

# **The Glacier Gate**

*An Adventure Story*

By

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# **THE GLACIER GATE**

## CHAPTER I

### DETERMINED DESTINY

Destiny knocked at his door, but Doctor Rupert Lang was not at home. At that very moment he was talking of his destiny to Miss Eva Morrison in the glassed gallery of the Bayview Hotel, four miles out of Mobile, where they had motored for tea.

It was not the first time they had drunk tea in this spot, and they had usually come to talk of Lang's dubious future, of what he might do with what a series of catastrophes had left him. Nervous and ill, his plans wavered. He had lately come to think of starting life afresh in a country medical practice far back up State, in the "piney woods."

"I'm not much good at general practice," he said. "Surgery is all I ever shone at. But up there they need doctors badly, men who can handle a big, rough practice, rough-and-ready surgery of all kinds——"

"You mean to bury yourself alive!" Eva interrupted indignantly.

He looked at her with sudden, nervous irritation. She had said the same thing before. Bury himself alive? As if he didn't know it! But what else was left to him?

Nothing else seemed to be left. He would not have believed that a career could have been snuffed out so quickly. It was only a few weeks ago that his future had been all golden; a great, growing Boston reputation, even extending toward New York.

He was one of the rising stars of surgery, a coming man, a magician of the knife, one of these modern gods who take men apart and reconstruct them with improvements. Still well under thirty, he enjoyed the respect, the admiration, the jealousy of men twice his age. His reputation increased; the big checks came in.

And then—a little carelessness or ill luck, an unregarded scratch on a finger that left it poisoned after an operation, and all at once he was confronted with the danger of losing his right hand. Good work had averted that; he recovered, but the poisoning left a slight stiffness of the fingers and thumb, a nervous cramp that would have meant nothing to a carpenter, but was ruin to the delicate craft of a surgeon.

The bandages were not yet off his hand when the Automotive Fuel Company collapsed, following the disappearance of Arthur Rockett, its promotor, with all the liquid assets. Lang had spent the big checks freely as they came, and his sole investment, amounting to twelve thousand dollars, was in Automotive Fuel. The company had been touted as a good thing by people who should have known better, and wiser men than Lang were bitten.

For Lang the immediate result was a bad nervous breakdown. Winter was coming on. He was ordered to seek a mild climate, a moist, relaxing atmosphere, freedom from work and worry. Eva Morrison was acquainted with all this story, except the fact of his financial collapse, and she had no idea that all he possessed in the world was some fifteen hundred dollars in the Mobile bank.

“You mustn’t give up. You mustn’t bury yourself,” she persisted.

“Why not? It’s as good a life as any, maybe. I was born here in Alabama, you know—took my first diploma in Montgomery. I know the piney-woods country, the big swamps, the bayous and the great rivers, and the queer, good, primitive people. I’ll drive a flivver over the sand roads, and hunt wild turkeys and never get my fees.”

She saw through his affected lightness, and looked at him gravely, her chin on her hands.

“Your hand will get better. Your surgery will come back.”

“Never, or perhaps in years, and what good then? A surgeon has to keep in constant practice, like a pianist.”

Failing to find him at his hotel, persistent Destiny tried again, and a page summoned Lang to the telephone. He was away only a minute, and came back with an odd smile.

“A call. A patient—the owner of a yacht out in the harbor somewhere.”

Eva made a delighted gesture, beaming suddenly.

“I declined, of course,” he added. “I referred them to another physician. I’m not practicing in Mobile.”

“But you might—you could—you’re qualified!” Eva exclaimed, bitterly disappointed. “You must be mad! A yachtsman—likely a millionaire! They’ve heard of your reputation even here.”

“But I tell you I don’t want to practice in Mobile, or in any of these towns!” Lang exclaimed, again in sudden irritation. “I

dare say they have heard of me. The doctors here know my name, and I don't want to face their sympathy for my comedown. I had enough of that in Boston—the men who had always hated me, been jealous of me, coming with their crocodile sympathy, hoping that I'd soon be fit again, and praying that they'd seen the last of me. I'd sooner bury myself, as you say."

He checked himself, quivering, angry and ashamed at his lack of control. Sick nerves know no reason. He looked at Eva Morrison again, wondering once more how she had come so deeply into his confidence, this girl of twenty, pretty as a picture, indeed, looking at him now with grieved brown eyes. But he had known her less than a month, and what could she understand, after all?

She had been a passenger on the steamer that he boarded at Boston for Mobile. He had not remembered her at first; he did not want to know anybody; but in the inevitable companionship of shipboard she reminded him of past acquaintance. She had been a patient of his; he had treated her for some slight injury received in playing basket ball at the girls' college she attended, and he had met her afterward at somebody's house.

She had made no impression upon him, but somehow they drifted together in that six-day voyage, more and more together as the steamer rounded Florida and the air grew warmer and they came into the Gulf seas. She had heard of his breakdown, as he gathered; but it was not spoken of between them until afterward, in Mobile.

He had a dim impression that she was to wait in Mobile for relatives from the North who were to join her there; and Lang stopped there because he did not know where else to go. He had no plans, but it was imperative to make some at once. He thought at times of becoming a ship's surgeon, then of retreating into the upriver woods and he came by degrees to talk over these plans with Eva, and so by degrees they arrived at this extraordinary pitch of intimacy.

A week passed, and her relatives did not arrive. She had established herself at the quiet Iberville Hotel, and Lang saw her almost daily, and often twice a day. They motored, boated together, went to the movies, dined out. Lang was by no means in love. Standing in the wreck of all his life he was far from even thinking of love, but Eva was restful and comforting and she soothed his tortured nerves and his tormented spirit.

More than once he had been suddenly angry and rude to her, as just now, and had had to apologize.

"Sorry!" he said repentantly.

She smiled with complete comprehension.

"I only wish I could influence you a little," she said. "See, we must go. It's past five, and look at the bay."

The mellow, springlike Alabama autumn of the early afternoon had turned suddenly foul. Fine rain drove against the windows, and the broad surface of the bay beyond was blurred with squalls of wind and mist. They lingered, waiting for it to clear, and the small black page who had called Lang to the telephone came again behind his chair.

“Gentleman to see you, suh,” he whispered confidentially. “Same gentleman what telephoned. Mighty important, he says, suh!”

He had evidently been scientifically tipped, for, before Lang could deny himself he perceived the persistent caller at the heels of the page. He turned with some annoyance.

“I’m sure I hope you’ll excuse me, doctor, breaking in on you after what you said on the phone,” said the caller hastily. “But if I could speak to you just half a minute—— My name’s Carroll. I’m from the yacht, you know.”

He was a good-looking young fellow, considerably less than Lang’s age, brown-faced, black-haired, dressed in immaculate blue serge and fresh linen like a yachtsman; and he had a most plausible and ingratiating manner. Afterward Lang came to find the brown eyes rather hard, the lips uncertain. But their smile was winning, and it was difficult to resist Carroll’s address when he chose to please.

“Say what you like,” said Lang. “But you know I’m not practicing here. There are plenty of good physicians in Mobile.”

“Sure. Not in your class, though. We know you’re not located here—just passing through—saw it in the paper, and we simply couldn’t lose the chance of getting you. It looked providential. As for fee, you know—why we don’t mind a hundred dollars, or anything you like to name.”

“There’s no question of that,” said Lang stiffly. “What’s the matter with your patient? I couldn’t possibly operate.”

“Oh, I hope it won’t come to an operation. We don’t know what’s the matter with him. He’s kind of paralyzed—some sort of stroke, I reckon. He hasn’t moved or spoken for days, and don’t know anything. He’s on his yacht, right out in the harbor.”

Lang glanced furtively at Eva. Her eyes beamed, and she made a little surreptitious, imperative gesture: “Go—go!”

“Very well,” he decided. “How do I get aboard your yacht? I must take this lady home first, of course.”

“I can go alone,” Eva said, eagerly; but Carroll broke in with still greater alacrity.

“My taxi is waiting down below, and I’ll drive you and the lady wherever you want to go. I’ve got a motor launch near the foot of Government Street, and we’ll be aboard the yacht in no time.”

Plainly he was determined not to lose sight of his prize. Accepting his offer, they drove rapidly into town and put Eva down at her hotel, where Lang promised to come next day and report. Thence they went to Lang’s own hotel, where he secured his black medical bag and a raincoat, and then to the wharf.

Carroll’s boat was a small but speedy-looking craft, a trifle battered for a yacht’s tender, but they got aboard, Carroll started the engine, and they nosed out past a couple of moored freighters into the muddy bay. The weather had become worse, and driving sheets of mist and fine rain swept the water.

“I hope your yacht isn’t far,” said Lang uneasily.

“We’ll be there before you have time to get wet,” Carroll genially assured him.

Lang looked all about the harbor to espy the trim, white-painted craft he expected to board. The launch’s engines hummed and she gathered speed, tearing down the harbor with a sheering wave thrown from her bow. It was very wet. Lang could feel the rain dripping from his hat brim, and he humped his shoulders and stared through the gathering twilight and the mist.

They were well clear of the harbor proper. A black anchored steamer loomed up, slipped past; a couple of bare-masted schooners lay still without a sign of life aboard. Nothing was in sight ahead but another big three-master lying close to the western shore. Dimly he made out the lighted windows of the Bayview Hotel, where he had often sat with Eva.

He leaned over and spoke to his pilot with some irritation. Carroll muttered something cheerful about “There in a jiffy,” and let her out another notch.

Lang huddled in his seat, wet, uncomfortable, growing more and more uncomfortable and indignant. He was sorry he had come. The bay widened; the shores were growing invisible, and the whole waterscape was darkening rapidly.

“Look here, where are you taking me?” he broke out at last. “You said it would be only a few minutes. I’d never have come——”

“For God’s sake, shut up!” Carroll snapped back at him.

Lang subsided indignantly, unwilling to risk his dignity in altercation. Carroll suddenly sounded a siren that quavered and wailed piercingly.

Nothing answered it. Again and again the horn screamed over the turbid heave of the darkening water, and then the boat swerved in a wide curve westward.

It kept this course for more than a mile, and then began to sweep an equal curve the other way. At regular intervals Carroll blew the horn, but half an hour passed, and they had made several more great curves before a vast, hoarse roar sounded through the gloom, perhaps a mile away.

With a relieved exclamation Carroll headed the boat toward it. Nothing yet was visible, but the deep steam blast sounded again and again, always louder; and finally a spark began to show through the misty gloom ahead. It was not a ship's side light, but it developed into a lantern swinging close to the water, and suddenly there was a loom of something huge and black moving slowly through the darkness, and he saw a spot of great rusty steel hull in the glimmer of the lantern.

Some one shouted from high above. Carroll answered, slowing down, approaching a side ladder now visible by the lantern. The big ship was barely moving, and Carroll hooked on with a practiced hand. He indicated the ladder to his passenger, and Lang, though much tempted to refuse, managed to catch it as the trailing launch heaved and fell alongside.

Dripping wet, and in a state of the most extreme irritation and disgust, he scrambled up the ladder, felt himself gripped by the

arm and helped over the rail, where he almost tumbled upon the deck.

A group of men in wet, shining waterproof coats surrounded him. Carroll had scrambled up at his heels. A light was turned on somewhere.

“Here we are!” Carroll cried triumphantly. “Got him. Gentlemen—Doctor Robert Long of Chicago!”

## CHAPTER II

### FALSE COLORS

Lang caught this amazing introduction, and if he had been less wet, less ruffled, less indignant, he would probably have instantly denied it. As it was, he shut his mouth, and limply shook hands with the three or four men who greeted him warmly.

He knew well the name of Doctor Robert Long, of course, and was thoroughly acquainted with that eminent Chicago specialist's success in nervous diseases. The resemblance of the name to his own had caused confusion before, and now he recollected that Doctor Long was said to be spending a vacation in the South, and might really be in Mobile.

The humor of the thing suddenly quenched his wrath. He had been half kidnaped, but he had turned the joke on his captors. Let them take what they had got, he thought. He would look at their patient, charge them nothing, and go ashore again, recommending a good Mobile physician. He knew well that Doctor Long would never dream of accepting any such casual call.

He glanced sharply at the men before him, and up and down the steamer's dim-lit deck. Scarred planking, dirty paint, rusty metal confirmed his suspicions. Whatever this ship was, she surely was no yacht. The man they called "Captain" stood at his elbow, tall, rough-featured, mustached, dripping in his wet oilskins; and another, dimly seen, showed a smooth face,

owlish with large tortoise-shell glasses. Carroll stood in front, looking anxiously on. They were all waiting for him.

“Well, where’s the patient?” he said sharply.

At once they were all alert to serve him. They guided him down the stairs to the saloon—a long, dingy, shabby cabin, with grimy white paint, and the usual fixed table, chairs, and a number of stateroom doors opening from either side. There was a strong odor of cigar smoke and spirits.

“The doctor’s wet, Jerry. Give him a touch of something, can’t you?” exclaimed Carroll, bustling to take Lang’s dripping raincoat. Before Lang could decline, the captain had produced a couple of bottles from a cupboard, and was pouring strong doses into a rack of glasses on the table; and, in spite of the doctor’s abstinence, the rest of the company swallowed their drinks with alacrity.

“Better have some, doctor. It’s the good stuff. We called at Havana last week,” Carroll advised.

Lang again declined, and looked over the company as they drank standing by the table. Jerry, the captain, was tall and lean, with a long mouth, bad teeth, a truculent eye, and a seaman’s heavy, horny hands. He with the big spectacles, Lloyd or Floyd, was a smooth-faced, neatly dressed man of over thirty, cool and contemptuous looking. Carroll looked more of a gentleman than the rest of them. It was an odd company, this “yachting” crew, and Lang thought ironically of Eva’s hope that this might be the beginning of a wealthy practice.

One of the doors opened just then, and another man came out, whom he had not seen before. He came with silent swiftness like a cat, glancing furtively at the newcomer. He was not over twenty, lean and slouching, with a nervous hatchet face and a bad-colored skin. Lang recognized that skin tint that comes of cocaine and heroin. He had seen that type of youth occasionally in his hospital work, generally in connection with bullet wounds. It was not a type likely to be found at sea, he thought, the youthful dope-addicted gunman and gangster; and his presence threw a point of light, perhaps, on the whole unusual company.

Nobody introduced the young man, who slipped behind the table and poured himself a drink, then lighted a cigarette. Carroll put down his glass.

"This way, doctor," he said, and reopened the door from which the young gunman had just emerged. Lang followed him in, and the others trooped after.

It was a rather large stateroom, painted white, with one berth, a rattan chair, and the usual basin, taps and stand. The port was open, letting in a cool, moist freshness; and Lang's eyes instantly fixed on the berth's occupant.

It was a big man, a man of perhaps sixty, with a great, rugged face and short, grizzled hair. His eyes were shut and sunken; he was considerably emaciated; he seemed to be asleep. A gray blanket covered him to the chin, and one huge, inanimate arm lay outside.

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