

PARROT & CO



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The Place of Honeymoons, etc.

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SYNOPSIS.

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Warrington, an American adventurer, and James, his servant, with a caged parrot, the trio known up and down the Irrawaddy as Parrot & Co., travel along the road to the landing, bound for Rangoon to cash a draft for \$50,000 rupees. Elsa Chetwood, rich American girl tourist, sees Warrington come aboard the boat at the landing, and, amazed at his likeness to her fiance, Arthur Ellison, asks the purser to introduce her. He tells her that Warrington has beaten a syndicate and sold his oil claims for £20,000.

CHAPTER III—Continued.

"Well, he wasn't above having his revenge. He made the syndicate come up there. They wired asking why he couldn't come on to Rangoon. And very frankly he gave his reasons. They came up on one boat and left on another. They weren't very pleasant, but they bought his oil lands. He came aboard last night with a check for twenty thousand pounds and two rupees in his pocket. The two rupees were all he had in this world at the time they wrote him the check. Arabian night; what?"

"I am glad. I like pluck; I like endurance; I like to see the lone man win against odds. Tell me, is he going back to America?"

"Ah, there's the weak part in the chain." The purser looked diffidently at the deck floor. It would have been easy enough to discuss the Warrington of yesterday, but the Warrington of this morning was backed by twenty thousand good English sovereigns; he was a different individual. "He says he doesn't know what his plans will be. Who knows? Perhaps some one ran away with his best girl. I've known lots of them to wind up out here on that account."

"When do we reach Prome?"

"About six," understanding that the Warrington incident was closed. "It isn't worth while going ashore, though. Nothing to see at night."

"I have no inclination to leave the boat until we reach Rangoon."

She met Warrington at luncheon, and she greeted him amiably. To her mind there was something pitiful in the way he had tried to improve his condition. So long as she lived, no matter whom she might marry, she was convinced that never would the thought of this man fade completely from her memory. Neither the amazing likeness nor the romantic background had anything to do with this conviction. It was the man's utter loneliness.

"I have been waiting for Parrot & Co. all the morning," she said.

"I'll show him to you right after luncheon. It wasn't that I had forgotten."

Rajah took the center of the stage; and even the colonel forgot his liver long enough to chuckle when the bird turned somersaults through the steel hoop. Elsa was delighted. She knelt and offered him her slim white finger. Rajah eyed it with his head cocked at one side. He turned insolently and entered his cage. Since he never saw a finger without flying at it in a rage, it was the politest thing he had ever done.

"Isn't he a sassy little beggar?" laughed the owner. "That's the way; his hand, or claw, rather, against all the world. I've had him half a dozen years, and he hates me just as thoroughly now as he did when I picked him up while I was at Jaipur."

"Have you carried him about all this time?" demanded the colonel.

"He was one of the two friends I had, one of the two I trusted," quietly, with a look which rather disconcerted the Anglo-Indian.

"By the actions of him I should say that he was your bitterest enemy."

"He is; yet I call him friend. There's a peculiar thing about friendship," said the kneeling man. "We make a man our friend; we take him on trust, frankly and loyally; we give him the best we have in us; but we never really know. Rajah is frankly my enemy, and that's why I love him and trust him. I should have preferred a dog; but one takes what one can. Besides . . ." Warrington paused, thrust the perch between the bars, and got up.

"Jah, jah, jah! Jah—jah—ja-a-ah!" the bird shrieked.

"Oh, what a funny little bird!" cried Elsa, laughing. "What does he say?"

"I've often wondered. It sound like the bell-gong you hear in the Shwe Dagon pagoda in Rangoon. He picked it up himself."

The colonel returned to his elderly charges and became absorbed in his aged Times. If the girl wanted to pick up the riff-raff to talk to, that was her

affair. Americans were impossible, anyhow.

"How long have you been in the Orient?" Elsa asked.

"Ten years," he answered gravely.

"That is a long time."

"Sometimes it was like eternity."

"I have heard from the purser of your good luck."

"Oh!" He stooped again and locked the door of Rajah's cage. "I dare say a good many people will hear of it."

"It was splendid. I love to read stories like that, but I'd rather hear them told first-hand."

Elsa was not romantic in the sense that she saw heroes where there were only ordinary men; it was the obscure and unknown hero who appealed to her: such a one as this man might be.

"Oh, there was nothing splendid about the thing. I simply hung on." Then a thought struck him. "You are traveling alone?"

"With a companion." A peculiar question, she thought.

"It is not wise," he commented.

"My father was a soldier," she replied.

"It isn't a question of bravery," he explained, a bit of color charging under his skin. "This world is not like your world. Women over here. Oh, I've lost the art of saying things clearly." He pulled at his beard embarrassedly.

"Are you warning me against yourself?"

"Why not? Twenty thousand pounds do not change a man; they merely change the public's opinion of him. For all you know, I may be the greatest rascal unhang'd."

"But you are not."

He recognized that it was, not a query; and a pleasurable thrill ran over him. Had there been the least touch of condescension in her manner he would have gone deep into his shell.

"No; there are worse men in this world than I. But we are getting away from the point, of women traveling alone in the East. Oh, I know you can protect yourself to a certain extent. But everywhere, on boats, in the hotels, on the streets, are men who have discarded all the laws of convention, of the social contract. And they have the keen eye of the kite and the vulture."

To Elsa this interest in her welfare was very diverting. "In other words, they can quickly discover the young woman who goes about unprotected? Don't you think that the trend of the conversation has taken rather a remarkable turn, not as impersonal as it should be?"

"I beg your pardon! Shall I go?"

"No. I want you to tell me some stories." She laughed. "Don't worry about me, Mr. Warrington. I have gone my way alone since I was sixteen. I have traveled all over this wicked world with nobody but the woman who was once my nurse. Now, tell me something of your adventures. Ten years in this land must mean something. I am always hunting for Harun-al-Raschid, or Sindbad, or some one who has done something out of the ordinary."

He inclined against the rail and stared down at the muddy water. "Adventure?" He frowned a little. "I'm afraid mine wouldn't read like adventures. There's no glory in being a stevedore on the docks at Hongkong, a stoker on a tramp steamer between Singapore and the Andaman Islands. What haven't I been in these ten years?" with a shrug. "Can you fancy me a deck-steward on a P. & O. boat, tucking old ladies in their chairs, staggering about with a tray of broths, helping the unsteady to their staterooms, and touching my cap at the end of the voyage for a few shillings in tips?"

"Tell me more."

He looked into her beautiful face, animated by genuine interest, and wondered if all men were willing to obey her.

"It always interests me to hear from the man's own lips how he overcame obstacles."

"Sometimes I didn't overcome them; I ran away. After all, the strike in oil was a fluke."

"I don't think so. But go on," she prompted.

"Well, I have been manager of a coconut plantation in Penang; I've helped lay tracks in Upper India; had a hand in some bridges; sold patent medicines; worked in a ruby mine; been a haberdasher in the Whiteaway Laidlaw shop in Bombay; cut wood in the teak forests; helped exterminate the plague at Chitor and Udaipur; and

never saved a penny. I never had an adventure in all my life."

"Why, your wanderings were adventures," she insisted. "Think of the things you could tell!"

"And never will," a smile breaking over his face.

How like Arthur's that smile was! thought the girl. Romantic persons never have any adventures. It is to the prosaic these things fall. Because of their nearness you lose their values."

"There is some difference between romance and adventure. Romance is what you look forward to; adventure is something you look back upon. But I always supposed adventure was the finding of treasures, on land and on sea; of filibustering; of fighting with sabers and pistols, and all that rigmarole. I can't quite lift my imagination up to the height of calling my six months' shovel-engineering on the Galle an adventure. It was brutal hard work; and many times I wanted to jump over. The Lascars often got out of trouble that way."

"It all depends upon how we look at things." She touched the parrot cage with her foot, and Rajah hissed. "What would you say if I told you that I was unconventional enough to ask the purser to introduce you?"

The amazement in his face was answer enough.

"Don't you suppose," she went on, "the picture you presented, standing on that ledge, the red light of the torch on your face, the bird cage in your hand—don't you suppose you roused my sense of the romantic to the highest pitch? Parrot & Co!"

She was laughing at him. It could not be otherwise. It made him at once sad and angry. "Romances! I hate the word. I again affirm that young women should not travel alone. They think every bit of tinsel is gold, every bit of colored glass, ruby. Romance, adventure! Bah! So much twaddle has been written about the East that cads and scoundrels are mistaken for Galahads and D'Artagnans. Few men remain in this country who can with honor leave it. Who knows what manner of man I am?"

He picked up the parrot cage and strode away.

"Jah, jah!" began the bird.

Not all the diplomacy which worldly-wise men have at their disposal could have drawn this girl's interest more surely than the abrupt, rude manner of his departure.

CHAPTER IV.

Two Days of Paradise.

At first Elsa did not know whether she was annoyed or amused. The man's action was absurd, or would have been in any other man. His advice to her to go home was downright impudence; and yet the sight of the parrot cage dangling at his side made it impossible for her to take fastidious offense. Once upon a time there had been a little boy who played in her garden. When he was cross he would take his playthings and go home. The boy might easily have been this man Warrington, grown up.

Of course he would come and apologize to her for his rudeness. Perhaps he had resented her curiosity; perhaps her questions had been pressed too hard; and perhaps he had suddenly doubted her genuine interest. At any rate it was a novel experience. And that bewildering likeness!

She returned to her chair and opened the book again. And as she read her wonder grew. The diction was exquisite; there was style; but now as she read there was lacking the one thing that stood for life—blood. It did not pulsate in the veins of these people. Until now she had not recognized this fact, and she was half-way through the book. What had happened to her since yesterday? To what cause might be assigned this opposite angle of vision, so clearly defined?

The book fell upon her knees and dreamily she watched the perspective open and divercate. The low banks with their golden haze of dust, the cloudless sky, the sad and lonely white pagodas, charmed her; and the languor of the East crept stealthily into her northern blood. She was not conscious of the subtle change; she only knew that the world of yesterday was unlike that of today.

Warrington, after depositing Rajah in the stateroom, sought the bench on the stern deck. He filled his cutty with purser-loaned tobacco and roundly damned himself as a blockhead. He had forgotten all the niceties of civilization; he no longer knew how to behave. The first young woman in all these years who had treated him as an equal, and he had straightway proceeded to lecture her upon the evils of traveling alone in the Orient!

And yet he had told her the truth. It was not right that a young and attractive woman should wander about in the East, unattended save by a middle-aged companion. It would provoke the devil in men who were not wholly bad. Women had the fallible idea that they could read human nature, and never found out their mistake until after they were married.

He knew her kind. If she wanted to enter his presence. They begged so earnestly that the astonished king forbade the intended murder.

ning she would do so. If a man followed her she would ignore the fact. If he caught up with her and spoke she would continue on as if she had not heard. If a man touched her she would rely upon the fire of her eyes. She would never call out for help. Some women were just that silly.

He bit hard upon the stem of his pipe. What was all this to him? Why should he bother his head about a woman he had known but a few hours? Ah, why lie to himself? He knew what Elsa, usually quick and receptive, did not know, that he was not afraid of her, but terribly afraid of himself! For things ripen quickly in the East, men and women, souls and deeds. And he was something like the pariah dog; spoken kindly to, it attached itself immediately and enduringly.

He struck the cutty against his boot heel. Why not? It would be only for two days. At Rangoon their paths would separate; he would never see her again. He got up. He would go to her at once and apologize. And thus he surrendered to the very devil he had but a moment gone so vigorously disengaged.

He found her asleep in her chair. The devil which had brought him to her side was thrust back. Why, she was nothing more than a beautiful child! A great yearning to brother her came into his heart. He did not disturb her, but waited until five, that grave and sober hour, when kings and clerks stop work for no logical reason whatever—tea. She opened her eyes and saw him watching her. He rose quickly.

"I was very rude a little while ago. Will you accept my apologies?" "On condition that you will never take your playthings and go home."

He laughed engagingly. "You've hit it squarely. It was the act of a petulant child."

"It did not sound exactly like a man who had stoked six months from Singapore to the Andaman Islands. But there is one thing I must understand before this acquaintance continues. You said, 'Who knows what manner of man I am?' Have you ever done anything that would conscientiously forbid you to speak to a young, unmarried woman?"

Take care of herself? He rather believed she could. The bluntness of her question dissipated any doubt that remained.

"No. I haven't been that kind of a man," simply. "I could look into my mother's eyes without any sense of shame, if that is what you mean."

"I agree with you. But there is something we rely upon far more than either eyes or ears, instinct. It is that attribute of the animal which civilization has not yet successfully dulled. Women rely upon that more readily than men."

"And make more mistakes," with a cynicism he could not conceal.

She had no ready counter for this. "Do you go home from Rangoon, now that you have made your fortune?"

"No, I am going to Singapore. I shall make my plans there."

Singapore. Elsa stirred uneasily. It would be like having a ghost by her side. She wanted to tell him what had really drawn her interest. But it seemed to her that the moment to do so had passed.

"Vultures! How I detest them!" She pointed toward a sand bar upon which stood several of these abominable birds and an adjutant, solemn and aloof. "At Lucknow they were red-headed. I do not recollect seeing one of them fly. But I admire the kites; they look much like our eagles."

"And thus again the eye misleads us. There is nothing that lies so rapacious as the kite."

Little by little she drew from him a sketch here, a phase there. She was given glimpses into the life of the East such as no book or guide had ever given; and the boat was circling toward the landing at Prome before they became aware of the time.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

A Cannibal Feast.

Among the early missionaries to the Fiji Islands were James Calvert and his wife. A band of natives had seized 14 women in order that a cannibal feast might be held in honor of some visitors. Mrs. Calvert and another missionary lady were alone at the time. They rushed through the crowd until they were before the king, though no woman was allowed to enter his presence. They begged so earnestly that the astonished king forbade the intended murder.

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