

CAMEO

By Booth
Tarkington and
Harry Leon
Wilson

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Subtle humor, tear impelling pathos, dueling, lynch law, suicide, attempted murder, gambling, heart entanglement and realistic character drawing combine to make "Cameo Kirby" an unusual play and an unusual novel—a cameo of modern fiction finely graven, richly set; a word cameo by those master craftsmen Booth Tarkington and Harry Leon Wilson, whereon are shifting pictures of the old days along the Mississippi when the Natchez and the Robert E. Lee raced to New Orleans with fortunes at stake; old days when gamblers, amateur and professional, won and lost almost unbelievable sums on the river steamers; days when Mark Twain was a pilot and when the real life prototype of Jim Bludso of the Prairie Belle held "her nozzle ag'in the bank till the last galoot" was ashore. A well born, well intentioned young man through association with bad companions becomes an accomplished gambler. Falsely accused of murder, he meets a young girl, with whom he falls in love. How vital complications baffle him, how conspiracy places his life in the balance, how the love of a pure woman may work wonders in the regeneration of a man—these themes and others give "Cameo Kirby" its thrill, its fascination, its powerful heart interest.

CHAPTER I.

"ONE card," said John Randall quietly, extending a hand as firm as was his voice. For the first time in twenty-four hours the debt of intoxication was paid solely by his eyes. Perhaps the pile of double eagles strewn before him on the green baize table conveyed a fugitive and sobering realization of the present; drove home the fact, as only hard earned money can, that this delightful levitation of the senses, this genial warmth of body and soul, this impression that he was a nabob who might hazard with a care free hand, was purely fictitious and that the morning would find him a sepulcher filled with the decaying bones of dead emotions and the living worm of remorse. That pile of gold twinkling under the oil lamps in a private stateroom of the John W. Shotwell represented one-tenth of his yearly income, and yet he was blithely staking it on



CAMEO KIRBY EXUDED A DEBONAIR AND BAKISH ATMOSPHERE.

the turn of a single card at poker, for that was the game that was being played—staking it as indifferently as he had staked and lost its predecessors.

He pulled himself together with the air of one who, guilty of a false start, is but the mere confident of the future, while he reflected with some pride that his extended hand was as steady as that of his impassive opponent. As the cards lay he was beaten, but luck must eventually change, and a four card "inside straight" was his weakness—weakness and strength, for when he drew to one he "filled."

"Here's luck," said Colonel Moreau heartily, extending the pasteboard

KIRBY

Adapted From
the Play of the Same
Name by W. B. M.
Ferguson

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"It's bound to change some time, sub, and even a niggah could beat a measly pair of deuces. I'll take three."

Randall glanced at his card and as he laid it face down on the table strove to keep the sudden exultation from his eyes. But as Moreau spread out his draw, disclosing trash, the planter lost his momentary self control.

"Drew to an inside straight and filled it, by gad!" he cried excitedly. "There's the turn in the tide, colonel! It rarely ever goes back on me. That's what I've been waiting for. Let me draw to a four card inside straight and I'll bet my immortal soul that I fill her. Yes, sub."

A satiric gleam flickered in Moreau's black eyes as he indifferently shoved his lost bet across the table.

"One thousand to yoh, sub," he said courteously, stifling a yawn—"a most remarkable example of good fortune



and one that was a-coming to yoh. Allow me, sub, to drink to the turn in the tide." And, filling the other's glass, he bowed with the most admirable courtesy and good feeling.

"Yoh health, colonel," replied the other thickly, mopping his face with an immense silk handkerchief, "and my compliments for the sentiment, sub. I can return them by adding that the tide had already turned even before I had the pleasure and good fortune of making yoh acquaintance, sub. I reckon that, all in all, my trip to New Orleans this year has been very lucky—very lucky, sub—foh I have sold my sugar crop for ten thousand, a much higher figure than I reckoned, considering the poh price of cane. And my luck still follows me by permitting this indulgence of my favorite game with a gentleman, sub, of yoh standing. My plantation is at Plaquemine, and"

"The Randalls are well known, sub," interrupted Moreau, with delicate deference, which went to the point of refilling the other's glass—"the Randall, I presume, sub, who so distinguished himself at the defense of the Alamo?" This was stated as a known fact rather than a chance shot, which in reality it was.

"My brother, sub," gravely replied the planter, tapping his ample breast as if in order to convey the sentiment that the same noble spark of heroism smoldered therein, awaiting but a fitting opportunity of burning his owner's name on the immutable pages of history. "Peace hath her victories no less renowned than war," he added oracularly, instinctively reaching for his glass, "and it was my fortune to stay at home and look after the plantation while my brothea had it out with the Mexicans. If the Randalls are well known, sub, it is not through me. My yearly trip to New Orleans is the extent of my traveling, and my children, sub, have the felicity to regard me as the most guileless creation that the Almighty ever turned out. Bless their innocent hearts! They never suspect what a thoroughpaced man of the world I am. Why, sub, the advice they give me when I start out on these trips would cover the late Lord Chesterfield with confusion, sub. They warn me especially against gambling. My son Tom, you know, is just at that age when he thinks his father an amateur in sin, sub, and, according to him, the river is a paradise for pirates!"

"Well, I don't think he is far wrong," interrupted Moreau, idly shuffling the cards. "Naturally, this is the greatest waterway in the world. Did yoh ever think of the wealth that passes down here from St. Louis to New Orleans, the fortunes that are lost and won?"

"Every one gambles on the Mississippi, sub, foh here the ladies—my compliments to them—must temporarily yield dominion. And of co'se, as a thoroughpaced man of the world, sub, and one who has lived on the

river for over fifty years, I recognize that yoh professional gamblers are an institution; but, bless me, I don't take my son Tom's view of them. They gamble for a living, yes, but I believe they do so honestly, as yoh or I. We are a gambling nation, sub, foh we are young, red blooded and prosperous, but our country is incapable of giving birth to a man who deals off the bottom of the pack, who is afraid to meet fortune eye to eye. Yoh agree with me, sub?"

"As a fellow patriot, yes—as a sane man, no," replied the other, the satiric gleam again smoldering in the dead slag of his eyes. "Yoh have yet to be picked by a brace of these river vultures—they generally travel in pairs—but as a man of the world, of co'se, yoh would instantly recognize them."

"Of co'se, sub," heartily agreed the other. "Aside from all else, yoh professional gambler may be remarked for his lavish display of diamonds."

"Yoh pardon, sub, but not always. I calculate that as a man of the world yoh have heard of Cameo Kirby?"

smiled Moreau, again paying attention to his companion's glass.

"Kirby? That's an old and honored name in Plaquemine, sub," replied Mr. Randall, opening his coat and fanning inflamed cheeks with his huge slouch hat. "Kirby was my neighbor, sub, and I knew his folks well. I had the honor to be of some slight assistance when he went under during the panic years. Crops failed, banks went to smash, but yoh remember, I reckon. Well, sub, Mr. Kirby's son, Eugene, came home from school to find his poh father dead and a bankrupt—everything swept away. That was a hard homecoming, sub. Very sad case. I have often wondered what became of the boy, foh he had all his father's pride and refused to let me exert my privilege of an old neighbor and friend. That was twenty years ago, and since then I have heard in a roundabout way that he had become wild, drifted in with bad companions and taken to the river for a livelihood. In fact, became a common gambler. But of co'se I don't believe it, for no Kirby could ever do that, sub—fall so low. Yet the name is uncommon. Have you ever met this gentleman of whom you spoke?"

"Not socially, sub," replied the other dryly. "I calculate he is no relative of the folks you mentioned, foh his reputation, sub, is the worst on the river; known from New Orleans to St. Louis and back again. He and his side partner, sub—a dam carpetbagging Yankee by the name of Bunce—are the most reckless characters on the river. It is scum like them, sub, who give our fair Mississippi her evil name. Yoh speak of no man dealing off the bottom of the pack. Why, sub, I assure yoh on my honor they're so crooked they have to sleep in a roundhouse. I merely mentioned Kirby's name because of the fact that, man of the world as you are, sub, yoh would never pick him for a professional gambler. Never wore a diamond in his life. The cameo is his favorite stone, foh they say it once saved his worthless life, and from it he gets his name. But shall we continue the game? I am still five hundred yoh master, and we have foh hours to kill before we make yoh landing."

Randall accepted the cards with unsteady hands. "I assure you, sub, yoh are betting against a foregone conclusion," he said, "foh there is no stemming the turn in the tide. I'll bet you five hundred on this showdown, and then we'll pull stakes, sub, all square, foh further play would be sheer robbery. You can't beat the Randall luck when once it has turned."

"I never believed in luck," replied Moreau, "foh life has demonstrated to me that there is no such abstract. Foh instance, if a coin falls head ten times out of ten it is still an even bet foh heads or tails on the next toss. That is the law, sub, and all the superstition in the world cannot revoke or change it."

"My dear sub," replied the planter, waving an impatient hand, "that is all nonsense, for I hold that our entire existence is greatly controlled by luck and not law. I believe in a Supreme Being, sub, and I attend church regularly, but I do not believe, sub, that our poh mundane affairs are regulated by a celestial corporation, especially such affairs as card games. Yoh know yohself, colonel, that the best playing in the world can't stand against a run of blind luck, and as a man of the world I've seen moh fortunes lost on high hands—foh barnmaids topped by foh kings every trip—just because their holders hadn't sense enough to realize that the tide had set in against them. And I give yoh my word, sub," he finished, thumping the table, "that when I fill a foh card inside straight the Randall luck is sitting into the game right with me, and yoh simply can't win. Oh, yoh may get one or two little pots, but yoh'll finish dead broke. Call it what yoh like—luck or the shuffling of the devil."

"Now, sub, yoh're bucking right against my pet hobby," replied Moreau, leaning across the table and growing as earnest as his companion. "Of co'se I accept yoh word foh past experiences, but it is the old case of the coin. Though yoh may have turned heads a hundred times in succession, as I said, the chance of it being tails is still an even bet. Yoh may have changed, but I'm willing to lay ten thousand that I hold the best hands in two out of three. There's a sporting offer, sub, that will test yoh theory."

Randall blinked at his glass. Again he was momentarily sobered.

"No, sub," he said decidedly, plucking at his filled shirt. "There are aigh stakes, colonel, for, as wealth goes nowadays, I am not a very rich man, and I cannot afford to be

dize the welfare of my children for the sake of proving my point. Again, sub, I consider it would be taking an unfair advantage of yoh."

"Come. Yoh statements don't agree, Mr. Randall," laughed the other. "What do yoh jeopardize, sub, if yoh consider the advantage entirely with yohself? However," he finished, with some coldness, "this is but a game, sub, and I had no idea that yoh were at all imperiling yoh welfare."

"The Randalls, sub, never incur an obligation which they cannot meet," hotly interrupted the other, the drink showing in his eyes. "Yoh pardon, sub, if I have touched on personal matters. It is not my custom, I assure yoh, to do so with strangers."

"Now, now, Mr. Randall, sub," interrupted the other, putting the planter's arm. "Yoh pardon, sub, if I have offended. I am an old soldier," twirling his mustaches, "and perhaps own an exaggerated and touchy sense of honor. When yoh mentioned imperiling yoh welfare it seemed as if we were no longer indulging in a gentleman's game merely for the sake of passing the time. I have a very delicate sense of honor, sub, and perhaps I am too ready to back my opinions with sums which I consider mere trifles. I hope this difference of opinion will not impair our but newly formed friendship, Mr. Randall."

"I was too hasty, colonel," replied the other, "foh I reckon my pride is as touchy as yoh own. Come, fill up yoh glass, sub. Yoh're a good fellow, and I'm a good fellow. We're both good fellows, sub. A Randall never yet refused to back his opinion, and ten thousand is as much a playmate affair to me as to yoh. If yoh persist in going broke, I'll take yoh bet, sub. The best two out of three. My cards, I reckon. There's my money, sub." And he thumped a buckskin bag on the table.

"Covered, sub," replied Moreau, carelessly peeling off ten \$1,000 bills.

By now the unconcern which Mr. Randall displayed was entirely authentic, for his incessant attention to his glass had lent him a bibulous courage and defiance of the future, in which lurked no wholesome heaven of caution. Moreover, his pride had been delicately touched to the quick, and rather than appear a "piker" before this magnificent acquaintance he would readily have hazarded his entire estate. Pride of family was his fetish, and a Randall, he considered, was an Admirable Crichton, who could be beaten at nothing. All this was quite aside from his desire to uphold his self bestowed reputation of man of the world and the immutable conviction that his luck had turned. There was no doubt that if he had not sold his sugar crop for such an unexpectedly high figure he would not have embarked on his subsequent erratic career, nor, although of a jovial nature, so quickly formed a friendship with the magnificent and highly estimable Colonel Moreau, owner of the very delicate sense of honor. Although in that period, a decade or so before the war which severed the country, but to ultimately knit it the more firmly together, the punch bowl was an institution in every southern household, Mr. Randall was not what is termed a drinking man, and it was



"CAMEO KIRBY—THE WORST ONE ON THE RIVER."

solely on his yearly business trips to the Crescent City that he permitted himself any latitude in that direction. Meanwhile Mr. Randall had shuffled, dealt and lost the first showdown. The next, however, he won, only to lose the third and last.

(To be continued)

Notice to Pay Up.

To the Ladies and Gentlemen: I have purchased a business in Omaha and expect soon to move to that city to make my future home, and as there is considerable money outstanding on my books I would like to get all these matters straightened up before I go away. I shall leave about July 4, and at that time will place all my business in the hands of an attorney, who will take charge of the remaining stock here and also attend to my collections in this vicinity. If those who know they are indebted to me will kindly call and settle on or before that date it will be greatly appreciated. M. Fanger

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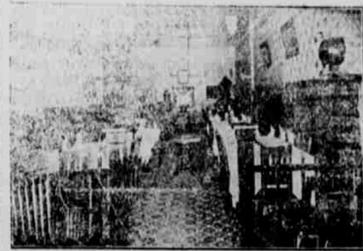
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