

THE ST. JOHN EVENING TIMES, FRIDAY, OCTOBER 14, 1904.

Hemming, The Adventurer

BY THEODORE ROBERTS

(Continued.)

"What do you think of them?" he asked, waving his hand toward the troops.

"They look to me as if they were drilled with brass," answered the Englishman, "and their formation is all wrong."

"Ah," said Tetsou, sadly crestfallen.

Presently he touched Hemming's knee.

"If you will take them in hand, — where roses grow thickest, and broad-fruit-trees made a canopy of green shade. A fountain glistened softly beside the stone bench whereon she sat, and near by stood a little brown crane watching the water with eyes like yellow jewels.

"The girl has changed from her riding habit into a white gown, such as she wore almost every day. But now she seemed to him more beautiful than he had dreamed a woman could be. Yesterday he had thought, in his indolent way, that he loved her. Now he knew it, and his heart seemed to leap and pause in a mad sort of fear. The away from him. He stood there between the roses like a fool, — he who had come down to look at his lips, — something will happen now," she said, and smiled up at him. Hicks wondered what she meant.

"It is too hot to have anything happen," he replied.

"That is the matter with us, — it is too hot, always too hot, and we are too tired," she said, "but Mr. Hemming, I call it a pretty good army for all its lack of style."

"I call it half a battalion of duffers," said Hemming to himself.

Later, the new commander-in-chief and the private secretary sat together in the former's quarters.

"I do not quite understand this Parnamba idea," said Hemming. "Is it business or is it just an unusual way of spending money?"

"I don't know what the old man is driving at myself," replied Hicks, "but of one thing I am sure: there's more money put into it than there is in it. The army is a pretty expensive toy, for instance. Just what it is for I do not know. The only job it ever tried was collecting rents, and it made a mess of that. We don't poll enough coffee in a year to stand those duffers a month's pay. We get skinned right and left back here and down on the coast. Mr. Tetsou thinks he still possesses a clear business head, but the fact is he cannot understand his own book-keeping. It's no fun running a hundred-square-mile ranch, with a fair-sized town thrown in."

Hemming wrinkled his forehead, and

stared vacantly out of the window. Below him a gray parrot, the property of Miss Tetsou, squawked in an orange tree.

"If I had money, I should certainly live somewhere else. Why the devil he keeps his wife and daughter here, I don't see."

"Just then the secretary caught the faint strumming of a banjo, and left hurriedly, without venturing an explanation. He found Miss Tetsou in her favourite corner of the garden, where roses grew thickest, and broad-fruit-trees made a canopy of green shade. A fountain glistened softly beside the stone bench whereon she sat, and near by stood a little brown crane watching the water with eyes like yellow jewels.

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thought Hemming. Somehow — perhaps only in size — Hicks recalled O'Rourke to his mind; and back to him came the days of their good-comradeship. He wondered where O'Rourke was now, and what he was busy about. He had seen him last in Labrador, where they had spent a month together, salmon fishing, and up to that time O'Rourke had found no trace of Miss Hudson. Hill's information had proved useless. Disgusted at the deception practiced upon him, the poor fellow had ceased to speak of the matter, even with his dearest friend during night-watches by the camp-fire.

CHAPTER IV.

The Thing That Happened.

Hicks came along the boardwalk road at dusk. Lights were glowing above the strong walls and bobbing the straight trunks of the palms. A mist that one might smell lay along the course of the river. Hicks rode heavily and with the air of one utterly oblivious to his surroundings. But at the gateway of the officers' mess he looked up. Captain Santos was in the garden, a vision of white and gold and dazzling smile. He hurried to the gate.

"Ah, my dear Hicks, you are in time for our small cocktails, and then dinner. But for this riding so hard, I can call you nothing but a fool."

"Thanks very much," replied the American, dismounting slowly, "and as to what you call me, old man, I'm not at all particular." The woe-begone expression of his plump face was almost ludicrous.

Santos whistled, and presently an orderly came and took Valentine's horse. The two entered the building arm in arm, and the secretary awaited as he walked.

Five or six of the native officers were already in the mess-room, stalling mild swizzles, and talking quietly. They greeted Hicks affectionately.

"This man," said Santos, "had his horse looking like a shaving-brush, and I know nothing in English so suitable to call him as this," and he swore vigorously in Portuguese.

"Stow that rot," said Hicks, "can't you see I'm fit as a fiddle; and for Heaven's sake move some liquor my way, will you?" His request was speedily complied with, and he helped himself recklessly from the big decanter.

The dinner was long and hot, and Valentine Hicks, forgetting utterly his Harvard manner, dropped his head on the table, between his cleared-glass and coffee-cup, and dreamed of his thoughts.

beastly dreams. The swarthy Brazilians talked and smoked, and sent away the decanters to be refilled. The stifling air held the tobacco smoke above the table. The cotton-clad servants moved on noiseless feet.

"These Americans, — dear heaven," spoke a fat major, softly.

"I am fond of Hicks," said Santos, saying his hand on the youth's unconscious shoulder. A slim lieutenant, who had held a commission in a Brazilian regiment stationed in Rio, looked at the captain.

"The Americans are harmless," he said. "They mind their own business, — or better still, they let us mind it for them. The President — bah! And our dear Valentine, if he gets enough to eat, and clothes cut in the English way, and some one to listen to his little stories of how he used to play golf at Harvard, he is content. But this Englishman, — this Senior Hemming, — he is quite different."

"Did not you at one time play golf?" asked Santos, calmly.

"Three times, in Florida," replied the lieutenant, "and with me played a lady, who talked at her ease and broke two clubs in one morning. She was of a fashionable convent named Smith, but this did not deter her from the free expression of her thoughts."

"Sit up, Senior Hicks, that we may bear two fools at the same time," said the colonel.

"Take my word for it, colonel, that Valentine is not a fool," said Santos, lightly. "He is very young."

"Have you nothing to say for me?" asked the slim lieutenant, good-naturedly.

"You know what I think of you all," replied Santos, without heat, the conversation was carried on in Portuguese, and now ran into angry surmises as to the President's reason for placing Hemming in command.

It was close upon midnight when Hicks awoke. He stretched himself in his chair and blinked at Santos, who alone, of the whole mess, remained at table.

"You have had a little nap," said the Brazilian.

Hicks looked at him for awhile in silence. Then he got to his feet, and leaned heavily on the table.

"I'll walk home, old toe-cossey. Tell your nigger to give my gun something to eat, will you?"

"You do not look well, my dear Valentine. You had better stay here until morning," said Santos.

Hicks swore, and then begged the officer's pardon.

"Am I drunk, old chap? Do I look that way?" he asked.

Captain Santos laughed. "You look like a man with a grudge against some one," he answered.

"Perhaps you have a touch of fever, otherwise I know you would have good taste enough to conceal the grudge. A gentleman enters — and smiles."

It was past two o'clock in the morning, and Hemming was lying flat on his back, smoking a cigarette in the dark. He had been writing verses, and letters which he did not intend to mail, until long past midnight. And now he lay wide-eyed on his bed, kept awake by the restless glass and coffee-cup, and dreamed of his thoughts.

His windows were all open, and he could hear a stirring of wind in the crests of the taller trees. His reveries were disturbed by a stumbling of feet in the room beyond, and suddenly Valentine Hicks stood in the doorway. By the faint light Hemming made out the big, drooping shoulders and the attitude of weariness. He sat up quickly, and pushed his feet into slippers.

"That you, Hicks?" he asked.

"Don't talk to me, your damn traitor!" said Hicks.

Hemming frowned, and tossed his cigarette into the night.

"If you will be so good as to turn on the light, I'll get the quinine," he said.

The secretary laughed.

"Quinine!" he cried. "You fool! I believe an Englishman would recommend some blasted medicine to a man in hell."

"You're not there yet," replied Hemming. He was bending over an open drawer of his desk, feeling among papers and bottles for the box of pills. Hicks drew something from his pocket and laid it softly on the table.

"Good morning," he said. "I intended to kick up a row but I've changed my mind. I hand over your pill and I'll go to bed."

When he awoke next day, it was only to a foolish delirium. The doctor looked at him, and then at Hemming.

"I suppose you can give it a name," he said.

Hemming nodded.

"I've had it myself," he replied.

The President, followed by his daughter, came into the room. Hicks recognized the girl.

"Marian," he said, and when she bent over him, "something has happened after all."

"Marian," he said, "something has happened after all."

She looked up at Hemming with a colourless face. Her eyes were brave enough, but the pitiful expression of her mouth touched him with a sudden painful remembrance. During the hours of daylight the doctor and Miss Tetsou watched by the bedside, moving silently and speaking in whispers in the darkened room.

The doctor was an Englishman somewhat beyond middle age, with a past well buried. In the streets and on the trail his manner was short almost to rudeness. He spoke bitterly and lightly of those things which most men love and respect. In the sick-room, he bit in the rich man's villa or in the mud hut of the plantation labourer, he spoke softly, and his hands were gentle as a woman's.

(To be continued.)

Lady Henry Somerset is a great grand-daughter of one of Marie Antoinette's maids of honour.

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