The POOL of FLAME

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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 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, 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 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 worsts 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 Algeria the Irishman finds the governor general away. Des Trebes makes a mysterious appointment, and tells O'Rourke that he has gained possession of the jewel by stealing it. In a duel O'Rourke masters the viscount, secures possession of the Pool of Flame and starts by ship for Rangoon. He finds the captain to be a smuggler who tries to steal the jewel. It is finally secured by the captain and O'Rourke escapes to land. With the aid of one Danny and his sweetheart, O'Rourke recovers the Pool of Flame. On board ship once more, bound for Rangoon, a mysterious lady appears.

CHAPTER XIX.

The wanderer had come upon Mrs. Prynne but once since he had boarded the Panjnab. That morning, himself early astir because of his vague misgivings, he had discovered her on the hurricane deck of the liner; an inconspicuous, slight figure in the shadow of a life-boat, leaning upon the rail and gazing with (he fancied) troubled eyes, out and across the waste below Ismailia.

Though she must have been conscious of nearing footsteps, she had not stirred, and he had passed on, gaining but a fugitive glimpse of a profile sweetly serious; nor had she appeared either at breakfast or luncheon. A circumstance which led him to surmise that she did not court observation; an idiosyncrasy which seemed passing strange in a woman so fair.

He told himself that she wore an air of watchfulness, of vague expectancy, as though she, like himself, feared some untoward mishap; that she had the manner of one definitely apprehensive, constantly on guard against some unforeseen peril.

Now, he asked himself, what could it be? What threatened her? And why?

He dimly promised himself the pleasure of her acquaintance, relying in the rapid intimacy that springs up between strangers on a long voyage, with a still more indefinite intention of putting himself at her service in any cause that she might be pleased to name, provisionally: she must not interfere with his plans for reaching Rangoon "in ninety days."

That night he was hoping to find the lady at dinner; but though the ship's company was small, he failed to see her in the saloon, at either the captain's, the chief officer's or the doctor's table; nor, so far as he could determine, was she taking the air on deck. Was it possible, then, that he had been right, that she had a reason equally as compelling as his own for secluding herself? Or, was it simply (and infinitely more probably) that Mrs. Prynne was indisposed, an enervated victim of excessive heat?

The latter conjecture proved apparently the right one, Mrs. Prynne failing to appear during the two following days, while the Panjnab was rocking down the Red Sea channel; and O'Rourke grew interested enough (he had little else to occupy his mind, for a duller voyage he had never known) to give Danny permission to pursue his inquiries; with an injunction, however, prohibiting too lavish an expenditure of the boy's wealth of affection. Whereupon Danny returned with the information that the mistress of Cecile, the maid, was suffering from heat exhaustion.

This was entirely reasonable. O'Rourke accepted the demolition of his airy castles of Romance, laughed at himself, in part was successful in putting the woman out of mind; doubtless, in time, he would have done so altogether, had not the lady chosen to take the air the night that the Panjnab negotiated the Straits of Bab-el-Mandeb. For on that same night, O'Rourke, himself wakeful, was minded to sit up and watch the lights of Perim Island heave into view.

O'Rourke, in a deck-chair on the starboard side, well cloaked in the shadow of the deck above, watched the other passengers, one by one, quiet their chatter, yawn, stretch and slip below to stuffy staterooms.

He suffered a dreamy eye to rove where it would, greedy of the night's superb illusion.

Four bells—two o'clock—chimed upon his consciousness like a physical shock. He verified the hour by his watch and, reluctantly enough, agreed that it was time he got himself to bed. He half rose from his chair, then sank back with an inaudible catch of his breath. Without warning the apparition of a white-clad woman had invaded the promenade deck. For an instant he hardly credited his eyes, then, with a nod of recognition, he identified Mrs. Prynne.

Unquestionably unconscious of his presence in the shadow, she fell to pacing to and fro. Now and again, she stopped, and with chin cradled in her small hands, elbows on the rail, watched the approaching cliffs of Arabia; then, with perhaps a sigh, returned to her untimely constitutional.

Partly because he had no wish to startle her, partly because he was glad to watch unobserved (he had a rare eye for beauty, the O'Rourke), the wanderer sat on without moving, stirred only by active curiosity. The strangeness of her appearance upon deck at such an hour fascinated his imagination no less than her person held his eye. He gave himself over to vain and profitless speculation. . . . Why, he wondered, should she keep to her cabin the greater part of the evening, only to take the air when none might be supposed to observe her?

Why, if not to escape such observation? Then, he told himself, he must be right in his supposition that she had something to fear, someone to avoid. What or whom? What was it all, what the mystery that, as he watched her, seemed to grow, to cling about her like some formless, impalpable garment?

Events conspired to weave the man into the warp and woof of her affairs; more quickly than he could grasp the reason for his sudden action, he found himself a-foot and dashing aft at top speed. But an instant gone Mrs Prynne had passed him, unmolested and wrapped in her splendid isolation; and then from the after part of the deck he had heard a slight and guarded cry of distress, and a small scuffling sound.

In two breaths he was by her side and found her struggling desperately in the arms of a lascar—a deck-hand on the steamer.

At first the strangeness of the business so amazed O'Rourke that he paused and held his hand, briefly rooted in action. For although it was apparent that she had been caught off her guard, wholly unprepared against assault, and while she struggled fiercely to break the lascar's hold, the woman still uttered no cry. A single scream would have brought her aid; yet she held her tongue.

The two, the woman's slight, white figure and the lascar's gaunt and sinewy one, strained and fought, swaying silently in the shadows, tensely, with the effect of a fragment of some disordered nightmare. But then, as the lascar seemed about to overpower his victim, O'Rourke, electrified, sprang upon the man's back. With one strong arm deftly he embraced the fellow, an elbow beneath his chin forcing his head up and back. With the other hand O'Rourke none too gently tore away an arm encircling the woman. Then wrenching the two apart, he sent a knee crashing into the small of the lascar's back, all but breaking him in two, and so flung him sprawling into the scuppers.

Without a word the man slid upon his shoulders a full half-dozen feet, while O'Rourke had a momentary glimpse of his face in the moonlight—dark-skinned and sinister of expression with its white, glaring eyeballs. Then, in one bound, he was on his feet again and springing lithely back to the attack: and as he came on a jagged gleam of moonlight ran like lightning down the sinuous and formidable length of a kris, most deadly of knives.

O'Rourke fell back a pace or two. His own hands were empty; he had nothing but naked fists and high courage to pit against the lascar and his kris. Keenly alert, he threw himself into a pose of defence.

But O'Rourke had forgotten the woman; it was enough that he had made possible her escape, and he had no thought other than she had fled. It was, therefore, with as much surprise as relief that he caught the glimmer of her white figure as she thrust herself before him and saw the lascar bring up in the middle of a leap, his nose not an inch from the muzzle of an army Webley of respect-compelling caliber.

Simultaneously, he heard her voice, clear and incisive if low of tone: "Drop that knife!"

The kris shivered upon the deck.

"Faith!" murmured the Irishman, "and what manner of woman is this, now?"

The lascar stood as rigid as though carven out of stone, long, gaunt legs shining softly brown beneath his cool, dazzling white cummerbund, the upper half of his body lost in the shadow of the deck, a gray blur standing for his turban.

O'Rourke stepped forward, with a quick movement kicking the kris overboard, and would have seized the fellow but that the woman intervened.

She said decisively: "If you please—no."

Bewildered, O'Rourke hesitated. "I beg your pardon—" he said in confusion.

She did not reply directly; her attention was all for the lascar, whom her revolver still covered. To him, "Go!" she said sharply, with a significant motion of the weapon.

The lascar stepped back, with a single wriggle losing himself in the dense shadows.

O'Rourke fairly gasped amazement at the woman, who, on her part, retreated slowly until her back touched the railing. She remained very quiet and thoroughly mistress of herself, betraying agitation only by slightly quickened breathing and cold pallor. Her eyes racked the deck on either hand: it was plain that she had no faith in the lascar, perhaps apprehended his return; yet her splendid control of her nerves evoked the Irishman open admiration.

"Faith!" he cried, breaking the tense silence, "'tis yourself shames me, madam, with the courage of ye!"

She flashed him a glance, and laughed slightly. "Thank you," she returned. "I'm sure I don't know where I should be now but for you."

"'Twas nothing at all. But ye'll pardon me for suggesting that ye have made a mistake, madam."

"A mistake?" she echoed; and then, thoughtfully: "No, I shouldn't call it that."

"Letting him go, I mean. Neither of us, I believe, could well identify him. When ye report this outrage to the captain, whom will ye accuse?"

"I shall accuse no one," she said quietly, "for I shan't report the affair."

"Ye will not—" he cried, astounded.

"Indeed, I am quite sincere: I shall do nothing whatever about it. It is, moreover, a favor which I shall ask of you, to say nothing of the matter to anyone."

O'Rourke hesitated, unwilling to believe that he had heard aright.

"Believe me," she was saying earnestly, "I have good reason for making a request so unaccountable to you."

"But—but—Mrs. Prynne—!"

"Oh, you know me then?" she interrupted sharply. And her look was curious and intent.

"I—'tis—faith!" O'Rourke stammered. He felt his face burn. "Me valet told me," he confessed miserably. "'Tis a bit of flirtation he's been having with your maid, Cecile, I believe, madam."

"Ah, yes." She seemed unaccountably relieved. "You, then, are Colonel O'Rourke?"

He bowed. "Terence O'Rourke, madam, and at your service, believe me."

"I am very glad," she said slowly, eyeing him deliberately, "that, since I had to be aided, it came through one of whom I have heard so much—"

"Faith, Mrs. Prynne—!"

"And I thank you a second time, very heartily!" She offered him her hand, and smiled bewitchingly.

"'Tis embarrassing me ye are," he protested. "Faith, to be thanked twice for so slight a service! I can only wish that I might do more—"

"It is possible," she said, apparently not in the least displeased by his presumption— "It is possible that I may take you at your word, Colonel O'Rourke."

In her eyes, intent upon his, he fancied that he recognized an amused flicker, with, perhaps, a trace of deeper emotion: the kindling interest of a woman in a strong man, with whose signals he was not unfamiliar. Pride and his conceit stirred in his breast.

"'Twould be the delight of me life," he told her in an ecstasy.

"Don't be too sure, I warn you, colonel." Her manner was now arch, her smile entirely charming. "It might be no light service I should require of you."

"Ye couldn't ask one too heavy. . . . But 'tis weary ye are, Mrs. Prynne?" he inquired, solicitous.

"Very." There was in fact an indefinite modulation of weariness in her voice. "I'm only a woman," she said faintly, with a little gesture of deprecation; "and my ways are hedged about with grave perils—"

"'Tis the O'Rourke would gladly brave them all for ye, madam," he declared gallantly. "Command me—what ye will."

She lifted her gaze to his, coloring divinely there in the moon-glamor. He looked into her curiously bewitching eyes and saw there an appeal and a strange little tender smile. Her head was so near his shoulder that he was aware of the vague, alluring perfume of her hair. Her scarlet lips parted . . . And he became suddenly aware that it behooved him to hold himself well in hand. It were an easy matter to imagine himself swept off his feet, into a whirl of infatuation, with a little encouragement. And he was not unsophisticated enough to fail to see that encouragement would not be lacking if he chose to recognize it.

Found Her Struggling Desperately in the Arms of a Lascar.

"Faith," he told himself, "I'm thinking 'twould be wiser for me to take to me heels and run before . . . ."

He was spared the ignominious necessity of flight. In two breaths they showed two very different pictures. Now they stood alone on the dead white deck, alone with the night, the sea, the stars, the silence and the moonlight: O'Rourke a bit dismayed and wary, but as curious as any man in such a case; the woman apparently yielding to a sudden fascination for him, swaying a little toward him as if inviting the refuge of his arms. . . . And now she started away, clutching at her heart, with a little choking cry of alarm; while beneath them the vessel was still quivering with a harsh yet deadened detonation like an explosion, together with a grinding crash and shriek of riven steel somewhere deep in the hold.

Inexpressibly dismayed, they stared with wide and questioning eyes at one another, through a long minute filled with an indescribable uproar: a succession of shocks and thumps in the interior of the vessel gradually diminishing in severity while, in a pandemonium of clamorous voices, the liner, like a stricken thing, hesitated in its southward surge, then slowly limped into a dead halt on the face of the waters. . . .

CHAPTER XX.

O'Rourke's first fears were for the woman, his first words a lie designed to reassure her.

"What—what does it mean?" she gasped faintly, her face as white as marble, her eyes wide and terrified.

"Sure, I'm thinking 'tis nothing at all," he answered readily, with a smile amending, "nothing of any great consequence, that is to say. Permit me to escort ye to your cabin."

"I'm not afraid," Mrs. Prynne interjected.

"Faith, I see that, madam. But your maid, now—? Would it not be well to return to your stateroom and quiet her, whilst I'm ascertaining the cause of this trouble? I promise to advise ye instantly, whether there's danger or not."

"You're very thoughtful," she returned. "I'm sure you're right. Thank you."

He escorted her to her stateroom and left her at the door, remarking its number and renewing his pledge to return in ten minutes—more speedily if possible. He was back in five, with a long face.

Mrs. Prynne answered instantly his double-knocked summons and, stepping out quickly, closed the door tight. In the fraction of a second that it was wide, however, O'Rourke saw one side of the stateroom warm and bright with electric light, and sitting there, Cecile the maid, completely dressed, wide awake and vigilant. The girl was French and sullenly handsome after her kind. O'Rourke got an impression of a resolute chin and resolute eyes under level brows; and he did not in the least doubt that she was quite prepared to make good and effectual use of the revolver which she held pointed directly at the opening.

Why?

From her mistress' poise, too—one arm rigid at her side, the hand concealed in the folds of her gown—O'Rourke divined that she was alert, armed, on her guard no less than the maid. But she left him no time to puzzle over the mystery.

"Well?" she demanded breathlessly.

"'Tis as I thought, Mrs. Prynne. A cylinder-head has blown off and done no end of damage. We're crippled, if in no danger. The other screw will take us far as Aden, but there we'll have to wait for the next boat."

Mrs. Prynne's face clouded with dismay. "How long—a day or two?" she demanded.

"Mayhap," he replied, no less disconsolate; "mayhap as much as a week. Faith, 'tis meself that would it were otherwise, but I fear there's no mending matters."

She regarded him thoughtfully for an instant.

"Then you, too, travel in haste, colonel?"

"Indeed I do so, madam. Me fortune hangs upon me haste. If I get—there"—he checked himself in time, the word Rangoon upon his lips—"too late, 'twill be all up. I'm heavy with an urgent enterprise, madam." And he smiled.

The woman looked past him, down the dusk of the gangway, apparently pondering her dilemma. "What will you do?" she inquired at length.

"Faith!" he said, disturbed, "that's hard to say."

She flashed him an ironic look. "You mean you are resigned to the inevitable?"

"Be the powers!" he cried in resentment, "I'm resigned to nothing that doesn't please me. Is it that ye ask me aid? Sure, if ye do, neither the inevitable nor the impossible shall keep ye from arriving at Bombay, and on time!"

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Polyglot Chicago.

The introduction of Polish as a course in the public schools of Chicago, by Superintendent Ella Flagg Young, is an interesting experiment, though some may regard it as a rash one. There is a tendency among children of foreign parentage to drop their native language, while it would no doubt add to the general culture of the rising generation in our large cities if they would retain it along with the prescribed studies. If the experiment is successful, Mrs. Young proposes to follow it up with other languages. There are perhaps 150,000 Poles in the city, but there are 14 tongues, each of which is spoken by more than 10,000 persons. Newspapers appear in ten languages and church services are held in twenty. In all there are forty different languares of dialects employed to express the thoughts, needs and emotions of the population. Chicago is the second largest Bohemian city in the world, the third Swedish, the fourth Norwegian, the fifth Polish and the fifth German. If all these are to be instructed in their national language and literature the city will eventually need an Elihu Burritt or a George F. Marsh to direct its educational activities.—Boston Transcript.

Don't Forget the Waiter.

"Well, our vacation is over. We leave for home today."

"I see the waiter has decorated our table with rosemary."

"Rosemary, eh? Ah, yes; that's for remembrance."

SPLENDID OUTLOOK FOR CROPS IN WESTERN CANADA

RELIABLE INFORMATION FROM THE GRAIN FIELDS SHOW THAT THE PROSPECTS ARE GOOD.

This is the time of year when considerable anxiety is felt in all the northern agricultural districts as to the probable outcome of the growing crops. Central Canada, comprising the Provinces of Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta, with their 16,000,000 acres of wheat, oats, barley and flax, of which 6,000,000 acres may be said to be sown to wheat alone, has become a great factor in the grain markets of the world. Besides this, government returns show that every state in the Union has representatives in these provinces, and naturally the friends of these representatives are anxious to hear of their success. It has never been said of that country that it is absolutely faultless. There are, and have been, districts that have experienced the vagaries of the weather, the same as in districts south of the boundary line between the two countries, but these are only such as are to be expected in any agricultural country. The past has proven that the agricultural possibilities of this portion of Canada are probably more attractive in every way than most countries where grain raising is the chief industry. The present year promises to be even better than past years, and in a month or six weeks it is felt there will be produced the evidence that warrants the enthusiasm of the present. Then these great broad acres will have the ripened wheat, oats, barley and flax, and the farmer, who has been looking forward to making his last payment on his big farm will be satisfied. At the time of writing, all crops give the promise of reaching the most sanguine expectations.

In the central portion of Alberta, it is said that crop conditions are more favorable than in any previous year. Heavy rains recently visited this part, and the whole of this grain growing section has been covered. Reports like the following come from all parts:

"Splendid heavy rain yesterday. Crops forging ahead. Great prospects. All grains more than a week ahead of last year. Weather warm last week. Good rains last night."

From southern Alberta the reports to hand indicate sufficient rain. Crops in excellent condition. Labor scarce.

Throughout Saskatchewan all grains are looking well, and there has been sufficient rain to carry them through to harvest.

From all portions of Manitoba there comes an assurance of an abundant yield of all grains. Throughout southern Manitoba, where rain was needed a few weeks ago, there has lately been abundant precipitation, and that portion of the province will in all probability have a crop to equal the best anticipations. A large quantity of grain was sown on the stubble in the newer west, which is never a satisfactory method of farming, and may reduce the general average.

Taken altogether, the country is now fully two weeks in advance of last year, and in all grains the acreages sown are much larger than in 1911. This means that with auspicious weather the west will have the grandest harvest in its history. Two hundred and fifty million bushels of wheat has been mentioned as an estimate of the present growing crop, and it looks now as if that guess will be none too large.

Advantage.

Stella—Has that summer resort any views?

Bella—Er—no, but it is close to the moonlight.