



The GAGE of BATTLE

THE DAY OF THE DUEL
(A True Story)



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He sat upon the headland, watching the long blue ranks of waves shoulder in from the Antarctic Sea to spray in thunder beneath him. The steady breath of the wind, pure and chill as the cheeks of the ice ranges whence it came, kept the streaming smoke of the whaler which was boiling down blubber in the little cove well to leeward. Though safe from the odorous folds of that ragged black banner he glanced uneasily from time to time toward the spot where the vessel lay concealed, as if constantly and unpleasantly reminded of its presence.

His shifting gaze gave him an appearance of alert attention, but he did not notice a figure that was slowly ascending the headland at his back. He started when the figure hailed him from the lower terrace of the rock.

"Aho! there!" the newcomer called cheerily. "How'd you get up? Regular old bird roost, so far's I can see."

The man on the rock turned and looked down at the stranger who thus intruded upon his privacy. He saw a young fellow in rough seaman's garb, powerfully built, his face burned with exposure and his hat perched rakishly at one side of a tangled thatch of light hair. A bizarre note was added to his attire by a full, bright green silk handkerchief which he wore knotted loosely about his throat.

The man on the rock, without answering the query in words, pointed a precarious way near where the other stood. The newcomer gauged it quickly, nodded, and after a stiff pull dragged himself up to the flat summit. "A rare lookout, mate," he announced, sweeping the view with appreciative eye. "Sort of private observatory, eh?" he added, inspecting his silent companion with frank curiosity. The appearance of the man on the rock justified the scrutiny. Tall, thin and dark, he was dressed in a nondescript collection of tattered garments. In place of boots he wore woven grass sandals, and his trousers had been cut off at the knee, apparently to check progressive fraying. The abbreviation gave him a comic air of immaturity that his sullen, bearded face belied.

"How did you know I was here?" he returned, with a quick flash of suspicion. His speech was oddly precise.

"Why, if you come to that, the Maori boys down at the village said there was a white man in these parts and told me where I'd likely find him. You see, whaling for eight months kind of makes a chap sour on the crew he's with, and when we do make port, why, even a graven image is good company."

"You don't talk like a sailor," said the other, without noticing the allusion to his own distant welcome.

"Nor you like a cannibal tribesman," snapped the stranger, "and still that's the part you're cast in. However, I am a sailor, though I haven't always been a whaler. There's no mystery about me. I'm George Dibble, one time midshipman, U. S. N. now harpooner on the steamship Caesar. That's all. If you've got any questions to ask, don't. And he tilted his hat at the opposite angle and glared defiantly.

Each Was In Error.

The direct, outspoken manner of Dibble seemed to lift some shadow from the sombre face of the man on the rock. "I'd be the last one in the world to ask questions," he said, with a jerky little laugh. "I was afraid that was what you were after. Every stranger I've seen in these parts for four years has taken me for an escaped convict and had visions of a reward."

"I don't blame them," said Dibble, bluntly. "The only difference between me and the others is that I don't care a continental damn whether you're a convict or not."

"Well, I'm not," said the man on the rock.

"All right," grinned Dibble, "that lifts no burden from me. My only emotion is relief at finding you're a tongue in your head. But you'll admit that white men don't usually camp out on the southern coast of New Zealand from choice. And four years! Good Lord!"

"It's not any queerer than your being on a whaler," answered the other with a show of spirit.

Dibble frowned, then grinned again. "You touched me there, my son. We'll start even again. What do they call you around here? Man with Pants, or White Chief, or what?"

"If you want my name it's Edward Lundy. I'm a Canadian," said the man on the rock quietly.

Dibble laughed, displaying strong, sharp teeth. "For generosity in purely gratuitous information we run a close race," he said. "If I felt as you evidently do I'd take to the hills. What makes you linger?"

"Why—I suppose—" said Lundy, hesitatingly, with his jerky little laugh. "I guess I rather like some one."

"Want to talk," nodded Dibble. "Yes, I can understand that, all right enough. I feel the same way myself. Well, here we are, both satisfied. I'm on liberty to-night to see the birds and paint the town red. Can't you take me around and show me the sights?"

"Of course," said Lundy, who had thawed under the advances of his new acquaintance. "There's not much here. But have you ever eaten a Maori meal or seen a poi dance?"

"Not I," said Dibble. "I've got too much respect for your friends to break in on their society without being properly introduced. I suppose it'll be all right with you to vouch for me, though, eh?"

"Oh, they're all right," laughed Lundy. "They're very friendly along here. The wild tribes are up in the mountains and back to the north. Would you like to come up to my place and take dinner with me?"

"Going to have much company?" asked Dibble, with a keen glance.

"There'll only be my wife."

"Ah," said Dibble. He paused a moment, then



His Native Wife.

Lundy was waiting on the shore of the cove at the appointed time. He led Dibble through the little settlement, where the flashing of fires through fragrant smoke betokened the preparation of the evening meal. He continued to a hut higher up the hill, in a sheltered nook, and entered. Dibble followed boldly. The dwelling was built with some pretension to comfort and boasted a rough stone fireplace. In front of this a woman was crouching.

"My wife, Too-ora," said Lundy briefly. The woman at the hearth stood up. Dibble had been conscious of an intense curiosity to see the partner in the joys and sorrows of his strange acquaintance. But he lost it now in admiration. Straight and slender as a young tree, Too-ora turned proud, lustrous eyes upon the visitor. Her skin was a soft, warm brown, almost a copper, and Dibble thought instantly of the handsome women among the American Indians.

The straight, black hair, braided in two heavy strands, bore out the resemblance, but Too-ora was more beautiful than any Sioux or Chippewa girl he had ever seen. Her skirt of twisted grass strips served to accentuate the smooth, subtle curves of her limbs. About her shoulders she had thrown a thick, crimson fabric, that lay gracefully to her figure and left one purely moulded arm free. Dibble's blood tingled in him as he gazed upon her, and it was with a distinct effort that he recovered the ease to return her murmured greeting with "Madam, I am honored in making your acquaintance."

Nor did the stiff drawing room phrase seem odd when once spoken. He could have framed no other address to such a magnificent and queenly hostess. The remark he made to himself was, "This accounts for part of the four years."

She withdrew immediately and Dibble followed her with his eyes to the last second. He turned to find Lundy watching him.

After the meal of fish and herbs Lundy led his guest to the carved council hall in the middle of the settlement and they saw the poi dance, in which the young native women participated. Dibble was the more content because Too-ora was present, and he had full opportunity to observe her. None of the others handled the twirling pois—little bags of rushes held by strings in each hand—with grace or dexterity approaching her own. Her lithe, supple body flashed in the red glare of the torches as she moved and swung to the rhythm of the chant. While yielding to the spirit of the dance with a sinuous grace that made his veins sing, she was restrained and indulged in no wild, impetuous gestures, as did her sisters. He noticed, too, that her face bore none of the disfiguring tattoo marks which marked all except the youngest girls.

On the way back to the hut Dibble noticed that Lundy had retired again to his barrier of suspicious reserve, and he divined the cause. It was not strange that a man who had a gem like Too-ora should be uneasy when any other approached her. But Dibble was not the one to play at hidden intrigue.

"Fine woman, your wife," said Dibble, avowing his admiration frankly. "I hope you don't think me a beast for staring at her that way. You've got to allow something for a man who hasn't seen land for nearly a year."

When they had settled with a bottle of Hollands by the fire Lundy warmed once more, and their session

lasted far into the night. Softened by the liquor and the unwonted excitement of company the host became confidential. He came at length to the story of Too-ora, telling it with mingled diffidence and pride.

"You've noticed that she's different," he said. "She came from one of the wild tribes far back to the north. I went there under safe conduct from the chiefs, bartering muskets and cloth for carved work and native weapons. She was the daughter of Ti Whoyao, the ruler of a small but warlike nation, and when I came back she came with me. We were pursued for miles by her father and by her promised husband, Kariton, but escaped through the friendship of tribes nearer the coast which were then at war with Ti Whoyao."

"I have since received messages from her father saying that if I would consent to have her lips and forehead tattooed with the marks that indicate a married woman he would consider me his friend and son. As it is he does not regard her as my legitimate wife. I refused."

The Lure of the Woman.

"Naturally," cried Dibble, who had also mellowed under the Hollands. "What? Place the hideous blemish of black and blue rings and scrolls upon that precious pearl?"

"You find her beautiful, then?" asked Lundy, "with a shift of his dark eyes."

"Beyond compare the most beautiful woman of a savage race I have ever seen."

Lundy seemed to dwell upon the words a moment, then he rose, a little unsteadily. "I have some business with the chief of the village," he said. "If your shore leave has not expired I should be glad to have you wait here for me."

"Thanks," laughed Dibble, reaching for the bottle. "I have all night. We leave early in the morning. I'll try to get along with this for company."

Lundy left the hut, and Dibble sat at the table with the bottle at his elbow. The fire, replenished by Lundy as he stepped out, lighted the place with a flickering, fantastic radiance. Dibble, his imagination inflamed by the events of the day, stared about the room. The ruddy gleam of the fire brought up the poi dance once more before his vision. How swift and sure and strong had been the play of that rounded form! How softly that wondrous skin had flashed under the torches! How the direct glance of those great, proud eyes had thrilled him!

There was a faint, rasping rustle of grass plait, and he looked up to find her there.

He scrambled to his feet and bowed, offering her the other chair. "I am charmed, madam," he said. It was plain she knew no word of English, but she took the chair, smiling and nodding prettily. She

laugh. He wondered insistently what Lundy would have done if he had stolen that kiss.

"You'll stay with me to-night, Dibble."

"Here?"

"Yes. We may as well have a time of it until your ship sails."

"All right," said Dibble, carelessly. "If you're willing I'll take the chances."

It was past midnight when the men stretched themselves on the mats by the fire to sleep. As he trod the first dim steps toward slumber Dibble was aware of gentle, regular breathing from the rear room of the hut.

The Revelation.

Lundy awoke with a start. The sun was shining in at the door of the hut. He looked around for Dibble, but the place was empty. He stepped to the door and looked toward the cove. The whaler was gone.

"Too-ora," he called. There was no answer from the inner room and he entered. She was not there. An object on her sleeping mat caught his gaze. He stooped and picked it up. It was a bright green silk handkerchief.

The faro dealer was manipulating his cards with thin, nimble fingers. His bright, sharp eyes kept constant watch, but his face was so colorless and impassive as if moulded in wax. About the board, under the yellow light of the smoky lamps, crowded the bent figures of the players, attentive and silent. It was San Francisco in the gold times. Men gambled feverishly with mother earth for her treasures and gambled with each other for what each had won. The crowd melted and grew and changed without commotion as losers left and new players came. Always the man with the cards dealt, swiftly, deftly, with fixed face in which only the eyes lived.

It was late, in the crowded hour, when the thing happened. Suddenly the unerring fingers faltered, stopped. The intent players looked up in surprise to see that the dealer was staring at a man who had joined the group and had just thrown a coin on the table. What they saw next was that the dealer's right hand fell into the convenient drawer, where a revolver lay. There was a quick rush, a scramble, and the space was cleared save for these two.

The newcomer was a broad shouldered, powerful man, with sun burned face and a thatch of light hair, prosperously dressed. He smiled at the dealer tolerantly. It was evident that he did not understand. The dealer rose slowly and took two steps toward him, leaning over the table. Then, brutally, without warning, he struck the smiling face a blow that sent the newcomer spinning backward.

The newcomer gasped, recovered himself with a wrench and shot a hand toward a rear pocket. But he was caught and dragged back by a dozen hands. The crowd, relieved of the threat of immediate gun play, had swung upon both the men. The faro dealer, who had not taken the weapon from the drawer, made no resistance, but he kept his burning eyes upon the other.

The look of bewilderment, wrath and amazement upon the features of the man thus suddenly attacked struggled with dawning recognition. "Why—damn you—it's Lundy," he spluttered.

"Yes, it's Lundy, and you are Dibble," breathed the faro dealer. The crowd watched this exchange with appreciative interest.

"Well, what in hell is the matter with you?" stammered Dibble.

"I've been waiting five years for this," answered Lundy. With a reassuring glance to the captor on his right he loosed his right arm, took something from a pocket and tossed it across to Dibble in a loose, fluffy ball. Some one picked it up and revealed it as a green silk handkerchief of bright hue. Dibble accepted it mechanically and stuffed it away.

"Gentlemen," drawled a lanky, mustachioed man in miner's garb who strode between them, "perhaps you'll pardon my intruding, but there seems to be some slight difference pending. If you'll take my advice you'll settle it somewhere else and in the usual way. The vigilantes have a nasty habit of making these promiscuous shooting scrapes mighty unhealthy." The suggestion was neatly seconded by the polite appropriation of available weapons from both belligerents, to which they submitted with good grace.

"A friend of mine will wait on you to-morrow, Lundy," said Dibble, who had recovered from his surprise. "At the Exchange Hotel," answered Lundy, formally, and the other left the room.

They met, with their seconds, near the race course early in the morning two days later, September 20, 1881. The terms, acceptable to both parties, precluded the possibility of anything but a fatal ending. They were to fight with pistols, at four paces.

Placed thus, almost within striking distance, they waited for the signal, neither showing a trace of fear or uncertainty.

"Are you ready?" came the warning of the second.

"Yes," they answered.

"Fire! One!"

Both levelled and fired at the same instant. Dibble wheeled, stood erect for a second, and fell on his face. It was found that the bullet had passed through his lungs and that death would be a matter of minutes. He asked faintly that he might speak with Lundy. The latter, who was unharmed, approached reluctantly. "I suppose—you thought—Too-ora—" began Dibble. Lundy nodded, with set face.

"Was she gone?" asked Dibble. Again Lundy nodded.

"You were wrong, old chap," said Dibble, with a ghost of his old smile. "You'll have to go back and look up Kariton, her old flame. I've always suspected it was he. I woke up that night to find a ton of naked devils on my chest. They bound and gagged me, poured a drug down my throat and took me aboard. The captain thought I was drunk and put to sea. Here, I won't need this any more. You might keep it—as a souvenir."

With a last effort he partly dragged from a pocket the green silk handkerchief.

"The Day of Conflict," Next Week.

