

MOON OF DELIGHT

by Margaret Bell Houston

Chapter 6 THE LURE OF A VEIL

Rubies or diamonds or the famous Belaise sapphires, or what Kirk liked best, the single strand of pearls!

Mrs. Belaise contemplated herself in the mirror. She was 74. Face and throat were withered flowers, but with the fine blue eyes, the delicate profile, the small foot, she was still the spirited ghost of beautiful Nelly Sartoris, belle of New Orleans when the 70's were young.

Faithful black Lorena had waved her mistress' thin white hair, had drawn the mascara pencil lightly along where the fine black eye-lashes used to be, had rouged ever so delicately the sunken cheek.

"No lipstick, Lorena," Mrs. Belaise had remarked from the very beginning of lipstick. "Hard. That is what it makes us look. And all beautifying is merely a softening process."

"Yes ma'am," agreed Lorena, who really understood. Her mistress had not changed for Lorena in these 30 years of service. Lorena stood back now, contemplating the rubies on her lady's breast.

Mrs. Belaise shook her head, fumbled nervously with her gold vinaigrette. She was always delightfully nervous on the evenings she played roulette. It was the nearest thing she had felt to youth in 40 years.

"Rubies look common," she said, "since they have learned to reconstruct them. Genuine pigeon-blood these are—Take them off. Try the diamonds. I never know what a new dress will like best."

Lorena held the links of platinum-cupped light tentatively about her mistress' neck. "You looks like a white angel, Mrs. Belaise!"

Nelly Belaise thought of the first time she had worn them. Of the sensation they had caused. Thirty-one years ago at the old French opera house. Delphine, her daughter,—was a bride. She had grieved over Delphine's leaving, and Arthur Belaise had sought to comfort her with these. He had spent his inheritance on gems for her. Sometimes she had scolded him. "But these are investments, Nelly," he would say.

Nelly Belaise had not needed to realize on them. Kirk, Delphine's son, provided her with all she could desire. Delphine had died when Kirk was born, and Kirk's father had gone back north and married again when Kirk was a year old. Kirk had belonged to Nelly ever since. Indeed, he called her "mother" when he didn't call her "Nelly".

Now Kirk's father was dead and Kirk had come in to the greater part of the Standard fortune, a solid New England fortune made in shoes.

"Tonight Nelly Belaise took the diamonds from her neck. They never bring me luck, Lorena. Not the pearls either. I'll wear the sapphires again."

Delphine had helped her father choose the sapphires in Paris. Somehow Nelly Belaise could not remember Delphine as she looked after her marriage. Somehow she saw her only as she was that summer in Paris, or coming down the curved stair pondering as a bride.

The sapphires were perfect. Lorena fastened the necklace, clasped the earrings in the pierced ears, held out the tray of the silver jewel casket that the small veined hands might choose their rings.

Nelly Belaise rose at last in the full ivory satin gown that fell about her feet, the slim ankles and small gowned slippers glimpsed and veiled again. Lorena sprayed perfume on the jeweled hands. Proudly Lorena watched her descend the stair.

Kirk Standard met his grandmother in the hall. He was not unlike her. Brown hair graying at 30, the same fine blue eyes and slightly aquiline profile, her smile.

"They went into the drawing room, his arm about her. Two men rose. One was a portly person with a frown carved between black brows, a man of perhaps 60. Kirk Standard presented him.

"Senor Basara, mother. You remember meeting Senor Basara in Mexico City? We went to a ball at his home."

Senor Basara was kissing the fragrant hand, Nelly Belaise remembered. She remembered when Kirk spoke of Senor Basara's house.

"The senor has just returned from a trip around the world," Kirk explained. "He has only this evening in New Orleans, but he is sharing it with us and with his consul."

Senor Basara smiled. His frown did not disappear even when he smiled.

Ah, and there was Adrian Fouche who had introduced her to roulette and made life a different thing! Adrian with his youth, his black soft eyes and languid grace, bent his dark head over the hand of Nelly Belaise. Even to her he must make his murmurs significant, as if touched with love.

"I hope you have luck tonight!" "Ah, but I shall. I am wearing the sapphires."

Pompey, the old colored butler, drew back the portiers. Mrs. Belaise put her hand through Senor Basara's arm and led the way to the dining room.

"Tell me about this roulette," Basara begged. "Have you just discovered it?"

"A month ago," Mrs. Belaise answered. "Adrian, the naughty boy, has known the place a long time."

"It was no resort for you, glorious one—before the days of Little Buttercup and her magic touch."

"Touch" is not bad," laughed Kirk. "All the same, I miss Little Buttercup. She used to beguile me while mother played."

"Do you not play yourself?" Basara asked.

Kirk shook his head. "I am a cotton man, Senor. Gambling is no recreation. I get my fun watching mother. She's happier in Divitt's than at the races."

"And roulette lasts all year," said Nelly. "Senor Basara, won't you join us tonight?"

"But there is my boat, and my call on my consul—and if Little Buttercup is gone—"

Adrian lifted a slender hand. "You should see Little Buttercup's successor. Such eyes! Such a body! But me, she does not notice. I say to her, Senorita, I have a wager what your lips are like. You see she wears a veil."

"A veil?" Basara was all interest. "Where is this place?" "The old Croiselle house," Nelly informed him.

"Ah, yes! That beautiful home. . . . And this lovely decoy is covered with a veil!"

"Not covered," Adrian assured him. "Only the lips, the nose, tantalizing. I asked her to lift the veil. She does not even glance at me, but hurries by."

"Perhaps she didn't understand," said Nelly.

"That is it. And she seemed afraid. But the next night she is different. She carries her cigarettes like in a dream. She looks at me calmly. And so the next night and the next. She has found American cigarettes are not so terrifying. Only she is silent. French, Spanish, English, we try them all. She does not understand."

"I approach Divitt about her. But unfortunately I spoke to him once about Buttercup, and she is his wife," Adrian sighed. "He has not liked me since. Little Buttercup is not gone. She sits in the case taking in cash. She says the veiled one escaped from a harem, and I must speak to her in Turkish."

"And of course you can not."

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LITTLE ORPHAN ANNIE



GEER, JAKE— I'M ANWFUL SORRY I'M SO LATE THIS MORNIN'— BUT I WAS SO BUSY GETTIN' TH' KID DRESSED AND FED THAT I DIDN'T NOTICE I HAD LATE IT WAS GETTIN' THAT'S ALL RIGHT, ANNIE— BUT I DON'T UNDERSTAND— THIS KID— WHAT KID IS THAT?



OH, GEE— I FORGOT— I WASN'T GOIN' TO TELL ANYBODY 'BOUT HER— BUT I CAN TELL YOU— YOU WONT' BLAS— SHE'S JUST A LITTLE BABY, BOUT A YEAR AND A HALF OLD— SOMEBODY LEFT HER IN OUR HALL AND I'M RAISIN' HER. BUT WHO WILL TAKE CARE OF HER WHILE YOU ARE HERE AT THE STORE?



OH, SHELL BE O. K.— SANDY'S THERE WITH HER— AND MAW GREEN LOOKS IN NOW AND THEN— SHE'S A SWELL KID— HARDLY TELPS AT ALL AND EATS ANYTHING— I OUGHTA SEE HER GO FOR BANANAS— COURSE I DON'T LET HER HAVE TOO MANY— AND IS SHE CUTE? CURLY HAIR— I CAN'T FIGGER ANY FOLKS WANTIN' TO GET RID OF A KID LIKE THAT— BUT ITLL BE A BREAK FOR HER, 'CAUSE I'M GOIN' TO GIVE HER A REAL HOME— SEE?



YI— SUCH A GIRL— NOW SHE TAKES IN A LITTLE WAIFF TO RAISE— SHE IS YOUNG IN YEARS— YES— BUT SHE WILL RAISE THAT KID FINE— MAYBE IF I WORK IT RIGHT ANNIE WILL LET OLD JAKE BE GOD-FATHER TO THIS LITTLE ONE— I THINK I COULD BE A GOOD GOD-FATHER—

REG'LAR FELLERS



ONE— TWO— THREE— FOUR— FIVE— SIX— SEVEN— EIGHT— NINE— TEN! HOW'S THAT FOR COUNTIN'?



I DON'T HAFTA COUNT MORE'N THAT 'CAUSE IM GONNA BE A BOXIN' REFEREE WHEN I GROW UP!



THAT'S ONEY WHATCHA SAY 'CAUSE YOU DON'T KNOW WHAT COMES AFTER TEN!



I DO TOO! JACK— QUEEN— KING— ACE!

THE GUMPS



POOR UNCLE BIM— HE SAYS— HE'S GOING BACK TO AUSTRALIA— HIS HEART IS BROKEN— I'M SO AFRAID THAT WHEN THE WIDOW REALIZES TOM CARR IS PENNILESS— SHE WILL COME BACK TO BIM FOR HIS MONEY— AND HE WILL MAKE UP WITH HER AGAIN— NO— I THINK HE'S THROUGH THIS TIME—



IT'S JUST TOO BAD THAT HE TAKES IT TO HEART SO— IS ALL— WELL— HENRETTA— THE LITTLE BUSY BEE— GOT BUSY AND STUNG OUR POOR UNCLE— THAT'S ALL— THEY SAY A BEE STINGS ONLY ONCE— BUT BOY— WHEN SHE SAT DOWN— WHEN SHE ONE STING LIKE THAT IS ENOUGH—



SHE'S OUT OF IT NOW— SHE HAS HER TOM AND HIS POVERTY— AND WE HAVE OUR UNCLE BIM WITH HIS MILLIONS— WHICH IN ALL PROBABILITIES WILL NOW BE LEFT TO NONE OTHER THAN OUR LITTLE CHESTER GUMP— AND IF SHE THINKS SHE HAS A CHANCE FROM NOW ON TO GET ANY OF THAT DOUGH— SHE'S OUT OF LUCK— SHELL BE LIKE THE MERMAID— NOT A LEG TO STAND ON—

BRINGING UP FATHER



YOU BIG LOAFER— DON'T YOU EVER THINK OF WORK? GET OUT OF HERE— I WANT YOU TO CALL ON MR. EDDIE FICE— FOLLOW HIS EXAMPLE DO AS HE DOES AND YOU'LL AMOUNT TO SOME THING.



I SUPPOSE I'LL HAVE TO OBEY MAGGIE— BUT I HOPE HE AIN'T IN WHEN I CALL.



MR. FICE— I SAY— MR. FICE.



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MUTT AND JEFF



WHATCHA DOIN', MUTT?



FLYING AROUND THE WORLD, JEFF—



WHAT'S DETAININ' YOU?



GOTTA WAIT UNTIL THE ENGINE GETS HOT—

TAILSPIN TOMMY



WHEN DID YOU FIND THESE MAIL SACKS, IRELAND?



THIS MORNING— JUST BEFORE I CALLED MR. SMITH! IT'S ABOUT AN HOUR'S RIDE FROM HERE TO THE RANGER STATION!



BY THE WAY, MR. SMITH, WERE THERE ANY THREE-POINT PLANES FLYIN' THROUGH HERE YESTERDAY MORNING, SAY ABOUT FIVE O'CLOCK?



I HEARD A PLANE— SEVERAL TIMES— MUST HAVE BEEN FLYIN' PRETTY LOW— AN' CIRCLIN'— YOU KNOW HOW A PLANE SOUNDS LOUDER WHEN IT'S GOIN' AWAY FROM YOU ON ACCOUNT OF TH' EXHAUST? IT WAS KIND OF MISTY, THOUGH, AN' I COULDN'T SEE IT!

HIS AIRPLANE HAS NO TRADE-IN VALUE



I'M GOING TO REFUEL IN MIDAIR!



YOUR IGNORANCE IS REFRESHING!



SHOOTIN' STAR FISH! IF THAT WAS TH' BANDIT SHIP DROPPIN' THIS MAIL TH' CROOKS MUST STILL BE HANGIN' AROUND!

ACROSS Solution of Yesterday's Puzzle

1. Bone of the body
2. Automobiles
3. Excited
4. Black bird of the cuckoo family
5. Norse deity
6. Untransliterated
7. State of which Dover is the capital
8. Fair waste
9. Deceit of the Sultan
10. Epoch
11. Oil of rose
12. Concoct
13. River
14. Park in the Rockies
15. Give way
16. Scatter
17. Capture scalps
18. Acquire
19. Bull birds
20. Ale, drink, Eng.
21. Stinted
22. Part of the form
23. Split over
24. Having the bones removed
25. Obtain
26. Difference between two consecutive numbers
27. The Pines
28. Scotch
29. Attorney
30. One who is constantly taking medicine
31. River bottom
32. Logical thinker
33. Kind or class
34. Poem
35. Hoari
36. Italian comb
37. Crayfish
38. Vegetable
39. Decays
40. Soldier employed in digging mines
41. Wanderer
42. Cotton in Kentucky
43. Bordered
44. Let it stand
45. Porehead
46. Trench lightly
47. Back
48. Ocean
49. Before

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