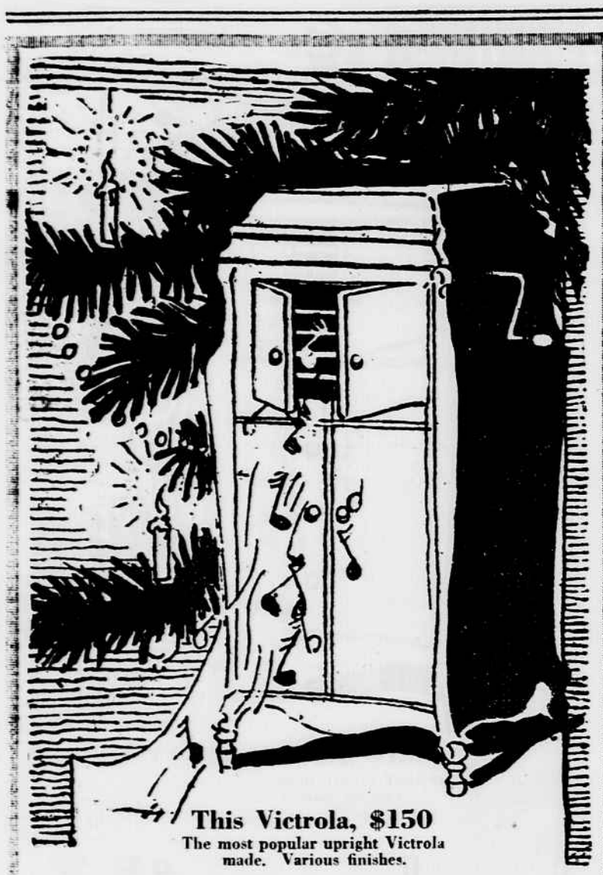

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A Son of the Sahara

A Modern Story of the Desert

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By Louise Gerard

THE STORY AS TOLD IN PRECEDING CHAPTERS.

Col. Raoul Le Breton, a French army officer, has taken his young bride on a small expedition into the African desert. He meets the Sultan Casim Ammeh, hereditary ruler of that part of the Sahara. The latter admires the young wife, and, with a horde of wild horsemen, attacks the little expedition, butchering all except the young woman, whom he takes captive and makes the chief of his harem. While she is in captivity, Annette Le Breton bears a son, who is the child of her dead husband. Sultan Casim Ammeh believes it is his own son, and showers favors upon him, with the result that he and the boy become constant companions. This is distasteful to Annette, who has refused to be reconciled to her fate. The sultan calls the boy Casim Ammeh, while the mother calls him Raoul Le Breton. Annette dies during an epidemic without having informed her son of his parentage. The boy shares in the raids of the thieving sultan, and when they have been decisively defeated by the French, because the latter possessed machine guns, the sultan decides to obtain similar guns by attacking a British outpost in the south. Capt. George Barclay, in command, learns of the approach of the sultan's forces and prepares his defense. The raid is made at night. It is unsuccessful. The sultan is captured and put to death, while his supposed son, after repeated vengeful attacks on the garrison, is deserted by his followers and taken captive. He escapes after threatening that he will kill Barclay and sell the members of his family as slaves. Two years later Barclay returns to England, bearing on his cheek the scar of a wound which was inflicted by the sultan's heir. He tells his young daughter Pansy of the threat. Incidentally she announces that Robert Cameron is her sweetheart.

that Robert Cameron is her sweetheart. Meanwhile, the young sultan has entered legitimate trading as more profitable than robbery and has adopted the name of Raoul Le Breton, given him by his mother. He extends his operations to Paris and, while in company with a young woman in a cabaret, he engages in a fight with an Englishman. He is the loser, but accompanies the woman to her home, with the purpose of making use of her in vengeful plans.

"If I give you these, Marie, will you teach me to become a Frenchman?" he asked.

"Won't I just!" she cried enthusiastically, and without hesitation continued: "First of all we must get an apartment. And, mon Dieu! yes, you must cut your hair short."

The youth wore his hair long, knotted under his hood in the Arab fashion.

It was three months before Casim Ammeh left Paris. And he left it in a correctly cut English suit and with his smooth, black hair brushed back over his head. In the spick-and-span young man it would have been difficult to recognize the barbaric youth who had come there knowing nothing of civilized life except what his mother had told him and what he had seen in St. Louis; and, what was more, he felt at ease in his new garments, in spite of having worn burnoose and hood all his life.

The day before he left, Marie sat with him in the salon of the pretty flat they had occupied since the day they struck their bargain. And she looked very different, too.

Her evening frock was no longer of shabby black. It was one of the several elaborate gowns she now possessed, thanks to the young man. And she no longer wore a string of coral beads about her pretty throat, but the pearl necklace.

Although Marie had taken on the youth as a business speculation, within a few days she loved him passionately. She was loath to let her benefactor go, but all her wiles failed to keep him.

"When you're back in Africa you won't quite forget your little Marie who taught you to be a man, will you?" she whispered tearfully.

Her remarks made him laugh.

"I've had women of my own for at least a year before I met you," he replied.

It seemed to Marie she had never really known the youth who had come to her a savage and was leaving her looking a finished man of the world. He never talked to her of himself or his affairs. Although kind and generous, he demanded swift obedience, and he treated her always as something infinitely inferior to himself.

"Say you love me," she pleaded. "That you'll think of me sometimes."

"Love!" he said contemptuously. "I don't love women. I have them for my pleasure. I'm not one of your white men who spend their days whining at some one woman's feet, pleading for favors. Women to me are only toys. Good to look upon, if beautiful, but not so good as horses."

"Oh, you are cruel!" she said, weeping. "And I thought you loved me."

"It is the woman's place to love. There are other things in a man's life.

Marie realized she had never had any hold on her protege. She had been of use to him, and he had paid her well for it, and there, as far as he was concerned, the matter ended.

Being sensible, she sat up and dried her tears, gathering consolation from the fact that he had been a good speculation. There would be no immediate need to return to the florist's shop when he had gone. In fact, if she liked to sell the necklace, she could buy a business of her own.

"Shall you come to Paris again, Casim?" she asked.

"Oh yes, often. It's a good city, full of beautiful women who are easy to buy."

But he made a reservation to himself.

When he came again he would come under the name his mother used to call him—Raoul Le Breton, and he would come in European clothes. Then the English he hated would not be able to hurl that detestable word "nigger" at him.

CHAPTER VIII.

In a select French boarding school a girl sat reading a letter. She was about fifteen years old, a slender, lovely child, light and graceful, with a cascade of golden curls reaching to her waist, and wide, purple eyes. Her complexion was perfect. She had a vivid little red mouth, impulsive and generous, and a pink rose on each cheek.

On reading the letter, sorrow clouded her face. For it ran:

"My Dear Little Pansy:

"When you get this letter I shall be with your mother. I am leaving you the money she would not have. And it was worth having, you will agree, for it will bring you in about £60,000 a year. The only condition I make is that you take the name your mother refused, your own second name. And my one hope is that you will be more successful in love than I was.

"Your affectionate 'grand-godfather,'
"HENRY LLANGHAM."

For some minutes Pansy sat brooding on her godfather's end. The poor old boy had been awfully ill for a long time, and now he was dead.

She blinked back a couple of tears. Then her thoughts went to the fortune she had inherited.

Presently she crossed to the mirror and looked at herself.

"No, old girl," she said to her reflection, "your head isn't turned."

Then she slipped the letter into her pocket and made straight for her great friend and confidante.

To the average eye there was nothing about Miss Grainger to attract a vivid, beautiful girl like Pansy Barclay—Pansy Langham as she would be now. Miss Grainger was middle-aged, gray-haired, thin and depressed-looking; the downtrodden English mistress, with no qualifications except good breeding.

She was poor and friendless, and life had gone hard with her, but these facts were sufficient to fill Pansy's heart with a warmth of generous affection and sympathy.

The girl's principal thought as she went along was not so much of the millions she had just inherited, but that she had always wanted to do something for Miss Grainger, and now she saw a way of doing it.

She entered the room that served the English mistress as bedroom, study and sitting room, disturbing the latter in the midst of correcting an accumulated pile of exercise books.

"What is it, Pansy?" she asked, smiling at her favorite.

"Miss Grainger, you'll be pleased to hear I'm a millionaire."

The English mistress put down her pen carefully, and then sat staring at the child.

"Really, my dear," she said in a bewildered tone, "you have a way of saying the most surprising things in the most matter-of-fact manner. But, since you're saying it, it must be true."

"That's a character in itself," Pansy remarked, smiling, a smile that brought to view several bewitching dimples.

She produced the letter and handed it to her friend.

The English mistress read it through.

"Sixty thousand pounds a year!" she exclaimed. "It makes my head reel."

"Then yours can't be so firmly screwed on as a mine. Mihe isn't turned one little bit. I looked at myself in a glass to see."

"But what are you going to do with it all?" the governess asked helplessly.

"Spend it, of course. I take after my father, and never shirk an unpleasant duty," she went on, a mischievous glint in her eyes. "To begin with, you, Miiss Grainger, are going to be my companion, and we'll have a yacht and go all around the world together, and see and do everything that can be seen and done.

"You'll get married, Pansy," the governess said, looking lovingly at the beautiful flower-like, little face.

"Not much! You dear old antiquated thing. I'm not going to be tied by the leg in that fashion."

"As the English mistress, I must remind you that 'tied by the leg' is slang."

"When you're my companion you'll be talking slang yourself. I'm not so sure I won't make that one of the stipulations," the child went on teasingly. It'll be such a change for you after thirty years of correcting stupid exercises."

"It will be rather," Miss Grainger said wistfully.

"And I shall come out at seventeen," Pansy went on. "I must start as early as possible if I'm to spend all that money. I shall write and ask my father if I may come out at seventeen. Do you think he'll refuse?"

"No man will ever refuse you anything, Pansy. You're too sweet and good and beautiful."

"And rich. Don't forget the rich. That'll be a tremendous draw."

Miss Grainger smiled at her favorite.

"I hope the man who marries you will pick you for your good heart and generous nature, not your looks and money," she remarked.

"Still harping on that old string, Mrs. Noah. Women don't get married nowadays if they can afford to stay single."

Then the school dinner-bell ringing sent Pansy from the room, but not before she had given an impetuous hug and kiss to her friend.

CHAPTER IX.

Paris always has a welcome for millionaires. And it always had a specially warm welcome for Raoul Le Breton, the African merchant prince. Not only was he fabulously rich, but he was young and remarkably good looking. It was whispered that he had Arab blood in his veins, but he was wealthy enough for the majority to overlook this drawback.

Like many modern Frenchmen, he dabbled in "le sport." He was a brillaint tennis player, a worthy opponent at billiards and he kept a stud of race horses. There was hardly an actress of any repute and with any pretense to youth and beauty who had not had his patronage at one time or the other. Match-making mothers with marriageable daughters laid snares about his feet. With surprising agility he avoided their traps. None of the daughters proved sufficiently tempting to turn him from the broad, smooth way of gay Parisian bachelorhood to the steep and jagged path of matrimony.

Raoul Le Breton was about twenty-five when he paid his sixth visit to Paris. He came now for about three months every year. And he always came in style, with a whole retinue of Arab servants—silent, discreet men who never gossiped about their master. It was whispered also that out in Africa he had a whole harem of his own; moreover, that he was some big chief or the other. In fact, many things were whispered about him, for, on the whole, Paris knew very little except that he was wealthy and wild.

His French acquaintances tried to learn more of his doings through the medium of his own private doctor, a stout Frenchman who accompanied the young millionaire to and fro. But Dr. Edouard refused to gossip about his friend and patron.

In spite of his success, the young sultan of El-Ammeh had not forgotten George Barclay.

On getting more in touch with civilization and its ways he had tried to find out the name of the man who was responsible for the death of his supposed father. It was not an easy task. George Barclay had left Gambia five years before Raoul Le Breton set about his investigations. There had been a succession of men since Barclay's time, and the shooting of a native malefactor was not a matter of great note in the annals of a government.

However, eventually Le Breton managed to establish the identity of the man he looked upon as his father's murderer.

But to trace George Barclay in England proved an even more difficult task than tracing him in Africa.

The Englishman had not stopped long in his country. In search of forgetfulness, he had gone from one place to another, holding posts in various parts of the empire.

The Sultan Casim Ammeh was twenty-five when he heard that Barclay was in the Malay Straits.

The news came to him in Paris just when he was setting out for an evening's amusement in company with Dr. Edouard. The letter was brought to him as he stood in dress suit, opera hat in hand, in his own private sitting room at the palatial hotel he always patronized when in Paris.

On perusing it he turned to his companion, and said, with an air of savage triumph:

"Well, Edouard, I've managed to trace my man at last."

The doctor knew who the man in question was, for he, Edouard, was the Sultan Casim's one confidant. Rather uneasily he glanced at his patron. He wished the young man would be content with money and the many joys and pleasures it could buy—for Casim Ammeh was no longer a strict Mohammedan—and would not be always hankering after vengeance, a vengeance that might embroil him with England and bring his wild and brilliant career to an abrupt close.

"Where is George Barclay?" Edouard asked uneasily.

"In the Straits Settlements."

The doctor experienced a feeling of intense pleasure on hearing Barclay was in so remote a spot.

"It'll be difficult for you to get hold of him there," he remarked, trying to keep out of his voice the relief he was feeling.

"He won't stay there forever. I've waited eleven years for my vengeance. I can go on waiting a little longer, until fate thinks well to place him in a more accessible position."

With a savage expression Le Breton turned to a desk. Sitting down, he wrote to his agents telling them to keep him informed of George Barclay's movements.

PART II.

CHAPTER I.

The harem in the palace of El-Ammeh led into a large hall with carved doors and tiny arabesque windows, fretted and scrolled, with no one spot big enough to squeeze more than a hand throubh.

Generally speaking, the women of the harem preferred the large hall, where they could gossip among themselves and with their attendant women, to the little rooms that were their own private quarters.

But there was one special apartment that they all in turn had striven after and, in turn, had failed to attain. No one in the harem had seen the room except old Sara, and she had plenty of tales to tell about its magnificence. It was a big gilded chamber, with a ceiling like the sky on a desert night, and great golden, jeweled lamps. There was a wonderful bathroom, a fretted gallery that gave a wide view of the desert, a walled garden full of roses, and, above all, a door that led into the sultan's private suite. The room had had no occupant since the days of the sultan's mother, the Lady Annette, the first wife and favorite of his father. And Sara had been her special slave and attendant.

It could be reached from the harem, at one point behind the silken curtains, a narrow stairway led upward, and ended in a scented, sandalwood door. But the door was always locked, and only the sultan had the key. It was common harem gossip that in that room he would place the one among his slaves whom he deigned to make his first wife.

Although the law allowed him four, and as many slaves as he fancied, so far he had no legal wife. It was strange, considering he was nearly thirty. But, in many ways, he differed from all the previous sultans. According to old Sara, it was because his mother belonged to quite another race, and had come from a land as remote from El-Ammeh as Paradise, where the women were all white, a land that the sultan now visited yearly.

For that land he was starting tomorrow.

He had just been to the harem to say farewell to the half-dozen girls there, departing with promises of new jewels and novelties to please and amuse these toys of his on his return. And now he lingered with his newest slave and favorite, Rayma, the Arab girl he had bought but six weeks ago.

Envious glances were cast toward the door behind which the Sultan Casim Ammeh and his new slave, Rayma, took farewell of one another.

One girl more than the other watched the door with hurt, angry, jealous eyes.

She was about twenty-three, with a full figure, a creamy skin, a profusion of long black curls, and great soft, languid eyes—a half-breed Spanish-Moorish girl of the true odalesque type.

Her attire was scanty. A red silk slip draped her from shoulder to knee, held on by ribbon straps; and on her hands and wrists and neck a quantity of barbaric jewelry flashed.

"I pray to Allah that on his travels our sultan will find some woman he loves better than Rayma," she said, spite and jealousy in her soft voice.

(Continued in Tomorrow's Star.)

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