



SYNOPSIS

CHAPTER I—In the small New Jersey village of Carlisle, in the year 1749, Richard Lindsay, who tells the story, is a carefree youth whose chief activities are fishing and hunting. Proud of his marksmanship, he gives an exhibition before some villagers and a stranger, with whom he afterward dines at the tavern. The conversation turns on a notorious pirate, whose ship, the Black Panther, is thought to be in the vicinity.

CHAPTER II—Next morning Lindsay, after wild ducks, is sitting in a "blind" when three strangers land on a beach near him. Surprised, he makes no sound. The men bury a chest while he watches. The work finished, he sees two of the strangers kill the third. The actual slayer is the man with whom Lindsay had talked the day before. Lindsay's presence is discovered. After apparently determining to kill the youth to prevent his talking, the question of his shooting ability seems to be of importance, and he gives the two men proof of his skill. His acquaintance, whose name he learns is Barclay, tells Lindsay the third man is Captain Barclay, and his ship, off shore, is the Black Panther. The three go aboard.

CHAPTER III—On the ship Lindsay meets a youth whom he resembles in a remarkable manner. The youth is Robert McAllister, whom Barclay has captured on his way to his uncle's plantation in Jamaica. The pirate tells a story of wrong done to him by Andrew McAllister and admits he has sworn to kill him. He would use young McAllister as a spy in his uncle's household. The youth refuses to be a party to the treachery, and Barclay and Barclay kill him.

CHAPTER IV—Realizing his helplessness and under threat of a lingering death, Lindsay agrees to assume young McAllister's name and take his place in Andrew's household.

CHAPTER V—The Black Panther comes upon a plundered ship, with all on board murdered. Barclay tells his followers the deed is the work of a pirate ship, the Shark, owned by McAllister, and the Black Panther starts in pursuit. The Shark is overtaken and destroyed, with all her crew.

CHAPTER VI—Barclay sets Lindsay ashore on Jamaica Island, after telling him to seek out Shively, manager of McAllister's plantation, introduce himself as Robert, find out all he can about his "uncle's" house, and its defenses, and report to Barclay in two weeks. On his way to the town, Lindsay is a witness to the kidnapping and tying up of a colored man, whom he frees. The man tells him he is Quashy, well known jockey, and the kidnapping was to keep him from riding in a match race the next day. Quashy sends Lindsay to his employer, Colonel Singleton, to explain the matter. He does so, and next day Singleton's horse, with Quashy up, wins the race.

CHAPTER VII—Lindsay has made the acquaintance of a young man, George Lewis, whom he admires. While watching a card game in which Lewis is engaged, Lindsay detects a player cheating. He denounces the cheater, and a duel follows. Lindsay wounds his opponent, but grants him his life on his admitting the truth of Lindsay's accusation.

impact of the whip.

Many a time, since then, I have seen thoroughbreds striving for the crowns of the turf, in America, England and in far-off Australia. Many a splendid racer have I seen thundering down the home stretch to victory; but never in my life can I recall a more tremendous and terrific burst of speed than I saw that morning on the track at the Port of the Devil. If he had run fast before, now he fairly flew. In one bound, as it seemed, he drew head to head with the mare; in another, for the first time that day, he drew clear. We saw that thin ophidian head stretched, shooting backward and forward, and then, all in a moment, amid a babel of shrieks, shouts, prayers, curses, the race was over, and though by a scant quarter length only Satan had won!

Utterly exhausted, too spent for words, George and I silently clasped hands. I do not think we even so much as remembered our winnings; it was the race and the race only that had held us spellbound. And then much like two figures in a dream, we made our way down to the track. Fly away, brave little thoroughbred that she was, stood with legs apart head down, flanks heaving. Staunch little mare, she had given her utmost. Satan, quiet for once, still rolled those wicked eyes with what seemed to be an expression of sardonic humor. "Gave you a scare?" they seemed to say as plainly as words. He, too, breathed heavily, and his black sides dripped with foam. Two stable boys were throwing water on Quashy, who lay on the track in a dead faint, his rigid upper lip, drawn clear of the clenched teeth, showing the agony he had undergone. Colonel Singleton leaned against the rail, mopping the perspiration from his brow, and looking like a man on the verge of collapse. And at sight of him I suddenly experienced a great reaction, realizing that I, too, felt old and spent and drawn and half-dead for the need of rest. I turned to Lewis, and in a voice which seemed to me to come from an immense distance I managed to falter, "George, I think we need some sleep."

He stared at me as if making a great effort to understand. He looked as I imagined that I did; his face was gray; blue circles lay deep under his blinking eyes. "Bob," he answered slowly, as if picking his words, "you are a man of sense." And linking arms for mutual support, we turned

our erring footsteps in the direction of the Palace of Delight.

CHAPTER VII

Under the Moon.

When I next opened my eyes I was in semi-darkness, and for a moment stared about me in that curious, half dazed condition which follows a heavy slumber. Then, with a start, consciousness returned, and the events of the day before came crowding to my mind. Looking at my watch, I discovered it was evening, and rising hastily, I found that my head ached savagely, while the floor of the room heaved under me like the decks of the Black Panther in a heavy sea. Presently, after sluicing my face with water, I felt better, and managed to make my way to George's room.

I found George in the act of rising, and inclined to make merry over my pallor and my generally woebegone appearance. He himself was in the best of spirits, and at supper blithely ordered his usual bottle, while I, with a shudder, raised a protesting hand and found water a cooling and delicious draft.

Gradually the palace assumed its familiar aspect. In twos and threes the regular patrons arrived; the roulette wheel began to spin; the gentlemen drank and gambled, while the ladies continued their search for conquests. Already, however, I had been gun to weary of these things, and when supper was over and George suggested more roulette, I was content to be a looker-on. Fortune, we discovered, is a fickle jade, and had now deserted us; for George lost steadily and at length, in disgust, accepted the proposal of the officers for a game of cards. At this, I confess, I was not overpleased, for further acquaintance with these gentlemen had aroused in me a strong dislike. A Captain Johnson, with pink cheeks and straw colored hair, was my pet aversion, and Lieutenant Renfrew, with bulldog features and a swaggering air, filled me with equal loathing. It was therefore not without suspicion that I saw then depart; and after watching the fortunes of the wheel for perhaps half an hour, I took my leave and strode across the room to where the card game was in progress. By this time the hall was crowded; the players were intent upon their sport; and thus, as it chanced, I had an excellent opportunity to watch them unnoticed. Clearly a crisis was impending; gold was heaped in the center of the table, and each man's eyes were riveted on his cards. And then, so quickly that I should never have perceived it had I not been watching them closely, I saw Johnson, who sat opposite George, deftly slip a card from his sleeve, and, without pausing, add another heap of gold to the pile. For an instant I stood thunder-struck, and in that moment the players laid their cards upon the table, and Johnson, with a triumphant smile, encircled his winnings with his arms and calmly swept them toward him.

My blood boiled. I have made, God knows, my share of mistakes in this world; have done many things for which, afterward, I have been sorry and ashamed, but I think that I have at least, always tried to play the game of life fair and square. And to see this pink-cheeked dandy deliberately swindling my friend was too much. In three strides I had reached the table, and leaning forward, I shook my fist full in Johnson's face and ejaculated, "You cheat, sir!"

For one thing, at least, I will give him credit; there was no hesitation in his reply. His glass of wine stood a his elbow and the next second I gasped and spluttered while it trickled, most uncomfortably, down my neck. A once I lost all control of myself, unused to the customs of society in such cases, in another moment I should have leaped at him bodily, trusting to weapons but to mere grip of hand on throat to wipe out the insult at determine who was the better man. I think, too, he read my purpose in my eyes, for he started up and had half drawn his sword when fortunately for me George gripped my arm. "Steady!" he cried. "Don't brawl!" And seeing that he had succeeded in calming me, he led me a little to one side. "Did he really cheat?" he asked. "Cheat?" I echoed angrily. "Of course he did. Slipped a card from his sleeve, the scoundrel. Let me at him, George."

But his answer brought me to a realization of how these things were properly done. "Nonsense," he rejoined. "You'll challenge him, of course, and I suppose you'll want me for your second. You go to your room, and I'll manage the affair."

There was such an air of finality in his words that I obeyed at once. But on the way thither, and while I sat waiting for him, I had ample time for reflection. I knew next to nothing of dueling, but one thing I did know: That the challenged party had the choice of weapons. That he would choose rifles there was of course no hope; if I could have been assured on that point, I would have counted him already as good as dead. No, he would choose swords or pistols; if pistols, my chance was at least even; if swords, I felt sure that I was the one already dead, for I knew nothing of the fencer's art. I was far from happy in my mind.

Surprisingly soon, however, I heard the sound of footsteps outside, the door opened, and George appeared. "Well?" I queried eagerly, "what do we fight with? Swords?"

Infinitely to my relief, he shook his head. "No," he answered as he seated himself. "It's not to be swords. Renfrew makes an unusual proposal. It seems that there is a long, narrow sand spit a little way off the shore. He suggests that we place one of you at one end of this island, the other at the other, giving each of you a pistol with one load only, and a knife. At the word you are free to do what you please; shoot, advance, hold your ground, anything. It's a bit unusual, I confess; I've never heard of a duel of just that sort. But I suppose it's fair enough. Don't you?"

I was so relieved that I need not fight with swords that I would have agreed to anything. "Certainly it's fair," I answered. "When do we fight? Tomorrow morning?"

George stared at me. "Oh, I forgot," he cried. "They want to fight now. It's clear moonlight, you know. What do you say?"

Once more, I felt that I could not complain of the sporting spirit of these officers. They might do many things which they should not do; might be dishonest where cards were concerned, but at least it seemed to me that they were brave enough as far as fighting went. Yet if I had known at the time that Johnson had fought a duel on this self-same spot only a month previous had killed his man, and had thus become familiar with his surroundings, I am sure that I should have given them less credit than I did. Nor was this my only error; I was foolish enough to underrate my adversary and with the cocksureness of youth leaped to the conclusion that he was probably no great shot, while if I came to grips and knives, I felt certain that I could best him there. So that altogether it was with alacrity that I jumped to my feet, crying: "All right! I'm ready!"

George nodded approval. "That's the way to feel," he answered. "Come on, then; let's get it over." And leaving the palace, we walked down to the wharf, to find the officers there before us, already seated in their boat. With a gesture, Renfrew indicated another for ourselves, and thus, since George very properly would not allow me to row for fear of unsteady my hand, I seated myself in the stern and we set forth for the island in our opponents' wake.

I shall not pretend that I enjoyed the trip. I was reflecting, with some remorse, on the excellent advice given me by Capt. Francis Barclay. He had told me not to drink or gamble, and to avoid quarrels; and I now realized how completely I had managed to disobey him. But presently I banished these thoughts from my mind. This was no time to let my wits go wool-gathering; my present business was to get the better of this supercilious Englishman.

By this time our adversaries had reached the island, and after we had drawn alongside of them, it took but a few moments for George and Renfrew to agree upon the details of the fight. Then, stripping to shirt and trousers, we each took our knife and pistol, the latter carefully loaded by our seconds, and tossed a moldere for choice of position. I won, named the easterly end, to bring the moonlight into my opponent's eyes, and an instant later we had landed and were walking away, back to back, while our seconds shoved off and stood ready to give the word of command.

As I passed leisurely along the edge of the islet, I began to reflect on how this curious duel might best be fought. To draw his fire, if possible, seemed the surest way; but I had scarcely realized, until now, what a gamble the encounter was, and I began to feel profound respect for the inventor of the plan. If we had been acquaintances of long standing, each knowing the other's merits as a marksman, that would be one thing; but as it was neither of us had the slightest clue to the ability of the other. Then, too, there was the moonlight, bound to affect the straightest aim. And thus the more I pondered, the more elusive the problem appeared. How far could I advance in safety? I could not tell, but I resolved, more strongly than ever, to try to draw his fire, running the risk that his bullet might find a mortal spot. Nothing short of that, I figured, would stop me; and his pistol once emptied, I should have him at my mercy.

Thus I marched along, the tiny waves rippling into silver at my feet, while away to the north the outlines of the land loomed softly through the haze. And now I had reached the end of the sand spit, and wheeling about, saw the figure of my antagonist at the opposite extremity, while our two seconds had paddled off a short distance from the island, and lay resting upon their oars. There was no need of further delay, and indeed, now that we were fairly at it, I was anxious to have the affair begin. Thus I halted with relief the sight of Renfrew standing erect in his boat, and then the sound of his voice crying,

"Ready? Go!"

Though with no definite plan of campaign, I started forward, and even in the uncertain light could see that my opponent was also advancing, and at a much brisker pace. All at once, and without warning, my antagonist flung up his arm and I saw the moonlight glint on the barrel of his weapon. Instinctively I dodged sharply to the left, screening my face as I did so, but to my mortification no report followed. Clearly he had been testing me—trying to throw me into sudden panic and thus lead me to discharge my pistol with hasty and ill-considered aim.

Warily now, like two wrestlers nearing each other, we slackened our pace so that we scarcely progressed at all. So near, indeed, had we come, and such a tempting mark did Johnson present, that I said to myself: "Three steps more and I fire." One I took—two—and then, like a flash, he threw himself flat on the ground, I saw his arm extended, and the next instant the night seemed filled with noise and flame; something dealt me a terrific blow, and when I came to myself it was to find that I lay prostrate on the sand, without any clear idea of how I came there, or indeed, of exactly where I was. By God's grace, however, my brain cleared, and all at once realizing what had happened, and seeing Johnson racing toward me at full speed, I started to raise my pistol, only to discover, to my horror, that it was no longer in my hand. In one nightmare moment I glanced to right, to left, in front, behind, without a sight of my weapon; then, perceiving a straggling bush to my left, I felt that it must be there, and groping desperately, the next instant, to my inexpressible relief, my fingers closed upon its butt. Yet only just in time; Johnson was almost on me; and shouting aloud in my excitement, I covered his breast with certain aim, and pressed the trigger. Never in my life have I felt so sure of triumph, but either the fall or the clogging sand had done its work, for instead of the dash and roar that I expected, there followed the feeble click of a misfire.

The next moment my opponent was on me; if I had tried to draw my knife from my belt I knew that I should never have succeeded, that he would have buried his weapon in my heart while I was still making the vain attempt. But fortunately for me pure instinct, derived, I suppose, from far-off ancestors in the jungle, came to my aid. Whether my act was within the laws of refined dueling I do not know, nor, indeed, do I greatly care, for my opponent's conduct had been more irregular by far; I drew back my arm, conscious, as I did so, of a

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