



The POOL of FLAME

by LOUIS JOSEPH VANCE

ILLUSTRATIONS BY ELLSWORTH YOUNG

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HARD FOR THE HOUSEWIFE.

It's hard enough to keep house in perfect health, but a woman weak, tired and suffering with an aching back has a heavy burden. Any woman in this condition has cause to suspect kidney trouble, especially if the kidney action seems disordered. Doan's Kidney Pills have cured thousands. It is the best recommended special kidney remedy.

Mrs. John Robinson, 908 Burney St., Modesto, Cal., Says: "My back was so lame and sore I was practically helpless. My feet and ankles swelled, puffy spots appeared beneath my eyes and I became so dizzy I had to grasp something to keep from falling. Relief quickly followed the use of Doan's Kidney Pills and it was not long before I was enjoying good health."

"When Your Back Is Lame, Remember the Name—DOAN'S." 50c., all stores. Foster-Milburn Co., Buffalo, N. Y.

He Could. A northern visitor in the south tells the following story to illustrate the tactfulness of the southern negro.

He had asked Steve, a typical dandy of the region, numerous questions concerning a certain plantation, and to each the negro gave the invariable reply of "Yahs, sah."

"Steve," asked the somewhat exasperated northerner, "don't you say anything but 'Yahs, sah'? Can't you say 'No, sir'?"

The negro blinked his eyes indolently for a moment and replied, "Yahs, sah."—Judge.

Flattered Him. A little girl four years old wanted a nickel one day and thought the best way to get it was to say something nice to papa. So climbing upon his lap she said sweetly:

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SYNOPSIS.

The story opens at Monte Carlo with Col. Terence O'Rourke, a military free lance and something of a gambler, in his hotel. Lazing on the balcony he sees a beautiful girl who suddenly enters the elevator and passes from sight. At the gaming table O'Rourke notices two men watching him. One is the Hon. Bertie Glynn, while his companion is Viscount Des Trebes, a duelist. The viscount tells him the French government has directed him to O'Rourke as a man who would undertake a secret mission. At his apartment, O'Rourke, who had agreed to undertake the mission, finds a mysterious letter. The viscount arrives, hands a sealed package to O'Rourke, who is not to open it until on the ocean. A pair of dainty slippers are seen protruding from under a doorway curtain. The Irishman finds the owner of the mysterious feet to be his wife, Beatrice, from whom he had run away a year previous. They are reconciled, and opening the letter he finds that a Rangoon law firm offers him 100,000 pounds for a jewel known as the Pool of Flame and left to him by a dying friend, but now in keeping of one named Chambret in Algeria. O'Rourke worships the nobleman in a dust. The wife bids O'Rourke farewell and he promises to soon return with the reward. He discovers both Glynn and the viscount on board the ship. As he finds Chambret there is an attack by bandits and his friend dies telling O'Rourke that he has left the Pool of Flame with the governor general, who at sight of a signet ring given the colonel will deliver over the jewel.

CHAPTER IX.—(Continued.)

"Quite right," echoed O'Rourke with assumed indignation. "Be quiet, Bertie. Children should be seen and not heard. Mind your uncle." And, "Oho!" he commented to himself. "And they knew I didn't have the Pool of Flame! Let me think. . . . Oh, faith, 'tis just bluffing they are!"

"You say," the viscount continued slowly and evenly, "you've destroyed the letter."

O'Rourke took up pipe and tobacco. "I told ye," he replied, filling the bowl, "that the letter was non-existent. Now, me man," he continued, with an imperceptible change of tone, "drop the bluff. Turn that pistol away from me. Well I know that ye won't snoot, for if ye did ye would put beyond your reach forever the information that would win ye the reward—always providing ye had got possession of the ruby, be hook or crook. 'Twould be crooks, I'm thinking."

He lit a match and applied the flame to the tobacco. "There's me last word on the subject," he added indistinctly, puffing and eyeing the pair through the cloud of smoke.

The revolver waved in the viscount's hand; he was livid with passion and disappointed, yet amenable to reason. Glynn bent and whispered briefly in his ear, and the Frenchman, nodding acquiescence, laid aside his weapon. The Honorable Bertie continued to advise with him in whispers until O'Rourke, though quite at loss to understand this phase of the affair, saw that their attention was momentarily diverted and, with a swift movement, leaned over, snatched up the revolver and, with a flirt of his hand, flung it out of the window.

Glynn started back with an oath, his hand going toward his pocket; but O'Rourke promptly closed with him. A breath later a second pistol was ejected from the carriage and the Englishman was sprawling over the knees of the viscount.

They disengaged themselves and, mad with rage, started up to fall upon and exterminate the wanderer. I think it must have been the very impertinence of his attitude that made them pause in doubt, for he had resumed his seat as calmly as though nothing at all had happened and was pulling soberly at his pipe. As they hesitated he removed the latter from his lips and gestured airily with the stem. "Sit ye down," he invited them, "and take it easy, me dear friends. The mischief's done, and naught that ye can do will repair it. Faith, I said I'd not strike back unless ye crowded me. I remember me words to the letter. Your guns made a crowd out of this happy reunion. I've merely dispensed with them; I call ye both to witness that ye have neither of ye suffered. Sure, I'm as peaceable as any lamb. Sit down, sit ye down and take it like little men. The situation's unchanged, save that I've put temptation out of your reach."

And as they wavered, plainly of two minds, O'Rourke clinched the argument of his attitude. "I beg to call your attention," he remarked, "to the fact that ye have left me own brace of revolvers here at me feet, when ye so joyously turned me bag inside out. I'm not touching them, mind ye, but mind ye further: I'll brook no nonsense. If ye make a move as if to attack me, I'll . . . There! That's much better. Wise lads, ye are, both of ye; graceful in defeat. Let me see: We've a long ride together, though ye did come uninvited. I trust ye will help me beguile the tedium with society chatter, me friend," with a twinkle at the discomfited viscount. "I'm in danger of forgetting me man-

ners. Pardon me, I pray, but—I trust your nose is convalescing?"

In high feather with himself, O'Rourke entertained his companions with a running fire of pleasantries for the balance of the darkened hours. And he touched both more than once with the rapier-point of his wit and irony, and had the pleasure of seeing both squirm in impotent rage. They cut wretched figures, two against one, yet failures, while he taunted them in one breath, with the next declared himself their captive. Toward the end the reserve which the viscount imposed upon the Honorable Bertie was worn down; the Englishman turned with raw nerves upon his tormentor.

"You damned ass!" he stammered, all but incoherent. "You sit there and—gloat, damn you! When all the time we've got the upper hand!"

"Be quiet!" interposed the viscount. "I won't!" raged the honorable. "He thinks himself so infernally clever! What 'dyou say, you Irish braggart, if I told you you'd never see the Pool of Flame again?"

"I'd say," returned O'Rourke, "that you were either lying or a fool. In either case a fool. If, as ye seem to be trying to make me believe—which I don't for one instant—ye have succeeded in stealing the Pool of Flame, I'll hunt the pair of ye to the ends of the earth, if need be."

He eyed them reflectively during a moment or two made interesting by Glynn's desperate attempts to blurt out indiscretions against the prohibition of the viscount: something which the older man enforced crudely by clapping his hand across the Englishman's mouth, as well as by whispering savagely in his ear.

"But there'll be no need," continued the Irishman, when Glynn was calm. "Let's consider the matter dispassionately, presupposing that ye have the stone. Well, what then? Ye dare not attempt to sell it—'twould result in instant detection. It would not pay ye to have it secretly cut up into smaller stones—the loss in value would be stupendous, the whole not worth your while, as I say. Ye cannot take the Pool of Flame (don't get excited: I'm not going to tell ye where) to claim the reward, for a white elephant it would be on your hands."

"It does not seem to strike monsieur that there are other ways of finding out who offers the reward," the viscount suggested icily.

"I can see ye wandering around asking somebody please to relieve ye of the Pool of Flame and pay ye a commission. I wonder how long ye think ye'd last. But 'tis no use trying to hoodwink me: I don't believe one word ye say. I'll wait until I find out the truth before I bother meself with ye."

Their persistence in hinting that they had gained possession of the ruby perplexed and discomfited him. He did not believe it; 'twas inconceivable; yet—he had known stranger things to happen. Still, without a clue, to have stumbled upon the secret, to have made off with it from under the very nose of the Governor-General! No; it was not reasonable to ask him to believe all that.

Nevertheless, when he arrived at Algiers, his anxiety had grown so overpowering that he called a cab and desired to be conveyed post-haste to the Palace de la Gouverner.

CHAPTER X.

It was high noon when O'Rourke drove up before the Palace of the Governor-General. Weary, dusty and travel-stained as he was, he hesitated no instant about sending in his name and requesting an interview with the representative of France's sovereign power.

Disappointment awaited him at the very outset; disappointment in the shape of word that his excellency was away. But the name of O'Rourke was one well and favorably known in the province, and secured him an invitation to ascend to the Governor's office and state his business—if he cared to do so—to the gubernatorial secretary.

Upon consideration he accepted, and a little later was seated in a broad, low, cool room in the old Moorish palace, the affable secretary—a young, lively and engaging Frenchman—solicitously sounding him as to his errand.

It was obviously the office of a man of great affairs, presenting an eminent business-like look for all its Oriental setting. To one side, set in the solid masonry of the wall, was a massive safe with doors ajar, exposing a cavity well stocked with documents. It occurred to the adventurer that such a safe might easily have been the place of security selected by the

Governor-General for anything he held in trust. He built upon it a theory whilst he listened—nor lost a point—and replied to the secretary.

The latter regretted excessively that his excellency was absent; his excellency would undoubtedly be desolated when he returned and found he had missed Colonel O'Rourke.

"He'll be back soon, monsieur?"

"Alas, no!" with a shrug. "He is en route for Paris—possibly arrived by this moment—on matters of state."

"And he left?"

"Several days since, monsieur."

"You know nothing of this package, indorsed with the name of Monsieur Chambret?"

To the contrary; the secretary knew it very well. He could place his hand upon it at any moment—monsieur would appreciate that he durst not surrender it without the Governor's authority.

O'Rourke drew a long sigh of relief and was abruptly conscious of fatigue and a desire to get away and rest.

"I'm obliged to ye," he said slowly, rising. "I'll have to wait until the Governor returns, I presume. . . . By the way, are ye by any chance acquainted with Monsieur le Vicomte des Trebes?"

But certainly; the viscount was a great friend of his excellency's. He had dined with his excellency something over a week since, just prior to the latter's departure.

"And I take it ye have seen nothing of the gentleman since?"

"On the contrary, monsieur; the viscount called here but two days ago." It appeared that he had desired some trifling information, with which the secretary had obliged him.

"Ye didn't happen to leave him alone in this room?"

The secretary, plainly much perplexed by this odd catechism, admitted that such had been the case; the pursuit of the desired data had necessitated his absence from the Governor's room for a matter of some ten minutes.

"But ye say ye can put your hand on this package?"

"But certainly, monsieur."

"Would ye mind making sure 'tis safe. 'Twould save me a deal of waiting, perhaps—"

With alacrity and a smile that depreciated his visitor's anxiety over so trifling a matter, the secretary rose, went to the safe and confidently enough thrust a hand into one of the pigeon-holes. The hand came forth empty. A frown of bewilderment clouded the secretary's face. "It must be here," he announced with conviction. "It was in plain sight and labelled with the name of Monsieur Chambret. . . . He turned. "If Monsieur le Colonel will but return in half an hour, I undertake then to show him the packet itself. I shall by then have found it—but assuredly!"

"Ye are very courteous, monsieur. I will return."

This he did—in two hours. The packet had not been found; the secretary, in a flutter of nerves, confessed that through some culpable negligence it must have been misplaced. An extended search was even then in progress. It would surely come to light before evening.

"Thank ye; I shan't be back," returned O'Rourke grimly; and went away, downcast for the first time since the inception of the adventure. "Faith! and to think I would not believe the truth when they slapped me face with it! And all the time, belike, 'twas in the viscount's own pocket!"

But he had no vocabulary adequate to the task of expressing his self-contempt.

Disconsolate, conceiving that he had proven himself a blind, egregious fool, he plodded with heavy steps and a hanging head back to his hotel; where the crowning stroke of the day was presented to him in the shape of a note, by the hand of a black Biskri porter.

"Monsieur le Colonel Terence O'Rourke. Be hand," he connoed the address. "Faith, and what's this?"

"If Monsieur le Colonel O'Rourke will do Monsieur des Trebes the honor of dining with him, at seven or seven-thirty this evening, at the Villa l'Orleans, St. Eugene, an arrangement satisfactory to both himself and Monsieur le Vicomte may be consummated."

"R. S. V. P.—The bearer waits."

A trap? A subterfuge? A trick to throw him off the scent whilst the two blackguards escaped with their booty? The adventurer frowned darkly over it, dubious. Then, in a flush of recklessness, he seized a sheet of paper from a near-by desk, scrawled a formal acceptance of the strange invitation, and handed it to the Biskri boy. "All to gain, naught to lose," he summed up the state of mind which had dictated his response; and at six

thirty, with brow and eye serene, he left the hotel in a carriage bound for the suburb of St. Eugene—and heaven knew where besides!

CHAPTER XI.

The Villa d'Orleans proved to be a handsome house of white stone, situated in extensive and well-groomed grounds, on a height outside the town, overlooking the Mediterranean. So complete and elegant seemed the establishment, indeed, viewed from without or within, that O'Rourke's suspicions were stimulated and his certainty that he was being played with resolved into a pretty definite conviction, as he waited in the broad hallway.

His uneasy conjectures were interrupted when the viscount appeared to welcome his guest. Suave, dressed properly for the occasion, showing traces neither of fatigue nor of his antipathy for O'Rourke, blandly ignoring the peculiarities of the situation which his own inexplicable invitation had created, he presented himself in the guise of a gracious host.

"Monsieur," he declared, bowing to O'Rourke (but with a care not to offer his hand), "overpowers me with his condescension and punctuality. I can only regret—with a significant glance at the bulge of the adventurer's coat—that he thought it wise to come armed."

"'Tis a habit I find it hard to break meself of," O'Rourke offered the inadequate explanation in a dry and coolish tone.

"It was unnecessary, I assure monsieur."

"Faith, I'm convinced 'twill prove so."

Tactfully the viscount digressed from the unpleasant topic. "I have asked you here, monsieur," he said with an air of deprecation, "to confer with me on business after we have dined. I trust the arrangement suits your convenience."

"I'm content, monsieur."

"I regret that circumstances prevent me from receiving you under my own roof-tree. The Villa d'Orleans is the property of a dear friend, merely loaned me during my stay in Algiers."

"Ye're fortunate in your choice of friends."

Over his next remark Des Trebes faltered a trifle, with a curious smile that O'Rourke failed to fathom. "Monsieur Glynn," he said, "is—ah—a trifle indisposed—the sun. Nevertheless, I believe he will join us during dinner, if you will be so kind as to excuse him—"

"I could do very well without him."

The viscount caught the eye of a servant, and, "Dinner is announced," he said. "Do me the honor to accompany me to the table."

In the course of time, as the viscount had predicted, the Honorable Bertie joined them; and on sight O'Rourke diagnosed the "indisposition" as plain intoxication. The Englishman was deep in his cups, far too deep to ape the urbanity of his host. He favored O'Rourke with a curt nod and a surly look, then slumped limply into a chair and called for champagne, which he drank greedily and with a sullen air, avoiding the viscount's eye. Before dessert was served he passed into a black humor, and sat mutely glowering at his glass (what time he was not unsteadily filling it) without regard for either of his companions.

When the cloth was cleared and the servants had withdrawn, Des Trebes definitely cast aside pretence. A cigarette between his lips, he lounged in his chair, eyelids drooping over eyes that never left his guest's while either spoke. A cynical smile pre- faced his first words.

"So," he said, "the farce is over. Some regard for the conventions was necessary before the servants of my friend, the owner of this villa. Now, we can be natural, Monsieur le Colonel."

"Be all means; I cannot say I found the play diverting, despite the skill of your friend's chef. I gather ye wish to get to business? Well—I'm waiting." O'Rourke pulled at a cigar, honoring the man with a cat-like attention. He had no longer to watch the honorable; the latter had fully relieved him of the necessity.

"You have been then," pursued the viscount, without further circumlocution, "to the palace of Monsieur le Gouverneur-Generale?"

"I have—unfortunately a few days too late, it seems."

"You are satisfied?"

"I'm satisfied that the Pool of Flame has been stolen."

"Then you will probably believe me when I declare myself the malefactor. It was an easy matter: I purposely brought up the name of Chambret in conversation with the Governor and by him was informed of the existence of the packet—which, of course, I had already surmised. Afterward . . . the secretary was absent, the safe open, the name on the packet stared me in the face. What could I do?"

"Precisely. I'm convinced that, being what ye are, ye did only what ye could."

The viscount bowed, amusement flickering in his glance. "Touched," he admitted. "Well . . . I have the jewel, you the information."

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Realization usually comes as something of a jolt, after anticipation.



A Frown of Bewilderment Clouded the Secretary's Face.