



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. Berthe 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, Beatrice, from whom he had 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 friend, but now in the keeping of one named Chambret in Algeria. O'Rourke wrests the nobleman in a duel. The wife bids O'Rourke farewell and he promises to soon return with the jewel. 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. O'Rourke finds 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 Rangoon, he 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 Harry and his sweetheart, O'Rourke recovers the Pool of Flame. On board ship once more, O'Rourke comes upon a lady about to attack the man who is Mrs. Pryne, and kills the man into the hold. Mrs. Pryne claims she is en route for Indiana on a matter of the king. O'Rourke is attacked by the lasciar, who secures the Pool of Flame, the captain is shot and the lasciar jumps into the sea. The ship arrives in port. Danny hands O'Rourke the Pool of Flame which he has stolen from Mrs. Pryne. It is the real jewel, the one lost at sea being a counterfeit. O'Rourke goes to Calcutta and discovers Des Trebes disguised. He now knows that Mrs. Pryne was an accomplice. Finally he gets to the lawyer who has offered the reward, delivers the jewel and gets the money.

CHAPTER XXX.—(Continued.)

Sypher had very explicitly named his dinner hour, after the formal English fashion, nowhere and by nobody more rigidly observed than by the Englishman in the Orient; "eight for eight-thirty," he had said. And as O'Rourke, a very dignified and imposing O'Rourke in his evening dress, waited for a sampan on the lower grating of the Poonah's passenger gangplank he had a round three-quarters for an hour for leeway—ample leisure for an interested inspection of that part of Rangoon lying between the floating jetty and Sypher's residence in a suburb near Dalhousie Park.

Danny remained aboard ship only temporarily, being instructed to follow with O'Rourke's belongings to suitable accommodations already engaged at a hotel on the Strand, overlooking the roadstead; from whose windows O'Rourke was promising himself the pleasure of watching the arrival of the steamship bearing his wife to his arms.

"Bless her dear face!" said he softly. "Tis meself will be desolated if she's not aboard that Messageries boat due tomorrow—now that I can go back to her, a man of property, no longer a pauper ne'er-do-well! Think of that, ye lucky dog!"

A sampan slid noiselessly in beside the grating. O'Rourke let himself cautiously into it and inconspicuously collapsed upon the rear seat as the boat slid away toward the shore lights, yielding to the vigorous sweeps of the single long oar wielded by the Burman in the bows.

Ashore, a tikkaharry caught him up and bore him down the silent road that winds between the Strand and the river's edge, then whipped into Mogul street, where the fluent tide of life ran broad and deep beneath a glare of light.

He stroked his chin, perplexed, wonder-

dering if by mischance the native driver had brought him to the wrong bungalow. But it was now too late to call him back and make sure. And this verandah, still and empty as it was, softly lighted by lanterns dependent from its roof, was to him a small oasis in a world of darkness. Without advice he was lost, could find his way no other where. He would have simply to wait until the householder came to life, or until by his own efforts he succeeded in quickening it.

He tried to do this latter to the best of his ability by tapping a summons on the door-lamb. Through the wire insect-screens a broad hallway and a staircase rising to the upper floor were visible. Limp, cool-looking rugs conceived in pleasing color-schemes protected the hardwood flooring. To the right a door stood ajar and permitted a broad shaft of light to escape from the room beyond. On the other hand a similar door, likewise open, showed a dimmer glow. Two other doors were closed; O'Rourke assumed that they led to the kitchen offices.

Having waited a few moments without event, the Irishman knocked a second time, and would have knocked a third when he thought better of it and glanced at his watch. It was only a matter of ten minutes after eight; strictly interpreting the intent of Sypher's invitation, he was a trifle early. Presumably the servants were all out of earshot, preoccupied with preparations for the meal; while Sypher and his niece were most probably still dressing.

With an impatient air O'Rourke turned back to the veranda. A hammock in one corner was swinging idly in the breeze. A number of wicker armchairs stood about, invitingly furnished with cushions. O'Rourke selected one and disposed himself to wait.

After five minutes he frowned thoughtfully and lit a cigarette. "Faith, 'tis a fine surprise he's given me," he said, irresolute. "But it can't be premeditated insult. Why should it be? And they can't all be out. 'Tis sorry I am I let that driver go; more than likely this will be the wrong house entirely. That must be the trouble. I'll just go, quietly fold up me tent and decamp before the inhabitants, if any there be, discover me and run me off the premises."

But at the head of the steps, with foot poised to descend, something restrained him; it would be difficult to say what, unless it were the unbroken, steadfast, uncanny quiet. "I'll have a look," he determined suddenly; "perhaps . . ."

He turned to the right and stopped before a long, open window, looking into what seemed to be a music room and library combined. Brilliantly illuminated by hanging lamps of unusual brilliancy, the interior was clearly revealed. And with an abrupt exclamation the adventurer entered, feeling for the revolver, to carry which had of late become habitual with him. The room was simply furnished, if tastefully. There was a grand piano near the veranda windows with a music rack and cabinet near by. Dispersed about the floor were a few comfortable chairs, a rug of rare Oriental texture, two consoles adorned with valuable porcelains. In the middle of the room stood a draped center-table littered with books and magazines; toward the back a long, flat-topped desk. And against the rear wall, ordinarily hidden by a folding screen of Japanese manufacture, now swept aside, was a small steel safe. Upon this O'Rourke's attention was centered. He remarked that it looked new and very strong; it was open, disclosing a variety of pigeonholes more or less occupied by docketed documents, and a smaller interior strong-box.

Between the desk and the safe a man lay prone and quite motionless. He was dressed for a ceremonious dinner, and apparently had been struck down in the act of stepping from his desk to the safe. For beyond all doubt, he had been murdered. The haft of a knife protruded from his back, buried to its hilt just beneath his left shoulder-blade.

O'Rourke moved over to the body and lifted it by the shoulders, turning the face to the light. Then, with a low oath, he dropped it.

A small sound, so slight as to be all but indistinguishable, penetrated O'Rourke's stupefaction. He stood erect, looking about, telling himself that the noise resembled as much as anything the hushed cry of a child sobbing in sleep, soft and infinitely pathetic. Unable to assign its source elsewhere, he attributed it to the stricken man at his feet; and in a desperate hope that the pulse of life might still linger in Sypher's body, he knelt, withdrew the knife, turned the corpse upon its back, and laid his ear

to its breast, above the heart. Beyond dispute, Sypher was dead. "Poor divvie!" muttered the Irishman. . . . "The Pool of Flame!"

CHAPTER XXXII.

For several minutes O'Rourke remained beside the body, making two notable discoveries. For he was quick to note the fact that one of the dead man's hands was tightly clenched, while the other lay half-open and limp. The former was closed upon a leather thong so stout as to resist any attempt to break it by main strength, so firmly held that the murderer had found it necessary to sever it with a knife. The knife itself was there, for proof of this; the sheen of light upon its mother-of-pearl handle caught the Irishman's eye.

Picking it up, he subjected it to a close examination that, however, gleaned no information. It was simply a small pocket penknife, little worn, with blades of German steel. It carried no identifying marks and told him but one thing—that the assassin had been a European; a native would never have bothered with so ineffectual a thing when a sturdy weapon, serviceable alike for offense and defense, would have served its purpose equally well.

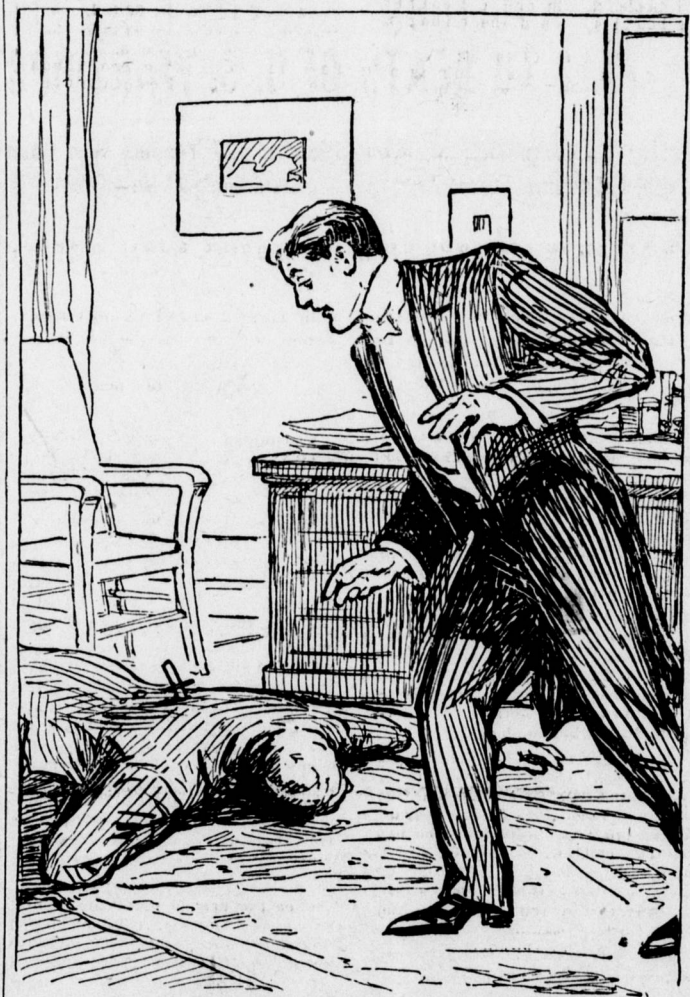
From this he turned to the dagger which he had taken from the body; a stiletto with a plain ebony handle, unmarked, unscratched, apparently fresh from the dealer's showcase. It meant nothing, save that it indicated

face. "And poor, poor young woman!" He was startled by the thought of her; for the first time it entered into his comprehension, until then bounded by the hard and fast fact of the murder. Now instantly his concern about the crime was resolved into solicitude for the girl. What could have happened to her? What had become of the servants, whose sudden desertion had left the house so sinisterly quiet?

Swept on by a fervor of anxiety on the girl's behalf, O'Rourke glanced quickly about the study to assure himself that he had overlooked nothing of importance, then passed out into the main hall or reception-room. Here the most searching inspection revealed nothing amiss. He moved on to the other room on the main floor and found himself in the dining-room; here again all was in perfect order.

The kitchen offices in the rear of the house next received his attention; he found them completely untenanted, having apparently been abandoned in desperate haste. Everything was in disorder; the meal he had been invited to partake of was cooking to clutters in pots and ovens; a heavy offense of burning food thickened the atmosphere. Half-stiffed, he left the place as quickly as possible, returned to the main hall and ascended to the upper story.

Here he found three bed-chambers and a bath. He first entered Sypher's, then the room evidently occupied by Miss Pynsent, finally what was unquestionably a guest-chamber, discovering nothing noteworthy until he reached the latter. And here he re-



Beyond All Doubt, He Had Been Murdered.

still more strongly that the murderer was most probably not a native. A Greek or an Italian, a Genoese sailor or a native of Southern France—say a seafaring man out of Marseilles—might have carried it.

"Oho!" said O'Rourke, speculative. "A Frenchman, mayhap!"

He got up, satisfied that he would learn nothing more by continuing his search of the solicitor's body. The mental link between the fact of the crime and its perpetrator was inevitable; O'Rourke believed implicitly that Sypher had been murdered by Des Trebes masquerading as "De Hyeres."

And he could have done himself an injury in the impotent fury aroused by realization that he had permitted himself to be so childishly hoodwinked, despite the suspicions he had entertained of the so-called "De Hyeres." He felt himself responsible, since he had neglected to warn Sypher. It had been on his tongue's tip that afternoon, when Sypher himself had divined the warning by his request that O'Rourke could more comfortably spin his yarn after they had dined.

"Poor divvie!" said the adventurer again. He stooped to spread his handkerchief over the staring, pitiful

face of a shock. Thrown carelessly across the foot of the bed was a woman's evening wrap, while on the bureau were gloves, long, white and fresh, but wrinkled from recent wear, and a silk veil. Plainly these were the property of the fourth guest, whose place had been set at the table below, but of whose identity he had not been apprised. Presumably, he reflected, she (whoever she was) had been intended as the fulfillment of Sypher's hinted surprise.

A guess formed vaguely in his brain, and suddenly curdled into a suspicion. He took the gloves in his hand, examining them for marks of identification, but found none. But in one corner of the veil he discovered an embroidered initial—the letter B.

"Beatrice?" he guessed huskily. "Is it possible? . . . He promised me a surprise. . . . 'Twould have been like her to plan it with him—and 'tis quite possible she reached Rangoon before I . . . My wife!"

He turned to the evening wrap, a fascinating contrivance of lace and satin unquestionably the last cry of the Parisian mode, such a wrap as his wife might well have worn. But beyond Paquin's label stitched inside

the dainty pocket it boasted no distinguishing mark.

He stumbled hurriedly from the room and down the stairs, returning to the study where Sypher's body lay; tortured by mounting fears, he stood and looked blankly about him, at a loss where next to turn, if almost preternaturally alive to every sound or sight that might afford him a clue. . . . He fought against a suspicion that crawled like a viper in his brain. Had he, after all, been deceived in Sypher's niece, Miss Pynsent? Had that innocent charm of hers been a thing assumed, a cloak for criminal duplicity? Had she in reality been Des Trebes' accomplice? Had those clear and limpid eyes of youth, all through that voyage been looking forward to such a scene, to such a tragic ending as this? Could she have afforded the Frenchman the aid he needed to consummate his chosen crime?

For he was now ready to believe Des Trebes the prime mover in this terrible affair; he no longer entertained a shred of doubt that his enemy had traveled with him from Calcutta under the disguise of "De Hyeres." And he believed the man had planned this thing far ahead; else would he have surely taken some overt step to prevent O'Rourke from delivering the ruby to Sypher. He divined acutely that, despairing of any further attempt to win the jewel from him, Des Trebes had turned his wits to the task of stealing it from Sypher; somebody naturally much less to be feared than the adventurer.

But on the other hand, if the girl had not been Des Trebes' assistant—what had become of her? And what of her guest—the lady one of whose initials was B?

It was not inconsistent with Des Trebes' whole-hearted villainy that he should employ a gang of thugs sufficiently large to overpower and make away with bodily and in a body Miss Pynsent, her guest and the servants. "Great God!" cried O'Rourke. "If it be in truth my wife—!"

Without preface a thin but imperative tintinnabulation broke upon the silence of the house of death. O'Rourke jumped as if shot. Somewhere in one of the other rooms a telephone bell was ringing. It ceased, leaving a strident stillness; but before he could move to find the instrument and answer the call, there rose a second time that moaning sob which first he had attributed to an impossible source, then, in the turmoil of his thoughts, had forgotten.

He waited, listening intently. The telephone called again and again subsided. Then a third time he heard the groan, more faint than before, but sufficiently loud to suggest its source. He moved warily toward the windows and out upon the veranda—hounded by the telephone. But that would have to wait; here was a more urgent matter to his hand. Between the long, insistent rings the moaning was again audible; and this time he located it accurately. It came from the lawn, near the edge of the veranda. He stepped off carefully, but almost stumbled over the body of a man who lay there, huddled and moaning.

"And another!" whispered the adventurer, awed. "Faith, this Pool of Flame . . .!"

He was at once completely horrified and utterly dumbfounded. Nothing he had come upon within the bungalow seemed to indicate that there had been anything in the nature of a struggle prior to the assassination of Sypher. He had up to this moment considered it nothing but a cold-blooded and cowardly murder; the man had apparently been struck down from behind in total ignorance of his danger. O'Rourke had deduced that Sypher had risen from the desk to put the jewel in his safe; and that while he was so engaged the assassin, till then skulking outside the long windows and waiting for a moment when his victim's back should be turned, had entered and struck. . . . But how could he reconcile that hypothesis with this man who lay weltering and at the point of death at the veranda edge?

Indeed, he could not do so. But this victim, at least, was not yet dead; if he had strength to moan, he might yet be revived, at least temporarily.

Without delay, then, the Irishman grasped the man beneath the armpits, and, lifting him bodily to the veranda, dragged him into the library. Not until he placed him in the middle of the floor, beneath the glare of the lamp-light, did O'Rourke have an opportunity to observe his features. But now as he dropped to his knees beside the body, his wondering cry testified to immediate recognition.

The latest name to be inscribed on the long and blood-stained death-roll of the Pool of Flame was that of Paul Maurice, Vicomte des Trebes; or, if there were life enough left in the man to enable him to insist upon his nom de guerre (the wanderer reflected grimly) Raoul de Hyeres.

"What next?" wondered O'Rourke. "What can the meaning of it all be now?"

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Masterpiece of Advertising. A physician of Montpellier, France, was in the habit of employing a very ingenious artifice. When he came to a town where he was not known, he pretended to have lost his dog, and ordered the public crier to offer, with beat of drum, a reward of 25 louis to whomsoever should bring it to him. The crier took care to mention all the titles and academic honors of the doctor, as well as his place of residence. He soon became the talk of the town. "Do you know," says one, "that a famous physician has come here, a very clever fellow? He must be very rich, for he offers 25 louis for finding his dog." The dog was not found, but patients were.

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Lawyer Probably Was Willing to Pay More Than \$10 Under the Circumstances.

A noted lawyer of Tennessee, who labored under the defects of having a high temper and of being deaf, walked into a court room presided over by a younger man, of whom the older practitioner had a small opinion.

Presently, in the hearing of a motion, there was a clash between the lawyer and the judge. The judge ordered the lawyer to sit down, and as the lawyer, being deaf, didn't hear him and went on talking, the judge fined him \$10 for contempt.

The lawyer leaned toward the clerk and cupped his hand behind his ear. "What did he say?" he inquired. "He fined you \$10," explained the clerk.

"For what?" "For contempt of this court," said the clerk.

The lawyer shot a poisonous look toward the bench and reached a hand into his pocket.

"I'll pay it," he said. "It's a just debt."—Saturday Evening Post.

PIMPLES IN BLOTCHES

316 57th St., Brooklyn, N. Y.—"About a year ago I noticed a pimple on the back of my hand. I picked it, and the next day my hand became full of pimples. They came in blotches, about a half dozen together. When they first appeared they were red and inflamed and itched very much. I scratched them so they bled and then they developed into sores. The disease spread to my other hand, and face. At one time my face got so full of pimples and they itched so much I was ashamed to go out on the street.

"When I bathed they became inflamed. I treated for them but instead of getting better I became worse, and by this time my disease became so bad that I could not sleep or eat. Finally when I began to despair of getting better a friend told me to try Cuticura Soap and Ointment. I sent for samples and used them. I took a hot bath, using Cuticura Soap, and then applied the Cuticura Ointment to the affected parts before going to bed. When I woke up the next morning the itching had stopped. Within three weeks I had no sign of a pimple. I was entirely cured." (Signed) E. Marks, Dec. 16, 1911.

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"I employed the best doctors and even went to the hospital for treatment and was told there was no help for me. But while taking Lydia E. Pinkham's Vegetable Compound I began to improve and I continued its use until I was made well."

—Mrs. HENRY LEISEBERG, 743 Adams St.

Kearneysville, W. Va.—"I feel it my duty to write and say that Lydia E. Pinkham's Vegetable Compound has done for me. I suffered from female weakness and at times felt so miserable I could hardly endure being on my feet. "After taking Lydia E. Pinkham's Vegetable Compound and following your special directions, my trouble is gone. Words fail to express my thankfulness. I recommend your medicine to all my friends."—Mrs. G. B. WHITTINGTON.

The above are only two of the thousands of grateful letters which are constantly being received by the Pinkham Medicine Company of Lynn, Mass., which show clearly what great things Lydia E. Pinkham's Vegetable Compound does for those who suffer from woman's ills.

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