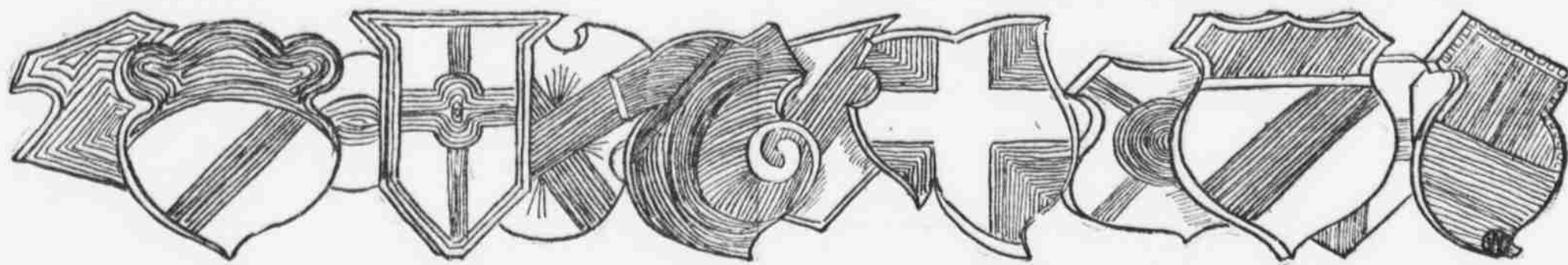


Romance: A Chronicle of the Adventures of John



Kemp in England and Jamaica----By Joseph Conrad

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PART FIRST.

The Quarry and the Beach.

CHAPTER I.

TO YESTERDAY and to today I say my polite "vaya usted con Dios." What are these days to me? But that far-off day of my romance, when from between the blue and white bales in Don Ramon's darkened storeroom, at Kingston, I saw the door open before the figure of an old man with a tired, long, white face, that day I am not likely to forget. I remember the chilly smell of the West Indian store, the suffel of damp gloom, of locos, of pimento, of olive oil, of new sugar, of new rum; the glassy double sheen of Ramon's great spectacles, the piercing eyes in the mahogany face, while the tap, tap, tap of a cane on the flags went on behind the inner door; the click of the latch; the stream of light.

The door, petulantly thrust inward, struck against some barrels. I remember the rattling of the bolts on that door, and the tall figure that appeared there, snuff-box in hand.

In that land of white clothes, that precise, ancient Castilian in black was something to remember. The black cane that had made the tap, tap, tap dangled by a silken cord from the hand whose delicate blue-veined, wrinkled wrist ran back into a foam of lawn ruffles. The other hand paused in the act of conveying a pinch of snuff to the nostrils of the hooked nose that had, on the skin stretched tight over the bridge, the polish of old ivory; the elbow pressing the black cocked hat against the side; the legs, one bent, the other bowing a little back--this was the attitude of Seraphina's father.

Having imperiously thrust the door of the inner room open, he remained immovable, with no intention of entering, and called in a harsh, aged voice: "Senor Ramon! Senor Ramon!" and then twice: "Seraphina--Seraphina!" turning his head back.

Then for the first time I saw Seraphina, looking over her father's shoulder. I remember her face of that day; her eyes were gray--the gray of black, not of blue. For a moment they looked me straight in the face, reflectively, unconcerned, and then traveled to the spectacles of old Ramon.

This glance--remember I was young on that day--had been enough to set me wondering what they were thinking of me; what they could have seen of me.

"But there he is--your Senor Ramon," she said to her father, as if she were chiding him for a petulance in calling; "your sight is not very good, my poor little father--there he is, your Ramon."

The warm reflection of the light behind her, gliding the curve of her face from ear to chin, lost itself in the shadows of black lace falling from dark hair that was not quite black. She spoke as if the words clung to her lips; as if she had to put them forth delicately for fear of damaging the frail things. She raised her long hand to a white flower that hung above her ear like the pen of a clerk, and disappeared. Ramon hurried with a stiffness of immense respect towards the ancient grandee. The door swung to.

I remained alone. The blue bales and the white, and the great red oil jars loomed in the dim light filtering through the jealousies out of the blinding sunlight of Jamaica. A moment after, the door opened once more and a young man came out to me; tall, slim, with very bright, very large black eyes aglow in an absolute pallor of face. That was Carlos Riego.

Well, that is my yesterday of romance, for the many things that have passed between those times and now have become dim or have gone out of my mind. And my day before yesterday was the day on which I, at 22, stood looking at myself in the tall glass, the day on which I left my home in Kent and went, as chance willed it, out to sea with Carlos Riego.

That day my cousin Rooksby had become engaged to my sister Veronica, and I had a fit of jealous misery. I was rawboned, with fair hair, I had a good skin, tanned by the weather, good teeth and brown eyes. I had not had a very happy life, and I had lived shut in on myself, thinking of the wide world beyond my reach, that seemed to hold infinite possibilities of romance, of adventure, of love, perhaps, and stores of gold. In the family my mother counted; my father did not.

She was the daughter of a Scottish earl who had ruined himself again and again. He had been an inventor, a projector, and my mother had been a poor beauty, brought up on the farm we still lived on--the last rag of land that had remained to her father. Then she had married a good man in his way; a good enough catch, moderately well off, very amiable, easily influenced, a dilettante and a bit of a dreamer, too. He had taken her into the swim of the regency, and his purse had not held out. So my mother, asserting herself, had insisted upon a return to our farm, which had been her dowry. The alternative would have been a shabby, ignominious life at Cadals in the shadow of Brummel and such.

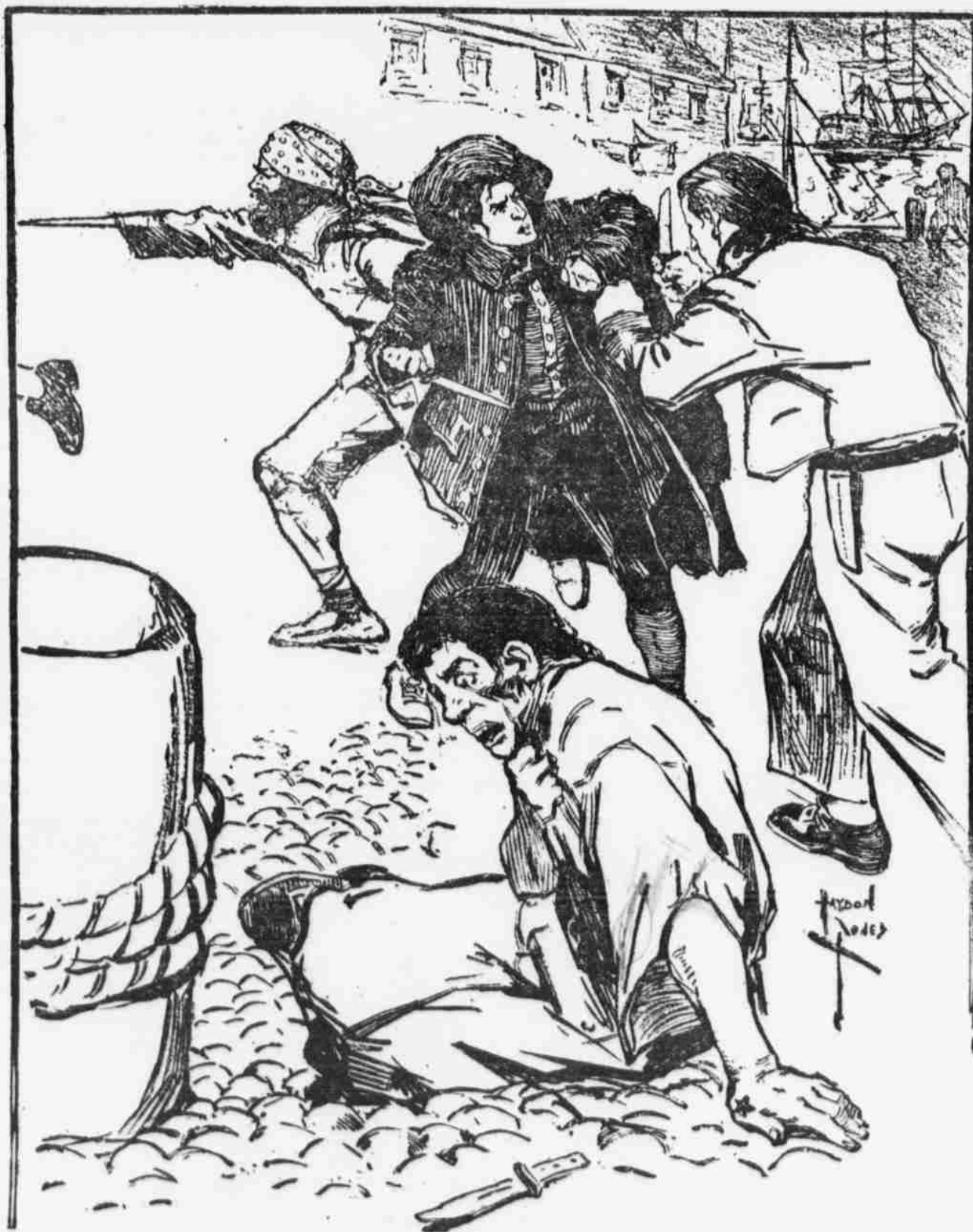
My father used to sit all day by the

pleasant, well-spoken, amiable young squire of the immediate neighborhood; young Sir Ralph, a man popular with all sorts, and in love with my sister Veronica from early days. Veronica was very beautiful, and gentle, and very kind; tall, slim, with sloping white shoulders and long white arms, hair the color of amber, and startled blue eyes--a good mate for Rooksby.

Rooksby had foreign relations. The uncle from whom he inherited the Priory had married a Riego, a Castilian during the peninsular war. He had died in Spain, I think. When Ralph made the grand tour he had made the acquaintance of his Spanish relations; he used to talk about them, the Riegos, and Veronica used to talk of what he said of them until they came to stand for romance to me. One day, a little

ness overcome, I adored Carlos, and Veronica liked him, and laughed at him, till one day he said goodby and rode off along the London road, followed by his Tomas Castro. I had an intense longing to go with him out into the great world that brooded all round our foothills.

Shortly after Carlos went, Rooksby proposed for the hand of Veronica and was accepted by my mother. Veronica went about looking happy. That upset me, too. It seemed unjust that she would go out into the great world--to Bath, to Brighton, should see the prince regent and the great fights on Hounslow heath--whilst I was to remain forever a farmer's boy. That afternoon I was upstairs, looking at the reflection of myself in the tall glass, wondering miserably why I seemed to be such an



THERE HAD EVIDENTLY BEEN SOME PLAY WITH KNIVES.

fire, inscribing "ideas" every now and then in a pocketbook. I think he was writing an epic poem, and I think he was happy in an ineffectual way. He had thin red hair, untidy for want of a valet, a shining, delicate hooked nose, narrow-lidded blue eyes, and a face with the color and texture of a white-heart cherry. He used to spend his days in a hooded chair. My mother managed everything, leading an out-of-door life which gave her face the color of a wrinkled pippin. It was the face of a Roman mother, tight-lipped, brown-eyed and fierce.

As for me, I was under her, and, since I had my aspirations, I had a rather bitter childhood. And I had others to contrast myself with. First there was Rooksby, a

before Ralph and Veronica became engaged, these Spaniards descended out of the blue. It was romance suddenly dangled right before my eyes. It was romance; you have no idea what it meant to me to talk to Carlos Riego.

Carlos was dark, and of a grace to set Ralph as much in the shade as Ralph himself set me; and Carlos had seen a deal more of the world than Ralph. He brought with him a short, puffy, bearded companion, half friend, half servant, who said he had served in Napoleon's Spanish contingent, and had a way of striking his breast with a wooden hand (his arm had suffered in a cavalry charge), and exclaiming: "I, Tomas Castro!" He was an Andalusian.

For myself, the first shock of his strange-

oaf. The voice of Rooksby hailed me suddenly downstairs. "Hey, John--John Kemp; come down, I say!"

He wanted to talk to me, he said, and I followed him out to the soft road that climbs the hills to the westward. The evening was falling slowly and mournfully; it was dark already in the folds of the amber downs.

"I know what you've got to tell me," I said. "You're going to marry Veronica. Well, you've no need of my blessing. Some people have all the luck."

"Confound it," I continued, "I shall run away to sea! I say, Ralph, give me Carlos' direction. I'll go after him. Carlos is the only soul I know outside five miles from here. He's friends in the Indies. That's