

DAUGHTER OF THE SUN
A TALE OF ADVENTURE

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Table of Contents

CHAPTER I

CHAPTER II

CHAPTER III

CHAPTER IV

CHAPTER V

CHAPTER VI

CHAPTER VII

CHAPTER VIII

CHAPTER IX

CHAPTER X

CHAPTER XI

CHAPTER XII

CHAPTER XIII

CHAPTER XIV

CHAPTER XV

CHAPTER XVI

CHAPTER XVII

CHAPTER XVIII

CHAPTER XIX

CHAPTER XX

CHAPTER XXI

CHAPTER XXII

CHAPTER I

IN WHICH A YOUNG AMERICAN KNOWN AS "HEADLONG" PLAYS AT DICE WITH ONE IN MAN'S CLOTHING WHO IS NOT A MAN

Jim Kendric had arrived and the border town knew it well. All who knew the man foresaw that he would come with a rush, tarry briefly for a bit of wild joy and leave with a rush for the Lord knew where and the Lord knew why. For such was ever the way of Jim Kendric.

A letter at the postoffice had been the means of advising the entire community of the coming of Kendric. The letter was from Bruce West, down in Lower California, and scrawled across the flap were instructions to the postmaster to hold it for Jim Kendric who would arrive within a couple of weeks. Furthermore the word URGENT was not to be overlooked.

Among the men drawn together in hourly expectation of the arrival of Kendric, one remarked thoughtfully:

"Jim's Mex friend is in town."

"Ruiz Rios?" someone asked, a man from the outside.

"Been here three days. Just sticking around and doing nothing but smoke cigarettes. Looks like he was waiting."

"What for?"

"Waiting for Jim, maybe?" was suggested.

Two or three laughed at that. In their estimation Ruiz Rios might be the man to knife his way out of a hole, but not one to go out of his way to cross the trail made wide and recklessly by Jim Kendric.

"A half hour ago," came the supplementary information from another quarter, "a big automobile going to beat the band pulls up in front of the hotel. The Mex is watching and when a woman climbs down he grabs her traps and steers her into the hotel."

Immediately this news bringer was the man of the moment. But he had had scant time to admit that he hadn't seen her face, that she had worn a thick black veil, that somehow she just *seemed* young and that he'd bet she was too darn pretty to be wasting herself on Rios, when Jim Kendric himself landed in their midst.

He was powdered with alkali dust from the soles of his boots to the crown of his black hat and he looked unusually tall because he was unusually gaunt. He had ridden far and hard. But the eyes were the same old eyes of the same old headlong Jim Kendric, on fire on the instant, dancing with the joy of striking hands with the old-timers, shining with the man's supreme joy of life.

"I'm no drinking man and you know it," he shouted at them, his voice booming out and down the quiet blistering street. "And I'm no gambling man. I'm steady and sober and I'm a regular fool for conservative investments! But there's a time when a glass in the hand is as pat as eggs in a hen's nest and a man wants to spend his money free! Come on, you bunch of devil-hounds; lead me to it."

It was the rollicking arrival which they had counted on since this was the only way Jim Kendric knew of getting back among old friends and old surroundings. There was nothing subtle about him; in all things he was open and forthright and tempestuous. In a man's hardened and buffeted body he had kept the heart of a harum-scarum boy.

"It's only a step across the line into Old Town," he reminded them. "And the Mexico gents over there haven't got started reforming yet. Blaze the trail, Benny. Shut up your damned old store and postoffice, Homer, and trot along. It's close to sunset any way; I'll finance the pilgrimage until sunup."

When he mentioned the "postoffice" Homer Day was recalled to his official duties as postmaster. He gave Kendric the letter from Bruce West. Kendric ripped open the envelope, glanced at the contents, skimming the lines impatiently. Then he jammed the letter into his pocket.

"Just as I supposed," he announced. "Bruce has a sure thing in the way of the best cattle range you ever saw; he'll make money hand over fist. But," and he chuckled his enjoyment, "he's just a trifle too busy scaring off Mexican bandits and close-herding his stock to get any sleep of nights. Drop him a postcard, Homer; tell him I can't come. Let's step over to Old Town."

"Ruiz Rios is in town, Jim," he was informed.

"I know," he retorted lightly. "But I'm not shooting trouble nowadays. Getting older, you know."

"How'd *you* know?" asked Homer.

"Bruce said so in his letter; Rios is a neighbor down in Lower California. Now, forget Ruiz Rios. Let's start something."

There were six Americans in the little party by the time they had walked the brief distance to the border and across into Old Town. Before they reached the swing doors of the Casa Grande the red ball of the sun went down.

"Fat Ortega knows you're coming, Jim," Kendric was advised. "I guess everybody in town knows by now."

And plainly everybody was interested. When the six men, going in two by two, snapped back the swinging doors there were a score of men in the place. Behind the long bar running along one side of the big room two men were busy setting forth bottles and glasses. The air was hazy with cigarette smoke. There was a business air, an air of readiness and expectancy about the gaming tables though no one at this early hour had suggested playing. Ortega himself, fat and greasy and pompous, leaned against his bar and twisted a stogie between his puffy, pendulous lips. He merely batted his eyes at Kendric, who noticed him not at all.

A golden twenty dollar coin spun and winked upon the bar impelled by Jim's big fingers and Kendric's voice called heartily:

"I'd be happy to have every man here drink with me."

The invitation was naturally accepted. The men ranged along the bar, elbow to elbow; the bartenders served and, with a nod toward the man who stood treat, poured their own red wine. Even Ortega, though he made no attempt toward a civil response, drank. The more liquor poured into a man's stomach here, the more money in

Ortega's pocket and he was avaricious. He'd drink in his own shop with his worst enemy provided that enemy paid the score.

Kendric's friends were men who were always glad to drink and play a game of cards, but tonight they were gladder for the chance to talk with "Old Headlong." When he had bought the house a couple of rounds of drinks, Kendric withdrew to a corner table with a dozen of his old-time acquaintances and for upward of an hour they sat and found much to talk of. He had his own experiences to recount and sketched them swiftly, telling of a venture in a new silver mining country and a certain profit made; of a "misunderstanding," as he mirthfully explained it, now and then, with the children of the South; of horse swapping and a taste of the pearl fisheries of La Paz; of no end of adventures such as men of his class and nationality find every day in troublous Mexico. Twisty Barlow, an old-time friend with whom once he had gone adventuring in Peru, a man who had been deep sea sailor and near pirate, real estate juggler, miner, trapper and mule skinner, sat at his elbow, put many an incisive question, had many a yarn of his own to spin.

"Headlong, old mate," said Twisty Barlow once, laying his knotty hand on Kendric's arm, "by the livin' Gawd that made us, I'd like to go a-journeyin' with the likes of you again. And I know the land that's waitin' for the pair of us. Into San Diego we go and there we take a certain warped and battered old stem-twister the owner calls a schooner. And we beat it out into the Pacific and turn south until we come to a certain land maybe you can remember having heard me tell about. And there—— It's there, Headlong, old mate!"

Kendric's eyes shone while Barlow spoke, but then they always shone when a man hinted of such things as he knew lay in the sailorman's mind. But at the end he shook his head.

"You're talking about tomorrow or next day, Twisty," he laughed, filling his deep lungs contentedly. "I've had a bellyful of mañana-talk here of late. All I'm interested in is tonight." He rattled some loose coins in his pocket. "I've got money in my pocket, man!" he cried, jumping to his feet. "Come ahead. I stake every man jack of you to ten dollars and any man who wins treats the house."

Meanwhile Ortega's place had been doing an increasing business. Now there was desultory playing at several tables where men were placing their bets at poker, at seven-and-a-half and at roulette; the faro layout would be offering its invitation in a moment; there was a game of dice in progress.

Kendric's companions moved about from table to table laughing, making small bets or merely watching. But presently as half dollars were won and lost the insidious charm of hazard touched them. Monte stuck fast to the faro table for fifteen minutes, at the end of which time he rose with a sigh, tempted to go back to Kendric for a "real stake" and cut in for a man's play. But he thought better of it and strolled away, rolling a cigarette and watching the others. Jerry bought a ten dollar stack of chips and assayed his fortune with roulette, playing his usual luck and his usual system; with every hazard lost he lost his temper and doubled his bet. He was the first man to join Monte.

For upward of an hour of play Kendric was content with looking on and had not hazarded a cent beyond the money flung down on the table to be played by his friends. But now at last he looked

about the room eagerly, his head up, his eyes blazing with the upsurge of the spirit riding him. About his middle was a money belt, safely brought back across the border; in his wild heart was the imperative desire to play. Play high and quick and hard. It was then that for the first time he noted Ruiz Rios. Evidently the Mexican had just now entered from the rear. At the far end of the room where the kerosene lamp light was none too good Rios was standing with a solitary slim-bodied companion. The companion, to call for all due consideration later, barely caught Jim's roving eye now; he saw Rios and he told himself that the gamblers' goddess had whisked him in at the magic moment. For in one essential, as in no others, was Ruiz Rios a man after Jim Kendric's own heart: the Mexican was a man to play for any stake and do no moralizing over the result.

"Ortega," cried Kendric, looking all the time challengingly at Rios, "there is only one game worth the playing. King of games? The emperor of games! Have you a man here to shake dice with me?"

Ortega understood and made no answer, Rios, small and sinister and handsome, his air one of eternal well-bred insolence, kept his own counsel. There came a quick tug at his sleeve; his companion whispered in his ear. Thus it was that for the first time Kendric really looked at this companion. And at the first keen glance, in spite of the male attire, the loose coat and hat pulled low, the scarf worn high about the neck, he knew that it was a woman who had entered with Ruiz Rios and now whispered to him.

"His wife," thought Kendric. "Telling him not to play. She's got her nerve coming in here."

The question of her relationship to the Mexican was open to speculation; the matter of her nerve was not. That was definitely settled by the carriage of her body which was at once defiant and imperious; by the tilt of the chin, barely glimpsed; by the way she stood her ground as one after another pair of eyes turned upon her until every man in the room stared openly. It was as useless for her to seek to disguise her sex thus as it would be for the moon to mask as a candle. And she knew it and did not care. Kendric understood that on the moment.

"Between us there has been at times trouble, señor," said Rios lightly. "I do not know if you care to play? If so, I will be most pleased for a little game."

"I'd shake dice with the devil himself, friend Ruiz," answered Jim heartily.

"I must have some money from Ortega here," said Rios carelessly. "Unless my check will satisfy?"

"Better get the money," returned Kendric pleasantly.

As Rios turned away with the proprietor Kendric was impelled to look again toward the woman. She had moved a little to one side so that now she stood in the shadow cast by an angle of the wall. He could not see her eyes, so low had she drawn her wide *sombrero*, nor could he make out much of her face. He had an impression of an oval line curving softly into the folds of her scarf; of masses of black hair. But one thing he knew: she was looking steadily at him. It did not matter that he could not see her eyes; he could feel them. Under that hidden gaze there was a moment during which he was oddly stirred, vaguely agitated. It was as though she, some strange woman, were striving to subject his mind

to the spell of her own will; as though across the room she were seeking not only to read his thought but to mold it to the shape of her own thought. He had the uncanny sensation that her mind was rifling his, that it would be hard to hide from those probing mental fingers any slightest desire or intention. Kendric shook himself savagely, angered that even for an instant he should have submitted to such sickish fancies. But even so, and while he strode to the nearby table for the dice cup, he could not free himself from the impression which she had laid upon him.

She beckoned Rios as he came back with Ortega. He went to her side and she whispered to him.

"We will play here, at this end of the room, señor," Rios said to Kendric.

As Kendric looked quite naturally from the one who spoke to the one from whom so obviously the order had come, he saw for the first time the gleam of the woman's eyes. A very little she had lifted the brim of her hat so that from beneath she could watch what went forward. They held his gaze riveted; they seemed to glow in the shadows as though with some inner light. He could not judge their color; they were mere luminous pools. He started with an odd fancy; he caught himself wondering if those eyes could see in the dark?

Again he shrugged as though to shake physically from him these strange fancies. He snatched up the little table and brought it to where Ruiz Rios waited, putting it down not three feet from the Mexican's silent companion. And all the time, though now he refused to turn his head toward her, he was conscious of the

strangely disturbing certainty that those luminous eyes were regarding him with unshifting intensity.

Kendric abruptly spilled the dice out of the cup so that they rolled on the table top.

"One die, one throw, ace high?" he asked curtly of Rios.

The Mexican nodded.

It was in the air that there would be big play, and men crowded around. Briefly, the unusual presence of a woman, here at Fat Ortega's, was forgotten.

"Select the lucky cube," Kendric invited Rios. The Mexican's slim brown fingers drew one of the dice toward him, choosing at random.

Kendric opened vest and shirt and after a moment of fumbling drew forth and slammed down on the table a money belt that bulged and struck like a leaden bar.

"Gold and U. S. bank notes," he announced. "Keep your eye on me, Señor Don Ruiz Rios de Mexico, while I count 'em."

Unbuttoning the pocket flaps, he began pouring forth the treasure which he had brought back with him after two years in Old Mexico. Boyish and gleeful, he enjoyed the expressions that came upon the faces about him as he counted aloud and Rios watched with narrow, suspicious eyes. He sorted the gold, arranging in piles of twenties and tens, all American minted; he smoothed out the bank notes and stacked them. And at the end, looking up smilingly, he announced:

"An even ten thousand dollars, señor."

"You damn fool!" cried out Twisty Barlow hysterically. "Why, man, with that pile me an' you could sail back into San Diego like kings! Now that dago will pick you clean an' you know it."

No one paid any attention to Barlow and he, after that one involuntary outburst, recognized himself for the fool and kept his mouth shut, though with difficulty.

Ruiz Rios's dark face was almost Oriental in its immobility. He did not even look interested. He merely considered after a dreamy, abstracted fashion.

Again a quick eager hand was laid on his arm, again his companion whispered in his ear. Rios nodded curtly and turned to Ortega.

"Have you the money in the house?" he demanded.

"*Seguro*," said the gambling house owner. "I expected Señor Kendric."

"You do me proud," laughed Jim. "Let's see the color of it in American money."

With most men the winning or losing of ten thousand dollars, though they played heavily, was a matter of hours and might run on into days if luck varied tantalizingly. All of the zest of those battling hours Jim Kendric meant to crowd into one moment. There was much of love in the heart of Headlong Jim Kendric, but it was a love which had never poured itself through the common channels, never identified itself with those two passions which sway most men: he had never known love for a woman and in him there was no money-greed. For him women did not come even upon the rim of his most distant horizon; as for money, when he

had none of it he sallied forth joyously in its quest holding that there was plenty of it in this good old world and that it was as rare fun running it down as hunting any other big game. When he had plenty of it he had no thought of other matters until he had spent it or given it away or watched it go its merry way across a table with a green top like a fleet of golden argosies on a fair emerald sea voyaging in search of a port of adventure. His love was reserved for his friends and for his adventurings, for clear dawns in solitary mountains, for spring-times in thick woods, for sweeps of desert, for what he would have called "Life."

"Ready?" Ruiz Rios was asking coldly. Ortega had returned with a drawer from his safe clasped in his fat hands; the money was counted and piled.

"Let her roll," cried Kendric heartily.

Never had there been a game like this at Ortega's. Men packed closer and closer, pushing and crowding. The Mexican slowly rattled the single die in the cup. Then, with a quick jerk of the wrist, he turned it out on the table. It rolled, poised, settled. The result amply satisfied Rios and to the line of the lips under his small black mustache came the hint of a smile; he had turned up a six.

"The ace is high!" cried Jim. He caught up die and box, lifting the cupped cube high above his head. His eyes were bright with excitement, his cheeks were flushed, his voice rang out eagerly.

"Out of six numbers there is only one ace," smiled Ruiz Rios.

"One's all I want, señor," laughed Jim. And made his throw.

When large ventures are made, in money or otherwise, it would seem that the goddess of chance is no myth but a potent spirit and

that she takes a firm deciding hand. At a time like this, when two men seek to put at naught her many methods of prolonging suspense, she in turn seeks stubbornly to put at naught their endeavors to defeat her aims. Had Jim Kendric thrown the ace then he would have won and the thing would have been ended; had he shaken anything less than a six the spoils would have been the Mexican's. That which happened was that out of the gambler's cup Kendric turned another six.

Ruiz Rios's impassive face masked all emotion; Kendric's displayed frankly his sheer delight. He was playing his game; he was getting his fun.

"A tie, by thunder!" he cried out in huge enjoyment. "We're getting a run for our money, Mexico. Shall I shake next?"

"Follow your hand," said Ruiz Rios briefly.

That which followed next would have appeared unbelievable to any who have not over and over watched the inexplicable happenings of a gaming table. Kendric made his second throw and lifted his eyebrows quizzically at the result. He had turned out the deuce, the lowest number possible. A little eagerly, while men began to mutter in their excitement, Rios snatched up cup and die and threw. Once already he had counted ten thousand as good as won; now he made the same mistake. For the incredible happened and he, too, showed a deuce, making a second tie.

Ruiz cursed his disgust and hurled the box down. Kendric burst into booming laughter.

"A game for men to talk about, friend Rios!" he said. And at the moment he came near feeling a kindly feeling for a man whom he hated most cordially and with high reason. "Follow your hand."

Rios received the box from a hand offering it and made his third throw swiftly. The six again.

"Where we began, señor," he said, grown again impassive.

Kendric was all impatient eagerness to make his throw, looking like a boy chafing at a moment's restraint against his anticipated pleasures.

"A six to beat," he said.

And beat it he did, with the odds all against him. He turned up the ace and won ten thousand dollars.

In the brief hush which came before the shouts and jabberings of many voices, Ruiz Rios's companion pulled him sharply by the arm, whispering quickly. But this time Rios shook his head.

"I am through," he said bluntly. "Another time, maybe."

But the fever, to which he had so eagerly surrendered, was just gripping Kendric. That he was playing for big stakes was the thing that counted. That he had won meant less to him than it would have meant to any other man in the room or any other man who had ever been in the room or any other man who would ever come into the room. He saw that Ruiz was through. But, as his dancing eyes sped around among other faces, he marked the twinkling lights of covetousness in Fat Ortega's rat eyes and he knew that, long ago, Ortega himself had played for any stake. Beside Ortega there was another man present who might be inclined to accept a

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