The COAST DYESTHER E LUCIA CHAMBERIAIN ILLUSTRATIONS by M. G. Kettner COPYRIGHT 1908 by BOBBS - MERRILL CO.

SYNOPSIS.

At a private view of the Chatworth personal estate, to be sold at auction, the Chatworth ring, known as the Crew Idol, mysteriously disappears. Harry Cressy, who was present, describes the ring to his fiance, Flora Gibey, and her chaperon, Mrs. Clara Britton, as being like a heathen god, with a beautiful sapphire set in the head. Flora meets Mr. Kerr, an Englishman, at the club. In discussing the disappearance of the ring, the exploits of an English thief, Farrell Wand, are recalled. Flora has a fancy that Harry and Kerr know something about the mystery. Kerr tells Flora that he has met Harry somewhere, but cannot place him. \$20.00 reward is offered for the return of the ring. Harry admits to Flora that he dislikes Kerr. Harry takes Flora to a Chinese goldsmith's to buy an engagement ring. An exquisite supphire set in a hoop of brass, is selected. Harry argos her not to wear it until it is reset. The possession of the ring seems to cast a spell over Flora. She becomes uneasy and apprehensive. Flora meets Kerr at a box parry. She is startled by the effect on him when he gets a glimpse of the sapphire. The possibility that the stone is part of the Crew Idol causes Flora much anxiety. Unseen, Flora discovers Clara ransacking her dressing room. Flora refuses to give or self the stone to Kerr, and suspects him of being the thief. Flora's interest in Kerr increases. She decides to return the ring to Harry, but he tells her to keep it for a day or two. Elia Buller tells Flora father, Judge Buller.

CHAPTER XIV .- (Continued.)

"Well, I'll let you know if it makes any difference," said Ella hopefully.

Flora knew that nothing either of them could say would make any difference to Clara, or turn her from the thing she was pursuing; but by speaking she might at least find out if Judge Buller himself were really her object.

The bells and whistles of one o'clock were making clangor as she ran up the steps of her house again. In the hall Shima presented her with a card. She looked at it with a quickening pulse. "Is he waiting?"

'No, madam. Mr. Kerr has gone. He waited half an hour,'

Down went her spirits again. Yet surely after their last interview she ought not to be eager, to meet him "In the morning," she thought, "and waited half an hour. How he must have wanted to see me!" She didn't know whether she liked that or "When did he come?"

"At 11 o'clock." At this she was frightened; he had missed Harry by less than half an

hour. "He waited all that time alone?"

"No. Mr. Cressy came." Flora felt a cold thrill in her nerves, Then Harry had come back! What had he come for?

"He also would wait," the Japanese explained.

Flora gasped. "They waited to-

gether! The Japanese shook his head, "They

went away together.'

She didn't believe her cars. "Mr. Kerr went away with Mr. Cressy?"

The Japanese seemed to revolve the problem of mastery. "No, Mr. Cressy accompanied Mr. Kerr." He had made a delicate oriental distinction. It put ative attacking, always attacking carried him off. What had he done, and how had he managed, when Harry must have had such pressing reasons for wanting to stay? Ah she knew only too well Kerr's exquisite knowledge of managing; but why must to be managed? Had he no idea where Harry stood in this affair? In pity's name, didn't he know that Harry had seen him before-had seen him under circumstances of which Harry wouldn't talk?

CHAPTER XV.

A Lady in Distress.

She had returned, ready for pitched battle with Clara, and on the threshold back if he was not there to receive there had met her the very turn in them. Then-the business of waitthe affair that she had dreaded all ing in the large house full of echoes along-the setting of Kerr and Harry and the round ghostly globes of elecupon each other.

These were two whom she had kent whom she was pledged, with whom in her windows and doors, she had supposed herself in love, and the man for whom she was flying in out, and shook the window-casings. the face of all her traditions. She She cowered over the library fire, had not scrutinized the reason of her listening. The leaping flames set her extraordinary behavior; not since shadow dancing like a goblin. A bell that dreadful day when the vanishing rang, and the shadow and the flame mystery had taken positive form in gave a higher leap as if in welcome of felt about Kerr. She had only acted, library door. In the glooms and lights cause upon herself and made it her should arrive at once. She stepped own, as if that was her natural right. back and stood waiting with a quicker She could hardly believe that it was she who had let herself go to this ex-ters upon his tray. She had a mo-tent. All her life she had been do-ment's anxiety lest both her notes had cile to public opinion. bowing to conventions, respectful of those legal and moral rules laid down by some rigid the responsibility had scended upon her, she found that these things had in no way persuaded she might send over for some girl and

Then this was herself, a creature odulations her decade set upon This was that self which she

real than flesh and blood, and Kerr

Then what was Harry? The bland implacable pronouncement of Shima had summoned him up to stand beside Kerr more clearly than her own eyes could have shown him

Kerr, with his brilliant initiative. might carry him off, but Kerr was still the quarry. For had not Harry, from the very beginning, known May I see you, anywhere, at any time, something about him? Hadn't he at to-night? ROBERT KERR. from the very beginning, known first denied having seen him before, and then admitted it? Hadn't he dropped hints and innuendoes without ever an explanation? She remembered the singular fact of the embassy ball, twice mentioned, each time with that singular name of Farrell Wand. And to know-if that was what Harry knew-that a man of such fame was in a community where a ring of such fame had disappeared-what further proof was wanted?

Then why didn't Harry speak? And what was going on on his side of the affair? Harry's side would have been her side a few days before. Now, unaccountably, it was not. Nor was Kerr's side hers either. She was standing between the two-standing hesitating between her love of one and her loyalty to the other and what he represented. The power might be hers to tip the scales Harry held, either to Kerr's undoing, or to his protection. At least she thought she might protect him, if she could discover Harry's secret. Her special, authorized relation to him-her right to see him often, question him freely -even cajole-should make that easy. But she shrank from what seemed like betrayal, even though she did not be tray him to Kerr by name.

Then, on the other hand, she doubt ed how much she could do with Harrv. She wasn't sure how far she was prepared to try him after that scene of theirs. She had no desire to pique him further by seeing too much of Kerr. On her own account she wanted for the present to avoid Kerr. He roused a feeling in her that she feared-a feeling intoxicating to the senses, dazzling to the mind, unknit ting to the will. How could she tell if they were left alone, that she might not take the jewel from her neck, at his request, and hand it to him-and damn them both? If only she could escape seeing him altogether until she could find out what Harry was doing and what she must do!

Meanwhile, there was her promise to Ella. She recalled it with difficulty. It seemed a vague thing in the light of her latest discovery, though she could never meet Clara in disagreement without a qualm. But she made the plange that evening, before Clara left for the Bullers', while she was at her dressing-table in the halfdisarray which brings out all the softness and the disarming physical charm of women. From her low chair Fiora spoke laughingly of Ella's perturbation. Clara paused, with the powder puff in her hand, while she listened to Flora's explanation of how Ella feared that some one might, aft- her the lie. by the hand of her own er all these years, be going to marry the whole thing before her in a mo. Judge Buller. Who this might be she Shima delivered the missive as if it ment. Harry had been the resistant, did not even hint at. She left it ever which Clara met it, the amusement, hanging breathless over the baluster. when he should have been hiding, had | the surprise, and the shortest possible little laugh, were guarantee that Clara had seen it all. She had filled out Flora's sketch to the full outline, and pronounced it, as Flora had, an absurdity. But though Clara had laughed, she had gone away with her he make such a reckless exposure of delicate brows a little drawn together, himself? Did he suppose Harry was as if she'd really found more than a laugh, something worth considering, in Ella's state of mind.

She heard the wheels of Clara's departing conveyance. Now was her chance for an interview with Harry. She spent 20 minutes putting together three sentences that would not arouse his suspicions. She made two copies, and sent them by separate messengers, one to his rooms, one to the club, with orders they be brought tric lights, with that thing around her neck for which-did they but apart even in her mind-the man to know of it-half the town would break

The wind traveled the streets withhim had she dared to think how she what had arrived. She went to the acted; only asked herself what to do outside Shima was standing, and two next, and never why; only taken his messengers. It was odd that both pulse. Shima entered with two letbeen brought back to her, but no-the envelope which lay on top showed it open Harry's writing. She tore material spirit lurking in mankind, hastily. Harry wrote that he would But now when the moment had come, be delighted, and might he bring a friend with him; a bully fellow whom he wanted her to meet? He added they could have a jolly little party.

Flora looked at this communication too much concerned with the primal blankly. Was Harry, who had always harmonies of life to be impressed by jumped at the chance of a tete-a-tete, the modulations her decade set upon dodging her? In her astonishment she let the other envelope fall. She

had obscurely cherished as no more stooped, and then for a moment rereal than a fairy; but at Kerr's accla- mained thus, bent above it. The mation it had proclaimed itself more superscription was not hers. The note was not addressed to Harry, but to himself the most real thing in all her her, and in a handwriting she had never seen before!

Again the peal of the electric bell. Shima appeared with a third envelope. This time it was her own note returned to her. With the feeling she was bewitched she took up the mysterious letter from the floor and opened it. She read the strange handwriting:

It was as if Kerr himself had entered the room, masked and muffled beyong recognition, and then, face to face with her, let fall his disguise. She gazed at the words, at the signature, thrilled and frightened. She looked at Harry's note, hesitated; caught a glimpse of the two messengers waiting stolldly in the hall. Waiting for answers! Answers to such communications! She made a dash for the table where were pens Three times now within three days he

and ink and on one sheet scrawled: 'Certainly, Bring him," appending her initials; on the other the word "Impossible," and her full name. Then she hurried the letters into Shima's hands, lest her courage should fail her-lest she should regret her choice.

"Anywhere, at any time, to-night," she repeated softly. Why, the man must be mad! Yet she permitted herself a moment of imagining what might have been if her answers had been reversed.

But no, she dared not meet Kerr's impetuous attacks yet. First she must get at Harry. And how was that to be managed if he insisted on surrounding himself with "a jolly little party?"

She found a moment that evening in which to ask him to walk out to the Presidio with her the next morning. But he was going to Burlingame on the early train. He was woefully sorry. It was ages since he had had a moment with her alone, but at least he would see her that evening. She had not forgotten? They were going to that dinner-and then the reception afterward? Her suspicion that he was deliberately dodging wavered before his boyish, cheerful, unconscious face. And yet, following on the heels of his tendency to question and coerce her, this reticence was amazing. The next day would be lost with Harry beyond reach—12 hours while Kerr was at the mercy of chance, and she was at the mercy of Kerr.

Yet when his card was brought up to her the next morning she looked at the printed name as wistfully as if it had been his face. It cost an effort to send down the cold fiction that she was not at home, and she could not deny herself the consolation of leaning on the baluster of the second landing, and listening for his step in the hall below. But there was no move-Could it be possible he was waiting for her to come in? Hush! that was the drawing-room door. But instead of Kerr, Shima emerged, He was heading for the stair with his little silver tray and upon it-a note. Oh, impudence! How dared he give butler! She stood her ground, and were most usual to find one's mistress

Shima,"-she addressed the man's intelligence-"make him understand it."

She watched the note departing. How she longed to call Shima back and open it! There was a pausethen Kerr emerged from the drawingroom. As he crossed the hall he glanced up at the stair and as much as was visible of the landing. He had not taken Shima's word for it, after all!

The vestibule door closed noiselessly after him, the outer door shut with a heavy sound. Yet before that sound had ceased to vibrate, she heard it shut again. Was he coming back? There was a presence in the vestibule very vaguely seen through the glass and lace of the inner door. Her heart beat with apprehension. The door opened upon Clara.

Flora precipitately retreated. She was more disturbed than relieved by the unexpected appearance. For Clara must have seen Kerr leave the house. had been found with her or waiting for her. She wondered if Clara would ask her awkward questions. But Clara, when she entered Flora's dressing-room a few moments later with the shopping-list, instead of a question, offered a statement.

"I don't like than man," she announced. "Who?"

"That Kerr, I met him just now on the steps. Don't you feel there is something wrong about him?"

"Oh, I don't know" said Flora vaguely. Clara gave her a bright glance

"But you weren't at home to him." "I'm not at home to any one this morning." Flora answered evasively. feeling the probe of Clara's eyes. "I'm feeling ill. I'm not going out this evening, either. I think I'll ring up Burlingame and tell Harry." It was in her mind that she might manage to make him stay with her while Clara went on to the reception.

"Burlingame! Harry!" Clara echoed in surprise, "Why, he's in town. I saw him just now as I was coming up."

"Are you sure?" "Yes. He was walking up Clay from

Kearney. 1 was in the car."
"Why that—that is—" Flora stammered in her surprise, "Then something must have kept him," she altered her sentence quickly. though this seemed the probable explanation she did not believe it. Harry walking toward Chinatown, when he had told her distinctly he would be in Burlingame! She thought of the goldsmith shop and there returned to her the memory of how Harry and the blue-eyed Chinaman had looked when she had turned from the window and seen them standing together in the back of the shop.

"You do look ill," Clara remarked. 'Why don't you stay in bed and not

try to see any one?" Flora murmured that that was her intention, but she was far from speaking the truth. She only waited to make sure of Clara's being in her own rooms to get out of the house and

telephone to Harry. It was not far to the nearest booth, a block or two down the cross street. She rang, first, the office. The word came back promptly in his partner's

"Take that back," she said coldly, at the clr's. He must be in town, then, "and tell him that I am out; and, on secret business

r of CHANCI

She walked rapidly, in her excitement, turning the troubling question over in her mind. She did not realize how far she had gone until some girl she knew, passing and nodding to her, called her out of her reverie. She was almost in front of the University club. A few blocks more and she would be in the shopping district. She hesitated, then decided that it would be better to walk a little further and take a cross-town car. A group of men was leaving the

club. Two lingered on the steps, the other coming quickly out. At sight of him, she averted her face, and, hurrying, turned the corner and walked down a block. Her heart was beating rapidly. What if he had seen her! She looked about-there was no cab in sight-the best thing to do was to slip into one of the crowded shops, full of women, and wait until the danger had passed. Once inside the door of the nearest, she felt herself, with relief, only one of a horde of pricers, lookers and buyers. She felt every moment in fear lest she be disas if she had lost her identity. She went to the nearest counter and asked for veils. Partly concealed behind the bulk of the woman next her, she kept her eye on the door. She saw Kerr come in. How absurd to think that she could escape him! She turned her back and waited a moment or two, still hoping he might pass her Then she heard his voice bebv.

hind her: "Well, this is luck!"

She was conscious of giving him a limp hand. He sat down on the vacant stool next her, laughing.

You are a most remarkably fast walker," he observed.

"I had to buy a veil," Flora murmured. "Has it taken you all the morn-

ing?" She could see she had not fooled

"I had a great many other things to do." She was resolved not to ad-

mit anything. "No doubt, but I wanted to see you very much last night, and again this

She saw that he awaited her answer the chorus. in anxiety. "But-" she hesitated just a going out this evening."

She started nervously to rise "Wait," he said in a voice that was audible to the shop-girl, "your pack-

age has not come." She looked at him helplessly, so attractive and so inimical to her. He swung around, back to the counter, and lowered his voice. "Did you know I called upon you yesterday morning,

also?" he asked. She nodded.

"Mr. Cressy and I waited for you together. Did he mention it to you?" "No." Her lips let the word out slowly.

"That's a reticent friend of yours! The exclamation, and the truth of it, put her on her guard. "I can't discuss him with you," she

said coldly. "Yet no doubt you have discussed

me with him?" 'Never!'

"You haven't told him anything?" ber they had been. The incredulity, the amazement of his and the other with his brilliant initisso sketchy. But the little stare with ative attacking, always attacking which Clara met it, the amusement, hanging breathless over the baluster. It was the same how extraordinary her conduct must seem. What could be think of her? What construction would be put upon She blushed, neck to forehead. and her voice was scarcely audible as she answered "No."

But at that small word his whole mood warmed to her. "Why, then," he began eagerly, "if Cressy doesn't

"Oh, but he-" Flora stopped in terror of herself. "I can't talk of him, I must not. Don't ask me!" she implored, "and please, please don't come to my house again!"

He gave his head a puzzled, imsee vou?" "In a few days-perhaps to-morrow

I will let you know." She rose. She had her package now. She was getting back her courage. There was no sy, all the evening!" further way of keeping her.

But he followed her closely through the crowd to the door. "Yes," he said quickly under his breath, "in a few days, perhaps to-morrow, as soon as you get rid of it, you won't mind meeting me! What are you afraid of? Surely not of me?"

She was, but hotly denied it. "I am not afraid of you. I am

afraid of them!" "Of them!" He peered at her.

"What are you talking about now?" Ah, she had said too much! bit her lip. They had reached the corner, and the gliding cable car was a last appeal.

"Don't ask me anything! Don't come with me! Don't follow me!"

Not until she was safely inside the car did she dare look back at him. He was still on the corner, and he raised his hat and smiled so reassuringly that she was half-way home before she realized that, in spite of all she had urged upon him, he had not know about some Englishman that committed himself to any promise. they're trying to put up at the club." And yet, she thought in dismay, he had almost made her give away Harry's confidence. She was seeing more of him at home, and can't vouch for and more clearly that this was the every fellow who comes along just danger of meeting him. He always because he is English." got something out of her and never, by chance, gave her anything in return. If he should seek her to-night uncomfortable. she dared not be at home! Any place



would be safer than her own house. It would be better to fulfill her engagement and go to the reception with Clara and Harry. That was a house Kerr did not know.

It was awkward to have to an nounce this sudden change of plan after her pretenses of the morning, but of late she had lived too constantly with danger for Clara's uplifted eyebrows to daunt her. The mere trivial act of being dressed each day was fraught with danger. To get the sapphire off her person before Marrika should appear; to put it back somehow after Marrika had done; to shift it from one place to another as she wore gowns cut high or low-and covered in the act! This was her daily maneuver. To-night she clasped the chain around her waist beneath her petticoats.

She was ready early, in the hope that Harry might come, as he had been wont to do, a little before the appointed hour. But he turned up without a moment to spare. Clara was downstairs in her cloak when he appeared. There was no chance for a word at dinner. But if she could not manage it later in the wider field of the reception, why, then she deserved to fall in everything.

But she found, upon their arrival, that even this was going to be hard to bring about. For she was imme diately pounced upon-first, by Ella Buller

"Why, Flora," at the top of her voice, "where have you been all these days?" Then in a hot whisper: "Did you speak to her? It hasn't done one bit of good.'

"I think you are mistaken," Flora murmured. "But be careful, and let me know-" She had only time for morning. I may see you this even-ing, perhaps?" He was grave now, surrounded; and other voices took up

She realized with some alarm that

though she had forgotten her public, ment too long before she added, "I'm it had kept its eye on her. She answered, laughing, that she was keeping Lent early, and allowed herself to be drifted about through the crowd by more or less entertaining people, now and then getting glimpses of Harry, tracking him by his burnished brown head, waiting her opportunity to get him cornered. At last she saw him making for the smoking-room. Connecting this with the drawing-room where she stood was a small red lounging-room, walls, floor and furniture all covered with crimson velvet. It had a third door which communicated Indirectly with the reception-rooms, by means of a little hall. She was near that hall, and it would be the work of a moment to slip by way of it into the red room and stop Harry on his way through. She had not played at such a game since, as a child, she had jumped out on people from dark closets, and Harry was as much astonished as she could remem-

"What in the world are you doing leave such a bundle of fascination at Jarge!

She made him a low courtesy and said she was preventing him from doing so.

"It's very good of you, and you are very pretty, Flora," he admitted with a grudging smile, "but I've got to see a man in here." His eyes went to the door of the smoking-room whence was audible a discussion of voices, and among them Judge Buller's basso. She was between Harry and the door. Laughingly, he made as if to put her aside, when the door through which patient shake. "Then where am I to she had entered opened again sharply; and Kerr came in.

"Forgive me. I followed you," he began. Then he saw Harry. "I-haha-I've been hunting for you, Cres-

Harry accepted the statement with cynical smile. It was too evidently not for him Kerr had been hunting, and after the first stammer of embar rassment, the Englishman made no attempt to conceal his real intentions. His words merely served him as an excuse not to retreat.

"This is a good place to sit," he said, pushing forward a chair for Flora. She sank into it, wondering weakly what daring or what danger had brought him into a house where he was not known, to seek her. He sat down in the compartment of a double settee near her. Harry still approaching. She turned to him with stood with a dublous smile on his face. The look the two men exchanged appeared to her a prolongment of their earnest interrogation in the nicture gallery; but this time it struck her that both carried it off less well. Harry, especially, bore it badly.

"Did you say you were looking for me?" he remarked. "Well, Buller's been looking for you. He wants to "How's that? Oh, yes! I remem-ber." Kerr shrugged. "Never heard

"Quite so!" said Harry, with a

straight look at Kerr that made Flora

(TO BE CONTINUED)



Sol" Said Harry, with a Straight Look at Kern.