



The POOL of FLAME

by LOUIS JOSEPH VANCE

ILLUSTRATIONS BY ELLSWORTH YOUNG

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RESINOL

Legs raw with itching, burning eczema

PITTSBURG, PA., May 23, 1912.—"A friend of mine had big red blotches form all over his legs, body and arms. It was pronounced a very bad case of eczema. After two months' treatment he was suffering untold tortures, and would awake at night and find himself scratching, with hands all over blood. His legs were like a piece of raw meat, itching and burning. For two months he slept scarcely any, but would get up and walk the floor. He says he simply felt as if he were burning up. After the case had lasted six months he began the use of Resinol Soap and Ointment. He was cured, and his skin was as clear as crystal."

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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 foot 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 \$500 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 swears the Rangoon firm 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 is a sign of a signal ring given the colonel will deliver over the jewel. Arriving at Algiers the Irishman finds the governor-general's 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 is 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. O'Rourke comes upon a lascar about to attack the lady, who is a Mrs. Prynne, and kicks the man into the hold.

CHAPTER XX.—(Continued.)

Her spirit, through her eyes, answered his in a flash. Then cooling, she looked him over from crown to toe, weighing him deliberately in the balance of her knowledge of men. He bore the inspection with equanimity, quite sure of himself, as was natural in the O'Rourke. Provoked, put on his mettle, he felt himself invincible, and showed it in every line of his pose. She could not have wavered long; indeed, her decision was quite manifest. Impulsively she caught his two hands in her own.

"Yes," she cried, "I do believe you! I take you at your word—your generous word, Colonel O'Rourke! I will trust implicitly in you. You shall get me to Bombay by the fifteenth."

"The fifteenth?" he echoed thoughtfully. "This is the tenth."

"The Panjab is scheduled to arrive on the fifteenth. All my plans depend upon there being no delays."

"Five days! . . . It shall be managed, Mrs. Prynne. Bombay by the fifteenth it shall be, or the O'Rourke will have broken his heart!"

She grew thoughtful. "You are very good—I've told you that. I believe that you will accomplish what you promise. Yet it seems hardly fair to saddle you with my cares, my perils, without informing you of their nature—"

"Madam, 'tis not the O'Rourke who would ever be prying into your secrets. Let's not complicate a simple situation with explanations."

"But, colonel, there is one thing more." He paused. "It is a question," she continued, "of chartering a ship at Aden. Is it not?"

"I see no other way."

"Then—spare no expense, Colonel O'Rourke. Remember that I foot the bill."

"But—er—"

"Or, if you insist, sir, I pay nothing: Great Britain pays for both of us."

"Eh? Yes?" he stammered.

"But see, colonel."

He had before then noted indifferently that she wore a chain of thin, fine gold about her neck, its termination—presumably a locket of some sort—hidden in the folds of her corsage. Now she quietly pulled this forth, and displayed her pendant, a little trinket of gold, a running greyhound exquisitely modeled.

Stunned, he stared first at the top, then at the woman. "Ye mean to say—" he whispered, doubting.

"On the King's service, Colonel O'Rourke!"

"A King's courier, madam? You—a woman!"

"And why not?" she demanded proudly. "The King's messengers dare many dangers, it's true. But in some of them might not a woman serve better than a man?"

"True enough. Yet 'tis unprecedented—at least, ye'll admit, most unusual. I begin to understand. That lascar, for instance—"

"Believe me, Colonel O'Rourke, I'm at liberty to tell you nothing."

"Tell me this, at least: would ye know him if ye saw him again?"

"Truthfully," she said, looking him in the eye, "I would not. I will say one other word: I had anticipated his attack, although I had never seen him before."

CHAPTER XXI.

Lurching drunkenly into the harbor known locally as Aden Back Bay, the Panjab came to anchor.

O'Rourke, from the lower grating of the steamship's accommodation ladder, signaled to one of the swarm of hovering dinghys, and waiting for it to come in, reviewed the anchored shipping, gathered transiently together in that spot from the four corners of the earth, and shook his head despondingly.

A yellow-haired Somali boatman shot his little craft in to the grating. O'Rourke dropped upon the stern-seat and took the tiller. "Post Office pier," he said curtly. The dinghy shot away with dipping, dripping oars, while the Irishman continued to search among the vessels for anything that seemed to promise the speed necessary for his purpose, and failed to discover one.

"'Tis hopeless," he conceded bitterly as the boat wove a serpentine wake in and out among the heaving bulks. "And, I'm thinking, 'tis the O'Rourke who will presently be slinking back to confess he bragged beyond his powers. The fool that ye are, Terence, with your big words and your fine promises, all empty as your purse! 'Tis out of patience I am with ye entirely!"

Doubtless he made the very picture of unhappiness.

So, at least, seemed to think a man lounging in a dilapidated canvas deck-chair beneath a dirty awning in the stern of a distant tramp steamer; who, raking the shoreward-bound with a pair of rusty binoculars, had chanced to focus upon O'Rourke.

"Looks as if he hadn't a friend in the world," said the man audibly.

"Looks as if a letter from home with cash draft 'ud about fill his little bill."

He grunted in pleased appreciation of his own subtle wit. A short man he was, stout, very much at home in grimy pajamas and nothing else, with eyes small, blue, informed with twinkling humor and set in a florid countenance bristling with a three days' growth of grayish beard.

He swung the glasses again upon O'Rourke, and, "Hell!" he exclaimed, sitting up with stimulated interest. "Well, by jinks!" said the stout man. "Who'd a-thunk it?"

He got up with evident haste and waddled forward to the bridge, where he came upon what he evidently needed in his business: a huge and battered megaphone. Applying this to his lips and filling his lungs he bel-

CHAPTER XXII.

lowed with a right good will, and his hall, not unlike the roaring of an amiable bull, awoke Aden's echoes: "O-o-Rourke!"

"Good morning," murmured the Irishman, lifting his head to stare about him with incredulous curiosity. "Who's that barking at me?"

The pajama'd person continuing to shout at the top of his voice, by dint of earnest staring the Irishman eventually located the source of the uproar. "Now who the divil might ye be?" he wondered. "Ananias, me friend—to the boatman—'row to the steamer yonder where the noise comes from."

Whereupon the stout man, seeing the boat alter its course, put aside the megaphone. And again peace brooded over Aden.

On nearer approach to the tramp, O'Rourke's smile broadened to a pleased grin, and airily he waved a hand to the man with the voice.

"Jimmy Quick!" he observed with unfeigned delight. "Faith, I begin to believe that me luck holds, after all!"

From the bottom step of the tramp's ladder he tossed a coin to the boatman, then mounted to the deck. Incontinently the stout man fell heavily upon his neck with symptoms of extreme joy. A lull succeeding his first transports, he wiped his eyes, beamed upon his guest and suggested insinuatingly: "Drink?"

"Brevity's ever the soul of your wit, captain," said O'Rourke. "I will. And he meekly followed Quick's bare heels forward to the officer's quarters beneath the bridge.

Having set him in a chair, Quick, still a-gurgle, wandered off, unearthed a bottle, beamed upon his visitor, asked a dozen questions in as many breaths and, without waiting for an answer, waddled off again to return with a brace of dripping soda-water bottles. "Schweppes," he said, patting their rotund forms tenderly; "and the last in our lockers—all in your honor, colonel."

"So?" commented O'Rourke. "Hard up, is it? 'Tis not the O'Rourke who

CHAPTER XXIII.

head, relieved by ragged patches of gray hair about the temples, apologetically into the cabin door.

"The top of the day to ye, Dravos!" said O'Rourke loudly, for little Dravos was partially deaf. "And how are the engines?"

The engineer carefully hitched up his trousers and regarded the wanderer with temperate gentility.

"Good afternoon, Colonel O'Rourke," he replied, clipping his words mincingly. "Very nicely, I thank you." He shook hands, sat down on the edge of a berth with the manner of one who fears he intrudes, and glanced searchingly at Quick. "If you're going to serve the drinks, cap'n," he snapped acidly, "hump yourself!"

He accepted his glass with a dispassionate air and drank hastily after a short nod to the guest, as one who sacrifices his personal inclinations to the laws of hospitality. But from his after-glow of benevolence, O'Rourke concluded that the drink had not been unwelcome.

"What brings you here?" demanded Quick in a subdued roar.

"I've a job for ye, if so be it ye're not otherwise engaged—and if ye can do it."

Quick slapped a huge thigh delightedly. "I knew it—could have sworn to it!"

"Can do anything," asserted Dravos with asperity.

"'Tis merely a question of speed," explained the Irishman. "Can ye make Bombay in four days—be the fifteenth?"

"Dravos," roared Quick, "how much speed can you get out of those damned engines?"

"Twenty knots," snapped Dravos.

"When can you sail?"

"To-night," said Dravos.

"If," stipulated Quick, "I can pick up a crew in Aden."

"'Tis settled then."

"We'll need a bit of money in advance."

"Ye shall have it, within reason."

Dravos rose and stidded towards the door, a faraway look in his pale eyes.

CHAPTER XXIV.

Mahone, to Danny's intense dismay.

O'Rourke took upon himself the duties of first officer under Captain Quick. The Irishman cared little for the sea, knew less of a first officer's duties; but it was patent that Quick could not stand every watch, and O'Rourke was not to be daunted by any such slight matter as nautical inexperience.

In the knowledge that they were safely off at last there was poignant relief to the wanderer, as he stood by Quick's side, on the bridge, with mid-night imminent and the ship still and peaceful. "I'll stand the night watches," the captain announced. "By morning we'll be far enough out for you to take hold without spraining the art of seamanship. O'night."

"Thank ye," said O'Rourke. In fact, he had long been sensible that he was very drowsy; the night wind in his face had something to do with that.

"Good night," he returned, and went down the ladder to the deck.

At its foot he paused, turning curiously; it seemed that surely there must be some serious trouble afoot in the crew. The Irishman could see in the glimmer of the forecast lantern a confused blur of naked, shining, brown bodies and limbs, apparently inextricably locked. A scream rang shrill and there followed the sound of a heavy fall.

Overhead, on the bridge, Quick was roaring himself hoarse, without effect. The sounds of shuffling, of blows, harsh breathing, stifled cries, continued. A knot of the contestants swept, whirling, aft, toward the superstructure. Something shot singing through the air; the wind of it fanned O'Rourke's cheek.

With an unconscious, surprised oath, O'Rourke stepped aside, his hand going toward his revolver. The missile struck a stanchion, glanced and fell clattering into the scuppers. Revolver in hand, he went forward to the rail overlooking the struggling rabble on the deck below. But they seemed intent only on their private differences, and Quick's roars were bringing them to their senses. Gradually the tumult subsided, the contestants separating and slinking forward to their quarters.

"It may have been chance," O'Rourke conceded a bit doubtfully. He swung about and moved aft slowly, examining the deck intently. In a moment or two he stopped and picked up a long, thin-bladed knife, double-edged and keen as a razor. The point was broken, having doubtless been snapped off at the moment of contact with the deck-house. O'Rourke turned it over soberly.

"Faith, I don't like to think it was intentional—but me head would have been split had it come two inches to the left."

He returned to the bridge, calling Quick aside. "You're armed?"

"Certainly—always armed when I'm dealing with these devils. Why?"

O'Rourke showed him the knife. Quick laughed at his theory. "Nothing in it," he was pleased to believe.

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Jack—Do you believe there's ml robes in kisses?

Gwen—You can search me.

His Reason.

He—Dearest—During the first dance I have with you be sure and say something to me.

She—Why?

He—Because you're so light, if you don't speak I will not know I have you in my arms.—Princeton Tiger.

BUT HE WAS WRONG.

"Did you fool anybody?"

"Yep. I fooled myself into thinkin' I could fool pa!"

"That's Good"

Is often said of

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With an Unconscious, Surprised Oath, O'Rourke Stepped Aside.

would be wishing ye ill, captain, dear, but, faith, meself's not sorry to hear that word this day. I'm thinking me luck is sound, after all."

Quick had again vanished. Presently O'Rourke heard his mighty voice booming down an engine-room ventilator. "Dravos! Dravos, you loafer! Come up and see a strange sight!"

He came back, still vibrant with an elephantine sort of joy. "O'Rourke," he panted, mopping a damp brow with the sleeve of his jacket, "you're a good sight for sore eyes. Never did we meet up with you yet but there came a run of luck."

"'Tis good hearing," said O'Rourke, smiling.

A slight little man slipped a bald

"You strike the bargain, Quick," he said; "I'll have a look around the engine-room."

"Right-O, Bobby. . . . Yourself alone, I s'pose, O'Rourke?"

"And three others. Danny—"

"Yes, yes."

"And two ladies; an Englishwoman and her maid."

CHAPTER XXV.

By nine o'clock the Ranees lay with steam up, ready to weigh anchor. It is no praise to Dravos to state that his engines were in admirable condition. Such was their invariable state. For an assistant he impressed into service none other than Danny

CHAPTER XXVI.

The day came out of the East with a windy swagger; 's Quick had foretold, a series of thunderstorms swept the sea before dawn, so that it, like the sky, seemed newly washed, clean and brilliant.

O'Rourke relieved Quick at four bells of the morning watch and kept the deck for the remainder of the day, his meals being brought to him on the bridge. His duties were simple enough, requiring little more than a display of the habit of authority which sat so well on his broad shoulders. It was no great trick to keep the crew in order: they went about their work peaceably enough and showed no signs of desiring to renew their disputations. Otherwise he had to keep an eye upon the helmsman and see that he held the Ranees to the course prescribed by Quick; and that was nothing difficult to a man of average intelligence. Naught but deep water lay between them and Bombay so long as a direct course was shaped and maintained.

As the sunlit watches wore out and nothing untoward took place O'Rourke's grim apprehensions dissipated into shadows. He began to believe with Quick that the affair of the winged knife was merely a haphazard accident, quite unpremeditated.

Below decks, Dravos and Danny were standing watch-and-watch, with clockwork regularity, where the former's beloved engines were justifying his confidence and pride in them and clicking off their twenty knots with out a hitch.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Wisdom.

Always think twice before you speak once and then be sure that you talk to yourself.—Puck.