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### "CAMEO KIRBY."

(Continued from Page 3.)

his hands until he resembled an expert bartender mixing drinks. This completed to his entire satisfaction, he spouted out the pastebards in a deal of lightning-like rapidity, while Mme. Davezac and the old judge sat bolt upright with astonishment. At length an extra desperate and well executed kick from Kirby checked the old gambler's stirring exhibition, and, covered with confusion, he dropped several cards to the floor and, in order to hide his flaming cheeks, stooped and began to miserably grope for them.

"You see," exclaimed Kirby, "my secretary is not so experienced as he might be. To speak confidentially, I would have let him go last month if it weren't that he is the only support of a wife and eleven children."

"I wish I was in the lower regions," groaned Bunce sotto voce.

"I'll see that you get your wish if you don't sit up here," replied Kirby. But soon it was Kirby's turn to gain that state of absentmindedness for which he had censured his partner, for in the adjoining room Adele had commenced to sing, and all his thoughts promptly went out to her, his lips mutely repeating the words of the well remembered song, while his eyes grew as dreamy and abstracted as his mind. At length, when it was his turn to play, conscious only that he was holding a book of cards and consequently inferring that he must be indulging in his bread and butter game of poker, he spread his hand face up upon the table.

"Malheur!" exclaimed Mme. Davezac, aghast at this startling innovation. "He exposes his hand."

"I fear," commented the judge, rising and pushing back his chair, "that Colonel Moreau finds it difficult to play cards and listen to the voice of a beautiful woman at the same time."

"And you cannot say that he has not good taste," commented Mme. Davezac. "Tiens! We adjourn, then, to the music room. You will come, Colonel Moreau and monsieur the secretary?"

Adele was still singing, Miss Pleydell accompanying her, and, drawn by the soft harmony, M. Veaudry and Aaron at length forsook the balcony and, as had the others, proceeded to make their way toward the music room. Their goal, however, was never attained, for as they stepped through the window into the deserted drawing room they were met by Poulette, one of the "French niggers." She carried a small bundle made of a knotted spotted handkerchief, and her manner attested that she was excitedly laboring under the repressed excitement incident upon discovering business not intended for her cognizance. In fact, she had but completed a victory over old Croup, who had persistently annoyed her with his attentions and, when censured for so doing by his ample wife, had promptly and quite untruthfully charged Poulette with making his life unbearable by her unrequited affection for his person. Since then Poulette, smarting under the calumny, had eagerly sought some method of assuaging her outraged feelings, and now at last she had secured it.

"Miche Aaron," she whispered, plucking Mr. Randall's sleeve as he was about to pass on—"Miche Aaron, dat black man, Croup, he have a secret. Dat secret it is with Miche Moreau."

### CHAPTER XI.

"WHAT secret?" demanded Aaron, for at the magic name "Moreau" his companion and he were instantly all attention. "What secret?" he again peremptorily demanded.

"I see them speak together sly," said Poulette, nodding her head and screwing up her eyes in a manner that boded ill for the amative and untruthful Mr. Croup. "I can tell that they did not wish you to see. Then when you come from dinner Colonel Moreau he hand this to Croup behind the door. Croup he keep it in he breast pocket until he fall asleep on poarch just now. I have look. It is all those camels!"

"Camels?" dryly echoed Aaron, with raised eyebrows. "Oui, miche," confidently nodded Poulette, evidently no whit amazed at the idea of the spotted handkerchief being able to accommodate such animals. "All those camels the colonel gen'eman wear when he is come, wear them on his fob chain." And she opened the spotted handkerchief.

"Cameos, M. Aaron!" exclaimed Anatole, an exultant light leaping to his eyes. "See, there they are. Now I know. You saw Colonel Moreau when he started for that meeting this morning. You saw him when Tom Randall has meeting this morning. You saw him when Tom Randall has give him that pistol of his father's to go and kill—who? But one man—Cameo Kirby!" he cried, leveling his arm at the startled Aaron.

And, as if further proof were needed, evidence which proved beyond a doubt the sinister identity of the unwelcome guest, Croup entered with a note, which he handed to M. Veaudry. "Man on horseback ride all de way from de city wif it," he explained.

Hastily scanning it, the young creole handed it in silence to Mr. Randall, and the latter read:

I have one more clew to run down, but I shall follow this within the hour. I hear a rumor that Colonel Moreau took the journey with you this morning. If this is true, secure his portmanteau, and if he is still at the plantation do not allow him to quit the place till I come. Use any means to prevent his leaving. Do not hesitate at force. Colonel Moreau was murdered this morning by Cameo Kirby.

### TOM RANDALL.

Aaron gravely returned the letter to his companion, and for a long moment the two men looked at each other in silence. Then M. Veaudry quietly placed the paper in his pocket, turned on his heel and strode from the room. Mr. Randall obediently following. At last they had arrived at a complete understanding regarding the identity and disposition of the troublesome guest who boldly masqueraded under the name of Colonel Moreau. That no words had been necessary testified to the sinister character of the resolve upon which they had mutely determined.

From the balcony Larkin Bunce, chewing impatiently on his cheroot, waited for Adele to leave the drawing room. It was imperative that he should have a final word with Kirby. Escaping from the music room before the others, he had been in time to catch a glimpse of Aaron Randall's face as the latter followed M. Veaudry, and the sight had not been a comforting one, the old gambler feeling assured that something untoward had happened. It would not have surprised him if their respective identities had at last been discovered.

"I knowed we'd get it if we stayed," he commented gloomily. "I wonder if this means it's come." glowering at Aaron's retreating back.

And yet, looking through the win-

dow, he discerned Kirby seated at the card table negligently toying with the pastebards and frittering away the time with Adele as if secure in the peace and happiness of his own home. Such indifference was maddening, inexplicable, and the old gambler, with a final imprecation, decided that the moment Adele had gone he would convey a last warning to his partner, and if it was still unheeded he would then think of his own safety and, however difficult it would prove, leave Kirby to the fate he deserved.

Meanwhile that gentleman was calmly pursuing his dialogue with Adele.

"You ask me if I am sorry I did not go," he was saying. "Miss Randall, what is a man who acts against all the reason he has?"

"Sometimes he is a hero," she replied, steadily meeting his eyes.

"And sometimes he's a fool," he added grimly. "Things come so suddenly sometimes that you can hardly get your breath quick enough to tell what to do. Yet," he added musingly, "you do know all the time, underneath, what you ought to do. For instance, I know that I ought not to be here now. I haven't any right. And, then, I ought to be hunting the man who stole a silver mounted pistol at the oaks this morning."

"But you can't do that," she expostulated, nodding wisely. "Your friends would—"

"Miss Randall, I've got only one friend in the world, and he's out there on the balcony swearing cuss words at me because I don't go."

She turned away, evincing sudden and vital interest in a book she had read twice over and knew by heart.

"Do you think you have a right to say that you have only one friend?" she asked gently.

"I—I hadn't thought of you as a friend, Miss Randall."

"Why? How do you think of me?" suddenly facing him, her eyes half timid, half daring, demanding a sincere answer.

"Why—just as you, Miss Adele—and I ought not to think of you at all." "Do you mean because this unjust charge is hanging over you? Do you think I care for that? Is there any other reason?"

He nodded, permitting the cards to fall from his hand one by one to the table. "Yes; there is another reason. You remember what Mercutio said of his wound—'Tis neither as deep as a well nor as wide as a church door, but 'twill serve. Ask for me tomorrow; you shall find me a grave man.' The bad prince ought not to stay too long, you know."

She seated herself at the table and scrutinized him with grave, troubled eyes, her chin resting daintly on the crux of arched hands. "You must make it clearer to me than that. What are you afraid of my finding out?"

He shrugged and smiled. "Life makes some pretty queer shuffles. Miss Randall, and you can't fool much with the deck yourself," he said, somewhat irrelevantly, picking up the cards and unconsciously beginning to riffle them. "If you don't play the game square it's only a question of time till you get caught, and then nobody will play with you. I don't know why Life dealt me the hand I hold. All I know is I've got to play the cards according to rule. Sometimes I've found that mighty hard. I keep wishing and wishing there'd be a different hand dealt, but wishing won't change it. It was the shuffle that settled it long ago."

"I don't think, sir, that you've said anything that concerns you and me very much," she commented, glancing up shyly.

"Concerns you and me," he echoed

the room. "Miss Randall, let me tell you something," he added at length, leaning and regarding her steadily. "One evening toward sunset, I was leaning over the rail of a Mississippi river steamboat, and, not figuring much pleasure in what I was thinking about, I put my hand casually into my pocket and drew out a deck of playing cards, cards that had been used—well, considerably. I contemplated them a moment and then let them fall from my hand. They dropped into the water in a kind of little shower. And then a curious thing happened. Those shabby old playing cards floated alongside a rosebush all in bloom that somebody had evidently planted too near a caving back upstream. It seemed as if they kind of hoped to go along with it on its journey, but it didn't look right. The rosebush was too pretty for bad companions like that. And then, one by one, those shabby playing cards, lying on their backs in the water, began to sink under and drown. Then along came an eddy and caught that pretty rosebush and swung it out into the current, and away it went down the stream, happy and proud in just a glory of sunshine and sparkle. It served those old playing cards right. They ought to have been drowned for trying to keep company so high above them. That's what I thought looking down from the boat's rail."

Without conscious effort or any attempt at elocution Kirby had told the little allegory with simple feeling and sincerity, his manner growing more abstracted until at the conclusion it seemed as if he were speaking to his inner self, taking counsel with all that was best in him. Silence ensued, while Adele looked dreamily away, and he continued to stare at the cards, but seeing them not.

"Does a man always stop to think whether he has a right or not?" she ventured at length, speaking so low that he strained forward to catch the words.

"Doesn't a woman always want him to?" he gravely returned.

"Ah, but there is something a woman wants a man to do more than that—she wants him not to give up anything till—he is beaten," she whispered.

"Suppose he is the kind of man that ought to be beaten?"

She arose, throwing the scarf about her shoulders, and walked meditatively to the door.

"But mightn't it be perhaps—perhaps with one woman," she whispered, "he couldn't be beaten even then?" Astonished at her own daring, she gave a little gasp, then incontinently fed, while Kirby stood staring after her, fearing to interpret her words. He turned with a start as Bunce strode through the balcony window.

(To be continued next week.)

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