

The POOL of FLAME

by LOUIS JOSEPH VANCE

ILLUSTRATIONS BY ELLSWORTH YOUNG

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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. Leaning 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 Trebas, 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, Beatrix, 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 300,000 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 warns the nobleman in a duel. 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. Arriving at Algiers the Irishman finds the governor general away. Des Trebas makes a mysterious appointment, and tells O'Rourke that he has gained possession of the jewel by stealing it.

CHAPTER XI.—(Continued.)

"And ye have to propose?"
"A plan after your own heart; I do your courage the credit to believe it, monsieur. With another man, whom I had studied less exhaustively, I should propose a combination of forces, a division of profits." O'Rourke made an impatient gesture. "But with you, Colonel O'Rourke, no. I esteem your address and determination too highly and—pardon me if I speak plainly—I despise and hate you too utterly to become willingly your partner."

"Go on—I begin to like ye better. Ye grow interesting."
"That does not interest me. . . . The situation, then, is simplified. Essentially it involves two propositions: first, we cannot combine; second, divided we both fail. While both of us live, mon colonel, the Pool of Flame will never earn its value."

"This meself takes exception to that. Let me once get me hands on the stone, monsieur, and I'll back meself against a dozen vicomtes—and honorables."

"While I live," the Frenchman stated, unruffled; "you will not touch the Pool of Flame; while you live, I cannot dispose of it to the best advantage. It would seem that one or the other of us must die."

"I am armed," remarked O'Rourke slowly, "if ye mean ye've brought me here to murder me—"

Monsieur speaks—pardon—crudely. I asked you, you came of your own will—to fight for the Pool of Flame." O'Rourke started; a glint of understanding danced in his eager eyes. "I see you catch my meaning. What I have to propose is this: you will take pen and paper and write the name of the person who offers the reward, with his address. This you will enclose in an envelope, seal, and place in your pocket. The Pool of Flame—you see I trust you—is here."

O'Rourke got upon his feet with an exclamation; the viscount was playing a bold hand. Before the Irishman had grasped his intention he had thrown upon the table a ruby as large, or larger, than an egg; an exquisite jewel, superbly cut and polished. Fascinated, O'Rourke remembered himself and sat down.

"You see," the viscount's cold incisive tones cut the silence. Slowly he extended a hand and took up the great ruby, replacing it in his pocket. "There is," he said evenly, "a level stretch of grass beyond the veranda. The night, I admit, is dark, but the light from these long windows should be sufficient for us. If you play me, take the ruby and go in peace; this is not—with a contemptuous glance at the unconscious honorable—I will never hinder you. If you die, I take the note from your pocket. The issue is fair. Will you fight, Irishman?"

O'Rourke's fist crashed upon the table as he rose. "Fight!" he cried. "Faith, I did not think ye had this in ye. Pistois, shall it be?"
"Thank you," said the viscount, with a courtly bow, "but I am an indifferent shot. Had you chosen rapiers at Monte Carlo one of us would never have left the field alive."

He went to a side table, returning with a sheet of paper, an envelope, pen and ink. And when O'Rourke had slipped the paper into his pocket he saw the viscount waiting for him by one of the windows, two naked rapiers, slender and gleaming and long, beneath his arm. As the Irishman came up, with a bow, the Frenchman presented the hilts of both weapons for his choice.

Together and in silence they left the dining-room, stode across the ver-

anda and down, a short step, to the lawn. The viscount stood aside quickly, bringing his feet together and saluting in the full glare of light.

O'Rourke whipped hilt to chin with consummate grace, his heart singing. Work such as this he loved. The night was pitchy black, the windows barred it with radiance. In the dark spaces between a man might easily blunder and run upon his death. . . . Somewhere in the shadowy shrubbery a night-bird was singing as though its heart would break. There was a sweet smell in the air.

His blade touched the viscount's with a shivering crash, musical as gongs.

CHAPTER XII.

Early in the dull hot dawn a clatter of winches and a bustle of shadowy figures on the deck of a small trading vessel, which had spent the night between the moles of the harbor of Algiers, announced that the anchor was being weighed.

While this was taking place a small harbor boat, manned by two native watermen and carrying a single passenger, put out from the steamship quay, the oarsmen rowing with a will that hinted at a premium having been placed upon their speed. The coaster was barely under way, moving slowly in the water, when the boat ran alongside. A line was thrown from the ship and caught by one of the watermen, the boat hauled close in, and its passenger taken on deck.

An hour later, a pipe between his teeth, O'Rourke stood by the helmsman, staring back over the heaving expanse, swiftly widening, that lay between the coaster and the Algerian littoral. The world behind was gray and wan, but the skies ahead were



O'Rourke Whipped Hilt to Chin With Consummate Grace.

golden. "A fair omen!" breathed the adventurer hopefully.

The bulk of the great ruby in his pocket brought his thought back in a wide swing to the girl who would be waiting for him at Rangoon. "Faith, and I must be getting below and making a dab at writing a letter to her. . . . That was nothing."

He nodded with meaning towards the bold profile of Algiers. . . .

An ill wind it was that blew Colonel O'Rourke into Athens. . . . It has blown itself out and been forgotten this many a day, praises be! but that, once it had whisked him thither, immediately it subsided and stubbornly it refused to lift again and wait him forth upon his wanderings, in the course of time came to be a matter of grievous concern to the Irishman.

All of which is equivalent to saying that the dropping breeze of his finances died altogether upon his arrival in the capital of Greece. He disembarked from a coasting steamer in the harbor of the Piræus encumbered with a hundred francs or so, an invincible optimism, a trunk and a kit-box, and a king's ransom on his person in the shape of the Pool of Flame; which latter was hardly to

be esteemed a negotiable asset. Thereafter followed days of inaction, while his hopes diminished.

Nearly two months had elapsed since he had promised two people—himself and one infinitely more dear to him—to be in Rangoon in ninety days. In little more than a month she'd be waiting for him there. . . . And where would he be? Still was he far by many a long and weary mile from the first gateway to the East—Suez; and still he lacked many an aloof and distant dollar the funds to finance him thither.

If only he could contrive to get to Alexandria!—Danny was there—Danny Mahone, he of the red, red head and the ready fists; Danny, who held the O'Rourke as only second to the Pope in dignity and importance; who had been O'Rourke's valet in a happier time and of late in his humbler way an adventurer like his master. He was there, in Alexandria, half partner in a tobacco importing house, by virtue of money borrowed from O'Rourke long since, at a time when money was to be had of the man for the asking. . . . And Danny would help.

You must see O'Rourke revolving in his mind this unhappy predicament of his, on the last of the many afternoons that he spent in Greece. Draw down the corners of his wide, mobile mouth, stir up the devils in his eyes until they flicker and flash their resentment, place a pucker between the brows of his habitually serene and unwrinkled forehead; and there you have him who sat beside the little table in the purple of the Zappelon, with a head bared to the cool of the evening breeze, alternately puffing at a medoc cigar and sipping black coffee from the demi-tasse at his elbow.

"That explains it," agreed the mollified man. "It's 'Ole, plyn Will'm 'Ole, master of the Pelican, fryghter, just in from Malta."

A light of interest kindled in O'Rourke's eyes. He reviewed the man with more respect, as due to one who might prove useful. "And bound—" he insinuated craftily.

"Alexandria. . . . I just dropped in for a d'y or two to pick up a bit of cargo from a chap down at Piræus. It's devilish 'ot and I thought as 'ow I'd tyke a run up and see the city—'aving a bit of time free, y'know."

"Surely," sighed O'Rourke, a far-away look in his eyes. "For Alexandria, eh? Faith, I'd like to be sailing with ye."

Again the captain eyed O'Rourke askance. "Wot for?" he demanded directly. "The Pelican's a slow old tramp. You can pick up a swifter passage on 'arf-a-dozen boats a day."

"This meself that knows that, sure," assented the Irishman. "Tis but a trifling difficulty about ready money that detains me," he pursued boldly, with a confidential jerk of his head. "There's a bit of stuff—no matter what—that I don't want to pass through the Custom House at Alexandria. I'm not saying a word, captain, but if I could smuggle it into Egypt, the profit would be great enough to pay me passage-money a dozen times over. I'm saying this to ye in strict confidence, for, being an Englishman, ye won't let on."

"Never fear," Hole asserted stoutly. "Umm. . . . Er—I don't mind telling you, Mr. O'Rourke, I sometimes do a little in that line myself. Being a casual tramp and sometimes l'yed by for weeks at a stretch for want of consignment—"

"Not another word, captain. I understand perfectly. Will ye be having a bit of a drink, now?"

"Captain Hole would. 'It won't 'urt to talk this over," he remarked. "Perhaps we might myke some sort of a dicker."

"Faith, 'tis meself that's agreeable," laughed the Irishman lightly.

And when, at midnight that night, he parted from a moist and sentimental sailor-man, whose capacity for liquor—even including the indelible native retsinato and masticahad proved enormous, the arrangement had been arrived at, signed, sealed and delivered by a clasping of hands. And it was O'Rourke who was the happy man.

"Tis Danny who'll be giving me the welcome," he assured himself, sitting on the edge of his bed and staring thoughtfully into the dishevelled depths of the battered steel kit-box that housed everything he owned in the world—for he was packing to join the Pelican at noon."

"I hope to hiven he has five pounds," announced O'Rourke later, frowning dubiously.

Five pounds happened to be the sum he had agreed to pay Captain Hole for the accommodation, it being further conditioned that the latter was to accompany the adventurer ashore at Alexandria and not part

this and that about him to tell O'Rourke more plainly than words that his profession was something nautical; he was most probably a captain, from a certain air of determination and command that lurked beneath his free-and-easy manner.

Therefore, having summed the stranger up in a glance, "And when did ye get in, captain?" inquired O'Rourke.

The man jumped with surprise and shot a frightened—at least a questioning—glance at O'Rourke. Then, seeing that he was smiling in a friendly fashion, calmed and continued to cool his face and beat his blood by fanning himself vigorously with a straw hat.

"'Ow the dooce do you know I'm a captain?" he demanded, with a slightly aggrieved manner.

"It shouldn't take a man an hour to guess that, captain—any more than it would to pick ye out for an Englishman."

The captain stared, gray eyes widening. "An' perhaps you'll tell me my name next?" he suggested rather truculently.

"Divvie a bit. 'Tis no clairvoyant I am," laughed O'Rourke. "But I can tell ye me own. 'Tis O'Rourke, and 'tis delighted I am to meet a white man in this heathen country. Sir, your hand!"

He put his own across the table and gripped the captain's heartily.

"Mine's 'Ole," the latter informed him.

"'Ole?" queried O'Rourke. "'Ole what?"

"Not 'Ole nothing," said the captain with some pardonable asperity. "I didn't s'y 'Ole, I s'y'd 'Ole."

"Of course," O'Rourke assented gravely. "I'm stupid, Captain Hole, and a bit deaf in me off ear." This, however, was a polite lie.

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from him till the money was forthcoming; something which irked the Irishman's soul. "Why could he not take me word for it?" he demanded of midnight darkness tempered by feeble lamplight. "But, faith, I forget what I'm dealing with. Besides, 'tis sure I am to find Danny."

He arose and resumed his packing, blowing an inaudible little air through his puckered lips. "Divvillish awkward if I don't. . . . By the Gods! I'd all but misremembered. . . ."

He failed to state exactly what he had misremembered, but stood motionless, with troubled eyes staring at the lamp flame, for a full five minutes. Then—

"I'll have to chance it," he said slowly. "Tisn't as if it were mine."

He unbuttoned the front of his shirt and thrust a hand between his under-shirt and his skin, fumbled about under his left armpit, his brows still gathered thoughtfully. Presently he gave a little jerk and removed his hand. It contained a chamole-skin bag about the size of a duck's egg, from which dangled the stout cord by which he had slung it about his neck.

Holding this gingerly, as if he feared it would explode, O'Rourke glanced at the window, drew the blind tight, and tiptoed to the door, where he turned the key in the lock. Then, returning to his bed and making sure that he was out of range of the key-hole, he cautiously loosened the drawing-string at the mouth of the bag.

Something tumbled out into his palm and lay there like a ball of red fire, brilliant and coruscant.

O'Rourke caught at his breath sharply; his very voice had an ominous ring in its timber when he spoke at length.

"Blood," he said slowly, "blood. . . ."

I doubt not that rivers of blood have flowed for the sake of ye. Be like ye were fashioned of blood in the beginning, for 'tis that's your color, and the story of ye as I've heard it is all told when I've said that one word—blood! . . ."

And, after a bit, "I'd best put it away, I'm thinking. 'Twouldn't be safe to carry it that way any longer. If something should catch in me shirt on board, and rip it, and Hole happen to see it—why, me life wouldn't be worth a moment's purchase. I'll hide it in me box there; they'll never suspect."

And with that he thrust the Pool of Flame back into the leather bag, and the bag into the depths of the kit-box; which he presently locked and noiselessly moved beneath his bed. After all of which he lay down and with another sigh slept tranquilly.

CHAPTER XIII.

Some time in the golden afternoon of the following day, the Pelican weighed anchor and slouched with a loafish air out of the harbor of the Piræus.

"Plyn Bill 'Ole," the captain said he preferred to be called. And "Plain Bill Hole!" mused the Irishman, leaning over the forward rail and sucking at a short black pipe. "Faith, not only plain, but even a trifle homely," he amended judgmentally.

"As for meself," he concluded later, "I'm no siren in this rig." And he lifted his eyebrows, protruding his lower lip, as he glanced down over his attire.

It was a strange rig for the O'Rourke to be in: an engineer's blue jumper, much the worse for wear, and a pair of trousers whose seat, O'Rourke maintained, was only held together by its coating of dirt and grease.

O'Rourke eyed this get-up with disdain. "Fortunately," he comforted himself, "twon't be forever I'll be wearing it."

In the present instance, the disguise was held an advisable thing, since O'Rourke was officially registered on the ship's books as assistant engineer. The Pelican carried no license for passengers, and in view of his avowed purpose it was deemed unwise for the Irishman to risk detection by appearing "too tony" (an expression culled from the captain's vocabulary).

Otherwise, it was understood that his duties were to consist of the pursuit of his own sweet will, that he was to occupy a stateroom aft, and that he was to mess at the captain's table.

On an evening, some nine or ten days after he had left Athens, O'Rourke at the forward rail saw the long, low profile of Egypt edge up out of the waters, saw it take color and form, made out palms and the windmills, the light-house and Pompey's pillar; and knew that he was close upon his journey's end.

Her winches rattled cheerfully as the Pelican dropped anchor, but O'Rourke did not move. There would be no going ashore, he knew, until Hole was ready, and that would be when the customs officials had paid him a call and the usual courtesies had been exchanged. The Irishman had no need to be in haste to change from his present garb to one that better suited him. So he lolled upon the rail and regarded with a kindling eye the harbor views.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Bill the Philosopher.

Wise remark, by Bill, the Philosopher:

"There's one good thing about it. Anybody who talks about himself all the time hasn't time to be a knocker."

Know any of 'em?—San Francisco Chronicle.

Another Exciting Game.

Friend—What were your sensations in the week?

Victim—Just the same as in football. Three coaches passed over me and then the doctors came.—Punch.

IOWA WOMAN WELL AGAIN

Freed From Shooting Pains, Spinal Weakness, Dizziness, by Lydia E. Pinkham's Vegetable Compound.

Ottumwa, Iowa.—"For years I was almost a constant sufferer from female trouble in all its dreadful forms; shooting pains all over my body, sick headache, spinal weakness, dizziness, depression, and everything that was horrid. I tried many doctors in different parts of the United States, but Lydia E. Pinkham's Veget-



able Compound has done more for me than all the doctors. I feel it my duty to tell you these facts. My heart is full of gratitude to Lydia E. Pinkham's Vegetable Compound for my health."—Mrs. HARRIET E. WAMPLER, 524 S. Ransom Street, Ottumwa, Iowa.

Consider Well This Advice. No woman suffering from any form of female troubles should lose hope until she has given Lydia E. Pinkham's Vegetable Compound a fair trial.

This famous remedy, the medicinal ingredients of which are derived from native roots and herbs, has for nearly forty years proved to be a most valuable tonic and invigorator of the female organism. Women everywhere bear willing testimony to the wonderful virtue of Lydia E. Pinkham's Vegetable Compound.

If you want special advice write to Lydia E. Pinkham Medicine Co. (confidential) Lynn, Mass. Your letter will be opened, read and answered by a woman and held in strict confidence.

KEEPING BABIES IN HEALTH

Success of Tent Scheme Last Summer So Pronounced That It Will Be Repeated.

Mothers of little babies that suffered much from the intense heat in the early part of July last summer will be interested in the success of the "baby tent" scheme adopted in some of the big cities.

The tents are placed on flat roofs of tall buildings and in open lots, with eight little cradles or cots in each tent. When all was ready mothers of babies under two years were invited to leave them at the nearest available tent over night, so that the youngsters, in addition to enjoying the privilege of sleeping out of doors, could also receive the attention of trained nurses and doctors free.

Some of the tents have a perforated iron pipe extending along the ridge pole and connected with the city water supply. On very hot nights the water was turned on and allowed to stream down over the canvas. By evaporation it greatly reduced the temperature inside the tents. Some of the tents were also kept cool by the use of large blocks of ice in tubs before the entrance. Electric fans blew the cold air from the ice into the tents sufficiently to keep the babies comfortably cool.

This is the way some of the poor babies are being cared for, but the ideas could be utilized by any one who had the welfare of the baby at heart.

Every time the wrong young man calls on a girl she always says to some other girl the next day: "I thought he never would go home."

DOCTOR'S SHIFT. Now Gets Along Without It.

A physician says: "Until last fall I used to eat meat for my breakfast and suffered with indigestion until the meat had passed from the stomach."

"Last fall I began the use of Grape-Nuts for breakfast and very soon found I could do without meat, for my body got all the nourishment necessary from the Grape-Nuts and since then I have not had any indigestion and am feeling better and have increased in weight."

"Since finding the benefit I derived from Grape-Nuts I have prescribed the food for all my patients suffering from indigestion or over-feeding and also for those recovering from disease where I want a food easy to take and certain to digest and which will not overtax the stomach."

"I always find the results I look for when I prescribe Grape-Nuts. For ethical reasons please omit my name." Name given by mail by Postum Co., Battle Creek, Mich.

The reason for the wonderful amount of nutriment, and the easy digestion of Grape-Nuts is not hard to find.

In the first place, the starchy part of the wheat and barley goes through various processes of cooking, to perfectly change the starch into dextrose or grape-sugar, in which state it is ready to be easily absorbed by the blood.

The parts in the wheat and barley which Nature can make use of for rebuilding brain and nerve centers are retained in this remarkable food, and thus the human body is supplied with the powerful strength producers, so easily noticed after one has eaten Grape-Nuts each day for a week or ten days.

"There's a reason" and it is explained in the little book, "The Road to Wellville," in pkgs.

Ever read the above letter? A new one appears from time to time. They are genuine, true, and full of human interest.