

Thrilling Tales of the **GOLDEN WEST!**

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"GOLD!"

A CUNNING RASCAL CAUGHT OUT! Edgar Oliphant, adventurer and fortune-hunter, had planned to scoop in the fortune of an innocent heiress. But he forgot the old saying that, "There's many a slip 'twixt the cup and the lip!"



The Island Heiress!

HERE'S A STORY OF THRILLING ADVENTURE, BOYS, FEATURING THE WORLD-FAMOUS DETECTIVE, FERRERS LOCKE.

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

Oliphant's Quest!

FERRERS LOCKE, the Baker Street detective, sat in a long, cane chair, under a canvas awning on the deck of the Spanish schooner. He leaned back idly in the chair, lazily watching the rise and fall of the glassy waves. Overhead, the sun streamed down; far to the eastward could be seen the mountain-tops of a range in Spanish Morocco. The Baker Street detective was far from his usual haunts.

Jack Drake was strolling up and down the deck, with a sunburnt face. He glanced occasionally at the sails, that flapped idly. The wind had fallen, and the schooner was scarcely creeping through the Atlantic waters.

A young man leaned on the rail, staring across the sea. His sunburnt face, under his Panama hat, was very handsome. He was biting his lip with impatience as he watched what looked like a cloud above the sea to the south. The Spanish skipper lounged by the helmsman, aft, smoking black cheroots; the half-breed crew loafed or sprawled about the deck. Edgar Oliphant turned from the rail at last, with an exclamation of impatience, and approached Ferrers Locke. He jerked his thumb towards the cloud that showed above the blue sea.

"That is the island of Kolos, Mr. Locke?" he asked.

"Our skipper tells me so," answered Ferrers Locke.

"In sight at last!" said Oliphant. "It is maddening to be crawling like this, with the goal in sight."

"One must be patient."

Oliphant muttered a curse.

"When shall we reach the island?" he asked.

"The breeze is already freshening," said Locke. "We shall be there before sundown."

"I shall be glad to get out of this evil-smelling old tub," said Oliphant, with an angry and disdainful glance round at the dirty decks, the rusty iron-work, and the idle, loafing seamen. "By gad, when we left London, I was not looking forward to roughing it like this!"

Ferrers Locke smiled.

"We are in rather an out-of-the-way corner of the world, Mr. Oliphant," he answered. "We were lucky to get a passage in this trader to the island of Kolos. Ships never touch there. The island does no trade, excepting a little with the mainland in canoes, among the natives. The skipper is going out of his way to take us there."

"He will wait for us to take us off again, I suppose?"

"That is arranged."

Oliphant gave another look round.

"Precious quarters for a lady, and my cousin, too!" he said. "Well, I suppose Gloriana Blackstone has been used to roughing it by this time, after many years among savages on an African island."

"Doubtless."

The Baker Street detective's manner was very dry. Oliphant gave him an impatient and suspicious look.

"You know more about the matter than you choose to tell me," he said.

"All I know of my cousin was that she

was wrecked in this region more than twenty-five years ago, a mere baby, sent home from South Africa with her nurse. You have somehow learned more than that."

"True."

"You have not chosen to tell me," said Oliphant sullenly.

Ferrers Locke was silent for a moment.

He glanced across the glassy sea towards the distant island, which was slowly growing clearer to the view as the schooner crawled through the water.

Then his glance rested upon Edgar Oliphant's handsome, reckless face and hard eyes.

"That is true," he said. "I gave you a warning before we left London, Mr. Oliphant, that if you were seeking your lost cousin with any selfish scheme in view, it would be wiser to abandon the matter."

"I remember." Oliphant shrugged his shoulders. "I am not accustomed to taking much notice of sermons, Mr. Locke."

"No doubt. But you would have been wise to heed my warning," said the Baker Street detective tranquilly.

Oliphant laughed angrily.

"What have you to complain of?" he exclaimed. "If we find Gloriana Blackstone—as you seem to feel assured of doing—we find the heiress to old Mr. Blackstone's million pounds. You need not fear for your fee in that case. I have nothing, but my cousin will be able to pay for your services."

"I was not thinking of that, Mr. Oliphant," said the Baker Street detective, unmoved. "I have little expectation of receiving a fee for this case, or even of being reimbursed for my expenses."

"Then why the thunder did you take it up?"

"For reasons you would scarcely appreciate. I looked upon it as a duty to find this girl, and give her a chance of hearing of her good fortune, and returning to England if she chose to do so. I have been hard at work lately, and intended to take a holiday. So I combined the two objects in this trip," said Ferrers Locke.

"I understand. But why should you imagine, for one moment, that Gloriana may be unwilling to come to England? Surely she will be glad to get back to civilisation!" exclaimed Oliphant.

"That is not so certain."

Oliphant gave an impatient, scoffing laugh.

"When I saw you in Baker Street I was careful not to talk too freely," he said, with a sneer. "I wanted your

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help in finding my cousin. But you have learned since perfectly well what my game is."

"I divined it at the time," said Ferrers Locke.

"Gad! I should not be likely to spend my last hundred pounds on the expenses of this journey to find a girl to whom my uncle left the money I expected to come to me!" said Oliphant savagely. "I have an axe to grind, and you know what it is. You have told me that there is a missionary on the island. Well, I am going to marry Gloriana Blackstone, take her back to England as my wife, and I don't care a rap if she is burnt as black as the ace of spades!"

Locke's lip curled.

"It is only her money you want?" he remarked.

"I admit it. It's her money I want, and if she has become some savage that would disgrace me in a civilised country, so much the worse for her," said Oliphant. "Gad, she ought to be glad to get a white man for a husband, if that is the case!"

"You have no doubt of success in this very peculiar love affair?"

"None at all," said Oliphant coolly. "I am a good-looking fellow. I have been a great deal run after. I am not likely to fail with a girl who has lived all her life among savage blacks. I should imagine that she will jump at the offer."

"It is quite probable."

"I shall allow no interference," said Oliphant, his brow darkening. "I know that you have something up your sleeve, Ferrers Locke; I have seen that for some time. But, by gad, if you try to come between me and my only chance of fortune—" He set his teeth.

"Well, what?" asked the detective, unmoved.

"I carry a revolver!" said Oliphant significantly.

"And you would use it?"

"If necessary, without hesitation, rather than lose this chance. Confound it, man, don't you understand my position? I'm desperate for money! My last hundred is invested in this venture! If I go back to England as Gloriana Blackstone's husband, I go as a millionaire." His face lighted up at the thought. "If I go back as I came, what's the prospect before me? Hanging on to the fellows I used to pal with; playing cards for a livin', till I'm kicked out of my clubs, and dropped by one man after another; comin' down, in the long run, to toutin' on racecourses! I tell you, I will marry Gloriana Blackstone if she is as black as any nigger on the island. As you so tersely put it, it's her money I want, and an unrepresentable wife can be kept out of sight!" said Oliphant cynically.

"It was because I knew that such were your views that I had not told you all I knew," said Ferrers Locke. "Now that Kolos is in sight, I will tell you."

"And what do you know?"

"A friend of mine—Captain Jervis—was cruising in these waters last year. He visited Kolos."

"He saw her?"

"Yes."

"What was she like?"

"A powerful young woman, six feet high—"

"My hat!"

"She is called Ayouda," continued Ferrers Locke, "and she is the Queen of Kolos."

"Phew! Anythin' else?"

"Yes. She leads the tribesmen on slave raids on the mainland, and takes part in the fighting. Subjects who displease her are thrown to the sharks in

the bay—the bay where we are going to drop anchor in a few hours."

"Gad!"

"The island tribesmen are cannibals, and whether their queen is also a cannibal I cannot say. It is probable enough."

Oliphant's face was quite pale now. He pushed back his Panama hat and brushed the perspiration from his forehead.

"She wears a brass ring through her nose," continued Ferrers Locke remorselessly, "and her ear ornaments are a kind of ear-ring, adorned with human skulls—the skulls of enemies slain in battle."

"Gad!"

"That is the lady you propose to marry for her money!" said the Baker Street detective. "If you had been seeking her from disinterested motives, I should, of course, have told you these facts as soon as I learned them. But I considered that you deserved a disappointment by way of punishment."

Oliphant was silent.

His chin was sunk on his hand, and he stared at the sea moodily, sunk in deep and bitter reflection.

He raised his eyes at last, to the cold and scornful gaze of the Baker Street detective.

"You're sure your friend hasn't exaggerated in his description of the Island Queen?" he asked.

"Quite sure."

"And you are sure that this woman—this Amazon—is really Gloriana Blackstone?"

"It is practically certain. The proofs exist on the island. Ayouda has them in her mud palace. Jervis learned that much from the missionary, Mr. Tunstall. She knows her English name, and has whatever was brought ashore with her. Do you still think of marrying Gloriana Blackstone and taking her back to England with you, Mr. Oliphant?"

Oliphant drew a deep breath.

"Yes," he said desperately. "I do! Savage or not, cannibal or not, only she can save me from ruin. Let her be a perfect fiend, she shall still serve my purpose."

Locke shrugged his shoulders.

"You are a baser man than I supposed," he said.

"Take care, Mr. Locke!" said Oliphant savagely. "I'm not in a mood to be insulted!"

"It would be very difficult to insult you, I think," said Locke contemptuously. "You intend no care or kindness towards this young woman. You would drag her away to a country where she will be unhappy—where, indeed, she may have to be placed under restraint—in order to lay your hand on her money, intending to waste it in selfish extravagance. I read your thoughts, Mr. Oliphant. You are already thinking of restraint—perhaps of trickery and a private asylum—of any selfish and cowardly scheme to rid yourself of an incumbrance after the money is in your hands."

"Whatever I am thinkin' of, no one shall stop me!"

"That remains to be seen," said Ferrers Locke. "Having taken up this case, I shall see it to an end. I shall find Gloriana Blackstone. If she is capable of protecting herself—as Jervis' description leads me to suppose—I shall not intervene."

"And if not?" sneered Oliphant.

"If she is in need of protection, I shall protect her," said Ferrers Locke. "In that case, you will not be allowed to make any advances towards the young lady."

"Who will stop me?" hissed Oliphant.

"I will."

Oliphant's hand slipped into his revolver pocket.

"Chuck that!" said a quiet voice, and he looked up, to catch Drake's eyes upon him. There was a revolver in Jack Drake's hand, glimmering in the tropic sunshine.

Oliphant spat out a curse.

"Bah! We need not quarrel!" he said, between his teeth. "We have not seen the girl yet. But take my word for it, Ferrers Locke, that if you try to come between me and my fortune, you will leave your bones to bleach on Kolos Island!"

"We shall see!" said Ferrers Locke tranquilly.

Oliphant, with a scowling brow, tramped away. He took up his position by the rail again, staring towards the island, now rising more clearly from the sea. In that lonely, savage island was centred all the desperate adventurer's hopes; and still he did not doubt of success. But his anticipations were gloomy enough now.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

On the Island!

THE light breeze had freshened a little, and the Spanish schooner drew nearer and nearer to the isle in the vast Atlantic. Jack Drake watched it, with keen curiosity, though he was far from sharing the tense anxiety of Edgar Oliphant. The isle was rock-bound. Rugged cliffs rose gradually into view, with hill-slopes clothed in thick wood and jungle at the back of them. The sunshine glinted on a stream that ran down to a little bay, with banks of shelving sand.

The African mainland was a dim line on the horizon; the mountains of Morocco loomed faintly in the blue haze. It was easy enough to see that the lone isle was seldom or never visited. Around it the water curled and gleamed over half-sunken reefs and shoals, and the navigation was dangerous. Captain Pedro Lopez, the skipper of the trading schooner, had taken the wheel himself now, with an unlighted cheroot sticking out of the corner of his mouth, and his sleepy, black eyes wide awake for once. Even the lazy, dirty crew of half-breeds looked alert for the first time.

Ships that passed north and south gave that rocky, savage coast a wide berth, as a rule. Looked at from the ocean, the isle appeared like a rocky cape jutting out of the mainland. Certainly it was not marked as an island on any chart.

Captain Lopez had, as he had told Ferrers Locke, touched at the isle of Kolos several times. He had done trade there, but without going ashore—he grinned as he said so, and made a significant gesture with his brown thumb to his throat. He did not care to trust his precious neck on the island. He had taken off tropical produce in the season, and sometimes slaves—Locke guessed the latter item, though Lopez did not tell him. He had seen the Island Queen—from the deck of his schooner—more than once, and his description of her was even more affrighting than Jervis' had been. Edgar Oliphant knew no Spanish, and the skipper knew no English, so the fortune-hunter had learned nothing from Lopez during the run down the coast. It was in Spanish that Locke had talked to the skipper.

By reef and shoal, the schooner ran into the bay. Drake watched the sandy beach, and spotted a single building a score of yards back from the water's



THE END OF THE QUEST! The Island Queen made an imperious gesture, and the travellers were brought before her. The missionary explained why they had come. Ayouda turned a friendly glance upon Ferrers Locke. "You are welcome," she said, in English. "You come as a friend, to offer me large sums of gold in your own country, if I travel there. Yes?" (See Chapter 3.)

margin. It was a wattled hut, and he guessed that it was the home of the missionary, Mr. Tunstall. What good Mr. Tunstall was doing on the island was a mystery; but doubtless the good man had hopes of instructing the islanders in better ways, with time and patience. From the description Locke had received of Kolos and its queen, the missionary's efforts had not met with much success so far. Mr. Tunstall's house, or hut, was the only building in sight. The native village was farther inland—doubtless placed out of reach of sudden raids from hostile savages in canoes from the mainland.

As the schooner dropped anchor, half a mile from the beach, Jack Drake turned a pair of binoculars on the shore, and saw a man come out of the hut—a brown-faced, white-bearded man, in ragged white drill clothes and a wide-brimmed hat of plaited straw. The man stood staring towards the vessel, shading his eyes with his hand.

"Lend me your glasses," muttered Oliphant.

Drake handed them to him.

"That's the missionary, I suppose," the young man remarked, as he fixed the binoculars on the distant figure.

"Looks like it," assented Drake. "He's a white man, anyhow."

"What a life—on such a place!" said Oliphant, with a shudder. "He must be a madman to live there!" He handed the glasses back to Drake. "He will be able to give me some news, at all events. Why don't they lower a boat?" Oliphant crossed over to Ferrers Locke. "Tell them to lower a boat, Locke."

Locke smiled.

"Captain Lopez has brought us here, and here his contract ends," he answered. "He has agreed to wait twenty-four hours for us. But not a man of his crew would go ashore for love or money."

Oliphant stared.

"How are we landing, then?"

"Canoes come out to any ship that puts in here," explained Locke.

"We are to wait for that?"

"Yes."

Oliphant gnawed his lip.

"Why are they afraid to go ashore?" he asked.

"They are afraid of the cooking-pot."

"Then you mean that we are risking our lives in setting foot on this island?"

"Undoubtedly."

"A pretty prospect! You are trying to frighten me off, Ferrers Locke. The missionary lives there—"

"He is under the protection of the Island Queen," said Ferrers Locke. "No other white man has been allowed to live there. A Spanish officer who came to survey the place was eaten."

Oliphant shuddered.

"Why don't they send a few gunboats and blow the filthy crew into perdition?" he muttered. "Anyhow, I'm chancing it. You're going ashore?"

"I am here to find Gloriana Blackstone," said Ferrers Locke tranquilly. "Certainly I am going ashore. I think we may do so in safety; but there is undoubtedly a risk." He turned away from Oliphant. "Drake!"

"Yes, Mr. Locke."

"You will stay on the schooner until I return."

Jack Drake looked rebellious at once.

"That's not fair play, Mr. Locke," he said. "I want to see the Island Queen, too. If there's going to be trouble, you will want me."

"I cannot take you into danger, Drake."

"There will be more danger in leaving me on the schooner."

"How so?"

"Because I shall swim ashore, and there are sharks in the bay," said Drake, with a grin.

Locke smiled.

"Well, I give you your choice, my boy; you shall come if you are really keen on it."

"Then I'm coming!" said Drake promptly.

"Here comes the canoe," said Locke, looking across the bay. "It is the missionary, I think."

A canoe, with the white man paddling, came shooting across the glassy blue waters towards the schooner. Edgar Oliphant went below to his cabin to prepare for going ashore. When he came back on deck, Drake glanced at him, with a smile. Oliphant had been giving a good deal of attention to his personal appearance. He was extremely well-dressed in white drills, with a yachting cap, and certainly looked a very handsome and well-set-up fellow. Drake could not help thinking that it was very probable that Oliphant would attract admiring eyes from the savage Island Queen. Probably she had seen no white man but the old missionary and a few rough, bearded traders. The handsome, elegant young man was likely to meet her admiring gaze like a dazzling vision.

Ferrers Locke observed Drake's smile. Oliphant gave him a look of defiance.

"I am going in that canoe!" he said. "Certainly," assented Locke. "I have no objection to make."

The canoe came alongside the schooner, and Ferrers Locke called down to the white-bearded man.

"Are you Mr. Tunstall?"

"That is my name." The old man stared up at the cool, clear-cut face looking down over the rail. "What is your business here?"

"A visit to Queen Ayouda."

"To trade?"

"No; I bring news for the Island Queen," said Ferrers Locke. "Will you give three of us a passage ashore?"

"Certainly!" said the missionary. "But you would be well advised not to set foot on the island. The blacks are treacherous, and the queen is sometimes very uncertain. She may receive you with hospitality, or—" He hesitated. "Or she may not."

"We will risk it."

"That is as you please. If you will honour my poor house I can give you a shelter for the night."

"Many thanks!"

Ferrers Locke and Jack Drake entered the canoe, and Oliphant followed them. The missionary resumed his paddle and the canoe glided shoreward. On the schooner the Spanish captain smoked his cheroot and stared after his passengers, and shrugged his shoulders. Probably he was rather doubtful of seeing them return alive.

Little was said in the canoe till the shore was reached. As the white men landed three or four savage-looking negroes appeared along the bank of the stream, staring at them, and jabbering at one another in their own tongue. The missionary called to them in the native language, and they held off at a distance; but certainly their looks were far from friendly. All three of the voyagers were glad enough to step into the shelter of the missionary's hut.

A little later they could hear the babel of barbarous tongues outside. Through the mosquito-netted window Jack Drake observed black face after black face, with savage eyes staring in curiosity. And he could not help feeling that the position was very like being on the summit of a volcano that might break out into activity at any moment.

THE THIRD CHAPTER. The White Queen!

TUNSTALL, the missionary, set a simple repast before his unexpected visitors, displaying all the hospitality his limited resources allowed. He was evidently glad to see men of his own race, and to talk once more in his own tongue. He talked freely of the island and its inhabitants, and the hopelessness of his own work there, though he declared that he had sometimes restrained the savages from deeds of horror, such as the torturing of prisoners of war. Oliphant's face grew longer and longer as he listened to the talk of the missionary. He realised that Ferrers Locke had not exaggerated in his description of the Island Queen and her savage subjects. But there was still no hesitation in his breast. He had come to Kolos to mend his broken fortune, and once the Island Queen was taken to a white man's country the unscrupulous adventurer did not doubt that he would be able to deal with her.

Ferrers Locke informed the missionary of his business on the island, and Tunstall smiled as he heard it.

"Ayouda is not likely to go with you to England," he said. "She belongs to the island, body and soul. I doubt very much whether she will even understand what it means to be a millionaire."

"She speaks English?" asked Oliphant abruptly.

"Yes; she remembered a little when I came to the island, ten years ago. I have taught her more. But she speaks the native language better."

"She is still unmarried?"

"Certainly!"

"She is my cousin," said Oliphant. "I have the right to take her back to England to claim her inheritance."

"I hope you may be successful. But I doubt it."

"When can we see her?"

"Already the news of your arrival must have been taken to her. She may send for you at any moment," said the missionary. "I shall conduct you to the palace, and I think I can answer for your safety. But it is useless to deny that it is very dangerous to go,

and you will be well advised to return to your vessel before her messenger comes for you."

"I would see her if her palace were at the bottom of the pit of Tophet!" growled Oliphant.

The hanging mat at the door was pushed aside, and a wizened, brown-skinned man, half Moor, half negro, entered. He stared at the strangers and spoke to the missionary in a barbarous tongue.

"It is the queen's messenger," said Tunstall. "Ayouda has sent him to conduct you to her to explain your business here."

"We are ready," said Ferrers Locke.

It was late in the afternoon now, and the heat of the day had almost passed. The three voyagers left the hut with the missionary, and, with the messenger stalking ahead, they followed a rough path by the bank of the stream. Drake kept his hand on the revolver in his pocket. But he was aware that if hostility broke out fighting would not be of much use. As they proceeded up the path blacks emerged from the jungle and followed them in an ever-increasing crowd. There was no offer to molest them, but the crowd of savages barred all retreat, if the travellers had wished to turn back. By the time the squalid collection of mud and wattle huts was reached, which was Queen Ayouda's town, there were four or five hundred savages babbling and gesticulating round the party. Drake observed that the natives treated Mr. Tunstall with great respect, doubtless on account of the queen's friendship for the old man. It was apparent that the Island Queen's authority was very well established in Kolos.

Oliphant looked round him with something like horror as the party entered the village. The hovels of the natives were dark and ill-smelling; garbage littered the narrow lanes between the crowded huts; here and there dogs worried ancient bones, and the young man observed, with a shudder, that some of them were human bones. His boot kicked something that rolled and glimmered, and he felt an inward sickness as he saw that it was a skull. What kind of a woman was it who reigned over such subjects, in such a place?

The "palace" was a mud hut, rather larger than the rest. In a courtyard, shaded by several tall trees, the queen gave audience to her guests. Oliphant looked at her, and drew a hard, deep breath.

Queen Ayouda—otherwise Gloriana Blackstone—was well over six feet in height. Her face, once white, was burnt a dark brown by tropical suns. Her bare arms were more powerful and muscular than an ordinary prize-fighter's. She was dressed in a rather scanty garb of leopard skins. Through her broad, thick nose was passed a large brass ring. Her large, flat ears were adorned by brass rings, which bore bones by way of ornament. Her eyes, large, and black, and fierce, were fixed on the travellers imperiously.

Gloriana Blackstone, if she had been brought up in her own country, would certainly have been a very "hefty" young lady. The developing power of a blazing tropical sun and a wild life in the open air had turned her into something like a giantess.

"Is this the—the queen?" faltered Oliphant.

"That is Ayouda," said the missionary.

"Gad!"

Ferrers Locke turned an ironical glance upon Oliphant.

"Have you changed your mind?" he asked.

"No. I would marry her, if she were ten times as savage, and a cannibal. I shall know how to deal with her in England."

The Island Queen made an imperious gesture, and the travellers were brought before her. In the native tongue the missionary explained why they had come. Ayouda was pleased to turn a friendly glance upon the Baker Street detective. She answered Tunstall in the island tongue, but spoke in English to Ferrers Locke.

"You are welcome," she said, speaking the language with some difficulty. "You come as a friend, to offer me large sums of gold in your own country if I travel there. Yes?"

"If your name is Gloriana Blackstone," said Locke.

Ayouda nodded. "That is the name," she said. "I remember it. It is written on papers which I have in my keeping. I am white." The Island Queen made this statement proudly. "I am white—I am English! Long ago I was on a ship. My father was a great warrior among the white men. I am a great warrior, like my father. I have killed many enemies, and my palace is decked with their skulls. You are my friends. But I shall not come to your country. It is cold. You do not put in your houses the skulls of your enemies."

"No," said Locke.

"I do not want gold," continued the queen. "What I need I take from my enemies, and their lives also. I shall not go with you. But I thank you to have come to tell me. You have come a long journey. Yes? That was good! You shall stay with my friend the old man as long as you like, and I shall order my slave to see that you are safe. You need not fear the cooking-pot."

The Island Queen was speaking to Ferrers Locke, but her glance passed him and fixed on Edgar Oliphant.

There was undoubted admiration in her look.

Oliphant observed it. He had expected it, and he concealed, as well as he could, the disgust and horror with which the woman inspired him.

Ayouda made a sign for him to come forward. Oliphant advanced, and bent his knee.

"Why do you come to my kingdom?" asked Ayouda.

"I am your cousin."

"You are—what?"

"Your relative—of your family," exclaimed Oliphant. Ayouda's English was limited. "We are of the same blood. Explain to her, Tunstall."

The missionary explained in the native tongue.

The Island Queen's manner became very gracious as she understood. It was evident that she was pleased to meet so handsome a relation.

"You come because we are of the same blood?" she asked.

Oliphant drew a deep breath.

"Yes; I came because of that, and for another reason. I—I have heard of Ayouda, the Island Queen. I come to seek you in marriage."

"My hat!" murmured Drake.

Ayouda smiled.

It had not taken Oliphant long to get down to business; but the Island Queen was obviously not displeased by his abruptness. In fact, it was plain that she was very pleased.

"I have not marry," she said. "I am white. I would not marry with black. When white men come I look among them for husband. But they are all—all—" Words failed her, and she made a gesture of disgust, to indicate her

opinion of the rough sea-traders who came to the island. "You are different. You are handsome as the rising sun. I love you! You shall be my husband, I am queen, and you shall be king."

Oliphant gave Ferrers Locke an ironical look.

"Will you chip in now?" he said, in a whisper. "Do you think my cousin needs your protection, Locke—or would put up with it?"

Locke smiled.

"I stand aside," he said. "I only warn you, Oliphant, not to enter into this, but to escape while you can."

"Keep your advice!"

Oliphant turned to the Island Queen again. Ferrers Locke and Jack Drake retired with the missionary, but Ayouda motioned to Oliphant to sit beside her, and he remained with his new-found cousin. And, under stranger circumstances than he had ever anticipated, the fortune-hunter proceeded to make himself agreeable to the heiress of Blackstone, and with even more success than he had expected.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

Oliphant's Triumph.

"LOCKE!"

The moon was sailing high over the squalid village.

Ferrers Locke was smoking his pipe in the doorway of the hut assigned to him by the hospitality of the Island Queen. Jack Drake was busy killing mosquitoes. Edgar Oliphant came up, with a smile of mocking satisfaction on his handsome face. He seemed to have recovered from the sickening disgust with which the Island Queen and her surroundings had filled him. The success of his scheme for annexing the Blackstone million atoned for all. He laughed lightly as he met the detective's eyes.

"I want you as a witness," he said.

"A witness?" repeated Locke.

"To the marriage."

"You are losing no time, Mr. Oliphant."

Oliphant shrugged his shoulders.

"The sooner I get out of this filthy place the better I shall like it," he answered. "I have talked with Gloriana Blackstone, and have gone through her papers. She has kept everything that came ashore with her, and there is no doubt of her identity. It will be proved easily enough in England."

"I have no doubt of it."

"Savage brute as she is, she inherits the Blackstone million," said Oliphant, "and as her husband I shall take possession of it, Ferrers Locke, and you cannot prevent it."

"I have said that I shall not interfere. The queen of Kolos does not seem to need protection," said the Baker Street detective, with a smile. "I have never seen a woman more capable of taking care of herself."

"Well, I'm glad we haven't come to a row," said Oliphant. "I would have shot you down like a rabbit, Locke, if you had stepped in my way—unless you had got in the first shot. But, as a matter of fact, if you tried to stop the marriage, I think Gloriana would have you thrown to the sharks. That is one of her nice little ways with people who displease her. From what I can gather, she has scores of murders to her credit."

"Yet you think of marrying her?"

"Her money," said Oliphant coolly and cynically. "It's a shock to me to find what she is like. But there's a proverb which says that the smell of all money is sweet. I shall be a millionaire, anyhow!"

Ferrers Locke looked at him curiously.

"How will you deal with such a wife in England?" he asked. "Can you hope to train her out of her savage ways—to teach her—"

"Too late for that."

"Then—"

A hard, ruthless look came over Oliphant's handsome face. At that moment he betrayed all the merciless evil in his nature.

"Once in England we shall see!" he said. "There are ways and means. She will have to be placed under restraint. Practically she is a mad woman. It will not hurt me to be known to have a wife in a private asylum."

"And that is what you intend? She is happy here, in her own savage way, and you would condemn her—to that?"

"I would—can—and will!" said Oliphant coolly. "And if you interfere, Ferrers Locke, you will go to the sharks before sunrise."

The Baker Street detective did not reply.

"She would not even understand if you tried to warn her," grinned Oliphant. "The dear amazon is in love with me already. They do not stand on ceremony in such matters in Africa, you know. If I had not proposed, by gad, I'm pretty certain that she would have done so. Anyhow, the missionary is going to tie the knot this evening, in a perfectly legal manner, and I want you as a witness."

"Very good!"

"Be at the palace in ten minutes, then."

"Rely on me."

Oliphant walked away, humming a merry tune. Jack Drake looked at his chief.

"Mr. Locke, you will not allow that villain to carry out such a villainous scheme?" he exclaimed breathlessly.

Ferrers Locke smiled grimly.

"Mr. Oliphant does not yet quite understand Ayouda!" he said. "She has refused to accompany me to England to claim her inheritance. She is wise—she is happier here. Oliphant has no doubt that, as her husband, he will take control. I doubt it. Ayouda may love him in her savage way, but she is accustomed to giving commands, not to receiving them. I fancy that Mr. Oliphant is digging a pit for his own feet. We shall see. Come along with me, Drake."

In silence Drake walked with Ferrers Locke to the mud palace. Queen Ayouda was ablaze with barbaric jewels when they saw her again, and was surrounded by her guards in great state. Mr. Tunstall, the missionary, was there, with a troubled face, to perform the ceremony. It pleased the island queen to be married according to the white man's rites. Her brown, broad face wore a satisfied smile. Oliphant gave the Baker Street detective a mocking look; evidently he considered that he had beaten Ferrers Locke. Drake looked on in silence.

The ceremony did not take long.

It was performed with strict legality, and, in brief space, Edgar Oliphant was master of the Blackstone million, so far as marriage to the Blackstone heiress could make him so. His eyes gleamed with triumph when the ceremony came to an end.

"My win, Ferrers Locke!" he whispered.

"Your win!" assented the Baker Street detective.

"You will tell Captain Lopez to prepare to take another passenger," said Oliphant. "My wife"—he laid emphasis on the words—"my wife will travel with us!"

"You are sure of that?"

Oliphant started,

"What do you mean? My wife will accompany me, of course!"

"Very good!" said Ferrers Locke tranquilly.

"I shall tell her to prepare for the journey now."

"Good!"

Oliphant, the startled look still on his face, hurried back to his bride. Locke watched him with a curious expression as he spoke to her in low tones. The island queen answered him in a resonant voice.

"No!"

"But——" stammered Oliphant.

Ayouda gave him an affectionate grin. "Here I am queen," she said. "In your cold island I should be nothing. I am queen—you are my husband. You shall reign here with me. You shall go to battle by my side. Together we will watch the skulls of our enemies dry in the fire, to hang upon our walls. Yes?"

Oliphant was white.

"But—but I must return to my own country," he faltered. "You are my wife now—you must come with me!"

"Must!" Queen Ayouda's big eyes blazed. "I am queen! Say no more! You do not leave Kolos!"

"By gad! I—I must—I shall! Do you think I will consent to remain here?" stuttered Oliphant, in bewilderment and rage. "I tell you, you are my wife, and you must go where I go—if not, I shall go without you!"

"I do not go—and you do not go!" said Ayouda. "You are my husband. You stay!"

"Never! I——"

"For Heaven's sake do not anger her!" whispered the missionary. "A word more, and you go to the cooking-pot."

Oliphant shuddered and was silent. He realised at last to what his greed and ruthless cunning had led him. He stood in stunned silence, and the look on the island Queen's face, no longer smiling, was grim and threatening. Ferrers Locke signed to Drake, and they quietly withdrew. Tunstall joined them in the courtyard, and they returned to the missionary's hut on the bay together. Under the brilliant moonlight they embarked in the canoe, and the missionary paddled them out to the schooner.

"But—but Oliphant!" Drake muttered, as they stepped on the deck. With all the adventurer's perfidy and rascality, Drake could not help feeling a touch of compassion for the wretched man.

Ferrers Locke shrugged his shoulders.

"He has won his heiress," he said.

"He has planned what has happened. If Gloriana Blackstone understood what he intended for her fate, I imagine that he would be thrown to the sharks before the moon sets. Fortunately for him, she does not suspect. But she will not leave the island—and she will not let him go—and so long as he is careful to conciliate her he will escape the cooking-pots. It will be one unscrupulous adventurer the fewer in London."

The anchor was weighed, the sails shaken out. The schooner glided out to sea.

Drake stood silent on the deck, watching the island of Kolos as it sank below the moonlit sea in the distance. In far-off England the Blackstone million remained unclaimed, and his old haunts of dissipation knew Edgar Oliphant no more. The intended victim was master of the situation; the fortune-hunter had been caught in his own trap.

THE END.

("THE MENACE OF THE BLACK TRIANGLE" is the title of next week's gripping tale of Ferrers Locke, detective.)