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Author: Louis Becke

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CHINKIE'S FLAT AND OTHER STORIES

By Louis Becke

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TO MY DEAR OLD COMRADES

North Queensland.

December, 1908

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CHAPTER I ~ "CHINKIE'S FLAT"

"Chinkie's Flat," in its decadence, was generally spoken of, by the passing traveller, as a "God-forsaken hole," and it certainly did present a repellent appearance when seen for the first time, gasping under the torrid rays of a North Queensland sun, which had dried up every green thing except the silver-leaved ironbarks, and the long, sinuous line of she-oaks which denoted the course of Connolly's Creek on which it stood.

"The township" was one of the usual Queensland mining type, a dozen or so of bark-roofed humpies, a public-house with the title of "The Digger's Best," a blacksmith's forge, and a quartz-crushing battery.

The battery at Chinkie's Flat stood apart from the "township" on a little rise overlooking the yellow sands of Connolly's Creek, from whence it derived its water supply—when there happened to be any water in that part of the creek. The building which covered the antiquated five-stamper battery, boiler, engine, and tanks, was merely a huge roof of bark supported on untrimmed posts of brigalow and swamp gum, but rude as was the structure, the miners at Chinkie's Flat, and other camps in the vicinity, had once been distinctly proud of their battery, which possessed the high-sounding title of "The Ever Victorious," and had achieved fame by having in the "good times" of the Flat yielded a certain Peter Finnerty two thousand ounces of gold from a hundred tons of alluvial. The then owner of the battery was an intelligent, but bibulous ex-marine engineer, who had served with Gordon in China, and when he erected the structure he formally christened it "The Ever Victorious," in memory of Gordon's army, which stamped out the Taeping rebellion.

The first crushing put through was Finnerty's, and when the "clean-up" was over, and the hundreds of silvery balls of amalgam placed in the retorts turned out over one hundred and sixty-six pounds' weight of bright yellow gold, Chinkie's Flat went wild with excitement and spirituous refreshment.

In less than three months there were over five hundred diggers on the field, and the "Ever Victorious" banged and pounded away night and day, the rattle and clang of the stamps only ceasing at midnight on Saturday, and remaining silent till midnight on Sunday, the Sabbath being devoted "to cleaning-up," retorting the amalgam, and overhauling and repairing the machinery, and for relaxation, organising riding parties of twenty or thirty, and chasing Chinamen, of whom there were over three hundred within a radius of twenty miles.

The rich alluvial of Chinkie's Flat had, as a matter of fact, been first discovered by a number of Chinese diggers, who were each getting from five to ten ounces of gold per day, when they were discovered by the aforesaid Peter Finnerty, who was out prospecting with a couple of mates. Their indignation that a lot of heathen "Chows" should be scooping up gold so easily, while they, Christians and legitimate miners, should be toiling over the barren ridges day after day without striking anything, was so great that for the moment, as they sat on their horses and viewed the swarming Chinese working their cradles on the bank of the creek, the power of speech deserted them. Hastily turning their tired horses' heads, they rode as hard as they could to the nearest mining camp, and on the following day thirty hairy-faced foreign-devils came charging into the Chinese camp, uttering fearful threats, and shooting right and left (with blank cartridges). The Chinese broke and fled, and in half an hour each of the thirty men had pegged out a claim, and Chinkie's Flat became famous as one of the richest, though smallest, alluvial diggings in the Far North.

Three months after the "discovery" of the field by Mr. Peter Finnerty, old "Taeping," as Gordon's ex-marine engineer had been promptly nicknamed, arrived with his crushing battery, and then indeed were halcyon days for the Flat. From early morn till long past midnight, the little bar of the "Digger's Best" was crowded with diggers, packhorsemen and teamsters; a police trooper arrived and fixed his tent on the ridge overlooking the creek, and then—the very zenith of prosperity—a bank official followed, and a stately building, composed of a dozen sheets of bark for a roof, and floor sacks for the sides, was erected and opened for business on the same day, amid much rejoicing and a large amount of liquid refreshment dispensed by the landlord of the "hotel" at a shilling per nobbler.

For six months longer all went well: more alluvial patches were discovered in the surrounding country, and then several rich reefs were found a mile away from the Flat, and every day new men arrived from Cooktown to the north, and Brisbane, Sydney, and far New Zealand to the south. Three new "hotels" sprang up; the police force was increased by another trooper and two black trackers, who rode superciliously around the camp, carbines on thighs, in their dark blue uniforms with scarlet facings, and condescended to drink with even the humblest white man; and then came the added glory of the "Chinkie's Flat Gold Escort"—when a police van with an Irish sergeant, two white troopers, and eight black police rattled through the camp, and pulled up at the bank, which now had a corrugated iron roof, a proper door, and two windows, and (the manager's own private property) a tin shower bath suspended by a cord under the verandah, a seltzogene, and a hen with seven chickens. The manager himself was a young sporting gentleman of parts, and his efforts to provide Sunday recreation for his clients were duly appreciated—he was secretary of the Chinkie's Flat

Racing Club (meeting every alternate Sunday), and he and old "Taeping" between them owned a dozen of kangaroo dogs, which lived on the community generally, and afforded much exciting sport every Saturday, either in hunting kangaroos or Chinamen, both of which were plentiful in the vicinity.

For although Peter Finnerty and his party had succeeded in driving away the heathen from the Flat itself, the continued further discoveries of rich alluvial had brought them swarming into the district from all the other gold-fields in the colony in such numbers that it was impossible to keep the almond-eyed mining locusts out, especially as the Government was disposed to give them a measure of protection—not from any unnatural sentiment, but purely because they were revenue producers, and the Government badly wanted money. Then, too, their camps were so large, and so many of them were armed, and disposed to fight when in a corner, that the breaking up of a "Chows' Camp" became more and more difficult, and in the end the white diggers had to be content with surprising outlying prospecting parties, chasing them with kangaroo dogs back to their main camp, and burning their huts and mining gear, after first making a careful search for gold, concealed under the earthen floor, or among their ill-smelling personal effects. Sometimes they were rewarded, sometimes not, but in either case they were satisfied that they were doing their duty to Queensland and themselves by harrying the heathen who raged so furiously, and were robbing the country of its gold.

Then, after old "Taeping" had succumbed to too much "Digger's Rest," and Finnerty—now Peter Grattan Finnerty, Esq., Member of the Legislative Assembly of Queensland—had left the Flat and become the champion of the "struggling white miner" in the House at a salary of £300 a year, came bad times, for the alluvial became worked out; and in parties of twos and threes the old hands began to leave, heading westward across the arid desert towards the Gilbert and the Etheridge Rivers, dying of thirst or under the spears of the blacks by the way, but ever heedless of what was before when the allurements and potentialities of a new field lay beyond the shimmering haze of the sandy horizon.

Then, as the miners left, the few "cockatoo" settlers followed them, or shifted in nearer to the town on the sea-coast with their horse and bullock teams, and an ominous silence began to fall upon the Flat when the tinkle of the cattle bells no longer was heard among the dark fringe of sighing she-oaks bordering the creek. As day by day the quietude deepened, the parrots and pheasants and squatter pigeons flew in and about the Leichhardt trees at the foot of the bluff, and wild duck at dusk came splashing into the battery dam, for there was now no one who cared to shoot them; the merry-faced, rollicking, horse-racing young bank manager and his baying pack of gaunt kangaroo dogs had vanished with the rest; and then came the day when but eight men remained—seven being old hands, and the eighth a stranger, who, with a blackboy, had arrived the previous evening.

And had it not been for the coming of the stranger, Chinkie's Flat would, in a few weeks, have been left to solitude, and reported to the Gold-fields Warden as "abandoned and duffered out."

CHAPTER II ~ GRAINGER MAKES A "DEAL"

Three years before Edward Grainger had been the leader of a small prospecting party which had done fairly well on the rivers debouching into the Gulf of Carpentaria from the western side of Cape York Peninsula. He was an Englishman, his mates were all Australian-born, vigorous, sturdy bushmen, inured to privation and hardship, and possessing unbounded confidence in their leader, though he was by no means the oldest man of the party, and not a "native." But Grainger had had great experience as an explorer and prospector, for he had been compelled to begin the battle of life when but a lad of fifteen. His father, once a fairly wealthy squatter in the colony of Victoria, was ruined by successive droughts, and died leaving his station deeply mortgaged to the bank, which promptly foreclosed, and Mrs. Grainger found herself and two daughters dependent upon her only son, a boy of fifteen, for a living. He, however, was equal to the occasion. Leaving his mother and sisters in lodgings in Melbourne, he made his way to New South Wales with a mob of travelling cattle, earning his pound a week and rations. At Sydney he worked on the wharves as a lumper, and then joined in the wild rush to the famous Tambaroora diggings, and was fortunate enough to meet with remunerative employment, and from then began his mining experiences, which in the course of the following ten years took him nearly all over the Australian colonies, New Zealand, and Tasmania. Never making much money, and never very "hard up," he had always managed to provide for his mother and sisters; and when he formed his prospecting party to Cape York and sailed from Brisbane, he knew that they would not suffer from any financial straits for at least two years.

For nearly three years he and his party wandered from one river to another along the torrid shores of the great gulf, sometimes doing well, sometimes not getting enough gold to pay for the food they ate, but always, always hopeful of the day when they would "strike it rich." Then came misfortune—sharp and sudden.

Camped on the Batavia River during the wet season, the whole party of five sickened with malaria, and found themselves unable to move to the high land at the head of the river owing to all their horses having died from eating "poison plant." Too weak to travel by land, they determined to build a raft and reach the mouth of the river, where there was a small cattle station. Here they intended to remain till the end of the rains, buy fresh horses and provisions, and return and prospect some of the deep gullies and watercourses at the head of the Batavia River.

Scarcely had they completed the raft, and loaded it with their effects, when they were rushed by a mob of blacks, and in a few seconds two of the five were gasping out their lives from spear wounds, and all the others were wounded. Fortunately for the survivors, Grainger had his revolver in his belt, and this saved them, for he at once opened fire on the savages, whilst the other men worked the raft out into the middle of the stream, where they were out of danger from spears and able to use their rifles.

After a terrible voyage of three days, and suffering both from their wounds and the bone-racking agonies of

fever, they at last reached the cattle station, where they were kindly received in the rough, hospitable fashion common to all pioneers in Australia. But, when at the end of a month one of Grainger's mates died of his wounds, and the other bade him goodbye and went off in a pearling lugger to Thursday Island, the leader sickened of Cape York Peninsula, and turned his face southwards once more, in the hope that fortune would be more kind to him on the new rushes at the Cloncurry, seven hundred miles away. From the station owner he bought six horses, and with but one black-boy for a companion, started off on his long, long journey through country which for the most part had not yet been traversed even by the explorer.

Travelling slowly, prospecting as he went, and adding a few ounces of gold here and there to the little bag he carried in his saddle-pouch, quite three months passed ere he and the black boy reached the Cloncurry. Here, however, he found nothing to tempt him—the field was overcrowded, and every day brought fresh arrivals, and so, after a week's spell, he once more set out, this time to the eastward towards the alluvial fields near the Burdekin River, of which he had heard.

It was at the close of a long day's ride over grassless, sun-smitten country, that he came in sight of Chinkie's Flat, and the welcome green of the she-oaks fringing Connolly's Creek and southing to the wind. The quietness and verdancy of the creek pleased him, and he resolved to have a long, long spell, and try and get rid of the fever which had again attacked him and made his life a misery.

Riding up to the hotel he found a party of some twenty or more diggers who were having a last carouse—for the "benefit" of the landlord—ere they bade goodbye to Chinkie's Flat on the following evening. Among them were two men who had become possessed of the "Ever Victorious" battery, left to them by the recently deceased "Taeping," who had succumbed to alleged rum and bad whiskey. They jocularly offered Grainger the entire plant for twenty-five pounds and his horses. He made a laughing rejoinder and said he would take a look at the machine in the morning. He meant to have a long spell, he said, and Chinkie's Flat would suit him better than Townsville or Port Denison to pull up, as hotels there were expensive and he had not much money. Then, as was customary, he returned the drink he had accepted from them by shouting for all hands, and was at once voted "a good sort."

In the morning he walked down to the deserted battery, examined it carefully, and found that although it was in very bad order, and deficient especially in screens—the one greatest essential—it was still capable of a great deal of work. Then he washed off a dish or two of tailings from one of the many heaps about, and although he had no acid, nor any other means of making a proper test in such a short time, his scientific knowledge acquired on the big gold-fields of the southern colonies and New Zealand showed him that there was a very heavy percentage of gold still to be won from the tailings by simple and inexpensive treatment.

"I'll buy the thing," he said to himself; "I can't lose much by doing so, and there's every chance of saving a good deal of gold, if I once get some fine screens, and that will only take six weeks or so."

By noon the "deal" was completed, and in exchange for twenty-five pounds in cash, six horses and their saddlery, Grainger, amid much good-humoured chaff from the vendors, took possession of the "Ever Victorious" crushing mill, together with some thousands of tons of tailings, but when he announced his intention of putting the plant in order and crushing for the "public" generally, as well as for himself, six men who yet had some faith in the field and believed that some of the many reefs would pay to work, elected to stay, especially when Grainger said that if their crushings turned out "duffers" he would charge them nothing for using the battery.

At one o'clock that day there were but eight Europeans and one black boy left on the once noisy Chinkie's Flat—the landlord of "The Digger's Best," six miners, Grainger, and the black boy, "Jacky," who had accompanied him on his arduous journey from the Batavia River. At Grainger's request they all met at the public-house! and sat down to a dinner of salt meat, damper, and tea, and after it was finished and each man had lit his pipe, Grainger went into details.

"Now, boys, this is how the thing hangs. I've bought the old rattletrap because I believe there's a lot of life in the old girl yet, and I'm going to spend all the money I have in putting her in order and getting some new gear up from Brisbane or Sydney. If I lose my money I won't grumble, but I don't think I *shall* lose it if you will agree to give some of the reefs a thorough good trial. As I told you, I won't ask you for a penny if the stone I crush for you turns out no good; but it is my belief—and I know what I am talking about—that there are a thousand tons of surface stuff lying around this field which will give half an ounce to an ounce to the ton if it is put through a decent machine. And I'm going to make the old 'Ever Victorious' a pretty decent battery before long. But it's no good my spending my money—I possess only four hundred pounds—if you don't back me up and lend a hand."

"You're the man for us," said one of the men; "we'll stick to you and do all the bullocking. But the battery is very old, and we have the idea that old Taeping wasn't much of a boss of a crushing mill, and didn't know much about amalgamation."

Grainger nodded: "I am sure of it. I don't believe that he saved more than 50 per cent, of the gold from the surface stuff he put through, and not more than a third from the stone.... Well, boys, what is it to be?"

The men looked at each other for a moment or two, and then they one and all emphatically asserted their intention of remaining on the field, assisting Grainger in repairing the plant and raising trial crushings of stone from every reef on the field.

"That's all right, then, boys," said Grainger. "Now you go ahead and raise the stone, and as soon as I am a bit stronger I'll start off for the Bay and buy what I want in the way of screens, grinding pans, quicksilver, and other gear. I'm almost convinced that with new, fine screens we shall get good results out of the stone, and if we are disappointed, then well tackle that heap of tailings. I've seen a lot of tailings treated without being roasted in Victoria, and understand the process right enough."

"Well, we'll do our share of yacker, mister," said a man named Dick Scott.

"And I'll do mine. As soon as I am fit some of you must lend me a couple of horses, and I'll ride down to the Bay.{*} I daresay I can get all that we want there in the way of machinery without my going or sending to Brisbane for it."

** The present city of Townsville, then always called "The Bay," it being situated on the shores of Cleveland Bay.*

On the following morning work was started by the six men, the landlord of the public-house agreeing to cook for all hands for the first week, while Grainger and the black boy (though the former was still very weak from recurrent attacks of ague) tried numberless prospects from all parts of the heaps of tailings. At the end of a week the miners began to raise some very likely-looking stone! and Grainger, finding some jars of muriatic acid among the stores belonging to the battery, made some further tests of the tailings with results which gave him the greatest satisfaction. He, however, said nothing about this to his new mates, intending to give them a pleasant surprise later on in the week before he left on his journey to the coast.

At six o'clock one evening, just as the men were returning from the claim for supper, Jacky, the black boy, was seen coming along the track at a fast canter. He had been out looking for some cattle belonging to Jansen the landlord, which had strayed away among the ranges.

"What's the matter, Jacky?" asked the men, as the boy jumped off his horse.

"I bin see him plenty feller Chinaman come along road. Altogether thirty-one. Close to now—'bout one feller mile away, I think it."

CHAPTER III ~ JIMMY AH SAN

Consternation was depicted on the faces of the men. And they all began to question Jacky at once, until Grainger appeared, and then the black boy gave them farther particulars—the Chinamen, he said, were all on foot, each man carrying two baskets on a stick, but there were also five or six pack-horses loaded with picks, shovels, dishes, and other mining gear.

"Curse the dirty, yaller-hided swine!" cried Dick Scott, turning excitedly to Grainger. "What's to be done? They've come to rush the Flat again; but, by thunder! I'll be a stiff 'un afore a Chow fills another dish with wash-dirt on Connolly's Creek."

"And me, too!" "And me, too!" growled the others angrily, and Grainger, as he looked at their set, determined faces, knew they would soon be beyond control, and bloodshed would follow if the advancing Chinamen tried to come on to the field. But, nevertheless, he was thoroughly in sympathy with them. The advent of these Chinese—probably but an advance guard of many hundreds—would simply mean ruination to himself and his mates, just as their prospects were so bright. The men looked upon him as their leader, and he must act—and act quickly.

"Let them come along, boys. Then we'll bail them up as soon as they come abreast of us, and have a little 'talkee, talkee' with them. But for heaven's sake try and keep cool, and I daresay when they see we look ugly at them, they'll trot on. How many of you have guns of any kind?"

Four rifles and two shot guns were quickly produced, and then every one waited till the first of the Chinese appeared, marching one behind the other. The foremost man was dressed in European clothes, and the moment Scott saw him, he exclaimed—

"Why, it's Jimmy Ah San! I used to know him at Gympie in the old times. He's not a bad sort of a Chow. Come on, boys!"

Grainger, who was not just then well enough to go with them, but remained in his seat with his revolver on his knee, could not help smiling at the sudden halt and terrified looks of the Chinese, when Scott and the others drew up in front of them with their weapons at the present. Half of them at once dropped their baskets and darted off into the bush, the rest crowding together like a flock of terrified sheep. The leader, however, came steadily on. Scott stepped out and met him.

"Good-morning. What do you and all your crowd want here?"

"Nothing," replied the Chinaman quietly, in excellent English, "nothing but to get down to the creek and camp for a few days. But why do you all come out with guns? We cannot do you any harm."

"Just so. But we can do *you* a lot if you try on any games, Mr. Jimmy Ah San."

"Ah, you know me then," said the man, looking keenly at Scott.

"Yes, I do, an' you're all right enough. But me an' my mates is going to keep this field for white men—it ain't goin' to be no Chinaman's digging'. So what's yer move?"

"Only what I said. Look at my men! We do not want to stop here; we wish to push along to the coast. Some of them are dying from exhaustion, and my pack-horses can hardly go another quarter of a mile."

Soott scratched his chin meditatively, and then consulted with his mates. He, although so rough in his speech, was not a bad-natured man, and he could see that the Chinese were thoroughly done up, and worn down to skin and bone. Then presently Grainger walked over and joined them, and heard what Ah San had to say.

"I'm sorry that you are in such a bad fix," he said, "but you know as well as I do that if any of your men put a pick into ground here, there will be serious trouble, and if they lose their lives you will be responsible—and may perhaps lose your own."

"I promise you that nothing like that will happen," replied the Chinaman. "My men are all diggers, it is true, but we will not attempt to stay on any field where we are not wanted. My name is James Ah San. I am a British subject, and have lived in Australia for twenty-five years. That man" (pointing to Scott) "knows me, and can tell you that 'Jimmy Ah San' never broke a promise to any man."

"That is right enough," said Scott promptly; "every one in Gympie knew you when you was storekeepin' there, and said you was a good sort."

"We have come over three hundred miles from the Cloncurry," went on the Chinese leader, quickly seeing that Scott's remark had much impressed the other miners; "the diggers there gave us forty-eight hours to clear out. The blacks killed fifteen of us and speared ten of my horses, and six more men died on the way. We can do no harm here. We only want to spell a week, or two weeks."

"Poor devils!" muttered Grainger; then he said to Ah San: "Very well. Now, you see the track going through that clump of sandalwood? Well, follow it and you'll come to a little ironstone ridge, where you'll find a good camping-ground just over a big pool in the creek. There's a bit of sweet grass, too, for your horses, so they can get a good feed to-night. In the morning this black boy will, if you like, show you a place in the ranges, about four miles from here, where you can let them run for a week. There's some fine grass and plenty of water, and they ought to pick up very quickly. But you will have to keep some one to see that they don't get round the other side of the range—through one of the gaps; if they do, you'll lose them to a dead certainty, for there are two or three mobs of brumbies{*} running there. Do you want any tucker?" {**}

* *Wild horses.*

** *Provisions.*

"No, thank you," replied Ah San, with an unmistakable inflexion of gratitude in his voice; "we have plenty of rice and tea, but I should like to buy a bullock to-morrow, if I can—I saw some cattle about two miles from here. Is there a cattle station near here?"

"No. The cattle you saw belong to one of us—this man here," pointing to Jansen, "will sell you a beast to-morrow, I daresay."

Then the armed protectors of the integrity from foreign invasion of the rights of Chinkie's Flat nodded "Good evening" to Ah San, and walked back across the road to the "Digger's Best," and the Chinamen, with silent, childlike patience, resumed their loads and trotted along after their leader. They disappeared over the hill, and ere darkness descended the glare of their camp fires was casting steady gleams of light upon the dark waters of the still pool beneath the ridge.

CHAPTER IV ~ GRAINGER AND JIMMY AH SAN TALK TOGETHER

It was eight o'clock in the morning, and Jimmy Ah San, a fat, pleasant-faced Chinaman, dressed in European costume, came outside his tent, and filling his pipe, sat down on the ground, and with his hands clasped on his knees, saw six of the white men emerge from two or three humpies, and walk down to the new shaft to begin work.

He was well acquainted with the previous history of the spot upon which he was now gazing, and something like a scowl darkened his good-humoured face as he looked upon the ragged, half-famished survivors of his company, and thought of the past horrors and hardships of the fearful journey from the Cloncurry. Fifteen of their number had been murdered by blacks in less than a fortnight, and the bones of half a dozen more, who had succumbed to exhaustion or thirst lay bleaching on a strip of desert country between the Cloncurry and the Burdekin River.

But Ah San was a man of courage—and resource as well—and his five-and-twenty years' experience of bush and mining life in the Far North of Australia enabled him to pilot the remainder of his men by forced marches to the Cape River, where they had spelled for a month so as to gain strength for the long stage between that river and Conolly's Creek, on one of the deserted fields of which he hoped to settle and retrieve his broken fortunes.

As he sat and watched and thought, eight or ten members of his company came and crouched near him, gazing with hungry eyes at the heaps of mullock and the mounds of tailings surrounding the "Ever Victorious" battery, watching the Europeans at work, and wondering when they, too, would give it up and follow their departed comrades. For the Chinamen knew that those dry and dusty heaps of mullock and grey and yellow sand, on which the death adder and the black-necked tiger snake now coiled themselves to sleep in the noon-day sun, still contained gold enough to reward patient industry—industry of which the foreign-devils were not capable when the result would be but five pennyweights a day, washed out in the hot waters of the creek under a sky of brass, "with flour at two-pounds-ten per 50 lb. bag," as Dick Scott said.

Presently, turning to a sun-baked, lanky Chinaman near him—his lieutenant—he bade him tell the men to prepare to go down to the Creek, and drag some of the pools with a small seine.

"There are many fish in all these creeks which run into the great river" (the Burdekin), "but I will first go to the foreigners and ask their permission. The tall, sick man is well disposed towards us, and we must be patient and submit to the tyranny of the others for a little while. But all may yet be well with us if I can but get speech of him alone. Meanwhile, keep the company under close watch; let no man wander from the camp till I return."

Then entering his tent, he took from a canvas pack-bag a small bottle, put it in his coat pocket, and, descending the ridge, walked towards the "Digger's Best."

As he drew near, Grainger, followed by the landlord, came out of the house and sat down on rudely made reclining chairs, composed of two pieces of sapling, with cross-pieces, from which was slung a flour sack.

"Good morning, gentlemen," said the Chinaman politely.

"Good morning," they replied civilly, and then Grainger, who was wearing a heavy overcoat, for the chill of an attack of ague was near, asked him to sit down and inquired how his men were.

"They are getting on very well, thank you, sir," replied Ah San, "but several of them are very weak, and will not be fit to travel for a fortnight unless we carry them. But the rest will do them much good, especially if they get a change of food. I have come now to ask you if you and your mates will let us drag some of the pools in the creek for fish. We have a small net."

"Certainly," replied Jansen; "some fish will do them good, and the pools are alive with them now that the creek is so low. And anyway, we don't want to stop you from getting food—do we, Mr. Grainger?"

"Certainly not; we have no earthly right to prevent you from taking fish in the creek, and even if we had we should not use it. We are not brutes."

"Thank you very much," said Ah San—and then, addressing himself to the landlord, he asked him if he had a bullock to sell.

Jansen was an alert business man at once. He had a small herd of cattle running wild about the creek! and was only too glad to sell a beast.

"You can have any bullock you like—the biggest in the lot—for a fiver—but, cash down."

The Chinaman pulled out his purse, handed him a five-pound note, and asked when he could have the beast.

"In about an hour, if you want to kill right off; but you ought not to kill till sundown in such weather as this. But, anyway, I'll saddle up and get a man to help me run the mob into the stockyard. Then you can pick one out for yourself—there's half a dozen bullocks, and some fine young fat cows, so you can have your choice."

In a few minutes the landlord had caught and saddled two horses, and riding one, and leading the other, he went off to the new shaft, where the spare horse was mounted by one of the men working there.

Then Ah San turned to the sick man, and said interrogatively—

"You have fever?"

"Yes, I caught it up Normanton way in the Gulf Country six months ago, and thought I was getting clear of it, but a month back it came on again, and I have been pretty bad ever since."

"I can see that, and the Gulf kind of fever is bad—very bad. I know all about it, for I lived in the Gulf Country for ten years, and have had it myself. Now, here is some medicine which will do you good—it will cure you in ten days if you take a dose every time you feel the 'shakes' coming on. But you must not eat more than you can help."

"Thank you," said Grainger eagerly, as he took the bottle; "it is very kind of you. But you may want it yourself?"

"I have three or four more bottles left. I had a dozen from the doctor at Georgetown on the Etheridge River. He is a man who knows all about fever, and I can assure you that you will be a well man in ten days. Show me your hand, please."

The European extended his hand languidly to the Chinaman, who looked at the finger-nails for a moment or two: "You will have the 'shakes' in a few hours."

"Yes. They generally come on as soon as the sun gets pretty high—about nine or ten o'clock."

"Then you must take a dose now. Can I go inside and get a glass and some water?"

"Yes, certainly. It is very good of you to take so much trouble."

Returning with a glass and some water, the Chinaman poured out a dose of the mixture, and with a smile of satisfaction watched the sick man drink it.

Then Grainger and his visitor began to talk, at first on general matters such as the condition of the country between the Cloncurry and the Burdekin, and then about Chinkie's Flat, its past glories and its present condition. The frank, candid manner of Ah San evoked a similar freedom of speech from the Englishman, who recognised that he was talking to an intelligent and astute man who knew more about the Far North of Queensland and its gold-fields than he did himself.

Then Ah San saw the opportunity for which he had been waiting, and drawing his seat nearer to Grainger's he spoke earnestly to him, told him exactly of the situation of himself and his company, and ended up by making him a certain proposition regarding the working of the abandoned claims, and the restarting of the rusting and weather-worn "Ever Victorious" battery.

Grainger listened intently, nodding his head now and then as Ah San emphasised some particular point. At the end of an hour's conversation they heard the cracking of the landlord's stock whip and the bellowing of cattle as they crossed the creek, and the Chinaman rose and held out his hand.

"Then good morning, Mr. Grainger. I hope you will be able to convince your mates that we can all pull together."

"I am sure of it. We are all pretty hard up. And you and your men can help us, and we can help you. Come down again to-night, and I'll tell you the result of my talk with them."

CHAPTER V ~ THE RESURRECTION OF THE "EVER VICTORIOUS"

At six o'clock in the evening, Grainger was seated at one end of the rough dining-table in the "Digger's Best" with some papers laid before him, At the other end was Dick Scott, and the rest of the men sat on either side, smoking their pipes, and wondering what was in the wind.

Grainger did not keep them waiting long. Taking his pipe out of his mouth, and laying it on the table, he went into business at once, He spoke to them as if he were one of themselves, adopting a simplicity of language and manner that he knew would appeal to their common sense and judgment far more than an

elaborately prepared speech.

"Now, boys, I've got something to say, and I'll say it as quick as I can. None of you know anything of me beyond what I have told you myself; but I don't think any one of you will imagine I'm a man who would try to ring in a swindle on you when I bought the old rattletrap down there?"

"Go ahead, mister," said Dick Scott, "we didn't think no such thing. We on'y thought you was chuckin' away your money pernicious."

Grainger laughed so heartily that his hearers followed suit. Then he went on—

"No. I'm not throwing my money away, boys. I am going to *make* money on this field, and so are you. But there are not enough of us. We want more men—wages' men; and presently I'll explain *why* we shall want them. But first of all, let me show you what I obtained the other day out of between 200 and 250 lbs. weight of those tailings."

He rose, went into the second room, and returned with a small enamelled dish, and placed it upon the table. The miners rose and gathered round, and saw lying on the bottom about an ounce and a quarter of fine powdery gold.

"Holy Moses!" cried one of them, as he drew his forefinger through the bright, yellow dust, "there's more than an ounce there."

"There is," affirmed Grainger: "there are twenty-five pennyweights, and all that came out of not more than 250 lbs. of tailings!"

The men looked at each other with eyes sparkling with excitement, and then Grainger poured the gold out upon a clean plate for closer examination.

"Why," exclaimed Scott, "that means those tailings would go ten ounces to the ton!"

"Just so," said Grainger, "but we can't get those ten ounces out of them by ordinary means, though with new screens, new tables and blankets I am pretty sure we can get four ounces to the ton. But we want the ten, don't we?"

"You bet," was the unanimous response.

"Well, I'll guarantee that we shall get eight ounces at least. But first of all I'll tell you how I got the result. You can try some of the stuff in the morning, and you will find that those tailings will pan out about eight or ten ounces to the ton."

"But acid is mighty dear stuff," said Scott.

"Just so, but it is very good as a test, and of course we are not such duffers as to try to treat more than a couple of thousand tons of tailings with acid. We'd die of old age before we finished. Now, I'll get on and tell you what I do propose. You remember that I said I had seen tailings treated in Victoria without roasting. Well, we could do that now, though we should only get half the gold and lose the other half in the sludge pits. Now, as I told you, I have about four hundred pounds' worth of alluvial gold, which I brought with me from the north, and which I can sell to any bank in the Bay. I intended when I bought the 'Ever Victorious' to spend this £400 in buying some fine screens, a couple of grinding pans, and some other gold-saving machinery, so that when I was not crushing stone for you men I could be running those tailings through. But we can do better—now that the Chinamen are here."

Something like dismay was depicted on the men's faces when they heard this, but no one interrupted as he went on—

"We can do much better. Instead of treating those tailings by simply running them through the screens again and losing half the gold, we can build a proper roasting furnace, and *then* we can grind them, keeping the stampers for crushing alone. This morning I had a long yarn with Ah San, the boss Chinaman, and he is willing to let us have as many of his men as we want for twenty-five shillings a week each, and indenture them to me for six months—there's the labour we want, right to our hand. It's cheap labour, I admit, but that is no concern of ours. The Chows, so Ah San tells me, will be only too glad to get a six months' job at twenty-five bob a week—of which he takes half."

"Aye," said Scott contemptuously, "they're only bloomin' slaves."

"To their boss, no doubt; but not to us. They will be well pleased to work for us and earn what they consider good wages. I propose that we get at least twenty of them and set them to work right away. There is any amount of good clay here, I know, and we'll start them digging. I know how to build a brick-kiln, and we'll get a proper bricklayer up from the Bay, and I guarantee that by the time the new machinery is up that the roasting furnace will be built."

"No need to get a bricklayer from the Bay and pay him about eight pound a week," said a man named Arthur O'Hare; "I'm a bricklayer by trade."

"Bully for you," said Grainger; "will you take four pounds a week to put up the furnace and chimney?"

"I'm willing, if my mates are."

"Well, boys, that's pretty well all I have to say. We'll build the roasting furnace; the Chinamen will do all the bullocking{*} both at that and the battery, and we'll put on half-a-dozen to help at the new shaft. I'll boss the battery, drive the engine, and do the amalgamating, and you men can go on roasting stone. Every Saturday we'll stop the battery and clean her up, and at the end of every four weeks we'll send the gold to the bank and go shares in the plunder. Now, tell me, what do you think? Do you think it's a fair proposition?"

* "Bullocking"—hard work—i.e., to work like bullock. In a team.

After a very brief consultation together, Scott, speaking on behalf of his mates, said they were all willing, and not only willing, but pleased to "come in" with him, but they thought that he would only be acting fairly to himself if he, as manager of the battery, amalgamator, and general supervisor of the whole concern, took a salary of ten pounds a week.

"No, boys. I'll take six pounds if you like. Of course, however, you will not object to refunding me the money

I am expending on the new machinery. As for the profits, we shall divide equally.

"Well then," said Scott, banging his brawny fist on the table and turning to his mates, "if you treats us in that generous way, we must do the same with you as regards the stone we raise. Boys, I proposes that as our new mate is finding the money to start the old battery again, and going even shares with us in the gold from the tailings, that we go even shares with him in whatever gold we get from the claims."

"Right," was the unanimous response. And then they all came up one by one and shook hands with Grainger, whose face flushed with pleasure. Then Jansan produced a bottle of rum and Grainger gave them a toast—

"Boys, here's good luck to us all, and here's to the day when we shall hear the stampers banging away in the boxes and the 'Ever Victorious' be as victorious as she was in the good old days of the field."

CHAPTER VI ~ "MAGNETIC VILLA"

"Magnetic Villa" was one of the "best" houses in the rising city of Townsville. It stood on the red, rocky, and treeless side of Melton Hill, overlooked the waters of Cleveland Bay, and faced the rather picturesque-looking island from whence it derived its name.

About ten months after the resurrection of the "Ever Victorious" and the concomitant reawakening to life of Chinkie's Flat, three ladies arrived by steamer from Sydney to take possession of the villa—then untenanted. In a few hours it was generally known that the newcomers were Mrs. Trappème, Miss Trappème, and Miss Lilla Trappème. There was also a Master Trappème, a lanky, ill-looking, spotted-faced youth of fourteen, in exceedingly new and badly-fitting clothes much too large for him. By his mother and sisters he was addressed as "Mordaunt," though until a year or so previously his name had been Jimmy.

A few weeks after the ladies had installed themselves in the villa there appeared a special advertisement in the Townsville *Champion* (over the leader) informing the public that "Mrs. Lee-Trappème is prepared to receive a limited number of paying guests at 'Magnetic Villa.' Elegant appointments, superior *cuisine*, and that comfort and hospitality which can Only be obtained in a Highly-refined Family Circle."

"Hallo!" said Mallard, the editor of the *Champion*, to Flynn, his sub, who called his attention to the advertisement, "so 'Magnetic Villa' is turned into a hash house, eh? Wonder who they are? 'Highly refined family circle'—sounds fishy, doesn't it? Do you know anything about them?"

"No, but old Maclean, the Melbourne drummer who came up in the *Barcoo* from Sydney with them, does—at least he knew the old man, who died about a year and a half ago."

"What was he?"

"Bank messenger in Sydney at thirty bob a week; used to lend money to the clerks at high interest, and did very well; for when he pegged out he left the old woman a couple of thousand. His name was Trappem—John Trappem, but he was better known as 'Old Jack Trap.' When they came on board the *Barcoo* they put on no end of side, and they were 'Mrs., the Misses, and Master Lee-Trappème.'"

"Lord! what a joke! Did the drummer give the show away on board?"

"No, for a wonder. But he told me of it."

"Daughters good looking?"

"Younger one is not too bad; elder's a terror—thin, bony, long face, long nose, long feet, long conceit of herself, and pretty long age, walks mincingly, like a hen on a hot griddle, and——"

"Oh, stop it! The old woman?"

"Fat, ruddy-faced, pleasant-looking, white hair, talks of her 'poor *papalless* girls,' &c. She's a pushing old geyser, however, and has already got the parsons and some of the other local nobility to call on her."

"Wonder what sort of tucker they'd give one, Flynn? I'm tired of paying £6 a week at the beastly overcrowded dog-kennel, entitled the 'Royal' Hotel—save the mark!—and I'm game even to try a boarding-house, but," and here he rubbed his chin, "this 'refined family circle' business, you know?"

"They all say that," remarked the sub. "You couldn't expect 'em to tell the truth and say, 'In Paradise Mansions Mrs. de Jones feeds her boarders on anything cheap and nasty; the toilet jugs have no handles, and the floors are as dirty as the kitchen slave, who does the cooking and waits at table, and the family generally are objectionable in their manners and appearance.'"

"Are you game to come with me this afternoon and inspect 'Magnetic Villa' and the 'refined family circle'?"

"Yes. And, by Jove! if you take up your quarters there, I will do so as well. We could try it, anyway. I'm batching with Battray, the police inspector, and three other fellows. It was only going to cost us £3 a week each; it costs us more like £6."

"Of course, too much liquor, and all that," said the editor of the *Champion*, with a merry twinkle in his eye.

Scarcely had the sub-editor left when a knock announced another visitor, and Grainger, booted and spurred, entered the room.

Mallard jumped from his chair and shook hands warmly with him. "This is a surprise, Grainger. When did you get to town?"

"About an hour ago. Myra is with me; her six months' visit has come to an end, and my mother and my elder sister want her back again; so she is leaving in the next steamer. But all the hotels are packed full, and as the steamer does not leave for a week, I don't know how to manage. That's why I came to see you, thinking you might know of some place where we could put up for a week."

"I shall be only too delighted to do all I can. The town is very full of people just now, and the hotels are

perfect pandemoniums, what with Chinkie's Flat, the rush to the Haughton, Black Gully, and other places Townsville is off its head with bibulous prosperity, and lodgings of any kind fit for a lady are unobtainable. Ah, stop! I've forgotten something. I do know of a place which might suit Miss Grainger very well. Where is she now?"

"In the alleged sitting-room at the 'Queen's.' I gave the head waiter a sovereign to let her have it to herself for a couple of hours whilst I went out and saw what I could do."

Then Mallard told Grainger of "Magnetic Villa."

"Let us go and see this refined family," he said with a laugh. "I don't know them, but from what my sub tells me, I daresay Miss Grainger could manage with them for a week. I know the house, which has two advantages: it is large, and is away from this noisy, dirty, dusty, and sinful town."

"Very well," said Grainger as he took out his pipe, "will three o'clock suit? My sister might come."

"Of course. Now tell me about Chinkie's Flat. Any fresh news?"

"Nothing fresh; same old thing."

"Same old thing!" and Mallard spread out his arms yearningly and rolled his eyes towards the ceiling. "Just listen to the man, O ye gods! 'The same old thing!' That means you are making a fortune hand over fist, you and Jimmy Ah San."

"We are certainly making a lot of money, Mallard," replied Grainger quietly, as he lit his pipe and crossed his strong, sun-tanned hands over his knee. "My own whack, so far, out of Chinkie's Flat, has come to more than £16,000."

"Don't say 'whack,' Grainger; it's vulgar. Say 'My own emolument, derived in less than one year from the auriferous wealth of Chinkie's Flat, amounts to £16,000.' You'll be going to London soon, and floating the property for a million, and—"

Grainger, who knew the man well, and had a sincere liking and respect for him, laughed again, though his face flushed. "You know me better than that, Mallard; I'm not the man to do that sort of thing. I could float the concern and make perhaps a hundred thousand or so out of it if I was blackguard enough to do it. But, thank God, I've never done anything dirty in my life, and never will."

"Don't mind my idiotic attempt at a joke, Grainger," and Mallard pat ont his hand. "I know you are the straightest man that ever lived. But I did really think that you would be going off to England soon, and that we—I mean the other real friends beside myself you have made in this God-forsaken colony—would know you no more except by reading of your 'movements' in London."

"No, Mallard, Australia is my home. I know nothing of England, for I left there when I was a child. As I told you, my poor father was one of the biggest sheep men in Victoria, and died soon after the bank foreclosed on him. The old station, which he named 'Melinda Downs,' after my mother, who has the good old-fashioned name of Melinda, has gone through a lot of vicissitudes since then; but a few weeks ago my agent in Sydney bought it for £10,000, and now my mother and sisters are going back there."

"And yourself?"

"Oh, a year or two more—perhaps three or four; and then, when Chinkie's Flat is worked out, I too, will go south to the old home."

Mallard sighed, and then, taking a cigar, lit it, and the two men smoked together in silence for a few minutes.

"Mallard!"

"Yes, old man."

"This continual newspaper grind is pretty tough, isn't it?"

"Yes, it is. But thanks to you—by putting me on to the 'Day Dawn' Reef at Chinkie's Flat—I've made a thousand or two and can chuck it at any time."

"Don't say 'chuck.' It's vulgar; and the editor of the 'leading journal in North Queensland' must not be vulgar," and he smiled.

"Ah, Grainger my boy, you have been a good friend to me!"

"It's the other way about, Mallard. You were the only man in the whole colony of Queensland who stood to me when I began to employ Chinese labour. That ruffian, Peter Finnerty, said in the House, only two months ago, that I deserved to be shot."

"Well, you stuck to your guns, and I to mine. Fortunately the *Champion* is my own 'rag,' and not owned by a company. I stuck to you as a matter of principle."

"And lost heavily by it."

"For six months or so. A lot of people withdrew their advertisements; but they were a bit surprised when at the end of that time they came back to me, and I refused to insert their ads. at any price. I consider that you not only did wisely, but right, in employing the Chinamen. Are they going on satisfactorily?"

"Very; they do work for me at twenty-five shillings a week that white men would not do at all—no matter what you offered them: emptying sludge-pits, building dams, etc."

"Exactly! And now all the people who rose up and howled at you for employing Chinamen, and the *Champion* for backing you up, are shouting themselves hoarse in your praise. And the revival of Chinkie's Flat, and the new rushes all round about it, have added very materially to the wealth of this town." After a little further conversation, Grainger went back to the Queen's Hotel, where Mallard was to call at three o'clock.

Myra Grainger, a small, slenderly-built girl of nineteen, looked up as he entered the sitting-room.

"Any success, Ted?"

"Here, look at this advertisement. Mallard knows the place, but not the people. He's coming here at three, and we'll all go and interview Mrs. Trappème—which her real name is Trappem, I believe."

"I shall be glad to see Mr. Mallard again. I like him—in fact, I liked him before I ever saw him for the way in which he fought for you."

"And I'm strongly of the opinion that Mr. Thomas Mallard has a very strong liking for Miss Myra Grainger."

"Then I like him still more for that."

Grainger patted his sister's cheek. "He is a good fellow, Myra. I think he will ask you to marry him."

"I certainly expect it, Ted."

CHAPTER VII ~ SHEILA CAROLAN

Although Mrs. Trappème had been so short a time in Townsville, she had contrived to learn a very good deal, not only about people in the town itself, but in the surrounding districts, and knew that Grainger was a wealthy mine-owner, had a sister staying with him on a visit—and was a bachelor. She also knew that Mallard was the editor of the *Champion*, and was likewise a bachelor—in fact, she had acquired pretty well all the information that could be acquired; her informant being the talkative, scandal-mongering wife of the Episcopalian curate.

She was therefore highly elated when at four o'clock in the afternoon Miss Grainger and her brother, and Mallard, after a brief inspection of the rooms—which were really handsomely furnished—took three of the largest and a private sitting-room, at an exorbitant figure, for a week, and promised to be at the Villa that evening for dinner.

"He's immensely rich, Juliette," she said to her daughter (she was speaking of Grainger after he had gone), "and you must do your best, your very best. Wear something very simple, as it is the first evening; and be particularly nice to his sister—I'm sure he's very fond of her. She'll only be here a week, but he and Mr. Mallard will probably be here a month. So now you have an excellent chance. Don't throw it away by making a fool of yourself."

Juliette (who had been christened Julia, and called "Judy" for thirty-two years of her life) set her thin lips and then replied acidly—

"It's all very well for you to talk, but whenever I did have a chance—which was not often—you spoilt it by your interference. And if you allow Jimmy to sit at the same table with us to-night he'll simply disgust these new people. When you call him 'Mordaunt' the hideous little wretch grins; and he grins too when you call me 'Juliette' and Lizzie 'Lilla.'"

Mrs. Trappème's fat face scowled at her daughter, and she was about to make an angry retort when the frontdoor bell rang.

"A lady wants to see yez, ma'am," said the "new chum" Irish housemaid, who had answered the door.

"Did you show her into the reception room, Mary?"

"Sure, an' is it the wee room wid the sthuffed burd in the fireplace, or is it the wan beyant wid the grane carpet on de flore; becos' I'm after puttin' her in the wan wid the sthuffed burd? Anny way it's a lady she is, sure enough; an' it's little she'll moind where she do be waitin' on yez."

"Did she send in her card, Mary?"

"Did she sind in her *what*?"

"Her card, you stupid girl."

"Don't you be after miscallin' me, ma'am. Sure I can get forty shillings a wake annywhere an' not be insulted by anny wan, instead av thirty here, which I do be thinkin' is not the place to shuit me"—and the indignant daughter of the Emerald Isle, a fresh-complexioned, handsome young woman, tossed her pretty head and marched out.

So Mrs. Trappème went into the room "wid the sthuffed burd in it," and there rose to meet her a fair-haired girl of about eighteen, with long-lashed, dark-grey eyes, and a somewhat worn and drawn expression about her small mouth, as if she were both mentally and physically tired. Her dress was of the simplest—a neatly fitting, dark-blue, tailor-made gown.

"I saw your advertisement in the *Champion* this morning," she said, "and called to ascertain your terms." Mrs. Trappème's big, protruding, and offensive pale-blue eyes stared at and took in the girl's modest attire and her quiet demeanour as a shark looks at an unsuspecting or disabled fish which cannot escape its maws.

"Please sit down," she said with a mingled ponderous condescension and affability. "I did not *advertise*. I merely *notified* in the *Champion* that I would receive paying guests. But my terms are very exclusive." "What are they?"

"Five guineas a week exclusive of extras, which, in this place, amount to quite a guinea more. You could not afford that, I suppose?"

The dark-grey eyes flashed, and then looked steadily at those of the fishy blue.

"Your terms are certainly very high, but I have no option. I find it impossible to get accommodation in Townsville. I only arrived from Sydney this morning in the *Corea*, and as I am very tired, I should like to rest in an hour or so—as soon as you can conveniently let me have my room," and taking out her purse she placed a £5 note, a sovereign, and six shillings on the table.

"Will you allow me to pay you in advance?" she said, with a tinge of sarcasm in her clear voice. "I will send my luggage up presently."

Mrs. Trappème at once became most affable. She had noticed that the purse the girl had produced was literally stuffed with new £5 notes.

"May I send for it?" she said beamingly, "and will you not stay and go to your room now?"

"No, thank you," was the cold reply, "I have some business to attend to first. Can you tell me where Mr. Mallard, the editor of the *Champion*, lives? I know where the office is, but as it is a morning paper, I should not be likely to find him there at this early hour."

Mrs. Trappème was at once devoured with curiosity. "How very extraordinary! Mr. Mallard was here only half an hour ago with a Mr. Grainger and Miss Grainger. They are coming here to stay for a few weeks."

The girl's fair face lit up. "Oh, indeed! I am sorry I was not here, as I particularly wish to see Mr. Grainger also. I had no idea that he was in Townsville, and was calling on Mr. Mallard—who, I know, is a friend of his—to ascertain when he was likely to be in town."

"They will all be here for dinner, Miss——"

"My name is Carolan," and taking out her cardcase she handed Mrs. Trappème a card on which was inscribed, "Miss Sheila Carolan."

"Then Mr. Grainger is a friend of yours?" said Mrs. Trappème inquisitively, thinking of the poor chance Juliette would have with such a Richmond in the field as Miss Sheila Carolan.

"No, I have never even seen him," said the girl stiffly, and then she rose.

"Then you will send for my luggage, Mrs. Trappème?"

"With pleasure, Miss Carolan. But will you not look at your room, and join my daughter and myself in our afternoon tea?"

"No, thank you, I think I shall first try and see either Mr. Mallard or Mr. Grainger. Do you know where Mr. Mallard lives?"

"At the Royal Hotel in Flinders Street. My daughter Lilla will be delighted to show you the way."

But Miss Sheila Carolan was stubborn, and declined the kind offer, and Mrs. Trappème, whose curiosity was now at such a pitch that she was beginning to perspire, saw her visitor depart, and then called for Juliette.

"I wonder who she is and what she wants to see Mr. Grainger for?" she said excitedly, as she mopped her florid face: "doesn't know him, and yet wants to see him particularly. There is something mysterious about her."

"What is she like?" asked Miss Trappème eagerly. "I didn't see her face, but her clothes are all right, I can tell you." (She knew all about clothes, having been a forewoman in a Sydney drapery establishment for many years.)

"Oh, a little, common-looking thing, but uppish. I wonder what on earth she *does* want to see Mr. Grainger for?"

Half an hour later, when Miss Carolan's luggage arrived, it was duly inspected and criticised by the whole Trappème family. Each trunk bore a painted address: "Miss Carolan, Minerva Downs, Dalrymple, North Queensland."

"Now where in the world is Minerva Downs?" said Mrs. Trappème, "and why on earth is she going there? And her name too—Carolan—Sheila Carolan! I suppose she's a Jewess."

"Indade, an' it's not that she is, ma'am, whatever it manes," indignantly broke in Mary, who had helped to carry in the luggage, and now stood erect with flaming face and angry eyes. "Sure an' I tould yez she was a lady, an' anny wan cud see she was a lady, an' Carolan is wan av the best names in Ireland—indade it is."

"You may leave the room, Mary," said Miss Trappème loftily.

"Lave the room, is it, miss? Widout maning anny disrespect to yez, I might as well be telling yez that I'm ready to lave the place intirely, an' so is the cook an' stableman, an' the gardener. Sure none av us—having been used to the gentry—want to sthay in a place where we do be getting talked at all day."

The prospect of all her servants leaving simultaneously was too awful for Mrs. Trappème to contemplate. So she capitulated.

"Don't be so hasty, Mary. I suppose, then, that Miss Carolan is an Irishwoman?"

"She is that, indade. Sore an' her swate face toold me so before she spoke to me at all, at all."

"Then you must look after her wants yery carefully, Mary. She will only be here for a few weeks."

Mary's angry eyes softened. "I will that ma'am. Sure she's a sweet young lady wid the best blood in her, I'm thinkin'."

Miss Trappème sniffed.

CHAPTER VIII ~ MYRA AND SHEILA

There was nothing mysterious about Sheila Carolan; her story was a very simple one. Her parents were both dead, and she had no relatives, with the exception of an aunt, and with her she had lived for the last five years. The two, however, did not agree very well, and Sheila being of a very independent spirit, and possessing a few hundred pounds of her own, frankly told her relative that she intended to make her own way in the world. There was living in North Queensland a former great friend of her mother's—a Mrs. Farrow, whose husband was the owner of a large cattle station near Dalrymple—and to her she wrote asking her if she could help her to obtain a situation as a governess. Six weeks later she received a warmly worded and almost affectionate letter.

"My dear Sheila,—Why did you not write to me long, long ago, and tell me that you and your Aunt Margaret did not get

on well together! I remember as a girl that she was somewhat 'crotchety.' I am not going to write you a long letter. I want you to come to us. Be my children's governess—and I really do want a governess for them—but remember that you are coming to your mother's friend and schoolmate, and that although you will receive £100 a year—if that is too little let us agree for £160—it does not mean that you will be anything else to me but the daughter of your dear mother. Now I must tell you that Minerva Downs is a difficult place to reach, and that you will have to ride all the way from Townsville—250 miles—but that will be nothing to an Australian-born girl 'wid Oirish blood in her.' When you get to Townsville call on Mr. Mallard, the editor of the Champion, who is a friend of ours (I've written him), and he will 'pass' you on to another friend of ours, a Mr. Grainger, who lives at a mining town called Chinkie's Flat, ninety miles from here, and Mr. Grainger (don't lose your heart to him, and defraud my children of their governess) will 'pass' you on with the mailman for Minerva Downs. The enclosed will perhaps be useful (it is half a year's salary you advance), and my husband and all my large and furious family of rough boys and rougher girls will be delighted to see you.

"Very sincerely yours, my dear Sheila,

"Noba Fabbow."

With the letter was enclosed a cheque for £50 on a Sydney bank.

As the girl descended Melton Hill into hot, dusty, and noisy Flinders Street, she smiled to herself as she thought how very much she had stimulated the curiosity of Mrs. Trappème—to whom she had, almost unconsciously, taken an instinctive dislike.

As she entered the crowded vestibule of the Royal Hotel, a group of men—diggers, sugar planters, storekeepers, bankers, ship captains, and policemen, who were all laughing hilariously at some story which was being told by one of their number—at once made a lane for her to approach the office, for ladies—especially young and pretty ladies—were few in comparison to the men in North Queensland in those days, and a murmured whisper of admiration was quite audible to her as she made her inquiry of the clerk.

"No; Mr. Mallard is with Mr. and Miss Grainger at the 'Queen's.' He left here a few minutes ago."

"May I show you the way, miss?" said a huge bearded man, who, booted and spurred, took off his hat to her in an awkward manner. "I'm Dick Scott, one of Mr. Grainger's men."

"Thank you," replied Sheila, "it is very kind of you," and, escorted by the burly digger, she went out into the street again.

"Are you Miss Caroline, ma'am?" said her guide to her respectfully, as he tried to shorten his lengthy strides.

"Yes, my name is Carolan," she replied, trying to hide a smile.

"Thought so, ma'am. I heerd the boss a-tellin' Miss Grainger as you would be a-comin' to Chinkie's on yer way up ter Minervy Downs. Here's the 'Queen's,' miss, an' there's the boss and his sister and Mr. Mallard on the verandah there havin' a cooler," and then, to her amusement and Grainger's astonishment, Mr. Dick Scott introduced her.

"This is Miss Caroline, boss. I picked her up at the 'Royal,'" and then, without another word, he marched off again with a proud consciousness of having "done the perlite thing."

"I am Sheila Carolan, Mr. Grainger. I was at the 'Royal' asking for Mr. Mallard when Mr. Scott kindly brought me here."

"I am delighted to meet you, Miss Carolan," said Grainger, who had risen and extended his hand. "I had not the slightest idea you had arrived." And then he introduced her to his sister and Mallard.

"Now, Miss Carolan, please let me give you a glass of this—it is simply lovely and cold," said Myra, pouring some champagne into a glass with some crashed ice in it. "My brother is the proad possessor of a big but rapidly diminishing lump of ice, which was sent to him by the captain of the *Corea* just now."

"Thank you, Miss Grainger. I really am very thirsty. I have had quite a lot of walking about to-day. I have a letter to you, Mr. Mallard, from Mrs. Farrow," and she handed the missive to him.

"I am so very sorry I did not know of your arrival, Miss Carolan," said Mallard. "I would have met you on board, but, as a matter of fact, I did not expect you in the *Corea*, as she is a very slow boat."

"I was anxious to get to Mrs. Farrow," Sheila explained, "and so took the first steamer."

"Where are you staying, Miss Carolan?" asked Myra.

"Oh, I've been very fortunate. I have actually secured a room at 'Magnetic Villa,' on Melton Hill; in fact I went there just after you had left."

Myra clapped her hands with delight. "Oh, how lovely! I shall be there for a week, and my brother and Mr. Mallard are staying there as well."

"So Mrs. Lee Trappème informed me," said Sheila with a bright smile.

Mallard—an irrepressible joker and mimic—at once threw back his head, crossed his hands over his chest, and bowed in such an exact imitation of Mrs. Trappème that a burst of laughter followed.

"Now you two boys can run away and play marbles for a while, as Miss Carolan and I want to have a little talk before we go to the 'refined family circle' for dinner," said Myra to her brother. "It is now six o'clock; our luggage has gone up, and so, if you will come back for us in half an hour, we will let you escort us there—to the envy of all the male population of this horrid, dusty, noisy town."

"Very well," said Grainger with a laugh, "Mallard and I will contrive to exist until then," and the two men went off into the billiard-room.

"Now, Miss Carolan," said the lively Myra, as she opened the door of the sitting-room and carried in the table on which were the glasses, champagne bottle, and ice, "we'll put these inside first. The sight of that ice will make every man who may happen to see it and who knows Ted come and introduce himself to me. Oh, this is a very funny country! I'm afraid it rather shocked you to see me drinking champagne on an hotel verandah in full view of passers-by. But, really, the whole town is excited—it has gold-fever on the brain—and then all the men are so nice, although their free and easy ways used to astonish me considerably at first. But diggers especially are such manly men—you know what I mean."

"Oh, quite. I know I shall like North Queensland. There were quite a number of diggers on board the *Carea*, and one night we held a concert in the saloon and I sang 'The Kerry Dance'—I'm an Irishwoman—and next morning a big man named O'Hagan, one of the steerage passengers, came up and asked me if I would 'moind acceptin' a wee bit av a stone,' and he handed me a lovely specimen of quartz with quite two ounces of gold in it. He told me he had found it on the Shotover River, in New Zealand. I didn't know what to say or do at first, and then he paid me such a compliment that I fairly tingled all over with vanity. 'Sure an' ye'll take the wee bit av a stone from me, miss,' he said. 'I'm a Kerry man meself, an' when I heard yez singin' "The Kerry Dance," meself and half a dozen more men from the oold sod felt that if ye were a man we'd have carried yez around the deck in a chair."

"How nice of him!" said Myra; "but they are all like that. Nearly every one of my brother's men at Chinkie's Flat gave me something in the way of gold specimens when I left there."

"Then," resumed Sheila, "in the afternoon *all* the steerage passengers sent me and the captain what they call a 'round robin,' and asked if he would let them have a concert in the steerage, and if I would sing. And we did have it—on the deck—and I had to sing that particular song *three* times."

"I wish I had been there! Do you know, Miss Carolan, that that big man who brought you here—Dick Scott—rough and uneducated as he is, is a gentleman. On our way down from Chinkie's Flat we had to swim our horses across the Ross River, which was in flood. When we reached the other side I was, of course, wet through, and my hair had come down, and I looked like a half-drowned cat, I suppose. There is a public-house on this side of the Ross, and we went there at once to change our clothes, which were in canvas saddle bags on a pack-horse, and came over dry. The public-house was full of people, among whom were three commercial travellers, who were doing what is called 'painting the place red'—they were all half-intoxicated. As I came in wet and dripping they leered at me, and one of them said, 'Look at the sweet little ducky—poor little darling—with her pittie ickle facey-wacey all wet and coldy-woldy.' Ted was not near me at the time, but Scott heard, and ten minutes later, as I was changing my clothes, I heard a dreadful noise, and the most *awful* language, and then a lot of cheering. I dressed as quickly as possible and went out into the dining-room, and there on the floor were the three commercial travellers. Their faces looked simply dreadful, smothered in blood, and I felt quite sick. At the other end of the room were a lot of men, miners and stockmen, who were surrounding Dick Scott, slapping him on the back, and imploring him to drink with them. It seems that as soon as I had gone to my room to change, the valiant Dick had told them that the 'drummers' had insulted Mr. Grainger's sister, and in a few minutes the room was cleared and a ring formed, and Dick actually did what the landlord termed 'smashed up the whole three in five minutes.'"

"I'm sure I shall like Mr. Dick Scott," said Sheila. "I had to try hard and not laugh when he pointed to you, and said in his big, deep voice, 'There they are, having a "cooler"'—I thought at first he meant you were cooling yourselves."

"Any drink is called a 'cooler,' "explained Myra; "but, oh dear, how I do chatter! The fact is, I'm so wildly excited, and want to talk so much that I can't talk fast enough. But I *must* first of all tell you this—I'm really most sincerely glad to meet you, for I feel as if I knew you well. Mrs. Farrow—I spent a week at Minerva Downs—told me you were coming, and that she was longing to see you. I am sure you will be very, very happy with her. She is the most lovable, sweet woman in the world, and when she spoke of your mother her eyes filled with tears. And the children are simply *splendid*. I suppose I am unduly fond of them because they made so much of me, and think that my brother is the finest rider in the world—'and he is that, indade'—isn't that Irish?"

"Yes," said Sheila smilingly, "that is Irish; and I am sure I shall be very happy there."

Myra Grainger, who was certainly, as she had said, wildly excited, suddenly moved her chair close to that on which Sheila sat.

"Miss Carolan, I'm sure that you and I will always be great 'chums'—as they say here in North Queensland—and I'm just dying to tell you of something. Within this last hour I have become engaged to Mr. Mallard! Even Ted doesn't know it yet. Oh, I have heaps and heaps of things to tell you. Can't we have a real, nice long talk to-night?"

"Indeed we can," said Sheila, looking into the girl's bright, happy face.

CHAPTER IX ~ DINNER WITH "THE REFINED FAMILY"

Somewhat to the annoyance of Grainger and his friends, they found on their arrival at "Magnetic Villa" that there were several other visitors there who had apparently come to dine. Whether they were personal friends of Mrs. Trappème or not, or were "paying guests" like themselves, they could not at first discover.

"Dinner will be ready at eight o'clock, Miss Grainger," said Mrs. Trappème sweetly to Myra, who with

Sheila had been shown into their private sitting-room; and then she added quickly, as she heard a footstep in the passage, "You have not met my daughter. Come, Juliette, dear—Miss Grainger, my eldest daughter; Miss Carolan, Miss Trappème."

The two girls bowed rather coldly to Miss Trappème, who, after the usual commonplaces, asked Miss Grainger if she were not tired.

"Very—and so is Miss Carolan. We shall be glad of an hour's rest before dinner."

The hint was unmistakable, and Miss Trappème smiled herself out, inwardly raging at what she told her mother was Sheila's forwardness in so soon thrusting herself upon Miss Grainger.

As she went out, Sheila looked at Myra and laughed. "We are certainly meant to be treated as members of the family, whether we like it or not. I wonder if the other people we saw are as pushful as 'Mamma' and 'Juliette.'"

"I trust not; that would be awful—even for a week."

Mallard was in Grainger's room, sprawled out on the bed, talking to him and smoking, whilst the latter was opening a leather trunk which contained some bottles of whisky and soda water, and a small box which held the remains of the ice.

"We can't let this 'melt on as,' as the Irish would say, Mallard," and he placed it in the toilet basin in its covering of blanket. "Now move your lazy self and break a piece off with your knife, whilst I open this bottle of Kinahan's and some soda. I trust the cultured family will not object to the sound of a cork popping at seven o'clock."

"Not they," said Mallard, as he rose; "they would not mind if you took the whisky to the table and drank it out of the bottle. Oh, I can gauge the old dame pretty well, I think; avarice is writ large in her face, and she'll squeeze us all she can. She told me in a mysterious aside that the butler kept all the very best wines and liquor obtainable. I thanked her, and said I usually provided my own. She didn't like it a bit; but I'm not going to pay her a sovereign for a bottle of whisky or Hennessy when I can get a case of either for a five-pound note. Oh!" he added disgustedly, "they're all alike."

"Well, don't worry, old man," said his friend philosophically, as he handed him a glass; "there, take this. I wonder if Mrs. Trap—Trapper, or whatever her name is, thinks we are going to dress for dinner. Neither my sister nor Miss Carolan will, and I'm sure I'm not going to establish a bad precedent."

"Same here. If other people like to waste time dressing for dinner, let them; this town is altogether too new and thriving a place for busy men like ourselves to worry about evening dress. By the way, Grainger, I've some news for you that I trust will give you pleasure: your sister has promised to marry me next year."

Grainger grasped his friend's hand. "I'm glad, very glad, old man. I was wondering what made her so unusually bright this afternoon; but she has kept it dark."

"Hasn't had a chance to tell you yet. I only asked her a couple of hours ago."

"Well, let us go and see her and Miss Carolan before dinner. I can hear them talking in the sitting-room. Hallo! who is that little fellow out there crossing the lawn with the younger Miss Trappème. He's in full fig."

Mallard looked out of the window and saw a very diminutive man in evening dress.

"Oh, that's little Assheton, the new manager for the Australian Insurance Company. He's just out from England. He's a fearfully conceited ape, but a smart fellow at the insurance business. Great fun at the 'Queen's' the other day with him. He came in, dressed in frock coat, tall hat, and carrying a thick, curly stick as big as himself. Of course every one smiled, and he took it badly—couldn't see what there was to laugh at; and when old Charteris, the Commissioner, asked him how much he would 'take for the hat,' he put his monocle up and said freezingly, 'Sir, I do not know you.' That made us simply howl, and then, when we had subsided a bit, Morgan the barrister, who is here on circuit with Judge Cooper, said in that fanny, deep, rumbling voice of his—

"'Are you, sir, one of the—ah—ah—circus company which—ah—arrived to-day?'

"The poor little beggar was furious, lost his temper, and called us a lot of ill-mannered, vulgar fellows, and then some one or other whipped off the offending hat, threw it into the street, and made a cockshy of it.

"'I'll have satisfaction for this outrage!' he piped. 'Landlord, send for a policeman. I'll give all these men in charge. Your house is very disorderly. Do you know *who* I am?'

"'No, nor do I care,' said old Cramp, down whose cheeks the tears were running; 'but if you'll come here like that every day, I'll give you a sovereign, and we'll have the hat. Oh, you're better than any circus I ever saw. Oh, oh, oh!' and he went off into another fit.

"The poor little man looked at us in a dazed sort of a way—thought us lunatics, and then when old Charteris asked him not to mind a bit of miners' horseplay, but to sit down and have some fizz, he called him 'an audacious ruffian,' and shrieked out—

"'I am Mr. B. D. Assheton—the manager of the Australian Insurance Company. Do you possibly imagine I would drink with a person *like you?*'"

Grainger laughed: "It must have been great fun."

"Rather—but the cream of it is to come yet. He rushed out into Flinders Street, found Sergeant Doyle and a policeman, and came back panting and furious, and pointing, to Charteris, told them to take him in charge. Doyle looked at us blankly, saw we were nearly dead with laughing, and then took Assheton aside, and said in his beautiful brogue—

"'Me little mahn, it's drinkin' ye've been. Do yez want me to arrest the Po-liss Magisthrate himsilf? Who are ye at all, at all? Ye'd bethter be after goin' home and lyin' down, or I'll lock ye up for making a dishturbance. Do ye moind me now?'"

Grainger could no longer control his laughter, and in the midst of it, Myra tapped vigorously at the door, He rose and opened it.

"Whatever is all this noise about, Ted? You two great boys!"

"Oh, take Mallard away, Myra, for heaven's sake!"

A little before eight o'clock the deafening clamour of a gong announced dinner, and the company filed in. Mrs. Trappème and the Misses Trappème were in "very much evening dress" as Sheila murmured to Myra, and they seemed somewhat surprised that neither Miss Grainger nor Miss Carolan had donned anything more unusual than perfectly-made dainty gowns of cool white Indian muslin. Grainger and Mallard wore the usual white duck suits (the most suitable and favoured dress for a climate like that of torrid North Queensland), and Sheila could not but admire their big well-set-up figures—both were "six feet men"—and contrast their handsome, bronzed and bearded faces with the insignificant appearance of Assheton and another gentleman in evening dress—a delicate but exceedingly gentlemanly young Scotsman. Of course there were more introductions—all of which were duly and unnecessarily carried out by Mrs. Trappème. Others of that lady's guests were the local Episcopalian clergyman and his wife—the former was a placid, dreamy-looking, mild creature, with soft, kindly eyes. He smiled at everybody, was evidently in abject terror of his wife—a hard-featured lady about ten years his senior, with high cheek-bones and an exceedingly corrugated neck and shoulders. She eyed Myra and Sheila with cold dissatisfaction, and after dinner had once begun, devoted herself to the task of extracting information from the latter regarding her future movements. She had already discussed her with Mrs. Trappème, and had informed her hostess that she had "suspicions" about a girl who affected mystery in the slightest degree, and who could afford to pay six guineas a week for simple board and lodging.

"Quite so, Mrs. Wooler," Mrs. Trappème had assented; "I must confess it doesn't look quite right. Even Juliette thinks it very strange for her to be so reticent as to who she is and where she is going. Of course I could have refused to receive her, and am now rather sorry I did not. I understood from her that Mr. Grainger was an utter stranger to her—and I was quite surprised to see them all come in together as if they had known each other for years. Not quite correct, I think."

"Mr. Grainger is very rich," said the clergyman's wife meditatively.

"Very," said her friend, who knew that Mrs. Wooler meant to do a little begging (for church purposes) as soon as opportunity offered.

"It would be a pity for him to be involved with such a—a forward-looking young person," she said charitably.

But for the first quarter of an hour she had no opportunity of satisfying her curiosity, for Sheila was quite hungry enough not to waste too much time in conversation. At last, however, a chance came, when Mr. Assheton said in his mincing voice—

"I believe, Miss Carolan, that like me, you are quite a new arrival in this country."

"Oh, dear no! I have lived here ever since I was two years old."

"Heah! in Townsville?"

"I meant Australia," Sheila observed placidly.

"Then you are not an Australian born, Miss Carolan?" put in Mrs. Wooler with a peculiarly irritating condescension of manner and surprised tone, as if she meant to say, "I am sure you are—you certainly are not lady-like enough to be an English girl."

"No, I am not," was the reply. "Do you think you will like Queensland, Mr. Assheton?"

"I really have as yet formed no definite impression. Possibly I may in the end contrive to like it."

"Do. It would be a great pity for the country if you did not," said Sheila gravely, without moving an eyelid.

"Do you purpose making a long stay in Queensland, Miss Carolan?" pursued Mrs. Wooler.

"A very long one, perhaps—perhaps on the other hand a very short one. Or it may be that I may adopt a middle course, and do neither."

Grainger, who was opposite, heard her, and as she looked across at him, he saw that she was "playing" her questioner and quite enjoying it.

Never for one moment did the clergyman's wife dream that Sheila meant to be anything else but evasive, so she followed up. To her mind it was absolutely incredible that any woman would dare to snub her—Mrs. Wooler—daughter of a dean, and possessing an uncle who had on several occasions been spoken of by the Bishop of Dullington as his probable successor; such a thing was impossible!

"I presume, however, that your stay in Townsville itself will be short, Miss Carolan? You will find it a very expensive place—especially if you have no friends to whom you can go."

Sheila's face flushed. Her blood was getting up, and Myra looked at her nervously.

"Is there no 'Girls' Friendly Society,' 'Young Women's Christian Association,' or other kindred institution, where I could 'be taken in and done for'?" she asked sweetly.

"Not as yet; but I am thinking of taking steps to found a Girls' Friendly Society. Such an institution will soon be a necessity in a growing place like this."

"How nice it would be for me to go there instead of staying at—at a boarding house!"

Juliette Trappème's sallow face flushed with rage, and Mrs. Trappème, who saw that something was occurring, spoke loudly to Mr. Wooler, who answered in his usual soft voice. But Mallard, who was seated next to Miss Lilla Trappème, shot Sheila an encouraging glance.

"Quite so," went on Mrs. Wooler. "I disapprove most strongly of any young woman incurring risks that can be avoided."

"What risks?" and Sheila turned and looked steadily at Mrs. Wooler.

The sharp query somewhat upset the inquisitive lady, who hardly knew what she meant herself.

"Oh, the risks of getting into debt—living beyond one's means—and things like that."

"Oh, I see, madam," and Sheila bowed gravely, although the danger signals were showing now on her cheeks. Then she added very clearly and distinctly, "That would be most dreadful to happen to any one, would

it not, Mr. Assheton?"

"Oh, howwible—for a lady."

"But," she went on—and as she spoke she gazed so intently into Mrs. Wooler's face that every one at the table saw her change colour—"but I am sure, Mrs. Wooler, that no girl could possibly come to such a sad condition while *you* are in Townsville, to give her the benefit of *your* years, *your* advice, and *your* experience—even though that advice was thrust upon her in a manner that I believe might possibly cause well-deserved resentment," and then, with a scornful smile still on her lips, she turned to Mr. Assheton and asked him sweetly if he did not "think it was beginning to be very warm so early in the year?"

"By heavens!" muttered Mallard to Myra, "she has done the parson woman good. Look at her face. It's unpleasant to look at."

Mrs. Wooler's features were a study. Unable to speak, and her hands trembling with rage, she gave the girl one glance of hatred, and then tried to eat; and Viveash, who had the sense to do so, at once began telling her some idiotic and pointless story about himself when he sang in a cathedral choir until his voice "failed him."

Just then a long ring was heard at the front door, and the butler presently came to Mallard, and said—

"One of the reporters, sir, from the *Champion* wishes to see you. Most important, sir, he says. Will you please see him at once?"

Making his excuses, Mallard left the dining-room and went into one of the sitting-rooms, where the reporter was awaiting him.

CHAPTER X ~ THE "CHAMPION" ISSUES A "SPECIAL"

Ten minutes later Mallard was at the hall door giving instructions to the reporter.

"Hurry back as fast as you can, Winthrop, and tell Mr. Flynn to rash the special through. And as fast as any farther news come in rap out another. Get all the boys you can, and distribute the specials everywhere—anywhere. Chuck some over into the cemetery—they'll make the dead 'get up and holler.' Tell the boys that they are not to make any charge—get the foreman to head it 'Special! Gratis! (Any one newsboy who makes a charge for this special will be immediately dismissed.)' See? And tell the boys they will get five shillings each extra in the morning. I'll be down in another twenty minâtes or so. Go on, Winthrop, loop!"

Mr. Winthrop, who was as excited as Mallard himself, "looped," and the editor returned to the dining-room with a galley-proof slip in his hand. Every one, of coarse, saw by his face that something had occurred.

"I won't sit down again, Mrs. Trappème, if you and the other ladies will excuse me, for I have to hurry back to the office to attend to some important business. There is great news." Then, bending down, he placed his hand on Grainger's shoulder, and whispered, "You must come with me, old man. There is glorious news from Chinkie's. I'll tell you all about it in a minute, as soon as we are outside. Make your apologies and let us go," and then going over to Mrs. Trappème, he handed her the proof to read to her guests and hurried out with Grainger, leaving every one in the room eager to learn what had occurred.

"Oh, dear me!" began Mrs. Lee-Trappème, adjusting her pince-nez, which always interfered with her sight.

"SPECIAL. 'TOWNSVILLE CHAMPION.'

"WRECK.

"9 P.M., May 2nd. "Authentic news has just reached the Champion office that the mail steamer Flintshire was wrecked on the Great Barrier Reef three days ago (the 5th). All the crew and passengers—200 in number—were saved, and are now on their way to Townsville. [Further particulars later.]"

"DREADFUL MASSACRE BY THE NOTORIOUS BLACK OUTLAWS.

"The Clonourry mail, which has been delayed by floods, brings news of a terrible massacre perpetrated by the ootlaw black ex-troopers Sandy and Daylight. A party of five miners who were camped at a lagoon near Dry Creek were surprised and murdered in their sleep by the two outlaws and a number of myall blacks. The bodies were found by the mail man. Inspector Lamington and a patrol of Native Polioe leave to-morrow to punish the murderers. Detailed particulars of the affair will be given in to-morrow's issue—Mudoch, the mail man, being too exhausted to stand the test of a long interview to-night."

"WONDERFUL GOLD DISCOVERY NEAR CHINKIN'S FLAT.

"A NEW EL DORADO. "MR. GRAINGER
AND HIS PARTNERS THE LUCKY MEN.

"By the Clonourry mail, which brought intelligence of the tragedy at Dry Creek, also comes most pleasurable exciting news. The 'Ever Victorious Grainger,' as his many friends often designate him, some months ago sent out a prospecting party to try the country near the headwaters of Banshee

Greek, with the result that probably the richest alluvial field in Australia has been discovered. Over 2,000 oz. of gold—principally in nuggets ranging from 100 oz. to 2 oz.—have already been taken by Mr. Grainger's party. Warden Charteris, accompanied by an escort of white and black police, leaves for the place to-morrow night. The news of this wonderfully rich field has been two weeks reaching Townsville owing to the flooded condition of the country between Banshee Creek and Chinkie's Flat.

"Mr. Grainger is at present in this city on a short visit. His good fortune will benefit the country at large as well as himself and his energetic partners."

"Dear me, how very exciting to be getting gold so easily!" said Mrs. Trappème, as she laid the proof on the table; "your brother will be delighted, Miss Grainger."

"He will be pleased, of course," absented Myra. "He always had a belief that a rich alluvial gold-field would be discovered in the Banshee Creek country. He sent this particular prospecting party away nearly two months ago."

"What a hawwid story about the murdered diggahs!" said Mr. Assheton to Myra. "Did it occur neah where you were living, Miss Graingah?"

"About a hundred miles further westward, towards the Minerva Downs district. These two men, Sandy and Daylight, have committed quite a number of murders during the past two years. They killed five or six poor Chinese diggers on the Cloncurry Road last year. They are both well armed, and it is almost impossible to capture them, as they retreat to the ranges whenever pursued."

"They are a most ferocious and desperate pair," said Mr. Wooler, who then told their story, which was this:

Some two or three years previously Sandy and Daylight, who belonged to one of the Native Police camps in the Gulf district, had, while out on patrol, urged one of their comrades to join with them in murdering their white officer and then absconding. The other man refused, and, later on in the day, secretly told the officer that he was in great danger of being shot if he rode on ahead of the patrol as usual. As soon as the party returned to camp the two traitors were quietly disarmed, handcuffed, and then chained to a log till the morning. During the night they managed to free themselves (aided, no doubt, by the trooper who was detailed to guard them), killed the man who had refused to join them by cleaving his skull open with a blow from a tomahawk, and then decamped to the ranges with their rifles and ammunition. They found a refuge and safe retreat with the savage myalls (wild blacks) inhabiting the granite ranges, and then began a career of robbery and murder. Small parties of prospectors found it almost impossible to pursue their vocation in the "myall country," for the dreaded ex-troopers and their treacherous and cannibal allies were ever, on the watch to cut them off. In the course of a few months, by surprising and killing two unfortunate Chinese packers, the desperadoes became possessed of their repeating rifles and a lot of ammunition, and the old single-shot police carbines were discarded for the more effective weapons. Sandy, who was the leader, was a noted shot, and he and his companion now began to haunt the vicinity of isolated mining camps situated in country of the roughest description. Parties of two or three men who had perhaps located themselves in some almost inaccessible spot would go on working for a few weeks in apparent security, leaving one of their number to guard the camp and horses, and on returning from their toil would find their comrade dead or severely wounded, the camp rifled of everything it contained, and the horses speared; and the hardy and adventurous pioneers would have to retreat to one of the main mining camps, situated perhaps fifty miles away, with nothing left to them but the hard-won gold they had saved and their mining tools, but ready and eager to venture forth again.

** Gulf of Carpentaria.*

One day, so the clergyman related, a man named Potter was travelling from Burketown to Port Denison, and camped beside a small water-hole to rest until the morning. After unsaddling and hobbling out the horse he had been riding, and unloading the pack-horse, he threw his packbags at the foot of a Leichhardt tree, lit a fire, and began to boil a billy of tea. He knew that he was in dangerous country, and that it was unwise of him to light a fire, but being of a reckless disposition, and having a firm belief in his luck, he took no further precaution beyond opening the flap of his revolver pouch.

He had just taken out a piece of damper and some salt meat, which, with the hot tea, were to be his supper, when he was startled to hear some one address him by name, and looking up, he saw a powerfully-built black fellow with a long black beard and smiling face standing a dozen yards or so away. He was all but nude, but round his waist was buckled a broad leather police belt with two ammunition pouches; in his right hand he carried a repeating rifle.

"Don't you know me, Mr. Potter?" he said in excellent English.

Potter recognised him at once, and the two shook hands.

"Why, you're Sandy! Have you left the police?" (He knew nothing of what had occurred.)

"Yes," was the reply, "I skipped," and carelessly putting his rifle down, he asked Potter if he had any tobacco to spare.

"Yes, I can give you a few plugs," and going to his saddle bags he produced four square plugs of tobacco, which he handed to his visitor, who took them eagerly, at once produced a silver-mounted pipe (probably taken from some murdered digger) filled it, and began to smoke and talk.

"My word, Mr. Potter," he said with easy familiarity, "it is a good thing for you that I knew you," and he showed his white, even teeth in a smile. "But I haven't forgot that when I got speared on the Albert River five years ago you drove me into Burketown in your buggy to get a doctor for me." (He had formerly been one of Potter's stockmen, and had been badly wounded in an encounter with wild blacks.)

Potter made some apparently careless reply. He knew that Sandy, though an excellent stockman, had always had a bad record, and indeed he had been compelled to dismiss him on account of his dangerous temper. He heard later on that the man had joined the Black Police, and a deserter from the Black Police is in nine cases out of ten an unmitigated villain.

Then Sandy became communicative, and frankly told his involuntary host part—but part only—of his story, and wound up by saying—

“You must not sleep here to-night. There is a big mob of myalls camped in the river-bed three miles away from here. If they see you, they’ll kill you for certain between now and to-morrow night, when you are going through some of the gorges. You must saddle up again, and I’ll take you along another track and leave you safe.”

Tired as the horses were, Potter took Sandy’s advice, and the two started at sunset, the blackfellow leading. They travelled for some hours, and then again camped—this time without a fire. Sandy remained till daylight, and during a further conversation boasted that he had enough gold in nuggets to allow him to have “a fine time in Sydney or Melbourne,” where he meant to make his way some day “when things got a bit quiet and people thought he was dead.” In proof of his assertion about the gold he gave Potter a two ounce nugget he picked out from several others which were carried in one of his ammunition pouches. Before they parted Potter gave him—at his particular request—one of the two blankets he carried, and then Sandy and he shook hands, and the blackfellow, rifle in hand, disappeared, and left his former master to continue his journey.

“What a hawwid chawacter!” said Mr. Assheton, when the clergyman had concluded his story. “Why don’t the police exert themselves and catch or shoot the fellow?”

“It is such very difficult country,” explained Myra, “and, in fact, has not yet all been explored.”

The ladies rose, and Myra and Sheila, pleading fatigue, went to their rooms—or rather to Myra’s—leaving Mrs. and Miss Trappème and Mrs. Wooler to, as Sheila said, “Tear me to pieces. But I could not let that woman insult me without retaliating.”

“Of course you did right. She’s an odious creature.”

Grainger returned alone about eleven o’clock. He tapped at Myra’s door, and asked her if she was asleep.

“No. Miss Carolan is here; we’ve been having a lovely talk.”

“Well, go to bed, and have a lovely sleep. I want to see you both, especially Miss Carolan, very early in the morning. We can all go out on the beach before breakfast.”

“Very well, Ted. Has Mr. Mallard come in?”

“No. He will not be here for another half-hour or more. Good-night.”

Mrs. Trappème had heard his voice, and quietly opened the door of her own sitting-room, where she and Juliette (Mrs. Wooler had gone) had been discussing Sheila’s delinquencies.

“Well!” gasped the mother to her daughter, as she softly closed the door again. “What on earth *is* going on, I should like to know! Did you hear that—I want to see you both very early, especially Miss Garolan? What *is* there going on? I must go and see Mrs. Wooler in the morning and tell her. And on the beach too! Why can’t they be more open?”

Master Mordaunt, who was in the corner devouring some jelly and pastry given to him by his fond mother, looked up and said, with distended cheeks—

“Ain’t the beach open enough?”

“Hold your tongue, you horrid little animal,” said the irate Juliette.

CHAPTER XI ~ A CHANGE OF PLANS

Myra and Sheila, both early risers, were dressed and awaiting Grainger on the verandah when he came out of his room at seven o’clock, and they at once descended the steep Melton Hill to the beach. The morning was delightfully fresh and cool, and the smooth waters of Cleveland Bay were rippling gently to a fresh southerly breeze. Eastward, and seven miles away, the lofty green hills and darker-hued valleys of Magnetic Island stood clearly out in the bright sunlight, and further to the north Great Palm Island loomed purple-grey against the horizon. Overhead was a sky of clear blue, flecked here and there by a few fleecy clouds, and below, on the landward side, a long, long curve of yellow beach trending from a small rocky and tree-clad point on the south to the full-bosomed and majestic sweep of Cape Halifax to the north.

“What a lovely day!” exclaimed Sheila as Grainger, as soon as they had descended the hill and stepped on the firm yellow sand, led them to a clump of black, shining rocks. “I wish I were a girl of twelve, so that I could paddle about in the water.”

“There is nothing to stop you doing that at Minerva Downs, Miss Cardan,” said Grainger with a smile. “There is a lovely fresh-water lagoon there, with a dear sandy bottom, and the Farrow children—big and little—spend a good deal of their time there bathing and fishing.” Then, as the girls seated themselves, he at once plunged into the subject uppermost in his mind.

“Myra, the news that came through last night has put me in a bit of a quandary, both as regards you and Miss Carolan. Now tell me, would you mind very much if I left you to-day and returned to Chinkie’s Flat?”

“No, indeed, Ted. Surely I would not be so selfish as to interfere with your business arrangements!”

“That’s a good little girl. I did want to stay in Townsville for a week or two after you had left, then I could have taken Miss Carolan as far as Chinkie’s Flat on her way to Minerva Downs. But I can do something better, as far as she is concerned. You will only be here for a week, and you can suffer the Trappème people for that time. Mallard”—and he smiled—“will no doubt try to make the time pass pleasantly for you.”

"Don't be so silly, Ted. Get to the point about Miss Carolan. When is she leaving?"

"To-day—if you will, Miss Carolan—with me. The Warden and his troopers are leaving at noon for the new rush; and Charteris, when I explained things to him (I saw him last night at Mallard's office) said he will be very pleased if we will come with him. Will it be too much of a rush for you?"

"Oh no, Mr. Grainger! But I have no horse," and then, as she thought of leaving her newly-found girl friend so soon, she looked a little miserable, and her hand stole into Myra's.

"Oh, that's all right," said Grainger cheerfully. "I've two for you—Myra's, and one Charteris is lending me for you. Can you ride hard and fast? Charteris is a terror of a man for pushing along to a new rush."

"I won't make him feel cross, I assure you, Mr. Grainger."

"Then it's decided." (Sheila well knew that whether she had or had not decided, he had; yet though dimly resentful, she was quite content when she looked into his quiet grey eyes.) "You see, Miss Carolan, it's quite likely I may be able to go all the way with you to Minerva Downs, and therefore we ought not to miss travelling with the Commissioner as far as he goes. Sub-Inspector Lamington, of the Native Police, is also coming with us. He's off on a wild goose—or rather, a wild nigger—chase after Sandy and Daylight and their myall friends. If, when we get to Chinkie's Flat, I find that I *must* go with Charteris to the new rush, your friend Dick Scott and my own trusty black boy Jacky will take you on to Minerva Downs. You can travel with Lamington and his troopers part of the way after you leave Chinkie's. Take some light luggage on a pack-horse—the rest, I am sorry to say, will have to come on from here by bullock team. But it is not unlikely that I may be able to take you all the way."

"I am very, very grateful to you, Mr. Grainger," said Sheila. "I fear I am going to prove a great encumbrance to you."

"Oh, Ted is a dear old brother!" said Myra, patting his brown, sun-tanned hand affectionately.

After a walk along the beach as far as the small, rocky point, they returned to breakfast, and great was Mrs. Trappème's astonishment when Grainger informed her that he was leaving in a few hours.

"Not for long, I trust?" she said graciously, bearing in mind that he had told her he might remain for a week or two after Myra had left.

"I do not think I shall be in Townsville again for some months," he replied, as he handed her fourteen guineas. "This is for the week for my sister and for me."

"Thank you," said the lady, with a dignified bow—for she felt a little resentful at his not telling her more. Then she said with a sweet smile, "We will take good care of Miss Grainger. Either my daughters or I will be delighted to see her safely on board the steamer."

"Thank you; but Mr. Mallard will do that."

"Oh, indeed!" said the lady, with unmistakable disappointment in her voice, and then Grainger, without saying a word about Sheila, went to his room to pack, and talk to Mallard, who had not yet risen.

"I wonder if Mr. Mallard is leaving too now that his friend is going," anxiously said Juliette a few minutes later.

"If he does I shall insist upon having the ful six guineas," remarked her mother angrily. "No, on second thoughts I won't *ask* for it. Whether he leaves or not, I may find him very useful. I quite mean to ask him to every day publish a 'list of guests at "Magnetic Villa."'"

"Miss Carolan wud like to see yez, mum, if ye are dishengaged," said Mary, entering the room.

Sheila was in the drawing-room, and thither Mrs. Trappème sailed.

"I shall be leaving Townsville to-day, I find," she said politely. "Would it be inconvenient for you to have my luggage sent to Hanran & Co., who will store it for me until I need it?"

Mrs. Trappème's curiosity was intense, but she remembered Mrs. Wooler's experience of the previous evening—and feared. And then she had had the girl's money in advance.

"Oh, I am so sorry you are going," she said, with a would-be motherly smile. "Of course I will send it anywhere you wish—but why not leave it here in my care?" And then she could not resist asking one question: "Are you going to Minerva Downs, Miss Carolan, may I ask?"

"Yes; I am going there."

"What a dreadfully long journey for you! Does it not alarm you? And you are surely not travelling alone?"

"Oh, no; I am fortunate in having quite a large escort. Will you send the luggage down as soon as possible, Mrs. Trappème?"

"Certainly," replied the lady—this time with a stiff bow; for she was now inwardly raging at not having learnt more. Then she went off to tell Juliette this new development.

At ten o'clock, after Mallard had breakfasted, he and Grainger (the latter bidding Mrs. and the Misses Trappème a polite goodbye) went away, and shortly after Dick Scott appeared, leading a pack-horse. He took off the empty bags, and marched up to the front door.

"Mr. Grainger has sent these to Miss Caroline, miss," he said to Lilla Trappème, "and will you please ask her to put her things into 'em and I'll wait?"

Myra helped Sheila pack some clothing, rugs, &c, into the bags, and Mary took them out to the burly Dick.

"By jingo! you're the finest woman I've seen here yet," said he affably to the blushing Mary. "Now, will you tell Miss Caroline and Miss Grainger that I'll be up with the horses in half an hour? Goodbye, bright eyes."

He returned within the time, riding his own horse and leading two others.

"Sidesaddles," said Juliette to her mother as they watched through the dining-room windows the big digger dismount and hang the horses' reins over the front gate.

As he strode across the lawn, they heard Mary's voice in the hall. It sounded as if she were half crying.

"Goodbye, miss, and Hivin's blessin' on ye; and may God sind ye a good husband."

A moment or two later she entered, wiping her eyes. "The ladies are goin', and wish to spake to yez," she

said.

Mrs. Trappème and her daughters rose, as Myra and Sheila, clad in their neatly-fitting habits, came into the room.

"I am going to accompany Miss Carolan and my brother for a few miles, Mrs. Trappème, so I shall not be here for lunch," said Myra.

"Oh, indeed," said Mrs. Trappème faintly; and then, with a pleasant smile from Myra, and a coldly polite bow from Sheila, they were gone.

Scott swung them up into their saddles, and in another minute they were descending the hill.

Mother and daughter looked at each other.

"So she's going with Mr. Grainger," said Juliette, with an unpleasant twitch of her thin lips; "the—the little *cat*! I'd like to see her fall off!"

"Never mind her—she's gone now—and I have had six guineas from her," remarked her amiable mamma. "Now, if you are coming into Flinders Street with me, make haste, and don't sit grizzling."

Poor Juliette! Poor Mrs. Lee-Trappème! When they descended the hill and emerged out into Flinders Street, they found the side-path crowded with people, who were all gazing into the great yard of the Queen's Hotel, from which was emerging a cavalcade. First came four people—the white-bearded Charteris with Myra, and Grainger with Sheila; after them a sergeant and six white police, and ten Native Police with carbines on thighs, and then Dick Scott and dark-faced Inspector Lamington; behind followed a troop of spare horses.

As they swung through the gates, the crowd cheered as Charteris gave the word, and the whole party went off at a sharp canter down the long, winding street.

CHAPTER XII ~ SHEILA BECOMES ONE OF A VERY "UNREFINED" CIRCLE

The night wind was souging mournfully through the dark line of she-oaks fringing the banks of a small, swiftly-running creek, when Sheila was awakened by some one calling to her from outside the little tent in which she was sleeping. She sat up and looked out.

"Did you call me, Mr. Grainger?"

"Yes. There is a storm coming down from the ranges. Sorry to awaken you, but we want to make your tent more secure."

Aided by Scott, whose giant figure Sheila could scarcely discern—so dark was the night—Grainger soon had the tent prepared to resist the storm. As they worked, there came such an appalling thunderclap that it shook the ground beneath her, and for some minutes she was unable to hear even the droning roar of the rain-laden tornado that came tearing down from the mountains, snapping off the branches of the gum-trees, bending low the pliant boles of the moaning she-oaks, and lifting the waters of the creek up in sheets.

A hand touched her face in the Cimmerian darkness, and Dick Scott's voice (he was shouting with all the strength of his mighty lungs) seemed to whisper—

"Lie down, miss; lie down, and don't be afeerd. The tent will stand, as we are pretty well sheltered here, and——"

Another fearful thunderclap cut short his words, and she instinctively clutched his hand. She was used to terrific thunderstorms in New South Wales, but she had never heard anything so awful as this—it seemed as if the heavens had burst.

"Where is Mr. Grainger?" she asked, putting her lips to Dick's ear and speaking loudly.

"Here, beside me, miss."

"And poor Jacky! Where is he?"

"We'll find out presently, miss. Most likely the horses have cleared out, and he's gone after 'em," shouted Scott.

For another five minutes the howling fury of the wind and the hissing of the rain rendered any further conversation impossible. Then came a sudden lull of both. Grainger struck a match and lit a small lantern he was holding, and Sheila felt a great satisfaction as the light showed upon his face—calm and quiet as ever—as he looked at her and smiled.

"You must pardon us coming into the tent, Miss Carolan, but we wanted to light and leave the lantern with you. I'm afraid the horses have bolted for shelter into the sandalwood scrub lower down the creek, or into the gullies, and Jacky has gone after them. Will you mind staying here alone for an hour or two whilst Scott and I help him to find them?"

"Not at all," she replied bravely, "and I really do not need the light. I am not at all afraid."

"I know that, Miss Garolan. But it will serve to show us the way back." (This was merely a kindly fiction.) "And if, during a lull in the rain, you should hear any of the horses' bells, will you fire two shots from that Winchester rifle there beside you? It is possible that they may be quite near to us. Old Euchre" (one of the pack-horses) "has as much sense as a Christian, and it is quite likely that whilst Scott, Jacky, and I are looking for them in the scrub, he will lead them back here."

Then placing the lantern beside her, and partly shielding it with a saddle cloth to protect it more folly from the gusts of wind, he and Scott went out into the blackness.

She heard Scott a minute or two later give a loud *Coo-ee!* for Jacky, and fancied she heard an answering cry from the blackboy, a long distance away. Then the rain again descended in a torrential downpour, and

drowned out all other sounds.

Two weeks had passed since Sheila had left Townsville with Grainger and the hard-riding old Warden and the swarthy-faced Lamington and his savage-eyed, half-civilised troopers. At Chinkie's Flat they had learnt that there were now three hundred white miners at the new rush on Banshee Creek, but that everything was quiet, and that no disputes of any kind had occurred, and all that Charteris would have to do would be to visit the place, and, according to the "Gold-fields Act," proclaim Banshee Creek to be a new gold-field. So, after spending a night at Grainger's new house, built on the ridge overlooking the "Ever Victorious" battery, with its clamorous stampers pounding away night and day, the Warden bid Sheila and Grainger goodbye, and rode off with his hardy white police, leaving Lamington and his black, legalised murderers to go their own way in pursuit of Sandy and Daylight, and "disperse" the myalls—if they could find them—such dispersion meaning the shooting of women and children as well as men.

Now, the truth is, that Grainger should have gone on with the Warden to the new rush, where his prospecting party was anxiously awaiting his arrival; but he was deeply in love with Sheila Carolan, and she with him, although she did not know it. But she was mightily pleased when the "Ever Victorious" Grainger told her that he was going to take her all the way to Minerva Downs, as he "wanted to see Farrow about buying a hundred bullocks to send to the new rush at Banshee Creek." (This was perfectly true, but he could very easily have dispatched a letter to Farrow, who would have sent the bullocks to the meat-hungry diggers as a matter of business.)

As she had stood on the verandah of Grainger's house in the early morning, watching Charteris and his troopers depart, and listening to the clang and thud of the five-and-twenty stampers of the new battery of the "Ever Victorious" pounding out the rich golden quartz, handsome, swarthy-faced Sub-Inspector Lamington ascended the steps and bade her good morning.

"So you and Grainger travel with me for another ninety miles or so, Miss Carolan," he said with undisguised pleasure. "Will you be ready soon?"

"In half an hour."

"Ah, that's right. My boys and I are anxious to get to work," and he went on to the horse yard.

Sheila could not help a slight shudder as she heard the soft-voiced, *debonnair* Lamington speak of his "work." She knew what it meant—a score or two of stilled, bullet-riddled figures of men, women, and children lying about in the hot desert sand, or in the dark shades of some mountain scrub.

Charteris had told her Lamington's story. He was the only survivor of an entire family who had been massacred by the blacks of Fraser's Island, and had grown up with but one object in life—to kill every wild black he came across. For this purpose alone he had joined the Native Police, and there were dark tales whispered of what he had done. But the authorities considered him "a good man," and when he and his fierce troopers rode into town and reported that a mob of wild blacks had been "dispersed," no one ventured to ask him any questions, but every one knew what had occurred.

So with Lamington and his silent, grim Danites, Sheila, Grainger, Scott, and Jacky travelled together for nearly a hundred miles, and then the two companies separated—Lamington heading towards that part of the forbidding-looking mountain range where he hoped to find his prey, and Grainger and his party keeping on to the west.

"It's dangerous country, Grainger," the police officer said as he bade them goodbye. "There are any amount of niggers all around, so you will need to be careful about your fire at night. Shift your camp a good half mile after you have lit your fire and had supper."

Grainger smiled. "I've been through the mill, Lamington. But I don't think we shall have any trouble unless you head them off and send Sandy and his friends down on to us."

"I do mean to head them off, and drive them down from the range into the spinifex country about thirty miles from here, when I can round them up," said Lamington softly, as if he were speaking of driving game. "Sorry you won't be with me to see the fun. The £500 reward for the production of Messieurs Sandy and Daylight—alive or dead—I already consider as mine. It will give up a trip to Melbourne to see the Cup next year."

"But you can't claim the money—you're an official."

"This is an exceptional case, and no distinction is to be made between civilians and policemen—the Government does sensible things *sometimes*."

Two hours passed, and Sheila, anxiously awaiting the sound of the horses' bells, or the reappearance of Grainger and Scott, began to feel that something had gone amiss. The storm had ceased, and when she rose and stepped outside she saw that a few stars were shining. Seating herself upon a granite boulder, she listened intently, but the only sound that broke the black silence of the night was the rushing of the waters of the creek.

She placed her hands to her mouth, and was about to give a loud *Coo-ee!* when her pride stopped her.

"If they hear me," she thought, "they will think I am frightened."

She went back into the tent and again lay down, and tried by the light of the lantern to read a book which Myra Grainger had given her. Her watch had stopped, and when she put the book aside she knew that the dawn was near for the harsh cackle of a wild pheasant sounded from the branches of a Leichhardt tree near by, and was answered by the shrill, screaming notes of a flock of king-parrots which the storm had driven to settle amidst the thick, dense scrub on the bank of the creek.

Quite suddenly she became aware that something was moving about in the grass outside the tent, and a thrill of alarm made her instinctively clutch the Winchester rifle beside her. Surely there was some one there, whispering! Very quietly she sat up and waited. Yes, there certainly were people outside, and a cold chill of terror possessed her when the whisperings changed to a rapid and louder muttering in an unknown tongue, and she knew that her visitors were blacks!

Unable to even speak, she heard the soft rustle of footsteps drawing nearer and nearer, and then the closed flap of the tent was pulled slowly aside by a long black hand, and the wicked eyes of the bearded face of a huge aboriginal, naked to the waist, gazed into hers. For a second or two he looked at her, watching her terrified expression as a snake watches the fascinated bird; then he drew back his lips and showed two rows of gleaming teeth in a fierce smile of exultation. By a mighty effort she tried to raise the Winchester, and in another moment the blackfellow sprang at her, covered her head with a filthy kangaroo skin and silently bore her outside.

For quite ten minutes she felt herself being carried swiftly along, till her captor came to the creek, which he crossed. Then he uncovered her face and spoke to her in English.

"If you make a noise I will kill you, and throw your body in the creek. I am Sandy the Trooper."

She gazed at him mechanically, too horrified at her surroundings to utter a sound. For dawn had just broken and she saw that she was standing in a small open space in the midst of a sandalwood scrub, and encircled by twenty or thirty ferocious-looking myall blacks all armed with spears and waddies. The strong ant-like odour which emanated from their jet-black skins filled her nostrils and, putting her hands to her eyes, she shuddered and fell upon her knees with a choking sob.

"Come, none of that, missie," said another voice in English, and her hands were rudely pulled aside; "you must get up and walk. Perhaps we won't hurt you. But if you make a noise I'll give you a tap on the head with this waddy," and the speaker flourished a short club over her head. "Come! get up!"

She obeyed him, rose slowly to her feet, and in another instant darted aside, and, breaking through the circle of myalls, plunged into the scrub towards the creek. But before she had gone twenty yards one of them had seized her by her loosened hair, and a long pent-up scream burst from her lips.

Again the filthy skin was thrown over her head, then her hands were quickly tied behind her with a strip of bark.

Sandy lifted her up in his arms, and he, Daylight, and their followers plunged into the forest and set off towards the mountains.

CHAPTER XIII ~ ON THE SCENT

Through the blackness of the night and the pouring rain Grainger and Scott made their way down the right bank of the creek to where, a mile or a mile and a half away, was a thick scrub of sandalwood trees, in which they imagined the terrified horses had taken refuge. The rushing, foaming waters guided them on their way, though every now and then they had to make a detour round the heads of some gullies, which were bank high with backwater from the swollen creek. As soon as there was a lull in the storm they again *Coo-eed*, but received no answer from Jacky. Grainger, who had the most implicit faith in the judgment of his blackboy, now began to fear that the horses, instead of making for the scrub, had gone towards the mountains, where it would perhaps be most difficult to get them. However, there was nothing to be done but to first examine the scrub, and then to see what had become of Jacky. Both he and Scott had brought their bridles with them, and the blackboy, they knew, had his as well, and they were hoping that at any moment they might meet him driving the horses back to the camp.

By the time the scrub was reached the storm had begun to break somewhat, for although rain still fell heavily, the wind was losing its violence; and presently, to their satisfaction, they heard Jacky's voice shouting somewhere near them.

"Where are you?" called out Scott.

"Here, on cattle camp, in middle of scrub. I been catch old Euchre and two more horse, but can't find other pack-horse and bay filly and roan colt. I 'fraid they been go 'way back up mountain."

They found him engaged in tying up the foreleg of Scott's horse with strips of his shirt. The animal, when racing along in the dark, had fallen and out itself badly from knee to hoof. Grainger examined the injury, and saw that, although the poor creature was very lame, it could easily be led to the camp. But the loss of the remaining horses was a serious matter, and after a brief discussion it was resolved to first make a thorough search along the creek for another mile before giving up any hopes of finding them in the vicinity of the scrub. Then, if no traces could be found, they were to return to the camp for their saddles, and Jacky and Grainger would endeavour to pick up their tracks as soon as daylight broke.

An hour was spent fruitlessly, and they turned back and made for the camp, Scott and Grainger riding barebacked, and Jacky going ahead on foot, leading the lame horse. Presently they came to a deep, rocky gully, which they crossed, and were carefully ascending the steep bank when Scott's horse tripped over a loose stone and fell heavily, with his rider underneath.

Jacky and Grainger at once went to his assistance and got the horse away, but Scott lay perfectly motionless, and when spoken to did not answer. Grainger, like all good bushmen, had kept his matches dry, and, striking a light, he saw that the big digger had not only received some injury to his head, but, worse still had broken his leg; the bone had snapped completely across half-way down from the knee.

For quite ten minutes the poor fellow remained unconscious, then, when he came to his senses, his first question was about the horse. Was he hurt?

"No, Dick; but your leg is broken."

The language that flowed from Mr. Scott's bearded lips cannot possibly be set down, but he resigned himself cheerfully to Grainger and Jacky when they put the broken limb into rough splints made of bark and twigs to keep it in position until they could do something better on their arrival at the camp.

Refusing to be carried, Scott dragged himself up the bank, and then allowed them to lift him on Euchre's

back, Grainger riding and Jacky walking beside him.

By the time they reached the camp it was broad daylight, and an alarmed look came into Grainger's eyes when there was no response to his loud *Coo-ee!* thrice repeated.

Suddenly Jacky, whose dark eyes were rolling unnaturally as he glanced all around him, let go the horse he was leading, sprang forward, and entered the tent. He reappeared in a moment.

"What is wrong, Jacky? Where is she?"

"Gone," was the quick reply. "Myall blackfellow been here and take her away!"

"Good God!" said Grainger hoarsely, feeling for the moment utterly unnerved as he watched the black-boy walk quickly round and round the tent, examining the grass.

"Plenty blackfellow been here," he said, "but only one fellow been go inside tent. I think it, he catch him up missie when she sleep——"

An oath broke from Scott's lips. "Let me down, boss, let me down! It's all my fault. Quick! put me inside the tent and let me be. You and Jacky has two good horses, and Jacky is the best tracker this side o' the country."

"I'll see to your leg first, Dick," cried Grainger, as he and Jacky lifted him off Euchre and helped him into the tent.

"By jingo, you won't, boss!" was the energetic reply. "What does it matter about my leg? Let me be. I'll pull along all right, even if you are away for a day, or two days, or a week. For God's sake, boss, don't fool about me! Think of *her*. Saddle up, saddle up, and bring her back! They can't be far away. Jacky, I'll give you fifty pounds if you get her. Boss, take plenty o' cartridges an' some tucker. I'll be as right as rain here. But hurry, hurry, boss! If they get her into the mountains we'll never see any more of her but her gnawed bones," and the big man struck his clenched fist passionately upon the ground.

But Grainger, although almost maddened with fear as to Sheila's fate, would not leave the man helpless, and whilst Jacky was saddling the horses, he put provisions and water, and matches and tobacco, near the poor, excited digger. Then, with the blackboy's aid, he quickly and effectively set the broken leg with proper splints, seized round with broad strips of ti-tree bark. "There, Dick, that's all I can do for you now." "You're losing time over me, boss. Hurry, hurry! and get the young lady back for God's sake."

Five minutes later Jacky had picked up the tracks of Sandy and Daylight and their allies, and he and Grainger, with hearts beating high with hope, were following them up swiftly and surely.

CHAPTER XIV ~ "MISS CAROLINE" IS "ALL RIGHT" (VIDE DICK SCOTT)

The tracks of the abductors of Sheila were easily discernible to the practised eyes of Jacky—than whom a better tracker was not to be found in North Queensland. They led in an almost direct line towards the grim mountain range for about seventeen miles, and then were lost at a rapidly-flowing, rocky-bottomed stream—a tributary of that on which Grainger's camp had been made.

Never for one instant did Grainger think of questioning the judgment of his tried and trusted blackboy, when, as they came to the stream, he jumped off his horse and motioned to his master to do the same.

"Them fellow myall have gone into water, boss, and walk along up," he said placidly, as he took out his pipe, filled and lit it. Then he added that they had better take the saddles off the horses, short-hobble them, and let them feed.

"You don't think, Jacky, that they" (he meant the blacks) "might get on too far ahead of us?" he asked, as he dismounted.

"No, boss, they are camped now, 'bout a mile or two mile farther up creek. We can't take horses there—country too rough, and myall blackfellow can smell horse long way off—all same horse or bullock can smell myall blackfellow long way off."

Grainger knew that this was perfectly true—cattle and horses can always scent wild blacks at a great distance, and at once show their alarm. And that the country was too rough for Jacky and him to go any further with the horses was quite evident. However, he knew that as soon as his companion had taken a few pulls at his pipe he would learn from him what his plans were.

The weapon that the black boy usually carried was a Snider carbine, but he had left that at the camp, and taken the spare Winchester—the one Sheila had dropped in the tent: and he was now carefully throwing back the lever, and ejecting the cartridges, and seeing that it was in good order ere he re-loaded it.

"Your rifle all right, boss?" he asked.

"All right, Jacky; and my revolver too."

Jacky grunted—somewhat contemptuously—at the mention of the revolver. "You won't get chance with rewolber, boss. Rifle best for you an' me this time, I think it. Rewolber right enough when you ride after myall in flat country."

"Very well, Jacky," said Grainger, "I'll leave the revolver behind. What are we going to do?"

"First, short-hobble horses, and let 'em feed—plenty grass 'bout here. Then you follow me. I think it that them fellow myall camp" (rest) "'bout two mile up creek."

"How many are there, Jacky?"

"'Bout twenty, boss—perhaps thirty. And I think it that some feller runaway policeman with them—Sandy or Daylight, I beleeb."

"What makes you think that?" said Grainger, instantly remembering that Lamington had said that he meant

to try and head off Sandy and his myalls down into the spinifex country.

"Come here, boss."

Grainger followed him to the margin of the creek, which although at dawn had been running half bank high, owing to the tremendous downpour of rain, was now at its normal level.

"Look at that, boss."

He pointed to a triangular indentation, which, with footmarks, was imprinted in the soft yellow sand at the foot of a small boulder; and taking the butt of his Winchester rifle, fitted it into the impression.

"Some feller with Winchester rifle been sit down here, boss, and light his pipe. See, he been scrape out pipe," and he indicated some partially consumed shreds of tobacco and some ashes which were lying on the sand.

"Ah, I see, Jacky," and a cold chill of horror went through him as he thought of Sheila being in the power of such a fiend as Sandy. The myalls would in all likelihood want to kill and eat her, but Sandy or Daylight would probably wish to keep her a captive. And that Jacky was correct in his surmise there could be but little doubt—both the outlawed ex-policemen had Winchesters, taken from the Chinese packers whom they had murdered.

"Go on, Jacky, my boy, for God's sake!" he said hoarsely, placing his hand on the blackboy's shoulder. "Missie may be killed if we do not hurry."

"No fear, boss!" replied Jacky with cheerful confidence, as he proceeded to strip. "You 'member what I told you 'bout that white woman myall blacks take away with them long time ago when ship was break up near Cape Melville, and they find her lying on beach? They didn't kill her—these myall nigger like White Mary {*} too much. I don't think these fellow will kill Missie. I think it Daylight or Sandy will want her for *lubra*. {**} Take off boots, boss."

Grainger pulled off his knee boots, and threw them up on the bank, and then he and Jacky short-hobbled the horses, and let them feed. The blackboy had stripped himself of every article of clothing, except the remnants of his shirt, which he had tied round his loins; over it was strapped his leather belt with its cartridge pouch.

"Come on, boss," and then instead of crossing the creek as Grainger had imagined he would, he led the way along the same side, explaining that the myalls, expecting—but not fearing—pursuit, would do all that they could to make the pursuers believe that they had walked up through the creek for a certain distance, and then crossed over to the opposite side. The gins{***} and picaninnies, he said, were not with the party that had seized Sheila, neither were there any dogs with them.

* "White Mary"—A white woman.

** Wife.

*** Gins. Synonymous with *lubra*—i.e., a wife.

"And you will see, boss," he said, as, after they had come a mile and a half, he pointed to a sandbank on the side of the creek, deeply imprinted with footmarks, "we will find them eating fish in their camp. Look there."

Grainger saw that on the sandbank were a number of dead fish which had been swept down the creek from pools higher up. That many more had been left stranded, and then taken away, was very evident by the disturbed state of the sand and the numerous footmarks.

Suddenly a harsh sound of many voices fell upon their ears, and Jacky came to a dead stop.

Motioning to Grainger to lie down and await his return, he slipped quietly away, his lithe, black body gliding like a snake through the dense jungle which clothed the banks of the creek.

A quarter of an hour later he came back, his black eyes rolling with subdued excitement.

"Come on, boss; it is all right. They are camped in an old *boora* {*} ground, and Sandy and Daylight are going to fight for Missie. I saw Missie."

* A place which the Australian aborigines use for their corroborées and certain religious rites.

"Where was she?" said Grainger, whose heart was thumping fiercely as, rifle in hand, he sprang to his feet.

"In the middle of the *boora* ground. She sit up, but all the same as if she sleep—eyes shut."

"Oh, God, to think that I left her!—to look after horses," Grainger said bitterly to himself as he followed Jacky, who little knew how dear Sheila was to the heart of his "boss."

Swiftly but cautiously Jacky led the way through the scrub until they came to the margin of the *boora* ground, and then Grainger saw twenty or thirty blacks seated on the ground in a circle, spears and waddies in hand. In the centre was Sheila, crouched on her knees, with her hands covering her eyes. On each side of her was a Winchester rifle, and a belt with an ammunition pouch—her dowry. And standing near by her, attended by their nude seconds, were Daylight and Sandy, who were also armed with spears and waddies. They were both stripped and painted, and ready to slaughter each other.

"Boss," whispered Jacky, "which feller you want to take?"

"I'll take the big man with the beard," said Grainger, as he drew up his Winchester.

"All right, boss! I take the other man—that's Daylight. But don't shoot until they walk across *boora* ground, and turn and face each other. Shoot him through *bingie*, {*} boss—don't try for head, you might miss him."

* Stomach.

"All right, Jacky," and Grainger lay flat on the ground and brought his rifle to his shoulder, "but don't miss your man."

"No fear of that, boss. I'm going to give it to Daylight between the eyes. But let me drop him first."

"Right."

Daylight and Sandy were taken by their seconds to opposite sides of the ring, and then, drawing their heads back and poising their spears, they awaited each other's attack.

Then Jacky's Winchester cracked, and Daylight span round and fell dead, and Sandy's spear flew high in air as a bullet took him fair in the chest. And then the savage instinct to slay came upon and overwhelmed Grainger, as well as his black boy, and shot after shot rang out and laid low half a dozen of the sitting and expectant savages ere they could recover from their surprise and flee.

Grainger rushed forward to Sheila and lifted her up.

A hysterical sob burst from her as she put her trembling hands out towards him.

"Oh, I knew you would come! I knew you would come!" and then her eyes closed, and she lay quiet in his arms.

That night, as Sheila, with tear-swollen eyes of gratitude to God for her preservation, lay sleeping in the little tent, Grainger and the ever-faithful Jacky sat smoking their pipes beside the recumbent figure of burly Dick Scott, who, broken-legged as he was, had insisted upon being taken outside and camping with them.

"Boss," he said, as he handed his pipe to Jacky to be filled, "this will be suthin' for Mr. Mallard to put in the *Champion*, eh?"

"Yes, Dick, old son," and Grainger put his hand on the big man's shoulder, with a kindly light shining in his quiet, grey eyes. "I'll write and tell him all about it. And I'll tell him what a real, downright, out-and-out 'white man' you are."

"Git out, boss," and the rough, bearded digger laughed childishly with pleasure; "if I sees anythin' in the *Champion* about me, blow me but I'm goin' back to Townsville, and I mean to spark that gal at 'Magnet Villa'—she that was a-cryin' when Miss Caroline came away."

"Right you are, Dick. You have promised Jacky fifty pounds if he brought Miss Carolan back—and you will give it to him. But you are one of the 'Ever Victorious' crowd, and don't want money, so I won't say any more except that I'll give Mrs. Dick Scott five hundred sovereigns for a wedding present. What is her present surname, Dick?"

"Don't know, boss. Didn't ask her. But if she isn't snapped up by one of them flash banker fellows, or some other paper-collared swell, I think I'll get her. Mr. Mallard and Miss Myra said they would put in a good word for me, seein' as I hadn't no time to do any courtin' myself."

"Dick, old son, she's yours! If you have got my sister and Mr. Mallard to speak for you, it's all right—that's a dead certainty. How is your leg?"

"Bully, boss—just bully. Say, boss!"

"Yes, Dick."

"D'ye think we'll get them missin' horses?"

"Horses be hanged! Do you think I'm troublin' about them just now?"

"Why, certingly you ought to be troublin' about 'em. Isn't the roan colt and the bay filly worth troublin' about? The best blood in the whole bloomin' country is in that bay filly o' Miss Caroline's. And Jimmy Ah San offered you ninety pound for the roan, didn't he?"

Grainger put out his hand, and grasping Scott's long beard, pretended to shake it.

"Just you go to sleep, Dick Scott, and don't waggle your chin and talk about horses or anything else. You are a blessed nuisance, and if you wake Miss Carolan up I'll pound you when you get better!"

Scott grinned, and then he put out his hand.

"Boss, have you fixed it up with her? I thought as how that there was nothin' in the world so sweet in the way of wimmen as Miss Myra; but Miss Caroline runs her a close second."

"I have not asked her yet, Dick."

"You ask her to-morrow, boss. You take my tip, or before you knows where you are some other fellow will be jumpin' your claim and gettin' her."

"I'll think of it, Dick."

"Don't think too long over it, boss. If it wos me, I'd see it through the first thing to-morrow momin'."

"You mind your own business, Mister Richard Scott," said Grainger, with a laugh.

"All right, boss; but what about them horses? That bay filly——"

"Go to sleep, you silly old ass."

At dawn Lamington and his Danites came splashing through the creek, and Grainger was aroused by a loud "Hallo!" as the swarthy-faced Inspector cantered up to the tent and dismounted.

"Well, here you are, Grainger. I know all that has happened. I rounded up the myalls outside the *boora* ground, only half an hour after you had left, and one of the bucks—whom I dropped with a bullet through his thigh—told me what had occurred, when Sandy and Daylight were just about to fight. How is Miss Carolan?"

"Well. She is sleeping. Take a peg," and he handed Lamington his brandy flask.

The officer poured out a stiff nip, drank it off, and then pointed to one of his troopers, who had just dismounted, and was holding in his hand a heavy bundle, wrapped up in an ensanguined saddle-cloth.

"That's my £500, Grainger. I'll have to send those heads to Townsville for identification before I can claim the reward. Awfully smart of you to pot both of them."

"Lamington, you're a *beast*. Tell that nigger of yours to take that infernal bundle away and keep it out of sight, or, by heavens, you and I will quarrel."

Lamington, gentleman at heart, apologised: "I *am* a beast, Grainger. I didn't think of Miss Carolan."

When Sheila awakened she had to bid Dick Scott goodbye, for Lamington was taking him back to Chinkie's

Flat.

“Goodbye, Miss Caroline. You an' the boss will pull along all right to Minerva Downs. And when I sees you again, I hope that——”

“Dry up, Dick,” said Grainger, with assumed severity.

“Oh, I know it's all right, boss; isn't it, Miss Caroline?”

“Yes, Mr. Scott,” said Sheila with a smile, as she put her little hand into his. “I don't think I shall stay very long at Minerva Downs, and I do think you will soon see me again.”

“At Chinkie's Flat?”

“Yes, at Chinkie's Flat,” said Grainger, as he put his arm round Sheila, and drew her to him. “Mr. Lamington is sending up a parson from the Bay to Minerva Downs.”

“Boss,” cried Scott, exultantly, “there's goin' to be a red, rosy, high old time by and by at Chinkie's Flat.”

THE END

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK "CHINKIE'S FLAT" ***

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