

*State of Nebraska*

“I am great hopes,” was all that Mr. Ekholm would say, when asked, “I am great hopes.”

“But what hopes are they?” asked William Drummond, time and time again, but without ever getting any reply beyond a significant tap to the side of Mr. Ekholm’s broken nose, before the Swede returned to his elaborate-looking pipe and gazed over the rail of the ship, staring like a shabby Viking into the west.

The ship *State of Nebraska* out of Glasgow was within a day or two of reaching the huge harbour of New York, where many a hope and dream ended its voyage. As each rumour swept the ship that land was sighted, excited passengers thronged up to the decks, drawing great lungfuls of what they imagined to be the sweet North American air, and, shading their eyes, looked towards the horizon. After ten minutes of this activity, when no further sign of land appeared, the crowd broke up, some to return below deck, others to lean their backs against the railings and soak in the May sunshine upon their faces.

William Drummond and his friend Jim Reynolds spent their days and nights in the open air. During the day, they were much in the company of Miss Jessie Munro, on whom Jim was very sweet, and she, while she did not mis-like William, returned the feeling with interest. Together, the three made a happy group. Jim was determined to “make a go” of America in this year of 1895, and his head was bursting with ill-defined plans: he would not stop in New York, for, said he, there were far larger fortunes to be made in Pennsylvania and other parts of the young country. “What about Mr. Carnegie, then?” he would ask triumphantly, thereby ending all discussion. Jessie was in full agreement with him, but despaired of ever seeing Jim again, since she had arranged a position in a house in New York, and could not so easily abandon that.

For his part, William was going to make a tidy sum as a salesman. “What,” would ask Mr. Ekholm, turning the tables, “are you to sell?” To which question, William merely tapped the side of his nose and winked. Leonard Ekholm would roar with laughter and call William a “most funny man”, and slap him hard, in Swedish style, on the back.

In truth, however, William had as yet no clear idea what it was he would sell - he knew merely that he was a born salesman, and expected to sell anything to anyone - from what he had heard of America, most things could be bought by anyone. Jim, in a moment of audacious ribaldry stirred up by the intoxicating presence of Jessie Munro, suggested that William try selling “lady’s unmentionables.” Jessie screamed into her pretty hands, which in turn made Jim himself turn bright red; William, however, coolly considered the suggestion and added it to a short list of possibilities - a man who could sell anything had to be alive to all profitable merchandise.

At least half of the many passengers on the ship were between the ages of seventeen and twenty-five, and as the days and nights of the Atlantic crossing passed, these young people merged together then broke apart like so many shoals of darting fish. Gradually, however, small groups of firm friends coalesced from the crowds - such as the one formed by William, Jim, Jessie and Leonard. On the periphery of this group were two others: Ivar Nyberg, still a boy, and so easily made to blush with embarrassment that the sport passed many dull hours - and Mary Barr, a shy, plain girl who had a deep-rooted fancy for William but dared not even hint at it. Only Jessie had guessed at this hidden passion, and, although she encouraged Mary to put herself in William’s way, the girl failed always to do so. Mary Barr, at the thought of

Mr. Drummond selling lady's underwear, fainted clean away and had to be helped below decks by Ivar and Jessie.

Thus passed the last days of the crossing made by the *State of Nebraska*. Mr. Ekholm's great hopes grew larger and more varied - and thereby hazier - in his mind, as he envisaged himself setting foot on the shores of America and, within months, a year at most, being able to send passage-money back to his parents, so that they could follow him out of poverty and darkness, to spend their last days in his bright and sumptuous mansion on the outskirts of some American city. All that remained was to find an opening where he could make his mark as a hard-working Swede: that was his great hope.

Jim Reynolds, who was here only to escape his widowed and sour-mouthed mother, dreamed idly of a life where, on a Saturday night, Jessie Munro lay in his bed; and with similar unspoken reveries Jessie reciprocated. All that remained was to set a foot on the lowest rung of the ladder, and see where it took them.

William Drummond alone had reflected soberly on the matter in hand, and had narrowed down his options to two classes of merchandise when the smoke of New York at last rose above the shimmering horizon. By the time the ship had tied up at Ellis Island, he knew what it was that would make his fortune. And in gratitude for the suggestion he shook Jim's hand warmly, before the pair of them set off down the gangway.