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BLUE RIBBON FICTION IS FOUND EVERY WEEK IN
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THE KING'S SON

A Short Story of
Love and Thrills in
Liberia and Va.
State College.



Pandemonium Broke Loose. Warriors Armed with Spears Surrounded the dwelling place of the royal family, shouting savagely and hurling their weapons as they came.

Her Parents Wanted Her to Marry an African King, but the Lad who Wooed Her at the State College Had Other Ideas About their Future.

By H. E. RICHTERSON

Twilight—of a day late in June. Graduation exercises at the State University had just been completed, and gathering dusk found the campus fast becoming a deserted village as the rear-guard of students, freed from the dreary routine of class-room life, packed up their belongings and started homeward.

Along the walk which cuts the campus into two parts, a couple strolled arm in arm in the deep, rich shadows cast by gnarled old campus trees. The girl, you could see, was young and beautiful—small and delicately modeled, with eyes large and dark, mouth small and vivid-red against the clear olive of her skin; the boy, tall and dark, with features which seemed to suggest, however faintly, a trace of nobility in their lines.

In silence, they traversed the shadowed lane, continuing onward into the spacious and grassy park which abuts the campus. Half around the beautiful reservoir they walked, caught in the spell of the moonlight reflected from its placid surface. Beneath the outstretched arms of one of the leafy trees they sat down.

Silence—and then the girl spoke. "Well," she said, "it's all over. We're graduated—after four long years. I can't help wondering—what's next?"

"I've asked you a dozen times to marry me," the boy said. "Are you still going to refuse?"

"There's nothing else to do, Jimmie"—her voice was troubled—"at least until you've got a good job and some money saved. We can't live on love, you know. They're so—well, ambitious for me, now that Dad's got money."

"But Helen..."

"No, Jimmie. It would be awfully foolish."

She turned her head away as if the matter was settled.

"I suppose you'll be going back home now," she said sadly, "to Africa—Liberia—and your people."

The boy was aroused.

"Of course not, honey," he declared emphatically. "I've only been here in America four years, but I've learned a lot. I've learned to love this country—and its democratic spirit."

Back in Africa we were ruled by a huge black king, and how the people hated him! Even when I was there revolutionists were working for the overthrow of his kingdom. The country won't make very much progress until he is overthrown. And he won't be overthrown until the people are educated enough to know their own rights. It was one of those revolutionists, by the way, who sent me here to learn the ways of the western world."

"And now, don't they want you to come back?"

"Of course they do. But I'm not going. I want to stay here—with you."

"Have they spoken to you about returning?"

"Several times. An agent of the revolutionists came up to my room only a few nights ago. He wanted me at once, so that I could begin to teach the people of Liberia what liberty and democracy really mean. But I couldn't see it that way. I couldn't see why I should tie myself down to a hopeless task in a backward country when I could remain here and really enjoy the benefits of my education."

The girl's wan smile was lost in the darkness.

"I think you're right, Jimmie," she said finally. "It would be rather a thankless task."

Hand in hand, they sat for a moment, silently watching the glint of headlights mirrored from across the water.

"And you—what are you planning to do?" asked the boy.

"Mother says we're going on a long trip," the girl said. "I know I should feel thrilled but somehow I don't. Mother's set on it, so we're sailing on the first."

"Where to?"

"It's still a mystery to me. Dad inherited a few hundred thousand last year and he's been feeling like a king ever since. It'll be just the regular round, I suppose—London, Paris, Berlin—you know what I mean. But there's something more than that behind it—something they won't tell. A grand surprise for me, Mother says, but I certainly wish I knew."

"You'll come back?"

"Of course, silly. It won't be for

long. And maybe, when I do get back..."

Her voice trailed off, lost in an ecstasy of dreams.

Through the long hours they talked quietly of what the future held in store. At last it was time to return to the dormitories and say good-night.

...

In the morning, she was gone.

Jimmie, his diploma tucked securely into one corner of his suitcase, moved into a cheap boarding house and went out in search of work.

He found it at last in a law office near the Judicial building. The salary was nothing to brag about, but the experience, he knew, would prove most valuable.

And yet, in the days that followed, his spirit, somehow, never seemed satisfied. He was restless for one thing, and found it increasingly hard to concentrate on his work. Routine dulled his brain, and at night his thoughts troubled him, tortured him, kept him awake when he most needed rest.

Should he return to Liberia—to his people—and teach them of the wonders of the western world which he had come to love? Or should he remain where he could be free of the despotic might of kings; where he could, perhaps, at last gain Helen's consent to marriage? It was the age-old conflict between love and duty that raged in his breast.

It was Helen's letter that decided him.

It came to him by special delivery, early one morning before he had left for work. Obviously, it had been written in haste, and the stationery was that of one of the liners which ply regularly between New York—and the west coast of Africa!

Sitting on his bed, he read the letter through once, then went back and started it all over again:

DARLING JIMMIE: At last I've found out what Mother and Dad meant when they planned this trip. The boat we are on is bound for South Africa, and from there we are going to push up through the jungles into Liberia! There is an African prince aboard, a huge, powerful black man whom I abhor. Mother thinks he's wonderful. And, Jimmie, she wants me to marry him! That was her whole scheme, and Dad's, too. She wants royalty in the family—you know how mothers are—and this man is the son of the king of your country.

I told mother I hated the sight of him. Of all the revolutionists, he

of him, but she seems to be determined to make me marry him at all costs. She is holding me now, locked in my cabin, and I'm allowed to see no one but him and the steward, to whom I'm slipping this note. They're kidnapping me. Jimmie! Can't you do something?

HELEN.

The boy crumpled the note in his hands and sat for a moment looking moodily at the walls of his room. Then, with sudden decision, he arose, went downstairs, and made a telephone call.

"I'm ready to go back to Liberia," he told the person whom he had called. A quick conversation, and ten minutes later he had packed and started for the union station, where he took a train for New York.

It was another week before he could obtain passage on a boat sailing for Africa, but with the help of his friends who had financed his schooling, the revolutionists, he at last obtained the necessary tickets and credentials. His heart was thumping wildly as the great ship pulled out of New York harbor and into the Atlantic, headed for that ancient country which he had once called home.

One month passed, and then another, before Bango, capital of Liberia, was reached.

The country was warm and beautiful, with its fruitful, grassy, flowery savannahs, its herds of antelopes, its clumps of thorny plants and towering palms. But for all its beauty, the boy had no eye. Onward he traveled toward Lamur, where the revolutionists had their headquarters. With eagerness he reported to their chief.

"I have heard the call of the blood," he said. "I have heard the cry of my people for freedom and democracy. Come, let us dethrone this despot king! Let us make Liberia a country in which the people are king."

The chief, aged and bent with his years, nodded wisely. "We are ready," he said. "We only awaited your arrival." Turning, he gave a signal to one of those who attended him.

No war-drums were sounded; no savage cries reverberated through the dark stillness of the forests. But swiftly, silently, preparations were made for the attack upon the stronghold of the king.

The boy did not await their completion. Instead, he rushed back into Bango, where he knew that Helen and her parents would be quartered as guests of the royal family.

alone was unknown to the guards of the king, and so was admitted, after close questioning, into the group of ancient mud-thatched houses of the court. At first opportunity he hid himself away, unobserved, and awaited darkness.

The hot sun disappeared behind the hills; the moon arose and rode swiftly across the sky, then all was dark. From his hiding-place, the boy had watched the movements of those about him, and had found that Helen slept in one of the large houses on the edge of the clearing. By close observation, he had even been able to ascertain which room was hers.

With the coming of complete darkness, he scrambled out from his hiding-place and, keeping close to the ground, stole across the open space to that house. Swiftly, he clambered up to the roof of his porch and slid along until he reached the window at which he had observed the girl.

Softly, he knocked on the window pane, but there was no response. Again he knocked, but only a thin muffled snoring greeted his ears. A figure below in the open—a guard—moved. Fearing detection, the boy swiftly tried the window. It yielded easily, and as it opened, he stepped through it into the room.

The snoring ceased suddenly. A figure in the room moved restlessly. Jimmie called softly: "Helen."

A figure on the bed turned over. Even in the darkness, the boy realized that it was not the figure of a girl. He crouched in a corner as the huge form arose, struck a match, and held it high. And with suddenness, Jimmie realized, both from the description Helen had given in her letter and from the embroidered monogram on his nightshirt, that this huge figure was that of the prince!

The match flickered and died out. The prince, rage in his eyes, charged upon the crouching form in the corner. Jimmie arose to meet his attack, ducking from the darkened corner and hurling his fists hard and straight at the bigger man's lunging body. The rush was stopped for the moment, but then the prince came in again, bellowing at the top of his voice.

Jimmie was no match for him. He ducked and feinted as best he could in the darkness, but the prince was not deceived. With unceasing aim, those big fists of his slashed the smaller boy, cutting his face and causing his lip to bleed.

In a moment the entire house was

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