

Gordon Craig SOLDIER OF FORTUNE

By RANDALL PARRISH
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"Then the fellow assumed that name, thinking I might be familiar with it and thus be impressed with the legality of the transaction. As to Neale, I will go to the courthouse in this county and find out about him. You have told me the whole truth about yourself now?"

"Absolutely, yes. Here is my marriage certificate; I have always kept it with me, for I have been afraid of him almost from the first. I gave you the name Bernard unthinkingly, as that was the name he insisted upon living under. Is that all you wish to know?"

"All now, yes. I must have time to think and plan what is best for us to do. I can already see my duty sufficiently clear, but not how to go at it. The fact is, Mrs. Henley—"

"Would it not be better for you to call me Viola?" she interrupted. "Some one might overhear, and we must continue to carry out the deception, I suppose."

"Then, Viola"—and her eyes suddenly flashed into mine—"the conditions I have already discovered here in this house are no less strange and dangerous than the mission which brought us here. Everything looks bad. There was murder committed in this house last night."

"Murder!" Her face went white, her fingers clasp my sleeve. "Who was killed? Coombs? That woman?"

"Neither. A man I never saw before. I heard the shot and found him lying dead on the floor of the rear room. He had been shot in the back of the head through an open window."

"And I told her the whole story."

"Bewildered consternation was clearly manifested in the girl's white face, and yet there was a firmness to the lips that promised anything but surrender. For an instant she seemed to struggle to regain her breath."

"Oh, how terrible! I can scarcely realize that all you have told me can be fact. There were pirates along this coast once—I have read of them—but now, in our age of the world, even to dream of such a state of affairs would be madness. What can it mean? Have you any theory?"

"Absolutely none. I am groping in the dark without a single clue. But in my judgment there are others than Coombs, Sallie and the creole involved about whom we know nothing."

"You mean there is a band, that we have stumbled into a rendezvous of outlaws?"

"I suspicion so. This plantation has been practically abandoned for years. Even when the judge was alive he lived in town and could get no negroes to work out here because they believed the place was haunted. A bayou comes within a hundred yards of the rear of the house, so concealed by trees and weeds as to be almost invisible until you stand on the banks. We are only a little over twenty miles from the gulf. Altogether this would make an ideal hiding place for Mobile or New Orleans thieves."

"What do you mean to do?"

"The question was asked quietly, and I glanced at her, noting the color had returned to her cheeks."

"I? Why, remain and ferret it out, I suppose," and I laughed. "Coombs is going to have a talk with me later. Intends to make sure who I am no doubt, and I may learn something from him during the interview."

"What about me?"

"You had better return to town. A traveling man on the train said there was a good hotel. Probably Coombs has some kind of a rig we can drive down in. I'll ask him after breakfast."

"Is it because you do not wish me with you?"

"I shall feel more free alone," I replied, "for I shall have only myself to guard. I am used to taking care of myself. Besides, this is likely to prove a rather unpleasant situation for a lady."

"And you conclude I can be of no help, no assistance?"

The cracked voice of Sallie came to us up the stairs, the unexpected sound startling both.

"I reckon you all better com' down an' eat."

She stood in the light of the front door watching us, and we descended the flight of steps without exchanging a word. The woman turned and walked in advance into the dining room.

"Where is Coombs?" I asked, looking about curiously.

"He done eat already, but I reckon he'll be found 'gain after awhile. You all just help yourselves."

We endeavored to talk as we sampled the meal, directing our conversation into safe channels, both obsessed with a feeling that whatever we said would be overheard. The woman had vanished into the dark passage leading toward the kitchen. Neither of use ate heartily and as soon as we were pushed back our chairs. It was a relief to get out of the room, but as we stood a moment in the front doorway breathing in the fresh air I noticed a giant form approaching the house through the weeds.

"Coombs is coming already for his interview," I said hastily. "As it may be stormy, perhaps you had better retreat upstairs."

"I will go," she said quickly, "but I shall not leave this house while you remain."

She was gone before I could speak, before I could even grasp the full purport of her decision. I followed the flutter of her skirt up the stairs, half tempted to rush after, yet as instantly comprehended the uselessness of any attempt at influencing her. Even the short space of our acquaintance had served to convince me that she was a woman of resource, of character and determination.

I heard the thud of Coombs' feet upon the steps of the veranda. That he had been drinking I realized at a glance, and it was equally evident that he planned to overawe me by brutal domineering.

"So yer've got through eatin', hey?" he began coarsely. "What's the female? Thought I saw her here."

"You did," I returned coldly, "but Mrs. Henley has returned to her room."

"Mrs. Henley, huh! Think yer kin pull that bluff over me?"

"What bluff?"

"Aw, this Henley racket you sprung last night—bout yer being young Phil Henley come back."

"Did I say that?"

"Yer shure did," eying me in some surprise. "I reckon my ears heard all right. Why, what are yer this morning?"

"If I ever made any such claim as that, Coombs, it was merely to assure our admittance. It's different this morning, and I am going to be just as frank with you as you are with me. Is that square?"

"I reckon," uneasily, not yet able to gauge my purpose and feeling his bluff a failure. "I ain't got nothin' ter lie about so fur as I know. Let's go inside, whar we kin have it out quiet like."

I followed him into the front room, and he kicked out a chair so as to bring my face to the windows. As I sank into it I noticed a dusty mirror opposite which gave me a dim reflection of the entire room. Coombs shut the door leading to the back of the house and sat down facing me, his big hands on his knees. His effort to look pleasant only made him appear uglier than usual.

"Waal, go on!" he said gruffly.

I crossed my legs comfortably and leaned back in the chair, quite conscious of thus adding to his irritation. My best card was cool indifference.

"There is not much to say," I replied deliberately. "I'll answer your questions so far as I think best, and then I'll ask a few of you. The lady upstairs is Viola Henley, the wife of Philip Henley. She has come down here to take legal possession of this property. That is the situation in a nutshell. I am merely accompanying her to make sure that she gets a square deal."

His jaw sagged, and his eyes wandered.

"Oh!" he managed to articulate.

"What is your real game?"

"Exactly as I have stated it, Coombs. To the best of my knowledge Philip Henley is dead—at least he has disappeared—and his widow is the rightful heir to this estate."

"Waal, I reckon he ain't dead—not by a jugful!"

I felt the hot blood pump in my veins. Did the man know this to be true, or was he merely making the claim for effect?

"That, of course, remains to be proved," I returned smilingly.

"Oh, does it, now! So does this yer wife business, to my thinkin'. Waal, it won't take long ter settle the matter, believe me. Who are you anyhow?"

"My name is Craig—Gordon Craig."

"A lawyer?"

"Not guilty."

"A detective?"

"Same plea."

I thought he gave a grunt of relief.

"All right, then. I reckon I got yer number, Craig. Yer after a little easy money. Somehow, yer caught on to the mixup down yere an' framed up a scheme to cop the coin. Might have worked, too, if I hadn't been on the job an' posted. Nice lookin' girl yer picked up!"

"Drop that, Coombs!" I interrupted sharply, leaning forward and staring him in the eyes.

"Oh, too nice, hey?"

"Yes, too nice for you to befool even with your tongue. If you mention her name again except in terms of respect there is going to be trouble."

He laughed, opening and closing his big hands.

"I mean it," I went on soberly. "Don't think I am afraid of you. No, you keep your hands where they are! If it comes to a draw you'll find me quick enough to block your game. Now, listen!"

I made no display of a weapon. He could not be sure that I was armed, yet my right hand was hidden in the side pocket of my coat. The brute and the coward struggled for mastery in his face.

"I've told you the truth about who we are and our purpose in coming here," I went on slowly and clearly, "because I have decided to fight in the open. Now, I want to know who you are—what authority you have on the Henley plantation. Speak up!"

The reply came reluctantly, but there must have been a sternness in my face which compelled an answer.

"I told yer—I'm the overseer."

"A fine specimen, from the looks of the place. What were you ordered to grow—weeds?"

"The'n none o' your business."

"It's the business of the lady upstairs, Coombs, and I am representing her at present. It will be just as well for you to be civil. Who appointed you to this position—the administrators?"

"I reckon not."

"Ever hear of a man named Neale—P. B. Neale?"

"No."

"Or Justus C. Vail?"

He shook his head.

"No one sent you any word, then, that we were coming or gave you any orders to look after us?"

The blank expression of his face was sufficient answer. I waited a moment, thinking, endeavoring to determine my next move. This knowledge made one thing clear—we were playing a lone hand. As well planned as was the scheme of those two conspirators, they had reckoned without sufficient knowledge of the existing conditions here. But was this true? Would villains as shrewd as they be guilty of such neglect? Besides, they had assured me that the overseer would be notified of our coming. Suddenly there flashed back to my memory a picture of that murdered man in the rear room. Could he be the connecting link, the overseer sent by Neale? Only the barest measure would compel Coombs to acknowledge the truth. I drew in my breath, every nerve braced for action. Then I jerked the pistol from my pocket and held it, glimmering ominously in the light, across my knee.

"You probably have some reason for lying to me," I said coldly, "and now I am going to give you an equally good reason for telling the truth. What do you know about the administrators of this estate? There is one named Neale, isn't there?"

"I—I reckon so."

"How do you know?"

"Waal," feeling it useless to struggle against the argument presented by the blue steel barrel, "all I know is a fellow com' long yere awhile back with a paper signed Neale, thinkin' ter take my job."

"What happened to him?"

"Oh, he just nat'ally got kicked out inter the road, an' I reckon he's a running yet. He was a miserable Yankee runt, an' I didn't hurt the cuss none to speak of. What yer askin' all this fer anyhow," he questioned anxiously, "an a-drawin' that gun on me?"

"It seemed to be the only available method for extracting information. Pardon my insistence, Coombs, but wasn't that dead man up there the fellow Neale sent?"

"Not by a jugful," and I could see the perspiration break out on his forehead. "Why, there wasn't none anyhow. That guy skipped out north ag'in."

"Under whose orders are you in charge here?"

He was so long in answering, his eyes glaring ugly under heavy brows, that I elevated my weapon, half believing he meditated an attack.

CHAPTER VIII.

Circumstantial Evidence.

S UDDENLY I became aware that his glance was not directly upon me, and I lifted my own eyes to the surface of the tarnished mirror behind where he sat. It reflected the large portrait of the late Judge Henley hanging on the opposite wall, and—by the gods—I thought I saw it move, settle back into position! I was upon my feet instantly, swinging aside into a better position for defense. Before Coombs could realize what had occurred I had the gun muzzle at the side of his head.

"Now answer," I commanded sharply. "Whose orders put you here?"

He choked, shrinking back helpless in the chair.

"You won't always have the drop on me."

"Well, I have now. Speak up. Who is the man?"

"Philip Henley," he whispered, so low I scarcely caught the name.

"What?"

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

TWO NERVOUS WOMEN

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SUNDAY SCHOOL.

THE INTERNATIONAL SERIES.

Lesson X.—Fourth Quarter, For Dec. 5, 1915.

Text of the Lesson, II Chron. xxvi, 8-21—Memory Verse, 16—Golden Text, Prov. xxix, 23—Commentary Prepared by Rev. D. M. Stearns.

Our studies thus far have made us acquainted with many people, good and bad, some better than others and some worse than others, but none without failure, and no rest for our souls but in the God of Israel, who often appeared as a man and in the fullness of time became man for us, God manifest in the flesh. Our study today concerns a king whose reign was the longest of any, being fifty-two years, but he became proud and self-willed and died a leper. The study of these lives is helpful only as, by analogy or contrast, we learn to know the Living God, the God of Israel, for the whole Bible is intended to make us acquainted with God that we may love and trust and serve Him and make Him known. Let us give a few minutes to Amaziah, the son of Joash, and the father of Uzziah, whose record is in chapter xxv. He died right in the sight of the Lord in a measure and for a time (verse 2), but his record on the whole is bad. He turned away from following the Lord, bowed down to idols and burned incense to them, and when the Lord sent a prophet to reproach him he compelled him to forbear (verses 14-16, 27).

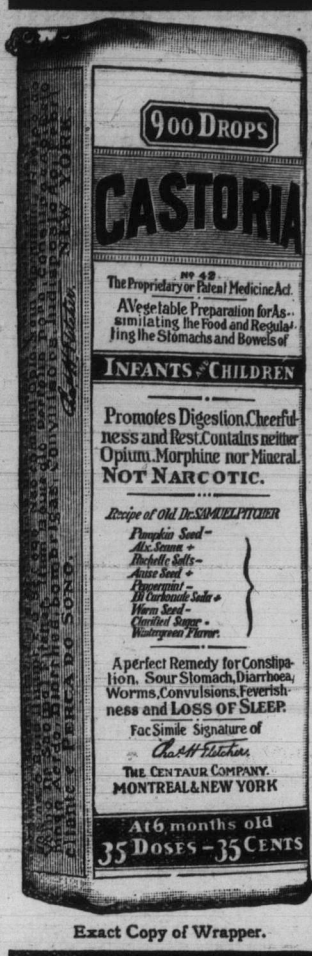
There was one incident in his life the record of which contains a saying which has often helped me and which I have often passed on to others. He hired 100,000 mighty men of valor out of Israel to help him in battle, and he paid them 100 talents of silver. A man of God was sent to him to say that he would not use these men, for the Lord was not with them and that God had power to help and to cast down. In reply to his question, "But what shall we do for the 100 talents paid to Israel?" he was told, "The Lord is able to give thee much more than this" (verses 6-9). We need to remember that God Himself hath power to help, and if we make an unwise investment or lose anything we may find comfort in the fact that the Lord is able to give us much more.

As to Uzziah, although his reign is the longest of any, his record is one of the shortest, for there seems to be but little to record. In some lives much is accomplished in a few years, while in others a long life is comparatively fruitless because God is not in it. It is said that he died right in the sight of the Lord, and as long as he sought the Lord, God made him to prosper (xxvi, 4, 5). God helped him against the Philistines and Aramians; he built towers in Jerusalem and in the desert, dug many wells (for he had much cattle) and loved husbandry. His name spread far abroad, and he was marvelously helped till he was strong (verses 7-15). His works seem to be more for his own name than the name of the Lord and nothing enduring, and all the time he seemed to be growing more self-important, growing away from the Lord, seeing himself and those who praised him.

What a contrast to Saul of Tarsus, who from the day that he saw the Lord Jesus on the way to Damascus could see no one else unless he might draw them to Him, for whose excellency he counted all things but doves and in whom alone he gloried. The whole story of the daily life is either self or Christ. The true life is denying self and magnifying the Lord. What an utter failure man is apart from God, for when this man became strong his heart was lifted up against God, and he transgressed against the Lord his God and even dared to burn incense in the holy place in the temple of the Lord, a thing which only the priests were authorized to do. When the priests ordered him out he became angry, and then the Lord smote him in his forehead with leprosy, and he himself hastened to go out. He dwelt in a separate house and died a leper (verses 16-21). In Gehazi the sin was covetousness and lying, but in this man it was pride, self-conceit, self-will. All consummation of sin, as in these and similar cases, points us onward to the man of sin, the greatest representative of the devil that ever was or will be, who will oppose and exalt himself above all that is called God or that is worshipped. . . . showing himself that he is God (II Thess. ii, 3-12; Dan. xi, 36; Rev. xiii). But he shall be overcome and cast into the lake of fire at the coming of the Lord (Rev. xx).

Many who have died lepers have gone home to heaven because redeemed with the precious blood of Christ, and we may meet Gehazi and Uzziah there, too, for the suggestion in their sins need not imply the loss of the soul, but, rather, the loss of service, as in I Cor. iii, 9-11. It is our privilege to walk with God all the way, to serve Him without turning aside and to receive a full reward at the coming of our Lord (II John vii; I John ii, 28). Isaiah seems to have begun his prophecy in the days of Uzziah, and he has much to say about loftiness being humbled, haughtiness bowed down and the Lord alone exalted.

When I think of Uzziah I feel led to pray that I may never be strong except in the Lord and always remember that His strength is made perfect in weakness. I also think of the record of Uzziah's death in Isa. vi, 1, and hear the prophet say what amounts to this, "I saw a king that never dies."



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PRISONERS BADLY TREATED.

Germans at Wittenberg Look on Captured Soldiers as Criminals.

LONDON, Nov. 22.—The British press bureau has published the reports of James W. Gerard, the American Ambassador to Germany, and members of the Embassy Staff in Berlin, relative to the condition of British prisoners of war in the camp at Wittenberg, Prussia.

Littore Osborne reported that his whole impression of the camp authorities was utterly unlike that which he had received in every other camp he visited. Instead of regarding their charges as honorable prisoners of war, he stated, they apparently regarded them as criminals whom a regime of fear alone sufficed to keep in obedience.

The following extracts are taken from Ambassador Gerard's report: "I regret to state that after a careful examination of the camp and long conversations with the prisoners my impression is even more unfavorable than I had been led to expect."

"There are over four thousand prisoners in the camp, of whom 278 are British. Among these I found only sixteen overcoats. The men, on the whole, are insufficiently clothed."

"The men told me that one of the British medical officers in the camp recently was struck by a German non-commissioned officer, and this proved to be true."

"Many prisoners complain that dogs were brought in by German soldiers at night, and that in certain cases prisoners had had their clothes torn by these dogs."

"They said that last year they had implored the German authorities to put the British soldiers in barracks by themselves, as this was the only way to prevent an outbreak of the epidemic, which had been brought to the camp by Russians. This request was refused on the ground that the British should learn to know their allies better. Largely because of this 50 British military prisoners and nine civilians died of the disease."

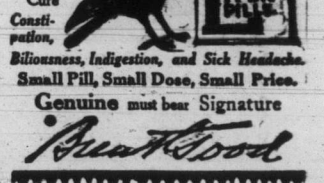
Enormous Rainfall in Hawaii.

The rainfall on the island of Hawaii varies greatly, ranging from the enormous downpour of 353 inches a year in the upper Waipio valley to twenty inches on some of the slopes of Halealua. The only surface streams on the island are found along the northeast coast between Hilo and Kohala. Waipio river, according to the United States geological survey, is the largest stream on the island and has been partly developed for irrigation. At Kapoho, on the east point of the island, warm water flows from seams in the rocks. These warm springs flow into a pool about 100 feet long, 25 feet wide and 20 feet deep. The pool is entirely surrounded by rocks, and its color varies in shade from a beautiful blue to violet. Waialeale, or Green lake, is a body of fresh water in the pit of an old crater near Kapoho. This lake covers an area of about five acres and is fed by springs below the surface. A pumping plant takes water from this lake for domestic use and for irrigation.

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