



CAMEO KIRBY

BY BOOTH TARKINGTON AND HARRY LEON WILSON
NOVELIZED FROM THE PLAY BY W.B.M. FERGUSON



[CONTINUED.]

CHAPTER X.

DURING a great measure to Kirby's and Adele's high spirits, which infected all but three members of the company, the dinner in honor of Colonel Moreau was an entire success and, in fact, could not have been surpassed had that unfortunate gentleman himself been present. Judge Pleydell, believing that he was assisting to entertain one who by championing the cause of the Randalls, while at the same time ridding the community of the notorious Cameo Kirby, had earned his lasting esteem and gratitude, told his best stories in his happiest vein, and Mme. Davezac, together with Ann Pleydell, suffering under the same delusion, put forth every effort to charm, even going to the length of heartily applauding the judge's most venerable and most ravaging yams.

No mean raconteur himself, Kirby ransacked his vast store of personal experience for interesting topics of conversation that would bear rehearsal in the present company, and even Mme. Davezac and unwillingly drawn to some mysterious spell into the vortex of small talk, carefully selected, as admitted a secretary, the least innocuous of his many escapades and ventured to provide the demure ear of his dinner partner, Miss Pleydell. This heroic action of the old river gambler—for he was desperately embarrassed at the honor shown him and thoroughly cognizant what must be the inevitable and tragic ending of his partner's reckless action—was sufficient testimony to the fact that the presumed manner of M. Veaudry, coupled with Mr. Randall's grave silence and stiffed courtesy toward Kirby, had no effect upon the spirits of the company. If, indeed, their demeanor was even noted by the majority.

Before entering the house the two gentlemen in question had come to an understanding regarding the status of their guest, concurring in the opinion that he was impersonating the gentleman in whose honor the dinner had been planned. But Aaron alone had found a sinister significance in the General's observation to the effect that Kirby wore a quantity of cameos, and, although he lacked authentic evidence upon which to erect his suspicions, while likewise granting that it was an amazing and unbelievable action for one to deliberately walk into the house of his enemies, he vaguely sensed that the pseudo Colonel Moreau was none other than the notorious Eugene Kirby.

Still, Aaron Randall was a strictly just and upright man, who was fully aware of the many crimes committed in the name of circumstantial evidence. Slow to pronounce judgment, he was quick to act when once assured that in no sense would justice be violated. Moreover, Adele, in whose integrity and force of character he had the firmest belief and for whom he had the highest regard and proof of whose acumen he had had ample testimony, roused for the imposture and even confessed complicity if not actual initiative in the same. In the absence of Tom Randall she was absolute mistress, with the right to act as she deemed fit, and had, moreover, exacted his word of honor that he would trust her until the arrival of her brother. Even had he been satisfied with the truth of his conjectures regarding Kirby's identity this would have done no good.

Aaron to secrecy and M. Veaudry, being subsequently acquainted with the compact, likewise agreed that it could not be violated.

For the young creole this passive role was extremely difficult, and it was eloquent proof of his self command and personal integrity, coupled with those refined instincts bestowed by gentle birth and breeding, that he considered Aaron's promise equally binding upon himself and, repressing all promptings of jealousy, refrained from denouncing Kirby as an impostor. The successful suit of an honorable rival would have been difficult enough to recognize, but this encroachment of a stranger who at the best was a masquerader if not a character more sinister and disreputable was intolerable, for M. Veaudry had gathered from Mr. Randall's manner that he suspected their guest of being guilty of something more criminal than assuming a name to which he had no right.

Thus, even while the young creole and Aaron prayed that Tom Randall's arrival would be hastened and coincident with his free vent could be given to their suspicions, Larkin Bunce earnestly hoped to the contrary—hoped that Kirby would suddenly realize his danger, growing the more deadly and certain as every minute passed, and would ride for the river before the coming of Nemesis.

But evidently nothing was more remote from that reckless young gentleman's intention, for, unmindful of his partner's increasing uneasiness and that both were the object of watchful, hostile eyes, he continued to act as if time and opportunity had been created solely for Adele and himself. Dinner finally at an end, he and his young hostess, entirely absorbed in each other's society, sought the drawing room balcony, while the others, with the exception of Bunce, indulged in a game of piquet, M. Veaudry proving a wretched partner, his entire attention being occupied with the couple on the balcony.

M. Veaudry, owing to his preoccupation, proving such a thankless partner, Mme. Davezac at last turned to Bunce and suggested that he and Kirby join the game in lieu of the young creole and the judge.

"Eh, truly, Anatole," she added, with some asperity, tapping the other's arm with her fan, "you cannot keep your mind on the game, and so we are unable to play. Will you surrender your place to Colonel Moreau?"

"It seems to me that I have already done that," he responded gloomily.

Some very strange suspicion of him? Instantly the woman in her was up in arms, seeking to defend, eager to do battle for the object it sought to shield. "It is enough that I know he is a man who has had a great wrong done him. That's one way of making a woman believe that you love her—when she's trying to help some one in trouble, make it harder for her—be jealous," she finished, with a bitter laugh.

"I am jealous—I do not deny that. But I am, first of all things, a man of honor," he said quietly enough, although white with anger. His voice trembled with emotion as he added, with simple dignity: "Do you think a man of honor has suspicion of a rival only because he is jealous? Do you think I would suspect him only for that?"

"I can't discuss it with you," she returned coldly. Leaning on the balcony railing, she promptly became absorbed in the wonders of the night.

Recognizing the sign of dismissal, he yet hesitated, miserably conscious that he had offended, but still feeling justified in the position he had assumed, still holding that those emotions which had prompted his words were but natural, impersonal and sincere. It was his right to protect the girl he loved from the wiles of a nameless adventurer, of whose integrity he had the gravest doubts. It was his right to protect her from herself, for, jolly it as she might, it was all too utterly apparent that this debonaire impostor had succeeded where others had failed and that Adele had discarded all sorrow with her mourning and was yielding to a fascination that he firmly believed would prove her ruin.

While he still hesitated, afraid to make an enemy of the girl he loved, yet stubborn in his resolution to thwart Kirby, Aaron Randall, suspecting some such controversy as had taken place, joined them on the balcony and Anatole, with evident relief, turned again to Adele.

"Mademoiselle, here is your cousin. He will not be thought to be jealous," he said gravely. "I ask him to tell you what he will not tell me. I ask him to tell you what he thinks about this gentleman."

"Cousin Aaron," replied the girl, turning and confronting the two from whom she had most to fear, "in my brother's absence you respect my authority here, do you not? Very well, then. My introduction of this gentleman as Colonel Moreau is enough for you."

"It must be, Cousin Adele," replied Aaron, evidently greatly perplexed and troubled.

"And I am responsible for my actions only to my brother," added the girl, looking directly at M. Veaudry.

He flushed under the scrutiny of her eyes and the significant inflection of her voice.

"In his absence I would protect you. I would act for him," he protested desperately.

"You may when you have his authority. Until then I bid you adieu." And, with an elaborate courtesy and pleasant smile, she vanished through the window, while the gentlemen remained on the balcony, a prey to the most disquieting thoughts.

"You see how she have change—in this one day—with him," bitterly exclaimed Anatole, pointing through the open window to where in a distant corner of the room Kirby sat at the card table. Mr. Randall merely nodded and gloomily chewed his cheroot. He was facing a difficult problem and praying for the arrival of young Randall.

Presently from the music room there came the subdued harmony of a guitar and harp, and when the soft preludes had finished Adele's fine contralto took up the theme, singing, "I sent thee late a rose wreath, not so much honoring thee." It was Kirby's favorite song, snatches of which Anatole had heard the other humming at intervals since his arrival. Clearer, sweeter, purer sounded the words until the music ascended like an anthem and came stealing out of the window to mingle with the soft murmur of the night, to blend with the unheard, far distant harmony of the stars. Anatole stood transfixed, a prey to the bitterest emotions to which man was ever hostage.

"You hear?" he cried passionately, turning to Aaron. "For the first time since how long? Now she wears no more black. Now she is no more silent. Now she sings, not for her brother, not for those who love her, not for us!"

"No; it's for Colonel Moreau," finished the older man, throwing away his cigar.

The creole laughed harshly, contemptuously, his black eyes snapping with passion. "For Colonel Moreau? I dare you—look me in the face and say that man is Colonel Moreau," waving a trembling hand to the window.

"I shall tell you nothing," replied Aaron sternly. "No matter what I suspect, I don't know. And I won't let a man be killed until I do know."

Thackeray's Satire.

Thackeray created quite erroneous impressions of himself by often indulging in irony in the presence of people who were incapable of understanding it. One curious instance which he gave was this: Thackeray had been dining at the Garrick and was talking in the smoking room after dinner with various club acquaintances. One of them happening to have left his cigar case at home, Thackeray, though disliking the man, who was a notorious tuff hunter, good naturedly offered him one of his cigars. The man accepted the cigar, but not finding it to his liking, had the bad taste to say to Thackeray, "I say, Thackeray, you won't mind my saying I don't think much of this cigar?" Thackeray, no doubt irritated at the man's ungraciousness and bearing in mind his tuff hunting predilections, quietly responded, "You ought to, my good fellow, for it was given me by a lord." Instead, however, of detecting the irony, the dull immediately attributed the remark to snobishness on Thackeray's part and to the end of his days went about declaring that "Thackeray had boasted that he had been given a cigar by a lord."

Maternal Instinct.

"Children that yell like that ought either to be gagged or kept at home," remarked the irascible gentleman with the white beard to the bus conductor. "And faces like the one you're scaring people with," chipped in the mother of the noisy infant, "oughter be made into door knockers or sent to the chamber of horrors." The gentleman with the patriarchal face fungus took a brick red complexion, "I know it's awkward at times"—he commenced.

Jungle Housekeeping.

The negro housewife in the West Indian jungle finds housekeeping very easy. Fruit and vegetables grow wild all about the hut and the river abounds with fish. On wash day all she has to do is to pick a few of the berries of the soap berry tree, take her clothes to the river and use the berries as she would use ordinary soap. Even her cooking pots grow on the trees, the calabash cut in halves being used for this purpose. Calabashes are used also for bowls, basins and jugs for carrying water from the river while the small ones make excellent cups. In the afternoon, when she is ready for her cup of tea, the negroes pick half a dozen leaves from the lime bush growing at her door, boils them, squeezes the juice from a sugar cane for sweetening and the coconut supplies the milk. Thus she has a delicious cup of tea without depending on the grocer for it. She makes the mats for her floor out of the dried leaves of the banana, plaited and sewed together as the old country people in this country make their rag mats.



"I CAN'T DISCUSS IT WITH YOU," SHE SAID COLDLY.

(To be continued.)

A Volcano. "What is a volcano?" asked the teacher. "A mountain with a fire inside," said one. A smile of comprehension spread over the puzzled face of the smallest pupil as she asked surprisedly, "Is that a mountain range?"

A Pungent Player. The comedian had his benefit and thankful for the patronage of "kind friends in front" let off this impromptu, which was applauded: Like a grate full of coals I glow, A great full house to see, And were I not grateful, too, A great fool I should be.

More Important. "See here, waiter: I found a collar button in this pie!" "Didn't see nothin' of an umbrella, did ya, boss? Dah was one los' head in's night." *Sinner's Magazine.*

Lead Pipe. Lead may be melted and when cooled to the solidifying point may be squirted. In this manner lead pipe is made.—*Mining World.*

Apologies only account for the evil which they cannot alter.—*Cuyler.*

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Edmund Keen was playing in "Richard III." and the part of Catesby had to be taken by a low comedian, who sauntered on to the stage at the wrong moment and uttered the famous words, "My lord, the Duke of Buckingham is taken," in the wrong place. Edmund clinched his fists in rage, but otherwise took no notice of the remark.

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Later the comedian repeated the words in the right place, and when the king expressed surprise at the news Catesby folded his arms, walked boldly down the stage and remarked to the great actor in loud tones: "I told you so before, Mr. Keen, but you wouldn't believe me."

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