

The Malabar Pearl

Home ties and a famous jewel swing
Anabel to the brink of tragedy



Anabel gave him a bright nod. Mr. Weeker smiled vaguely, then composed his features and walked on

BEYOND the crowded shipping within the breakwater the city of Colombo lay against the mountains of Ceylon like an emerald among amethysts. Anchor chains clanked up forward, and the Sargasso swung at rest, her decks lined with white-clad world tourists. Port officers climbed aboard. Passenger tenders nosed in among the crowding cargo boats. Brown-skinned natives dived for coins. Then the first of the shore parties descended the outslung gangway;

bound for Kandy and the more ancient mountain capitals, or on to Madras, Calcutta and the Taj Mahal.

Anabel Cayne, from her deck chair, idly watched them go. Then Gertie Hubbard pounced upon her. Gertie was fifteen or sixteen, pert and pretty.

"Hello!"

"Hello, Gertie! What are you doing here?"

The girl flopped into the next chair. "I'm staying with you. Told the wespected pawents (she couldn't pronounce her r's) you were going to look out for me."

"You told . . ."

"Sure. They've gone. What of it? They don't care what I do."

"And you expect me to be responsible?" An eavesdropper would have found humor in this remark; for Anabel was smaller than Gertie, was quite as scantily dressed, wore her hair in a provocative bob, and didn't look five years older.

"Oh, you don't have to do anything."

"What are you up to, Gertie?"

"I'm not up to anything." Her voice rose somewhat. "Why shouldn't I stick around Colombo? Gosh, I've seen ruins enough. . ."

A deck steward handed her a note. She tore it open. Then, paling, she sank back in her chair, looking like a crushed child.

Anabel regarded her. Again she asked, more crisply, "What are you up to?"

"Oh, well, I s'pose you may as well know now. It's Jimmy. Jimmy Balger. He's gone."

"Hmm!" Anabel felt fifty, a severe fifty. "So that's it. He was staying behind too."

"Yes, but you needn't think a lot of things. We were just going to play around. I guess I know how to take care of myself." She had been near tears at the first shock, but now surrendered to indignation: "Poor fish! Told me he could manage it. And now he says his father wouldn't let him. Going all the way through India. Leaving me flat. Hmp! If you want to know what I think of that flaming youth I'll just tell the angwy world he's a washout."

The tender moved steadily in through the shipping and the swarming native craft toward the landing.

"You know, I can't make

you out at all." Thus the outspoken Gertie. "You set up to be so pwoper . . ."

"Do I?" mused Anabel.

" . . . but I've seen a few things. You weren't like this when you came aboard at New York."

"Wasn't I?"

"Oh, you needn't be sly. I saw. You wore funny clothes and your hair was long. You looked like a school teacher. Victowian. Had your hair cut at Panama. And then you cwashed out in pwetty clothes. Twaveling alone, too. Where do you live?"

"In a quaint little old village. Coventry, Mass. I suppose I was quaint, too."

"You were quaint, all wight. Until you changed. That was talked about, on the ship."

"Was it?"

"Sure. What'll your old fwienids think when you go back, looking like this?"

"I'm not going back."

"Oh, you're not? Say, you asked what I was up to. Sometimes I've felt like asking what you're up to."

ANABEL fell silent, thinking of the settled, comfortable New England village where something like the spirit of caste had lingered on into a more crudely democratic day. There she'd been simply little Miss Cayne, who worked in the public library. There was a stabbing, poignant quality in the memories that came in a sudden uprush. Of Miss Edmunds, her faded, meticulous chief. (In time she'd have grown into just another Miss Edmunds.) Of the bewildered but excited ladies who wrote papers for the Women's Club. Of the children who couldn't keep quiet. She had loved the children. And of Mr. Weeker, who had once, out in the musty book-stall, tried shamefacedly to hold her hand. She'd been angry about that for months. The furtiveness of it. For all Mr. Weeker cared she might have been a servant or a shop girl. He was rich, and a bachelor, with a dragon of a Puritan mother. The Weeker place, on the hill, dominated Coventry.

"I've wondered why you don't get mawwied."

Anabel started.

"I wish I could get some wich old boy cwazy over me."

"Why?"

"Vamp him into mawwying me, of course."

"But why an old boy?"

"The young ones haven't got money enough. You have to have money."

"But if you were tied up to an old man. . ."

"Do you think for a minute I'd stay tied? No fear! I'd shake him down for some good alimony."

"Then what?"

"You know well enough. Go to Hollywood. Cwash into the movies. You stopped me once, when ewevything was going my way. But next time I'll go thwough."

A native newsboy came through the boat. Anabel bought a copy of the Ceylon Observer.

"Looks just like an English paper," remarked Gertie, contemptuously, as together they glanced over the decorous headlines.

"The Malabar Pearl's been stolen," said Anabel.

"What's the Malabar Pearl?"

"Haven't you read your guidebook?" "Shucks, no! Histowy? Not if I see it first."

"It's a marvelous pear-shaped pearl

By SAMUEL MERWIN

that was in the museum at Kandy. The top ornament in the crown of one of the early kings of Kandy."

"Making a lot of fuss about it, I'll say."

"Naturally. It's priceless."

"Begins to seem like home. Jewel wobbewies. Hmp! . . . Oh, look!"

"Where?"

"That big liner coming in around the bweakwater!"

"Must be the Campobello."

"What's that?"

"Oh, the other big cruise. They're going around the world the other way. The Chief Officer said we might meet her here. Didn't you know?"

But Gertie didn't know much of anything.

THEY rode through the Cinnamon Gardens in a rickshaw. Pleasant bungalows with ventilated roofs slumbered in the shade of monsoon-twisted palms. Well-kept hedges flamed with scarlet hibiscus. The brown skin of their runner glistened as he jogged steadily between the hand-shafts. He was a strong yet oddly effeminate skirted creature with his black hair done up in a knot behind and ornamented with a comb of tortoise shell.

"Oh, look!" cried Gertie.

A light-brown man in white skirt and turban was running toward them down the avenue, pursued by a similar figure with a long knife in his hand. The rickshaw runner stopped abruptly, in evident fright. Gertie ordered him on, but he merely stood, trembling for a brief moment, then dropped the shafts—so suddenly that the two girls were nearly pitched out on their noses—and ran around behind the vehicle. Gertie indignantly followed him, catching at his sleeve. Anabel covered her eyes.

The fugitive swerved in behind the rickshaw. His eyes were wild, his breath gone. Thrusting, without a word, a small object into Gertie's unresisting hand, he turned back toward his pursuer, falling on his knees, and chattering in a frenzy. The rickshaw man was crawling under a hedge. Gertie looked about, to note that Anabel had gotten down and was hurrying unsteadily into a private garden.

The pursuer gave no heed to the protestations of the kneeling native, but struck home with his knife. Struck again and again.

Gertie quickly followed Anabel; found her, white as death, clinging to a tree. She opened her hand then and looked at the object that had come so unexpectedly into her possession. It proved to be the biggest pearl she had ever seen, so big that it quite filled her palm. In form it was between a small pear and a large olive. In color it was a pure silver white, of a luster so perfect that her amazed eyes seemed to plumb immeasurable depths. There was no setting, but a drill-like hole running all the way through on the long axis bore more precise witness to its age than Gertie would ever know.

She turned it slowly over in her hand. First her breath had all but stopped; now she felt like squealing and jumping madly up and down. But she did neither; merely glanced at Anabel, who was still too upset to know what was

going on. She hadn't seen. And out in the road (through the hedge Gertie glimpsed this) that fugitive Singhalese lay inert in a widening pool of blood, while his slayer, squatting beside the body, tore off the turban and searched it with lightning fingers.

But suddenly he stopped, listening intently; then, without a sound, ran away. A moment later two Malay policemen came scorching down the road on bicycles. Gertie considered. Regarding the body out there, she murmured, "Far as I can see, Old Thing, you're just out o' luck." She dropped the pearl into her purse, and snapping it shut there turned to Anabel.

"Come along," she said. "Thing for us to do is to wun. Before any more people get murdered."

"We'd better get back to the hotel," said Anabel. "I'm a wreck."

"And we'd better keep our heads shut," remarked Gertie, who was jumpy and inclined to hum jazz tunes. "S'pose it happened to be important. They might take us wight off the ship. Hold us as witnesses. Months, maybe." She chuckled, abruptly, excitedly. "Wouldn't the respected pawents love that!"

"For all we know it might be mixed up with the pearl robbery," mused Anabel, wanly.

They sat in the hotel lounge. Anabel

was still white; while Gertie, flushed and queerly bright of eye, hummed a Charleston tune, marking out the rhythm with a twisting foot. That other flock of tourists from the Campobello were crowding into the hotel; the women in summery frocks, the men all in white duck and topees.

"WELL, of all things!" said Anabel. "What? What is it?" whispered the jumpy Gertie. Her gaze found and followed that of the amazed Anabel. She saw a large, rather handsome man with an elderly woman on his arm.

"Oh, nothing," said Anabel. "Just people from home. No reason why they shouldn't be here. They're rich enough

to go round all the worlds there are. Name of [demurely, this] Weeker."

"Wich, are they?"

"Heavens, yes! Old inherited money. They keep it, too."

"That's too bad." Gertie's foot was twisting. "Is the old girl his wife?"

"No, mother. The gossip of Coventry is that she'd never let him marry."

"Hmp! He's looking this way. Here they come."

Anabel chuckled softly. "He can't make me out."

"You know him, then?"

"Casually. He used to come into the library."

Slowly the stalwart man and the small wrinkled (Continued on page 40)

Illustrated by
CHARLES
LASSELL



"If we sit wight here," said Gertie, "maybe he'll come back. He was th'owing a wicked look"

Ain't It Grand?

WELL, sometimes love is and sometimes it isn't grand. Here are pictures that work both ways. If you're in love they are wonderful. If you're an old crab nothing would please you anyway.

At the left: Wouldn't you know that the nasty-faced little brat in the sleeping-bag would snoop along to bust up a stairway tête-à-tête between crinoline and kiltie? However, the old gentleman looks as though he hasn't forgotten he was young himself once, and perhaps it all ends happily. Remember, Elaine, it's a movie



Universal

At the right: There is no less ardor about this Romeo and Juliet bit by Ricardo Cortez and Marilyn Lane just because it's only a part of a production billed as "The Cat's Pajamas"



Universal

The important party of the second part isn't visible, but even if the ecstatic expression on Edward Horton's face didn't give him away one look at the impish visage of the office boy would prove that there's a woman on the other end of the line



Parting, even for a few hours, is no joke when one loves. And you can't blame John Gilbert, above, for lingering over it nor for making sickly google-eyes—when you consider that it's from the winsome Lillian Gish that he's tearing himself away

At the right: Well, well, they do say that one is never too old to plunge into matrimony. But the years may bring caution—certainly the kittenish lady's boy friend looks a bit worried and a little doubtful as to whether he hadn't better just forget about his hat—and run while there yet is time



Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer