

COLORS BY

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EMSLIE was always playing at regeneration. Steamer decks were his specialty. He had gone to the devil a good many times, usually taking some good fellow with him on the out-trip; when he hit bottom he would somehow manage to scrape up a new outfit and show up on deck in some out-of-the-way port on the tourist lanes—traveling for his health. Fresh and shiny from the barber and tailor, fascinating as the villain of a melodrama, plausible as a hypnotist, Emalie would cast his experienced eye over the deck parade and elect his victim. The rest was simple—permit himself to be discovered. Women discovered him too eagerly. That was not his game. Hard-bitten kings of industry, lulled into a false sense of the peace of Eden by the soft trade winds that make life so mellow on deck here in the tropics, were apt to forget that they had locked their desks tight when they stepped aboard ship, and listened with prickling ears when the clever rogue dropped quite casually some hint of new and untapped wealth in their particular line.

He always knew their particular line, and he always sensed the particular moment at which to show his hand. Shortly the hard-bitten capitalist would be having a word with Emalie in private, chair to chair, in some secluded deck corner, or shoulder to shoulder at the rail when the rest of the ship was to bed.

That was the way the Copper people "discovered" Emalie; they sent him into Ecuador, taking him from his partner to be just the electrolytic wizard they were seeking. He made good for them—until he got tired and quit cold. Another time he went down into New Guinea looking for the sacred hoatzin for some canny old mountebank who had become a supporting patron of science in his old age, and found the hoatzin.

He had the brains for any undertaking, good or bad. He seemed to take a saturnine delight in showing decent people how simple it was to be decent, and just when they came to pinning their absolute faith on him he'd get tired of being white and go back to yellow. Between times he stirred up dissent among Central American states, employed his talents at gun-running, or consorted with Mendoza, a particularly reprehensible black-leg who preyed on rich natives in local administrations. Emalie's record was written across the map from Mexico City down to Bahia, yet such was his compelling ascendancy with each reincarnation that his old friends who had known him when he started out with every promise of a distinguished career found themselves cherishing a vague hope—one of these times when he came bobbing to the surface he would stay on top.

When Emalie came aboard the Para with its white and gold superstructure and its elite cabin list, at Barranquilla, he knew all about Bailey. He knew that Bailey was a director in the Plantations Corporation by virtue of his wife's aunt; he knew that Bailey had come south with a perfectly obvious idea of inaugurating tourist traffic on the corporation's 14,000-ton ships, which now were operating under the handicaps of a one-way cargo, and he knew that Bailey was going back north with his toy balloon punctured; the Caribbean personnel of the corporation had stuck a pin in it. Tourist business was good business. But it wouldn't work out for the corporation. Their plans spent 28 days on the cruise, 17 at sea. But there were four days when the 14,000-tonners tied up to the wharf at the sinking post-hole of Bareya to take on crude rubber, with nothing to while away the time for the upstart's company except rats and fleas. Many a good man had suggested Bailey's obvious idea before—but it always blew when it came to Bareya. Distinctly Bareya was not for tourists, and since crude rubber was the principal ingredient of the annual dividend, tourist traffic was not for the corporation. Bailey was going back north with a groan.

Emalie, reclining with sophisticated, listened sympathetically. Bailey was pouring out the vials of his wrath against the Central American personnel. He had the contempt of the home office man for the outside men; he worked himself up to white heat at the recollection of the amused indifference with which the corporation's executives down here had listened to his great idea and then casually pricked it and let out the air.

"There is an answer," muttered Bailey doggedly, through his beard. "There is some way to take care of the passengers those four days."

"Didn't they know?" inquired Emalie idly.

"They wouldn't tell me if they did," snarled Bailey. He shot a vindictive look at the suave Emalie, who seemed amused. "Do you?" he challenged. Emalie nodded.

"Carson, then," he said to the tip of his cigar.

"The passengers, of course. That's what you are worrying about, isn't it?"

"I'm afraid I don't quite get you," said Bailey irritably.

"Carson then on a desert island," said Emalie lazily. "They can't get away from you. When you're loaded at Bareya sail out and pick them up. Nothing simpler."

Bailey sat up with a jerk, not yet grasping the full idea, yet seeing hope from afar.

"Can't you see the 'ad'?" drawled Emalie. "Play Robinson Crusoe for four days on our tropic isle of Paradise? Build a hotel, a casino and a park. Give them a chance to spend money. A tropic isle, with sapphires, sea, coral strand, mossy banks, nodding palms, and the trades always blowing."

"I've got it! I've got it!" cried Bailey ecstatically; he sprang to his feet to pacing eagerly. "I knew I'd beat that shirt sleeves bunch! An island. I want an island!"

"Dolly Key," said Emalie. Somehow he said it he managed to conjure the vision of a pretty girl in a cap with trim waist and slim ankles.

"Dolly Key? Who is she?" demanded Bailey.



western horizon. She's 12 hours' run down the coast from Bareya—about 10 miles off the Main."

Bailey had the hotel built, on paper, before an hour was gone. In another hour he had worked out the tariffs; this was an idea of a lifetime, and he would keep it fine. Emalie cast an experienced eye over the figures.

"Double them," he said shortly. "We don't want pikers. We want spenders—chronic spenders. This bunch," he added, and he indicated, with curling lip, the deck parade. "We want the man who knows it is the best because it costs the most. That's the oldest bait in the world. We'll have a waiting list, Bailey."

"We?" said Bailey, pulling up short. "Are you including yourself?"

"I'm including you," responded Emalie with easy good humor. "That is," he amended with a shade of insolence, "if you represent the people you say you do. If you can give me the corporation's backing, I will include you. Otherwise—"

"O, we want it," interjected Bailey with anxious reassurance. "You're coming north with me, old man. I want the board to see what a poet looks like."

"No, my friend; the only way I go north is in iron, or soldered up in a lead box," smiled Emalie. "My blood is too thin—and this is January. You go north. When you get carte blanche, you come to me in Havana. I'll be there for three weeks."

The wireless whispered it over forest, swamp and mountain to the remotest rubber plantation. Emalie was on top again.

"King" Mack, general manager of the Caribbean department for the corporation; Jim Scott, wandering bridge builder, who would wear his Kansas winter woollens in Tophet, and Facey (whose business was to touch undesirable on the shoulder and tell them when their boat sailed, and why) foregathered at an iron table on the veranda at the Washington in Colon to talk it over.

In the old days, when this crowd went holiday-making among the keys behind Carreening Island Emalie had been one with them.

"Yes, they have put him in charge of tourist traffic," admitted the fat monarch of all the rubber as he pulled at his lime squash.

"In charge of tourists?" ejaculated the cynical Facey. If there was anything on earth softer than a tourist, Facey did not know it. "And the corporation is going to deliver him a cargo of hand-picked lambs once a week?"

"Just what you are doing to do," said the rubber potentate. "Give him a chance."

Almost over night, so it seemed, Dolly Key put on her new raiment. You could see her in all her glory, from the deck of the O. & Q. boat as it passed, a little out to sea, coming down the coast—at that first hour of the tropical morning when the light is apt to play tricks with one's imagination. The rambling white villa with its red tiles would be struck by the long blue shadows from the mossy cypress and chattering locust. There was a great carpet of unbelievable green, a rolling park of sward and shrub descending in terraces to the strand. On the sea front, a celture of palms nodding to the trade winds; behind, the forest—not the usual feld bush of these latitudes, but a forest such as Parrish might draw for the Enchanted island, with leafy clerestory and deep, cool tunnels of shade.

Emalie had achieved perfection; even King Mack, Facey and the others who had watched this last bold stroke of his with raised eyebrows had to admit that. For 12 months now the big cruisers had appeared once a week, at evening, plumping

their way among the shoals behind Carreening Island, with an elite company that lined the rail exclaiming rapturously at their first glimpse of the island.

Bailey, up north, was in fine fettle. There was, indeed, a waiting list, at rates which even he, with his exaggerated ideas of the volume of a tourist's purse, had regarded in the beginning with misgivings. King Mack's confidential report on Emalie and his career, which that worthy had thought best to pass on to headquarters when the corporation began "delivering a cargo of hand-picked lambs" once a week to the tender mercies of that man of many careers, was now filed away as a specimen of rare humor.

It was in March, the height of the season. The graceful El Zayas, queen of the fleet, was drawing up on her spring lines at the wharf; the band was playing, pennons were lifting lazily in the mild trades, the red sun was sinking in the violet mists of the horizon. Animated groups clustered at the rail. Emalie was everywhere, the myriad details of this exciting business of bringing his gracious company ashore to the delights of his

island at his finger ends. Catching a question in one group, he turned smiling, pointing out on the glittering lagoon.

"Shark?" he said, and he indicated a lazy fin cutting the silver surface.

"Isn't he the most fascinating man?" exclaimed pretty Mrs. Thornton, whose trim, glove-like white raiment was edged with a tiny thread of purple. Her eyes followed the fascinating man as he lost himself in the throng.

The tall, loose-limbed youth by her side, lover in his own confession, and coming away to forget, sighed deeply as he always did before speaking, even at table when he asked for the sauce.

"I wonder who all these people are," he said. "Do you know?"

"No."

"One usually does, you know, after a week aboard ship," he said. "But not here. They are all strangers—always will be. Now, his nobles here," he indicated with a jerk of the head an elderly, consequential person tossing coins to the diving boys. "He might be a bishop."

"He's a gambler," she said. "Fairfield—the man with the bronze doors. I happen to know who he is."

Emalie, the tall youth, examined the elderly, consequential person tossing coins with renewed interest. Fairfield, the gambler, with his bronze doors that withstood the battering rams of the police, had been famous for two decades.

"Coming into Havana the other morning," said Emalie, "I was so bold as to address your friend, I asked him where he would stop ashore—I didn't know the hotels, you know. I thought I was paying a compliment to his cosmopolitanism. Not at all. He looked me coldly in the eye and said: 'I don't care to say.'"

He chuckled. "Where did you stop, by the way?" he went on. "I didn't see you at the Seville."

"Where he did," said the fascinating lady with the purple thread, smiling in amusement.

"Tell me," he begged, leaning closer.

"I don't care to say," she retorted, laughing. She tapped his hand with light fingers. "You don't belong among these people, do you?"

"Evidently not," said the youth. "I thought I knew the Blue Book people. But I don't know these—and they don't seem to stand, and all that. But polite like clams. Never by any chance do they suggest that they might have a background, like the usual human beings. Even you, Mrs. Thornton," he added, watching her beautiful face to catch the effect of

"I don't," she said, with a little shrug. "Don't what?"

"I don't become confidential with steamer deck acquaintances," she said.

"Good Lord!" he laughed. "Some of the finest friendships I've got began with a steamer deck. I'm going to include you in that category," he added boyishly.

Her steward was passing, and she turned to instruct him as to her baggage. Then a crowd caught her up and bore her off. Emalie sauntered down to the gangway and joined Corson, the ship's doctor, at the rail watching the gay throng stream ashore in the gathering twilight. Emalie had seen the tourist species in many corners of the world, and he had thought he knew them all. But this ship's company formed an ultra haute monde that was new to him. That the august personage built on ecclesiastical lines turned out to be none other than Fairfield, the famous gambler, was a revealing fact to the puzzled Emalie.

"Gamblers and high flyers," he muttered under his breath. "Where do you pick them up, Corson?"

Corson jerked a cautious thumb in the direction of Emalie.

"Ask him," said the doctor. "He does it. Every trip."

"Does anything ever happen, Corson?"

"Happen?"

Emalie nodded, his eyes lively.

"Yes, happen," he repeated. "Isn't the stage set? Here's a bunch of high flyers—who don't know each other or anybody else. The ultra sporting crowd—people who live on capital, not income. You've got them marooned out here, on an island, a million miles from nowhere. Isn't the stage set, Corson? It's a great chance for an artist—that man Emalie looks like an artist. He could pick the gold fillings out of their teeth and they wouldn't squeal. This man, this bunch doesn't squeal. If I know the breed. Do they ever die on your hands, Corson?"

The ship's doctor stared, astonished at the sudden question.

"Professionally," he drawled as he combed his young beard with his fingers. "I might admit that they have that falling—or, I might say, liability—in common with the rest of humanity. They don't indulge in it extravagantly, however," he added humorously. "You don't belong here, Emalie. What are you doing here?"

"One of them just asked me," laughed Emalie. "To tell you the truth, I've been wondering that myself," and he started away, still laughing, to find his steward. Emalie had indeed been asking himself what he was doing here ever since he set foot aboard ship in New York.

Six weeks before, running away from home, while he had made a mess of things, and determined not to face his own world again until he had proved himself to be a man, he had landed at Colon, assumed the name Emalie, and applied for work at the corporation office. King Mack, general manager of all the latex, looked up from a cablegram he had been in the act of reading. That cablegram said that young Dixon, son of the chief of staff in Washington, had gone wrong and had headed south—would the general manager keep an eye out for him? Before Emalie had spoken half a dozen words he was hired. In another hour he was bound north on a Royal mail ship. On a week he was bound south again as a casual passenger on the El Zayas, with nothing to do but eat natural and carry out the role of a love-love youth going away to forget.

"I can't see head or tail to it," he told his benefactor when his assignment was explained to him.

"You're not expected to," retorted King Mack. "You're a trial balloon. Emalie, I'm sending you up, loaded with recording instruments. Somewhere along the route some one will open you up and take the readings."

With this Delphic utterance the King had sent Emalie on his errand. At the same time he cabled General Dixon: "The boy is with me. Leave him alone for a time. It wasn't the first time in the last year King Mack had planted a casual passenger among Emalie's elite tour-

Night came suddenly. Hours later

the ship sailed away. They could see her lights attenuating through the blue night like a constellation of stars outward bound through space. The guests were dancing in the pavilion. A quartet of strings hummed languorously, and as he moved across the lawn Emalie caught the swish of feet and the babble of voices. There was finish here, he thought, for these spendthrift castaways. Not an item had been overlooked. The night, the sea, the sky, the dark stirring trees, the great rambling house that showed smokily—it all made a scene of almost fabled splendor. At the present moment, if some one had stopped him and opened the "recording instruments," King Mack would have learned that his "trial balloon" was vigorously registering flattering admiration. Emalie had achieved "finish." There was no flaw.

Emalie mounted the stone steps and took up a position in a wide window, inhaling the perfume of the scene. An old dowager, all puffs and rouge, looked up annoyed from her point-dappur in the embrasure of this window, and Emalie moved on to the next. Mrs. Thornton, dancing with Emalie, came into view, the two moving with a grace that put the others in eclipse. She was delicately modeled, with the contours of a child; her hair dressed her shapely head marvelously, her light draperies lent buoyancy to her, as this side-down imparts life and motion to its seed. Once, coming around, she saw Emalie standing at the window, and she picked him up net with her smile, which was vague, but with her eyes. He would like to dance with that woman. But not here, he decided.

He lighted a cigarette and started off through the park. The moon had come up, the extravagant tropical moon, sending shafts of silver among the tree trunks, painting the great drooping leaves with pallor. He wished she might come out. And presently, as if in obedience to his unspoken summons, she did. He saw her on the veranda, recognized her from her sash of some unpaintable color. When she came into the moonlight, its effect was to make her glow as with odic effulgence. She sat down on a great white seat that rose ghostly out of the dark, and he joined her. The sea was lapping against the stones. The tide was coming in. Back in the forest a night bird spoke plaintively, a single note.

"Isn't here a boat of some kind?" she said.

They found an electric launch. That was better than a dinner thought the romantic youth; now he would have room full of extravagant people who pursued their pleasures so industriously. They floated out beyond the shadow of the trees onto the matted surface of the water. Emalie shut off the power and let the tide that was setting in strong, bear them along swiftly. Emalie, with a luxurious feeling of well-being, prepared another cigarette, and lounged in his cushions and found keen pleasure in watching her. Off on the horizon the sleepy lights of the shore town Adolantova were just visible through the mists that hung on the rim of the sea.

"Like a fish?"

"Could you swim that far—with the tide?" he asked, pointing.

"And the sharks? No!" she laughed ripplingly.

"Or that tree," he said, "could you step aboard her and drift?"

Mrs. Thornton drew back in sudden alarm. A tree torn from some bank by storms had sailed alongside, its gaunt limbs, hung with shrouds of moss, standing stark against the sky. The great trunk, with its closed fist of tort roots, made not so much as a ripple in the water that swept it onwards swiftly.

"Here is our magic chariot," he said. "Let's step aboard. They'll find our empty boat in the morning. Journey's end! And we two—"

"Where would we be?" she asked idly.

"Probably high and dry on some mud flat," laughed Emalie, pleased with his vagary. There is an estuary just above that town, on the Main. There is a strong tide running here between those islands. It would land us up that creek."

"Marks on topocodies—which?" she laughed again, the while she watched the dead tree that kept pace with them. "Take me back," she

said, suddenly. He threw over the tiller, and they swung around, listing slightly, with a gurgling of water as they met the rip broadside. Emalie waved a farewell to the tree. Their little craft cut its way through the moonlight, its motor singing a thin song, phosphorescent streamers dancing on the lost ribbon of the wake.

"There is peace here, cheri," she said at last, with a sigh. "Do you know it?"

"Have you seen the chef—a grinning gorilla with long arms? Grin-ways peeping through door cracks," said Emalie. "And the maitre—yellow-eyed cut-throat. Emalie has a crew here to scuttle a ship."

"Isn't he wonderful?" she said, eagerly. "This is the masterpiece of an artist," she added, half turning and surveying the beckoning lights of the island. "It is repose," and she fell to quoting:

"In the afternoon they came unto a land in which it seemed always afternoon."

They were drawing alongside the pontoon. A black hand, like a snake, shot out, closed on the tiller rope, drew them in.

The revelers were still at it. Emalie said his good-night, and he watched her mount the broad staircase and disappear beyond the angle; he turned and made his way to the casino and joined a group at a table. He tossed out a gold coin.

"Noir!" cried the croupier, and reached out with his long stick and licked in the gold. Emalie pulled down another.

"Rouge!" cried the croupier. Emalie pocketed his winnings. A hand touched his sleeve, then fingers pressed his arm.

"Don't do it again, Emalie," said a voice in his ear. It was Emalie, speaking, smoothly, who met Emalie's eyes as he turned.

"Don't do what?"

"Don't go out on the water at night. There is a malaria. Risk yourself, if you wish. But not others."

Emalie turned on his heel and moved off. Later, in the ballroom, Emalie got a glimpse of him. The im-presario of this island of nepenthe was leaning over the old hag in puffs and rouge, who still held her post, drinking in the brilliant scene. Emalie whispered some word in her ear.

As he bent over her hand gracefully he scarcely veiled the insolent mockery in his eyes. Involuntarily, Emalie, watching this little by-play, found himself consulting his "recording instruments" again. He found himself harboring a sudden, ungovernable antipathy for the elegant Emalie.

There were a coterie of high flyers who lived riotously in detached groups; they knew nobody, not even each other. This perfect island was manned by a piratical crew who might scuttle a ship. And this man Emalie, efficient, polished, smooth—a little too smooth! Here was a combination which indicated there might be something worth recording. Things could happen here, in this superb isolation. But who would know—who would care? Certainly not these tainted epicureans who drink so deep, lived so widely, high, and extravagantly—and, yes, ferociously—every day that even the surcease they had come so far to seek was charged with fantastic echoes. Floating in their world, here they were tossed together in the intimacy of a quart measure by some mischievous whimsy of fate. Take Fairfield, who epitomized this company—a man whose life was too intense for friendships, whom nothing could shake from his cold calm, neither curiosity nor pity. Yes, anything might happen here.

Emalie's words and innocent manner had irritated Emalie. But the words of the im-presario about the night's vapors became more significant next day, when Mrs. Thornton did not appear. It was not until late afternoon that Emalie found her, on the great white seat by the sea. She was pale and listless. She shook her head dejectedly at his approach, and said with a wan smile as he seated himself beside her:

"It was very foolish of us."

He nodded contritely. "But fevers do not develop in a night. He wondered with what secret anguish she had kept company to steal the bloom from her cheeks. It was not until late afternoon that Emalie found her, on the great white seat by the sea. She was pale and listless. She shook her head dejectedly at his approach, and said with a wan smile as he seated himself beside her:

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each. The great house became alive with the excitement and bustle of departure, its eager moths, as though this cocoon had served its cycle, now intent only on sloughing it off, to spread fresh wings for new journeys. Emalie had seen his things aboard and given final instructions to his steward, when Corson, the ship's doctor, joined him at a table on the portico over a pair of tall, cool glasses. As they slipped and chatted they watched the groups filling by. Behind them a voice said:

"The pass-keys to number four-thirty-six. The door is locked. No-body answers."

He turned sharply and saw it was the yellow-eyed maitre, speaking to Emalie. The pair hurried away together.

"What do you make of that?" asked Emalie, turning to Corson.

The ship's doctor shrugged his shoulders.

"Nothing," he said absently, and sucked at his straw. After a time the dapper little man with a paint brush beard, the Nicaraguan house physician, a man whose exacted some authority here for his government, passed by, and Corson called him.

"Ferret," called Corson in a low tone. The little man stopped, and the two physicians regarded each other for a moment.

"Dead?" asked Corson casually. The little man, Ferret, nodded, closing his eyes; then he passed on.

"It is getting to be a habit," said Corson, in a low tone, to Emalie.

"What?" gasped Emalie, all alive suddenly.

"You heard," said Corson, regarding him with mild eyes. "Suicide, I suppose. It's happened before. Always at the last minute. That's the way they wish themselves on us. There is no guarding against it. If a man or woman decides to come off here to die, that's all there is to it."

"But who? Which one?" demanded Emalie violently.

"The ship's doctor shook his head. "I don't ask," he said dryly. "My territory is aboard ship. Ferret commands here. I interfere with nobody ashore."

The whistle sounded a long blast, and the tardy passengers scampered off. "Aren't you coming, Emalie?" Or are you going to stay over a boat?" said Corson, rising.

Darkness fell. The gangplank was lowered away. But it was an hour before the lines were cast off. Meantime the gay company seated itself for dinner, babbling excitedly at the prospect of moving water again. Of them all, only Emalie searched greedily among the faces, that had now become familiar, for one missing.

In one corner, beside a small table, stood the dapper little man with a paint-brush beard; he sat with a faint smile on his face, in a glass which he now and again raised to the light to peer through. By the window sat an old woman—it was the ridiculous old crone of the window, who since the first day of the cruise had fixed herself on Mrs. Thornton's attention by her rapt interest in the doings of her fellow passengers. The old woman sat in an hour-glass rush chair, pecking away with a needle at some stuff she held close to her old eyes. A breeze lifted the pongee strings of the window, disclosing a slit of the day outside, the sky dissolving into the sea, which in turn lost itself in the vivid green of grass and trees. A group gay with life and color moved across the field of the picture; then the curtain fell softly, as if its momentary drawing aside was merely a reassuring gesture.

Mrs. Thornton sighed involuntarily. The man of the beard turned sharply; with soft steps he approached; he touched her pulse, stood looking down on her as she lay back in her chair with closed eyes as if, by some protective instinct, she would cling yet a little longer to her moment of dissociation. She was conscious of a struggle to detach herself from the echoing pain of some experience outlived, before the fantastic period of this tale of forgetfulness.

Ferret went back to his final stirring. Someone joined him. From the cover of her dress she saw Emalie consulting the little native doctor in whispers. Emalie after a moment slipped away noiselessly, and Ferret stood over her with his glass, saying: "Please, madam."

She drank. A heaviness overcame her, and she surrendered herself to it. What might have been an instant or an age later, she was wide awake, staring, sitting up in her bed in the dark, listening. A voice far off had said: