no part in thediscussion."Some doubt has been expressed," said Beth judicially, "that Ajo isreally able to finance this big venture. But he says he is, and that hewill carry it through to the end, so I propose we let him do it.""Why not?" asked Louise. "If he succeeds, it will be glorious. If hefails, we will suffer in no way except through disappointment.""Well, shall we accept this offer, girls?""First," said Louise, "let us consider what we will have to do, on ourpart, when the twenty theatres are built and the film factory is inoperation.""We are to be the general managers," returned Patsy. "We must select thesubjects, or plots, for the pictures, and order them made under ourdirection. Then we must see that all of our theatres present them in aproper manner, and we must invite children to come and see the shows. Iguess that's all.""That will be enough to keep us busy, I'm sure," said Beth. "But we willgladly undertake it, and I am sure we shall prove good managers, as soonas we get acquainted with the details of the business.""It will give us the sort of employment we like," Patsy assured them."Our first duty will be to plan these theatres for children, and makethem as cosy and comfortable as possible, regardless of expense. Ajo willpay the bills, and when all the buildings are ready we will set to workin earnest."So, when A. Jones appeared he was told that the girls would gladly accepthis proposition. The young man seemed greatly pleased by this verdict. Heappeared to be much better and stronger to-day and he entered eagerlyinto a discussion of the plans in detail. Together they made a list of astring of twenty theatres, to be built in towns reaching from SantaBarbara on the north to San Diego in the south. The film factory was tobe located in the San Fernando Valley, just north of Hollywood.This consumed the entire forenoon, and after lunch they met a prominentreal estate man whom Jones had summoned to the hotel. This gentleman wasgiven a copy of the list of locations and instructed to purchase in eachtown the best site that could be secured for a motion picture theatre.This big order made the real estate man open his eyes in surprise."Do you wish me to secure options, or to purchase the landoutright?" he asked."Be sure of your locations and then close the deals at once," repliedJones. "We do not wish to waste time in useless dickering, and a locationin the heart of each town, perhaps on the main street, is more importantthan the price. You will, of course, protect me from robbery to the bestof your ability; but buy, even if the price is exorbitant. I will thisafternoon place a hundred thousand dollars to your credit in the bank,with which to make advance payments, and when you notify me how much moreis required I will forward my checks at once.""That is satisfactory, sir. I will do the best I can to guard yourinterests," said the man.When he had gone the girls accompanied Ajo in a motorcar to Los Angeles,to consult an architect. They visited several offices before the boy, whoseemed to estimate men at a glance, found one that satisfied him. Thegirls explained with care to the architect their idea of a luxuriouspicture theatre for children, and when he had grasped their conception,which he did with enthusiasm, he suggested several improvements on theirimmature plans and promised to have complete drawings ready to submit tothem in a few days.From the architect's office they drove to the German-American Bank, whereAjo gave his check for a hundred thousand dollars, to be placed to thecredit of Mr. Wilcox, the real estate agent. The deference shown him bythe cashier seemed to indicate that this big check was not the extent ofA. Jones' credit there, by any means.As they drove back to Hollywood, Patsy could not help eyeing thisyouthful capitalist with wonder. During this day of exciting businessdeals the boy had behaved admirably, and there was no longer a shadow ofdoubt in the minds of any of Uncle John's nieces that he was both ableand anxious to carry out his part of the agreement.Patsy almost giggled outright as she thought of Le Drieux and hisridiculous suspicions. One would have to steal a good many pearls inorder to acquire a fortune to match that of the Sangoan.He was speaking of Sangoa now, in answer to a question of Beth's."Yes, indeed," said he, "Sangoa is very beautiful, and the climate iseven more mild than that of your Southern California. The north coast isa high bluff, on which is a splendid forest of rosewood and mahogany. Myfather would never allow any of these magnificent trees to be cut, excepta few that were used in building our house.""But how do your people live? What is the principal industry of yourislanders?" asked Beth."My people are--fishermen," he said, and then the automobile drew upbefore the hotel entrance and the conversation ended.It was on the following afternoon, as they all met in the hotel lobbyafter lunch, that a messenger handed young Jones a neat parcel, for whicha receipt was demanded. Ajo held the parcel in his hand a while,listening to the chatter of the girls, who were earnestly discussingplans for the new picture enterprise. Then very quietly and unobtrusivelyhe unwrapped the package and laid upon the table beside him several smallboxes bearing the name of a prominent jeweler."I hope," said he, taking advantage of a pause caused by the girlsobserving this action, and growing visibly confused by their involuntarystares of curiosity; "I--I hope that you, my new friends, will pardon aliberty I have taken. I wanted to--to present those who were instrumentalin saving my life with--with a--a slight token of my gratitude--a sortof--of--memento of a brave and generous act that gave me back the life Ihad carelessly jeopardized. No," as he saw surprise and protest writtenon their faces, "don't refuse me this pleasure, I implore you! Thelittle--eh--eh--mementos are from my own Island of Sangoa, with thenecessary mountings by a Los Angeles jeweler, and--please accept them!"As he spoke he handed to each of the girls a box, afterward giving one toUncle John and another to Arthur. There remained upon the table threeothers. He penciled a name upon the bottom of each and then handed themto Patsy, saying:"Will you kindly present these, with my compliments, to the MissesStanton, and to their aunt, when they return this evening? Thank you!"And then, before they could recover from their astonishment, he turnedabruptly and fled to his room.The girls stared at one another a moment and then began laughing. Arthurseemed crestfallen, while Uncle John handled his small box as gingerly asif he suspected it contained an explosive."How ridiculous!" cried Patsy, her blue eyes dancing. "And did younotice how scared poor Ajo was, and how he skipped as fearfully as thoughhe had committed some crime? But I'm sure the poor boy meant well. Let'sopen our boxes, girls, and see what foolishness Ajo has been up to."Slipping off the cover of her box, Beth uttered a low cry of amazementand admiration. Then she held up a dainty lavalliere, with a pendantcontaining a superb pearl. Louise had the mate to this, but the one Patsyfound had a pearl of immense size, its color being an exquisite shade ofpink, such as is rarely seen. Arthur displayed a ring set with a splendidwhite pearl, while Uncle John's box contained a stick pin set with a hugeblack pearl of remarkable luster. Indeed, they saw at a glance that thesize and beauty of all these pearls were very uncommon, and while theothers expressed their enthusiastic delight, the faces of Mr. Merrick andPatsy Doyle were solemn and perplexed. They stared at the pearls withfeelings of dismay, rather than joy, and chancing to meet one another'seyes they quickly dropped their gaze to avoid exchanging the uglysuspicion that had forced itself upon their minds.With a sudden thought Patsy raised her head to cast a searching glancearound the lobby, for although their party was seated in an alcove theywere visible to all in the big room of which it formed a part. Yes, Mr.Isidore Le Drieux was standing near them, as she had feared, and theslight sneer upon his lips proved that he had observed the transfer ofthe pearls.So the girl promptly clasped her lavalliere around her neck and openlydisplayed it, as a proud defiance, if not a direct challenge, to thatdetestable sneer.Arthur, admiring his ring in spite of his chagrin at receiving such agift from a comparative stranger, placed the token on his finger."It is a beauty, indeed," said he, "but I don't think we ought to acceptsuch valuable gifts from this boy.""I do not see why," returned his wife Louise. "I think these prettytributes for saving Mr. Jones' life are very appropriate. Of courseneither Beth nor I had anything to do with that affair, but we areincluded in the distribution because it would be more embarrassing toleave us out of it.""And the pearls came from Sangoa," added Beth, "so all these preciousgifts have cost Ajo nothing, except for their settings.""If Sangoa can furnish many such pearls as these," remarked Arthur,reflectively, "the island ought to be famous, instead of unknown. Theirsize and beauty render the gems priceless.""Well," said Patsy soberly, "we know now where A. Jones got his money,which is so plentiful that he can build any number of film factories andpicture theatres. Sangoa must have wonderful pearl fisheries--don't youremember, girls, that he told us his people were fishermen?--for each ofthese specimens is worth a small fortune. Mine, especially, is thelargest and finest pearl I have ever seen.""I beg your pardon!" sternly exclaimed Uncle John, as he whirled swiftlyaround. "Can I do anything for you, sir?"For Mr. Le Drieux had stealthily advanced to the alcove and was glaringat the display of pearls and making notes in a small book.He bowed, without apparent resentment, as he answered Mr. Merrick: "Thankyou, sir; you have already served me admirably. Pardon my intrusion."Then he closed the book, slipped it into his pocket and with another lowbow walked away."What rank impertinence!" cried Arthur, staring after him. "Somenewspaper reporter, I suppose. Do you know him, Uncle John?""He forced an introduction, a few evenings ago. It is a pearlmerchant from New York, named Le Drieux, so I suppose his curiosityis but natural.""Shall we keep our pearls, Uncle?" asked Beth."I shall keep mine," replied the little man, who never wore any ornamentof jewelry. "It was generous and thoughtful in young Jones to presentthese things and we ought not offend him by refusing his 'mementos,' ashe calls them."Perhaps all the nieces were relieved to hear this verdict, for alreadythey loved their beautiful gifts. That evening the Stanton girls andtheir Aunt Jane received their parcels, being fully as much surprised asthe others had been, and their boxes also contained pearls. Flo and Maudhad lavallieres, the latter receiving one as large and beautiful as thatof Patsy Doyle, while Mrs. Montrose found a brooch set with numeroussmaller pearls.Patsy urged them all to wear the ornaments to dinner that evening, whichthey did, and although Jones was not there to observe the effect of thesplendid pearls, Mr. Le Drieux was at his place in the dining room andmade more notes in his little book.That was exactly what Patsy wanted. "I can't stand the suspense of thisthing," she whispered to Uncle John, "and if that man wants anyinformation about these pearls I propose we give it to him. In that wayhe will soon discover he is wrong in suspecting the identity of JackAndrews and A. Jones."Mr. Merrick nodded absently and went to his corner for a smoke. Arthursoon after joined him, while Aunt Jane took her bevy of girls to anotherpart of the loge."Le Drieux will be here presently," said Uncle John to young Weldon."Oh, the fellow with the book. Why, sir?""He's a detective, I think. Anyhow, he is shadowing Jones, whom hesuspects is a thief."He then told Arthur frankly of his former conversation with Le Drieux,and of the puzzling photograph."It really resembles the boy," he admitted, with a frown of perplexity,"yet at the same time I realized the whole thing was absurd. NeitherPatsy nor I can believe that Jones is the man who robbed an Austriancountess. It's preposterous! And let me say right now, Arthur, that I'mgoing to stand by this young fellow, with all my influence, in case thosehounds try to make him trouble."Arthur did not reply at once. He puffed his cigar silently while herevolved the startling accusation in his mind."Both you and Patsy are staunch friends," he observed, after a while,"and I have noticed that your intuition as regards character is seldomat fault. But I advise you, in this instance, not to be hasty, for--""I know; you are going to refer to those pearls.""Naturally. If I don't, Le Drieux will, as you have yourself prophesied.Pearls--especially such pearls as these--are rare and easy to recognize.The world does not contain many black-pearls, for instance, such as thatyou are wearing. An expert--a man with a photograph that stronglyresembles young Jones--is tracing some stolen pearls of great value--acollection, I think you said. We find Jones, a man seemingly unknownhere, giving away a number of wonderful pearls that are worthy a place inany collection. Admit it is curious, Uncle John. It may be all acoincidence, of course; but how do you account for it, sir?""Jones has an island in the South Seas, a locality where most of theworld's famous pearls have been found.""Sangoa?""Yes.""It is not on any map. This man, Le Drieux, positively stated that thereis no such island, did he not?"Uncle John rubbed his chin, a gesture that showed he was disturbed."He was not positive. He said he thought there was no such island.""Well, sir?""If Jones could lie about his island, he would be capable of the theft ofthose pearls," admitted Mr. Merrick reluctantly."That is conclusive, sir.""But he isn't capable of the theft. Le Drieux states that Jack Andrews isa society swell, an all-around confidence man, and a gambler. Jones is adiffident and retiring, but a very manly young fellow, who loves quietand seems to have no bad habits. You can't connect the two in anypossible way."Again Arthur took time to consider."I have no desire to suspect Jones unjustly," he said. "In fact, I havebeen inclined to like the fellow. And yet--his quaint stories and hisfoolish expenditures have made me suspicious from the first. You havescarcely done justice to his character in your description, sir. To us heappears diffident, retiring, and rather weak, in a way, while in hisintercourse with Goldstein he shows a mailed fist. He can be hard asnails, on occasion, as we know, and at times he displays a surprisingknowledge of the world and its ways--for one who has been brought up onan out-of-the-way island. What do we know about him, anyway? He tells atale no one can disprove, for the South Seas are full of small islands,some of which are probably unrecorded on the charts. All this mightpossibly be explained by remembering that a man like Jack Andrews isundoubtedly a clever actor.""Exactly!" said a jubilant voice behind them, and Mr. Isidore Le Drieuxstepped forward and calmly drew up a chair, in which he seated himself."You will pardon me, gentlemen, for eavesdropping, but I was curious toknow what you thought of this remarkable young man who calls himself'A. Jones.'"Arthur faced the intruder with a frown. He objected to being startled inthis manner. "You are a detective?" he asked."Oh, scarcely that, sir," Le Drieux replied in a deprecating way. "Myprinted card indicates that I am a merchant, but in truth I am a specialagent, employed by the largest pearl and gem dealers in the world, a firmwith branches in every large European and American city. My name is LeDrieux, sir, at your service," and with a flourish he presented his card.The young rancher preferred to study the man's face."I am a sort of messenger," he continued, placidly. "When valuableconsignments of jewels are to be delivered, I am the carrier instead ofthe express companies. The method is safer. In twenty-six years of thiswork I have never lost a single jewel.""One firm employs you exclusively, then?""One firm. But it has many branches.""It is a trust?""Oh, no; we have many competitors; but none very important. Our closestrival, for instance, has headquarters on this very coast--in SanFrancisco--but spreads, as we do, over the civilized world. YetJephson's--that's the firm--do not claim to equal our business. They dealmostly in pearls.""Pearls, eh?" said Arthur, musingly. "Then it was your firm that lost thevaluable collection of pearls you mentioned to Mr. Merrick?""No. They were the property of Countess Ahmberg, of Vienna. But we hadsold many of the finest specimens to the countess and have records oftheir weight, size, shape and color. The one you are now wearing, sir,"pointing to Uncle John's scarf pin, "is one of the best black pearls everdiscovered. It was found at Tremloe in 1883 and was originally purchasedby our firm. In 1887 I took it to Tiffany, who sold it to Prince Godesky,of Warsaw. I carried it to him, with other valuable purchases, and afterhis death it was again resold to our firm. It was in October, 1904, thatI again became the bearer of the pearl, delivering it safely to CountessAhmberg at her villa. It was stolen from her, together with 188 otherrare pearls, valued at a half million dollars, a little over a year ago.""This pearl, sir," said Uncle John stiffly, "is not the one you referto. It was found on the shores of the island of Sangoa, and you havenever seen it before."Le Drieux smiled sweetly as he brushed the ashes from his cigar."I am seldom mistaken in a pearl, especially one that I have handled,"said he. "Moreover, a good pearl becomes historic, and it is my businessto know the history of each and every one in existence.""Even those owned by Jephson's?" asked Arthur."Yes; unless they were acquired lately. I have spoken in this manner inorder that you may understand the statements I am about to make, and Ibeg you to listen carefully: Three daring pearl robberies have takenplace within the past two years. The first was a collection scarcelyinferior to that of the Countess Ahmberg. A bank messenger was carryingit through the streets of London one evening, to be delivered to LadyGrandison, when he was stabbed to the heart and the gems stolen.Singularly enough, Jack Andrews was passing by and found the dyingmessenger. He called for the police, but when they arrived the messengerhad expired. The fate of the pearls has always remained a mystery,although a large reward has been offered for their recovery.""Oh; a reward.""Naturally, sir. Four months later Princess Lemoine lost her wonderfulpearl necklace while sitting in a box at the Grand Opera in Paris. Thiswas one of the cleverest thefts that ever baffled the police, for thenecklace was never recovered. We know, however, that Jack Andrewsoccupied the box next to that of the princess. A coincidence--perhaps. Wenow come to the robbery of the Countess Ahmberg, the third on the list.Jack Andrews was a guest at her house, as I have explained to you. Noblame has ever attached to this youthful adventurer, yet my firm, alwaysinterested in the pearls they have sold, advised me to keep an eye on himwhen he returned to America. I did so."Now, Mr. Merrick, I will add to the tale I told you the other night.Andrews behaved very well for a few weeks after he landed at New York;then he disposed of seven fine pearls and--disappeared. They were notnotable pearls, especially, but two of them I was able to trace to thenecklace of Princess Lemoine. I cabled my firm. They called attention tothe various rewards offered and urged me to follow Andrews. That wasimpossible; he had left no clue. But chance favored me. Coming here toLos Angeles on business, I suddenly ran across my quarry: Jack Andrews.He has changed a bit. The mustache is gone, he is in poor health, and Iam told he was nearly drowned in the ocean the other day. So at first Iwas not sure of my man. I registered at this hotel and watched himcarefully. Sometimes I became positive he was Andrews; at other times Idoubted. But when he began distributing pearls to you, his new friends,all doubt vanished. There, gentlemen, is my story in a nutshell. What doyou think of it?"Both Mr. Merrick and young Weldon had listened with rapt interest, buttheir interpretation of the tale, which amounted to a positiveaccusation of A. Jones, showed the difference in the two men's natures."I think you are on the wrong trail, sir," answered Mr. Merrick."Doubtless you have been misled by a casual resemblance, coupled withthe fact that Andrews is suspected of stealing pearls and Jones is knownto possess pearls--the pearls being of rare worth in both cases. Still,you are wrong. For instance, if you have the weight and measurement ofthe Tremloe black pearl, you will find they do not fit the pearl I amnow wearing."Le Drieux smiled genially."It is unnecessary to make the test, sir," he replied. "The pearl Andrewsgave to Miss Doyle is as unmistakable as your own. But I am curious tohear your opinion, Mr. Weldon.""I have been suspicious of young Jones from the first," said Arthur; "butI have been studying this boy's character, and he is positively incapableof the crimes you accuse him of, such as robbery and murder. In otherwords, whatever Jones may be, he is not Andrews; or, if by chance heproves to be Andrews, then Andrews is innocent of crime. All yourtheories are based upon a desire to secure rewards, backed by a chain ofcircumstantial evidence.""A chain," said Le Drieux, grimly, "that will hold Jack Andrews fast inits coils, clever though he is.""Circumstantial evidence," retorted Mr. Merrick, "doesn't amount toshucks! It is constantly getting good people into trouble and allowingrascals to escape. Nothing but direct evidence will ever convince me thata man is guilty."Le Drieux shrugged his shoulders."The pearls are evidence enough," said he."To be sure. Evidence enough to free the poor boy of suspicion. You maybe a better messenger than you are a detective, Mr. Le Drieux, but thatdoesn't convince me you are a judge of pearls."The agent rose with a frown of annoyance."I am going to have Jack Andrews arrested in the morning," he remarked."If you warn him, in the meantime, I shall charge you with complicity."Uncle John nearly choked with anger, but he maintained his dignity."I have no knowledge of your Jack Andrews," he replied, and turned hisback.CHAPTER XVITROUBLEUncle John and Arthur decided not to mention to the girls this astoundingcharge of Isidore Le Drieux, fearing the news would make them nervous anddisturb their rest, so when the men joined the merry party in the alcovethey did not refer to their late interview.Afterward, however, when all but Arthur Weldon had gone to bed and he wassitting in Uncle John's room, the two discussed the matter together withmuch seriousness."We ought to do something, sir," said Arthur. "This Jones is a mereboy, and in poor health at that. He has no friends, so far as weknow, other than ourselves. Therefore it is our duty to see himthrough this trouble."Mr. Merrick nodded assent."We cannot prevent the arrest," he replied, "for Le Drieux will notlisten to reason. If we aided Jones to run away he would soon be caught.Absurd as the charge is, the youngster must face it and prove hisinnocence."Arthur paced the floor in a way that indicated he was disturbed bythis verdict."He ought to have no difficulty in proving he is not Jack Andrews," heremarked, reflectively; "and yet--those pearls are difficult to explain.Their similarity to the ones stolen in Europe fooled the expert, LeDrieux, and they are likely to fool a judge or jury. I hope Jones hassome means of proving that he brought the pearls from Sangoa. That wouldsettle the matter at once.""As soon as he is arrested we will get him a lawyer--the best in thiscountry," said Mr. Merrick. "More than that we cannot do, but a goodlawyer will know the proper method of freeing his client."The next morning they were up early, awaiting developments; but Le Drieuxseemed in no hurry to move. He had breakfast at about nine o'clock, readhis newspaper for a half hour or so, and then deliberately left thehotel. All of Mr. Merrick's party had breakfasted before this and soonafter Le Drieux had gone away young Jones appeared in the lobby. He wasjust in time to see the Stanton girls drive away in their automobile,accompanied by their Aunt Jane."The motion picture stars must be late to-day," said the boy, lookingafter them."They are," answered Patsy, standing beside him at the window; "but Maudsays this happens to be one of their days of leisure. No picture is to betaken and they have only to rehearse a new play. But it's a busy life,seems to me, and it would really prove hard work if the girls didn'tenjoy it so much.""Yes," said he, "it's a fascinating profession. I understand, and nothingcan be called \_work\_ that is interesting. When we are obliged to dosomething that we do not like to do, it becomes 'work.' Otherwise, whatis usually called 'work' is mere play, for it furnishes its quota ofamusement."He was quite unconscious of any impending misfortune and when Beth andLouise joined Patsy in thanking him for his pretty gifts of the pearls heflushed with pleasure. Evidently their expressions of delight were verygrateful to his ears.Said Uncle John, in a casual way: "Those are remarkably fine pearls, tohave come from such an island as Sangoa.""But we find much better ones there, I assure you," replied the boy. "Ihave many in my room of much greater value, but did not dare ask you toaccept them as gifts.""Do many pearls come from Sangoa, then?" asked Arthur."That is our one industry," answered the young man. "Many years ago myfather discovered the pearl fisheries. It was after he had purchased theisland, but he recognized the value of the pearls and brought a colony ofpeople from America to settle at Sangoa and devote their time to pearlfishing. Once or twice every year we send a ship to market with aconsignment of pearls to our agent, and--to be quite frank with you--thatis why I am now able to build the picture theatres I have contracted for,as well as the film factory.""I see," said Uncle John. "But tell me this, please: Why is Sangoa solittle known, or rather, so quite unknown?""My father," Jones returned, "loved quiet and seclusion. He was willingto develop the pearl fisheries, but objected to the flock of adventurerssure to descend upon his island if its wealth of pearls became generallyknown. His colony he selected with great care and with few exceptionsthey are a sturdy, wholesome lot, enjoying the peaceful life of Sangoaand thoroughly satisfied with their condition there. It is only withinthe last two years that our American agents knew where our pearls camefrom, yet they could not locate the island if they tried. I do not feelthe same desire my father did to keep the secret, although I woulddislike to see Sangoa overrun with tourists or traders."He spoke so quietly and at the same time so convincingly that bothArthur and Uncle John accepted his explanation unquestioningly.Nevertheless, in the embarrassing dilemma in which Jones would presentlybe involved, the story would be sure to bear the stamp of unreality toany uninterested hearer.The girls had now begun to chatter over the theatre plans, and their"financial backer"--as Patsy Doyle called him--joined them with eagerinterest. Arthur sat at a near-by desk writing a letter; Uncle Johnglanced over the morning paper; Inez, the Mexican nurse, brought baby toLouise for a kiss before it went for a ride in its perambulator.An hour had passed when Le Drieux entered the lobby in company with athin-faced, sharp-eyed man in plain clothes. They walked directly towardthe group that was seated by the open alcove window, and Arthur Weldon,observing them and knowing what was about to happen, rose from thewriting-desk and drew himself tensely together as he followed them. UncleJohn lowered his paper, frowned at Le Drieux and then turned his eyesupon the face of young Jones.It was the thin-featured man who advanced and lightly touched theboy's arm."Beg pardon, sir," said he, in even, unemotional tones. "You are Mr.Andrews, I believe--Mr. Jack Andrews?"The youth turned his head to look at his questioner."No, sir," he answered with a smile. "A case of mistaken identity. Myname is Jones." Then, continuing his speech to Patsy Doyle, he said:"There is no need to consider the acoustic properties of our theatres,for the architect--""Pardon me again," interrupted the man, more sternly. "I am positive thisis \_not\_ a case of mistaken identity. We have ample proof that JackAndrews is parading here, under the alias of 'A. Jones.'"The boy regarded him with a puzzled expression."What insolence!" muttered Beth in an under-tone but audible enough to bedistinctly heard.The man flushed slightly and glanced at Le Drieux, who nodded his head.Then he continued firmly:"In any event, sir, I have a warrant for your arrest, and I hope you willcome with me quietly and so avoid a scene."The boy grew pale and then red. His eyes narrowed as he stared fixedly atthe officer. But he did not change his position, nor did he betrayeither fear or agitation. In a voice quite unmoved he asked:"On what charge do you arrest me?""You are charged with stealing a valuable collection of pearls from theCountess Ahmberg, at Vienna, about a year ago.""But I have never been in Vienna.""You will have an opportunity to prove that.""And my name is not Andrews.""You must prove that, also."The boy thought for a moment. Then he asked:"Who accuses me?""This gentleman; Mr. Le Drieux. He is an expert in pearls, knowsintimately all those in the collection of the countess and has recognizedseveral which you have recently presented to your friends, as among thoseyou brought from Austria."Again Jones smiled."This is absurd, sir," he remarked.The officer returned the smile, but rather grimly."It is the usual protest, Mr. Andrews. I don't blame you for the denial,but the evidence against you is very strong. Will you come? And quietly?""I am unable to offer physical resistance," replied the young fellow,as he slowly rose from his chair and displayed his thin figure."Moreover," he added, with a touch of humor, "I believe there's a finefor resisting an officer. I suppose you have a legal warrant. May I bepermitted to see it?"The officer produced the warrant. Jones perused it slowly and then handedit to Mr. Merrick, who read it and passed it back to the officer."What shall I do, sir?" asked the boy."Obey the law," answered Uncle John. "This officer is only the law'sinstrument and it is useless to argue with him. But I will go with you tothe police station and furnish bail."Le Drieux shook his head."Quite impossible, Mr. Merrick," he said. "This is not a bailableoffense.""Are you sure?""I am positive. This is an extradition case, of internationalimportance. Andrews, after an examination, will be taken to New York andfrom there to Vienna, where his crime was committed.""But he has committed no crime!"Le Drieux shrugged his shoulders."He is accused, and he must prove his innocence," said he."But that is nonsense!" interposed Arthur warmly. "There is no justice insuch an assertion. If I know anything of the purpose of the law, and Ithink I do, you must first prove this man's guilt before you carry him toAustria to be tried by a foreign court.""I don't care a snap for the purpose of the law," retorted Le Drieux."Our treaty with Austria provides for extradition, and that settlesit. This man is already under arrest. The judge who issued the warrantbelieves that Jones is Jack Andrews and that Jack Andrews stole thepearls from the Countess Ahmberg. Of course, the prisoner will have aformal examination, when he may defend himself as best he can, but wehaven't made this move without being sure of our case, and it will berather difficult for him to escape the penalty of his crimes, cleveras he is.""Clever?" It was Jones himself who asked this, wonderingly.Le Drieux bowed to him with exaggerated politeness."I consider you the cleverest rogue in existence," said he. "But even thecleverest may be trapped, in time, and your big mistake was in disposingof those pearls so openly. See here," he added, taking from his pocket asmall packet. "Here are the famous Taprobane pearls--six of them--whichwere found in your room a half hour ago. They, also, were a part of thecountess' collection.""Oh, you have been to my room?""Under the authority of the law.""And you have seen those pearls before?""Several times. I am an expert in pearls and can recognize their value ata glance," said Le Drieux with much dignity.Jones gave a little chuckle and then turned deprecatingly to Mr. Merrick."You need not come with me to the station, sir," said he; "but, if youwish to assist me, please send me a lawyer and then go to the Continentaland tell Mr. Goldstein of my predicament.""I will do that," promptly replied Uncle John.Jones turned to bow to the girls."I hope you young ladies can forgive this disgraceful scene," he remarkedin a tone of regret rather then humiliation. "I do not see how any effortof mine could have avoided it. It seems to be one of the privileges ofthe people's guardians, in your free country, to arrest and imprisonanyone on a mere suspicion of crime. Here is a case in which someone hassadly blundered, and I imagine it is the pompous gentleman who claims toknow pearls and does not," with a nod toward Le Drieux, who scowledindignantly."It is an outrage!" cried Beth."It's worse than that," said Patsy; "but of course you can easily proveyour innocence.""If I have the chance," the boy agreed. "But at present I am a prisonerand must follow my captor."He turned to the officer and bowed to indicate that he was ready to go.Arthur shook the young fellow's hand and promised to watch his interestsin every possible way."Go with him now, Arthur," proposed Louise. "It's a hard thing to betaken to jail and I'm sure he needs a friend at his side at this time.""Good advice," agreed Uncle John. "Of course they'll give him apreliminary hearing before locking him up, and if you'll stick to himI'll send on a lawyer in double-quick time.""Thank you," said the boy. "The lawyer first, Mr. Merrick, and thenGoldstein."CHAPTER XVIIUNCLE JOHN IS PUZZLEDUncle John was off on his errands even before Jones and Arthur Weldonhad driven away from the hotel with the officer and Le Drieux. There hadbeen no "scene" and none of the guests of the hotel had any inkling ofthe arrest.Uncle John had always detested lawyers and so he realized that he wassure to be a poor judge of the merits of any legal gentleman he mightsecure to defend Jones."I may as well leave it to chance," he grumbled, as he drove down themain boulevard. "The rascals are all alike!"Glancing to this side and that, he encountered a sign on a building:"Fred A. Colby, Lawyer.""All right; I mustn't waste time," he said, and stopping his driver heascended a stairway to a gloomy upper hall. Here the doors, all in a row,were alike forbidding, but one of them bore the lawyer's name, so Mr.Merrick turned the handle and abruptly entered.A sallow-faced young man, in his shirt-sleeves, was seated at a tablelittered with newspapers and magazines, engaged in the task of puttingnew strings on a battered guitar. As his visitor entered he looked up insurprise and laid down the instrument."I want to see Colby, the lawyer," began Uncle John, regarding thedisordered room with strong disapproval."You are seeing him," retorted the young man, with a fleeting smile, "andI'll bet you two to one that if you came here on business you willpresently go away and find another lawyer.""Why?" questioned Mr. Merrick, eyeing him more closely."I don't impress people," explained Colby, picking up the guitar again."I don't inspire confidence. As for the law, I know it as well asanyone--which is begging the question--but when I'm interviewed I haveto admit I've had no experience.""No practice?""Just a few collections, that's all I sleep on that sofa yonder, eat ata cafeteria, and so manage to keep body and soul together. Once in awhile a stranger sees my sign and needs a lawyer, so he climbs thestairs. But when he meets me face to face he beats a hasty retreat."As he spoke, Colby tightened a string and began strumming it to get ittuned. Uncle John sat down on the one other chair in the room andthought a moment."You've been admitted to the bar?" he asked."Yes, sir. Graduate of the Penn Law School.""Then you know enough to defend an innocent man from an unjustaccusation?"Colby laid down the guitar."Ah!" said he, "this grows interesting. I really believe you have half amind to give me your case. Sir, I know enough, I hope, to defend aninnocent man; but I can't promise, offhand, to save him, even from anunjust accusation.""Why not? Doesn't law stand for justice?""Perhaps; in the abstract. Anyhow, there's a pretty fable to that effect.But law in the abstract, and law as it is interpreted and applied, arenot even second cousins. To be quite frank, I'd rather defend a guiltyperson than an innocent one. The chances are I'd win more easily. Are yousure your man is innocent?"Uncle John scowled."Perhaps I'd better find another lawyer who is more optimistic," he said."Oh, I'm full of optimism, sir. My fault is that I'm not well known inthe courts and have no arrangement to divide my fees with the powers thatbe. But I've been observing and I know the tricks of the trade as well asany lawyer in California. My chief recommendation, however, is that I'meager to get a case, for my rent is sadly overdue. Why not try me, justto see what I'm able to do? I'd like to find that out myself.""This is a very important matter," asserted Mr. Merrick."Very. If I'm evicted for lack of rent-money my career is crippled.""I mean the case is a serious one.""Are you willing to pay for success?""Liberally.""Then I'll win it for you. Don't judge my ability by my presentcondition, sir. Tell me your story and I'll get to work at once."Uncle John rose with sudden decision."Put on your coat," he said, and while Colby obeyed with alacrity he gavehim a brief outline of the accusation brought against Jones. "I want youto take my car," he added, "and hasten to the police station, that youmay be present at the preliminary examination. There will be plenty oftime to talk afterward."Colby nodded. His coat and hat made the young lawyer quite presentableand without another word he followed Mr. Merrick down the stairs and tookhis seat in the motorcar. Next moment he was whirling down the street andUncle John looked after him with a half puzzled expression, as if hewondered whether or not he had blundered in his choice of a lawyer.A little later he secured a taxicab and drove to the office of theContinental Film Manufacturing Company. Mr. Goldstein was in his officebut sent word that he was too busy to see visitors. Nevertheless, whenMr. Merrick declared he had been sent by A. Jones, he was promptlyadmitted to the manager's sanctum."Our friend, young Jones," he began, "has just been arrested by adetective."Goldstein's nervous jump fairly raised him off his chair; but inan instant he settled back and shot an eager, interested look athis visitor."What for, Mr. Merrick?" he demanded."For stealing valuable pearls from some foreign woman. A trumped-upcharge, of course."Goldstein rubbed the palms of his hands softly together. His face wore alook of supreme content."Arrested! Ah, that is bad, Mr. Merrick. It is very bad indeed. And itinvolves us--the Continental, you know--in an embarrassing manner.""Why so?" asked Uncle John."Can't you see, sir?" asked the manager, trying hard to restrain asmile. "If the papers get hold of this affair, and state that ourpresident--our biggest owner--the man who controls the Continentalstock--is a common thief, the story will--eh--eh--put a bad crimp inour business, so to speak."Uncle John looked at the man thoughtfully."So Jones controls the Continental, eh?" he said. "How long since, Mr.Goldstein?""Why, since the January meeting, a year and more ago. It was anastonishing thing, and dramatic--believe \_me\_! At the annual meeting ofstockholders in walks this stripling--a mere kid--proves that he holdsthe majority of stock, elects himself president and installs a new boardof directors, turning the tired and true builders of the business out inthe cold. Then, without apology, promise or argument, President Joneswalks out again! In an hour he upset the old conditions, turned ourbusiness topsy-turvy and disappeared with as little regard for theContinental as if it had been a turnip. That stock must have cost himmillions, and how he ever got hold of it is a mystery that has kept usall guessing ever since. The only redeeming feature of the affair wasthat the new board of directors proved decent and Jones kept away from usall and let us alone. I'd never seen him until he came here a few daysago and began to order me around. So, there, Mr. Merrick, you know asmuch about Jones as I do."Mr. Merrick was perplexed. The more he heard of young Jones the moreamazing; the boy seemed to be."Has the Continental lost money since Jones took possession?" heinquired."I think not," replied Goldstein, cautiously. "You're a business man, Mr.Merrick, and can understand that our machinery--our business system--isso perfect that it runs smoothly, regardless of who grabs the dividends.What I object to is this young fellow's impertinence in interfering withmy work here. He walks in, reverses my instructions to my people, ordersme to do unbusinesslike things and raises hob with the wholeorganization.""Well, it belongs to him, Goldstein," said Uncle John, in defense ofthe boy. "He is your employer and has the right to dictate. But just atpresent he needs your help. He asked me to come here and tell you ofhis arrest."Goldstein shrugged his shoulders."His arrest is none of my business," was his reply. "If Jones stole themoney to buy Continental stock he must suffer the consequences. I'mworking for the stock, not for the individual.""But surely you will go to the station and see what can be done for him?"protested Uncle John."Surely I will not," retorted the manager. "What's the use? There isn'teven a foot of good picture film in so common a thing as the arrest of athief--and the censors would forbid it if there were. Let Jones fighthis own battles.""It occurs to me," suggested Mr. Merrick, who was growing indignant,"that Mr. Jones will be able to satisfy the court that he is not a thief,and so secure his freedom without your assistance. What will happen then,Mr. Goldstein?""Then? Why, it is still none of my business. I'm the manager of a motionpicture concern--one of the biggest concerns in the world--and I'venothing to do with the troubles of my stockholders."He turned to his desk and Mr. Merrick was obliged to go away withoutfarther parley. On his way out he caught a glimpse of Maud Stantonpassing through the building. She was dressed in the costume of an Indianprincess and looked radiantly beautiful. Uncle John received a nod and asmile and then she was gone, without as yet a hint of the misfortune thathad overtaken A. Jones of Sangoa.Returning to the hotel, rather worried and flustered by the morning'sevents, he found the girls quietly seated in the lobby, busy over theirembroidery."Well, Uncle," said Patsy, cheerfully, "is Ajo still in limbo?""I suppose so," he rejoined, sinking into an easy chair beside her. "IsArthur back yet?""No," said Louise, answering for her husband, "he is probably staying todo all he can for the poor boy.""Did you get a lawyer?" inquired Beth."I got a fellow who claims to be a lawyer; but I'm not sure he will beof any use."Then he related his interview with Colby, to the amusement of his nieces,all three of whom approved the course he had taken and were alreadyprepared to vouch for the briefless barrister's ability, on the groundsthat eccentricity meant talent."You see," explained Miss Patsy, "he has nothing else to do but jumpheart and soul into this case, so Ajo will be able to command hisexclusive services, which with some big, bustling lawyer would beimpossible."Luncheon was over before Arthur finally appeared, looking somewhat graveand perturbed."They won't accept bail," he reported. "Jones must stay in jail until hisformal examination, and if they then decide that he is really JackAndrews he will remain in jail until his extradition papers arrive.""When will he be examined?" asked Louise."Whenever the judge feels in the humor, it seems. Our lawyer demandedJones' release at once, on the ground that a mistake of identity hadbeen made; but the stupid judge is of the opinion that the chargeagainst our friend is valid. At any rate he refused to let him go. Hewouldn't even argue the case at present. He issues a warrant on acharge of larceny, claps a man in jail whether innocent or not, andrefuses to let him explain anything or prove his innocence until aformal examination is held.""There is some justice in that," remarked Uncle John. "Suppose Jones isguilty; it would be a mistake to let him go free until a thoroughexamination had been made.""And if he is innocent, he will have spent several days in jail, beenworried and disgraced, and there is no redress for the falseimprisonment. The judge won't even apologize to him!""It's all in the interests of law and order, I suppose," said Patsy; "butthe law seems dreadfully inadequate to protect the innocent. I supposeit's because the courts are run by cheap and incompetent people whocouldn't earn a salary in any other way.""Someone must run them, and it isn't an ambitious man's job," repliedUncle John. "What do you think of the lawyer I sent you, Arthur?"The young ranchman smiled."He's a wonder, Uncle. He seemed to know more about the case than Jonesor I did, and more about the law than the judge did. He's anirrepressible fellow, and told that rascal Le Drieux a lot about pearlsthat the expert never had heard before. Where did you find him, sir?"Uncle John explained."Well," said Arthur, "I think Jones is in good hands. Colby has securedhim a private room at the jail, with a bath and all the comforts of home.Meals are to be sent in from a restaurant and when I left the place thejailer had gone out to buy Jones a stock of books to while away hisleisure hours--which are bound to be numerous. I'd no idea a prisonercould live in such luxury.""Money did it, I suppose," Patsy shrewdly suggested."Yes. Jones wrote a lot of checks. Colby got a couple of hundred for aretaining fee and gleefully informed us it was more money than he hadever owned at one time in all his previous career. I think he will earnit, however.""Where is he now?" asked Uncle John."Visiting all the newspaper offices, to 'buy white space,' as he put it.In other words, Colby will bribe the press to silence, at least untilthe case develops.""I'm glad of that," exclaimed Beth. "What do you think of this queerbusiness, Arthur?""Why, I've no doubt of the boy's innocence, if that is what you mean.I've watched him closely and am positive he is no more Jack Andrews thanI am. But I fear he will have a hard task to satisfy the judge that he isfalsely accused. It would be an admission of error, you see, and so thejudge will prefer to find him guilty. It is this same judge--Wilton, Ithink his name is--who will conduct the formal examination, and to-day heopenly sneered at the mention of Sangoa. On the other hand, he evidentlybelieved every statement made by Le Drieux about the identity of thepearls found in Jones' possession. Le Drieux has a printed list of theAhmberg pearls, and was able to check the Jones' pearls off this listwith a fair degree of accuracy. It astonished even me, and I could seethat Jones was equally amazed.""Wouldn't it be queer if they convicted him!" exclaimed Beth."It would be dreadful, since he is innocent," said Patsy."There is no need to worry about that just at present," Arthur assuredthem. "I am placing a great deal of confidence in the ability ofLawyer Colby."CHAPTER XVIIIDOUBTS AND DIFFICULTIESThe Stanton girls and Mrs. Montrose came in early that afternoon. Theyhad heard rumors of the arrest of Jones and were eager to learn what hadoccurred. Patsy and Beth followed them to their rooms to give them everyknown detail and canvass the situation in all its phases."Goldstein has been an angel all afternoon," said Flo. "He grinnedand capered about like a schoolboy and some of us guessed he'd beenleft a fortune.""He ought to be ashamed of himself." Patsy indignantly asserted. "The manadmitted to Uncle John that Ajo is the biggest stockholder in theContinental, the president, to boot; yet Goldstein wouldn't lift a fingerto help him and positively refused to obey his request to go to him afterhe was arrested.""I know about that," said Aunt Jane, quietly. "Goldstein talked to meabout the affair this afternoon and declared his conviction that youngJones is really a pearl thief. He has taken a violent dislike to the boyand is delighted to think his stock will be taken away from him."Maud had silently listened to this dialogue as she dressed for dinner.But now she impetuously broke into the conversation, saying:"Something definite ought to be done for the boy. He needs intelligentassistance. I'm afraid his situation is serious.""That is what Arthur thinks," said Beth. "He says that unless he canfurnish proof that he is not Jack Andrews, and that he came by thosepearls honestly, he will be shipped to Austria for trial. No one knowswhat those foreigners will do to him, but he would probably fare badlyin their hands.""Such being the logical conclusion," said Maud, "we must make our fightnow, at the examination.""Uncle John has engaged a lawyer," announced Patsy, "and if he provesbright and intelligent he ought to be able to free Ajo.""I'd like to see that lawyer, and take his measure," answered Maud,musingly, and her wish was granted soon after they had finished dinner.Colby entered the hotel, jaunty as ever, and Arthur met him andintroduced him to the girls."You must forgive me for coming on a disagreeable mission," began theyoung attorney, "but I have promised the judge that I would produce allthe pearls Mr. Jones gave you, not later than to-morrow morning. He wantsthem as evidence, and to compare privately with Le Drieux's list,although he will likely have the expert at his elbow. So I can't promisethat you will ever get your jewels back again.""Oh. You think, then, that Mr. Jones is guilty?" said Maud coldly."No, indeed; I believe he is innocent. A lawyer should never suspect hisclient, you know. But to win I must prove my case, and opposed to me isthat terrible Le Drieux, who insists he is never mistaken.""Arthur--Mr. Weldon--says you understand pearls as well as Mr. Le Drieuxdoes," suggested Patsy."I thank him; but he is in error. I chattered to the judge aboutpearls, it is true, because I found he couldn't tell a pearl from aglass bead; and I believe I even perplexed Le Drieux by hinting at abroad knowledge on the subject which I do not possess. It was all a bitof bluff on my part. But by to-morrow morning this knowledge will be afact, for I've bought a lot of books on pearls and intend to sit up allnight reading them.""That was a clever idea," said Uncle John, nodding approval."So my mission here this evening is to get the pearls, that I may studythem as I read," continued Colby. "Heretofore I've only seen the thingsthrough a plate glass window, or a show case. The success of our defensedepends upon our refuting Le Drieux's assertion that the pearls found inJones' possession are a part of the Countess Ahmberg's collection. He hasa full description of the stolen gems and I must be prepared to showthat none of the Jones' pearls is on the list.""Can you do that?" asked Maud.She was gazing seriously into the young man's eyes and this caused him toblush and stammer a little as he replied:"I--I hope to, Miss Stanton.""And are you following no other line of defense?" she inquired.He sat back and regarded the girl curiously for a moment."I would like you to suggest some other line of defense," he replied."I've tried to find one--and failed.""Can't you prove he is not Jack Andrews?""Not if the identity of the pearls is established," said the lawyer. "Ifthe pearls were stolen, and if Jones cannot explain how he obtainedpossession of them, the evidence is \_prima facia\_ that he \_is\_ JackAndrews, or at least his accomplice. Moreover, his likeness to thephotograph is somewhat bewildering, you must admit."This gloomy view made them all silent for a time, each thoughtfullyconsidering the matter. Then Maud asked:"Do you know the cash value of Mr. Jones' stock in the ContinentalFilm Company?"Colby shook his head, but Uncle John replied:"Goldstein told me it is worth millions.""Ah!" exclaimed the girl. "There, then, is our proof."The lawyer reflected, with knitted brows."I confess I don't quite see your point," said he."How much were those stolen pearls worth?" asked the girl."I don't know.""You know they were not worth millions. Jack Andrews was an adventurer,by Le Drieux's showing; he was a fellow who lived by his wits andgenerally earned his livelihood by gambling with the scions of wealthyfamilies. Even had he stolen the Countess' pearls and disposed of thecollection at enormous prices--which a thief is usually unable to do--hewould still have been utterly unable to purchase a controlling interestin the Continental stock."She spoke with quiet assurance, but her statement roused the group tosudden excitement."Hooray!" cried Patsy. "There's your proof, Mr. Colby.""The logic of genius," commented Uncle John."Why, it's proof positive!" said Beth."It is certainly a strong argument in favor of the boy's innocence,"asserted Arthur Weldon."Maud's a wonder when she wakes up. She ought to have been a 'ladydetective,'" remarked Flo, regarding her sister admiringly.Colby, at first startled, was now also regarding Maud Stanton with openadmiration; but there was an odd smile on his lips, a smile of indulgenttoleration."Le Drieux's statement connects Andrews with two other pearl robberies,"he reminded her. "The necklace of the Princess Lemoine is said to bepriceless, and the Grandison collection stolen in London was scarcelyless valuable than that of Countess Ahmberg.""Allowing all that," said Mr. Merrick, "two or three hundred thousanddollars would doubtless cover the value of the entire lot. I am quitecertain, Mr. Colby, that Miss Stanton's suggestion will afford you anexcellent line of defense.""I shall not neglect it, you may be sure," replied the lawyer. "TonightI'll try to figure out, as nearly as possible, the total cash value ofall the stolen pearls, and of course Jones will tell us what he paidfor his stock, or how much it is worth. But I am not sure this argumentwill have as much weight as Miss Stanton suggests it may. A boldgambler, such as Andrews, might have obtained a huge sum at Baden Badenor Monte Carlo; and, were he indeed so clever a thief as his recordindicates, he may have robbed a bank, or stolen in some way an immensesum of money. Logically, the question has weight and I shall present itas effectively as I can; but, as I said, I rely more on my ability todisprove the identity of the pearls, on which the expert Le Drieux laysso much stress. Jones will have a thorough and formal examinationwithin a few days--perhaps to-morrow--and if the judge considers thatAndrews the pearl thief has been captured, he will be held here pendingthe arrival from Washington of the extradition papers--say two orthree weeks longer.""Then we shall have all that time to prove his innocence?" inquired Maud."Unfortunately, no. There will be no further trial of the prisoner untilhe gets to Vienna and is delivered to the authorities there. All our workmust be done previous to the formal examination.""You do not seem very hopeful," observed Maud, a hint of reproachin her tone."Then appearances are against me, Miss Stanton," replied the lawyer witha smile. "This is my first important case, and if I win it my future isassured; so I mean to win. But in order to do that I must consider thecharge of the prosecution, the effect of its arguments upon the judge,and then find the right means to combat them. When I am with you, thefriends of the accused, I may consider the seamy side of the fabric; butthe presiding judge will find me so sure of my position that he willinstinctively agree with me."They brought him the pearls Jones had presented to them and then thelawyer bade them good night and went to his office to master the historyof pearls in general and those famous ones stolen from Countess Ahmbergin particular.When he had gone Uncle John remarked:"Well, what do you think of him?"They seemed in doubt."I think he will do all he can," said Patsy."And he appears quite a clever young man," added Beth, as if toencourage them."Allowing all that," said Maud, gravely, "he has warned us of thepossibility of failure. I cannot understand how the coils of evidencehave wrapped themselves so tightly around poor Ajo.""That," asserted Flo, "is because you cannot understand Ajo himself. Norcan I; nor can any of us!"CHAPTER XIXMAUD MAKES A MEMORANDUMMy mother used to say to me: "Never expect to find brains in a prettygirl." Perhaps she said it because I was not a pretty girl and shewished to encourage me. In any event, that absurd notion of the ancientsthat when the fairies bestow the gift of beauty on a baby they withholdall other qualities has so often been disproved that we may welldisregard it.Maud Stanton was a pretty girl--indeed, a beautiful girl--but shepossessed brains as well as beauty and used her intellect to advantagemore often than her quiet demeanor would indicate to others than her mostintimate associates. From the first she had been impressed by the notionthat there was something mysterious about A. Jones and that his romanticexplanation of his former life and present position was intended to hidea truth that would embarrass him, were it fully known. Therefore she hadsecretly observed the young man, at such times as they were together, andhad treasured every careless remark he had made--every admission orassertion--and made a note of it. The boy's arrest had startled herbecause it was so unexpected, and her first impulse was to doubt hisinnocence. Later, however, she had thoroughly reviewed the notes she hadmade and decided he was innocent.In the quiet of her own room, when she was supposed to be asleep, Maudgot out her notebook and read therein again the review of all she hadlearned concerning A. Jones of Sangoa."For a boy, he has a good knowledge of business; for a foreigner, he hasan excellent conception of modern American methods," she murmuredthoughtfully. "He is simple in little things; shrewd, if not wise, inimportant matters. He proved this by purchasing the control of theContinental, for its shares pay enormous dividends."Had he stolen those pearls, I am sure he would have been too shrewd tohave given a portion of them to us, knowing we would display them openlyand so attract attention to them. A thief so ingenious as Andrews, forinstance, would never have done so foolish a thing as that, I ampositive. Therefore, Jones is not Andrews."Now, to account for the likeness between Andrews, an Americanadventurer, and Jones, reared and educated in the mysterious island ofSangoa. Ajo's father must have left some near relatives in this countrywhen he became a recluse in his far-away island. Why did he become arecluse? That's a subject I must consider carefully, for he was a man ofmoney, a man of science, a man of affairs. Jones has told us he has norelatives here. He may have spoken honestly, if his father kept him inignorance of the family history. I'm not going to jump at the conclusionthat the man who calls himself Jack Andrews is a near relative of ourAjo--a cousin, perhaps--but I'll not forget that that might explain thelikeness between them."Ajo's father must have amassed a great fortune, during many years, fromhis pearl fisheries. That would explain why the boy has so much money athis disposal. He didn't get it from the sale of stolen pearls, that iscertain. In addition to the money he invested in the Continental, he hasenough in reserve to expend another million or so in Patsy Doyle's motionpicture scheme, and he says he can spare it easily and have plenty left!This, in my opinion, is a stronger proof of Jones' innocence than LawyerColby seems to consider it. To me, it is conclusive."Now, then, where is Sangoa? How can one get to the island? And,finally, how did Jones get here from Sangoa and how is he to return, ifhe ever wants to go back to his valuable pearl fisheries, his people andhis home?"She strove earnestly to answer these questions, but could not with herpresent knowledge. So she tucked the notebook into a drawer of her desk,put out her light and got into bed.But sleep would not come to her. The interest she took in the fate ofyoung Jones was quite impersonal. She liked the boy in the same way shehad liked dozens of boys. The fact that she had been of materialassistance in saving his life aroused no especial tenderness in her. Onhis own account, however, Jones was interesting to her because he was sounusual. The complications that now beset him added to this interestbecause they were so curious and difficult to explain. Maud had thefeeling that she had encountered a puzzle to tax her best talents, and soshe wanted to solve it.Suddenly she bounded out of bed and turned on the electric light. Thenotebook was again brought into requisition and she penciled on its pagesthe following words:"What was the exact date that Jack Andrews landed in America? Whatwas the exact date that Ajo landed from Sangoa? The first questionmay be easily answered, for doubtless the police have the record.But--the other?"Then she replaced the book, put out the light and went to sleepvery easily.That last thought, now jotted down in black and white, had effectuallycleared her mind of its cobwebs.CHAPTER XXA GIRLISH NOTIONColby came around next morning just as Mr. Merrick was entering thebreakfast room, and the little man took the lawyer in to have a cup ofcoffee. The young attorney still maintained his jaunty air, althoughred-eyed from his night's vigil, and when he saw the Stanton girls andtheir Aunt Jane having breakfast by an open window he eagerly beggedpermission to join them, somewhat to Uncle John's amusement."Well?" demanded Maud, reading Colby's face with her clear eyes."I made a night of it, as I promised," said he. "This morning I know somuch about pearls that I'm tempted to go into the business.""As Jack Andrews did?" inquired Flo."Not exactly," he answered with a smile. "But it's an interestingsubject--so interesting that I only abandoned my reading when I found Iwas burning my electric lamp by daylight. Listen: A pearl is nothing moreor less than nacre, a fluid secretion of a certain variety of oyster--notthe eatable kind. A grain of sand gets between the folds of the oysterand its shell and irritates the beast. In self-defense the oyster coversthe sand with a fluid which hardens and forms a pearl.""I've always known that," said Flo, with a toss of her head."Yes; but I want you all to bear it in mind, for it will explain adiscovery I have made. Before I get to that, however, I want to say thatat one time the island of Ceylon supplied the world with its most famouspearls. The early Egyptians discovered them there, as well as on thePersian and Indian coasts. The pearl which Cleopatra is said to havedissolved in wine and swallowed was worth about four hundred thousanddollars in our money; but of course pearls were scarce in her day. Asingle pearl was cut in two and used for earrings for the statue of Venusin the Pantheon at Rome, and the sum paid for it was equal to about aquarter of a million dollars. Sir Thomas Gresham, in the days of QueenElizabeth, had a pearl valued at about seventy-five thousand dollarswhich he treated in the same manner Cleopatra did, dissolving it in wineand boasting he had given the most expensive dinner ever known.""All of which--" began Maud, impatiently."All of which, Miss Stanton, goes to show that pearls have been of greatprice since the beginning of history. Nowadays we get just as valuablepearls from the South Seas, and even from Panama, St. Margarita and theCaromandel Coast, as ever came from Ceylon. But only those of rare size,shape or color are now valued at high prices. For instance, a string ofmatched pearls such as that owned by Princess Lemoine is estimated asworth only eighty thousand dollars, because it could be quite easilyduplicated. The collection of Countess Ahmberg was noted for its varietyof shapes and colors more than for its large or costly pearls; and thatleads to my great discovery.""Thank heaven," said Flo, with a sigh."I have discovered that our famous expert. Le Drieux, is anarrant humbug.""We had suspected that," remarked Maud."Now we know it," declared Colby. "Pearls, I have learned, change theircolor, their degree of luster, even their weight, according toatmospheric conditions and location. A ten-penny-weight pearl in Viennamight weigh eight or nine pennyweights here in California, or it is morelikely to weigh twelve. The things absorb certain moistures and chemicalsfrom the air and sun, and shed those absorptions when kept in darkness orfrom the fresh air. Pearls die, so to speak; but are often restored tolife by immersions in sea-water, their native element. As for color: thepink and blue pearls often grow white, at times, especially if kept longin darkness, but sun-baths restore their former tints. In the same way awhite pearl, if placed near the fumes of ammonia, changes to a pinkishhue, while certain combinations of chemicals render them black, or'smoked.' A clever man could steal a pink pearl, bleach it white, andsell it to its former owner without its being recognized. Therefore, whenour expert, Le Drieux, attempts to show that the pearls found in Jones'possession are identical with those stolen from the Austrian lady, hefails to allow for climatic or other changes and cannot be accurateenough to convince anyone who knows the versatile characteristics ofthese gems.""Ah, but does the judge know that, Mr. Colby?" asked Maud."I shall post him. After that, the conviction of the prisoner will beimpossible.""Do you think the examination will be held to-day?" inquired Mr. Merrick."I cannot tell that. It will depend upon the mood of Judge Wilton. If hefeels grouchy or disagreeable, he is liable to postpone the case. If heis in good spirits and wants to clear his docket he may begin theexamination at ten o'clock, to-day, which is the hour set for it.""Is your evidence ready, Mr. Colby?""Such as I can command, Miss Stanton," he replied. "Last evening I wiredNew York for information as to the exact amount of stock Jones owns inthe Continental, and I got a curious reply. The stock is valued atnineteen hundred thousand dollars, but no one believes that Jones ownsit personally. It is generally thought that for politic reasons the youngman was made the holder of stock for several different parties, who stillown it, although it is in Jones' name. The control of stock withoutownership is not unusual. It gives the real owners an opportunity to hidebehind their catspaw, who simply obeys their instructions.""I do not believe that Jones is connected with anyone in that manner,"said Mr. Merrick."Nor do I," asserted Aunt Jane. "His interference with Goldstein's plansproves he is under no obligations to others, for he has actedarbitrarily, in accordance with his personal desires and against thefinancial interests of the concern.""Why didn't you ask him about this, instead of wiring to New York?"demanded Maud."He might not give us exact information, under the circumstances,"said Colby.The girl frowned."Jones is not an ordinary client," continued the lawyer, coolly. "Hewon't tell me anything about himself, or give me what is known as'inside information.' On the contrary, he contents himself with sayinghe is innocent and I must prove it. I'm going to save the young man, butI'm not looking to him for much assistance."Maud still frowned. Presently she said:"I want to see Mr. Jones. Can you arrange an interview for me, sir?""Of course. You'd better go into town with me this morning. If theexamination is held, you will see Jones then. If it's postponed, you mayvisit him in the jail."Maud reflected a moment."Very well," said she, "I'll go with you." Then, turning to her aunt, shecontinued: "You must make my excuses to Mr. Goldstein, Aunt Jane."Mrs. Montrose eyed her niece critically."Who will accompany you, Maud?" she asked."Why, I'll go," said Patsy Doyle; and so it was settled, Uncle Johnagreeing to escort the young ladies and see them safely home again.CHAPTER XXITHE YACHT "ARABELLA"As the party drove into town Colby said:"It wouldn't be a bad idea for Jones to bribe that fellow Le Drieux. IfLe Drieux, who holds a warrant for the arrest of Jack Andrews, issued bythe Austrian government and vised in Washington, could be won to ourside, the whole charge against our friend might be speedily dissolved.""Disgraceful!" snapped Maud indignantly. "I am positive Mr. Jones wouldnot consider such a proposition.""Diplomatic, not disgraceful," commented the lawyer, smiling at her. "Whyshould Jones refuse to consider bribery?""To use money to defeat justice would be a crime as despicable asstealing pearls," she said."Dear me!" muttered Colby, with a puzzled frown. "What a queer way tolook at it. Le Drieux has already been bribed, by a liberal reward, torun down a supposed criminal. If we bribe him with a larger sum to giveup the pursuit of Jones, whom we believe innocent, we are merelydefending ourselves from a possible injustice which may be brought aboutby an error of judgment.""Isn't this judge both able and honest?" asked Uncle John."Wilton? Well, possibly. His ability consists in his knowledge of law,rather than of men and affairs. He believes himself honest, I suppose,but I'll venture to predict he will act upon prejudice and an assumptionof personal dignity, rather than attempt to discover if his personalimpressions correspond with justice. A judge, Mr. Merrick, is a mereman, with all the average man's failings; so we must expect him to bequite human.""Never mind," said Patsy resignedly. "Perhaps we shall find him a betterjudge than you are lawyer.""He has had more experience, anyhow," said Colby, much amused at theshot.They found, on arriving at court, that the case had already beenpostponed. They drove to the jail and obtained permission to see theprisoner, who was incarcerated under the name of "Jack Andrews, alias A.Jones." Maud would have liked a private audience, but the lawyer waspresent as well as Patsy and Mr. Merrick, and she did not like to askthem to go away.The boy greeted them with his old frank smile and did not seem in theleast oppressed by the fact that he was a prisoner accused of an uglycrime. The interview was held in a parlor of the jail, a guard standingby the door but discreetly keeping out of earshot.Colby first informed the boy of the postponement of his formalexamination and then submitted to his client an outline of the defense hehad planned. Jones listened quietly and shook his head."Is that the best you can do for me?""With my present knowledge, yes," returned the lawyer."And will it clear me from this suspicion?" was the next question."I hope so.""You are not sure?""This is an extraordinary case, Mr. Jones. Your friends all believe youinnocent, but the judge wants facts--cold, hard facts--and only thesewill influence him. Mr. Le Drieux, commissioned by the Austriangovernment, states that you are Jack Andrews, and have escaped to Americaafter having stolen the pearls of a noble Viennese lady. He will offer,as evidence to prove his assertion, the photograph and the pearls. Youmust refute this charge with counter-evidence, in order to escapeextradition and a journey to the country where the crime was committed.There you will be granted a regular trial, to be sure, but even if youthen secure an acquittal you will have suffered many indignities and yourgood name will be permanently tarnished.""Well, sir?""I shall work unceasingly to secure your release at the examination. ButI wish I had some stronger evidence to offer in rebuttal.""Go ahead and do your best," said the boy, nonchalantly. "I will abideby the result, whatever it may be.""May I ask a few questions?" Maud timidly inquired.He turned to her with an air of relief."Most certainly you may, Miss Stanton.""And you will answer them?""I pledge myself to do so, if I am able.""Thank you," she said. "I am not going to interfere with Mr. Colby'splans, but I'd like to help you on my own account, if I may."He gave her a quick look, at once grateful, suspicious and amused.Then he said:"Clear out, Colby. I'm sure you have a hundred things to attend to, andwhen you're gone I'll have a little talk with Miss Stanton."The lawyer hesitated."If this conversation is likely to affect your case," he began, "then--""Then Miss Stanton will give you any information she may acquire,"interrupted Jones, and that left Colby no alternative but to go away."Now, then, Miss Stanton, out with it!" said the boy."There are a lot of things we don't know, but ought to know, in order todefend you properly," she observed, looking at him earnestly."Question me, then.""I want to know the exact date when you landed in this countryfrom Sangoa.""Let me see. It was the twelfth day of October, of last year.""Oh! so long ago as that? It is fifteen months. Once you told us that youhad been here about a year.""I didn't stop to count the months, you see. The twelfth of Octoberis correct.""Where did you land?""At San Francisco.""Direct from Sangoa?""Direct from Sangoa.""And what brought you from Sangoa to San Francisco?""A boat.""A sailing-ship?""No, a large yacht. Two thousand tons burden.""Whose yacht was it?""Mine.""Then where is it now?"He reflected a moment."I think Captain Carg must be anchored at San Pedro, by now. Or perhapshe is at Long Beach, or Santa Monica," he said quietly."On this coast!" exclaimed Maud."Yes."Patsy was all excitement by now and could no longer hold her tongue."Is the yacht \_Arabella\_ yours?" she demanded."It is, Miss Patsy.""Then it is lying off Santa Monica Bay. I've seen it!" she cried."It was named for my mother," said the boy, his voice softening, "andbuilt by my father. In the \_Arabella\_ I made my first voyage; so you willrealize I am very fond of the little craft."Maud was busily thinking."Is Captain Carg a Sangoan?" she asked."Of course. The entire crew are Sangoans.""Then where has the yacht been since it landed you here fifteenmonths ago?""It returned at once to the island, and at my request has now madeanother voyage to America.""It has been here several days.""Quite likely.""Has it brought more pearls from Sangoa?""Perhaps. I do not know, for I have not yet asked for the captain'sreport."Both Uncle John and Patsy were amazed at the rapidity with which Maud wasacquiring information of a really important character. Indeed, she washerself surprised and the boy's answers were already clearing away someof the mists. She stared at him thoughtfully as she considered her nextquestion, and Jones seemed to grow thoughtful, too."I have no desire to worry my friends over my peculiar difficulties," hepresently said. "Frankly, I am not in the least worried myself. Thecharge against me is so preposterous that I am sure to be released afterthe judge has examined me; and, even at the worst--if I were sent toVienna for trial--the Austrians would know very well that I am not theman they seek.""That trip would cause you great inconvenience, however," suggestedMr. Merrick."I am told a prisoner is treated very well, if he is willing to pay forsuch consideration," said Jones."And your good name?" asked Maud, with a touch of impatience."My good name is precious only to me, and I know it is still untarnished.For your sake, my newly found friends, I would like the world to believein me, but there is none save you to suffer through my disgrace, and youmay easily ignore my acquaintance.""What nonsense!" cried Patsy, scornfully. "Tell me, sir, what's to becomeof our grand motion picture enterprise, if you allow yourself to beshipped to Vienna as a captured thief?"He winced a trifle at the blunt epithet but quickly recovered andsmiled at her."I'm sorry, Miss Patsy," said he. "I know you will be disappointed if ourenterprise is abandoned. So will I. Since this latest complication aroseI fear I have not given our project the consideration it deserves."The boy passed his hand wearily across his forehead and, rising from hisseat, took a few nervous steps up and down the room. Then, pausing, heasked abruptly:"Are you still inclined to be my champion, Miss Stanton?""If I can be of any help," she replied, simply."Then I wish you would visit the yacht, make the acquaintance of CaptainCarg and tell him of the trouble I am in. Will you?""With pleasure. That is--I'll be glad to do your errand.""I'll give you a letter to him," he continued, and turning to theattendant he asked for writing material, which was promptly furnishedhim. At the table he wrote a brief note and enclosed it in an envelopewhich he handed to Maud."You will find the captain a splendid old fellow," said he."Will he answer any questions I may ask him?" she demanded."That will depend upon your questions," he answered evasively. "Carg isconsidered a bit taciturn, I believe, but he has my best interests atheart and you will find him ready to serve me in any possible way.""Is there any objection to my going with Maud?" asked Patsy. "I'd like tovisit that yacht; it looks so beautiful from a distance.""You may all go, if you wish," said he. "It might be well for Mr. Merrickto meet Captain Carg, who would prefer, I am sure, to discuss so delicatea matter as my arrest with a man. Not that he is ungallant, but with aman such as Mr. Merrick he would be more at his ease. Carg is a sailor,rather blunt and rugged, both in speech and demeanor, but wholly devotedto me because I am at present \_the\_ Jones of Sangoa.""I'll accompany the girls, of course," said Uncle John; "and I think weought not to delay in seeing your man. Colby says you may be called forexamination at any time.""There is one more question I want to ask," announced Maud as they roseto go. "On what date did you reach New York, after landing at SanFrancisco?""Why, it must have been some time in last January. I know it was soonafter Christmas, which I passed in Chicago.""Is that as near as you can recollect the date?""Yes, at short notice.""Then perhaps you can tell me the date you took possession of theContinental Film Company by entering the stockholders' meeting andejecting yourself president?"He seemed surprised at her information and the question drew from him anodd laugh."How did you learn about that incident?" he asked."Goldstein told Mr. Merrick. He said it was a coup d'etat."The boy laughed again."It was really funny," said he. "Old Bingley, the last president, had noinkling that I controlled the stock. He was so sure of being reelectedthat he had a camera-man on hand to make a motion picture of the scenewhere all would hail him as the chief. The picture was taken, but itdidn't interest Bingley any, for it showed the consternation on his face,and the faces of his favored coterie, when I rose and calmly voted himout of office with the majority of the stock.""Oh!" exclaimed Maud. "There was a picture made of that scene, then?""To be sure. It was never shown but once to an audience of one. I satand chuckled to myself while the film was being run.""Was it kept, or destroyed?" asked the girl, breathlessly."I ordered it preserved amongst our archives. Probably Goldstein now hasthe negative out here, stored in our Hollywood vaults.""And the date--when was it?" she demanded."Why, the annual meeting is always the last Thursday in January. Figureit out--it must have been the twenty-sixth. But is the exact dateimportant, Miss Stanton?""Very," she announced. "I don't know yet the exact date that Andrewslanded in New York on his return from Vienna, but if it happened to belater than the twenty-sixth of January--""I see. In that case the picture will clear me of suspicion.""Precisely. I shall now go and wire New York for the information Ineed.""Can't you get it of Le Drieux?" asked the young man."Perhaps so; I'll try. But it will be better to get the date from thesteamship agent direct."With this they shook the boy's hand, assuring him of their sympathy andtheir keen desire to aid him, and then hurried away from the jail.CHAPTER XXIIMASCULINE AND FEMININEUncle John and the girls, after consulting together, decided to stop atthe Hollywood studio and pick up Flo and Mrs. Montrose."It would be a shame to visit that lovely yacht without them," saidPatsy; "and we were all invited, you know.""Yes, invited by a host who is unavoidably detained elsewhere," addedUncle John."Still, that yacht is very exclusive," his niece stated, "and I'm sure weare the first Americans to step foot on its decks."They were all in a brighter mood since the interview at the jail, andafter a hurried lunch at the hotel, during which Maud related to theothers the morning's occurrences, they boarded the big Merrickseven-passenger automobile and drove to Santa Monica Bay. Louise couldn'tleave the baby, who was cutting teeth, but Arthur and Beth joined theparty and on arrival at the beach Uncle John had no difficulty insecuring a launch to take them out to the \_Arabella\_."They won't let you aboard, though," declared the boatman. "A goodmany have tried it, an' come back disjointed. There's something queerabout that craft; but the gov'ment don't seem worried, so I guess itain't a pirate."The beauty of the yacht grew on them as they approached it. It waspainted a pure white in every part and on the stern was the one word:\_Arabella\_, but no name of the port from which she hailed. The ladder washoisted and fastened to an upper rail, but as they drew up to the smoothsides a close-cropped bullet-head projected from the bulwarks and a gruffvoice demanded:"Well, what's wanted?""We want to see Captain Carg," called Arthur, in reply.The head wagged sidewise."No one allowed aboard," said the man."Here's a letter to the captain, from Mr. Jones," said Maud,exhibiting it.The word seemed magical. Immediately the head disappeared and an instantlater the boarding ladder began to descend. But the man, a sub-officerdressed in a neat uniform of white and gold, came quickly down the stepsand held out his hand for the letter."Beg pardon," said he, touching his cap to the ladies, "but the rules arevery strict aboard the \_Arabella\_. Will you please wait until I've takenthis to the captain? Thank you!"Then he ran lightly up the steps and they remained seated in the launchuntil he returned."The captain begs you to come aboard," he then said, speaking veryrespectfully but with a face that betrayed his wonder at the order of hissuperior. Then he escorted them up the side to the deck, which wasmarvelously neat and attractive. Some half a dozen sailors lounged hereand there and these stared as wonderingly at the invasion of strangers asthe subaltern had done. But their guide did not pause longer than to seethat they had all reached the deck safely, when he led them into aspacious cabin.Here they faced Captain Carg, whom Patsy afterward declared was thetallest, thinnest, chilliest man she had ever encountered. His hair wasgrizzled and hung low on his neck; his chin was very long and ended in apoint; his nose was broad, with sensitive nostrils that marked everybreath he drew. As for his eyes, which instantly attracted attention,they were brown and gentle as a girl's but had that retrospectiveexpression that suggests far-away thoughts or an utter lack of interestin one's surroundings. They never looked at but through one. The effectof Carg's eyes was distinctly disconcerting.The commander of the \_Arabella\_ bowed with much dignity as his guestsentered and with a sweep of his long arm he muttered in distant tones:"Pray be seated." They obeyed. The cabin was luxuriously furnished andthere was no lack of comfortable chairs.Somehow, despite the courteous words and attitude of Captain Carg, therewas something about him that repelled confidence. Already Maud and Patsywere wondering if such a man could be loyal and true."My young master," he was saying, as he glanced at the letter he stillheld in his hand, "tells me that any questions you may ask I may answeras freely as I am permitted to.""What does that mean, sir?" Maud inquired, for the speech was quiteambiguous."That I await your queries, Miss," with another perfunctory bow in herdirection.She hesitated, puzzled how to proceed."Mr. Jones is in a little trouble," she finally began. "He has beenmistaken for some other man and--they have put him in jail until he canbe examined by the federal judge of this district."The captain's face exhibited no expression whatever. Even the eyesfailed to express surprise at her startling news. He faced his visitorswithout emotion."At the examination," Maud went on, "it will be necessary for him toprove he is from Sangoa."No reply. The captain sat like a statue."He must also prove that certain pearls found in his possession camefrom Sangoa."Still no reply. Maud began to falter and fidget. Beth was amused.Patsy was fast growing indignant. Flo had a queer expression on herpretty face that denoted mischief to such an extent that it alarmedher Aunt Jane."I'm afraid," said Maud, "that unless you come to your master'sassistance, Captain Carg, he will be sent to Austria, a prisoner chargedwith a serious crime."She meant this assertion to be very impressive, but it did not seem toaffect the man in the least. She sighed, and Flo, with a giggle, broke anawkward pause."Well, why don't you get busy. Maud?" she asked."I--in what way, Flo?" asked her sister, catching at the suggestionimplied."Captain Carg would make a splendid motion picture actor," declared theyounger Miss Stanton, audaciously. "He sticks close to his cues, you see,and won't move till he gets one. He will answer your questions; yes, hehas said he would; but you may prattle until doomsday without effect, sofar as he is concerned, unless you finish your speech with aninterrogation point."Mrs. Montrose gave a gasp of dismay, while Maud flushed painfully. Thecaptain, however, allowed a gleam of admiration to soften his grimfeatures as he stared fixedly at saucy Flo. Patsy marked this fleetingchange of expression at once and said hastily:"I think. Maud, dear, the captain is waiting to be questioned."At this he cast a grateful look in Miss Doyle's direction and bowed toher. Maud began to appreciate the peculiar situation and marshalled herquestions in orderly array."Tell me, please, where \_is\_ Sangoa?" she began."In the South Seas, Miss.""Will you give me the latitude and longitude?""I cannot.""Oh, you mean that you \_will\_ not?""I have been commanded to forget the latitude and longitude of Sangoa.""But this is folly!" she exclaimed, much annoyed. "Such absurd reticencemay be fatal to Mr. Jones' interests."He made no reply to this and after reflection she tried again."What is the nearest land to Sangoa?""Toerdal," said he."What is that, an island?""Yes.""Is it on the maps? Is it charted?""No, Miss."She silenced Flo's aggravating giggle with a frown."Tell me, sir," she continued, "what is the nearest land to Sangoa thatis known to the world?"He smiled faintly as he replied: "I cannot tell."Uncle John had grown very uneasy by this time and he decided he ought toattempt to assist Maud. So, addressing Captain Carg, he said in apositive tone:"We quite understand, sir, that it has been the policy of the owners ofSangoa to guard all knowledge of the island's whereabouts from theoutside world, as well as the fact that its pearl fisheries are veryrich. We understand that an influx of treasure-seekers would embarrassthe Sangoans. But we are close friends of young Mr. Jones and have nodesire to usurp his island kingdom or seize his pearls. Our only anxietyis to free him from an unjust suspicion. A foolish man named Le Drieuxaccuses Jones of stealing a choice collection of pearls from a lady inAustria and fleeing with them to America. He has a photograph of the realcriminal, taken abroad, which curiously resembles your young master."Here the captain turned a quick look upon the speaker and for the firsttime his eyes lost their dull expression. But he made no remark and UncleJohn continued:"This man Le Drieux found several choice pearls in the possession of Mr.Jones, which he claims are a part of the stolen collection. Hence heobtained your master's arrest. Jones says he brought the pearls fromSangoa, his home, where they were found. No one here knows anything ofSangoa, so they regard his story with suspicion. Now, sir, we believethat through you we can prove he has told the truth, and so secure hisrelease. Here is the important question: Will you help us?""Willingly, sir," replied the captain."Are you forbidden to tell us where Sangoa is, or anything aboutthe island?""Yes, sir; I am forbidden to do that, under any circumstances," was theready answer."Have you been to Sangoa since you landed Mr. Jones in San Francisco,some fifteen months ago?""Yes, sir.""And did you bring back with you, on this trip, any pearls?""Yes, sir.""Have you already disposed of them?""No, sir.""Why not?""I am awaiting orders from my master.""Has he been aboard since you anchored here?""No, sir.""What were your instructions?""To anchor on this coast and await his coming.""Well," said Mr. Merrick, reflectively, "I believe you can prove our casewithout telling the location of Sangoa. An exhibition of the pearls youhave brought ought to convince any reasonable judge. Are there many ofthem in this lot?""Not so many as usual, sir.""Are they very choice ones?""Not so choice as usual, sir."Uncle John was greatly disappointed, but Maud exclaimed eagerly:"Let us see them, please!"That was not a question, but the captain rose at once, bowed and left thecabin. It was some ten minutes before he returned, followed by two menwho bore between them a heavy bronze chest which they placed upon thecabin floor. Then they left the room and the captain took a key from hispocket and unlocked a secret panel in the wainscoting of the cabin. Asmall compartment was disclosed, in which hung another key on an ironhook. He removed this and with it unlocked the chest, drawing-from itsrecesses several trays which he deposited upon the table. These trayswere lined and padded with white velvet and when the covers were removed,the girls, who had crowded around the table, uttered cries ofastonishment and delight."They may not be as numerous or as choice 'as usual,'" murmuredMrs. Montrose, "but they are the most amazing lot of pearls I haveever beheld.""And did all these come from Sangoa?" Maud asked the captain."They represent two months' fishing on the coast of our island," hereplied; "but not the best two months of the year. The weather was bad;there were many storms.""Why, the pearls that Ajo gave us were insignificant when compared withthese!" cried Beth. "This collection must be worth an enormous sum.Uncle John."Uncle John merely nodded. He had been thinking, as he studied the pearls,and now turned to Captain Carg."Will you come ashore and testify before the judge in behalf ofyour master?""Yes, if he asks me to do so.""And will you bring these pearls with you?""If my master orders it.""Very good. We will have him send you instructions."The captain bowed, after which he turned to the table and began replacingthe trays in the chest. Then he locked it, again hung the key in thesecret aperture and closed the panel. A whistle summoned the two seamen,who bore away the chest, accompanied by the captain in person.When they were left alone, Maud said anxiously:"Is there anything more we can do here?""I think not," replied Mr. Merrick."Then let us get back. I want to complete my evidence at once, for no oneknows when the judge will summon Ajo for examination."They thanked the captain when he rejoined them, but he remained as silentand undemonstrative as ever, so they took their departure without furtherceremony and returned to the shore.CHAPTER XXIIITHE ADVANTAGE OF A DAYThat evening Le Drieux appeared in the lobby of the hotel and sat himselfcomfortably down, as if his sole desire in life was to read the eveningpaper and smoke his after-dinner cigar. He cast a self-satisfied andrather supercilious glance in the direction of the Merrick party, whichon this occasion included the Stantons and their aunt, but he made noattempt to approach the corner where they were seated.Maud, however, as soon as she saw Le Drieux, asked Arthur Weldon tointerview the man and endeavor to obtain from him the exact date whenJack Andrews landed in New York. Uncle John had already wired to MajorDoyle, Patsy's father, to get the steamship lists and find which boatAndrews had come on and the date of its arrival, but no answer had as yetbeen received.Arthur made a pretext of buying a cigar at the counter and thenstrolled aimlessly about until he came, as if by chance, near to whereLe Drieux was sitting. Making a pretense of suddenly observing the man,he remarked casually:"Ah, good evening.""Good evening, Mr. Weldon," replied Le Drieux, a note of ill-suppressedtriumph in his voice."I suppose you are now content to rest on your laurels, pending theformal examination?" said Arthur."I am, sir. But the examination is a mere form, you know. I have alreadycabled the commissioner of police at Vienna and received a reply statingthat the Austrian ambassador would make a prompt demand for extraditionand the papers would be forwarded from Washington to the Austrian consullocated in this city. The consul has also been instructed to render meaid in transporting the prisoner to Vienna. All this will require severaldays' time, so you see we are in no hurry to conclude the examination.""I see." said Arthur. "Is it, then, your intention to accompany theprisoner to Vienna?""Of course. I have not mentioned the fact to you before, but I hold acommission from the Chief of Police of Vienna authorizing me to arrestJack Andrews wherever I may find him, and deliver him up for trial. Myfirm procured for me this commission, as they are very anxious to recoverthe lost pearls.""Why?""Well, to be frank, sir, the countess still owes our firm a large sum forpurchases. She had almost her entire fortune tied up in that collection,and unless it is recovered--.""I can well appreciate the anxiety of your firm. But aside from that, Mr.Le Drieux, I suppose a big reward has been offered?""Not big; just a fair amount. It will repay me, quite handsomely, for mytrouble in this affair; but, of course, my firm gets half of the reward.""They are not too generous. You deserve it all.""Thank you. It has been an interesting episode, Mr. Weldon.""It has been more than that. I consider this escapade of Andrews quite aromance; or is it more of a tragedy, in your opinion?""It will be a tragedy for Andrews, before he's through with it," repliedLe Drieux grimly. "They're pretty severe on the long-fingered gentry,over there in Europe, and you must remember that if the fellow livesthrough the sentence they will undoubtedly impose upon him in Vienna, hehas still to answer for the Paris robbery and the London murder. It's allup with Andrews, I guess; and it's a good thing, too, for he is tooclever to remain at large.""I do not consider him so clever as his captor," said Arthur smoothly."It did not take you long to discover where he had hidden. Why, he hasonly returned to America about fifteen months ago.""Eleven months ago--even less than that, I think," retorted Le Drieux,with much pride. "Let me see," taking out a notebook, "Andrews landedfrom the \_Princess Irene\_ on the twenty-seventh of January last.""Oh, the twenty-seventh? Are you sure of that?" said Arthur."Of course.""I was under the impression he landed on the twenty-fifth.""No; you are wrong. Why, I met the boat myself, but missed him, althoughhe was on the passenger list. He disembarked very slyly, I afterwardlearned, being doubtless afraid he would be arrested. But at that time Ihad no positive evidence against him."Arthur asked a few more questions of no importance and then bade LeDrieux good night and rejoined the girls."You win, Maud," he remarked as he sat down. "That clew of yours was aninspiration. Andrews arrived in America on January twenty-seventh, justone day after Jones had a motion picture of himself taken at thestockholders' meeting of the Continental Film Company.""Then we needn't worry over Ajo any longer!" asserted Patsy joyfully."With this evidence and the testimony of Captain Carg and his pearls, themost stupid judge on earth would declare the boy innocent. Why, Beth, weshall get our theatres built, after all!"CHAPTER XXIVPICTURE NUMBER NINETEEN"Well, where have you been?" demanded Goldstein gruffly, as Maud Stantonentered his office the next morning in response to a summons from theContinental manager. "What made you run away yesterday? Don't you knowsuch things make us lots of trouble and cost us money?""I'm not worrying about that," replied Maud, as she composedly sat downopposite the manager.Goldstein glared at her, but he was cautious."You're a fine actress, Miss Stanton, and you're popular on the films,"he said, "but if you cannot attend to business we are paying you toomuch money.""Indeed!""No other firm could afford to give you so much, you know that; and theonly reason we are so extravagant is because you are one of ourfeatures.""Am I to take this as a dismissal?" she asked carelessly."Dismissal!" he cried, holding up his hands. "Of course not. Who istalking of dismissal? But I owe a duty to my firm. Such actions as yours,in running away from rehearsals, must have a--a--reprimand. Not severe; Iam not so angry as grieved; but a reprimand is your due--and thatfly-away sister of yours is just as bad.""We went to assist your president--Mr. Jones--to establish his innocenceof the awful charge made against him," she explained."Bah. You can't do that. No one can save him," he replied, with triumphand satisfaction mingled in his tone.She looked at him thoughtfully."You seem pleased with the idea that he is guilty, Mr. Goldstein.""I am glad he is caught. What is Jones to me? An interloper! A boy whogets money, buys stock, and then interferes with a business he knowsnothing about. You are a professional, Miss Stanton. You know how we, whoare in the game, have won our knowledge of it by long experience, bycareful study, by keeping the thousand threads of the rope of successtwisted tightly together. Any fool could buy this business, but only anexpert could run it successfully. You know that. So I am glad thisinterfering boy is wiped off the slate forever.""But he isn't!" she protested. "You still have this boy to reckon with,Goldstein. When he is examined by the judge he will be set free, for allthe evidence is in his favor and there is ample proof that he is not theman they are after. And that reminds me. There is a negative here thatwas made at the directors' meeting in January, a year ago, which showsMr. Jones taking control of the Continental.""I have never seen it," he said, shaking his head."It is here, though, and I want a positive printed at once, and mountedon a reel, so it can be exhibited before the judge. Have Alfred get itout of the vault.""Why should I do that?" he inquired, frowning."Because, if you refuse, Mr. Jones is quite likely to find anothermanager. No other firm would pay you so much as you are getting here. Youknow that."He grinned with delight at the thrust, then grew solemn."You are sure he will go free?""Positive," returned Maud. "He doesn't really need that film, but itwould be good policy--excellent policy--for you to produce it.""Alfred!" called the manager. "Bring me the stock book."He ran his finger down the pages."January--eh--eh--""January twenty-sixth," she said."Here it is: 'Special of Annual Meeting, C.F.M. Co.--280 feet.--No. 19,'Get number nineteen out of the vault, Alfred."While the young man was gone he relapsed into thought. Maud waitedpatiently."You see," resumed the manager abruptly, "I am making more money for theContinental than I get paid for. That is because I know how. It is notgood business to cut down the profits; therefore I should be paid abigger salary. Miss Stanton, you're a friend of young Jones, who controlsthis company. Yon might talk to him about me.""I will," she said."You might say I know every trick of the trade. Tell Jones how all theother film makers are crazy to get me. But say how I refuse more moneybecause I believe our directors will wake up to my value and raise mysalary. That sounds pretty good, eh?""It sounds remarkable.""And it's no dream. Ah, here comes Alfred."The clerk laid upon the table a round box coated with paraffin to excludethe air. A tag was attached to the box, describing its contents."Number nineteen. Quite right. Take it to the printing room and tellMcDonald to make me a copy as quickly as possible. Tell him to let meknow when it's dry and ready to run."As the clerk disappeared Maud said:"I needn't wait, I suppose?""No. Werner wants you at the rehearsal of 'The Love of a Princess.'Before you go home to-night I'll call you in to see the run of numbernineteen. Then you may take the film to Jones--with my compliments."At five o'clock, when she was dressing to go home, Maud was summoned tothe little "dark room" where all films are exhibited, trimmed and testedbefore being sent out. She took Aunt Jane and Flo with her and they foundGoldstein already waiting and the operator standing by his machine.The scene was short and not very exciting, although of interest in thepresent crisis. It showed the interior of the hall where thestock-holders' meeting was held, and began with the assembling of themembers. Two or three pompous individuals then seated themselves facingthe others, and the proceedings began. A slim boy on a back bench aroseand said something. Panic was at once written on the faces of the formerofficers. They gesticulated; their lips moved rapidly. The boy, easilyrecognized as A. Jones, advanced and displayed a lot of papers, whichwere carefully examined. He then took the president's chair, the formerofficers fled in disgust and the throng of stockholders wildly applauded.Then the light went out, the machine stopped, and Goldstein opened thedoor to let in light and air."It was the same kid, all right," he remarked. "I had never seen thisfilm run before, but it shows how Jones called the turn on the oldofficers in great shape. I wonder where he got all the money?"Maud secured his promise to send an operator to town, to exhibit the filmbefore the judge, whenever he might be required. Then she went to herhotel fully satisfied that she had done all in her power to assist A.Jones of Sangoa.CHAPTER XXVJUDGMENTA telegram from Major Doyle corroborated Le Drieux's assertion that JackAndrews had arrived at the port of New York via the \_Princess Irene\_ onJanuary twenty-seventh. A report from Lawyer Colby stated that he was nowso thoroughly posted on everything pertaining to pearls that he couldeasily confound the expert, Mr. Isidore Le Drieux. There the matterrested for three days, during which the Stanton girls continued theirwork at the studio and Uncle John's nieces busied themselves enjoying thecharms of the ideal Hollywood climate. Then came the news that the judgewould call Jones for examination at nine o'clock on Friday morning, thethirteenth."Friday, the thirteenth!" said Patsy with a grimace. "I hope Ajo isn'tsuperstitious.""That combination proves lucky for some people," replied Arthur,laughing. "Let us hope that Jones is one of them.""Of course we shall all go to see what happens," said Beth, and to thisthere was no dissenting voice.Maud obtained a letter from Jones to Captain Carg, asking him to be onhand, and this she dispatched by a safe messenger to the yacht\_Arabella\_. She also told Goldstein to have his operator in attendancewith the film. Finally, a conference was called that evening with Mr.Colby, at which the complete program of defense was carefully rehearsed."Really," said the lawyer, "there's nothing to this case. It's a regularwalkaway, believe me! I'm almost ashamed to take Mr. Jones' money forconducting a case that Miss Stanton has all cut and dried for me. I'llnot receive one half the credit I should had the thing been complicated,or difficult. However, I've learned so much about pearls that I'm almosttempted to go into the jewelry business."Friday morning was bright and cool--one of those perfect days for whichSouthern California is famous. Judge Wilton appeared in court with atranquil expression upon his face that proved he was in a contented mood.All conditions augured well for the prisoner.The prosecution was represented by two well known attorneys who hadbrought a dozen witnesses to support their charge, among them being theAustrian consul. The case opened with the statement that the prisoner,Jackson Dowd Andrews, alias A. Jones, while a guest at the villa of theCountess Ahmberg, near Vienna, had stolen from his hostess a valuablecollection of pearls, which he had secretly brought to America. Some ofthe stolen booty the prisoner had disposed of, it was asserted; a parthad been found in his possession at the time of his arrest; some of thepearls had been mounted by Brock & Co., the Los Angeles jewelers, at hisrequest, and by him presented to several acquaintances he had recentlymade but who were innocent of any knowledge of his past history or hismisdeeds. Therefore the prosecution demanded that the prisoner be kept incustody until the arrival of extradition papers, which were already onthe way, and that on the arrival of these papers Andrews should beturned over to Le Drieux, a representative of the Vienna police, and byhim taken to Austria, the scene of his crime, for trial and punishment.The judge followed the charge of the prosecution rather indifferently,being already familiar with it. Then he asked if there was any defense.Colby took the floor. He denied that the prisoner was Jackson DowdAndrews, or that he had ever been in Vienna. It was a case of mistakenidentity. His client's liberty had been outraged by the stupid blundersof the prosecution. He demanded the immediate release of the prisoner."Have you evidence to support this plea?" inquired Judge Wilton."We have, your honor. But the prosecution must first prove its charge."The prosecution promptly responded to the challenge. The photograph ofAndrews, taken abroad, was shown. Two recognized experts in physiognomydeclared, after comparison, that it was undoubtedly the photograph of theprisoner. Then Le Drieux took the stand. He read a newspaper account ofthe robbery. He produced a list of the pearls, attested by the countessherself. Each individual pearl was described and its color, weight andvalue given. Then Le Drieux exhibited the pearls taken from Jones and,except for the small ones in the brooch which had been presented to Mrs.Montrose, he checked off every pearl against his list, weighing thembefore the judge and describing their color.During this, Judge Wilton continually nodded approval. Such evidence wasconcise and indisputable, it seemed. Moreover, the defense readilyadmitted that the pearls exhibited had all been in Jones' possession.Then Colby got up to refute the evidence."Mr. Jones," he began, "has--""Give the prisoner's full name," said the judge."His full name is A. Jones.""What does the 'A' stand for?""It is only an initial, your honor. Mr. Jones has no other name.""Puh! He ought to have taken some other name. Names are cheap," sneeredthe judge.Colby ignored the point."Mr. Jones is a resident of Sangoa, where he was born. Until he landed atSan Francisco, fifteen months ago, he had never set foot on any land butthat of his native island.""Where is Sangoa?" demanded the judge."It is an island of the South Seas.""What nationality?""It is independent. It was purchased from Uruguay by Mr. Jones' fathermany years ago, and now belongs exclusively to his son.""Your information is indefinite," snapped the judge."I realize that, your honor; but my client deems it wise to keep thelocation of his island a secret, because he has valuable pearlfisheries on its shores. The pearls exhibited by the prosecution wereall found at Sangoa.""How do you account, then, for their checking so accurately against thelist of stolen pearls?""I can make almost any pearls check with that list, which represents ahuge collection of almost every size, weight and color," replied Colby."To prove this, I will introduce in evidence Captain Carg of Sangoa, whorecently arrived at Santa Monica Bay with the last proceeds of the pearlfisheries of the island."Captain Carg was on hand, with his two sailors guarding the chest. He nowproduced the trays of pearls and spread them on the desk before theamazed eyes of the judge. Le Drieux was astounded, and showed it plainlyon his face.Colby now borrowed the list, and picking up a pearl from the tray weighedit on Le Drieux's scales and then found a parallel to it on the list.This he did with several of the pearls, chosen at random, until one of LeDrieux's attorneys took the expert aside and whispered to him. Then LeDrieux's expression changed from chagrin to joy and coming forward heexclaimed:"Your honor, this is the collection--the balance of it--which was stolenfrom the Countess Ahmberg!"The judge looked at him a moment, leaned back in his chair and nodded hishead impressively."What nonsense!" protested Colby. "These trays contain twice the numberof pearls included in that entire list, as your honor may plainly see.""Of course," retorted Le Drieux eagerly; "here are also the pearls fromthe necklace of Princess Lemoine, and the London collection of LadyGrandison. Your honor, in his audacity the defense has furnished us proofpositive that this prisoner can be none other than the adventurer andclever thief, Jack Andrews."It was in vain that Colby declared these pearls had just come fromSangoa, where they were found. The judge cut him short and asked if hehad any other evidence to advance."These pearls," he added, indicating the trays, "I shall take possessionof. They must remain in my custody until their owners claim them, orCaptain Carg can prove they are the lawful property of the prisoner."Consternation now pervaded the ranks of the defense. The girls wereabsolutely dismayed, while Uncle John and Arthur Weldon wore bewilderedlooks. Only Jones remained composed, an amused smile curling the cornersof his delicate mouth as he eyed the judge who was to decide his fate.On the side of the prosecution were looks of triumph. Le Drieux alreadyregarded his case as won.Colby now played his trump card, which Maud Stanton's logic and energyhad supplied the defense."The prosecution," said he, "has stated that the alleged robbery wascommitted at Vienna on the evening of September fifteenth, and thatJack Andrews arrived in America on the steamship \_Princess Irene\_ onthe afternoon of the January twenty-seventh following. Am I correct inthose dates?"The judge consulted his stenographer."The dates mentioned are correct," he said pompously."Here are the papers issued by the Commander of the Port of SanFrancisco, proving that the yacht \_Arabella\_ of Sangoa anchored in thatharbor on October twelfth, and disembarked one passenger, namely: A.Jones of Sangoa.""That might, or might not, have been the prisoner," declared theprosecuting attorney."True," said the judge. "The name 'A. Jones' is neither distinguished nordistinguishing.""On the evening of January twenty-sixth, twenty-four hours before JackAndrews landed in America," continued Colby, "the prisoner, Mr. A. Jones,appeared at the annual meeting of the stockholders of the ContinentalFilm Manufacturing Company, in New York, and was formally electedpresident of that organization.""What is your proof?" inquired the judge, stifling a yawn."I beg to submit the minutes of the meeting, attested by its secretary."The judge glanced at the minutes."We object to this evidence," said the opposing attorney. "There is noproof that the A. Jones referred to is the prisoner.""The minutes," said Colby, "state that a motion picture was taken of themeeting. I have the film here, in this room, and beg permission toexhibit it before your honor as evidence."The judge was a bit startled at so novel a suggestion but assented witha nod. In a twinkling the operator had suspended a roller-screen from thechandelier dependent from the ceiling, pulled down the window shades andattached his projecting machine to an electric-light socket.Then the picture flashed upon the screen. It was not entirely distinct,because the room could not be fully darkened and the current was notstrong, yet every face in the gathering of stockholders could be plainlyrecognized. Jones, especially, as the central figure, could not bemistaken and no one who looked upon the picture could doubt his identity.When the exhibition was concluded and the room again lightened, LeDrieux's face was visibly perturbed and anxious, while his attorneys satglum and disconcerted.Colby now put Goldstein on the stand, who testified that he recognizedJones as president of his company and the owner of the majority ofstock. The young man had come to him with unimpeachable credentials tothat effect.The girls were now smiling and cheerful. To them the defense wasabsolutely convincing. But Le Drieux's attorneys were skillful fightersand did not relish defeat. They advanced the theory that the motionpicture, just shown, had been made at a later dale and substituted forthe one mentioned in the minutes of the meeting. They questionedGoldstein, who admitted that he had never seen Jones until a few daysprevious. The manager denied, however, any substitution of the picture.He was not a very satisfactory witness for the defense and Colby wassorry he had summoned him.As for the judge, he seemed to accept the idea of the substitution withalacrity. He had practically decided against Jones in the matter of thepearls. Now he listened carefully to the arguments of the prosecution andcut Colby short when he raised objections to their sophistry.Finally Judge Wilton rose to state his decision."The evidence submitted in proof of the alleged fact that the prisoner isJack Andrews, and that Jack Andrews may have robbed the Countess Ahmberg,of Vienna, of her valuable collection of pearls, is in the judgment ofthis court clear and convincing," he said. "The lawyer for the defensehas further succeeded in entangling his client by exhibiting anadditional assortment of pearls, which may likewise be stolen property.The attempt to impose upon this court a mythical island called Sangoais--eh--distinctly reprehensible. This court is not so easily hoodwinked.Therefore, in consideration of the evidence advanced, I declare that theprisoner is Jack Andrews, otherwise Jackson Dowd Andrews, otherwiseparading under the alias of 'A. Jones,' and I recognize the claim of theAustrian police to his person, that he may be legally tried for hisalleged crimes in the territory where it is alleged he committed them.Therefore I order that the prisoner be held for requisition and turnedover to the proper authorities when the papers arrive. The court isadjourned."CHAPTER XXVISUNSHINE AFTER RAINOf course not one of our friends agreed with the judge. Indignation andresentment were written on every face--except that of Goldstein. Themanager rubbed his hands softly together and, approaching Maud, hewhispered:"You needn't speak to Jones about me. It's all right. I guess he won't beinterfering with me any more, eh? And come \_early\_ to-morrow morning.We've got a lot of rehearsing to do. To-day I will call a holiday foryou. And, believe me, Miss Stanton, this is nothing to worry any of us.The judge settles it, right or wrong, for the law defies us all."As the manager hurried away Uncle John looked after him and said:"I wonder if he realizes how true his words are? 'The law defies us all.'How helpless we are to oppose injustice and oppression when one man,with a man's limitations and prejudices, is clothed with authority tocondemn us!"Colby stood silent. The poor fellow's eyes were full of unshed tears."This is my first case, and my last," said he. "I won it honestly. It wasthe judge, not the evidence, that defeated me. I'm going to rent myoffice and apply for a job as a chauffeur."Jones was the least affected of the group. "Never mind, friends," he saidto them, "it will all come right in the end. If you will stand by me,Colby, I'll retain you to plead my case in the Austrian court, or atleast advise my Austrian lawyers. I've an idea they will treat me fairly,over there in Vienna.""It's outrageous!" quoth indignant Patsy Doyle. "I'd like to give thatjudge a piece of my mind.""If you did," replied Arthur, "he'd fine you for contempt.""It would be a just line, in that case," said Patsy; "so I'm sure hewouldn't do it."The jailer had come to take the prisoner back to his cell. He smiledwhimsically at Miss Doyle's speech and remarked:"There's always one side to kick, Miss, whichever way the judge decides.It was only Solomon who could satisfy everybody.""Clear the room!" shouted the bailiff.Captain Carg's men took the empty chest back to the launch. The captainfollowed them, after pressing the hand of his young master, who said:"Wait for orders, Captain." Uncle John took his flock back to the hotel,where they gathered in his room and held an indignation meeting. Here itwas safe to give full vent to their chagrin and disappointment."Every bit of honest evidence was on our side," declared Maud. "I shallnever be able to understand why we lost.""Bribery and corruption," said Flo. "I'll bet a cookie Le Drieux dividedthe reward with the judge.""I suppose it's all up with Ajo now," sighed Beth, regretfully."Yes," replied Colby, who had accompanied them; "there is nothing more tobe done for him at present. From the judge's order there is no appeal,in such a case. Mr. Jones must go to Vienna for trial; but there he maysecure an acquittal.""He is very brave, I think," said Patsy. "This affair must have hurt hispride, but he smiles through it all. In his condition of health, theconfinement and humiliation may well shorten his life, yet he has madeno murmur.""He's good stuff, that boy," commented Uncle John. "Perhaps it is due tothat John Paul blood his father was so proud of."When Arthur went into the lobby a little later he found Le Drieux seatedcomfortably and smoking a long cigar. The pearl expert nodded to theyoung ranchman with so much evident satisfaction that Arthur could notresist engaging him in conversation."Well, you won," he remarked, taking a vacant chair beside Le Drieux."Yes, of course," was the reply; "but I'll admit that fellow Andrews is asmooth one. Why, at one time he had even me puzzled with his alibis andhis evidence. That flash of the pearls was the cleverest trick I everheard of; but it didn't go, I'd warned the judge to look out for a scoop.He knew he was dealing with one of the most slippery rogues incaptivity.""See here, Le Drieux," said Arthur; "let us be honest with one another,now that the thing is settled and diplomacy is uncalled for. Do youreally believe that Jones is Jack Andrews?""Me? I know it, Mr. Weldon. I don't pose as a detective, but I'mconsidered to have a shrewd insight into human character, and from thefirst moment I set eyes on him I was positive that Jones was the famousJack Andrews. I can understand how you people, generous and trusting,have been deceived in the fellow; I admire the grit you've all shown instanding by him to the last. I haven't a particle of malice toward anyone of you, I assure you--not even toward Andrews himself.""Then why have you bounded him so persistently?""For two reasons." said Le Drieux. "As a noted pearl expert, I wantedto prove my ability to run down the thief; and, as a man in modestcircumstances, I wanted the reward.""How much will you get?""All together, the rewards aggregate twenty thousand dollars. I'll gethalf, and my firm will get half.""I think," said Arthur, to test the man, "that Jones would have paid youdouble that amount to let him alone."Le Drieux shook his head; then he smiled."I don't mind telling you, Mr. Weldon--in strict confidence, ofcourse--that I approached Jones on that very subject, the day he wasplaced in jail. He must have been sure his tricks would clear him, for herefused to give me a single penny. I imagine he is very sorry, right now;don't you, sir?""No," said Arthur, "I don't. I still believe in his innocence."Le Drieux stared at him incredulously."What, after that examination of to-day?" he demanded."Before and after. There was no justice in the decision of Judge Wilton;he was unduly prejudiced.""Be careful, sir!""We are talking confidentially.""To be sure. But you astonish me. I understand the character of Andrewsso thoroughly that I fail to comprehend how any sensible person canbelieve in him. Talk about prejudice!""I suppose you are to remain at this hotel?" said Arthur, evadingfurther argument."Yes, until the papers arrive. They ought to be here by Monday. ThenI shall take Andrews to New York and we will board the first steamerfor Europe."Arthur left him. Le Drieux puzzled him more than he puzzled Le Drieux.The expert seemed sincere in the belief that he had trapped, in Jones, anoted criminal. Weldon could not help wondering, as he walked away, ifpossibly he and his friends had been deceived in A. Jones of Sangoa. Thedoubt was but momentary, yet it had forced itself into his mind.On Saturday afternoon they all made a visit to the prisoner and tried tocheer him. Again on Sunday they called--the Stantons and Merricks andWeldons and all. Young Jones received them with composure and begged themnot to worry on his account."I am quite comfortable in this jail, I assure you," said he. "On myjourney to Vienna I shall be able to bribe Le Drieux to let me have suchcomforts as I desire. There is but one experience I shrink from: thepassage across the Atlantic. If it brings a return of my former malady Ishall suffer terribly.""It may not be so bad as you fear," Patsy assured him, although in herheart she realized it might be the death of the boy. "Often those who aredistressed by a voyage on the Pacific endure the Atlantic very well.""That is encouraging," said he. "It is my dread of the water that hasprevented me from returning to Sangoa, or even visiting my yacht. Andthis reminds me of a favor I wish to ask.""You may rely upon our friendship," said Maud."I believe that. Here is a letter to Captain Carg, putting the \_Arabella\_at your disposal until my return from Vienna. I have named Mr. Merrickas the commander of the yacht, in my absence, and if you feel inclined tomake the trip and can spare the time I would like you all to make avoyage to Sangoa.""To Sangoa!" they cried in chorus."Yes. I am ambitious to prove to you, who have been my staunch friends,that the island is indeed there. Incidentally you will become acquaintedwith the prettiest place in all the world. My house will be at yourdisposal while you remain and I am sure you will find it fairlycomfortable."They were so amazed at this proposition that at first no one foundwords to answer the boy. It was Flo, naturally, who first collectedher thoughts."It will be awfully jolly!" she cried, clapping her hands with delight."I'm sure Maud and I need a vacation. Let's stick up our noses atGoldstein and sail away to the mysterious isle. What do you say, girls?And you, Mr. Merrick?""I believe, my boy," said Uncle John, laying a kindly hand on the youth'sshoulder, "that all of us are inclined to take advantage of your offer.That is, if you are sure we can be of no further use to you in yourdifficulties.""I am taking Colby abroad with me and he can do all that may be doneuntil after my trial. Then I hope to rejoin you here and am lookingforward to a jolly reunion."Uncle John took the letters which Ajo had written to Captain Carg, to hissuperintendent in Sangoa and to his housekeeper. Then they all pressedthe boy's hand and went away. \* \* \* \* \*Monday morning the extradition papers arrived. Le Drieux exhibited themproudly to young Weldon, to Mr. Merrick, and even to the girls, whoregarded the documents with shuddering awe."We'll take the night train," said the man. "That will get us to New Yorkon Friday, in time to catch the Saturday steamer for Calais."As he spoke a boy approached and handed Le Drieux a telegram."Excuse me," said he, and opened it with an important flourish. The nextmoment his face fell. He staggered and sank half fainting into a chairwhich Mr. Merrick pushed toward him.Patsy ran for some water. Maud Stanton fanned the man with a foldednewspaper. Arthur Weldon picked up the telegram which had \_fluttered\_from Le Drieux's grasp and deliberately read it. Then he, too, sankgasping into a chair."Listen, girls!" he cried, his voice shrill with emotion. "What do youthink of this?"'Jack Andrews arrested here in New York to-day by Burns detectives.Countess Ahmberg's collection of pearls was found in his possession,intact. Return here first train.'"Signed: 'Eckstrom & Co.'"There was a moment of tense silence.Flo clapped her hands."Come on," she shouted in glee, "let's go and tell Ajo!"

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