

The POOL of FLAME

by LOUIS JOSEPH VANCE

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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, who is a 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. O'Rourke comes upon a lascar about to attack the lady, who is Mrs. Pryne, and kicks the man into the hold. Mrs. Pryne claims she is en route for Indiana on a mission for the king. O'Rourke is attacked by the lascar, who seizes the Pool of Flame, the captain is shot and the lascar jumps into the sea. The ship arrives at Rangoon for the king. 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. Going to the residence of the lawyer on invitation, O'Rourke finds him murdered and Des Trebes is found by him. An officer appears and O'Rourke assists him in unraveling the mystery. O'Rourke leaves with the reward.

CHAPTER XXXIV.—(Continued.)

"He confessed he was in the pay—like these chaps we're after now—of a highly respectable Chinese merchant and head of one of the tonges—one of the richest men in Rangoon, who, it seems, was also after that ruby. I can't imagine what he wanted of it, but that'll come out, probably; the man's rich enough to buy dozens of stones as fine. However . . . I gather he'd laid his plan far ahead. The coolies intimidated you'd been watched all the way from Bombay. At all events, the brutes were ready when you arrived; Sypher was a doomed man from the moment you handed over the Pool of Flame. They surrounded his house this night, coming up from the river, just as soon as it was dark enough to conceal their actions. Then they found a third element in the business—your friend Des Trebes, all unsuspecting of them, lurking on the veranda and watching Sypher through the window. So they waited to see what he was up to. And pretty soon they found out. Sypher came downstairs, went to the safe and opened it; I presume he had the stone in his hand, ready to put away. While he was standing there the Frenchman slipped up behind and stabbed him, annexing the stone and leaving the way he got in. The instant he stepped off the veranda the Chinese got him; but he managed to scream before they could silence him and drew the attention of the household, Miss Pynsent, your wife and the servants. So to cover things up they had to gather them all in. The servants were killed—there were three of them—and the women . . ."

Neither man spoke for a time. Then Couch resumed. "This coolie was an outsider—a servant of the merchant's—not one of the junk gang; so he stayed ashore, and thought it would be a fine young scheme to return and do a little looting on his own . . . I've telephoned the head office to arrest that cursed merchant and confiscate his house and goods and detain anybody they could catch connected with him. The net's well enough laid, and I think . . ."

The lights of the city became visible, strung along the right bank of the river as the launch rounded a bend. Couch swung the little boat out into midstream. "Half-speed, Wheeler," he said, adding to O'Rourke: "I've got to pick out that junk. I presume the right one will have all sail set and be moving downstream with the tide; it's just on the turn now and fortunately there's no wind worth mentioning. . . . I wish I could see something of the other launch." He peered anxiously into the obscur-

ity ahead. "If there were only starlight!" he complained bitterly. "Stand by, Wheeler, to stop the motor. We'll drop alongside with the current, as quietly as we can. Colonel O'Rourke, will you get forward and take the boathook and headwarp, please; I'm needed at the wheel and Wheeler at the engine until we make fast."

Cautiously the Irishman rose, took the boathook Couch offered him, and crept out upon the narrow triangle of deck at the bows. Crouching there, he found the headwarp and waited, tense with anxious expectancy, staring ahead in futile effort to penetrate the wide, shadowy reaches of the river. But the mystical distances confused and eluded him. The launch seemed to move, panting, in an abyss of night. She made little noise; a hiss of water beneath her stem; the steady humming of the motor, throttled down to half speed; the muffled gasping of the exhaust. And presently even these ceased at a word from Couch, and the launch moved only with the tide.

Abruptly a towering wall of opaque black rose out of the darkness to starboard. O'Rourke braced himself for the imminent instant of action, poised so lightly upon his toes and fingertips that a swell from a moving vessel would have thrown him off his balance, perhaps overboard. The launch closed swiftly and silently in upon the black wall; it towered over him like a cliff; far above he could see dim divisions between black and black that must be the rail. And he shook his head, dismayed; he could never scale that, he thought; not even the O'Rourke could accomplish a miracle. But in a breath it had faded back, and he realized that the towering poop of the junk had misled him. They were now alongside at the waist. He stood up and saw a low railing moving and caught it over the edge of the rail, drew the launch in, let go the boathook and, with the headwarp wrapped about his hand, jumped blindly.

Something dealt him a vicious, all but paralyzing, blow in the pit of the stomach; he doubled up, for a moment helpless, across the junk's rail, but retained sufficient presence of mind to hold on to the headwarp. Then, recovering a trifle, he squirmed over and fell sprawling upon the deck, his heels drumming an abrupt and violent alarm. From somewhere he heard a shrill jabbering arise, with an ensuing patter of bare feet. Swiftly he got upon his knees and drew in the headwarp, with his free hand searching along the rail for a cleat. Something thumped heavily on the deck beside him, and grunted; and something else followed with a second bump; and the launch swung outward and, caught by the current, jerked the headwarp from his grasp. "May the luck of the O'Rourke still hold!" he prayed fervently, getting upon his feet to realize that, with Couch and the man Wheeler, he was imprisoned aboard the junk, doomed there to . . .



The Boarding Party Stood at Bay, main whatever might befall, until the coming of the second launch . . . or perhaps for a longer time. As he rose some indistinct body ran into him and cannoned off with an uncouth yelp; with no time to draw his revolver, the adventurer struck out with a bare hand and had the satisfaction of finding a goal for his blow—of landing heavily on bare flesh and of hearing the dull sound of a fall upon the deck. Synchronously lights were flashing out for and aft. A revolver spat venomously beside him. Somewhere a man screamed and fell, whimpering horribly. The revolver exploded a second time. There were confused noises, as of a furious struggle, rough and tumble, and he suspected that one



The Woman Gapsed Faintly and Clung Tightly to Her Husband's Arm.

or another of his companions had been tackled bodily by one of the junk's crew. On his own part he caught a glimpse of a shadow moving ghostlike against one of the lights, and promptly exorcised it with a shot. By this time the vessel seemed to be caught in the grip of pandemonium; shouts and shots vied with screams, groans, confused padding footsteps, to make the moment one of a nightmare. The boarding party stood at bay, not daring to venture from the spot on which they had landed, firing steadily but with discretion.

Huddled together like children in fear of the powers of darkness, the three held their fire against the inevitable assault in force, handicapped fearfully by their absolute ignorance of the lay of the deck, of the number of their opponents, and of from which quarter they had to expect the attack. And the silence and the suspense wore upon their nerves until the final struggle came in the shape of a boom to save them from madness. And it came with a rush and a will, cyclonic, tremendous, overpowering. By sheer weight of human flesh the Europeans were plined against the rail, fighting at handgrips with a cruel and cunning foe far better prepared for such business than they. For at such close quarters pistols were practically worthless save as clubs, while knives could slip to slay through almost any interstice, however straitened. O'Rourke had no time to think of his companions. Stung to desperation by the silent, unrelenting fury of his assailants—twice he was conscious of the white-hot agony of a knife-thrust, one penetrating the flesh of his side and scraping his ribs, the other biting deep into his thigh—he fired until he had but one cartridge left in his revolver, and expended that blowing out the brains of an extraordinarily persistent coolie, then dropped the useless weapon and trusted to his naked strength.

It served him well for a little. One man, precipitated by the weight of those behind him into the adventurer's arms, he seized by the throat and throttled in a twinkling; then lifting him from the deck, he exerted his power to the utmost, and cast the body like a log into the midst of the melee. Thus clearing a little space, he found himself able to step aside and let another run past him into the bulwark; and seeing the sheen of a swordblade in the fellow's hand, before he could recover seized his wrist, twisted it savagely, and wrenched the weapon away.

The finale came a moment later, signaled by a blinding flash of light more bright than that of day, which fell athwart the deck and illuminated instantaneously every inch of the fighting ground. Fervently he blessed the near-by vessel that had turned its

searchlight on the junk. The scene it revealed beggared the experience of a man whose trade was fighting; it fell upon decks slippery with blood and littered with the bodies of dead and wounded; it silenced a confusion indescribable. Upon that insane turmoil the light fell with the effect of a thunderbolt from a clear sky. Screaming shrilly in their panic, the Chinese scattered and fell away, leaving O'Rourke beside Couch, Wheeler being down and buried beneath three Chinese corpses. And instantaneously something grated harshly against the starboard side of the junk, and a man, his figure stark black against the cold white glare, leaped upon the rail and tumbled inboard. Others to the number of a dozen followed him, swarming over the decks. Couch reeled towards them, babbling orders and instructions.

The second launch had arrived. Sick and faint, O'Rourke slouched back against the rail, watching with lack-luster eyes the end of the chapter. It was simple to the point of seeming farcical in comparison with that which preceded it. The dazed and now outnumbered Chinese offered no further resistance. Disarmed and put under guard, they disappeared from his consciousness, while he watched the men from the second launch, spurred by Couch, scatter in search of the abducted women.

Loss of blood was beginning to tell upon him; his strength seemed altogether gone; his wits buzzed in his head like a swarm of gnats. He grasped his support convulsively, beginning to appreciate how seriously he was hurt. He heard as from a great distance thin, faint cries of men shouting in triumph; saw Couch, a pygmy shape, holding in his arms a doll who wore the face of Miss Pynsent. Then of a sudden he was conscious of a woman hastening toward him, a fantastic and incongruous figure in a dinner-gown, her skirts trailing in the slime of the shambles, her arms out held to him; and knew her for his wife.

He essayed to speak, but could not. He felt her arms close about him. In the face of the searchlight's penetrating and undeviating glare, night closed down upon him.

CHAPTER XXXV.

In after days, when he was altogether well and whole, they journeyed forth, these two, the man and his wife, from Rangoon northward. The railway carried them some distance; later they struck off with their train into the primitive wilderness beyond the ultimate British outposts on the Chinwine, main tributary to the Irrawaddy.

The land was peaceful, hospitable, and very, very lovely in its wilderness. Their happiness was ecstas-

By day they rode through jungles, wood and rolling uplands, or less easily through the fastnesses of the hills, side by side, thought linked to thought, their hearts attuned. By night their camps were pitched in a new-found world of beauty, wonderful in its shadowy mystery.

It was so ordered that they came, toward sundown of a certain day, to the foot of a hill crowned with a great pagoda of many multiplied roofs fringed with a myriad silver bells that tinkled ceaselessly in the evening airs.

Here they dismounted and together made the ascent of an age-old wooden stairway, broad and easy, and thronged from the first rise to the last with weary pilgrims, beggars, lepers, laughing children, mendicant holy men. The sun was low upon the horizon when, having bribed their way along that gauntlet, O'Rourke and his bride (she could never be aught less to him) attained to the topmost platform and, having received permission, with meet show of reverence entered the temple.

It was very dark inside and for a time they moved blindly in and out; but at length they came to a massive doorway looking toward the West, and here they paused, hand in hand, looking up to the placid face of a huge Buddha, who squatting cross-legged upon a pedestal, looked through the incense-scented gloom ceaselessly forward to Nirvana.

The figure, carved originally from stone, had been so heavily plastered with gold-leaves by the devout, that now it had all the semblance of being gold to its core; and, lavishly decorated with necklaces and bracelets of rare jewels set in crushed gold, in the evening glow it shone like some great lamp of holiness. Only its face was in shadow.

Slowly the light struck higher beneath the eaves of the pagoda, and slowly it crept up and yet up, until its last blood-red shaft revealed the Buddha's forehead and what was set therein, a monstrous ruby.

The woman gasped faintly and clung tightly to her husband's arm. He held her close, watching the great stone flame and throb and pulse, like a pool of living flame swimming in darkness.

And then the light of the world went out.

Pensively in the dusk they descended the temple staircase. At the foot, before they remounted their horses, the woman came to the man and put her hands upon his shoulders.

"Terence," she said, "I think I am very weary. Take me home."

He gathered her into his arms. "I think," she said, "it frightened me—made me fearful of this country—the Pool of Flame, up there."

"You've seen the last of it," he said tenderly, "and so have I. 'Tis done with, like the days of me adventuring. I have no thought but you, dear heart. Let us go home."

THE END.

USE FOR OLD BLUEPRINTS

Bleached by a Simple Process, They Furnish Sketch Paper of a Fair Grade.

In the engineering department of every mine office, blueprints will accumulate until the quantity has reached amazing proportions. Some companies keep a record and file of all prints made and at periodical times destroy the old ones. In addition to this, says the Engineering and Mining Journal, at the time of printing, there is sure to be a certain waste due to poor exposures, blotchy paper, etc. A method for turning this waste into a useful article is presented by E. B. Birkenbend, in the American Machinist.

These old or useless prints may be bleached by immersing them in a soda bath containing four ounces of soda to one gallon of water. If it is desired to bleach only a portion of the print, this may be done by painting that part with this solution. By washing the prints in fresh water, after bleaching, any discoloration is prevented. The blank paper thus obtained furnishes a fair grade of sketch paper, and there are numerous other uses to which it could also be put.

Pure Food Law Labels Old.

Pure food law labels were in existence in 900 B. C., according to a discovery made by Prof. George A. Reisner, of Harvard. Inscriptions excavated in the ancient city of Samaria, in Palestine, are labels which were employed as seals on jars of wine and oil. They mention the years in which the wine was laid down in the cellar of the palace storehouse and they state the vineyard from which the wine came. These labels, about 75 in number, have been dug up on the ruins of the storehouse attached to the palace of King Ahab some 3,000 years ago and the names of the owners as given indicate that not only the king himself but other men stored their wines and oils there.

From the Ash Tray.

Even the ash of hubby's cigar can be utilized. In what way? Why, as a polisher for gold watches, bracelets and rings, jet alone chains and a multitude of other trinkets. This comes from a prominent jeweler, so it must be nearly correct. He even goes to the extent of carrying with him a small case in which he preserves all the ashes from the cigars which he smokes. He says that the grain is so fine that it leaves no mark that is discernible to the naked eye.

Didn't Get Across.

First Omaha Man (in surprise)—What! Back already? Why, I thought you were going to see Europe? Second Omaha Man (cheerfully)—So did I, but it seems that New York saw me first.—Puck.

TRAVEL IN THE EAST

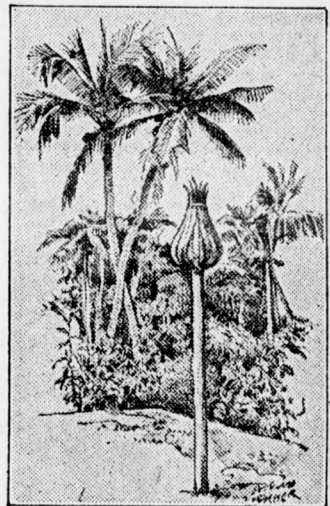
The "Gemming" Country of Famed Old Ceylon.

Native Superstitious in Evidence Everywhere—Three Small Votive Lamps Always Kept Burning by the Devout Natives.

Ceylon.—I wanted to see the "gemming" country, and journeyed by train to Avisawela, whence I drove by coach the twenty-six miles to Ratnapura; it was late in the afternoon when at last I reached Ratnapura resthouse, and Adam's Peak itself appeared over the jungle, glorious under warm, rosy cloudlets that seemed to be playing a game of "touch mountain" as they passed from one pinnacle to another. The rest house is pitched high up on the hillside, and in front of it the broad Kela Gange river gleamed that night under the stars, and the mysterious gloom of the forest brooded behind a curtain of winking fire-flies.

Less than half-way to the sea, up among the hills on the southern side of the river, an English syndicate is working a plumbago mine with first-class machinery and expert engineers. I stopped to visit this mine, and in its dark "levels," blasted out of the gneiss rock in the bowels of the earth, saw the plumbago being hacked out in lumps. Near the top of the shaft, in a small wooden box, three little votive lamps are always kept burning—one light for God, one for the company, and one for the miners.

During the second day of the river journey came the shooting of some rather gentle "rapids," where brown rocks thrust their noses out of the water and we rushed down splashing on a slide to lower level. At last, some



Cingalese Superstition: A "Luck-Pole" on the Site of a New House in Ceylon.

miles after we had passed the opening of the Kelani river canal, the long bridge of Kalaletura appeared at the river mouth with a line of fiery sunset sky behind it, and I saw again the railway, and that fringe of cocoanut palms against the sea which more than any other detail is typical of Ceylon.

COLUMBUS WAS A SPANIARD

Noted Cuban Scholar Asserts That He Has Documents to Prove This Claim.

New York.—Dr. Constantino de Hora y Pardo of Havana, a Cuban scholar of note and a Fellow of the Royal Spanish Geographical society, has undertaken to prove to the satisfaction of the American Geographical society and the Hispanic society of America that Christopher Columbus was a Spaniard and not an Italian. He maintains that Columbus was born at Pontevedra, Galicia, Spain, and not at Genoa, Italy.

Dr. Horta has gathered a mass of documents to prove his contention, and these are now in New York awaiting the consideration of the American Geographical society and the Hispanic society.

After these organizations have completed their examination, Dr. Horta proposes to publish the details of his research in a pamphlet which will be sent to governments, universities and civic authorities throughout Latin-America, that they may rejoice in the knowledge that Columbus was of their own blood.

Vanderbilt Helps Injured Man.

Newport, R. I.—Reginald Vanderbilt and Preston Gibson, the latter formerly of Chicago but now of Washington, rescued David C. Cruikshank, who had been run down by an automobile driven by Augustus Jay. The injured man, whose skull was fractured, had been riding on the tail seat of a motorcycle when run into by the automobile and hurled to the curb. Vanderbilt and Gibson, passing in their machine, lifted Cruikshank into the car and carried him to Newport hospital, where he was said to be in a serious condition owing to his age of seventy years.

Innocent, 23 Years in Cell.

Huntington, Ind.—Mrs. John Epps, who served 23 years in the Indiana woman's prison for the murder of her husband, and who was paroled six years ago, has been vindicated, it was learned, by the deathbed confession of Henry Epps, a brother. Epps, before dying, said that he poisoned his brother.