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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE SHADOW OF THE PAST ***

F.E. Mills Young

"The Shadow of the Past"

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## Chapter One.

On the strip of yellow sand in the curve of the wall which separates the beach at Three Anchor Bay from the roadway above it two men sat playing cards in the blaze of the morning sunshine, which beat with untempered violence upon their uncovered heads, upon the hot sand that sloped gently to the rocky shore, and upon the long blue waves rolling slowly in from the Atlantic with the semblance of a succession of hooded serpents, rearing themselves with languid grace and folding over reluctantly, throwing off a stream of spray from their crests like the tail of some gigantic comet. Far out the sea was aglitter, save where it touched the horizon and lay mirror clear in the sensuous warmth, reflecting the light and colour from the sky.

With the exception of the two card players the beach was deserted; they were alone with the riot of colour and sunlight and the beauty of the sea. Neither looked at the sea. The older man, sitting cross-legged on the sand, had his back towards it; the younger, leaning, save when he dealt the cards, on his elbow, only lifted his eyes from the cards to fix them on his companion's face, which he did at infrequent intervals with an odd half admiring resentment in their expression.

He was a well made, good-looking man of about twenty-seven. His fair skin, caught by the strong salt air and daily exposure, was burnt to a brilliant brick, the pink stain travelling down his long throat and broad chest which, moist with perspiration, showed to the waist where the grey flannel shirt was unbuttoned; the sleeves also were rolled up above his elbows revealing a pair of muscular arms covered with fine golden hairs. Strength, indolence and amazing recklessness showed in this man's look and bearing. While giving the idea that physically he was capable of any effort of endurance, his manner conveyed also the impression that usually he would be discovered playing the passive part while others strove, that only some powerful inducement would rouse him to exert his strength: physical and mental qualities seemed here to be at variance.

His companion was altogether less noticeable; a shrewd, light-eyed, slightly built man in the thirties; a man marked early in life for moderate success in most things. One of his successes was card playing, as his adversary was discovering; perhaps he was more successful in that than in anything. For days he had been steadily winning away from its owner the recently acquired wealth which a stroke of luck had brought him; and the loser, in the grip of the gambler's superstition, played on in the hope of winning back.

Their solitude was invaded by the sudden appearance of a girl with a collie dog. She approached unexpectedly from behind the wall within a foot or two of the players, who, flushed and intent, disregarded her in their silent concentration on the game. The girl surveyed their grouping in surprise; and the younger man, looking up involuntarily from the cards he held, paused in the act of taking one from his hand to return her curious look. She averted her eyes and walked on; and the man returned to the game, and forgot almost immediately in this greater interest that just for a moment he had been quite curiously impressed by the steady inquiring eyes which had looked into and held his with the odd intimacy and interest of their gaze.

The owner of the inquiring eyes walked leisurely down to the shore, where she paused to respond to the dog's excited invitation by throwing a stick she carried for the purpose into the sea for him to retrieve. Again and again, when the collie brought back the stick and laid it before her and barked for a repetition of the game, the girl stooped with swift grace, picked up the stick, and with a free side swing of the arm flung it far into the waves.

"Damn that dog!" snapped the older man. "Why doesn't the fool of a girl move farther on instead of making herself a nuisance?"

The younger man allowed his attention to stray from the cards and turn his gaze seaward. He watched the collie swimming through the surf, and the white figure of the girl poised against the blue, with the cool waves running up the wet sand almost to her feet, and the shimmering steamy heat vapour rising from the sands behind her, an

atmospheric veil quivering between herself and him. The joyous barking of the dog as, emerging from the waves, it beshowered the girl plentifully in an attempt to shake the salt drops from its coat, was the only sound to disturb the harmony of the sea's lazy response to the whisper of the breeze.

"I expect," he said, leisurely shuffling the cards, "she considers her occupation more legitimate than ours. After all, I don't see what cause you have to be nervy because a dog barks."

As though the complaint had travelled across the dividing space and reached her ears, the girl started to walk, still throwing the stick when it was brought to her, but no longer remaining stationary to pursue this seemingly unending game. She disappeared with the dog round the curve; and fitfully, and growing fainter, the barking of the collie was borne back to their ears, till finally the sound died away in the distance, and only the thud of breaking waves, the swish of their advance, with the backward suck of their waters in retreat, broke the surrounding quiet. A great silence and a great stillness reigned.

At last the younger man threw down the cards, and lay back on his elbow, staring at the sea.

"That's the finish," he said presently, in controlled quiet tones. "You've cleaned me out."

"There's always the chance," the other returned, rolling a cigarette and lighting it, "of a change in the luck. Why not make use of paper and pencil, and have another run on it?"

The loser shook his head.

"No; I'm done. You have the devil's luck."

There was a dazed look in his eyes, an unhappy lode. His companion, while feigning not to observe him was aware of it, aware too of the grim tightening of the lips, and the repressed passion underlying the unnatural calm of his manner. Guy Matheson did not often betray emotion. He had played and lost steadily for days, and had parted with his money with an indifference that had misled the other as to the resources at his command. The information that he was "cleaned out," with the corroborative evidence of his stunned expression, came with a shock of surprise to his hearer. That which he had set himself to effect had been accomplished sooner than he had hoped. Luck and superior skill had both been in his favour. The run of luck had been consistent; each day he had been apprehensive of its changing, but it had held steadily; if it held only a little longer, all would be well.

The silence between them grew until it became difficult to break. To venture a trivial remark in the teeth of that grim pause was impossible. The man with the luck smoked reflectively, his eyes on the sand; the man without the luck stared seaward, indifferent in the preoccupation of his thoughts as to what construction his companion was likely to put upon his taciturnity. He was angry with himself, not alone because he had lost everything, but because he could not take his losses philosophically. He had no feeling of splendid adventure, no desire to flick his fingers in the face of fate and laugh. He felt much as he had felt when, a small boy, he had dropped a penny in the slot of an automatic sweet machine that was out of order, and had followed that failure to get a return for his money by dropping another, and this his last, penny in the same unresponsive receptacle. He had on that occasion kicked the offending machine viciously; to have been able to kick something now would have been a relief.

And then abruptly the noise of a bark snapped the silence. The collie was returning along the sands. He turned over on his elbow and swept the beach with his eyes, eyes in which a quickening interest vied with the hard bitterness of resentful anger. He wanted to see the girl again, the girl who had looked at him in wondering amaze that he could find no better pastime than card playing in the sunlight. She had disapproved of his occupation; he had read that in her look; he had also seen the interest that flashed to the surface and drenched the wonder and the disapproval in the dark eyes.

"Here's that brute of a dog again!" Holman said.

The complaint was allowed to pass without comment; the indolent figure reclining on the sand remained motionless, waiting for the reappearance of the girl. She came into sight presently, still stooping for, and throwing, the stick at intervals; though her response to the dog's insistence was not so ready as it had been, and her movements were listless, conveying an impression of fatigue. As the girl showed greater indifference for the game, the collie grew more eager. When by its barking it failed to rouse her to greater activity, it pulled at her dress, rushing in and snapping at her skirt excitedly. The man sprawling on the sands looked on. The dog, he decided, was a nuisance. It was boisterous in common with its breed. It scarcely surprised him when from the water's edge he heard a girl's scream. In one of its wild rushes the dog had caught her leg in its teeth. With amazing swiftness he was on his feet.

"The brute's bitten her!" he exclaimed.

"Serve her right," the other responded, "for letting it make itself a nuisance."

If he heard the callous remark, Guy Matheson paid no heed to it. In a few rapid strides he reached the girl's side. Holman looked after him; looked from him to the cards lying where they had been thrown down on the sands; looked from the cards to the two figures by the sea shore; and, reflecting on the unlikelihood of his friend's return, he slipped the cards into his pocket and left the beach.

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## Chapter Two.

The girl faced about at the sound of Matheson's approach. She was vainly attempting to ward off the dog's exuberant attacks, which Matheson quelled promptly with the effective argument of force. She looked from him to the collie as it ran howling behind her, and her eyes rebuked the man's roughness.

"He did not intend to hurt," she said. "He is always like that when he grows excited; one has to keep him off with a stick; but I forgot."

"I am afraid he bit you," he said. "Yes. But it isn't much, I think. I'll go back and bathe it. I am staying quite close."

"A dog's bite can be a nasty thing, particularly in this country," he said. "I wish you would let me have a look at it." She flushed brightly, and asked: "Are you a doctor?"

"Doctor enough for that sort of operation," he replied, smiling. "There is a natural and effective way of treating all bites when one has no artificial remedy handy."

"Oh! I don't think it is necessary to trouble you," she said quickly. "The dog is perfectly healthy."

"That may be; but it is a wise precaution," he urged. He was quietly insistent; but the girl was determined in her objection, which he had a persuasion arose from prudish reasons rather than indifference to the wound. A feeling of irritation gripped him. He wondered why he should concern himself about her. If she chose to run risks, that was her affair.

"I am afraid you consider my interference impertinent," he said. "It was not meant so."

Quickly she lifted her eyes, brown, earnest eyes, to his face, and scrutinised him closely.

"I am sorry if you really think that," she said. "And it isn't true. I feel only gratitude for your kindness. If I thought there was the least danger I would gladly follow your suggestion. But it's such a trifling matter. I cried out because I was startled. I didn't think you would hear up there by the wall."

"I happened to be watching," he said, "and saw what happened. I am glad the injury is only slight. All the same, I wouldn't stand about; a bandage and rest would be advisable."

"Yes," she said.

She hesitated for a moment, manifestly undecided whether to part without thanking him formally for his kindly interest would not appear rather ungracious. She had been prepared at first to resent his interference. It had annoyed her when he kicked the dog; the action had struck her as brutal, and consistent in a man who gambled away the best of the hours. A mental picture of a sunburnt face, flushed and absorbed in the game, of strong indolent hands fingering the cards, recurred persistently and prejudiced her against him. She wished that she had not discovered him thus engaged. As though he divined the reason of her hesitation, and sought to relieve her of further embarrassment, he glanced rapidly over his shoulder, made some remark about the necessity for following his friend, and turned away. Abruptly the girl held out her hand.

"Thank you very much for troubling about me," she said.

"There is nothing to thank me for," he answered, facing her again with a lazy smile. "You wouldn't let me render any service."

"Because there wasn't any need," she said quickly, as though thinking her refusal needed explaining. "But I am obliged to you for your concern for me."

She started to walk up the beach; and the dog, barking remonstrance that she should forsake the sea, remained with its feet planted protestingly in the wet sand in the hope that she would think better of it and return. Matheson walked beside her.

"Since we are both bound for the road," he said, "may I go so far with you?"

He stepped aside to pick up his jacket from the sands and slipped into it. The coat gave him a more civilised appearance, his companion thought. But, though she strove to, she could not place him to her satisfaction. He might be anything, from a miner to a trooper in the mounted police. He was, as a matter of fact, a civil engineer, though for the past year or two he had neglected his profession for more adventurous pursuits.

When they reached the road the girl pointed to a large house with a tower, lying back in a pleasant garden, and informed him that she was staying there.

"It's nothing of a walk, you see," she added, smiling suddenly. "Now I am going in to follow your prescription."

"I'll walk to the gate with you, if I may," he said.

His persistence surprised her. It occurred to her as unusual that a man who a few minutes before had been a complete stranger to her should consider an accidental introduction which left them both in ignorance regarding each other's name sufficient grounds for developing the acquaintance. She looked at him with her steady eyes, which seemed to be gravely considering him, as though she would estimate his worth before committing herself, and answered slowly:

"If it is not taking you out of your way."

He smiled at the primness of the conventionally worded permission which she so reluctantly gave; it pleased him, he hardly knew why. She pleased him altogether, this little brown girl, with the dark soft eyes that looked so straight into his with their wondering expression which was fearless and shy as well. He liked the clear rich olive of her sun-kissed skin, and the warm unruly brown of her hair. She was not in any sense of the word pretty, save with the beauty that

is youth's, and which vanishes with youth. But there was about her some quality which appealed to Matheson as no physical attraction could appeal; for lack of a more suitable phrase he designated it the essential feminine; but he knew in using the term that it failed in embodying all he wished to convey, failed to portray that brooding spirit of womanhood which he recognised looking out at him from her soft eyes. Possibly had it not been for this look, which he detected when for the first time he met her gaze fully, she would not have caught his attention, would certainly not have stimulated his curiosity. He found himself searching for the look whenever she lifted her eyes; and when for a fleeting second he surprised it in them he had a curious feeling that he wanted to kiss her. He wondered what she would have said had he yielded to the temptation.

"If it took me any part of the way out of my road," he replied, "it could not be reckoned an appreciable distance. I've a fancy to see that you take advantage of the side gate instead of mounting all those steps on to the stoep."

She emitted a quiet laugh.

"You would make me out quite an invalid," she said. "I've always been encouraged not to fuss over trifles."

"That advice suggests brothers," he ventured.

He became aware of some one standing on the balcony, gravely intent upon their figures as they climbed the shadeless road; and he saw a faint flush steal into his companion's cheeks, a tiny pucker of vexation contract her brows.

"I shall have to explain you," she said. "They'll never let me take Bruno out again."

"Not take out your dog!" he exclaimed.

"Oh, he isn't mine. He belongs to the house. I have never owned anything so valuable as a dog." She laughed again, entirely without bitterness, and added: "The advantage of possessing nothing lies in the knowledge that one can never suffer the disappointment of loss."

He wondered whether she guessed that he was suffering keenly from the particular disappointment of which she spoke, whether, when those clear eyes had fastened upon his in the surprise of that first encounter, she had discerned the breathless, almost feverish, anxiety with which he hung on the issue of the game. He felt that she would not sympathise with him if he confessed to her that he had lost his all, that he could boast no greater possessions than herself. He recalled the disapproval in her look; and he felt that in no circumstance could he be drawn to confide in her that for over a week he had been steadily gambling, and, for the greater part of the time, losing heavily. She simply would not understand.

"It is an advantage truly," he allowed—"so long as one is sure of one's next meal. I enjoy that enviable condition with yourself."

"Yes. But you won't enjoy it for long."

"You mean?" he asked.

"You'll acquire... Men can."

"And can't women too?"

"It's possible, of course; but it isn't so easy for us; we're up against so many obstacles—tradition is the biggest of them."

"Some of you have climbed over that," he said.

"Some of us have." She lifted her face with a brief smile. "When we've climbed over in sufficient numbers we'll roll it out of the way. Don't come with me any farther, please; Mrs Graham won't like it. That is Mrs Graham on the balcony. I am her companion."

"Oh!" he said.

He opened the gate for her and stood with his hand upon it. Because of the watchful figure on the balcony he made no offer to shake hands; the girl, he believed, would prefer that her employer should not witness how far they had advanced towards a friendly intimacy.

"I hope the leg will soon be well," he said. "I am often on the beach; I'm on holiday. Perhaps I shall have the pleasure of meeting you again, and hearing from you of its progress. I'm staying in town. Matheson is my name—Guy Matheson."

"Mine is Brenda Upton," she returned with a sort of shy bluntness that seemed to hint at unwillingness to respond to his insistent confidences. He was gaining information by insidious methods. In a few minutes he had learnt more about her than is sometimes revealed after a long acquaintance. She resented this. It conferred privileges to which he was entitled.

"Good morning," she said, and passed through the gate, leaving him to shut it after her.

She did not look back; and, after following her retreating figure for a moment with his eyes, he turned about and walked slowly away in the sunshine. On one point he was determined; he intended to make it his business to see Brenda Upton again.

He returned to the main road and boarded the tram for Adderley Street; he was staying in the vicinity with Holman. The latter's acquaintance he had made in Johannesburg. They had in a very brief space of time become surprisingly intimate. He was not quite dear what had been responsible for the development of the intimacy. He had never felt especially drawn towards the older man, who had pursued the friendship with a determination that was flattering and irresistible in the case of a man who was indolent in the matter of selection as in most things, and who, as a recent arrival in Africa, was fairly ready to respond to friendly overtures, particularly from a man long and closely associated with the country.

Holman seemed to have no specified profession. He was interested in company promoting, and had undoubtedly some influence in mining circles. He was a man of mystery, whose movements were abrupt and always uncertain, and whose friends were as insignificant in numbers as his circle of acquaintances was large. He travelled at irregular intervals to Europe; but he was seldom absent from Africa for longer than three months at a stretch. He hated the land, he was wont to say; but it was too important an investment to disregard.

"Rhodes realised the value of Africa," he informed Matheson. "He would have connived at anything so that he could hold it for the Empire in the hollow of his hand. But there was one thing he didn't foresee."

"What is that?" Matheson had asked.

"The near future will shed a light upon that," was the unexpected reply. "I'll leave it to the future to answer your question."

Matheson's knowledge of African politics and African history was superficial. He had considered the Boer war necessary as putting the only possible finish to an intolerable situation. He further considered independent government a mistake. Older and wiser men thought the same, but they were in the minority. The blunders of misgovernment are the inevitable result of circumscribed powers. To quote a wise and able statesman: It is better that a country should govern itself from within, even if at first it govern badly.

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## Chapter Three.

Holman was seated at lunch when Matheson joined him. He had tucked a napkin inside his waistcoat, and, with his elbows at right angles, leaned well over his plate, eating stewed mutton with an appetite which not even the extreme heat could affect. His table manners were a continual source of surprise and disgust to Matheson. A navvy could have given him points in daintiness.

"Finished spooning?" he asked, looking up as the younger man pulled out his chair and dropped heavily into it.

To his surprise Matheson showed annoyance.

"I only did what was civil," he answered shortly. "Hang it all! What else can a man do when he sees a girl bitten by a dog?"

"What else? ... Save do as I did. I dare say it gave her pleasure."

"I don't think it caused her emotion of any sort."

The tone of the response did not invite a pursuance of the subject. Having in mind the speaker's run of ill luck, Holman found it easy to excuse his irritability. He went on unmoved with his lunch, and confined his conversational efforts to the baldest commonplace, evincing neither surprise nor resentment when no reply was vouchsafed to some of his remarks.

Despite the fact that Matheson had sat down late he was the first to rise from the table.

"What are you doing this afternoon?" the other asked.

"Oh! I don't know... I shall loaf on the stoep, I think."

Holman looked at him closely.

"Loafing seems to agree with some people," he said, a trifle pointedly. "It's rather a favourite pastime of yours."

"What of it?" asked Matheson impatiently.

"Nothing. It is well if you can afford it. If you can't, it's imprudent."

His hearer laughed.

"You know about how well I can afford it," he said.

"I am ready at any time to give you a chance of making good," Holman answered quickly. "Take a day off—loaf, if you feel that way—to-morrow I will make you a proposal. I can't win so much off a friend. I don't like it."

Matheson seemed about to make some reply, but, after a slight hesitation, finally answered nothing; he gave a brief nod as his sole response, and walked quickly out of the room. Holman did not immediately follow him.

"There," he mused, looking reflectively after the retreating figure, "goes a useful man—a man who is too lazy to use his brains, and sufficiently a fool to allow others to adapt them to their own purposes. So long as there is need for a

type, that type exists."

Though such a possibility had not occurred to him at the moment of uttering them, his words had had considerable effect upon Matheson, who, stretching himself in a wicker lounge in the shade of the small stoep at the back of the hotel, farthest removed from the busy hum of the street, stared absently out upon the glaring sunlight and pondered over the implication that he was idling away the hours. It was not a new suggestion; but it had not struck him so forcibly before, perhaps because it had not before been brought so pointedly to his notice by another.

It was not Holman alone who had seemed to make this imputation of indolence. What the man had conveyed in speech, the girl's eyes had expressed with even greater effectiveness. It was what he had read in the girl's eyes that weighed with him now; it left him with a feeling of insufficiency and incompetence. He experienced an unaccustomed sense of shame at the thought that he was as a piece of flotsam which is set moving with the tide. He resented, but could not overcome, this unusual self-depreciation. For the first time he saw himself impartially, and recognised his limitations with surprising clearness. And all because a pair of brown, earnest eyes had seemed to accuse him of trifling with life, which was a serious problem and not the game he would have it. They were wise brown eyes, and carried persuasion. For the only time within his memory he felt dissatisfied with himself.

He looked into the past, and saw it a waste of opportunity; he looked at the present, and frowned, and dismissed it without comment; he attempted to view the future; but the future stretched vague and unsubstantial along a vista of untrodden years, years in which he foresaw waste also—always waste; unless he pulled himself together and made some appreciable endeavour to justify his existence. Life held obligations which he had not recognised before that day; perhaps because only then was born in him the consciousness that no life can be lived independently; the individual stands in responsible relationship to the race.

"By Jove!" he muttered, and struck the arm of his chair twice in rapid succession with his open palm, and continued to stare at the sunlight. "I wonder what has set my thoughts in this direction? I can't remember that these things ever troubled me before."

He passed his hand over his eyes; then he took the hand from before his face and contemplated it with interest, looking at it with a sort of surprised curiosity, as though until that moment he had not appreciated its strength. He opened and closed the fingers deliberately, attentively regarding the prominent knuckles that showed white against the sunburnt skin. It was a large hand, and broad, the hand of a mechanic; and it was covered, as were his arms and chest, with fine gold hairs. Evidence of strength was not lacking here, or in the long legs stretched out on the rests of his chair. He turned his attention to his legs, brought his feet deliberately to the stone floor, and sat up straighter.

"I suppose it amounts to this," he reflected, "that I'm something of a rotter, and am only now awaking to the fact."

It may have been the state of his finances, which were low, that was responsible for rousing him, or it may have been simply the criticism in a girl's eyes. It was of the latter he thought more often as he sat wakeful in the sultry afternoon, with a mind in alert contradiction to the repose which his attitude suggested. He saw always in imagination the look of wonder and perplexity shadowing their brown depths, the hint of disapproval behind their surprise. He felt inexplicably desirous of justifying himself in this girl's opinion, of winning her approval, even her admiration. An almost boyish enthusiasm gripped him to do great things, splendid things, to force her into a generous acknowledgement of his worth. He knew it to be absurd, but the conceit held him, despite his realisation that in all probability the girl had ceased to think of him. Their meeting was but an episode in life; possibly he had made less impression on her mind, notwithstanding all that her features had seemed to express, than she had made on his. He doubted that he had gripped her imagination.

It annoyed him to discover that he was more alive to her disapproval than to any other emotion she may have shown. There had been only disapproval, he believed; and he resented this thought, as he resented the feeling of his own insufficiency, futilely and yet with vehemence. He had got to make that right somehow. He could not let it rest at that. He was going to prove that he was not such a waster after all—prove it to the girl, until the disapproval in her eyes was banished entirely.

It was odd how the memory of that look stuck in his mind and exasperated him. He could not recall that he had ever been so deeply affected by a gaze before. It was as though he had turned a corner sharply and come unexpectedly up against some barrier he had never suspected of being there; it disconcerted him. But behind the embarrassment he was conscious of an immense curiosity, and coupled with the curiosity was an agreeable sense of adventure that coloured everything with the magic of romance.

Not since he had attained to manhood had he felt particularly interested in any individual woman. As a boy girls had interested him; but of late years he had come little in contact with women, and had fallen into the habit of avoiding their society when it was available. Therefore the encounter of the morning was the more significant. He recognised that his action in accosting the girl was the outcome less of impulse than of volition—an instinctive, compelling sympathy which had given him readily to perceive and resent the criticism of her look, and had made it easy, and indeed imperative, for him to speak to her. The same urgency impelled him to seek her again, some power outside his will yet not in conflict with it.

The afternoon wore slowly away. The brazen sun sloped to the hard blue horizon, sinking into the waves victoriously with its golden challenge flashed in the reluctant face of oncoming night. Along the shore the little waves were breaking gold-tipped, and lengthening shadows, the heralds of approaching dusk, lay along the sands. Matheson, while he sat at dinner, was thinking of the sea—the sea with the evening light upon it, and the restful shadows darkening cliff and sand. He dined alone. Holman was spending the evening with friends—a matter of business, he had explained, and had referred vaguely to the club. It did not concern Matheson that he should be dining at the club rather than at his friend's house; he was not particularly interested in his arrangements. In his present mood he was only conscious of relief at being left to himself. He was out of tune with life, and desirous of keeping the discord

unsuspected. He had a strong objection to the cause of his despondency being misinterpreted: Holman would naturally conclude that his losses were weighing unduly on his mind: they certainly sat there heavily, and caused discomfort; but he had an idea that he could bear up in face of these reverses. It was not the first occasion that he had been unlucky with the cards.

He left the dinner table with the picture of the dusk and the quiet sands exciting his imagination, luring him on to the committal of amazing follies. He resisted successfully for over half an hour the seductive call of the sea; and then went up to his room and changed into flannels, and did what for thirty odd minutes he had been resolving he would not do—tramped out along the road to Three Anchor Bay. He had not the smallest hope of seeing Brenda Upton on the beach, or elsewhere; nevertheless he walked down to the beach, and peered about him, searching the dusk vainly for a sign of the small slender figure. He knew that it was not in the least likely that she would be walking about; but he looked for her none the less, with the dogged yet purposeless air of a man pursuing consciously an illusion.

When he had satisfied himself that she was not on the beach, he regained the road, and deliberately turned his steps in the direction he had taken with her that morning. The house where she was staying loomed large in the darkness; and, as he strolled up the sandy roadway, he was conscious of the scent of the oleanders, tall trees of which, in a pink and white confusion, leaned over towards the road. The air was heavy with their fragrance, and warm and still. In the stillness the murmur of the sea followed him, resembling in its muffled monotony the almost outdistanced murmuring of a large concourse of people, uttering an insistent complaint. Lights gleamed fitfully from the open windows of the house, and upon the stoep and balcony people were grouped in small parties of twos and threes, contented, after dinner groups, enjoying the restful dusk which succeeded the heat and glare of the day. If Miss Upton had been there he could not have judged; it was not light enough to distinguish clearly, and the view he got was interrupted and shadowed with the trees.

When he had passed the house he turned, abruptly and retraced his footsteps, and walked back to his hotel, which he reached with a most unaccustomed feeling of weariness as a result of his long tramp. He discovered when he got back that Holman had returned. He came upon him in the vestibule, and was able to greet him with no trace of his former irritation. He had walked that mood off, or had got the better of it somehow.

Holman was in excellent spirits. He wanted to talk, and suggested whisky and a smoke and a retired corner; and Matheson, infected with his bonhomie, managed to throw off the despondency that had weighed upon him all day and respond to his genial humour.

Before they separated for the night, rather unexpectedly, and yet in a manner which seemed to suggest that he had deliberately led up to the subject, Holman made an allusion to the cards, and to the other's run of ill luck, which he prophesied must turn shortly.

"It can't hold for ever," he asserted. "I'll play you to-morrow double or quits."

"It's no good," Matheson answered. "If I lost I couldn't pay, and I'm not taking on a debt to hang like a millstone round my neck for years."

"I'll tell you what I will do." Holman's hand fell warmly on the other's shoulder... "I can't clear you out without giving you a chance of winning back. If you lose you can pay me in service."

"That depends," Matheson answered, and scrutinised the speaker closely, "on what the service is."

"Well, of course." There was a long pause.

"We will go into that to-morrow," came the slow response.

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## Chapter Four.

"And so you see," Holman said, and flung his coat upon the sands, and took a pack of cards from one of the pockets and shuffled them absently, "you don't stand to lose anyhow. If you win it's quits; if I win you get half your losses bade and simply render me a service which will trespass only on a few days—a week or two at most—of your time. It strikes me as a fairly generous offer."

"It's the undeniable generosity that gives it its Blackguard look," was the answer. "What's the nature of the service? ... You say you want me to deliver a letter to a certain person of Dutch extraction and to bring you back his reply. That would sound all right if there were no postal facilities; but in view of the very excellent postal arrangements in this country the request wears a sinister aspect. I don't want to offend you, but—it's shady, this business? Plainly I can't go into the thing with my eyes shut."

"I don't ask you to. At the same time, the less wide open they are the better. There is nothing shadier in it than is customary in the gamble of party politics. It's an attempt to overthrow the government. That, I take it, won't disturb you particularly; you're not interested. Despite your appreciation of the postal arrangements of this country, there is a leakage somewhere. I don't choose to have my private communications tapped, that is why I send important messages by hand."

Matheson pondered this, put a few questions as to the policy of the present government and the reason for the other's objection to it, and then lay full length on his lack on the sands and deliberated upon the offer. Judged on its face-value it was worthy of consideration—the whole of his losses, which were considerable, back if he won; and if he lost half of them returned to him, with the sole obligation of carrying a letter for a friend, who was presumably a political agitator, and to return to him bearing a reply to his communication.

There was no danger in the undertaking; it would have appealed more strongly had the dangerous element intruded; there was no particular satisfaction in it beyond the pecuniary gain. Politics did not interest him; but he was averse to this backstairs method of abetting agitators. Agitators were insufferable nuisances. He had always felt that. Usually they were moved by motives of personal interest; and they lacked reasonableness. The latter placed them outside the limit of sympathy. When one can't reason with a man one loses the desire to grasp his point of view. It struck him as odd that Holman should be one of these ill-balanced people; he had always regarded him as a shrewd and peculiarly level-headed man. As a political malcontent he appeared in a new light, a light that flared artificially about him and revealed a queer motley of anachronistic effects—modern civilisation practising the customs of bygone intrigue in a country that was young, in the accepted sense of development, and more ancient than history itself. He couldn't understand it.

After a while he ceased to concern himself with that aspect of the case, and brought his attention to bear upon the more personal view. He would be blind to self-interest if he could not perceive that the proposal, apart from its unpleasant flavour of intrigue, was altogether favourable to himself. He believed it to be prompted by purely friendly feeling, and a desire to accommodate without humiliating him. Regarding it thus, he could only appreciate the generosity and good feeling which dictated it, and marvel at his own reluctance to accept this opportunity of regaining half, or all, that he had lost. But the reluctance remained, and revealed itself, even when he had overcome it sufficiently to decide in favour of closing with the offer, in the ungracious acquiescence which he gave.

"All right," he said, sitting up and fidgeting with the sand. "That sort of thing isn't exactly in my line, but I'll do it—if I lose."

"And ask no questions?" Holman said, without moving.

"And keep my mouth shut in any circumstance..."

They cut, and Matheson dealt.

This gamble, with its odd stakes and uncertain issue, was like no other game he had ever engaged in. He felt as a man might feel who stakes life or liberty upon a chance without sufficient justification. Possibly it was because in some subconscious way he realised that it was honour that was at stake that made the issue of such tremendous importance to him. He had to win. He would not admit the possibility of failure.

In silence he took up his cards. His features were tense. The perspiration started on his forehead, on the backs of his hands, on his arms: there was an anxious look in his eyes, a suggestion of nervousness in his laboured breathing. In striking contrast, the calm of his opponent's manner was manifest in the deliberate way in which he looked over his hand and calculated its value. His luck still held; the advantage of the cards lay with him...

Later, with the excitement of the play past, the eager curiosity of indeterminate results changed to the unpleasant actuality of accepted defeat, Matheson was aware that he had lost more than a mere game, even a game with big stakes depending thereon. Although he had regained one-half of his former losses, he felt poorer than when on the previous day he had acknowledged that he was cleaned out. He stood pledged now to a service about which he knew nothing save its undeniably shady nature; he had agreed, moreover, not to attempt to learn more concerning it. The unwisdom of the undertaking struck him as it had not done when upheld with the belief that he would win and so be relieved of the obligation. He was committed to the carrying out of a piece of egregious folly which might lead to any wild complication, and force him into an unwilling co-operation with persons whose views were opposed to his own. Distrust of Holman grew in him. He could not give a name to his doubt, but the doubt existed: he resented having allowed himself to become the man's tool.

Holman made some comment on the unaccountability of luck, and, looking up to answer him, Matheson became aware of a small face, flushed and half averted, of a pair of disapproving brown eyes surveying their grouping with disfavour, as their owner passed close by the scene of the gamble and continued her way over the hot sands. Matheson got up.

"I'll see you at the hotel," he said, slipping into his coat. And without waiting for any response, he followed the girl and speedily overtook her.

"So the injury didn't amount to much after all," he said, meeting her eyes with a smile as she turned an inquiring face in his direction, and then halted and shook hands with him. "I am glad to see you are able to walk without inconvenience."

"Oh! the bite was nothing. I rested yesterday; but it wasn't really necessary. However, I don't mean to walk far; it is too hot."

"The best time is the evening," he said, keeping beside her when she started to walk again. "It was jolly on the beach last night. I tramped out after dinner," he explained, observing her surprise. "Do you ever come down here in the dusk?"

"No. I don't often get the opportunity," she answered; and there was, he fancied, a note of regret in her voice. "Mrs Graham likes to be read to after dinner—or we work."

The description of the manner in which her evenings were passed did not sound enlivening. He wondered that any girl should submit to these dull conditions, that girls could be found to fill such servile posts.

"Do you never get any time off?" he asked.

"It's off-time to-day," she admitted, smiling suddenly. "Mrs Graham has a sick headache. When she has a headache

no one is allowed near her. Sometimes they last three days. She is subject to them."

"Then," he said promptly, in the manner of one making a statement which admits no contradiction, "you can come to-night... Will you?" he added tentatively.

"Will I come—on the beach?" she asked in an undecided tone, as though uncertain that she apprehended him rightly. "You mean after dinner?"

"Yes," he returned. "It will be jolly if you do."

She hesitated; and he noticed in her eyes, before she averted them and looked seaward, a shadow like a tiny doubt passing over the clear surface of her mind.

"I... It is a little unusual," she said, the perplexed eyes in the glittering distance.

"That's tantamount to a refusal, I suppose?" he said, feeling nettled and unaccountably disappointed. "Perhaps I ought not to have proposed it; but it occurred to me that it would be pleasant. I'm sorry. I didn't wish to embarrass you."

Immediately, with his inference of refusal, her disinclination to adopt the suggestion faded. She wanted to come. He had said he thought it would be pleasant; she, more positive in her opinions, knew that it would be pleasant, wonderfully pleasant. Very few pleasant adventures happened in her life; it was ridiculous to reject anything that offered for so feeble a reason as a sense of the unusual. Was that not after all recommendation in itself? She sought about in her mind for words in which to convey to him without appearing eager that she would like to come, but her vocabulary failed her; seldom had she been at so great a loss for words. Unexpectedly he came to her relief.

"I am infected with the holiday mood," he said. "I want to enjoy things. And my holiday is very near the finish. I may leave any day—perhaps to-morrow. You too must know the holiday mood. We don't leave it altogether behind with our childhood. I want to talk to you. We happened upon the acquaintance by accident—it is part of the holiday. That must be my apology for seeming intrusive."

She turned towards him deliberately with a friendlier look in her eyes.

"I think my gaucherie needs some apologia too," she confessed.

"Why not make it in the form of a concession?" he suggested hopefully, and experienced a curious satisfaction when suddenly she laughed.

Somehow he did not need any assurance in words that she would be on the beach that evening. Instinctively he felt that the reason which had been responsible for her reluctance to accede to his request no longer existed. Whatever it had been she had ridded herself of it. He liked to think that if she had felt a want of confidence in him, her feminine intuition had made it possible to conquer this mistrust. It was the first step towards that better understanding which he wished, he did not know why, to establish between them.

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## Chapter Five.

Brenda Upton, avoiding the notice of the general company by leaving the dinner table early that evening and slipping into the garden while most of the guests remained seated, sauntered down the path to the gate, thrilled with an agreeable sense of adventure that was only slightly damped by the reflection that her behaviour in meeting this stranger about whom she knew nothing was not in keeping with the traditions of her class, was, in fact indiscreet, and might be regarded by the man himself as evidence of an unconventionality of which he might seek to take advantage.

She felt herself blushing at the thought; and pulled up at the gate, and stood with it open and her hand upon the iron spikes, wavering, and looking uncertainly upon the shadowy road. If she detected in his manner any decrease of respect it would hurt as well as humiliate... Perhaps after all it would be wiser not to go...

She glanced back over her shoulder towards the house. Two men made their appearance on the stoep while she looked back. She had made one of a set with them that day for tennis; the younger had suggested taking her up the mountain later. It had seemed quite natural and in order to consent to these things. Yet what did she know about these men more than she knew of Guy Matheson? They chanced to be staying in the same house; that was all: had the other been staying in the house she would not have hesitated to walk with him on the beach. These distinctions were rather absurd.

She let the gate go, and it clanged behind her as she emerged upon the road, and, startled a little by the noise of the gate swinging to, stood for a second and looked about her with an air of furtive watchfulness, and the feeling that she was doing something just a little shameful, something which later she might regret.

The expedition seemed scarcely worth such complications of perplexed thought. It was a proof of the strength of her inclination that she persevered in face of this sense of impropriety, and the formless doubts that assailed her continually in defiance of the logic with which she sought to banish them. She was interested in this man with the strong body and handsome face and the air of reckless indolence. She wanted to meet him and talk uninterruptedly without the necessity to break away in the middle of the conversation and hurry back to a meal or something. The freemasonry that exists between persons of like temperament and instinctive sympathy assured her that this interest was mutual.

She crossed the road and walked on to the beach. Against the wall, lounging in the shadow of it and obviously waiting for her, was Matheson. When she saw him she realised how ashamed, how bitterly ashamed, she would have felt had she arrived first. He must have dined early, or hurried through his meal, to have got there so soon. He turned his head quickly, caught sight of her, and advanced to meet her.

“It’s good of you,” he said. “But I felt sure you must relent.”

He scrutinised her for a moment, and found himself enjoying the effects of the last rays of the sunset warming her hair and the clear olive of her skin.

“The sun is kissing you good-bye. It’s a good time of the day, isn’t it?” he said.

“Yes,” she answered a little shyly—“the best time of all.”

“Wait,” he counselled. “I am going to take you beyond Sea Point. You needn’t trudge it all the way. We can board the tram—as far as it goes. Round the point one gets a view of the Twelve Apostles—if you care about mountains,—but I’m sure you do. One faces the wide sweep of the bay and the immensity of the open sea. We’ll watch the moon rise out there—then you will know which is the best time of all I want you to admit that my hour is the best hour.” He laughed with a ring of light-hearted enjoyment in the sound of the mirth. “Humour me,” he pleaded. “That’s one of my conceits.”

But she, smiling also, shook her head.

“The best hour of the twenty-four—the Perfect Hour,” she insisted, “belongs to no specified period. Haven’t you discovered that?”

“What is the perfect hour?” he asked.

“The hour we most enjoy.”

An earnest look had come into her eyes, the quiet tones of her voice echoed this earnestness, accentuated it; he felt his own mood responding to the seriousness of hers. He liked her treatment of the subject. Never in all his life, he believed, and wondered whether she had been more fortunate in this respect, had he experienced the perfect hour. It was possible, he decided, to go through life without experiencing it.

“Your idea appeals pleasantly to the imagination,” he said; “but it deals with superlatives. My good hour is not to be despised; it’s within the grasp of all.”

“You think the other isn’t?” she asked.

“Well, of course, enjoyment is relative; but I imagine your idea of it embraces only the highest quality. Am I right?”

“In a sense, yes—though possibly our ideas of what is truly enjoyable differ substantially. For instance, beautiful scenery is to me entirely satisfying; so is a beautiful flower.”

“You will get that to-night,” he said—“the scenery, I mean. But you know the coast about here, I expect.”

“Fairly well.”

“We’ll get on to the road,” he said; “then we can stop the first tram that overtakes us. It’s too far to walk. We have to study the leg.”

“Oh, that! I played tennis this afternoon,” she said.

He showed his disapproval.

“If you do foolish things like that you deserve complications.”

A tram came up almost immediately. They boarded it; and the girl, feeling a little constrained and disinclined to talk, sat silent, watching the spear of light along the horizon narrowing and paling as the sea settled to a grey restfulness beneath the darkening sky. She did not want Matheson to talk, and was glad when he fell into silence too. She was conscious of the people on the tram to a quite disproportionate degree. She had a persuasion that they knew she was doing something unusual and rather indiscreet. The sense of back doors and secrecy which had gripped her at first had hold of her again, and spoilt things. It was with immeasurable relief that she got down when they reached the terminus and started to walk.

“Let us go on and on,” she said, “until there is no one. I want—quiet.”

“I know,” he said on a note of understanding. “We’ll find what we want.”

A swift and unaccountable feeling of intimacy sprang out of this mutual desire for solitude, which she had expressed with unconscious audacity; while he, in voicing his agreement, seemed to be conspiring with her to get away together and be alone. This purpose had been in his mind from the beginning.

“Tell me when you are tired,” he said, as he helped her over a difficult place.

But she did not tire easily. It was the difficulty of making their way between and over the boulders of the rock-strewn beach that brought them to a halt. They sat down on a small strip of sand with a rock at their backs, and for a while remained silent, contemplating the scene in quiet appreciation that defied expression and lent itself to the prevailing

peace. Out of the warm dusk a few stars gleamed faintly, and upon the stirless air the contented murmuring of the sea as it drew away from the sleeping shore hung reposefully, the wild slumber song which throughout the ages the element which never rests urges upon the land.

As the silence between them lengthened, Brenda Upton became aware that the man beside her moved nearer to her; observed too, when she turned towards him, that he was more intent upon the study of her face than upon the deep swell of the moving waters, the sinister strength and secretiveness of the mountain range that walled and overlooked the bay. He had brought her here to see these things, but he did not look at them himself; he was not after all sharing them with her. A faint resentment stirred her as she met the steady gaze of the indolent eyes; she felt somehow cheated.

“I thought this would move you,” he said in a voice of satisfaction.

“It moves me—yes.” She took up a handful of sand and let it run slowly through her fingers. “And you?” she asked.

Suddenly he smiled. He changed his attitude for a more comfortable position, reclining on the sand on his elbow, with his chin supported on his hand.

“I’m enjoying your enjoyment. That’s enough for me to-night. It’s a fresh sensation; the scenery isn’t. When I first came out here it gripped me—as it grips you. I forgot the time. I missed my dinner.” He laughed at some reminiscence. “That didn’t matter; it was worth it. But I found it impossible to explain what had kept me. It would have spoilt it. You know the fatuous remarks that some people would have made... I could have talked of it to you—you would have understood. There’s something fine about this bit of coast—fine and lonely. People don’t come here much. You see, it’s difficult to get at; there’s no beach, and the rocks scare off bathers. There’s nothing to draw people—except just the rugged beauty of it...”

He broke off, aware of the criticism in her eyes, their look of veiled surprise.

“I don’t believe *you* understand,” he said doubtfully.

“The love of beauty!” she said. “Oh! yes, I understand that part. It’s the inconsistency that puzzles me.”

“The inconsistency!” he echoed.

“I’ll tell you,” she said, and added quickly: “Please don’t think I am criticising you—only when I hear you talk like that of the beauty of nature, it becomes difficult to reconcile that idea of you with—the earliest impression.”

“I know,” he said, and shifted a little on his arm in, order to get a more direct view of her.

He was thinking of the disapproval the brown eyes had so clearly expressed that first morning, and his subsequent wish to drive the disapproval out of them and earn her appreciation. There followed a brief, expectant pause before he said:

“I’m glad you spoke of that. Of course I saw what you were thinking that morning... And in truth it is a waste of a blue day to spend it in gambling. I’ve acted like a fool, and learnt a lesson. I don’t suppose I feel particularly keen about playing in future—not for a time, anyhow—but I have a feeling I’d like to make some sort of a resolve... Would it bore you to accept my undertaking never to play again?”

“It wouldn’t bore me,” she said, manifestly surprised at his question. “But are you sure? ... It is more likely to bore you afterwards to feel constrained to keep that resolve. Is it necessary to promise—anything?”

“Not necessary, perhaps. It would be a satisfaction to me.” He looked up at her with a swift smile. “I believe that’s what I inveigled you here for—to force you into the position of custodian of my conscience—to listen to confidences. I’m lonely. I’ve no one belonging to me out here—no one I can talk intimately with. I’ve knocked around. That sort of life doesn’t lend itself to intimacies. I want to talk—oh! about things one doesn’t talk about generally... I wonder whether I am making myself intelligible?”

“Yes,” she said. “Though possibly if I didn’t have those same feelings I might not follow you altogether. I’m lonely too. I often want a sympathetic listener; and there’s no one; so I moon about alone, and—”

Her voice trailed off on a thoughtful pause.

“Want to kick yourself?” he suggested.

“No. I don’t think it’s ever been quite so bad as that.”

“It is with me,” he said—“often. But I have few resources. I don’t sweat things out like some men in violent exercise. I’ve tried that, but it doesn’t give me any sort of relief. My beastly muscles develop and keep hard without that Sometimes I think they are the only part of me to develop and harden; the rest is non-resistant.”

“A man has his work,” she interjected. “There’s ambition...”

He looked away across the dark waste of waters and answered indifferently.

“I never had any. All that talk about a career—what does it amount to? One man makes a bit of a splash, another doesn’t; but they are both heading the same way, both making for the open sea, which eventually engulfs them. It’s only while they are inshore that the splash is visible; farther out the sea is deep and tranquil; and sometimes it is the man who hasn’t made a splash inshore who keeps up longest and sees well ahead. Those early splashes don’t count

for much when the swimmer is done. Death beats us all in the end. It isn't worth it... ambition... no."

"Without ambition nothing would be achieved ever," she said. "Some one's got to do the things—that are worth doing."

"Why?" he asked, and smiled at her lazily. She looked down at him, puzzled and hesitating, a little uncertain of her ground. "What are the things worth doing?"

"Don't you believe that there is a purpose in life?" she asked.

The smile on his face broadened.

"I confess I haven't given much thought to the matter, but, since you ask me, I suppose there might be some blind purpose even in the life of a mole. It's all rather futile though, isn't it? What are you doing? ... What am I doing? ... The obvious answer, of course, is sitting on the shore. Well, that's about all there is to it—sitting on the shore and talking. Later, well take the plunge and swim out to the deep sea—and that's the finish. I like best sitting on the shore. It's very pleasant, isn't it? Say you are enjoying it—and don't try to rouse ambition in me; it's a mean thing at best."

"It's a fine thing," she contradicted. "Very little has ever been achieved without it."

He sat up straighter.

"I'll prove my definition to be more correct than yours," he insisted. "What is ambition?—a desire for power, for superiority. It's utterly selfish, an egotistical quality. It springs from greed of gain, either of recognition or of material benefit. Can that be considered other than an ignoble sentiment?"

"Not as you put it," she dissented. "But I dispute your definition. Ambition is a lofty endeavour to excel."

"Well, it may be... sometimes it is," he allowed. "But in this very human world it is oftener the more sordid sentiment I described. I merely dragged the wings from your ideal and brought it down to earth."

"I believe that is what you enjoy doing," she said, a touch of reproach in her voice.

"What do we know better than this dear mother earth?" he asked, and pressed his hand heavily upon the sand. "She is altogether beautiful, save where man, in the determined pursuit of ambition, has scarred and changed her face. That idea of living at a high mental altitude is mere presumption. It's an age of posing. We catch at a phrase that sounds fine, and adopt it because of its fine sound. There isn't any need to live up to the sentiment it expresses—very often it doesn't express much. There's a cult that's called, I believe, the Higher Thought Movement. People read books—or they don't read them, but simply own them and talk vaguely of the higher things they express. It doesn't go far beyond talking as a rule. I never met any one who could transmit higher thought. It's another catch phrase."

"Doesn't every one have those thoughts at some time?" she asked quietly, without resenting his speech as he had half expected her to do.

"Higher thoughts? ... Yes, I suppose so. Only one doesn't talk about them."

"No," she returned; "you are right. One would have difficulty in expressing those things—particularly in high sounding phrases."

"Truth is never adorned," he said—"which possibly accounts for the frequency with which she is disregarded."

Abruptly he stood up, and held out both hands in invitation to her to rise.

"The moon's getting up," he said. "Come nearer to the water's edge and see it top the mountain."

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## Chapter Six.

For a week Matheson remained in Cape Town awaiting Holman's convenience. He was in no hurry to leave. He felt neither interest nor curiosity in his mission; the only emotion he experienced in regard to it was an impatient desire to have it behind instead of hanging perpetually over him, to fulfil his undertaking, and be done with the whole thing and thus be free of further obligation. The necessity for doing something altogether repugnant to him incensed him against the man who had imposed the condition, and who was formerly his friend. He resented the thing as though it had been a trick. In a way it had been a trick. He apprehended that without following the purpose of the stratagem. He had undertaken a questionable mission at the request of a man against whose interest it was to be detected in connection with the matter. The whole thing was ridiculous; but it was as imperative of discharge as any other debt of honour incurred at the option of the individual. Having agreed to the stake, it was impossible now to draw back.

During the week of compulsory inactivity in Cape Town he pursued with considerable diligence the congenial pastime of cultivating the acquaintance so recently begun, which on the night of that first walk had leaped forward with astonishing rapidity, clearing the conventional obstacles that intrude on new acquaintanceship, and arriving at something more nearly resembling an intimate comradeship than anything he had ever experienced in relation to feminine friendship. The novelty of the thing, as much as the undeniable enjoyment he derived from the girl's society, pleased him. The waiting about was not irksome when Brenda Upton was there to fit into the blanks. But Brenda was not always available.

During the next two days Mrs Graham remained indisposed; and her companion was therefore free to spend most of

the day, and all the evening, in any way she inclined towards. Never before had Matheson taken satisfaction in a woman's headaches; nor would he have believed it possible that the sufferer's recovery on the third day could have caused him such real disappointment. He would cheerfully have confined her to her room for a week.

With Mrs Graham about again the meetings were uncertain and hurried, and the after-dinner walks ceased altogether. Matheson rebelled against this.

"You can get away if you want to," he asserted unreasonably. "She couldn't refuse to let you off for an hour if you asked."

"Do you really believe that I don't want to?" she asked. "If you only knew how much more they mean to me than they can to you—these walks! ... It's out of the question, anyhow."

That evening while she sat in the lounge, holding wool for her employer and compelled to listen to the discordant noise made by a group of the younger guests, gathered about the piano in the corner, Brenda's thoughts wandered to the quiet beach. She pictured the warm satisfying serenity of the night out there under the starlit sky with the moan of the sea at one's feet. How good it was! ... how good! ... It was hot in the house, despite the draughts created by open doors and windows; there was difficulty in breathing. One wanted to be outside walls, away from artificial lighting, out in the open in the quiet dusk, with no light but the stars.

Mrs Graham finished winding her wool and, with the exhausted air of a woman recently prostrated by some nervous disorder, proposed an adjournment to her room for the inevitable hour's reading, which until now the girl had accepted as a matter of course and not found so unutterably wearisome.

With a limp disinclination that was an unspoken protest, she followed Mrs Graham downstairs and into a room on the left of the entrance, a pleasant room opening on to the stoep in front, and with access to a small conservatory. Mrs Graham touched the electric switch, and immediately the room was flooded with light.

"Shut die window," she directed, "or we shall be eaten alive by mosquitoes."

"But,"—Brenda paused—"it's so hot."

"Well, you can leave the fanlight open. It is as hot outside as indoors."

The reading proved a miserable business. The best of readers would fail to interpret successfully the spirit of a work with a mind intent upon matters wholly outside the subject of the book. Brenda attempted conscientiously to capture her straying thoughts and tie them down to the prosaic present, but they evaded her and flew off at a tangent in pursuit of retrospective glamour. She reached out after them and brought them back, only to lose them almost immediately as, eluding her listless vigilance, they wandered anew in unbidden channels.

"I really think," Mrs Graham's voice broke in complainingly, "that you must go back and read those last few pages again. You've missed the sense somehow. There's a want of relevance... You mustn't skip."

Brenda turned back without comment and endeavoured to fix her attention on the print, which conveyed no meaning whatever to her. The reading that evening was admittedly a failure.

"Year in year out, until I'm old, it will be like this, I suppose," the girl said wearily to herself later on her way upstairs. And then, almost fiercely: "Why do we stand it? Why do we allow all the dull, uninteresting things to be forced on us? I do this—for food and shelter. And there isn't any escape—except through marriage. Ugh!"

Arrived in her bedroom, leaning from the window looking out upon the stirless night, she admonished herself mutely.

"I don't think that moonlight walks and agreeable society are altogether good for you, my dear. You grow discontented because every hour isn't a perfect hour."

A faint smile curved her lips. She leaned farther out into the fragrant darkness, and rested her elbows on the sill and her chin in her hands, and gazed away towards the sea, and sighed.

"Life isn't made up of perfect hours," she reflected. "They are so few—so very few—that's what makes them so good. He's discontented too... Every one's discontented. We want things—oh! all sorts of fine, impossible things—we keep on wanting them. And life goes on in the same solid, stolid way: we live; we grumble; we die. *Sic transit*..."

"No," she contradicted presently, "that isn't all. There *is* a glory concealed somewhere—the rainbow in the bubble, if we look long enough."

And after that she ceased to speculate on the problem of life, and fell into a retrospective reverie and forgot the time.

Perhaps it is because women as a sex acquiesce too readily in the conditions of life, whatever they may be, instead of making a determined stand against what is unfavourable, that unfavourable conditions are imposed upon them. Men do not submit, and results justify their resistance—organised resistance is the charter of freedom. It is taught that there is beauty in submission—well, there isn't. Submission is lacking in dignity, and beauty is always dignified. There is beauty in restraint, in control, in unselfishness; but none of these qualities necessarily include submission—rule it out, therefore; its day is done.

It was Matheson who gave Brenda Upton her first lesson in resistance. He was very authoritative and firm and convincing; also—he was going away. That was the strongest argument in favour of his demand. It was a demand; there was nothing in the nature of a request about it. He required her on the day before he left Cape Town to obtain, not an hour off, but the entire evening. He wanted her companionship, wanted to sit and talk uninterruptedly, as they

had done on those other nights, and not to be worried with considerations of time. He met her on the beach during the hottest hour of the day, when Mrs Graham was enjoying her siesta, and stated his desire. Brenda looked amazed.

"She'll not hear of it," she said.

"Of course not, if you make up your mind in advance that you won't ask her," he returned.

A flicker of a smile showed in the dark eyes.

"If you only realised how difficult it is! She'll want it explained—why I want to go, and all that."

"But that's cheek," he said, surprised. "Don't you see it's cheek. You ought not to submit to that sort of thing. It isn't any business of hers."

She laughed.

"It isn't... But it's always understood in the case of a girl—it's one of the indignities we put up with."

"Then don't put up with them. Don't you see that in putting up with them you are responsible for their existence. It's up to you to make a stand for the good of the next generation."

"That's not as simple as it sounds when one has to exist," she said.

"No."

He was silent for a moment, then he returned to the attack.

"Well, you are coming with me to-night. Tell her what you like—only come."

Events combined that evening to facilitate matters for Brenda. Several of the younger people staying in the house arranged a walk to Camps Bay for that evening: the plan was under discussion during dinner, so audible a discussion that Mrs Graham could not avoid hearing it at her table in the corner. Brenda also listened with attention; and the manner in which she intended to put her request framed itself in her thoughts. After dinner she approached Mrs Graham with her sentences well considered.

"There is a walk on to-night," she observed, with the faintest trace of nervousness apparent in her manner, and a consciousness of wilfully deceiving. "It is such a perfect evening... I wonder if you would let me have to-night off?"

"To-night?" Mrs Graham's tone was expostulatory. "What am I to do for the reading?"

"I'm sorry." The girl's face looked mutinous; there was an obstinate ring in her voice. She was not going to give in. Matheson had made that point clear. She had to make a stand. "I will read longer to-morrow if I may have to-night... only to-night I won't be inconsiderate afterwards."

She felt that it was weak to promise that Why, after all, should she not have a night free occasionally?

"But they will be away hours," Mrs Graham objected. "I shall be in bed before you get back. There will be no one to massage my shoulder."

It trembled on Brenda's lips to promise to massage it in the morning; but deciding that this was weak also she remained obstinately silent. Something in the girl's manner, perhaps the unrelenting quiet of her air; convinced Mrs Graham that opposition would avail nothing. In the teeth of determined resistance she gave way.

"Well, of course, if you really wish to go..." she conceded with sufficient ungraciousness. "But it is very inconvenient. I should have thought that you had had plenty of free time lately."

She felt distinctly aggrieved. And she held a prejudice against these expeditions when her young companion formed one of the number. There was something not altogether seemly in the idea.

"I hope you won't be very late," she said.

Brenda followed the party from the house, and contrived to separate from it outside the gate. She took an unnecessary turn round a block of buildings, and came out again upon the main road and made her way on to the beach. Matheson came forward eagerly and caught her hands.

"Didn't I say you'd manage it?—clever person! Now, which is it to be?—into town, or a last pilgrimage to the spot we visited that first evening? It depends on whether your mood demands amusement or solitude."

Her answer pleased him.

"My mood demands neither... I want companionship, and the old spot."

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## Chapter Seven.

There are a thousand beauties of the night, as there are varied shades in the qualities of light and colour, many of them so subtly blended, so dependent on sympathetic conditions, that they are not revealed to every one equally. Beauty is interpreted according to the mood and temperament of the individual. There is beauty in a brick wall when the mind is in harmony with its subject; there is beauty in ugliness where ugliness is not divorced from the soul; there

is beauty in everything when youth stands on the threshold of its wonder world and gazes into the shining distances that disclose romance. Romance coruscates in shining distances, like the splendid bewilderment of the Northern Lights: one cannot reach out and grasp these wonders—to take hold of romance is to lose it; to attempt to decrease the distance is to dull the golden vista and distort the fine sense of proportions. As well attempt to bottle material fact with imagination; fermentation would inevitably set up and the result be catastrophe.

With feet planted lightly on the slippery rocks, and a strong hand holding her hand to steady her progress over the wet weed, Brenda looked out across the expanse of darkening ocean that flowed away to the horizon, beyond it, till it flung its spent waters upon the quiet shores on the other side of the world, and her eyes were big, and filled with the wondering content that is born of happiness. All the beauties that were in the night were revealed to her. The sensuous warmth enfolded her like the embrace of a lover; the sound of the sea was magic music in her ears, and the salt breath of the spray, which tightened the tendrils of her hair into ringlets, pressed with the flavour of salt kisses on her lips, acrid kisses, moist and stimulating, that stung the lips they caressed. And behind and above her towered the dark mystery of the land, the frowning heights of grey rock that defied the sea's advance and guarded that vast hinterland so jealously hidden behind the mountain-girt shores.

She came to a halt abruptly, and stood still, and looked down at the sea which bubbled at her feet in the interstices of the rocks, and made a soft splashing sound amongst the weed. She was not observing things consciously; her mind was intent on the man beside her, busy with the moment, and, despite the moment's happiness, oppressed with the sense of finality which the impending parting conveyed. She desired to be a bright and cheerful companion, and instead she was proving, she feared, rather dull. The warm, firm clasp of his hand somewhat confused her ideas. The baldest commonplace was all the utterance she found it possible to make.

"To-morrow at this time you will be in the train," she remarked suddenly, snapping the silence which was beginning to embarrass her.

"Yes," he answered. "Awful bore, isn't it? The heat will be intolerable. I shall be cursing fate, and wishing myself back here... on this rock with you. It's good, isn't it? Lift your face and feel the breeze on your cheek. It's like a breath—nature's cool sweet breath. And that jolly little duck of the sea between the rocks... Will you come here again afterwards?"

"No," she replied, and did not give, nor did he ask for, a reason. "We go back in a week," she added.

"And then the holiday comes to an end?"

"Yes."

"Well, my play time is finished too. I thought it would last longer, but necessity demands that I should earn a living. Why wasn't I born a Kaffir? No Kaffir need work unless he wants to. He settles down on another man's land, and eats another man's mealies, and makes pretence of being useful in return. It's an enviable existence."

"Oftener he lives by his wife's exertions," she said.

"There are white Kaffirs who do that," he rejoined—"plenty of them across the water. I don't fancy civilisation can reproach him there. I rather like the coloured man. Do you?"

"Custom is everything; I'm used to him," she said. "I'm South African, you know—born in the Colony. I have never been home."

It occurred to him as odd that she should speak of a country she had never seen as "home." He had noticed this peculiarity frequently since he had arrived in the country. To the Colonial of British extraction England was always home. It conveyed a sense of unwilling exile that struck like a reproach at the golden welcome of this radiant land which men of many nations have suffered and died for, and women also in the days of the early pioneers. The sting of ingratitude lay in the idea.

"Home, as you call it, is but another lump of mother earth set down under colder skies," he said. "And our skins over there aren't all white although they ought to be. I like new countries. If I possess the indolence of a Kaffir, the push and the enterprise of youth appeals to me. A young country is unspoilt; it offers immense possibilities. And the route isn't mile-stoned with precedents which may not be ignored. Incidentally, there are greater facilities for getting on without interest, and sometimes with an infinitesimal degree of energy."

"No," she contradicted; "it is seldom the lazy man who gets on out here."

"Don't discourage me," he pleaded, and turned a smiling face towards her, and looked deep into her eyes. "I'm for taking the smooth path all the way. Why not? Why make such a business of living? It ought to be quite a simple thing."

He was standing very close to her, still holding her hand which he pressed against his side. Her face in the deepening dusk showed misty and uncertain of outline, and the eyes meeting his in the dimness were just dark shadows glowing in their white setting; but he knew that the soft pensive look was in them which he liked to see there had the light been sufficient to reveal it.

"I wonder if I might kiss you?" he said, and bent forward in the warm dusk and found her lips.

"It was sweet of you to allow that," he said. "A little kindness is a touch of heaven to a lonely man."

He was not to know how much more that kiss signified to the girl than it did to him. No man had ever kissed her before that night. She did not then respond to the caress, but she accepted it. As his lips descended warmly upon her

mouth she felt her face grow hot, and was grateful to the darkness for hiding her confusion; her heart gave a bound and started racing at a great rate; it seemed to her that, standing so close, he must hear it pounding inside her chest.

If he observed her emotion he did not remark on it. The touch of the cool unresponding lips with the salt flavour of the sea upon them moved him unaccountably; but some quality that was compounded of the audacity and sensitiveness of youth, nicely balanced with the discretion of a more matured mind, decided him to ignore the little episode until he had further determined its importance in relation to events. It was never wise to precipitate things.

“Let’s get off the rocks,” he said. “There’s our little strip of sand waiting for us up yonder. The moon will be later to-night. But it doesn’t matter, does it? We’re in no hurry. And anyway we should never get back in the dark without coming to grief.”

He tucked his hand under her arm and assisted her over the rocks. She slipped once, and clutched at him desperately, and nearly upset his balance as well as her own. When with difficulty he maintained his ground and succeeded in holding her up, they remained for a moment or two with his arms about her and laughed recklessly over the averted mishap.

“You’re so strong,” she said.

“It’s just luck,” he observed, “that we aren’t playing at mixed bathing instead of standing high and dry. There’s a certain excitement in walking on the rocks. I’m enjoying this.”

Brenda was enjoying it also; she felt rather sorry when they reached the sand and sat down, and, there being no longer a reason for the attention, he released her hand.

“I want you, if you will,” he said presently, “to give me some address that will find you after you leave here. I want to write to you—if I may.”

She was silent for a space. He was lying on the sand beside her, looking up into her face; while she hesitated she looked down at him.

“I thought it was a case of ships that pass in the night,” she said.

“No,” he answered quietly; “I never intended it should be that.”

“I can give you Mrs Graham’s address,” she said, after a further pause. “But that, of course, is only temporary.”

“How about your home address?” he suggested.

“I haven’t one,” she answered, and started to play with the sand. “We broke that up when my father... He was unfortunate,” she finished in a flattened voice.

“I’m sorry,” he said simply. He felt that he had blundered upon a painful subject; the father was evidently one of those people whom their relations prefer to ignore. “I’ll have Mrs Graham’s address anyhow, and follow up the changes. This friendship has got to develop, you know. It wouldn’t be fair to me if you drew bade now after extending the hand of good-fellowship.”

“Oh! I’m not drawing back,” she said, and ceased fidgeting with the sand and sat nursing her knees, and watching the moving blackness below. “I’ve derived much pleasure from the friendship. It’s been... Well, there have been perfect moments...”

“To-night?” he questioned.

“To-night—yes.”

Her voice dropped to a whisper in making the admission; she spoke with an effort; there was a suggestion of a great deal which she might have said but determinedly repressed in her manner. The darkness crept closer and hid the blush that warmed her face.

“It’s rotten having to go to-morrow,” he said. “I’m sorry I have to go. I’ve enjoyed this week—oh! more than I have enjoyed anything since landing. I would have liked to have seen the holiday out with you. Perhaps some day...”

He broke off and dropped back on the sand and lay staring up at the stars.

“It’s a rotten nuisance, anyway,” he finished.

It was later than they had supposed when eventually they rose to retrace their steps; in the enjoyment of the present they lost count of time; and it was with something akin to dismay that Brenda learnt on consulting his watch by the light of the moon that it was approaching eleven o’clock. It would complicate matters if the others got home from their walk before her.

“We’ll have to hurry,” she said.

“It’s so simple to hurry over the rocks, isn’t it?” he returned with grim humour. “What, after all, can any one say if you are late?”

She did not explain that it was not hard words she feared, but the loss of her post and character, two important matters to a girl dependent on her own efforts.

“Please,” she said, “let us be as quick as possible.”

And so the return journey was made with none of the pleasant lingerings, the pauses to admire beauties that sprang unexpectedly to the gaze, the brief halts for agreeable wrangling or more intimate talk, the longer pauses when they did not talk but stood side by side and gazed out to sea in a sympathetic silence that needed no expression; these pleasures had to be foregone in the effort to overtake time.

The necessity for haste irked Matheson; the girl at his side was conscious of his irritation and distressed because of it.

“It is such a pity,” she said, as they emerged upon the road, “to have to spoil things.”

He caught the note of apology in her voice, its half breathless appeal to his forbearance, and his irritation vanished in a smiling satisfaction.

“By Jove!” he cried, nearly breathless too. “I never believed you’d keep the pace up. Let’s put the brake on a bit. It can’t make a difference of more than five minutes either way now. I can’t talk, scampering along like this.”

When they reached the road where she was staying, instead of parting at the corner, he accompanied her, as he had on the first morning, to the side gates. Before opening the gate he drew her into the shadow of the oleanders against the fence, and, having looked cautiously up the road and down, and ascertained that no one was within sight, he slipped his hands behind her shoulders and held her for a moment and looked into her eyes.

“It’s good-bye this time,” he said, and hung on a significant pause.

She remained very quiet and still under his hands, and made no response.

“You let me kiss you on the beach,” he said, “but...” He bent his face towards hers. “Won’t you kiss me?” he asked.

For a moment she hesitated; then she lifted her face swiftly, and her lips met his, shyly and a little shamefully, in a caress which brushed his eager lips as lightly as one of the pink petals that fell, fragrant and unheeded, about them. She broke away from him; and he turned without a word and opened the gate and looked after her as she slipped through and sped up the path, a slim white figure, with the moonlight splashed upon her hair and face.

The night had not been without its perfect moments for him too.

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## Chapter Eight.

At the last moment Holman decided that he was unable to see his friend off by train on the journey he was undertaking at his request; an engagement prevented him from getting to the station in time. They met at breakfast; but very little was said in reference to the journey or its mission, the details of which had been discussed overnight. Matheson had the letter and his directions. His destination was a farm some twenty miles to the west of De Aar. He would leave the train at the junction and complete the journey by road, obtaining a conveyance at a hotel which Holman recommended.

The prospect of the journey bored him. He was sufficiently familiar with the line to be able to judge fairly accurately the amount of discomfort he might expect from travelling in summer; and the idea of staying for a fortnight, perhaps longer, on a farm with Dutch people was distasteful.

“What, in hell,” he asked desperately, “shall I do with myself? I don’t even speak Dutch.”

“Nor write it?” Holman asked, without looking at him.

“Haven’t any knowledge at all of the fool lingo. You might as reasonably expect me to talk in Kaffir.”

“I’m not expecting anything,” was the response. “But I thought you might have picked up a few words—some fellows show a surprising facility in acquiring the taal. But it’s not important. The Dutch mostly speak English. The Kriges do, anyhow. Mrs Krige is, as a matter of fact, English by birth.”

“Come, that’s better,” Matheson said complacently. “It constitutes a link. I’ll know how to talk to a fellow-countrywoman.”

“I wouldn’t insist too much on the point of nationality,” the other threw in with a note of caution in his tones. “She’s Dutch now, and so are all her children.”

“In law, yes,” Matheson agreed. “There are kids, then?”

“Oh! they are all grown up. It is her son you are going to see. The old man died years ago.”

He changed the subject with some abruptness, and spoke of his own arrangements, and planned their next meeting. He would wait in Johannesburg; Matheson, when he turned up, would discover him in one of the usual haunts. They could then square their account finally. And if there was any little service that it lay in his power to do the other, he would be glad to be called upon to perform the same.

Later, when he was seated in the train, Matheson recalled this tentative promise and the peculiar emphasis of its utterance; and it occurred to him that Holman inclined to exaggerate the service he was rendering. He leaned back in a corner of the compartment, which he had to himself, and thought over things. The importance of this trumpery party intrigue was assuming disproportionate dimensions. The flicker of doubt in his mind developed steadily, while

he sat staring from the window at the changing scenery, pondering the matter deeply. He did not altogether believe the reasons Holman had alleged in explanation of the secrecy of the mission and the need for caution. His talk of overthrowing the government hadn't rung true. Moreover, men don't attempt the overthrow of governments by stealth; that is usually a noisy business which revels in publicity and insists upon the limelight. There was something behind it all, something which had not transpired, which conceivably might never transpire so far as he was concerned.

He regretted his ignorance of the taal. In the light of his growing suspicion it occurred to him that his disclaimer of all knowledge of Dutch had given Holman satisfaction. Whatever the tatter's business was with Andreas Krige it was not his wish that his messenger should learn it.

He took out his pocket-book, and examined the letter which lay inside the cover. The direction told him nothing. The name of the farm was Benauwdheidfontein. It had taken him some time to get anywhere near the pronunciation—Benaudtfontein was the best he could do; but Holman had told him the Kriges cut it down to Benfontein.

He put the letter back, having examined it from all angles, as one might examine a curiosity, and returned to his former occupation of staring unseeingly from the window while revolving matters in his brain, a form, of mental exercise that was unusual with him. Thinking bored him; he did not often encourage the habit. But this business roused his curiosity; he was beginning to be more interested than he ever remembered being in another man's affairs.

And then suddenly there flashed across his mind, allaying its distrust, the thought that these people were partly English. That to a great extent took from the sinister aspect of the thing. Quite possibly he was on the track of a mare's nest It might be merely some raining transaction of more or less doubtful honesty that Holman was communicating with Andreas Krige about Holman made a good thing of buying and selling shares—particularly selling. Krige might be in with him, or about to be bled by him. He would be able to judge better of that when he saw the man.

He dismissed the matter from his mind and read for a while; but the blistering heat in the sun-scorched compartment made it difficult to concentrate the attention on anything for long. And there was no escape from the heat, not even when night fell, bringing darkness without coolness to the earth, and a hushed silence, penetrated by the insistent, shrill chirp of the crickets and the intrusive rush of the train through the night-shadowed land.

He slept about eleven, and awoke to a golden sunrise and another cloudless blue day. But the breadth of the early day was fresh and sweet and wonderfully pure. He drew it into his lungs, leaning from the carriage window, surveying the parched landscape, and the gaping fissures in the almost dry beds of the river, along the banks of which the thorny mimosa grew, the reluctant dewdrops hiding in the hollows of its shrivelled leaves from the too searching rays of the sun.

The railway curved sharply, winding in and out among the hills, so that from the window the tail of the train was visible, seeming like a second train cutting the first in the middle. Beyond Hutchinson the line was being repaired. A row of white tents alongside the rails, with their owners squatted in the openings having breakfast, caused Matheson a queer, unaccustomed stab of envy. This was what he ought to be doing—useful work for the country, instead of using the metals to career about on a fool's errand.

The train had slowed down. He leaned farther out of the window and shouted to a sunburnt man who stood astride outside his tent, with a tin mug in one hand and part of a loaf in the other.

"You, Saunders!" he yelled. "What ho! Want an extra hand down there?"

The person addressed as Saunders grinned amiably; and another man came to the opening of the tent and stood behind him, interested, stripped to the waist, and towelling vigorously.

"Tumble out," shouted Saunders. "I dare say we could make use of you."

And then the train left the white tents and their tanned owners behind; and Matheson drew in his head with a feeling of sharp dissatisfaction with life, and thought of these men enviously, until the steadily increasing warmth of the day brought back to his memory the stuffy unbearableness of heat accumulated under canvas; and his imagination pictured anew the treeless, sunbaked nature of the land where those jolly cool-looking white tents were pitched. It wasn't after all much of a picnic.

He arrived at De Aar about noon, and went to the hotel, and had a bath and changed before sitting down to lunch. He had not been in this Karroo town before, and it struck him as fine and picturesque and altogether characteristic. The country was flat and open, and the veld greener and less drought-stricken.

It was a commercial hotel that Holman had recommended, run by Dutch people and patronised principally by the Dutch. Matheson shared a small table with a Jew, who owned a store in the town and took his meals at the hotel but did not sleep there. The Jew was not expansive; but he showed a ready courtesy when approached on any subject, and was emphatic in his agreement with Matheson's disparagement of the weather.

"It is a land of drought," he finished, and refilled his glass from the bottle at his elbow. "I have known the drought hold on the Karroo for two years. But the land won't die. There's water a long way below the surface."

"Well have to bore for that some day," Matheson said.

"Oh! they do bore—on the farms."

“It wants doing on a more extensive scale.”

“Yes; but there’s the difficulty of finance again. Who is to provide the money?”

Matheson lifted his brows.

“If a man finds a gold mine, he’s quick enough as a rule to find the capital for exploiting it. The Empire’s fairly wealthy.”

The other appeared doubtful.

“She did not become so through speculation,” he ventured.

“That’s no argument,” the younger man contended. “Something has been written, you know, against wrapping certain possessions away in a napkin. If one undertakes responsibility it’s up to one to turn it to the best account—otherwise leave it alone.”

The Jew relapsed into an acquiescent silence, from which Matheson presently dug him to inquire if he knew a farm named Benauwdheidfontein.

“No.” He looked up curiously. “I wouldn’t like to take a farm with a name like that,” he said.

“It’s something of a mouthful certainly,” Matheson agreed.

“Oh, that! Many Dutch homesteads have long names… But—Benauwdheidfontein! … No! that’s bad.”

It became clear to Matheson that it was something the name suggested, rather than the word itself, to which the speaker objected.

“What does Benauwdheidfontein stand for?” he inquired.

The Jew thought for a moment.

“Literally the word, I believe, means uneasiness, anxiety; but it conveys rather more than that. It suggests being at odds with life—cornered, as it were—having reached the limit of endurance. Fear lurks in the word. It’s a name with a sinister meaning—an unlucky name, we should call it.”

“I am not much of a believer in luck, are you?” Matheson said. His listener smiled.

“It depends on the hour, the place, and the circumstance,” he replied, and helped himself to cheese, which he proceeded to despatch in an abstracted manner, and with an air of being wishful to escape further conversation.

Matheson finished his lunch, and interviewed the proprietor.

“Can you provide me with a conveyance that will take me to Benauwdheidfontein?” he asked.

“Benfontein—Mr Krige’s place? Oh! yes,” was the response. “It’s a long drive. You won’t want to start for a couple of hours, I suppose?”

Upon Matheson’s replying that the hour of departure was a matter of indifference to him, the proprietor fixed it for four o’clock, when the great heat would be decreasing, and driving across the veld could be undertaken with less discomfort. He seemed anxious to do his best for his guest.

“Will I put a gun in the cart?” he asked. “With luck, you should see some birds as you travel. There is good sport on the flats.”

Matheson accepted gratefully. If Krige could offer something in the way of shooting, his stay at Benfontein would not lack compensation. He regretted that he had no gun with him. But on a farm a spare gun is usually available, the etiquette of the veld being strictly in accord with the principle of the traveller’s right to hospitality, which includes the enjoyment of one’s goods—providing always that he does not travel on foot.

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## Chapter Nine.

It was manifest to Matheson on his arrival at Benfontein that he was not expected. He had taken it for granted that Holman would inform these people of his coming, and instead he found it necessary to explain himself to the swarthy young Dutchman who came out of the house, when the cart drew up beside the big aloes that formed a hedge dividing the garden from the veld, and strolled leisurely forward with no great display of eagerness to receive the traveller. He descended from the Cape Cart and faced him.

“Is it Mr Krige?” he asked.

“Yes,” replied the Dutchman, and regarded him with something like distrust blended with dislike, and waited for further enlightenment.

“My name’s Matheson,” the visitor announced, and, perceiving that the name conveyed nothing to his listener, he added: “I thought Holman would have prepared you for my visit. Perhaps I had better give you his letter, which will explain things.”

He felt in his pocket for the letter, and presented it. Krige, taking it in the left hand, deliberately extended the right.

“That is all right,” he said. “I did not know. A friend of Mr Holman is very welcome.”

He spoke in Dutch to the coloured driver, who climbed down from the cart and started to take out the horses. One of Krige’s boys sauntered forward to his assistance; and a woman, who, judging from the likeness between them, was Krige’s sister, appeared on the shadeless stoep, and looked on with detached interest at the scene beyond the aloe hedge. Matheson judged her to be about thirty. She was swarthy, like her brother, with a deepening brown on the neck that suggested a strain of native blood somewhere in the Krige ancestry. Her eyes were very dark, and sombre in expression, which robbed them, as it robbed her face, of actual beauty, and lent both a tragic, almost a sullen air. Looking at her a stranger would pronounce unhesitatingly that hers had been a tragic life. At least it was a life which had known tragedy, and had nursed its bitterness throughout the years.

Krige conducted Matheson on to the stoep and presented him to his sister. From the way in which she unbent, as her brother had done, at the mention of Holman’s name, he concluded that in this household Holman was held in very warm regard. The mantle of his popularity descended in some measure upon himself.

“Come inside and rest,” said Miss Krige. “You will be hungry. We will be having supper just now.” She scrutinised him for a second. “I expect you are tired,” she added; “it’s a long drive from De Aar.”

He disclaimed undue fatigue, and followed her into the house, where bustling preparations were going forward in the guest chamber, which the younger girl had hastened to get ready as soon as the Cape Cart came within sight. The bed had to be made, and the room dusted. There were seldom visitors at Benfontein; and the great four-poster bedstead remained usually shrouded in dustsheets, under which the feather mattress humped itself protestingly, and fell into depressions where some heedless touch had deflated its bulging surface.

The younger Miss Krige, who was called Honor, treated the feather mattress as a conscientious cook might treat dough, the lightness of which depended on the energy of her kneading, with the result that the bed lost the appearance of an anaemic mountain and assumed quite reasonable dimensions of a sufficient flatness to warrant its claim to being a couch to repose upon. Then she fetched water and towels, and ran away to her own room to smooth her disordered hair, and, since her house frock was decidedly shabby, to make other alterations in her toilet calculated to improve her appearance, as her energetic ministrations had improved that of the bed. Honor took a greater interest in travellers than her sister. She was five years younger; and the sorrow which had touched their lives had touched hers more lightly, and left, not so much a bitterness, as a deliberately cultivated grievance to germinate in the furrows it had made.

Matheson was taken to the living-room, which struck him when he entered it as one of the pleasantest rooms he had ever seen—it was so essentially homelike. A blending of English and Dutch taste, and a feminine love of the beautiful, with inadequate resources at command, made the room in its bare cool simplicity invitingly restful and pleasing. There was not an article in it, save an old Dutch dresser, of any value. The dark, beeswaxed floor had no covering other than one or two golden jackal skins, shot, and roughly dressed, on the farm, and a large sheepskin mat. The chairs were reimpe bottomed, that is laced with strips of hide instead of cane, which makes a more durable and infinitely more comfortable seat. There were a few Madeira chairs with cushions in them, and a profusion of veld flowers, flowers in bowls and any available vessel—splashes of colour against the cool dark woodwork of the panelled walls.

In one of the low chairs a woman was seated, sewing. She looked about sixty, a well-preserved comely woman fair complexioned and essentially English in type. Her dear blue eyes met the blue eyes of the stranger with a cordial light of welcome in them, as she rose and came quickly forward and shook hands.

“We do not see many travellers at this season,” she remarked in her soft English voice, “which makes your visit doubly welcome. You have had a long drive.”

“Yes,” he said; “but the air is extraordinarily light. I didn’t find it too hot. It must be wonderful here in the spring.”

“It is,” she agreed. “The next time you come to Benfontein you must choose your season better. We aren’t always drought-stricken. We boast a fine climate really.”

“I think it’s topping,” he said. “And,”—he looked about him—“I think this is just the jolliest room I’ve ever seen.”

His wandering gaze, travelling critically about the room he professed such warm admiration for, was abruptly arrested when it reached the doorway, where it remained transfixed, caught by a vision of such surprising beauty that for quite an appreciable while he remained staring and speechless, until suddenly recalled to the present by the sound of Krige’s foot moved with some impatience on the wooden floor.

“It’s perfect,” he finished his encomium with, and faced his hostess again with an enigmatic smile. “I thought that as soon as I saw it.”

The vision hereupon entered through the doorway.

“My daughter, Honor,” Mrs Krige said.

The vision confronted Matheson now, a tall graceful girl, with bright hair that suggested the sunlight, and eyes that were like brown pools, dark and shadowed, and splashed with a lighter shade as though the sunlight penetrated here too and sported in their brown depths. It was a lovely face; Matheson found it flawless. He was amazed at her beauty, at the soft transparency of the fair skin, and her quiet self-possession. She held out a cool, aloof hand.

“You know all about me,” she said, “but no one enlightens me... English?—of course.”

He was not sure whether it was his imagination, but he fancied he detected some hostility in her voice as she pronounced his nationality. Her tones rang odd and rather hard.

“Matheson by name, cosmopolitan by disposition,” he returned easily—“like yourself.”

“Oh! I’m Dutch,” she said quickly.

“Mr Matheson is a friend of Mr Holman,” her mother explained.

Honor’s smile became more friendly.

“You ought to have told me that at the beginning,” she said. “It makes a difference.”

“Isn’t that a little rough on me?” he asked.

“I don’t see that. It’s an introduction. Mr Holman is a good friend. It is a long time already that we have known him.”

“Honor has known Mr Holman since she was a child,” Mrs Krige interposed. “That was before we came to Benfontein, when we lived in the town. Lately we have seen little of him. Andreas, I expect Mr Matheson would like to go to his room. We shall have supper shortly. If you are only half as hungry as I was the first time I drove across the flats,” she added, turning again towards the guest, “you must be very ready for it.”

Alone in the plainly furnished bedroom, dominated by the great four-poster, which recalled gruesome suggestions of a hearse, Matheson fell to thinking pleasantly about Honor Krige. It was extraordinary what a change the sight of her had put upon the face of things. He no longer experienced boredom at the prospect of spending a week, or even two weeks, at the farm. He hoped the reply to Holman’s communication would be delayed—the nature of the communication no longer mattered. Of what account was the overthrow of governments, or other and more wily knavery, when set off against daily intercourse and companionship with beauty’s self? He felt equal at the moment to participating in a crime if to do so were to win a smile of genuine appreciation from Honor Krige. Not that he imagined Honor, or any member of her family, to be steeped in infamy. If the brother were a political firebrand, he doubted that the women were infected with the disorder. They seemed to be quiet and homely folk.

The Kriges meanwhile were discussing him, while Honor and a little Kaffir girl laid the table for the supper which Freidja Krige was cooking.

“He is nice looking,” observed Honor, having dispatched Koewe to the kitchen for plates. “I am going to be nice to him.”

“Don’t be too nice,” advised her brother drily. “We do not know anything about him. We must be discreet.”

“He is a friend of Mr Holman,” she urged, as if that constituted a claim to their consideration.

“He only comes on business from Mr Holman,” he said. “It is best not to be hasty.”

Mrs Krige glanced swiftly at her son.

“Andreas,” she said, “is he on political business for Mr Holman?”

“As a messenger only. He brought me a letter.”

“Mr Holman would not send any but a trustworthy messenger,” she replied, and became silent as the Kaffir girl returned with the plates, and set them in a pile on the table for Honor to arrange.

“Place the chairs, Koewe,” said Honor—“straight, picannin schelm. That will do. Now go and help young missis in the kitchen.”

She swung round and faced her brother.

“What does Mr Holman say about him?” she asked.

“Very little,” Krige answered in his deliberate way. “I gather from the letter that he trusts him simply because he is new to the country, and has no knowledge of Dutch.”

“Ah!” said Honor, and gazed thoughtfully through the open window out upon the dried-up garden. “I wonder why he should carry letters for Mr Holman?” she mused.

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## Chapter Ten.

It was possible that Andreas Krige was a man of many ideas; he was not a man of many words. For the better part of an hour Matheson sat on the stoep and smoked in company with him, and waited in confident expectancy for the remark which, he calculated roughly, fell on an average once in every fifteen minutes from Krige’s lips. The remark, when it came, was not profound. His own conversational efforts partook of the nature of a monologue, which Krige punctuated at long intervals with grunts; a short grunt fitting like a comma into a pause, and a longer grunt putting a period to the talk. He emerged from these periods usually with one of his infrequent observations.

It occurred to Matheson later, thinking over that quiet hour on the stoep, that Krige, by his silence and those occasional sympathetic grunts, had deliberately encouraged him to talk, had indeed urged him on to talk while observing himself an intentional reticence. But this did not strike him at the time, perhaps because his mind was so intent on Honor Krige, whom he could hear moving about inside the room they had left by means of the long window near which their chairs were placed, that it held no space for other reflection.

He wondered why the women did not come out and join them. He wanted to talk to Honor, who was bright and animated and decidedly more companionable than her dark and silent brother. Krige did not interest him. And yet the long, loose-limbed figure reclining in the chair appealed to him as symbolic of the silence, the secrecy, the rugged simplicity of the veld, which daily exacted from him so much of energy and sweat and labour, and yielded its grudging return, rather as the man himself drew out of others more than he ever gave. The nature of the veld was in his blood. That is a characteristic of the Boer; he is as much a part of the soil as the coloured man, when it comes to wide spaces—to the veld which he has named. Krige suggested the solitudes, and the rude and primitive toil which Adam bequeathed his sons.

One thing he said during their talk stuck in Matheson's memory. It was the least simple remark he had made.

"We do not get many engineers this way," he said. "To-morrow I will ask you to lode at the wells. That windmill you see from here is out of order."

It was rather a cute way, Matheson decided, of testing the truth of his claim to his profession.

After a while Mrs Krige emerged from the house with her elder daughter, and the talk became general and more ready. But still it seemed to Matheson that without Honor the party was not so much incomplete as lifeless: her presence made for him the atmosphere of the place.

And then, quite unexpectedly and silently, she appeared among them, and stood in the open window of the sitting-room, leaning her shoulder against the frame. She came so softly to the window, and took up her position there without remark, that Matheson realised her presence only through that extra sense which apprises one of the nearness of another person through the medium of a wordless transmission of thought. He turned his head abruptly, and found her behind him, and stood up. Their eyes met. In the dusk amid the shadows of the unlighted room behind her she suggested to his imagination, in her pale and slender beauty, a moon's ray—the night seemed lighter for her coming.

"Please sit down again," she said without moving.

"But I can't sit while you stand," he returned. "Come and take my chair."

"Thank you; but if I wanted to sit I should bring a chair with me—there is one at my back. If you won't sit down again you will oblige me to go in."

He resumed his seat with a promptness which was a sufficient guarantee of his unwillingness to provoke her into acting as she proposed, and at the same time he moved it so that without turning he could see her where she stood. He rather liked to see her there so close to him in the dusk. It was immaterial whether she talked; to sit and watch her was so good in itself. But Honor did not remain silent long.

"What do you think of our Karroo nights?" she asked in her quiet, intense voice.

"You have put a difficult question," he returned. "It is so impossible to express what one feels without seeming extravagant. A night like this is—just wonderful. There's something... I can't put it into words... it grips."

She smiled suddenly and leaned forward looking into the night.

"I have a feeling when I stand here," she said, "and look away across the veld into the deep purple and primrose of the evening sky, that I am gazing into the heart of Africa—a heart which opens and reveals many things. The past unfolds like a picture before the mind. I wonder if you will ever see into the heart of the veld? ... I wonder whether any Englishman could look so deep?"

"But surely," he protested, "many Englishmen have loved this land?"

"Coveted, not loved," she insisted. "Does one ever hurt what one loves?"

In his surprise he forgot that the speaker was herself partly English, that her mother, a silent listener to their talk, was a compatriot of his own. His patriotism was aroused by this aspersion; as the sole representative of his country, he was bound to meet and repudiate it.

"I think your attack is most unjust," he said, a shade of resentment in his tones. "If you reflect a while I believe you will admit as much. Great Britain has done more for this country than any other nation."

"She has annexed land," the cool, dispassionate voice admitted—"she continues to annex. Wherever we have settled, she has followed and turned us out. She can do this—because of the power behind,—her strength lies across the seas."

"Oh, come!" he said, and regretted his ignorance of South African history. "It is quite elementary knowledge that the Netherlands sold the Cape Colony to Britain in the early part of the nineteenth century."

A cold little smile crossed her features.

“Oh! yes,” she said; “we were sold—we know that—after hundreds of us had bled for the land. They sold us because they knew they couldn’t hold the land. Then we left the colony which we had founded at the Cape a century and a half before, and trekked as far as Natal. When we had made that colony, the British annexed it… It was always trekking and then annexation and then trekking once more. We left the coast and struck inland, and crossed the Orange River in search anew of a home. Again we were driven on—beyond the Vaal. There we founded our Republic.”

The low, evenly modulated voice never raised its tones, but an increasing bitterness crept into them at this point.

“The Transvaal was rich in minerals. That was sufficient. The Transvaal was annexed by the British. But the Boers were stronger now, and they could endure this persecution no longer. They fought for their Republic, and bought it again dearly with their blood at Majuba Hill. But the feeling of insecurity remained. There was friction between the two white races, and jealousy, and much bitterness. Still you coveted our land. You never rested until, backed by the power across the seas, you fought again for it—and won.”

Matheson was amazed. When the quiet voice ceased speaking, in the pause that followed, the shrill noise of the crickets broke with disconcerting insistence and troubled the ears. Only Andreas Krige moved. He did not speak; he stood up abruptly, and pocketed his pipe, and went inside, passing his sister without appearing to notice her.

Matheson was interested, intensely interested—and hurt.

“Isn’t all this you have been telling me a distortion of facts?” he asked.

“No,” she answered. “It is just a bald summary of the principal events in the history of the Colony since its beginning.”

“I am sorry I am so ignorant of these things,” he said. “A man ought to read up the history of a country before he visits it. I’m at a disadvantage. That only matters in as far as it prevents my answering you. I am hearing only your side. You have made out a good case… There’s always injustice where the interests of races conflict. If one went back far enough, *I* imagine one would find the greatest injustice has been meted out to the natives.”

“Oh, the natives!” Her voice sounded her contempt. “You British always fall back on the natives. It’s your unfailing retort that you administer more wisely and more humanely than we do.”

“It’s a fairly sound argument,” he returned with greater assurance. “No nation in the world can colonise as we can.”

“Honor,” Mrs Krige interposed gently, “it is an abuse of hospitality to attack a guest.”

Again the pale fleeting smile crossed Honor’s features. She glanced down at the man, who sat with face half averted looking towards the deepening purple of the sky, the colours of which never fade entirely on the Karroo even in the pallid hour of the dawn.

“I am making no attack,” she answered. “I am exposing the bleeding heart of Africa for him to see.” She came closer to him. “Can you see? … blood and hatred, blood and hatred—the price of every morgen of this land.”

He looked up, immeasurably perplexed and discomposed. He had persuasion that he ought to say something, offer some protest, put up something of a defence; but he felt hopelessly inadequate. There was nothing he could find to say except:

“We don’t hate. As a race we are healthy: grievances do not fester with us; they heal.”

“I know,” she said. “You pride yourselves on that. You don’t bear malice. But in your generosity you incline to overlook the fact that this patronising attitude insults the object of your benevolence. You say tolerantly: ‘The Boer is not half bad; he’s useful; and anyway there is no getting rid of him. He is here for always. We will let bygones be bygones and not bear ill will,’—forgetting that the cause for ill will is on his side rather than on yours, and showing surprise that he does not respond, and appear obliged to you. You should learn to remember—to forget too easily causes suffering to others.”

“Honor!” Mrs Krige interposed again.

Honor passed swiftly behind Matheson’s chair and approached her mother.

“I think at least you should bear in mind,” Matheson said quietly, “that your mother is an Englishwoman.”

“My mother is Dutch,” Honor replied quickly, and put an arm about her mother’s shoulders and drew close to her.

Something in that protective gesture, in the tones of the proud determined young voice, and in the older woman’s acquiescent silence, acted like a silencing hand laid on Matheson’s lips. He felt tragedy in the air. She had said that she was revealing the bleeding heart of Africa to him—she was doing more; he was gazing on the stark, unlovely body of the past, disinterred from its too shallow grave by the morbid passions which are born of hate.

And yet he could not understand. How came this daughter of an Englishwoman to feel thus bitterly towards her mother’s people?—and why did the mother acquiesce in the condemnation of her country? It was as perplexing as it was distressing. Across the turmoil of his thoughts, a thing irrelevant and yet not without its significance in relation to the present disturbing scene, a speech the Jew had made at lunch that day flashed with startling clearness; and he recalled, besides the words, the distaste in the speaker’s tones when replying about Benauwdheidfontein: “It suggests being at odds with life… fear lurks in the word. It’s a name with a sinister meaning—an unlucky name.”

Possibly the Kriges were at odds with life. Could it be that Honor, beautiful, young, intelligent, was at odds with the

life which for her was only beginning? It could not be. The sorrows that embitter are encountered usually farther along the road: they are not the skies of spring and summer which are overcast.

His gaze, lingering upon her figure, as she stood in the dusk with her arm about her mother's shoulders, lifted to her face which in the fading light showed little more than an outline. It was, he decided, some fanciful touch of the twilight that gave to her features the expression of earnest entreaty he imagined he saw in them; her eyes shone with a softness in such direct contradiction to the hostility of her words, the proud aloofness of her manner, that he knew it for a trick of the twilight. No woman who felt so bitterly against his country could turn so soft a gaze upon an Englishman.

"You are a little startling in your vehemence, Honor," Freidja Krige observed, speaking for the first time since her sister's advent had snapped the desultory general conversation, which Matheson had found so unenlivening, and flung the bombshell of her complaining into the void.

Honor laughed quietly. The deep emotions that had swayed her and provoked her attack, were subdued; she had her feelings well in hand now.

"I haven't startled any one really," she said. "But—I have made Mr Matheson angry."

A new quality had come into her voice. She gave Matheson a gesture of appeal. It was as though she wished to assure him that there was nothing personal in her attack, that she did not hold him responsible for the national crimes of which she complained. She excepted him, as she excepted her mother. They had been born English, they couldn't help that. He might even be an estimable person in despite of it.

"Not angry," he contradicted, and rose, moved, not so much by a desire to stand, as a feeling that he wanted to be more on a level with her, wanted to face her on equal ground; seated he was at a disadvantage. "What you have said has given food for thought I'd no idea; ... One doesn't think enough about these things. It's only when one comes face to face with it that one gets a sense of what lies beneath the surface. We are too easily satisfied with a superficial view. One should look deeper."

Honor's arm fell from her mother's neck and hung at her side. She did not move nearer, but she turned more directly towards him.

"You will look deeper," she said with conviction.

Suddenly a smile broke over her face.

"I have shown you something of the tragedy of the veld," she added. "To-morrow, if you are willing to rise with the sun, I will show you something of its beauty and its charm. The Karroo is at its best when the day is young."

If he were willing... He would have risen in advance of the sun to have set forth in her company on any quest.

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## Chapter Eleven.

When he went to his room that night Matheson was in too great a state of excitement to sleep. For some time he made no show of seeking the enveloping couch prepared for him by Honor's capable hands, but remained at the open window looking out at the dark quiet beauty of the night, less in contemplation of the scene that stretched its uncertain outline to the far horizon than in a retrospective reverie, during which not only all that the Dutch girl had said, but all the concentrated bitterness of voice and expression, came back to him with the disconcerting effect of a blow which he could neither avoid nor return.

She had struck at him deliberately with intent to wound, and she had succeeded in that, and something more—she had succeeded in interesting him enormously.

In any circumstances he would have admired her; but it was something deeper than admiration she awoke in him, something more vital in quality, something which gripped and disquieted and provoked surprisingly, seeming part of the fierce passionate nature of the country, part of its unrestraint, its intensity, its rugged honesty. No woman had ever roused in him emotions so profound.

He was immeasurably perplexed and perturbed, and extraordinarily curious. One thing seemed fairly certain as an outcome of this visit to Benauwdheidfontein with its altogether unforeseen results; he would not leave this farm on the Karroo, to which he had journeyed against his inclination on an errand of doubtful honesty, unchanged by his experiences. He felt while he stood at the window and considered these things that his whole outlook on life was altering, and in the transition stage was altogether out of focus. Odd that in a few hours a man's view of life should change.

He turned away from the window and undressed slowly and climbed into bed, where he lay fretting in uneasy wakefulness on his mountain of feathers.

Before the rising of the sun he was up and dressed and waiting on the stoep for Honor Krige. She came out and joined him with the first flushing of the sky, the sudden brightening and deepening of the colours in the east came swiftly and noiselessly, so that she was close beside him before the sound of the light footfall on the concrete floor apprised him of her approach. He brought his head round sharply and surveyed her with critical, curious eyes, eyes which held a flash of reawakened interest in them as they rested in a close scrutiny upon her face, shaded by a white sun-helmet. She wore a riding-skirt, and carried a whip in one hand, and a cup of coffee in the other.

"I thought you would prefer to take this out here," she said, and gave the cup into his hand.

"Thank you." He greeted her formally when he had relieved her of the cup. "You are riding?" he said.

"Yes. We always ride on the veld." She beat her skirt softly with the whip, and looked up at him with a faint smile. "You are early. I hope you slept well?"

"I scarcely slept at all," he answered. "I was thinking... You set me thinking. I believe you intended that."

Without denying this, she answered, looking away from him:

"At least I did not wish to spoil your rest."

He stood sipping his coffee and regarding her the while. He decided that hers was the most beautiful face he had ever beheld; no pictured face that he could recall surpassed it, and among living faces it was more flawless than any he had seen.

"I'll make up for that to-night," he returned. "I don't believe even an uneasy conscience could rob me of sleep two nights in succession."

He finished the coffee, and carried the empty cup inside and put it down on the round oak table in the living-room. Honor made no effort to prevent him. She looked after him without moving, and remained silent until he returned and confronted her with an inquiring lift of the brows.

"Suppose I couldn't ride?" he asked.

She evinced surprise. Not ride! Every man rode.

"You do," she asserted.

"As luck has it... but there are plenty of quite respectable persons in England who don't," he informed her. "Getting on and off busses in motion is a more useful accomplishment with us. To each country its own customs! Do we start now?"

"Yes; we will walk across to the stables." She flashed a smile at him. "I am afraid we will have to saddle our own horses; there won't be any one about so early as this."

The business of getting the horses out took time. The sun was above the horizon when Matheson led them into the open, followed by Honor, who had done her share of the work. He held his hand for her, and assisted her to the saddle. Then he mounted himself. Honor sat quietly, with her face turned, and watched the performance. She had not expected him to be clumsy; his size and weight notwithstanding, he conveyed the impression that whatever he did he would do well. At least, she reflected, when, having gained the saddle, he brought his horse abreast of hers, his seat was good.

"Which direction do we take?" he asked.

She lifted a hand and pointed with her whip to some flat-topped hills far away, but standing out in the clear dry atmosphere, sharply defined against the blue cloudless sky like hills seen through a powerful glass.

"We will ride to the south," she said, "towards the tafel-kopjes yonder."

He looked down into her eyes.

"And there we shall find the beauty and the charm you promised?"

Honor returned his gaze with grave composure.

"That depends on yourself," she answered. "All this," and she indicated the wide and arid landscape, which, with the night dews still lingering on its gaping surfaces and sapless vegetation, sparkled in the early sunshine with a glitter as of silver and gems, "appeals to people differently. Some see in it beauty, and others only barrenness—but always it is impressive. It hurts or it pleases, according to the mood."

"But you believe I shall see its beauty," he said quietly.

"Yes," she answered; "I believe that—otherwise, I would not have suggested your coming."

They rode in silence for a while. Momentarily the sun gained power; the freshness of the early day yielded to its burning ardour, was caught up and enveloped in its heated embrace; the dew on the scant vegetation sparkled a moment and the next was absorbed; and the hot yellow stones basking in its rays revealed unexpected streaks of colour and fanciful patterns and quaint veinings, as they caught the refracted rays, and transmitted them, and gave back some of their assimilated heat into the shimmering air.

The soil became more sandy the farther they rode, and more arid; wide bare patches of sand appeared, and again other patches sparsely covered with dry brown scrub. An occasional ostrich, suggestive of farms in the neighbourhood, wandered over the sunbaked ground, and pecked at the little stones. Here was Africa—the real Africa—untamed, barbaric, fiercely splendid, and cruel in its callous disregard of life.

Matheson's gaze travelled over the scene, travelled to the distant hills, and rested there. A dark shadow like a black stain lay upon the hillside, the curious effect of some unseen cloud. In his imagination it seemed a significant, even a

sinister, shadow. He watched it for a time, but it moved so slowly that it did not appear to move at all, but to be in reality a black stain on the face of the land. He removed his gaze, and when later he looked again the shadow had passed.

“This is the real thing,” he said—“the key to Africa. The Karroo is the small sister of the Sahara.”

Suddenly, moved by some unaccountable emotion, he turned towards her swiftly.

“How can you endure living here?” he asked. “The loneliness... Heavens! the loneliness... It suggests a world in the making. The beauty! ... Yes, I acknowledge the beauty, the terrible beauty of it. But—how often do you see a human face besides your own?”

She broke into a quiet laugh.

“Not often. But then, we are busy; we don’t trouble about such things. The blood of the old Voortrekkers runs in our veins. At least there is freedom here.”

“Gods! I should say so,” he responded, and fell to contemplating once more the sameness of those leagues upon leagues of interminable, sun-scorched veld, with its dried-up water-courses, its gaping fissures, and scrubby blackened bush, among which at long intervals pushed the smooth green fingers of the milkbush, and the stunted, gnarled trunks of the butterbloem, yellow as though smeared with sulphur, with bell-shaped flowers blooming on long blood-red stems. Boulders of iron-stone broke the sameness, and an occasional hill, rounded or peaked, not rising gradually but seeming to have been dumped down there, or happened otherwise by accident.

Honor’s eyes rested dreamily upon the scene.

“You should see it after the rains fall,” she said. “It is wonderful then.”

“It is wonderful now,” he returned. “I have never beheld anything so extraordinarily moving and impressive.”

“But you don’t like it,” she said quickly.

“Oh, like! ... the term scarcely applies. I couldn’t live here... I’d be afraid to live here—not physically, of course. I mean it’s so immense, so unpeopled. The Karroo is jealous of life; it crushes it. I’d go down under the spell of it. I can imagine a man falling into the habit of talking aloud to himself here—for company.”

“One need not live alone,” she said.

“You love the solitudes,” he said, looking at her wonderingly.

“Yes; I suppose I do. I love the veld... It is my blood—that intense love of the land.”

Her eyes, looking out from the shade of her helmet, dwelt with intense appreciation upon the shimmering landscape. All the wonder and the beauty and the richness of the plain, which appeared now but a blackened waste, was known to her. To the unobservant gaze the scene might wear the semblance of an arid desert; but to one familiar with it through the different seasons the drought-stricken sterility which held the veld in a relentless, strangling grip was but the period of waiting when the land rested in expectation of the coming gift of life. With the rains the richness concealed in her dry bosom would spring forth and blossom prodigally, and the desert would be a garden, teeming with life.

“Love of the land!” she repeated softly. And added, after a moment: “Have you ever breathed air so good as this?—so light and clear and dry? There’s health in every breath of it. One could see to the ends of the earth through air so pure and clear. There is health here, and freedom.”

“It is a savage land,” he said suddenly—“but it grips. It is the savagery which gets hold of one. I feel I want to tame it.”

She laughed, and pointed upward where a vulture with great wings outspread flew heavily in the blue, sensing its prey.

“Could you tame the aasvogel,” she asked, “till it ceases to be a carrion bird and eats from your hand? Could you teach the jackal to respect the lamb?—or the snake to forget its venom? I would hate to see this land subdued.”

He smiled at her enthusiasm. There was something in herself which, if not exactly savage, was at least untamed, he reflected. Without thinking she had quickened her horse’s pace. Matheson rode faster to keep up with her.

“I have disappointed you,” he said.

“Oh, no!” she contradicted quickly. “It wasn’t to be expected that you would feel as we do about the veld... But you see deeper than many Englishmen. You will love the land yet.”

He made no answer to this. Had he put his thoughts into words, they would have claimed to love the land already. It was amazing how surely and firmly it had got a hold on his imagination. It was not only with his arrival at the farm, he told himself, that he had felt this extraordinary influence; but since he had come to Benfontein he had acquired a new sympathy with, and a deeper understanding of, the country. Honor Krige was teaching him that, and other things.

He had set forth that morning to behold the beauty and the charm of the veld; and, insensibly, while he gazed upon

this sun-scorched sameness, the mystery and the beauty of it were revealed to him. The translucent air, quivering in the sunlight like some glad and living thing, was wondrously soft and stimulating; eye and brain cleared with its magic healing; the mind became surprisingly alert and receptive of new impressions. The sandy soil lost its aridity, and disclosed numberless unsuspected shining beauties; it glittered as with many gems, and revealed in places unexpected shades and colours, and curious, infinitesimal insect-life creeping and pushing upon its white surface. The dry sluits and water-courses, proclaiming moisture where it would appear that moisture was unknown; the cairns of yellow stones, piled high in rude and strange formation; the yellow and red of the butterbloem, crude intense colours in an intense atmosphere under the hard blue of the sky; the occasional oddly-shaped kopjes; the distant oasis of some lonely farm; each struck a separate note of beauty in this strange, uncivilised scene—a beauty that was fearful and fiercely assertive, that crushed the senses, that again attracted and held surely by the unfailing magnetism of elemental and sincere things. And over all the parched nakedness of the land the sun flung its golden radiance, a yellow flame that quivered through the hot air and pierced into the earth.

Matheson knew while his eyes lingered upon it all that he would in very truth love the land.

And then he turned his head suddenly and met Honor’s eyes. She was smiling softly, but she did not speak.

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## Chapter Twelve.

Freidja Krige went many times to the window to look for the riders’ return. She had prepared the breakfast; the sarsates were cooked and ready to be served, and Andreas had come in from the land and was waiting with extraordinary patience for the meal, which usually made its appearance with his own. He glanced up from an agricultural journal he was reading when for about the fourth time his sister came through from the kitchen and took her stand by the window and looked out across the veld.

“They must have ridden far,” he observed.

“They are coming now,” she said—“walking the horses. I expect they find it hot. I’ll make the coffee, Andreas, and bring in your porridge.”

He shook his head.

“I will wait,” he said.

Mrs Krige entered the room, and her son rose and kissed her uneffusively but with affection. She stood at the window and watched with him the slow advance of the riders.

“It’s so hot,” she said. “They should have got back half an hour ago. Honor ought to think of these things.”

“Why does Honor ride with a stranger?” he asked. “I consider it unnecessary. He can ride on the farm with me.”

Mrs Krige raised surprised eyes to his.

“I see no reason for objecting,” she returned. “I think we may trust Honor.”

He lifted his loose shoulders heavily.

“It is always wise to go slow,” he said.

Then he caught up his hat and stepped out on to the stoep and went to meet the horses.

Honor slipped from the saddle, and relinquished the reins to him, making some remark about the warmth of the day to which he made no response. He shifted the rein to his left hand, and raised the right, which he proffered the guest.

“You had better dismount,” he said. “I will take the horses to the stable.”

Matheson offered a protest; at least he would accompany him; but Krige was firmly insistent. Finally Matheson swung himself from the saddle and followed Honor to the house, while Krige, whistling for a boy as he went, led the horses away.

Matheson had a persuasion that for some reason or other Krige did not like him. He had felt that on the stoep the previous night. Why, he wondered, should a man dislike another of whom he knew nothing, whom he met now for the first time? It was not reasonable. Racial prejudice possibly influenced him to some extent. It was obvious that as a family the Kriges were antagonistic to British supremacy; but that in itself seemed insufficient to justify personal animus, particularly in view of the fact of Mrs Krige’s nationality. Having regard to that last point, the attitude of the family towards all things British puzzled him. He felt that in her quiet acceptance of her children’s view, this Englishwoman displayed a strange disloyalty. It would have been altogether finer and more natural had she, through her marriage, attempted to bring the two white races in the Colony into closer and more sympathetic relations. She might have inculcated in this new generation a love for the best ideals of both races. In doing which she would have rendered a greater service to South Africa than in fostering racial jealousy, would have accomplished some worthier end than the poor satisfaction born of harbouring bitter feeling and petty distrust.

He resented this lade of patriotism in a countrywoman of his own, it forced him into a strong and quite sincere opposition. Love of country is the moral backbone of the individual; a vaunted contempt for one’s birthright is a tacit admission of unworthiness of the privilege it confers.

He stepped on to the stoep in Honor’s wake, and went along to his room and entered by the window.

“Don’t be long,” Honor called after him. “We are late.”

He made what haste he could; and entered the living-room to find the delayed breakfast steaming on the table, and every one obviously waiting amid a savoury smell of coffee and grilled meat Honor was not present. She came in when the rest were seated, looking cool and beautiful and fresh in a white muslin frock with blue ribbons, that drew Andreas Krige’s eyes in her direction in silent disapproval.

“I am sorry to be so late,” she said. “We rode farther than I intended. It was all so interesting that I did not think of the time.”

“What was interesting?” Freidja asked.

Honor looked across at her sister with a show of faint surprise.

“I was interested in watching Mr Matheson’s appreciation,” she said.

“Mr Matheson will not find much to appreciate on the Karroo at this dry season,” Freidja returned. “My! there’s nothing but burnt scrub to be seen. Don’t you wonder,” she asked, turning towards him, “how anything grows here?”

“I admit,” he replied, “that it occurs to me to doubt whether results justify the outlay. You are up against pretty well everything, aren’t you? Farming in this country must entail endless labour.”

“We do fairly well with ostriches,” Krige interposed. “If you care about it, I will show you our birds. I am making a speciality of the new breed, the feathers of which have a natural curl. They are very handsome.”

“Thanks; it will interest me immensely,” Matheson said. “Besides, there is the well. I am to look at that to-day.”

“Andreas,” Mrs Krige remonstrated, “we must not trespass too much on Mr Matheson’s good nature. I think he will be glad to rest a little. There are other days.”

Her words, seeming to imply an acceptance of his continued presence on the farm, pleased Matheson. He was very ready to stay as long as they were willing to entertain him. Krige had not yet referred to the purpose of his visit; he had made no mention of the letter which he was to carry away. Matheson was undecided whether there was a motive in his reticence, or whether he took it for granted that he was in Holman’s confidence and therefore in no need of enlightenment.

In response to his mother’s remark Krige simply said:

“The well will keep till another time.”

He did not after that make any observation unless directly appealed to, but despatched his breakfast in grave preoccupation, and left the table before the rest. Mrs Krige turned her face to look after him as he went out through the window; and Matheson was struck by the light of affection which shone in her eyes as they followed the tall figure till it disappeared from view.

“He works so hard. There is no one to help him,” she said, and sighed.

“He is interested in his work,” Freidja put in quickly. “As for hard work, every one works hard on a farm.”

Involuntarily her glance travelled in her sister’s direction. How did Honor purpose making beds and helping with the dinner in that frock?

Honor proceeded leisurely with her breakfast, as though work were the last thing to concern her. It did not concern her for the immediate present. With the finish of breakfast the visitor must be disposed of; he would sit in the garden in the shade of the pepper trees—her mother would see to that; then she would slip out of her clean frock and get through the morning’s work and dress again. It was quite simple, entailing merely a little additional trouble. Honor did not object to trouble of that nature, and visitors were rare.

“You shame my idleness, Miss Krige,” Matheson said. “I don’t see why I should be told off to rest. I think I’ll go and have a look at that well.”

Honor laughed.

“You know you just long to sit in the shade and smoke,” she said.

And Freidja, who, like Andreas, disapproved of her sister’s easy familiarity with the stranger, replied that she thought her brother would prefer to accompany him when he inspected the wells.

“You see,” he said, and turned in protest to Mrs Krige. “I am not allowed to do anything. Every one insists upon encouraging my natural indolence.”

He would have been very willing to sit in the garden had Honor consented to sit with him; but, breakfast over, Honor disappeared with her sister; and Mrs Krige, explaining that they had duties to attend to, offered to show him a pleasant corner in the shade of the trees, where he would feel as cool as it was possible to feel in such warm weather.

She led the way into the garden. There were chairs under the trees, and a primitive wooden seat formed with roughly sawn logs, which served the double purpose of a seat and table. Beyond the garden were lucerne beds, and beyond these again was a fencing of wire confining a number of Krige’s best birds. It was neither a restful nor a pretty

garden; it was burnt up and sunbaked like the surrounding veld, save for one long bed below the stoep which was planted with flowers and carefully tended. Some one who loved flowers cared for these and watered them.

"It is not pretty," Mrs Krige said. "We had a beautiful garden when we lived in the town. I miss it."

"It would be difficult," he replied, "to make a beautiful garden with so poor a supply of water. But the trees are fine. Trees in this country are more acceptable than anything else."

She looked about her with a vague discontent in her eyes, eyes which held at times, which held now, a haunting expression of sorrow.

"Yes, trees are good," she agreed. "Do you observe that so far as the gaze can reach there is not one patch of shade except just here?—not a bush, only that small clump of prickly-pear yonder to throw its scant shadow on the ground? Sometimes there are mirage trees. One wonders..."

She broke off without completing the sentence and seated herself in one of the chairs.

"I want to talk to you," she said. "It is long since I met a fellow-countryman. I have become so identified with the Dutch that the few English friends I possessed have dropped away one by one. In this country a divided allegiance is impossible. I belong to my husband's people—my admiration and sympathies are all with them. You can't understand that," she added, with a swift look into his grave eyes. "I saw last night while Honor talked that you failed to understand. I believe it was your restraint then that decided me to attempt to explain what is to you incredible. You didn't understand; but I saw that you were trying to understand."

He sat forward with his hands between his knees, and gazed very intently into her face—an earnest, pleasant face with patient eyes.

"No; I don't understand," he said. "It's puzzled me a lot. You see, your daughter disclaimed your nationality, and you offered no protest. That's un-English. You can't change your nationality at will; it's as much a part of yourself as the colour of your eyes. We are proud as a race of our nationality. We are the finest nation in the world. I'm not for giving preference to any other. I don't say I'd talk like that to a foreigner—unless he challenged me; and then," he smiled slightly, "I'd probably be emphatic."

Mrs Krige caught something of his humour, and smiled in sympathy. Deep down in her heart, so jealously hidden that she almost doubted its existence there, the undying love for her own people kept its place in spite of the sadness and injustice her life had known.

"I felt as you do at one time," she said—"oh! for long after I was married. My husband was a Free State Boer—one of the old type, a little narrow and prejudiced, but a good man—an excellent husband and father. My married life was very happy."

She folded her hands on her lap and turned aside her face and looked away with reminiscent gaze over the sunlit landscape. Possibly she saw anew those long dead years passing before her mind like the mirage trees of the veld which appear only to vanish again. Matheson watched her curiously, anticipating something of her story. How many persons in that country, he wondered, had been hurt by the conflicting interests of the two white races?

"And then," she added quietly, "all the happiness came to an end... everything came to an end with the war—with those three bitter years of struggle and hatred. The British were wrong—very wrong. I believe if I had not been married to a Dutchman I should have felt that. It is a black mark against our national honour."

He noticed with faint surprise that in her condemnation of her country she associated herself with it for the first time—it might have been unconsciously, or it might have been that, in condemning it, some instinct of race caused her to identify herself with its disgrace. There was a suggestion of a desire to defend in that simple connection, to defend what she could not condone.

"You don't know," she said—"no one could know who was not directly concerned—all the injustice of the war... I lost my husband, I lost my son—not fighting; it wouldn't have been so hard had they died fighting for their independence. They were both prisoners, in an internment camp near Matjesfontein. And they died there. My boy was delicate. I don't know... I suppose things were rough and he needed care. He developed consumption, and died and was buried there. I was not allowed to see him. I have never seen his grave."

Her voice was slightly tremulous, but she betrayed no other sign of emotion, and resumed quietly with only a brief pause:

"His father died later. I think myself his heart was broken." She lifted protesting eyes. "Is it worth it? ... these broken hearts and broken lives—the price of territorial gain! It is too much to pay for any country's aggrandisement. And the bitterness to me lay in the knowledge that it was my own country inflicting this injustice on a weaker people. I cannot convey all I suffered. I was treated with great indignity—a prisoner in my own house, where I remained with my three youngest children. I wasn't allowed outside the house save by permit, and it was with difficulty I obtained that. I insisted on seeing the officer in charge, and informed him I was an Englishwoman. He was very rough with me, and told me to be careful or I might find myself interned also.

"Oh! I cannot describe the misery and the hopelessness of that time. I don't know how I lived through it; but one learns to endure. Now you know why I am bitter, why my children are bitter, against the English. They have nothing to teach them love of reverence for England—the nation that made them orphans, and treated their mother harshly. These wrongs live in the memory—they embitter life."

“Yes,” he said, and was silent. It was so difficult to say anything in face of what he had heard. It was because he saw her point of view so clearly, sympathised with her in her sorrow, that he found it impossible to attempt to point out that she was taking an altogether wrong view. Her judgment was biassed. In no question concerning the community is the individual point of view the one to be considered. But one can’t say these things to a woman who has suffered deeply.

Suddenly he put out a hand and laid it upon hers. There was something in his action, in the firm reassuring grip of his fingers, that moved her more than he knew. It was as the outstretched hand of a fellow-countryman gripping hers in the wilderness; it conveyed hope and comfort.

“I say, I’m awfully sorry,” he said. He pressed her hand firmly and then released it and sat looking away from her, considering a while.

“It’s so often the case,” he said presently, “that authority gets into the wrong hands. Men find themselves in responsible positions who are not fitted for responsibility, and they make a mess of things. In war, of course, injustice is inevitable; it’s not possible to discriminate. Aren’t you being unjust in your turn by impugning all Englishmen because one, or even more than one, during a time of intense mental strain, treated you without consideration?” ... She made no response; and he continued almost immediately:

“You know, you impress me tremendously. You’ve made me intensely interested in these matters. I’ve not thought about these things before. I’ve stood apart from public questions—they haven’t seemed to be any affair of mine. But there’s where we make a mistake. Every question that concerns one’s country concerns the individual. The honour of the Empire is in our keeping. Men and women don’t bear that in mind sufficiently; we ought to have it in mind continually. It should be as much to us as personal honour, which most of us rate highly. Take this country, for instance, where old wrongs rankle and old wounds remain unhealed, it’s people like yourself who have the power to effect the healing process. You could do it—you, and others in this land which is so vitally important a part of the Empire. There is no wound of that nature which cannot be healed.”

He felt that he had not touched her. She remained manifestly unmoved and outside it all. She lived with the memories of the past.

“You may heal wounds and there will remain a scar,” she answered. “And for amputation cases there is no remedy.”

“You mean,” he said, “that in your alienated sympathies your patriotism has suffered amputation? Fellow-countrywoman, I am not going to believe that. You have tucked it away out of sight, and are cheating yourself into believing it isn’t there because you no longer see it. Well, I’ll tell you what you’ve done for me.” He smiled suddenly. “You have called my patriotism into being. I’d forgotten I had so precious a possession till you showed it to me.”

“I!” she said, amazed.

“You... and your daughter. For the greater part of last night I lay awake thinking over Miss Krige’s unpalatable history lesson. I don’t know enough about these things to judge whether it was altogether accurate, but I imagine she has got hold of facts—though, of course, there are two ways of presenting facts, and she is obviously biassed. But, anyway, what she said helped me to see the Dutch point of view, and it is essential for the complete understanding of a subject to see the view of either side; there is admittedly always something to be said for both. And she taught me besides that there are two principles which a great nation would do well to adopt—to forget the injuries it sustains, and to remember the wrongs which it inflicts upon others. In my opinion that is what we, as a nation, do. Aren’t we proving that in the way in which we administer this Colony? The Dutch can suffer no injustice under the existing system of independent government.”

Then suddenly he remembered that Krige was opposed to the present government. A light of understanding flashed across his brain. Krige was a revolutionary. He was working in concert with other malcontents against law and order and the existing state of affairs; and he, an Englishman, had allowed himself to be used as a tool towards this end. He wondered what the Kriges thought of him, if they considered him a dupe?—or worse?

In quick embarrassment he glanced at Mrs Krige. Unless she believed him to be a dupe, she must take him for a contemptible humbug. Her face told him nothing; its expression was sad and infinitely remote. After all, it was rather brutal to pursue the subject further. This stirring up of painful memories could serve no good purpose. More than a decade had passed since the sword had been sheathed; but it takes all of that time to realise the extent of the hurt; afterwards the mind readjusts itself and finds a new balance.

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## Chapter Thirteen.

Matheson had been over a fortnight at Benfontein before the question of his departure was touched upon, even then it was left to him to broach the subject. Day after day he expected Krige to make some reference to the purpose of his coming; but Krige ignored the matter. Every one behaved exactly as though the visit were an ordinary event, and the visitor at liberty not only to choose the hour of his departure, but to defer it as long as he pleased. They made him quietly welcome, and treated him after the first few days almost as a member of the household.

He was able in return to render Krige good service on the farm; several small matters he found needing attention which, with the aid of certain tools on the farm and others which Krige borrowed from a neighbour, he managed to accomplish fairly satisfactorily. It gave him a comfortable sense of squaring accounts. He had no wish to be indebted to the Dutchman for anything.

He felt differently in regard to the women—to Honor and her mother, at least. With the confidence the latter had reposed in him she had extended her friendship also, extended it in so frank a manner that he could be in no doubt

about it. And Honor... Well, Honor was quite a separate consideration. He did not care to analyse his feelings in regard to Honor. He had an idea that it was safest not to dwell on this subject. But it was obvious that Honor as well as her mother felt kindly towards him. She went out of her way at times to reveal this amiable state of her feeling for him—considerably and unnecessarily out of her way, Freidja Krige opined. The elder sister stood aloof with Andreas, and looked on at the development of this unequal friendship, of which she disapproved, notwithstanding that she also entertained for their guest a liking she had not believed possible in the case of an Englishman.

Matheson had disarmed their antagonism by reason of his moderation. Even Krige opened out as the days passed, and seemed to find some pleasure in the other man's company. The furtive distrust, so noticeable at first, disappeared from his manner entirely. He became altogether more sociable, and lost much of his taciturnity and blossomed into unexpected speech at times, a thing as surprising and unlooked-for as the sudden flowering of the Karroo following its period of barrenness.

But his speech never even directly hinted at Holman's business. Matheson began to believe that he did not intend to send any return message through him. Finally he broached the subject himself one evening during the inevitable hour spent in Krige's society on the stoep after supper. This quiet hour, devoted to smoking and fragmentary talk, had ceased to bore him. Krige was not loquacious at any time, but he had become more companionable; and, in his silent and rather tragic reserve, he was an interesting personality. The people who are slow of speech are not often stupid.

"It's time, I suppose, that I was thinking of moving on," Matheson observed apropos of nothing, breaking in indeed upon a protracted pause. "It's so jolly here that I'm inclined to trespass on your hospitality. In return I hope, if there's anything I can do for you when I get back, you will not hesitate to mention it I shall be seeing Holman, I expect, pretty soon. Perhaps you have a message you'd like me to carry?"

He surveyed Krige interrogatively; and Krige, after a long minute during which he continued to smoke meditatively as though he had not heard, suddenly took the pipe from his mouth, and lifted his eyes without moving any other part of him, and said, in lieu of answering the question:

"Are you tired of the farm already?" Matheson felt surprised, possibly he showed it. "No; I'm not tired of the farm. I thought I had made that clear. But I do not wish to outstay my welcome, and I have been here two weeks."

"If you can stay a little longer," Krige observed, "I shall have a message which I shall be glad for you to carry to Mr Holman. We will be sorry when you leave Benfontein. There is no need for haste unless you wish to go."

That was precisely what Matheson did not wish; he was very willing to remain as long as they showed equal willingness to have his company. Each day as it passed made the thought of leaving less agreeable: there was no doubt about it in his mind any longer; some influence had gripped him powerfully; he was in the throes of a great emotional crisis—the result of the magnetic power which Honor Krige exercised over him. Nothing which he had ever experienced equalled in intensity his feeling for her. Was it love? He did not know. If it were love, it was different in quality from any other emotion of the kind he had known. The thought of possession, of spending his life with her, had not entered his mind—such a thought would have struck him then as presumptuous. A royal princess would not have appeared to him more inaccessible than this Dutch girl with her beauty and her ideals and her ingrained prejudices—prejudices that stretched, an artificially fed gulf of bitter waters, between them.

"I think you are wonderful," he said to her one day.

They were seated under the pepper trees in the garden, and the sun, which was declining, slanted its rays through the fern-like foliage and played in bright patterns on her face and dress. She turned her face, with the sunlight playing upon it, towards him, and her eyes smiled mockingly.

"I suppose many men have told you so?" he added self-consciously.

"I meet so many men on the Karroo who are likely to tell me those things," she answered. "How often have you said that to other girls?"

"Not once," he answered truthfully.

She laughed, and the laugh sounded frankly incredulous.

"But—there is some one? ... There must be someone."

He was sensible anew as he met her gaze of the barrier which divided them. And inexplicably her words called up the memory of a pair of brown, disapproving eyes; of a rock-strewn coast and moonlight upon the sea; of moonlight striking through the oleanders in a quiet road and falling upon a serious, upturned face; of the feel of soft lips meeting his...

"Isn't there some one?" the sceptical voice persisted.

And he answered slowly:

"I—don't—know."

He wondered why until that moment he had not given Brenda a thought. The more dominating personality of Honor, with her surprising beauty, had submerged the other affair entirely. In less than a month he had almost forgotten the girl of the beach.

"Ah!" Honor exclaimed, and the note of disbelief was still distinguishable in her voice. "There is always some one."

He found himself wishing almost fiercely that he had not admitted that state of doubt, but had repudiated promptly the suggestion conveyed in her question. He had put himself in a false position. There was not the slightest foundation for her supposition. It even crossed his mind to explain this—to go into details. He had a profound conviction that it would be prejudicial to his interests to leave matters in this unsatisfactory, indeterminate condition.

While he was weighing these important considerations, Honor abruptly snapped his chain of thought with a wholly irrelevant remark about the sunset; and he realised with a sense of mingled regret and relief that the time was past in which any explanation was possible. Honor never encouraged personalities, as he had noticed before; whenever the talk showed a tendency to slip to a more intimate note than usual she speedily brought it back to the impersonal.

He ignored the sunset. He did not even glance towards it.

"When are you going to show me more of the beauty of the Karroo?" he asked. "You have never taken me for a second ride."

"Oh!" she cried, and he wondered whether it were simply the glow of the setting sun that flushed her cheeks so brightly. "We have ridden every day."

"We have ridden, yes—but never alone since that first morning. The magic of the solitudes is not found among crowds."

"Crowds!" murmured Honor, with a suspicion of laughter in her voice.

"Don't tease," he entreated. "You know exactly what I mean. One mind not entirely in sympathy with another can create its multitudes. Won't you go with me again alone in search of the truth and the mystery which make the beauty of the veld? I want to see these things with your eyes."

"Why?" she asked.

"Because of your wonderful insight. One person looking into a puddle would see only the mud at the bottom, and another would perceive sufficient beauties of light and shade to transform even mud into a glorious substance. You have the gift of imagination—which is merely another term for being able to see truth. Teach me to see it also. I begin to believe that my destiny has led me here that I may learn that of you."

"To see truth!" she said, and regarded him thoughtfully. "I wonder if you are being sincere? One doesn't learn those things from another human being. But I'll ride with you—to-morrow. Rise an hour earlier, and we will start before any one is about."

She stood up suddenly and faced the west.

"See!" she said. "The sun has gone. I must go in and see about supper."

He stood up also, and interposed himself in her path and looked down into her face, flushed with the sunset, and very fair and earnest in expression.

"I am always entirely sincere with you," he said. "You mustn't ever again question my sincerity."

Honor appeared surprised, even a little startled; his outburst was unusual and unexpected, and his manner was very insistent. Without intending it she had hurt him; she regretted that.

"I was mistaken," she acknowledged generously. "I believe that you are sincere."

Then she left him, standing in the path feeling a little surprised at himself, and went swiftly up to the stoep and entered the house. For the first time in her life she had experienced shyness in a man's presence.

Matheson remained for a while in a state of indecision; then he went indoors and stayed in his room until supper was ready. From his window he watched Krige ride away, as he had done on several occasions during the past week. That the business upon which he rode was important, Matheson judged from the fact that Krige dressed with care on these evenings, and discarded the veldschoens he used daily about the farm for highly varnished black boots; his clothes also were black. Invariably he rode away in advance of supper, and seldom returned before eleven o'clock, which was late for a man who rose daily with the sun.

Matheson was undecided whether these journeys were taken in pursuance of revolutionary or matrimonial designs. Krige did not wear the air of a lover; but a man may cherish romance who does not cut a romantic figure. It was difficult to imagine Krige in ardent mood; yet the picture of Krige as a married man and a father, seemed perfectly natural and likely; he was not the type of man who remains single.

No reference of his absence was ever made by the other members of the family; only his place at the supper-table was not set for him, which omission, with the agreeable substitute of the company of Mrs Krige and one of her daughters for Krige's silent presence on the stoep after supper, marked the general acceptance of the fact.

Matheson experienced an increasing curiosity as to the nature of these journeys. Some inward prompting suggested that the message for Holman depended upon these nightly pilgrimages; and into his mind the first misgivings as to the honourableness of acting as intermediary in this business insinuated themselves, and gave him food for much unpleasant thought. A man has no sort of moral right to traffic in his honour.

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## Chapter Fourteen.

When Honor appeared on the stoep the next morning, dressed for the ride and carrying the early cup of coffee, the horses were saddled and waiting below the stoep, and Matheson stood in the path beside them doing something to his stirrup leather. He left what he was doing and came up the steps and joined her.

“That’s too bad,” she cried; “you’ve done all the work this morning.”

“No,” he contradicted, taking the cup from her hand. “You made the coffee. I call that sharing. But I have been waiting a good while.”

“It’s early though,” she said, and looked beyond the aloe fence to where the dew spread its silvery cobwebbed veil along the ground.

“Yes; it’s early.”

He drank the coffee slowly, standing beside her watching the soft colour deepening her clear skin, and the look of pleased expectancy shining in her eyes. He wondered whether she too knew the satisfaction which he was feeling in anticipation of their uncompanioned ride? It was not possible that she felt it in the same degree.

He put down the empty cup and assisted her to mount.

“Which direction do we take to-day?” he asked. “Last time we rode to the south.”

“So you remember?” She looked up, smiling, “There isn’t any choice to-day. I have a letter to carry for Andreas to Cornelius Nel. The Nels’ farm is about five miles from here. You will see it when we top the rise.”

“Isn’t it somewhat early for making calls?” he asked.

“We need only leave the letter,” she said. “We will stop there on our way home. It is possible they will want us to stay to breakfast; but if you prefer—”

“Oh, please!” he interrupted. “It’s for you to decide.”

“Yes. But you don’t understand. Cornelius hates the English; his brother, Herman, is different. Often they do not speak for months as a result of political disagreement. The farm is jointly theirs, but they have separate houses.”

“In that case,” he said, smiling involuntarily, “if we remain to breakfast, it would seem wise that you should breakfast with Cornelius and I with Herman. Are they married, by the way?”

“Cornelius is.”

“And does Mrs Nel share her husband’s prejudices?”

Honor reflected a moment. Then unexpectedly she broke into a laugh.

“Mrs Nel is of the opinion that had the Lord intended the different peoples of the earth to remain on friendly terms. He would never have contrived the confusion of tongues.”

“Ah!” Matheson’s smile broadened. “There is a good deal to be urged in defence of her argument,” he said.

“Do you know,”—Honor glanced at him swiftly—“I believe they will like you. You have none of the irritating characteristics of the average Englishman.”

“Look here!” he remonstrated. “When you disparage my countrymen, you disparage me. I wish you wouldn’t say those things. I don’t know how far you are in earnest, but I can’t take it as a compliment when you dissociate me from my country. Why not practise a little forbearance?”

“I think we will not remain to breakfast with the Nels,” was all she said in response, and rode on with her face turned from him and her chin held high.

Matheson felt exasperated. The qualities which appealed to her, tolerance and a sympathetic understanding, were inexplicably entirely lacking in herself: she did not desire to take any but a personal view. The injuries which she, with her family, refused to forget were ancient scars now; but they kept these scars from healing by constant probing, indifferent to the fact that the unhealed wound is painful only to the sufferer. She had not any sense of fair play, he decided, for all her English blood.

It was rather a silent ride they took that morning. Matheson, sensible of the tension, of the curious thrill of antagonism which he felt was common in both, held to his point stubbornly and refused to make overtures. He was not in the wrong; it was not for him to offer reparation.

His thoughts crystallised round her while he rode. He attempted to get a clearer insight into her mind. To grasp her point of view, and that of other Boers who thought and felt as she did, seemed to him essential in order to live harmoniously with these people. But her outlook was so circumscribed, so amazingly egotistical. This grievance was like every other thing which becomes a personal matter—a cult narrowed down to pettiness, which alienates even its sympathisers by the selfishness of its aims. He failed to understand how a beautiful nature could become corrupted by bitterness. It spoilt her, as all abnormal qualities must spoil what is simple and direct.

Honor brought her head round presently and met the eyes which he turned in response to her movement from the contemplation of steel-blue distances seen between his horse’s ears, to fix them upon her face.

“You came out in search of truth,” she said, with a suggestion of irony in her tones. “Have you found it?”

“No,” he answered bluntly. “How can I find what you refuse to show me?”

She flushed brightly and made no answer. After a moment or so he said:

“I think you are a little vexed that I asked you to ride alone with me this morning.”

“No,” she contradicted quickly, “no. There is no reason why I should not wish to ride with you. The first ride we took was at my suggestion. I have taken pleasure in watching your interest.”

Matheson felt while he looked at her that he had never been so baffled by any one in his life; her psychology was altogether beyond his understanding. On the whole he enjoyed that ride, though what constituted the enjoyment he would have been at a loss to explain. Possibly the assurance he felt, even in the moment of her annoyance, that despite her prejudices she realised, perhaps admitted to herself, that he had a hold upon her which threatened to weaken those carefully fostered antagonisms, was a sufficient satisfaction. He was certain of her interest in himself, and this gave him unbounded pleasure. His reciprocal interest was advancing with amazing rapidity. One soft look from those eyes which held a smile in them would cause him a thrill of happiness such as he had never known before. She excited him. Also her influence set stirring within him the beginning of a new responsibility which had for its ultimate object the complete reconciliation of her people with his own. It was unthinkable that Honor and he should remain enemies. The two races had buried their grievances and become united. But there were factions on both sides which remained outside the Union. He hated to think of Honor placed in one of these camps of irreconcilables. She was altogether too fine for that company. That sort of thing, racial jealousy, was what the undereducated man and woman mistook for patriotism. It is the lowest intelligences which keep alive the sense of injury.

While these new thoughts were shaping themselves in his mind, another idea presented itself which seemed to open out a way to some sort of an understanding. The solution lay with Herman Nel—the Boer who did not hate the English, and wrangled with his brother on the strength of his convictions. He must talk with Herman Nel. From him he might receive much useful information.

When he arrived at this determination they were already within sight of the farm. As they came nearer Honor pointed with her whip to a round cob building with a grass roof, which stood apart from the homestead and the outbuildings, as though, like its owner, it withdrew from what it failed to agree with, maintaining a comfortable isolation on open ground that defied surprise.

“That is the rondavel,” she explained, “which Herman Nel built for himself when his brother married. It’s small, but it is very comfortable. When he marries he will have to enlarge it.”

“Is he thinking of marrying?” Matheson asked.

“Oh, yes. He wants to marry Freidja. But just now they have quarrelled.”

“It would appear that he has a quarrelsome disposition,” Matheson said.

“No.” She smiled ever so faintly. “He is rather like yourself—he exasperates other people.”

“Ah!” He smiled too. “I should like to meet Mr Herman Nel.”

Mr Nel came out from his rondavel at that moment, stood for a second or so looking in their direction, and then came swiftly towards them. Honor, who was riding in the direction of the homestead, changed the horse’s course and went to meet him. It occurred to Matheson that she would have preferred to avoid the meeting; she did not seem pleased.

Nel came on unhesitatingly. When a short distance off he raised his wide-brimmed hat and flourished it; and Matheson observed that his hair was turning grey; grey showed also in his short pointed beard. He was a man of middle height and spare build, rather handsome, with an alert expression, and clear blue eyes with a humorous twinkle in them. The twinkle in them faded when they rested upon Matheson. It appeared to Matheson that they refuted Honor’s assertion of their owner’s bias in favour of the English. Nel’s face expressed curiosity, and something which looked very like contempt, as it lifted to his own. He transferred his attention almost immediately to Honor.

“So it’s you?” he said, shaking hands. “I gathered from Andreas last night that some one would be over from Benfontein in the morning. I was on the watch to intercept you.”

“I am afraid you are disappointed,” Honor said with a laugh.

“Not disappointed, but not wholly satisfied,” he answered. “How are they all at home?”

She made some reply in Dutch, which Matheson failed to understand, and which did not seem to afford Nel particular pleasure. He made no response, but looked somewhat dejected. Honor turned abruptly and brought Matheson into the conversation by effecting an introduction.

“Mr Matheson,” she explained, as the two shook hands, “is staying at Benfontein.”

“Yes, I know.” The tone was short and lacked cordiality. “Mr Holman’s friend, eh?”

For the first time since his arrival in the district Matheson heard Holman’s name spoken without friendliness; also the speaker gave it an un-English pronunciation; he had noticed that previously with the Kriges, and had put it down to the Dutch accent. It might be, he reflected, that Nel was jealous of Holman’s popularity at Benfontein.

"I was admiring your curious dwelling as we rode up," he said. "You've built on the native style. I like it."

Nel was vain about his house: he unbent a little.

"You must come and see it," he said. "Look in on your return. If I am not there, go inside. There are no secrets—it is open to inspection."

He looked towards Honor.

"You will be staying to breakfast? ... Leentje expects you."

Honor hesitated; and Matheson, observing her hesitation, explained the difficulty.

"Miss Krige doesn't trust me sufficiently to allow me to breakfast with her friends," he said, smiling. "We belong to opposite camps. Couldn't I inspect the rondavel while she delivers her message?"

"So!" said Herman Nel, obviously at a loss to understand the position. "I thought you would have business with Cornelius. But I will be very pleased if you will breakfast with me instead. They will not let Miss Krige leave until after breakfast."

He laid a hand on the sweat-darkened, satin neck of Honor's horse; and the beast turned its head and nosed him with friendly interest. The hand moved with the slow, rhythmic, caressing touch of the animal lover. He looked up at Honor smilingly.

"There will be a lot for you to see. The baby has cut his first tooth; that is perhaps the most important thing. When you have seen everything and have had breakfast, come to my bachelor quarters and eat meiboss with us. I will take care of Mr Matheson."

Still Honor appeared reluctant. Matheson could not but notice it; it seemed as though she hesitated to leave him with Herman Nel.

"I think I ought not to stay," she said.

"I think you will not be able to leave," Nel replied. "When Leentje tells me a thing is to be so, I accept it; it is less unpleasant to do that I like peace. You will not forget that I am expecting you to meiboss, and that I may not stay too long by my house?"

"Cornelius will think it strange, perhaps, that Mr Matheson should breakfast with you," Honor suggested.

"If Cornelius gives you to understand that he is either surprised or displeased, extend the invitation to meiboss to him and Leentje," he replied.

She laughed, and flicked the reins a little vexedly, and rode on.

Nel kept pace beside the second horse. Matheson, despite his protest, dismounted and walked on the other side.

"Is this your first visit to this district, Mr Matheson?" he asked.

"It is," he answered. "And I believe that in the short time I have been here more thought and experience have been crowded than during any other period of my life—certainly any period of like duration."

The eyes of the two men met in a long steady scrutiny. Nel was the first to withdraw his gaze.

"That is interesting," he replied slowly—"and surprising; so little happens here. But the less that happens the more time there is for thought. In my rondavel I have much leisure for thinking; but staying by Benfontein you are in good company. They are nice people, the Kriges—yes!"

The undoubted distrust with which Nel viewed him was forced anew on Matheson's notice. He realised clearly that it would be necessary to allay this distrust before he could hope to gain his confidence. The man on the other side of the horse was shrewd, and it was not altogether surprising that he should entertain doubts of the Englishman's honesty of purpose. He knew the errand that had brought him there, and formed his judgment in accordance with his knowledge. Matheson's claim that he belonged to a different camp puzzled him considerably. He regarded the speaker as a liar. Men who work evil stealthily are not addicted as a rule to truth.

"We will leave your horse in the shade of this tree," he said. "My boy will see to him until you are ready to start."

He called for the boy, and then led the way inside.

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## Chapter Fifteen.

The rondavel was curious rather than beautiful. It was built entirely on the native principle, save that it had a fireplace and properly constructed chimney. In the centre four uprights of timber supported the roof—young trees which had been felled and barked under Nel's supervision. The roof was of wattle and reed, the thatching of which had been done entirely by native women because in Nel's opinion they understood the work thoroughly. The mud floor, smooth and of a perfect evenness, was subjected regularly to the unsavoury process of smearing—washing over the surface with a weak solution of cow-dung. This is less unpleasant than it sounds, and is admittedly the best treatment for mud floors; it prevents crumbling and unevenness of surface. Upon the floor were one or two good

skins. A curious curtain of strips of hide attached to the supports divided the hut into separate apartments. Nel held aside this reimpe curtain and disclosed his bed.

“When I go to bed,” he explained, “I draw the curtain back; then my sleeping apartment is quite spacious.”

Behind the rondavel a second and smaller hut had been erected. This served as a kitchen and his boy’s quarters; and from this hut presently a Kaffir appeared and spread a cloth on the round table, and brought in the breakfast. They took their seats.

“You would have fared better by my brother’s house,” Nel observed, helping his guest to porridge with which raw cream was served. “I live simply here. It suits me. There are buttered mealies to follow—and biltong, if you care for it. It’s quite good eating cut fine—a pocket-knife is best for the purpose. I’ll cut you some to eat with bread and butter.”

“Thanks,” Matheson answered. “I call it excellent fare. For myself I should be satisfied with the porridge and that fine water melon to finish with.”

“Yes!” Nel regarded the huge green fruit that furnished the centre of the table. “We grow good melons—a very pleasant and refreshing fruit. It makes a nice confit, too. My sister-in-law is very clever in that way. It is she who keeps me supplied with meiboss, and other agreeable preserves.”

He went into a dissertation on the unsurpassed excellence of Dutch housewifery, and extolled the Dutchwoman’s knowledge in all branches of cookery, and the special preparation of the produce of the country. Matheson was not particularly interested in the subject; but the speaker and his quaint abode and curious mode of living interested him enormously. He had imagined that all Dutchmen were phlegmatic; slow of speech, slow of thought, heavy in their humour, and violent in temper. This Dutchman was altogether different from any type he had met. Instinctively he liked him. He had a feeling that Nel was predisposed towards reciprocating this liking; but the man was cautious. He talked continuously; and while he talked he was quite plainly taking stock of his visitor—thinking him out. He could not place the Englishman, and was frankly puzzled. The Englishman was agreeable, and seemed honest; but an honest man does not undertake a dishonourable mission.

“I expected to see you at the meeting last night,” he said presently.

He spoke with some abruptness, and fumbled in his pocket for his knife, which he opened deliberately, keeping his gaze fixed on Matheson’s face the while.

“It is the first I have heard of any meeting,” Matheson replied. “I suppose Mr Krige attended?”

“Yes. You think it wise to keep away, eh?”

Matheson stared hard at the speaker. The shrewd eyes withdrew their gaze and fixed themselves on the dried buckflesh which was being finely sliced with the sharp blade of the clasp knife. Matheson felt incensed.

“I don’t know what you mean,” he said. “I wasn’t invited to attend. Why should it seem to you wise that I should keep away?”

Nel went on quietly dicing the biltong.

“When a man sells his country he does not usually attend the auction,” he said.

Matheson’s head went up with a jerk. It was the most astonishing moment in his life. Here was a man whose hospitality he was partaking of, with whom a minute before he had been in amicable conversation, accusing him of one of the worst crimes in the calendar; and for the life of him he could not tell whether the accusation were just or not. That was the worst of it, the most serious side of the business; he did not know the extent of his responsibility.

He raised his hand, prepared to bring his clenched fist passionately down on the table; but his arm dropped to his side, the hand fell open loosely. He sat back in his seat and stared amazedly at the composed face of the man who accused him of a thing so vile, so absolutely unthinkable.

“I think, Mr Nel, you will have to take that back,” he said quietly, “or prove your words.” And then, losing for a space the grip he had managed to get on his feelings, he burst out with some vehemence: “Damn it! What the devil do you mean?”

Nel pushed the plate of biltong towards the middle of the table, pocketed his knife, and sat forward, leaning with his arms on the cloth.

“You resent my words,” he said. “Why should you? Are you not the paid messenger of a German secret agent?”

“Holman! ... You mean Holman? Holman is—”

“A German,” interrupted Nel coolly. “In the Colony perhaps it suits him to pass as British. If you had read the letter you delivered to Andreas Krige you would have seen that he signs himself Holmann. That isn’t the English way of spelling the name.”

“You’ve read the letter?” Matheson asked quickly.

“No.” Nel smiled drily. “I saw only the signature. They do not trust me with the letter—no! When they can they keep me from their meetings. But last night I attended. I attend to talk common sense. They do not like common sense; they do not listen. When I talk Andreas Krige closes his eyes; when I have finished he opens them again and resumes

as though I had not spoken." The Boer became suddenly excited. "It's devil's work you are engaged upon, Mr Matheson. I am not surprised you feel shame to acknowledge your part in it."

Matheson leaned his arms on the table also and brought his face close to the speaker's. With an effort he controlled his temper. He was on the fringe of a discovery; he did not wish to prejudice his chances of learning what was so vitally important that he should know by rousing the other to anger. To learn more of this secret business was all that mattered for the present. In those days the fact that Holman was German was not in itself significant, but it was remarkable that he should conceal his nationality and pass as British. The whole thing in its lying secrecy wore a very sinister look.

"It seems rather much to ask you to believe, Mr Nel, that I am less well informed than yourself as to the nature of this business of Holman's. He told me it was political; and I gathered that it was some party squabble. I consented to act as the bearer of his letter in part payment of a sum of money I owed him. I also undertook to keep my mouth shut. But in opening it to you I cannot be said to be giving information. You, know more than I do. It would seem I have been assisting in what is contrary to the interests of the Empire. I would let my hand rot off before I applied knowingly to such work."

Nel shrugged his shoulders.

"I don't care that for the British Empire," he said, snapping his fingers. "It's working against the good of this country that concerns me. Look at this country, prosperous and free and developing rapidly. South Africa was never more prosperous. The conditions for the white races are favourable to all alike. We in South Africa enjoy as great liberty and freedom as any country; yet men like Krige and Cornelius—ah! and older and more responsible men whom I could name if I would—would plunge the country into bloodshed out of a bitter spirit of revenge. They have a sense of personal grievance; they seek to wipe it out with no care nor compunction for the wrong they will do others. We can't get anything through war that we haven't got. It is merely nominal privileges they seek. They want to separate South Africa from the British Empire. Even if they succeeded, what would they gain? Do they imagine they would be allowed to keep so great a prize? ... There is only one sure means of conquest." He smiled, a slow, quiet smile. "It isn't warfare... Propagation... that is the secret We multiply; and I tell you surely we will people South Africa. Your people come and go, but the Boer lives by the land. South Africa is his Fatherland. I bid them to have patience; but they want to see in this generation the result of the seed which lies in the womb of the future."

"It's rebellion, then, that is hatching?" Matheson said.

The present concerned him much more vitally than the future. The future of South Africa he believed was quite secure; there was little need to worry about that. He reflected for a space.

"The overthrow of the government... Yes; I begin to understand."

Again he was silent, staring into the Dutchman's flushed, earnest face. Nel's eyes, alight with patriotic zeal, returned his gaze.

"I would do anything," the Boer said—"anything in the world, to crush this spirit of rebellion—to rid the land of it for ever. There must be an end of racial bitterness. The welfare of the country depends upon the co-operation of Dutch and British. The Boers must learn to crush down personal feeling. The best men have done that in the interests of the Fatherland. What matters it, the flag we prosper under? The country belongs to the people who live in it. It's personal feeling that is at the bottom of this discontent. There is no patriotism in it. It is not the wrong done them as a people, it's the personal grievance that rankles. The whole spirit of rebellion is fed on personal animus. These men would injure their country out of a spirit of revenge. There is no sense in it; it is childish."

He paused, and scrutinised Matheson closely for a moment or so.

"You say you are not wilfully assisting in sowing seeds of discord throughout the Union, yet you admit being in the pay of a man who has carried on this devil's work for years. One day we will reap the harvest; and the result will be that brother will be against brother, friend against friend. A bloody civil war is not a pleasant thing to contemplate. Think well before you meddle again in what you don't understand. I will give you a message to bear to your friend, Mr Holmann: tell him from me that he is a damned scoundrel."

"I shall probably have a similar message to deliver to him on my own account," Matheson answered. "I am obliged to you for enlightening me. And I can only say that I hope you believe me when I give you my word of honour that I had not the remotest suspicion of what you have informed me. I'm amazed. Of course, I've heard the Kriges' story; I know they feel bitterly towards the British. But I imagined they voiced a quite insignificant minority."

"They voice a minority—but not insignificant. Mostly this madness—for it is madness—shows itself among the most ignorant of the backveld Boers, in whom racial prejudice dies hard. They are not properly civilised, these men. They want freedom—freedom from taxation, from laws, and restraints. They are of the pioneer breed. They make good trekkers, but they don't submit kindly to government. The men who lead them know better; but they are actuated by jealousy and hate. They are mad with hate, just mad; and a madman who isn't under restraint is a danger to the population."

With surprising suddenness Nel's face softened wonderfully, the anger died out of his eyes.

"I get carried away," he said apologetically. "I feel strongly, Mr Matheson. This matter is the one subject of dissension between me and my brother. Cornelius, like Lot's wife, cannot look forward because some evil influence impels him always to turn back towards the shadow of the past."

He put out a hand as though he waved the subject aside, and returned to his neglected duty as host.

“Come!” he said. “You are not eating. You mustn’t starve yourself because I talk too much.”

He passed the plate of biltong to his visitor and helped himself at the same time.

“The best guarantee that I accept your word that you acted in ignorance,” he said presently, “is that I have spoken as freely as I have. If you would, you could help largely in counteracting the evil influences that are working to undermine the peace of this country.”

He paused; and Matheson, looking up to inquire in what way he could be useful, discovered the searching eyes scrutinising him anew with disconcerting attentiveness. He laughed quietly.

“I don’t believe you are very sure of me yet,” he said.

“Oh! yes, I am… as sure as a man can be of another whom he knows so slightly. What I would say to you is, go back—you can do no good here—go back, and help to instil in the minds of your own countrymen a feeling of greater kindliness towards the Dutch. The racial bitterness is not all on our side. A little forbearance, a more generous spirit—what you call fair play, will lead to a better understanding. I believe that under tactful and sympathetic conditions of government the spirit of rebellion which exists to-day, which will exist for some time while men turn to look back at that shadow of the past, will eventually die out; and the union of the two white races in South Africa will become cemented. The prosperous future of the country depends on that. It is one camp; there must be no enemies in it.”

His mouth lifted at the corners humorously.

“This farm is an example of dissension in the camp,” he said. “I build myself a rondavel, with a rope ladder leading to the roof which I can draw up after me. When we have eaten I will show you. No one knows of that retreat. I have kept my secret; then, when I do not wish to be found, I climb into my secret chamber, and they look for me in vain. My rondavel has a double roof.”

Matheson looked up with surprise at the innocent-looking grass roof, while Nel observed him smilingly.

“A child with a toy!—eh, Mr Matheson?” he said. “I was just a big boy when I planned my house.”

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## Chapter Sixteen.

Nel showed something of the disposition of a boy when later he revealed to Matheson the secret of his rondavel. He fixed his rope ladder to a beam in the roof, mounted, and, removing a part of the thatch, disappeared into the obscurity beyond through the opening he had made. For a moment his face showed in the opening, smiling down on Matheson, who stood below watching the proceedings with interest.

“Follow me,” he said. “It is quite spacious up here, but somewhat hot. And there are cockroaches.”

Matheson swarmed up the ladder after him, and thrust his head and shoulders through the opening and looked about him. It was difficult to see anything in the gloom, but after a while he made out Nel’s figure seated with the shoulders against the thatch. It was not possible to stand upright; the room at its highest point was not above five feet; but there was space enough for three or four persons to sit with ease, and a certain amount of ventilation came through holes in the grass roof.

“One would not perhaps use it for a sitting-room,” Nel said; “but it is a good hiding place.”

“Excellent,” Matheson replied. “No one would suppose, judging from the exterior, that there was space enough between the roof for a room like this. It’s deceptive from below.”

“Yes. I decided on a high roof for coolness, and the double thatch for the same reason. It was an afterthought to make use of the space between. I planned this loft, and elaborated it until it developed into my secret chamber. The movable thatch and rope ladder I made myself. I will ask you to descend now. It would not distress me if Miss Krige surprised my secret, but I would not have it generally known.”

Matheson, as he observed Nel unhitch his ladder and fold it up and thrust it inside a chest which stood on the floor, realised that this display of confidence was Herman Nel’s way of showing that he trusted him, that he accepted his word as to his ignorance of the nature of the enterprise he had so heedlessly embarked upon. It was a practical proof of faith in his future discretion.

They resumed their seats and discussed South African politics and the future of the country, until the arrival of Honor, with Cornelius, his wife, and the baby, broke up their talk.

Mrs Nel was a heavily made woman, dark complexioned and far from handsome. Cornelius had married her for no physical attraction, but for the many domestic qualities for which she was justly renowned. The baby was not handsome either; but it was good, and in Cornelius’ opinion a good baby was preferable to a pretty baby. He, himself, was rather like his brother, only taller and more stoutly built.

Matheson was introduced, and the newcomers shook hands.

“Why did you not come to my house?” asked Cornelius. “My wife and I would have been very pleased.”

Matheson explained that the rondavel had interested him, that Mr Herman Nel had kindly invited him to breakfast, and he had been glad to accept Mrs Nel laughed when he finished speaking.

“Ach! Herman lives like the Kaffirs,” she said. “There is never anything to eat by his house. You will be hungry just now.”

“Indeed, we fared sumptuously,” Matheson answered.

“And we have not finished,” Herman Nel put in. “We are about to taste some of your very good meiboss. Come and join us.”

Mrs Nel took some meiboss, and allowed the baby to suck a small piece, which it did with considerable enjoyment. She listened complacently to the general appreciation of this delicious preserve which she made according to a recipe that had been in the family for generations. Mrs Nel’s meiboss was unrivalled.

“Lekker!” she said to the baby. “It is lekker, eh?”

She put her fingers in the jar and drew out another piece. For the first time since she had entered Honor looked in Matheson’s direction, looked with a quick gleam of hostility in her eyes, as though expecting to detect in his expression something of the amusement she believed he experienced at the Nels’ expense. His steady gaze as it met hers disarmed her resentment. If it was a little unusual to thrust one’s fingers into a jar the contents of which others were sharing, it was a practice for which a precedent could be claimed. He helped himself from the jar and passed it to Honor.

“Jolly good stuff,” he said. “I don’t know when I have tasted anything half so good. Made with apricots... They’d like this in England.”

Mrs Nel proceeded to ply him with elucidatory questions about England.

“It is always raining there,” she announced by way of comment.

“The sun is to be seen on occasions,” he returned. “Also cases of heat apoplexy have been known. Still, it is drier on the Karroo.”

“Ach, the Karroo! Generally we have a drought here. One wishes the Lord had distributed things more evenly. But no doubt. He had His reasons. It would not be well for us to have everything as we would like.”

The conversation hung after that, until Herman Nel revived it by a discussion of the various accepted methods for raising water: he put forward certain projects of his own in this connexion which Cornelius and Matheson disposed of as impractical. Cornelius was inclined to accept the drought, as the unenlightened Boer accepts scab and other evils, as a visitation of Providence which it would be futile as well as impious to attempt to evade. He was a fairly prosperous man, but the profitable working of the farm was largely owing to the more energetic younger brother, whose keener intelligence and sound judgment co-operated successfully with the other’s undoubted skill in, and knowledge of, all branches of farming. Cornelius disapproved of many of his brother’s advanced, and what he termed English, ideas; but he was quick to appreciate the advantage when he reaped a profitable return on them. He was shrewd enough to recognise that alone he could not have achieved the prosperity he enjoyed.

The conversation shifted from wells to motor-cars. This convenient means of transport had found its way on to many farms. It linked up scattered districts and decreased distances enormously. Herman Nels spoke of getting a car, but his brother, and his brother’s wife, opposed the idea energetically.

“My! I would never trust myself in one of those things,” Mrs Nel declared emphatically, unconscious that her decision was in her brother-in-law’s opinion an argument in favour of the thing she depreciated. “It was never intended that we should rush through the air like that.”

“And yet there is the railway,” Matheson reminded her.

“Ach! the railway has its uses. But it does a lot of damage. Do you remember, Cornelius, when a spark from the engine fired your good trucks loaded with forage? And the Government would give no compensation, because no one actually saw the spark that set it alight come from the engine. As though it could have been fired any other way! Ach né! the railway is no good. The Lord gave us oxen for beasts of burden.”

“A bit slow in the going, aren’t they?” Matheson suggested.

“Those who travel slowly travel surely,” she answered conclusively.

“I would like a car if we could afford one,” Honor said. “But nothing is so good as a horse.” She looked at Matheson, and added: “We ought to be mounting.”

He rose promptly, and a general move followed. When he was on his feet Cornelius delivered himself of the weighty reflections which had kept him silent during the recent discussion.

“The railway is very well; but it should make full compensation for all loss. The railway is controlled by the government; the government is controlled by the capitalists. That is not good, no!”

“The landowner is something of a capitalist himself,” Herman Nel put in drily.

His brother bent on him a look of heavy displeasure.

“The landowner in the future will represent the power of this country,” he said, and closed the argument by lighting his pipe.

Every one accompanied the visitors outside, and watched them mount and ride away. Herman Nel assisted Honor to the saddle, and while he remained with his hand on the rein he looked up at her and said quietly:

"Carry my love to Freidja."

He did not seem to expect an answer, for he stepped back as he spoke; and Honor made no response, only when the other adieux were spoken and the horses started, she looked back at the man standing apart from the rest and smiled at him as she rode away.

For a while Matheson and his companion rode in unbroken silence. He was busy with the thoughts which Herman Nel's disclosure had set fermenting in his brain. The course he would follow was plain. But it was not easy after the Kriges' courtesy to leave them summarily; it was not possible, he felt, to do so and refuse to carry Krige's message without causing offence. The risk had to be taken however. He could no longer lend himself to the furtherance of a matter which he now admitted freely he had not approved of from the first. He ought never to have allowed himself to be mixed up in the affair. It was not easy to draw back; it was less easy to rid himself of the influences which, spreading over three weeks of intimate daily life with Honor—for it was always in Honor his thoughts centred—affected him powerfully, changing all his view of things, altering his entire perspective. It was amazing what a grip this girl had succeeded in getting on his imagination. Try how he would he could not shake his thoughts clear of her. Abruptly he glanced in her direction. She rode with the reins loose on the horse's neck; her face, which was partly averted, wore an air of abstraction, the eyes fixed with unfocussed vision upon the distance. She too seemed to have much to occupy her thoughts.

"I say!" he said, and broke off suddenly, not knowing after all what he intended saying.

She turned her face and looked towards him with gravely inquiring eyes.

"I've got to go away," he jerked out after a pause. "I've got to get back. This is very pleasant, but... it has to come to an end."

"Yes," she agreed, and looked a little puzzled—"of course. We expected you would be leaving shortly. I'm sorry."

"I don't want to go." He was insistent on this point. "I regret going—immensely." He paused, and added after a thoughtful moment: "For some reasons I regret that I ever came."

"That is not very kind," she said. "No," he allowed; "it doesn't sound kind. But... you know. You understand... I've been here too long."

"I think," she said, breaking the short embarrassed silence with a remark so apposite that he was considerably taken aback, "that Herman Nel's company has affected you. I did not wish to leave you with him."

"Why not?" he asked.

"He is a man who holds mistaken ideas," she replied. "In my opinion he is a very fine man," he returned, a note of quiet admiration in his voice. "But I don't see what grounds you have for assuming my mind to be so responsive to tutelage. I am not more readily impressed than most people."

She laughed in some amusement, but made no comment on his speech. It flashed into her mind to wonder whether he was so fixed in his opinions that she would fail to sway him if she essayed the task? And thinking so, and looking up with the laugh still in her eyes, she surprised so warm an expression of admiration in his glance that her cheeks burned under his look. She turned her face away. It seemed to her that in his eyes she had read an answer to her thought.

"You do not go to-day?" she asked presently.

"No," he answered sharply.

A conviction that he ought to go without delay assailed him with irritating persistence. With the moment for decision, the thought of leaving Benfontein became less easy; he did not want to go. He believed that she was aware of his reluctance, that in a measure she shared it. He felt her will joining with his to oppose his decision.

"Then at least we can have one other ride together," she said softly.

"Yes." He flicked at the flies that were worrying the horse, and did not look at her. "We will have one last ride together—since you are good enough to propose it."

"That is my way of showing I am sorry for being disagreeable," Honor observed.

Which remark, calling for contradiction, making too a special claim upon his gratitude, moved him to express warm appreciation of her consistent kindness, and his deep regret at the thought of departure. He did not intend to have any misunderstandings on that head. He wanted to make it quite clear that it was in relation to herself the approaching separation affected him so gravely. He was busy with his explanation, and getting, as he was aware, somewhat deeply involved in an analysis of emotions that threatened, while leading nowhere in particular, to leave him presently stranded high and dry above the watermark of conventional intercourse, when Honor interrupted him, snapping effectually the chain of his ideas.

"Visitors!" she cried.

The displeased ring in her voice, the vexed surprise of her expression, were eloquent of her resentment at this

unlooked-for event. They were nearing the homestead. Matheson, intent upon his companion to the exclusion of everything, failed, until roused by her exclamation to a closer observation, to see the low buggy standing in the shade of the big aloes. A Kaffir stood by the horses' heads. He presently led the animals towards the stable, and the buggy, bumping into the open, showed a heavy list on the driving side which witnessed to the girth of the owner beneath whose weight the springs had all but collapsed. This familiar sight drove the vexation out of Honor's eyes. She smiled suddenly.

"It's Oom Koos," she said—"Oom Koos Marais. That's all right. I feared it might be a stranger."

On the whole, Matheson decided on reflection, the presence of the newcomer would facilitate rather than hinder his departure.

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## Chapter Seventeen.

Oom Koos Marais was a Boer of the old style, who had acquired what little education he possessed, as he had acquired other things during the leisurely course of a frugal, industrious, and accumulative span of fifty odd years, unaided and by dint of his own perseverance and his lack of all pretence. Most men trusted Oom Koos; Oom Koos in turn trusted no man, and only one woman—his wife. He concealed his wealth in his house; read his Testament; did not flog his Kaffirs, because he had grown too stout and the power had gone from his arm; and was bitterly opposed to the Scab Act. Apart from this, he was an amiable, simple-minded man, of staunchly conservative principles, with a big heart, and certain fixed ideas of life which no argument could unsettle. Any one who attempted to convince Oom Koos against his judgment inevitably arrived at the cul-de-sac which prohibited further progress when Oom Koos broke in gently with the relevant impertinence: "As my old father used to say, I have my good sight and my good hearing, which remain unaffected when men talk foolishness."

Oom Koos was partaking of a late breakfast when Matheson rode up with Honor. Honor dismounted and went inside, and Matheson took the horses to the stable, a privilege he had insisted upon after the first ride, off-saddled, and then returned to the house to find the newcomer smoking a big calabash pipe near the open window of the living-room, sending heavy wreaths of blue smoke into the air through which his big face looked serenely like a setting sun obscured by clouds.

Andreas, with his hat on, about to depart to his work, delayed his start in order to introduce Matheson when the hitter appeared on the stoep; and, following upon the introduction, a huge hand, having first waved aside the smoke-cloud which obscured the vision, was slowly extended, a hand which looked capable of felling an ox, and assuredly of gripping another heartily, and Matheson felt a moist palm lying in his, and was almost ashamed of his own strong grip in returning the flabby handshake.

"Moiré, Mynheer!" said Oom Koos.

Matheson replied to this greeting in English, explaining, apologetically that always he had been a fool at languages, and that he did not speak the taal.

"You will not have been long in the country, eh?" Oom Koos said pleasantly, as one who considered the taal the language of the country, and its acquirement the natural outcome of residence therein. "Do you think of becoming a farmer?"

"Mr Matheson takes more interest in gold than in mohair," Honor put in, with the tiniest shade of malice in her smile.

Oom Koos farmed two thousand morgen and principally ran goats on the land. At Honor's speech his face lost its amiable complacency, his expression darkened.

"That is all the English care for," he said abruptly—"to make big holes in the ground and take the gold and leave the holes. Ja."

"Miss Krige does me an injustice," Matheson protested. "The mines lured me only for a brief while. Engineering is my profession. I go back to it when I leave here."

"So!" remarked Oom Koos, and smoked reflectively. "Do you make a long stay at Benfontein?" he asked.

"I have made a long stay," Matheson answered. "I leave to-morrow, if that is convenient to Mrs Krige."

"To-morrow, eh? I am going by De Aar to-morrow. If it suits you, I will be very pleased to drive you."

This arrangement was so entirely convenient, and so satisfactory in that it fixed the day and settled definitely the time for his departure, that Matheson's reluctant acceptance of the kindly intentioned offer sounded somewhat ungracious even in his own ears. He was amazed at himself. Here was an offer which exactly suited his plans, and which relieved the Kriges of the necessity of driving him into town, and he felt resentful at having to avail himself of it. At the back of his mind had loomed the hope that Honor would drive with him to De Aar. For some reason of her own Honor appeared equally dissatisfied with the arrangement. She listened to Matheson's halting acceptance, and to her mother's mildly uttered protest against this sudden departure, with thinly disguised impatience, breaking in on Mrs Krige's expressions of regret.

"It all depends on what hour you start, Oom Koos. Mr Matheson has an engagement to ride with me to-morrow morning," she announced.

"Certainly. I am not forgetting that," Matheson said promptly.

Oom Koos looked from one to the other and smoked deliberately and smiled.

“Mijn Maachtij!” He delivered himself of a deep breath. “I have been young myself, Honor. When you release Mr Matheson I will drive him to the town. That shall not interfere with your pleasure.”

Inexplicably, now that his departure was definitely fixed, though the responsibility for its settlement was his, Matheson chafed at the thought of going, and felt quite unjustly aggrieved with the worthy Dutchman’s amiable endeavour to suit his convenience. He considered Oom Koos officious. And then he fell to blaming Honor. Why had she not attempted to dissuade him that morning? Why had she taken the announcement of his departure so calmly, showing an indifference that seemed to indicate that his going affected her no more than the going of any other chance visitor? Simply she had appeared not to care; and that hurt him. Bidding good-bye to her would not, he knew, be an easy matter for him. It would have consoled him somewhat to know that it would not have left her unaffected. He had a persuasion that though he was leaving Benfontein it would not be for ever: some day he would travel again in that direction; and the next time he came it would not be on another man’s business.

The thought of that unfinished business harassed him not a little. He had yet to inform Krige that he had reconsidered his offer to carry a message for him to Holman, that it was uncertain when he would see Holman. It was an awkward explanation to make, involving unpleasant possibilities, and raising invidious suggestions; but there was no prospect of evasion; it had to be done. It was not possible, he felt, to go into this before a third person; he must mention the matter to Krige privately. Usually no difficulty to private talk presented itself. In ordinary circumstances he would have deferred it till the evening, and said what was necessary during the half-hour when he was left to the uninterrupted enjoyment of Krige’s society; but the arrival of Oom Koos complicated matters. His best chance of seeing Krige alone he believed was after the newcomer had gone to bed. He decided to await his opportunity, and put the affair aside with the quick impatience that characterised his treatment generally of unpleasant matters. After all, the man could not oblige him to carry his communications. If no alternative offered he could at least refuse point blank at the last moment.

As the day wore on two things became dear to Matheson: that the enormous Dutchman belonged to the same faction as Krige, and that his visit to Benfontein had some connexion with Holman’s communication. He saw Oom Koos, with the letter in his hand and his big glasses on his large nose, seated at the table in the living-room poring over its contents during the quiet hour of the hot afternoon when he himself was resting in the shade of the trees, and inclined, but for his interest in Oom Koos’ doings, to sleep.

After a while Mynheer Marais came out and joined him, lowering his great bulk with heavy cautiousness into one of the cane chairs.

“You take your ease,” he said. “That is well in this country. It is very warm, eh?”

“A Turkish bath would seem cool by comparison,” Matheson replied.

“So! You like the heat? ... No!” Oom Koos chuckled, and mopped the perspiration from his florid brow. “It makes some men thin, while others prow fat—according how they take their ease. But you like the country?”

“Yes; the country’s all right,” Matheson replied without enthusiasm.

“It is a fine agricultural country,” Oom Koos proceeded. “South Africa has a great future. Oh, ja! There will be more gold got out of mohair than out of the ground. You cut the wool and it grows again; the ground yields its minerals, and that is finished. If you ever travel by Three Sisters come to my farm—any one will tell you where Oom Koos Marais lives. I and my good wife and my good son will make you welcome.”

“Thanks. It’s very kind of you.”

Matheson’s tone was non-committal. He was undecided whether Oom Koos accepted him as a friend, or was merely trying to sound him in respect to his opinions. Possibly Krige had told him that he was uncertain as to his views. If Krige felt any curiosity in this matter he had not revealed it; he had never, even indirectly, tried to get information from him. Oom Koos’ next remark settled his indecision.

“You are a friend of Mr Holman, I hear? He is also my very good friend.”

Matheson faced him more directly.

“I am no friend of Mr Holman,” he replied. “I have some acquaintance with him. The little I know of him does not reflect to his credit.”

The big Dutchman evinced surprise, but of so mild a nature and untinged with any resentment, that it struck Matheson the surprise was not altogether genuine.

“So! You amaze me, Mr Matheson. I have always believed that to be a very good man,” he declared. “It is a proof that men are not lightly to be trusted. You are not perhaps mistaken; ... Ach, né! A man should select his friends, as he selects his wife, with consideration for their virtues.”

Matheson smiled broadly.

“A good many of us would be fairly lonely if that rule were applied,” he said.

Whereat Oom Koos laughed gently, refusing in his amiable good nature to take this cynical conclusion seriously. And after that he talked of farming, and the increasing export trade in mealies, and the excellence of his mohair.

As a result of their conversation it did not surprise Matheson that he was debarred from bearing any part in the conference that took place between the two Dutchmen that same evening. With the finish of supper when, according to custom, he went out on the stoep to smoke, instead of being accompanied by Krige, he discovered Mrs Krige following in his wake, cutting him off from the others, who remained seated at the table which Honor, assisted by Koewe, was clearing.

“Mr Marais wants to talk business with Andreas,” Mrs Krige explained.

When the white cloth was removed the two men drew their chairs closer about the table; and the hum of their voices, with the pungent smell of Oom Koos’ calabash, assailed the senses insistently, and afforded reasonable grounds for Mrs Krige’s suggestion that they should move their chairs farther along the stoep. Matheson accordingly moved them beyond sight of the room and its inmates, where the sound of voices reached them muffled and indistinct, and the powerful scent of Boer tobacco ceased from being an offence.

“He is the kindest dear in the world,” she said; “but he does smoke vile tobacco. And he prefers to smoke inside. The smell of it hangs about the room for days.”

Freidja came out and joined them, and after a long interval Honor made her appearance on the stoep, tired and rather cross and unnaturally silent. She had been making bread, and still wore her sleeves rolled above the elbow. Matheson’s glance fell admiringly to the round white arms, and then lifted to the fair face which even in the fading light showed plainly its owner’s discontent.

“Come and sit down,” he said.

“No.” She stood with her shoulders flattened against the wall of the house, and did not move. “I want air. How hot it is!”

“You are tired, Honor,” Mrs Krige said. “It has been a trying day.”

The ghost of a smile flickered across Honor’s face.

“It has,” she agreed. And Matheson felt that she included him in the day’s list of trying experiences.

“I think you tire yourself with riding so much before breakfast,” Freidja observed.

In the jagged state of Honor’s nerves her temper was not proof against this. She turned sharply in her sister’s direction.

“Some one had to ride to the Nels’ farm,” she retorted. “I hadn’t any choice since you wouldn’t go.”

She emitted a short, vexed laugh, and moved abruptly.

“I am going into the garden to search for what I shan’t find.”

Matheson rose promptly.

“I say,” he cried, “that sounds interesting. Let me go with you and help in the search... May I?”

She looked at him uncertainly.

“You don’t know what I am wanting to find,” she said.

“Well, whatever it is, two people are more assured of success than one.”

“All right.” Honor preceded him down the steps. “I am going in search of my lost temper,” she announced over her shoulder.

Freidja looked after the two figures disappearing in the obscurity of the shadowy garden, and her face hardened as the sound of a laugh was borne bade to their ears on the motionless air.

“I think it is well that Mr Matheson leaves to-morrow,” she said, and turned in sullen protest towards her mother.

Mrs Krige, looking deep into the shadows, answered nothing.

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## Chapter Eighteen.

No opportunity for talking with Krige offered itself to Matheson that night; he left him still earnestly conferring with Oom Koos when he went to bed. Honor assured him that they would probably remain so until the day broke. They did. He heard Mynheer Marais going heavily to bed in the dawn; heard later Mynheer Marais’ loud snoring which sounded so plainly through the thin wall that he was prevented from getting further sleep.

He rose early, and dressed to the accompaniment of Oom Koos’ trumpeting, and went quietly out by the window and along the stoep. The window of the living-room remained open, as it had been left overnight, in despite of which the fumes of Mynheer Marais’ pipe hung about the room even as Mrs Krige had described, a coarse heavy smell of stale tobacco.

Matheson halted at the window and thrust his head inside and sensed the atmosphere. Then he stepped within. On

the floor beneath the table, where presumably it had fallen and been overlooked, lay the letter Holman had written to Andreas Krige. He recognised the neat legible handwriting without difficulty; he had studied it to some purpose coming along in the train, and he knew the greyish-blue tint of the paper. The letter was not in its envelope, nor could he see the envelope anywhere in the room.

He stooped deliberately and picked up the written sheet of paper, and stood by the table with the mysterious document in his hand. There was no thought in his mind of reading it; it was, he knew, written in Dutch; but he had a wish to satisfy himself in regard to the signature; and he opened the letter and turned to the second page and looked at the name which footed it—K. Holmann. There was no doubt about that; and yet he had seen Holman sign his name at least a dozen times, and on no occasion had he affixed the second N. Herman Nel was right: the man was a scoundrel, and engaged in devil’s work.

So absorbed was he, while he stood there by the table turning the letter in his hands, so deeply plunged in thought, piecing what he had recently learnt with the imperfectly remembered past which recurred in fitful and broken consecutiveness; episodes and fragments of speech, all relevant to the main issue and seldom joining on to one another, darting into his mind with the quick unexpectedness, the blinding bewilderment of a lantern flashed out of darkness into the eyes; so fiercely angry at having lent himself to this man’s nefarious schemes—schemes which while Herman Nel had talked he had inclined to doubt, considering them too wildly improbable for credence, and which now he doubted no longer; so intent was he upon the problem of how he should act in regard to this knowledge which had come to him unsought, that he did not hear the door open, nor see the figure standing in the opening, quietly observant of him. It was not until the draught caused by the open door fluttered the paper in his hand that he looked up; and immediately he became aware of Honor watching him from the threshold, a cold little smile on her face and a look of scorn in her deep eyes.

She came forward into the room, closing the door behind her. Matheson was so surprised by the strange manner of her entry, and by the scornful disapproval of her look, that he remained motionless and silent, staring at her, with the open letter crushed in his hand.

“It is my brother’s letter you have there, I believe?” she said.

He relinquished it to her.

“It was on the floor,” he explained.

“I understood you had no knowledge of Dutch,” she said. “You gave us to understand that... but you were reading the letter.”

Matheson flushed darkly.

“I have no knowledge of Dutch,” he answered. “I have not read the letter—if I were sufficiently curious, and also sufficiently dishonourable to wish to do so, I could not. I was interested in the German signature of a man I always believed to be English.”

She still, he saw, disbelieved him. He had never felt so passionately angry with any one in his life before.

“If I had read the letter I doubt whether it could give me more information of this miserable business than I have already,” he added in tones like edged steel.

“We will see,” she rejoined, and spread the letter on the table, while he remained in a cold amazed silence, and read it aloud.

> “My dear Andreas,—
>
> “I am in communication with Piet van der Byl, and friendly burghers in the F.S. You will be glad to hear that we have every reason to hope for a good response in the event of such happenings as are predicted. The northern and eastern areas are sympathetic. Every quarter which I have tapped responds with the most encouraging readiness. I have little doubt that the desire which lies so near to our hearts will be achieved entirely to our satisfaction and sooner than we expect.
>
> “The messenger who delivers this has no knowledge of the taal. He is, I believe, a fool, who can be bought over if judiciously approached. You can safely send by him an answer to this. I shall be glad to have some account of the attitude your district takes up, and the names of any men who are likely to be of service to the cause. The time is not yet fulfilled when our expectations can be realised, but I feel it approaching, and it is well to be prepared.
>
> “Faithfully yours,
>
> “H.K. Holmann.”

When she had finished reading Honor folded the letter deliberately and looked up.

“You have gained a little information, haven’t you?” she asked; and Matheson realised that she referred to the insulting allusion to himself in the letter.

Why she had read the letter to him he failed to understand; he could not divine her reason. Quite possibly she was not moved by any reason; some swift inexplicable impulse more probably governed her action. He believed that already she regretted having yielded to this impulse; he read signs of a growing distress in her look.

“I have gained a little information,” he answered—“nothing that matters. I wish I could feel obliged to you for this unlooked-for display of confidence, but unfortunately it doesn’t carry any sort of conviction. You’ve no trust in me; your words prove that. You think, with the writer of the letter, that I’m a fool who can be made use of, and who isn’t dangerous, who doesn’t in short count—”

“No,” she interrupted in a low voice. “No!” He went on as though he had not heard her. “In one sense you are right—I’m not dangerous. Simply I could not, if it lay in my power, injure you. Whatever you did—and I believe you contemplate something hateful—I could only stand by silent, and regret the misconception which is leading you on to this miserable folly. You are led away by others—by men who have some ignoble end to serve, and are using you, as one of them has used me, as a tool.”

She lifted her head proudly and looked him steadily in the eyes, and answered with a quiet, and what appeared to him absurd dignity:

“I am led by patriotism and a hatred of injustice, Mr Matheson—not by any man.” He made an impatient movement. “You are ignorant of the very rudiments of patriotism,” he said. “You have educated yourself to one end, and you go forward blindly, seeing nothing of the evil of this flame of hate you are helping to fan into a conflagration—intent on an impossible goal.”

“Not impossible,” she insisted. “You are altogether mistaken,” he went on. “You won’t admit that, of course. Most persons with a grievance are unreasonable; they become obsessed with the one idea. You imagine you are out for reform. Even if you were sincere in believing that, you are too clever not to know that reforms don’t come about the way you are working. Impulsive reform leads to reaction. Change to be enduring must be gradual. That—the right sort of reform—is taking place every day; it goes on year by year. Injustice was deported long since. We are making all the compensation possible.”

She rested a hand on the table and leaned towards him, a gathering resentment smouldering in her eyes.

“You don’t understand,” she said. “You can’t put yourself in our place—in the place of any of these people who have suffered. What right have you to talk of these things? You haven’t lost your birthright. If you had,”—she smiled faintly—“I am quite convinced you would fight for its recovery.”

“You haven’t lost your birthright either,” he replied—“and some of you know it.”

Herman Nel’s words leapt suddenly to his mind: “A country belongs to the people who live in it.” South Africa belonged to the South African. The British Empire could not, did not desire to, dispute that.

She turned aside and went to the window and stood there, her air a little drooping as though she were weary, her eyes travelling listlessly across the shining wonder of dew-drenched sunlit veld.

“What’s the good of talking?” she said. “I’ve tried to show you—to make you see our side. At one time I thought I was succeeding. But you don’t understand.”

“I appreciate the hurt, but not your remedy,” he answered. “You would start a rebellion for a grievance. No successful upheaval was ever based on so paltry a foundation. Nothing worth achieving can be brought about by unworthy methods. Look here!” He joined her at the window, and stood beside her scrutinising her partly averted face. “You don’t know how much this means to me... your part in it. I’m not concerning myself for the present with anything outside that I hate the idea of your becoming obsessed with this cult of revenge. I hate it—in connexion with you. You are splendid and sweet; you are too good for that sort of thing—altogether. Miss Krige—Honor, don’t waste anything so precious as life by living in the past: the present is so good—so tremendously good. Don’t spoil it.”

He possessed himself of her hand and gripped it firmly, holding it between both his.

“I’m a blundering idiot. I’m saying all the wrong things. Be patient with me,” he entreated. “I know you’ve been hurt—badly hurt. I’d like to make reparation, if that were possible... and it isn’t. But I do care... Honor, you know I care...”

A soft colour crept into her cheeks, deepened, spread to her brow and throat. There was a quality in his voice, in his touch, which was unmistakable. She was unprepared. He had come perilously near, she felt, to hating her that morning. She had realised his anger and been unmoved by it; his tenderness affected her deeply; but she managed to control her emotion.

“You have been very considerate always,” she returned quietly—“and impartial I’ve liked that in you. Whatever happens, I believe that in our hearts you and I will remain friends—even if we don’t meet in the future.”

“Oh! we shall meet,” he said confidently.

But she shook her head and smiled faintly and made no reply in words.

“Do you mean you would rather we didn’t meet?” he asked, in tones of hurt surprise.

“No; not that.”

She attempted to withdraw her hand, but he prevented her, and she desisted.

“What then?” he asked, and was conscious of a sudden overmastering passion for her. A fierce desire to seize her and crush her in his arms wellnigh swept him off his balance. Hunger for her gripped him and hurt him like a physical ache. He wanted Honor at that moment more than he had ever wanted anything in his life.

“Nothing can keep us apart but your own wish... nothing. Honor, I want you... I love you.”

His voice shook. He pulled her towards him a little roughly and threw an arm about her and held her close.

“Dear! ... my beautiful dear!” he said. “I love you. Do you love me? ... a little?”

The soft colour deepened in her face. She looked up at him and smiled; then her eyelids drooped over the shining eyes.

“I like you,” she admitted. “Ah!”

The disappointment occasioned by this mild concession betrayed itself in his voice. With her intense nature, so lukewarm a response was almost a rebuff.

“That isn’t strong enough to throw down the barriers,” he said. He took her face between his hands and gazed deeply into her eyes. “I love you more than life. Haven’t you something a little better than liking to give me in return? Honor, I want to marry you.”

For a moment she was silent. Her breath fluttered nervously between her parted lips; her eyes lifted to his, fell, lifted to his again.

“Is *your* love strong enough to throw down barriers?” she asked.

“There aren’t any barriers on my side to knock over,” he answered, smiling.

“Are there not?” Her face was grave now, and purposeful, her gaze steadfast. She put up her hands and clasped his wrists. “I will marry you—on one condition.”

“Yes!” he said, and waited, feeling curious and oddly chilled. The excitement of his passion died down before her strange composure.

“If you renounce your country, and become one of us,” she said; “if you fight—supposing it comes to fighting—on our side, I will marry you. That is my condition.”

He still held her face between his hands, and now he drew it nearer, pressed his face to her face, kissed her tenderly upon the brow, pushed her face gently away.

“You ask more than you expect me to give,” he said. “You wouldn’t make such a condition if you loved me...”

Without looking at him Honor went swiftly and silently out through the window and along the stoep. He remained quite still, looking after her, a feeling of finality, of flatness, weighing upon him, and a queer sense of loss, which was not after all loss because he had never possessed, never been near possession; until that morning the hope of proprietorship had not entered into his thoughts of her; passion had not before gripped him. It was odd, he reflected, how swiftly and unexpectedly the factor of passion had entered and provoked this crisis. The whole thing was an amazement; and it left him a little dazed, with a sensation of plunging into sudden darkness after being in the light.

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## Chapter Nineteen.

There was no ride that morning. Feeling disinclined to remain indoors Matheson left the house and went for a walk, hoping to rid himself in some measure of his depression. He passed beyond the aloe boundary, and continued his way beside the ostrich camps, keeping at a respectful distance from the wire fencing behind which the great birds stalked aimlessly, craning their long necks forward and regarding him malevolently out of their large soft eyes.

He watched them with a detached interest, and reflected on the many occasions he had accompanied Honor when she fed them, carrying the basket of mealies for her and standing by while she threw the corn. He had chaffed her on account of her fear of the fierce clumsy birds. Fear had seemed so altogether foreign to her nature. They had strolled over the veld often at sunset, and listened to the ostriches’ cry to the departing day; had walked on over the rise and looked down in a pleasant and intimate companionship upon the homestead, softened and beautified in the evening light, upon the serried ranks of the mealie stalks, and the cluster of native huts dotted about near the kraals. They had been pleasant walks those. There was no doubt about it, they had had some good times together. And now it was all ended—in a moment, like the collapse of a pack of cards.

He quickened his pace, ruminating as he went. What exactly had happened? It was not, he felt, only prejudice and racial animosity that divided Honor and himself. Save in very exceptional cases, a woman does not exalt hate above love. There was something behind, something which he did not understand. He began to believe that he had been mistaken in thinking that she cared. She had never cared. She felt merely interested in him, as she might feel interested in any stranger coming for a time into her uneventful life. There was no more in it than that.

He returned to the house when it was approaching the breakfast hour, returned reluctantly, an unaccustomed feeling of nervousness, which increased as he came nearer, seizing him, causing a dryness of the throat and giving a furtiveness to his look. He did not know how he should face Honor—what they would say to one another. He experienced an absurd regret that she had her seat next his at table. It was not possible to sit beside any one and

remain silent.

In the garden he saw Mrs Krige. She was looking out for him; and immediately from her face he divined that she knew. It puzzled him why this fact should occasion him relief rather than embarrassment. Perhaps the expression in her eyes as she came towards him assured him of her sympathy.

“I am not late, I hope?” he said, as he joined her. “I have been taking a last walk.”

“Every one is late this morning,” she replied. “Mr Marais is only now awake, and Honor is lying down with a headache. Even Andreas was late. I think there is thunder in the air; the weather has been very oppressive these past few days; it upsets one.”

“Yes,” he agreed, following her talk only imperfectly, but grasping the reference to Honor which seemed to point to the unlikelihood of his seeing her again before he left. It was difficult to realise that he had actually seen Honor for the last time.

“I am sorry you are going,” Mrs Krige said presently. “I have so enjoyed your visit. Your being here has made me a little hungry for my own people. I haven’t talked so much English for six years. It may be years before I speak it again.”

“I think,” he returned, looking at her curiously, “you punish yourself heavily.”

He could not forget that it was from her mother Honor had learned her bitter creed. He found it difficult to forgive that. Of all these people whom he had met up here, so jealous of any infringement of the rights of the Dutch, so zealous in support of their claim to a national status, there was only one good patriot among them, and he was Herman Nel. It was such men as Nel who would make South Africa a great country.

Suddenly, while they walked towards the house, he found himself speaking of his proposal to Honor, and her rejection of his suit.

“She has told you?” he finished.

“Yes,” Mrs Krige admitted. “I am sorry about it. Honor will never marry; she does not think of it. Since you’ve been here I’ve fancied at times... But she isn’t like most girls; she never gives it a thought.”

“No,” he answered almost fiercely, “because her mind is preoccupied. She’s obsessed with a sense of her wrongs, with a longing for revenge, which she miscalls patriotism. Mrs Krige, I’d give the world to undo the injury that has been done a young, impressionable, and beautiful nature. Honor was made for love, and she puts love outside her life. Her life holds other interests.”

The slow tears gathered in Mrs Krige’s eyes. “You are blaming me,” she said... “I know you blame me.”

“I blame no one,” he answered, and felt savage with himself for hurting her to no purpose. “I’m feeling sore. This thing cuts, you see...”

“Yes,” she said. “Yes—I know. I’m sorry.”

She wiped her eyes quickly, unwilling that he should witness her emotion, and added presently:

“If Honor had given a different answer I should have been glad.”

They stepped on to the stoep in silence. Freidja was in the living-room, superintending Koewe who was bringing in the breakfast. She came to the window and admonished them good-naturedly.

“Ach! I don’t know what is the matter with every one this morning,” she said. “The breakfast has been cooked a long time already, and only myself to eat it. Andreas has not come in yet, and Oom Koos says he will be ready just now—which means in about half an hour, perhaps. Meanwhile the porridge cools, and the chops are burnt. What has got all of you?”

Andreas came into sight while she spoke, and walking with him was Herman Nel. Nel had ridden over on an errand of peace which, as Freidja knew, was connected solely with herself. She flushed on catching sight of him, and retired to the kitchen, where she remained until Nel, having shaken hands all round, and not seeing her, and feeling obviously very much at home at Benfontein, went in search of her, and returned after some while carrying the dish of chops and followed by his fiancée, both of them looking thoroughly happy, and Freidja appearing, to Matheson’s amaze, softened and entirely womanly and rather shy.

Mynheer Marais came in after the rest, and he and Herman Nel indulged in some amicable wrangling across the breakfast table. Mostly the conversation was carried on in English in consideration of Matheson’s presence, but occasionally it drifted into Dutch when the speakers grew excited; and then Matheson was glad to sit in silent preoccupation, deaf to the unintelligible sounds, indifferent to his surroundings, seeing only a fair upturned face with eyes that were entirely beautiful looking into his; and behind it, setting off the fair face with the shining eyes and the sunny hair, glowed the dark wood panelling of the old room, warmed with the newly risen sun. That picture he knew would live in his mind for ever.

“So you leave to-day?” Herman Nel said, turning and addressing him unexpectedly.

Matheson, looking towards the speaker, met the shrewd friendly eyes scrutinising him attentively as they had done across the small table at the rondavel.

"Yes," he said. "I'm going back."

"You'll have a lot to say about the fertility of this district," Nel remarked and laughed. "Come in the spring next time, Mr Matheson. We are rather proud of our veld then. When you are again in these parts I will be pleased if you will stay with me at my rondavel. You have seen what accommodation I have to have to offer; it is sufficient. If at any time you come and I am not there, enter and take possession. I never lock my house."

"No," interposed Oom Koos before Matheson could reply. "He tries to live like the Kaffirs; and the Kaffirs, who steal everything they can lay their filthy hands on, are baang to touch his goods because they think him white witch-doctor. But one day there will come a Kaffir who is not afraid."

"I go on the principle," Nel replied, "that evil hides instinctively from those who are not in search of it, but reveals itself impudently where it realises its presence is suspected. Oom Koos has lost more goats than I ever possessed. It is well for Mr Marais that he is a richer man than I."

"If I followed your example," Oom Koos retorted, "I would not be that. The wise man who would guard his sheep from the jackals, sees to it that they are safe in the kraals each night. A Kaffir will murder his father and his mother for their few paltry possessions."

"Occasionally," Nel returned quietly, "the white man commits worse crimes than that: he will murder his own people and rob his unborn child. But we style his crime differently. It is the tide one affixes to an act which proclaims it a crime or a virtue."

As though aware that he was treading on difficult ground, warned possibly by the steady look from Freidja's sombre eyes, he turned again to Matheson and skilfully directed the talk into a safer channel.

"I like the native," he said. "I always fight his battles. He is not highly developed mentally; he is largely instinctive; but his instincts on the whole are good."

"The mental inferiority, I suppose," Matheson ventured, "is the result of his want of civilisation. He is coming on rapidly, don't you think?"

"He advances undoubtedly. But I think the mental inferiority strikes deeper than that. I believe myself that eventually the black races will become extinct. Wherever the white man penetrates the effect becomes marked in succeeding generations."

"In my opinion that is regrettable," Matheson observed. "I am in favour of race preservation."

"Yes! Well, so am I. The dark man has his uses."

"He is a lazy schelm," put in Oom Koos, his customary amiability temporarily eclipsed behind his disapproval of the talk. "And the English are spoiling him. They give him too much money. Wages go up yearly; and the higher the wage the less he works."

"That's the rule all up the scale, isn't it?" Matheson asked with a laugh. "It's a sign of civilisation, anyway."

"This country is only in the making," Krige remarked, in his slow unexpected way of breaking in upon a conversation in which he had taken no previous part. "European principles don't apply out here."

"One has to live in this country for many years," Mrs Krige threw in, loyally supporting her son's statement, "before one begins to understand it; and even then there is always much to learn."

Which obvious remark put a period to the conversation, and when the talk revived ethnological discussion was tacitly tabooed.

With the finish of breakfast Oom Koos announced his intention to start. It was a long drive to De Aar, and he had business to transact there. He did not consult Matheson. He went with Andreas Krige to the stables to superintend the inspanning of his horses, and later drove up to the fence of spiky aloes and waited for his passenger in the patch of shade which they cast along the ground.

Matheson flung his things into a suit-case and hurried out. They were all there, grouped about the spider, with the exception only of Honor; but that exception meant everything to him. An overwhelming regret seized him. He was going away—she was allowing him to go—like a stranger, without so much as a touch of the hand, without a word of farewell. He rebelled against this. He resented it All these people would wonder—they would understand perhaps. He imagined he detected satisfaction in Andreas' eyes, and suspected Oom Koos' habitual twinkle of being assumed at his expense. Rage, which was in part misery, gripped him, and filled him with a desire to do something violent, which was none the less imperative because of its futility and utter absurdity. He had to make an effort at control before he could face these people calmly, and climb quietly to his place beside the massive Dutchman and respond to the chorus of farewells.

In his angry misery he forgot that he had had no talk with Krige about the message he had promised to carry for him. It did not occur to him until after the horses started to wonder why Krige had made no reference to this matter. When he thought about it, it struck him as significant, this ignoring of the subject. Possibly Honor had warned her brother against taking the course he had intended. It did not matter anyway. That was finished. He was leaving the farm with the sinister name, and carrying away with him a sense of the ill luck which was associated with its strange title.

He turned in his seat to look back at the low white building, gleaming in the brilliant sunlight with a hard dazzling effect which hurt the eyes. Somewhere behind the gleaming walls, beyond the wide open windows, Honor hid from

him—complex and beautiful and incomprehensible—a bright life overshadowed with the tragedy of the past.

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## Chapter Twenty.

It was Matheson's intention to return to the work—to the old firm, if it would take him back—which at Holman's instigation he had thrown up for the uncertain but more attractive methods of livelihood which speculation, under the expert tutelage of the German, offered. It seemed a long time since those days of careless adventurous living, though the actual period was under a month. He had thought so much, thought more deeply, during that month than he had ever done before. And he had felt things—understood with a wider sympathy than he had any idea he possessed. It was not so much that he had developed, as that he had tumbled by accident upon those unexplored mental regions which remain in cases of indulged indolence often unsuspected. The discovery had only now come about, but his feet had unconsciously turned into the road on the morning when he had first seen Brenda Upton, and been moved to unaccustomed self-analysis by the criticism in her eyes. It had pulled him up. He had not before considered himself or life seriously; the sense of responsibility had not touched him.

From that time onward he had felt his way forward, as an explorer might, curious and heedful, observant of every fresh surprise of the unfamiliar way, inquiring, acquisitive, immensely interested. And now he had received a check, the most serious check he had met with in life. It was not very clear how this would affect him; it was bound to leave a deeper impression on his mind than anything that had gone before. For the present he was conscious only of a feeling of defeat, of exasperated misery, that moved him to the same insensate anger that a man tortured with toothache feels sometimes towards the cause of his discomfort.

It was not Honor he was angry with; it was the systematic perversion of ideals, and the hypocrisy which exalted this mischievous doctrine into something fine and ennobling that enraged him. He saw Honor as a bright soul following blindly the path into which others had directed her steps, following it tirelessly, the brightness fading and the beauty of her fading with it as her nature became more warped and embittered with the years. No nature, however fine and sweet, can pursue a policy of revenge without hurt to itself.

During the greater part of the long drive from the farm to the hotel at which he had lunched on his arrival, Matheson sat wrapped in his own gloomy meditations, while Mynheer Marais smoked his huge calabash and grunted encouragement to the horses at frequent intervals, occasionally turning to address a remark to his silent companion.

It was plain to Matheson that Mynheer Marais did not trust him; he was reserved and guarded in his speech, confining himself to such safe topics as the climate and the uncertain distribution of the rainfall, and the visitations of God in the form of drought and other ills peculiar to the country.

"You will go back to England some day, perhaps—eh?" he suggested—"and will talk of these things and be glad you are out of the sun."

"I don't think that at all likely," Matheson replied. "It is my intention to colonise."

Oom Koos scrutinised him closely and smiled and stroked his horses' flanks gently with the whip.

"When you have made much money you will return to England," he said confidently. "That is what all the English do. Ja."

Which speech tended only to harden Matheson in his resolve to remain in the country and do his part towards furthering British interests there. Why should a man regard this, or any, country simply as a place in which to accumulate wealth? The ultimate purpose of a man's life rightly planned was to found a home and carry on: the getting of wealth should be concomitant and subordinated to that idea. Herman Nel had placed his hand upon the very heart of truth when he asserted that the secret of conquest lay not in destruction, but in the production and safeguarding of life. To pass on leaving one's life work finished with one's own brief span is to fail in the greatest achievement possible to the individual.

At the hotel Matheson and Mynheer Marais separated. The big Boer was well known in the town, and as soon as he appeared on the stoep of the hotel he was accosted by some Dutch acquaintance, with whom Matheson left him exchanging greetings in the taal.

Later he saw Oom Koos again for a few minutes after lunch; and then, accompanied by his friend, Oom Koos departed for the town, which was the last Matheson saw of him, a huge, ungainly, genial figure, talking and gesticulating freely, walking heavily amid the dust that stirred lazily about his big feet as he disappeared in the golden haze of the sultry afternoon.

Matheson experienced a curious and inexplicable loneliness after he had watched the lumbering figure of the Dutchman out of sight. The going of Oom Koos closed the Benfontein episode finally. He felt as though a door had been slammed in his face and the key turned in the lock.

The same feeling of loneliness, that sense of being shut out, clung to him after he left De Aar. It remained with him throughout the journey to Johannesburg. But with the sight of the straggling town, of its innumerable buildings and red streets, its busy crowded station, other emotions held him, and obliterated for a time the strange unaccustomed sensation of being adrift and without bearings. At least he could find his bearings here. He knew very well what he intended to do.

He drove to his old rooms and settled in. Then he went straightway to ascertain if there was any likelihood of getting back with his old firm, and was more successful than he had anticipated. The firm had a big Government contract at Cape Town and was glad to take him on in connexion with the work. That settled the uncertainty as to his future

finances.

He returned to his rooms considerably lightened in spirit, and with as many daily papers as he could procure. He had been living out of the world, and had not the remotest idea of what was going on in it. There is nothing so isolating as existing without newspapers. Beyond a Dutch paper, principally concerned with agricultural matters, which Andreas received once a week, no newspaper, so far as Matheson was aware, ever found its way to the farm.

Having read his papers, which contained nothing of particular interest—the country was still recovering from the stupefying effects of the great strike and the subsequent deportations, and did not appear to have altogether regained its breath—he went out again for the purpose of hunting up Holman and having a plain talk with him. He found him in the private room he called his office, where he transacted business principally through the medium of the telephone, and received the few callers who penetrated the mysteries of the winding passage and outer premises which led to the rather squalid quarters he inhabited at the lower end of the town.

He was, Matheson learned on arrival from the youthful clerk, who seemed to do little beyond guard the inner sanctum and scan the daily news, engaged for the moment. Since no one emerged from the inner room while he waited, and no one was present when a few minutes later, in response to the ring of a bell, he was conducted by the clerk to the presence, the inference was that the engagement was telephonic. Holman was alone, seated at his desk. His hand fell from the receiver as the door opened and closed upon his visitor. He swung round on his swivel chair and welcomed Matheson cordially.

“You never sent me any word,” he said. “When did you arrive? I’ve been expecting you daily for the past week. You haven’t hurried.”

He could not fail to notice the very obvious fact that his extended hand was ignored, nor that the cordiality of his manner received no response. He waved the neglected hand in the direction of a seat.

“Sit down,” he said, and crossed one leg over the other and regarded Matheson closely, fidgeting idly and with a suggestion of nervousness in the quick, uncertain movement of his fingers, with the pen on his blotting pad. “Now, let me hear all about it,” he resumed.

Matheson seated himself.

“Well, in the first place,” he said, leaning forward with his hands upon his knees, “I had better state at once that I know a good deal about this damnable business... not through the Kriges... there was a sort of conspiracy to keep me in the dark—Krige never talked to me. I learned what I know from Herman Nel. Nel called you a damned scoundrel... and I endorse his sentiments. Have you anything to say to that?”

He paused. Holman ceased fidgeting with the pen and clenched his hand on the blotter and sat quite still, smiling faintly.

“No. I don’t see that any comment of mine would avail anything. Of course you don’t expect me to applaud your opinion. Simply, I refuse to consider it. What you have learned from Herman Nel doesn’t interest me either. Nel was never a recipient of my confidence. He knows nothing whatever about me.”

“You are mistaken; his knowledge is more complete than you imagine. It was from Nel I learned that you are German, and not a British subject as I supposed.”

“Did I ever assert that I was British?” Holman interrupted him to inquire.

“Not to me. But I understood you were. You led me somehow, whether intentionally or not I can’t say, to understand that. And you spell your name in the English way, and sign the double n only when you correspond with your Dutch friends. I saw that in your letter to Krige.”

“So you read the letter I entrusted to your safe keeping?” Holman said with a flash of anger. “Then it was a lie when you said you couldn’t read Dutch?”

“It was nothing of the sort. I leave the lying to men practised in the art, like yourself. I saw the letter. I did not read it... but it was read to me. Had Nel’s statement needed corroboration I had it in your own words. You are helping to stir up bad feeling among the Dutch. You are inciting the dissatisfied Boers to open rebellion—Heaven knows why!—or the devil, to whom Nel gives the credit of the direction of this affair. What you expect to gain by it personally is your secret, but you must realise that it is a hopeless business for them in any event. A handful of farmers can’t fight a great organised nation with any hope of success.”

Holman smiled.

“You are talking arrant nonsense, you know,” he said. “If it wasn’t such absolute nonsense it would be offensive. There was not a sentence in my letter to Krige that even hinted at rebellion; there is not a sentence in my letter—not a word, for that matter, that I could not explain satisfactorily if I recognised any necessity for an explanation. Nel didn’t tell you, I suppose, while he was engaged in aspersing my character, that there is a feud of long standing between us which is principally of his making?”

“He told me nothing,” Matheson replied, “beyond what I have stated, and the further fact that you have been carrying on this underhand intrigue for years. What your game is remains to be seen. You have got some stake in this. It isn’t just philanthropy and sympathy with the poor Boer that actuates you. Time will show, perhaps. In the meanwhile with men of Herman Nel’s type in the country, I don’t think you will accomplish much. As regards my own share in this, I can only say that your estimate of my intelligence as expressed in your letter would seem to fit I have

been a fool. But you overestimated my complaisance—my conscience is not for purchase, however high the price.”

“You misread that,” Holman said, not looking at him. “I don’t deal in consciences. I fancied you were likely game to fall to the lovely Honor’s charm. That was in my mind when I watched you fooling about with that girl on the beach. You will agree, I imagine, that I would be scarcely likely to engage in a dangerous intrigue in co-operation with a girl like Honor?”

“I prefer,” Matheson answered brusquely, “to leave Miss Krige’s name out of this. I didn’t, as a matter of fact, come here to discuss this ugly business, but merely to explain my reasons for not fulfilling my undertaking, and to return your advance, minus my travelling expenses. That,” he said, rising and placing a note on the desk, “finishes everything between us.”

“As you will, of course.” Holman made a gesture with his shoulders. “It seems useless for me to say anything. I don’t attempt explanations twice. You have taken an outrageous tone and closed every door upon a possible understanding.”

“I understand as much as is necessary,” Matheson replied. “I’m on watch now. If any ill results follow upon your mischievous activities you can regard me as an enemy. I’ll track you down, and fix the thing on you.”

Holman rang the bell at his elbow sharply.

“I really can’t waste time while you talk nonsense,” he said. “Your abuse of me is absurd. If it were less ridiculous I should resent it more effectively.”

He turned back to the desk as the door opened to admit the clerk, and, speaking over his shoulder, curtly directed the astonished youth to show the visitor out Matheson, when he emerged from the winding intricacies of the airless passage into the sunlight, had a feeling that he had not so much closed that episode as broken an insincere friendship and started an open feud.

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## Chapter Twenty One.

The meeting with Holman and the latter’s reference to the girl of the beach brought Matheson’s memory with a swing back to Brenda and his promise to her. In all these weeks he had not thought of her twice, nor looked at the address she had given him at his request. He took it out when he got back to his rooms, and considered the wisdom of writing to her in a calm, detached way, and with a view to possible developments.

Finally he decided that he would write, and did so, asking for news of her. He despatched his letter, and waited in a state of curious uncertainty for her reply. When the reply did not come this uncertainty as to the real state of his wishes yielded to a very genuine disappointment. It was no longer a matter of indifference to him; he wanted to hear from her, wanted her friendship.

Some months later, after he was back in Cape Town, his own letter was returned to him through the post office, with the unsatisfactory information pencilled upon it. “Gone away, address not known.” He had waited too long; it was not possible now to get into touch with her.

He was sorry for this. He found himself wondering why she had left Mrs Graham, where she had gone. He worried about her. It was not easy to put his anxiety into words, but he had a feeling, strengthened possibly by the fact that she had left no address behind, that the loss of her former post was in the nature of a disaster. It couldn’t, he reflected uneasily, be consequent on that moonlight walk... She had so feared being late, and he had displayed impatience at having to hasten. Perhaps after all she had been late... It was beastly unjust that a little thing like that should have such disproportionate results. He wondered why women didn’t combine and insist upon fairer conditions. Even a companion should be privileged to count certain hours of the day her own.

And then for a time he forgot Brenda again in the interests of his work, and the distraction of new friendships made under the auspices of Macfarlane, an engineering acquaintance resident in Cape Town. There was a man from Port Elizabeth, named Aplin, whom he met first at the docks and with whom he became rather intimate. Aplin was round visiting his people; and there were two pretty cousins whom he took about who evinced a quite flattering interest in Matheson, and invited him to tennis and tea, and met him on occasions by agreement in town in the middle of the morning for ices and coffee. They were merry, high-spirited, Colonial girls, who brought just that bright touch of femininity into his life which he needed at the moment, an easy encouraging friendliness that was not intimate enough in character to set throbbing the pain of the recent hurt, but was sufficiently appreciative and competitive to be agreeable. These girls were not in the least intellectual, but they had plenty of small talk and were pleasant to look at. Matheson enjoyed going to the house. It was somewhere, to go out of working hours, where he could feel sure of a welcome and of being amused.

At no period of the acquaintance did he entertain any deeper sentiment than that of friendship for either of them; but they both took a kind of proprietary interest in him and let him see it. At the same time they showed a similar interest in Aplin, and one or two men who frequented their tennis court. They were quite frankly matrimonial in intention. Their limited and rather commonplace lives shaped them for the one inevitable destiny, failing which there was no resource, no visible outlet.

“You go out there a good deal,” Macfarlane warned him one Saturday, meeting him on the tram for Rondebosch with a racquet under his arm. “You’ll be engaged before you know where you are.” He laughed, a jolly good-natured laugh. “They tried to catch me at one time. It’s Rosie you had better be careful of.”

When Matheson reached the house and entered the garden he saw Rosie in the path, stooping over a flower-border.

He had met her like this before and believed the encounter accidental, but Macfarlane’s words, coming back to him, illumined his understanding. Rosie turned with a little start and straightened herself and came towards him. She looked quite pretty and entirely unconscious, and she held some blue flower in her hand the name of which he did not know.

“How nice!” she said. “I didn’t guess it was you when I heard the gate. I was picking flowers.”

She held the sample one up to him as evidence of her occupation.

“You shall wear it in your buttonhole. It matches your eyes.”

He stood while she pinned it in for him, and found some difficulty in keeping the amusement out of the eyes which matched with her flower. She stepped back to admire the effect of her handiwork and flashed a coquettish glance at him, and then returned to admiring the effect.

“That’s awfully kind of you,” he said. “I feel tremendously smart.”

“You look festive,” she admitted. “Blue suits you. I’m glad I happened to be in the garden when you arrived.”

There was only one obvious reply to this obvious speech. Matheson made it perfunctorily.

“It is I who have the greater reason to be glad,” he said. “I don’t think any one has ever given me a flower before—certainly no one else has been kind enough to pin one in my coat.”

“I’m glad I’m the first,” she said, and flashed another look at him, and walked on by his side. “I am not considered generous with my favours,” she added mendaciously... “but the colour of the flower suggested you. I like blue eyes.”

Matheson laughed at that.

“I prefer brown eyes,” he said, and was amused at the smiling satisfaction of the brunette face close to his shoulder.

“Well, of course,” she returned, “one usually admires opposite colouring. That’s only natural.”

Her speech somehow set him thinking of the fairest face he had ever seen. The picture of that fair face framed in the sunlit hair, with the dark woodwork of the old room for a background, was so vividly before him that it was not surprising his attention wandered from the empty little person at his side, whose flow of frivolous chatter went on uninterruptedly, and covered while it did not disguise the fact that he had grown suddenly dull. Then May appeared unexpectedly from behind some flowering shrubs, and took charge of him and conducted him to the tennis court, where Aplin and another man were playing singles, while Mrs Aplin sat in a rustic summer-house overlooking the court, a self-effacing chaperon, beaming complacently upon the young people, with an indulgent eye lit with maternal pride for her girls. There were no other girls present. As Rosie explained, if they invited too many people they never got any play themselves.

It was all very jolly and homelike, Matheson considered. He played with both girls in turn. May lit a cigarette for him between the sets, and Mrs Aplin fussed over him during tea, and was confidential with him later in regard to her daughters’ tastes and accomplishments and general amiability.

“They are such favourites with *every one*,” she confided with emphatic earnestness. “A friend whose girls are not popular asked me recently the secret of my training... what plans I adopted in bringing my girls up that made them so generally liked? I told her that I had brought them up to play games.” She regarded Matheson quite seriously, with a gleam of satisfaction in her eyes. “They play games... every game... *well*. What more is required of a girl? All this nonsense about higher education... It’s so unnecessary. And study is bad for the eyes; it makes girls frown; and a girl with a frown doesn’t look so much studious as bad tempered. Let them play games and look nice; that’s all that is requisite.”

“It’s the sort of idea I started out with,” Matheson returned, beating his tennis boot softly with his racquet and idly watching the pipe-clay rise in little clouds. He laughed suddenly. “I don’t know about looking nice, but I had a fancy for playing games. Life itself seemed a game. But it isn’t. And playing games doesn’t provide one with a banking account.”

“Of course it’s different for men. I don’t advocate games for *every one*,” she assured him gravely. “But girls don’t need to think about banking accounts.”

“Some of them must,” he said.

She looked at him in surprise.

“I wasn’t speaking of *that* sort of girl; I meant my own girls,” she answered in a tone that opened up all the social distances before Matheson’s amazed vision.

“I think responsibility *unsexes* a woman,” she added; and her bewildered listener felt that the final nail had been driven into the coffin containing the discredited remains of the girl-worker’s claim to respectability.

That was the tone of the Rondebosch household; and the head of the house, whose flourishing business made this comfortable despite of everything save leisure possible to his womenkind, showed his appreciation of their views by spending as little time under his roof-tree as was compatible with his position in relation to the family. Matheson had met Mr Aplin only once when he dined at the house. Macfarlane called him morose, but Matheson rather liked the silent, heavy, bored-looking man whose presence his wife and daughters managed to eclipse.

“It was seeing the old man among them scared me off,” Macfarlane informed him. “Any man who marries one of them can look forward to becoming like that. He’s a cipher in the house. They do well to keep him in the background as a rule. But there’s lots of money. If a man isn’t particular in other respects... there you are.”

Money undoubtedly swelled the train of the Aplin girls’ admirers; but it was not a sufficiently powerful magnet to attract Matheson. As he explained one day in a burst of confidence to Macfarlane, he could not dispense altogether with brains in a life-partner.

“They are pretty,” he allowed,—“and jolly nice to talk with for an afternoon, but they have no more intelligence than kittens. Imagine how fed up a man would get! And looks don’t last. Though, apart from that, I’d grow weary to death of the inanity long before the looks were faded. I want more than either of them could give from my wife.”

“Well, I don’t know,” Macfarlane returned lazily, “that I’m so keen on matrimony. A man has a lot better time while he’s single.”

“That’s all very well,” Matheson argued; “but the world can’t be run on those lines. I mean to marry. I want to have a wife and children and some stake in the country.”

“You’re going ahead a bit,” Macfarlane laughed. “What’s changed you? You weren’t keen on responsibilities at one time... You are changed, Matheson. You’ve changed a lot during the last few months... A girl—eh?”

“A girl—yes.”

Matheson was silent for a moment or so; and the other man, observing him closely, drew his own conclusions from his gloomy face.

“That’s past and done with though. She hasn’t any part in this. I want to marry... It has nothing to do with being in love. I’ve been thinking about things... getting hold of a sort of idea of what my special job in life is. I am going to colonise—in earnest. I’m going to own land in the country, and raise a family on it if it’s possible, and try for a seat in the Legislative Assembly and have a voice in matters.” He looked up, met Macfarlane’s astonished, questioning eye, and smiled drily. “You think I’m talking over my hat,” he said.

“I think you are taking on something of a job,” was all Macfarlane vouchsafed.

They were seated after dinner in a quiet corner of Macfarlane’s stoep which fronted his small bachelor bungalow. It was a Sunday afternoon, warm and still, and until their present conversation roused them from their lethargy they had both seemed more inclined to drowse than talk. Matheson, who was smoking, threw away his cigarette in order to give his whole attention to his subject.

“I was on a Dutch farm before I came down,” he said, “staying among Dutch people—some of the disaffected Dutch —”

“There are a good many of that breed,” Macfarlane interposed.

“They’ve got a case,” Matheson said.

“Oh! they’ve got a case,” Macfarlane allowed—“but it’s against their own interests to insist upon it. The men with brains recognise that. It’s among the more ignorant Boers that the disaffection spreads. I don’t fancy it is worth worrying over.”

“Possibly not. But it’s always desirable to stop the spread of contagious disease.”

“What remedy have you to propose?” Macfarlane inquired.

“Tact. I’m of the opinion that it is because most of us refuse to recognise their case that the ill feeling spreads. I’ve talked with them... It’s a real sense of injustice at the back of their minds that rankles. They aren’t all of them actuated by blind hatred.”

Macfarlane looked doubtful.

“Well, there may have been injustice,” he allowed. “But the position out here was impossible, as any one who wasn’t a sentimentalist would acknowledge. After all, it’s a British Colony, and there wasn’t room for a rival power. We paid hard cash for the privilege of settling, and our right received international recognition. We’ve done more for the development of South Africa than the Boers ever could. If they owned the country some greater power would step in and take it from them. They aren’t, you see, a nation.”

“They are a nation in the making,” Matheson rejoined, thinking of Nel’s words. “They are going to be a power in the country.”

“Why not? There’s room for all of us under the one flag.”

Matheson was silent for a while, thinking. Presently he said:

“There’s ill work—underhand work going on. I’ve come in touch with it. There’s a German I know, who passes for an Englishman, who is deliberately fostering the spirit of rebellion among the Boers.”

“I dare say. The Germans played dirty tricks with the Boers during the late war. But if it came to a head,” Macfarlane answered comfortably, “it would be only a half-hearted rebellion. That spirit isn’t general.”

"No. But it has crossed my mind to wonder whether there is something behind this—something we aren't expecting. Europe seems settled and peaceably inclined, but... Suppose there should be something brewing?"

Macfarlane sat up and looked at him queerly.

"It's odd you should say that," he remarked. "It was only last week Aplin was commenting on the German exodus from Port Elizabeth. For the past two years they have been leaving for Europe, all the influential Germans. They have any amount of German firms there, and the beggars are all clearing out." He laughed suddenly. "Oh, rats!" he cried. "You are making me fanciful. I should advise you to quit staying on Dutch farms. You stick to engineering, my boy, and give over philosophising on love and war."

"I'm going to talk with Aplin about this," Matheson said. "I'd like to hear what he has to say."

"Oh! he'll play up to you all right. There's a German round his way who puts his back up with his incessant peace talk. He has ideas for a federation of nations to enforce peace on the world. That idea, according to Aplin, is aggressive; no principle can be peaceful that needs to be enforced."

"One can argue down anything with that kind of sophistry," Matheson contended. "But there is something in the idea."

"Yes—if the beggar's sincere. But something of that nature appeared in a magazine a little while back. For myself, I'd like to know where it originated. I'm not much of a believer in any German made article. The German may talk brotherly love; but he never has loved his neighbour, and he never will. Look at their Colonies. None but Germans can live under their flag. And then look at Cape Town—bar America, it is the most cosmopolitan city in the world. So much for that!" he said, and lighted himself another cigarette. "I discredit equally their peace palaver and your predicted rebellion. If rebellion does come, we've got a man at the head of affairs—and he's a Dutchman, mind you—who will be equal to dealing with it."

"He knows how to deal with strikers anyhow," Matheson said, and laughed.

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## Chapter Twenty Two.

Whether as a result of the talk with Macfarlane, or the expiration of Aplin's leave and his departure for Algoa Bay, Matheson's visits to the Rondebosch household fell off in regularity. He went out for tennis when the mood inclined him, and on occasions still met the two girls at the café in the luncheon recess and ate ices with them. It was a somewhat remarkable coincidence that they were so often in the vicinity of the café he frequented at the same hour as himself; it was always an accident, and so unexpected.

He came in time to look for them, and evolved a formula in response to their surprised exclamations. There were even times when he experienced a faint disappointment if they failed to appear. There were other times when, disinclined for their chatter, he dropped into a less fashionable café nearer his work and took his iced coffee in solitary enjoyment. They detected him immediately upon his new discovery diving into the small café, and followed him, and were "so surprised" when they met within to see that he too patronised this nice quiet little place.

"It's so restful," said Rosie audibly, as they seated themselves at his suggestion at the same table. "And really the things they give you are quite good. How did you come to find it out?"

"It's handy for me, you see," he explained. "I can't always get off at this hour, and often I have only ten minutes. When time is limited I bolt in here."

He did not consider it necessary to admit that it was only the second time he had visited the café.

"I like to try the different places," he added, with a view to future evasion.

"The girls' dresses are pretty," observed May, looking after the neat Puritan figure of the waitress who had served them. "They suggest the chorus in a revue."

"I dare say Mr Matheson considers that one of the attractions of the place," Rosie threw in with a touch of malice.

Matheson, who had not as a matter of fact taken particular note of the waitresses, glanced after a tall blonde girl who passed their table carrying a trayful of American drinks, and laughed.

"I think they look jolly fine," he said.

May looked about her, nibbling an ice wafer.

"I wouldn't mind being a waitress in a café. They don't have half a bad time," she averred.

"May!" Her sister appeared horrified. "The things men say to them... And imagine taking tips!"

"I'd like the tips all right," May declared, and caught Matheson's eye and smiled. "And it's just fascinating squirting drinks out of those syphons. It makes one cool to watch. Besides, I'd like going about in fancy dress all day, and wearing a dinky little cap. How do you think I'd lode in one of those Puritan caps, Mr Matheson?"

"I think you would look sufficiently attractive to be sure of your tips," he answered.

"Flatterer!" she exclaimed, and laughed. "I shouldn't look puritanical anyhow."

"No," he rejoined. "I don't believe you could."

"That sort of thing is all very well at a charity bazaar," Rosie affirmed. "Even then, I prefer selling flowers."

"And charging extra for pinning them in the lucky purchaser's buttonhole?" he suggested.

"Come and find out whether I do that at the next bazaar," she said.

"She always does well at the flower stall," May commented. "That's why they ask her to serve. I don't see much difference between charging extra for pinning in a buttonhole and taking tips."

"It's both a form of blackmail," Matheson asserted.

"You don't believe in tipping then?"

"Oh! I believe in it—it's too evident to be questioned; and custom, like the right of way through a person's property, legalises most things."

"People are so much more civil when one tips them," Rosie observed.

"If they return civility, that's value for one's money all right. But the civility depends largely on the amount of the tip," he said.

The inference they drew from his remarks was that he inclined to meanness, and they both, under cover of searching for gloves and vanity bags, took a surreptitious interest in the proceedings that followed upon the presentation of the account which the neat Puritan waitress unobtrusively placed beside his plate, and then, even more unobtrusively, withdrew to a distance as though a tip were the last thing in the world she expected to receive or desired. He took up the check, glanced at the amount, placed sixpence on the table as unobtrusively as the Puritan girl had delivered his account, and was approaching the desk behind his gay companions when he felt a touch on his sleeve.

"Your change, if you please."

In the hand which had touched his arm, lying upon the open palm, was the sixpence he had left on the table. He felt awkward as his glance fell to it; it was difficult he found to explain.

"That's all right," he was beginning over his shoulder, and broke off embarrassed before the persistence of that outstretched determined little hand so obviously refusing his munificence.

"Thanks," he added hurriedly, and faced round. "I must have dropped it."

He looked at her as he took the coin, a little curious about her. He hadn't noticed her when she served his party; he had been preoccupied, and she had kept in the background somehow. It flashed across his mind to wonder whether she had overheard any part of their talk, and resented his remarks about tipping. Then his eyes met hers, and the coin which he was in the act of taking slipped from his fingers and rolled away out of sight.

"You!" he cried. His eager hand shot out and grasped the small one which had returned his money. "I have been trying to discover you for months. I thought I had lost you... And you've been here, close at hand, all the while!"

A faint colour warmed the face that had lost much of its brownness, the dawn of a smile broke in the earnest eyes he had last seen raised to his in the moonlight in the shadowy road beneath the oleanders—a hint of a smile which failed to reach her lips.

"I thought you had forgotten," Brenda said.

He remembered that for a time he had forgotten. It seemed incredible now, with the small warm hand in his, and the sense of comradeship which the nearness of her, the friendly light in her eyes, conveyed, that ever it had been a matter of indifference to him whether he saw her again. There was not a shadow of doubt as to his pleasure at the moment.

She drew her hand away.

"The management may be watching me," she said.

"Oh bother! There is always some one watching you," he returned. "No matter! We will have our talk out where no one can watch us save the stars. It's jolly that you're here... I'm not going to lose sight of you again."

He arranged to meet her that evening and parted from her feeling extraordinarily dated. He looked back when he had paid his score and was passing out to smile across the room at her. Then he pushed the swing door and emerged upon the pavement to discover his late companions, rather silent and faintly displeased, waiting by the kerb for him.

"Well, we can never go in there again!" Rosie said, in tones charged with inner meaning.

It was so obvious that she wanted him to inquire the reason for this taboo that he did not ask it; instead he remarked cheerfully:

"That's the biggest surprise I've had—and about the pleasantest. I never expected to run across Miss Upton like that."

"We didn't imagine you knew her," May said. "When she served us I saw who it was, but of course one couldn't speak

to her. She ought not to stay in Cape Town."

"Why not?" he asked.

"Oh! there's nothing exactly against her—except of course, the connexion. Her father embezzled money and went to prison. He was in dad's firm. We knew her quite well at one time. But it was an awful disgrace; one couldn't go on knowing them. You must acknowledge it is impossible for us. Mother wouldn't like us to talk to her."

"No," he said; "I don't suppose she would."

"You didn't know about her father, of course," Rosie said.

"Oh! yes, I did. She told me herself—not the details, but the bald facts."

"Really! I'm surprised at that. A man doesn't need to be so particular, perhaps; but it wouldn't do for us to be seen talking to her."

"My friendship dates since her misfortunes," he explained. "I can't believe that I could have respected her more had I known her in her prosperous days. The fact that her father was imprisoned, apart from my sympathy with her on that account, doesn't affect me. I can't stay now, or I could talk to you for an hour on the immorality of injustice. I'll come out to your place some day, and we'll take it for a subject for debate."

"The things you say!" Rosie exclaimed, divided between resentment and an earnest desire to prevent a breach.

They parted on less cordial terms than usual, feeling it necessary to maintain their displeasure. As May observed, Mr Matheson should be made aware that he must not obtrude his common acquaintances upon them.

"As long as he keeps his shop-girls in the background I suppose it's all right," she said.

"Men are funny animals," was Rosie's comment.

Matheson, with his thoughts revolving round his discovery and the Aplin girls' revelations, went to Macfarlane for information. Macfarlane, having spent ten years in Cape Town, was fairly well qualified to give it. The most interesting events in the histories of many of the inhabitants were known to him, and the Upton affair was barely five years old.

He had forgotten the details of the case, he said. So far as he could remember it was just a sordid tale of common embezzlement. The man was weak—one of those people with a moral kink. There was no apparent reason why he should appropriate the firm's money; he had a decent salary, and a decent wife who certainly never led him into extravagance. When he came out of prison he went under altogether, and the home was broken up. He had no idea what had become of the family. There was only one girl, and the boys were old enough now to be doing for themselves.

"I can tell you where Miss Upton is," Matheson said, "because I happened to know her."

He explained how and where he had met her that morning. Macfarlane was interested.

"It's a come down," he said, "and a beastly shame. That's the worst of it when these sort of things happen, the family goes under with the man."

"I don't fancy there is much fear of Miss Upton going under," Matheson returned, and became so earnest and eager in his championship as to provoke Macfarlane's curiosity.

"She is so plucky and clever... one of the bravest and honestest little souls!"

"Well," observed Macfarlane drily, "I haven't seen her since she was an ugly little flapper with a predilection for snubbing people, and a partiality for animals. You'll lose the chance of a marriage of convenience, my boy, if you let Rosie see you trotting her about."

Matheson laughed.

"She and May were with me this morning, and both were rather scandalised at my friendship with a girl in a café," he said.

"That's finished anyhow," Macfarlane asserted grimly. "You'll never be asked to stretch your legs under the old man's mahogany again, and you won't swagger back from tennis any more with Rosie's favours in your coat Considering your ambitions, which you confided to me recently, I think you are playing the fool with your prospects."

"I've got to get there on my own," Matheson answered. "I've no prejudice against my wife lending me a helping hand, but I don't want to depend on her entirely for a leg up."

"Just so!" Macfarlane observed. "At the same time it is as well not to give her a chance of holding you back."

Which piece of advice served only as an irritant. The disparagement of one's friends, or of one's opinions, forces the sincere believer in either into a sturdy opposition.

It was a matter of extreme gratification to Matheson that he had found Brenda Upton again. Her family history concerned him very little. She was such a good comrade. He had not realised until he rediscovered her how much he stood in need of the friendship she could give him. Friendship with a woman who is sympathetic, and young enough

to be attractive as well as companionable, fills the blanks in a man's life.

He was not in love with Brenda; he realised that perfectly; but he was fond of her. If he retained from his intercourse with her none of the glowing memories he recalled in connexion with Honor, her society afforded him a quiet pleasure that was restful and satisfying. She suggested home to a man who knew no home, and peace to a restless spirit, like the calm of inland waters following a voyage in tempestuous seas. Honor had been a dream, a beautiful inspiration. This other girl possessed a charm of an altogether different quality. Already she was becoming for him a symbol of familiar and essential things.

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## Chapter Twenty Three.

Matheson dressed early for his meeting with Brenda, dressed with unusual care. A strange excitement held him. The renewal of this friendship meant more to him than its beginning had signified. He was proceeding towards his object with eyes open, proceeding deliberately with, he was aware, one ultimate end in view. His mind, despite its excitement, was quite steady of purpose. The complexities of life were resolving surely into a quite simple exposition of the human requirement. He had reached the stage when a man knows what it is he wants and is bent upon its attainment.

He met Brenda at the tramway. She wore a dark, rather shabby, coat and skirt, and she was manifestly shy. They climbed to the top of the tram, and for the first half-mile of the journey neither of them found much to say. The tram was fairly full, and the proximity of strangers made talking difficult for people who had nothing of a conventional nature to say to one another.

When they got down at the terminus he tucked her hand within his arm and started to walk quickly, drawing a long breath of relief when they left the tram lines and the remaining passengers behind and faced the sea.

"Time rolls back," he said. "This is just like it was in the summer."

"Yes," she agreed; "only the satisfying warmth of summer has gone."

There was something pathetic in her way of saying this; it was as though she lamented not only the summer's geniality, but the satisfying warmth of their comradeship. He gripped her hand tightly, and looked down into the serious face.

"What have you been doing since I left you here—so jealously guarded? I thought I had lost you altogether. I wrote, but my letter came back to me."

"Did you write?" Her eyes met his with a light of gladness in them. "I thought—that was only talk."

"Did you?" His manner was faintly reproachful. "I had no idea you would leave Mrs Graham so soon, or I'd have written before."

Brenda suddenly smiled.

"Neither had I," she said. "It was not exactly voluntary."

"You don't mean," he began quickly, and stopped, regarding her perplexedly. "I've wondered," he added somewhat lamely after a pause, "since getting my letter back, whether you had any trouble that night? It wasn't, I hope, in any way due to our intercourse that you lost your post?"

She laughed, and he thought her mirth the sweetest and most infectious he had ever heard. He laughed with her.

"Oh Lord!" he said. "Don't tell me it was that."

"Mrs Graham waited up for me," she confessed, "and the others got back first and admitted I hadn't gone with them. She was—oh! so angry... There was a man who boarded there who was sorry for me; and he secured me my present position at the café. It helped at the time, but of course it's a step down."

"It's a drop, yes," he admitted. "I'm awfully sorry. You must climb again. Life is always; climbing."

"It is easier to drop a step than to climb one," she returned.

"That isn't your philosophy really," he insisted. "I know you have encouraged me in believing that the greater the difficulty the more exhilarating and better worth the effort is its surmounting. It's up to you to practise what you preach."

"Ah!" she said, and her voice sounded a little weary. "I must have been a horrid little prig when I talked to you like that."

"You were never priggish," he asserted. "But you keep a man up to the mark."

They walked on for a while in silence, and still in silence made their way down to the shore, scrambling with difficulty over the slippery rocks. When they came upon a stretch of sand he called a halt. They seated themselves close together on the sand, and he took his coat and put it about both their shoulders.

"The nights turn in chilly," he said. "Do you remember how hot it was when we sat here before?"

“Yes,” she replied, and drew closer to him. “Everything seems changed,” she said,—“even you—you, perhaps, most of all.”

“I know I am changed,” he allowed. “I’ve been through a good deal since I saw you...”

He could not, he discovered, tell her then the nature of the thing which had changed him. He had meant to, but when he tried to express himself he could not find the words.

“I’ve been through a good deal,” he repeated. He played with the cold damp sand, and his manner became more aloof, less intimate and confidential. “Life changes most of us.”

“Because life hurts,” she said.

He looked at her closely, recalling the bright girlishness of her when last they had talked together.

“You are depressed,” he said. “I am inclined to believe that becoming a Puritan doesn’t agree with you.”

She laughed a little tonelessly, and expressed the wish that she had been born a man.

“A man in my position wouldn’t be serving in a café,” she explained. “If I had a profession I would work at it, and not grumble.”

And then he made a clumsy remark which immediately on its utterance he would have recalled, had that been possible.

“You will have a home of your own some day. That’s a woman’s rightful profession.”

He felt her withdraw from him, and in the dragging silence that followed he realised his mistake. How could he tell what jangling chord his clumsy touch had set vibrating? Misfortune had played so busy a part in her life that love had had little chance.

“Where are you staying?” he asked presently—“with whom?”

“My mother came back to Cape Town to be with me,” she said. “We board in a little house not far from the Gardens.”

“Do you think I might come to see you there?” he asked.

“Of course. Mother would like to meet you. She knows all about you.”

She hesitated, and then said with some embarrassment:

“Before you call I ought perhaps to tell you more about ourselves...”

“That isn’t necessary,” he answered quickly. “I know as much as suffices. Nothing could alter my regard for yourself anyway. I hope you believe that?”

“You are very generous,” she answered, in so low and grateful a voice that he felt he wanted to comfort her in some more practical way than by mere words. Instead he said quietly:

“I think you are a brave, dear little soul. Your friendship is an immense help to me. It’s the best thing that has happened to me. I’ve been back in Cape Town three months now, and I’ve come out here alone and thought about our jolly walks and missed you more than I can say. It was good to find you unexpectedly like that to-day.”

Brenda glanced at him swiftly.

“You came into the café last week,” she said, “and stood close to me. I could have touched you.”

“Really?” he exclaimed in amaze. “Why in the name of mystery didn’t you speak to me?”

“I wasn’t sure you would be pleased. I thought—perhaps you didn’t wish to see me.”

“Oh Lord!” he cried, and laughed. “You—Puritan, you! As though I could be anything but pleased to see you anywhere. I don’t know how I came not to see you... But I’m eyes right generally with all those girls around. If you hadn’t returned my change—”

“Your tip,” she corrected.

“My tip, then.” He laughed again light-heartedly.—“I doubt I’d have noticed you at all. What made you do it?”

“I don’t know. It was quite a handsome tip for a café. But I could not take it—from you.”

She did not add that besides her reluctance to take his tip, she had desired to make him recognise her—had wanted to prove to her own satisfaction whether his former omission was intentional or merely the accident he now assured her it had been. She had believed it to be accidental, but at the back of her mind there had lingered a doubt; and the doubt hurt.

“I don’t want you to take tips from any one,” he said. “Promise me... I don’t like the thought of your being offered tips. I don’t like to think of your serving people. It’s ridiculous, perhaps, but I would rather you were still in attendance on that immoral old woman. She was an immoral old woman. I’d like to tell her how her conduct strikes an outsider.”

"I prefer the café," Brenda said. "At least, there's a mental freedom. Often I am tired, and frequently I am annoyed; but there's a sort of liberty… After all, liberty is the best thing in life. And it's good to get home at night-time," she added on a softened note.

Home consisted of one room, but in that room her mother waited for her, and that meant everything.

"On the whole," he said lightly, "you're a lucky person. I get off at night, but I can't get home. There's the ocean between me and all the home I ever knew."

He described his home to her briefly, and his parentless childhood.

"One day I hope to make a home of my own," he finished reflectively, and after a brief pause proceeded to unburden himself of his ambitions to her in much the same words as he had confided them to Macfarlane. Then, drawing on his imagination, he enlarged and elaborated his schemes, almost forgetting his audience in the pleasure of thinking out and developing his views of life, evolved in the first instance from Nel's opinions.

She listened in an attentive silence, which she did not break when he ceased talking. For the life of her she could find nothing to say. It sounded so coldblooded this deliberate purpose of marriage for certain ends, with a definite idea of colonisation, and no thought, it seemed to her, of love or the needs of the girl he would single out for his purpose. She felt the keen breath of disappointment chilling her liking for him.

"You don't say anything," he observed, slightly aggrieved. "I don't believe you are the least interested. You don't enter into the spirit of Empire building."

She was looking away, seaward, and the moonlight, falling upon her face, lent it a strange pallor, and revealed the soft roundness of its outline and the shadowed mystery of her eyes. Quietly, and very deliberately she turned her face towards him, and he noticed when she moved the quick, nervous beat of a tiny pulse in the bare white throat, and the faint, half-wistful smile that curved the parted lips.

"Oh, Empire building!" she said indifferently. "What of the human need? … Isn't that more important? You are overlooking that, and yet it's the most important thing of all. I don't think so much of the Empire. Of course I'm patriotic; but the human need comes first."

He did not answer immediately. He looked into her eyes, puzzled and disquieted, and reflected a while. The patriotism that Honor had stirred into active being was questioned and opposed by this other girl's quiet insistence on the claim of the individual. Was he in danger of developing into a bloodless idealist, with a limited understanding of the requirement both of the individual and of the State?

So many emotions had held him of late for a space, so many thoughts had filtered through his brain and left their conflicting impressions there, that a certain confusion held possession of his mind. All the old warm impulses were subdued and dulled, and he had nothing in the place of them that was as good as the emotions he repressed. He realised that now. Something—something enveloping, stultifying and bewildering the understanding—dropped away from his soul, as a leaf drops from the tree which no longer nourishes it. He saw clearly how surely, through disappointment, he was drifting towards a hard callousness that would end inevitably in all the kindly human sensibilities becoming submerged therein and ultimately lost. He did not want that to happen. And yet he felt that he had no power to stay this drifting. The warm, generous youth of him was running back, as the sap runs back in the bark; and he was no more able to prevent this than the tree to stay the processes of nature. He had believed that he had discovered the purpose of life: now he was beginning to realise that he had discovered nothing, only lost something of worth, which he might never recover.

"It's odd," he remarked, "how you set me thinking. I never met any one who challenged thought as you do. I believed I was on the right tack, and you immediately point out that I've got my values wrong. It's like having one's sums crossed out on the slate when one fancied the answers were correct. There's a baffling sort of feeling about it. And you're right, that's the worst of it."

"It's only your values that are wrong," she said quietly. "If you readjust those, then the idea is fine enough."

In confiding his plans to her he had intended to prepare her for the proposal of marriage he had in contemplation, and to accustom her to the idea of marriage with a man who could never be a lover. He did not know whether she divined his purpose, but he apprehended very clearly that she would not be satisfied with that.

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## Chapter Twenty Four.

Matheson made Mrs Upton's acquaintance on the following Sunday. He called at the boarding house and had tea in the shabby general sitting-room, and allowed himself to be drawn out by Brenda's mother, who was plainly bent on learning all she could concerning him before and since his intimacy with her daughter.

He succeeded on the whole in impressing her favourably, despite a natural prejudice she entertained against the unconventional manner in which the acquaintance had begun, and a further disapproval of the nightly excursions which Brenda made under his escort, a custom which allied itself with her present occupation but was not the custom of her class. Without a home, a girl was so handicapped. She felt their social downfall more bitterly on her daughter's account than ever she had felt it on her own.

She resembled her daughter in appearance, and also in manner. Before life had bruised her she had possibly been a very entertaining woman. She possessed still a certain charm, and had an alert way of expressing herself which appealed to the listener. Matheson was conscious primarily of an immense relief. He had rather dreaded this meeting

with Brenda’s mother. Why he should have expected anything so wildly improbable he could not tell, but he had anticipated a replica of Mrs Aplin. But this little quiet-eyed woman was altogether different; and her bright way of saying the unexpected thing pleased him. If her life had known unusual distress, she had not permitted herself to go down under them, but kept a brave front to the world, hiding even from her daughter the humiliation she experienced in coming back to the place where she and her misfortunes were so well known.

Brenda poured out the tea and left the talking principally to the others. She was almost nervously anxious that this man whom she already liked so well should win her mother’s approval. Mrs Upton had expressed doubts as to the desirability of this casual friendship. Matheson’s request for permission to call had done much towards mislaying these misgivings; but the ultimate decision, Brenda felt, rested with himself. She wanted him to shine, to say brilliant things; and all the while he was behaving in a perfectly correct and commonplace manner. She had not believed he could be so dull. It exasperated her. And when he rose to go he did not suggest, as she hoped he would, that they should go for a walk. Possibly, she reflected resentfully, he had other calls to make and did not want her company. It never occurred to her that he was regulating his conduct with a view to its effect upon her mother. It surprised her when he was gone to hear her mother praise in him the characteristics which she deplored.

“But he wasn’t at his best,” she protested. “I never knew him to be so dull.”

“He is a very interesting man,” Mrs Upton declared. “It was you who were a little dull. You scarcely spoke to him.” She laughed suddenly. “Perhaps he is one of those men who like an audience; otherwise I don’t see what he gets out of it, if you are not more eloquent alone with him than you were to-day.”

“Yes, he needs an audience. He always does most of the talking,” Brenda said.

After that Sunday it became a weekly custom for Matheson to call in the afternoon. Generally he took Brenda out somewhere, and when he brought her back he stayed for a chat with her mother, and occasionally had tea with them. He took them to the theatre, and to any entertainment he thought might give them pleasure. And once, despite a natural shrinking on Mrs Upton’s part to be seen in public, he persuaded them to dine with him at the Mount Nelson. That evening stuck in his memory. It was the first occasion on which he had seen Brenda in evening dress. She looked well, and was animated and almost brilliant. He felt proud to be seen with her.

Mrs Upton was considerably perplexed. It was quite manifest to her that Matheson was making up his mind to propose to her daughter, if indeed it was not already made up; but she could discover in his undoubted affection for Brenda nothing of the quality of passionate love. This disturbed her. Matheson’s quiet affection seemed to her a wholly inadequate return for the devotion of the girl’s whole heart. It was no secret from her mother that Brenda was very much in love. It was the girl’s first and only love affair, and it absorbed her entirely. Should anything interpose between her love and its fulfilment the result might easily lead to a lifelong disappointment.

Mrs Upton, realising this perfectly, could only stand by and watch the course of events shaping themselves to the making or the marring of her daughter’s happiness. There were times when she wished Matheson had not come into the girl’s life; though all the glamour and romance her life had known had come to her through him. She wished too that he had not been so sure of Brenda. The girl’s devotion shone in her look.

But Matheson, though he had no doubt of Brenda’s love, was not so confident of winning her as her mother believed. In all the weeks of their renewed friendship he had not uttered one word of love to her, had attempted none of those affectionate familiarities he had practised during the early days of their acquaintance. The kiss she had given him in the road at their first parting was the only kiss he had received from her. Something in the girl’s manner silenced him.—It may have been that the mere knowledge that she loved him, acted as a restraint; possibly too the lukewarm quality of his own desires caused him to hesitate ere taking the irrevocable step he contemplated. He was sure of the girl’s love, but he could not feel positive as to her answer. Nor was he satisfied that perfect happiness would result from an alliance based on such inequalities of affection. She had set this doubt working in his mind, and he was powerless to determine it, or to put it aside. The matter occasioned him endless thought and worry.

At times he felt like taking the plunge and leaving the doubts to resolve themselves; and then her quiet face, with the earnest eyes lit with love for him, gave him pause, and he decided to wait and allow the friendship to develop. Already it had grown deep enough to make him conscious of his need of her. The idea of letting her drop out of his life again was altogether unthinkable. She was necessary to him. He did not understand it, but he realised it perfectly. Out of the odd confection of human emotions that swayed him, his dependence on Brenda, even the inconsistent urgency of his requirement of her love, stood out and dominated the rest. He wanted her; he had no longer any doubt about that.

And yet when he was alone, and at night-time, it was seldom of Brenda he thought Even when he was with her the memory of Honor thrust between them, a beautiful, intangible obstruction keeping them apart.

The time came when he felt the necessity to talk to her about Honor. He did not stop to consider whether it was wise to do so; something impelled him to speak of this matter which alone formed a bar to their complete understanding. He could not, he found, ask Brenda to marry him without confiding to her something of that part of his life the influences of which intervened between them.

It was on a Sunday afternoon that Matheson chose to unburden himself. He took Brenda to see the Rhodes’ Memorial —the fine unfinished work of Watts, emblematic of Rhodes’ unfinished work—for that matter, emblematic of the unfinished work of any human span.

It was a day of brilliant sunshine and cool winds, such as one gets during the Cape winter, and which one can only compare with spring weather in England, or an early autumn day before the leaves fall. They went out by tram, and walked through the wonderful grounds of Groot Schuur, that magnificent home of a wealthy, ambitious, brilliant man, who dreamed of Empire expansion, and who realised a part, though never the entire dream.

Silent and a little weary, they followed the broad gravelled drive to the temple where the eight bronze lions guard the steps which lead up to the lonely enshrined bust of a strong man who, for all his greatness, despite wealth and success and numberless friends, stands out a lonely figure in the history of his time.

They walked up the broad stone steps and stood before the fine thoughtful face, lifelike in its quiet abstraction, gazing towards the north, as Watts' equestrian statue of Energy gazes, through eternal sunlit spaces, across rich plains of unsurpassed beauty, towards the mountains and the remote distances of that hinterland which lies beyond them, and in which Rhodes' hopes and thoughts were centred.

It was the first time that Matheson had visited the place. Its influence upon him in the quiet grandeur, the spirit-invaded atmosphere of this spot where Rhodes in his lifetime spent so many thoughtful hours, where even now in bronze he mounted guard over this chosen place, was tremendous. It did not surprise him, on looking towards her after a pregnant silence, to see the tears standing in Brenda's eyes. There was a greatness in the quality and the inspiration of this monument to greatness which touched the secret springs of emotion and stirred the imagination.

"Let us go and sit on the seat below there, under the trees, where he used to sit," he said.

And without further speech they descended the steps and walked quietly to the plain wooden bench where Rhodes in his lifetime sat often and dreamed his big dreams, looking away through the golden haze over the limitless scene.

"He was wonderful," Brenda said... "His is the greatest name in South African history."

Matheson, looking towards the distant mountains, nodded acquiescence.

"He died too soon," he said. "That's the worst of it... Had he lived long enough he would have linked up the south with the north. He won more territory for the Empire without bloodshed than any other man."

"And then came the Boer war..."

Quickly he brought his face round and looked at her.

"Well, yes," he said. "But I don't suppose he could help that."

"When I stand in front of his bust up there, and gaze away over this scene, and realise the greatness of him and the vastness of his ambition, I incline to believe that he could," she said.

"Yes!"

Her words obviously impressed him. Involuntarily his mind travelled bade to Benfontein, to the impressions obtained from that visit, and the memory of the bitterness of racial hate he had discovered among the Dutch whom he had met.

"He cherished so many schemes—too many for one man to carry out Perhaps you are right, and he neglected the finest and wisest scheme of all, that of welding together the two white races in the Colony by the closest ties of friendship and trust. One can't determine these things now."

"He was an Empire builder," she returned, and looked at him with a smile in her eyes. "The Empire builder inclines to overlook the great human essentials. The field of his operations is necessarily impersonal."

For a moment or so he looked back at her steadily. She was wise, this slender slip of a girl. He already entertained a profound respect for her opinion; and it occurred to him while he gazed at her, that she would be ready also of understanding, that he had less to fear in giving her his entire confidence than in holding a part, the vitally important part, back.

And then abruptly he began to talk to her about Honor.

"I think I ought to tell you," he said in a slightly constrained voice, and without looking at her, "that while I was away, before I came back here, something happened to me, something of tremendous importance. I met—some one—a girl... You understand... She meant a lot to me. I fell in love. She was Dutch. She hated the British... she couldn't forget. That stood between us—her resentment struck deeper than anything else."

He paused, and leaned forward slightly, peering into the distance.

"That's all," he added jerkily. "I felt I would like to tell you."

She was silent for a space, watching him, seeing the strained look in the eyes staring straight ahead of him, the set lines of his mouth. One strong hand was clenched on the bench beside him; the prominent knuckles showed white. She put out her hand and covered his.

"Poor dear!" she said, and repeated softly after a moment: "Poor dear! ... That explains it."

"Explains what?" he asked dully.

"Explains everything I haven't understood in you of late... Why didn't you tell me sooner?"

"I don't know," he answered. "I wasn't sure, I suppose, that I ought to tell you... I'm not sure now that I've done well."

"Oh! yes," she returned quickly. "I'm glad you trusted me... I'm sorry. I hate to see you hurt."

“One gets over that—in time,” he said. “I’m not going to let it swamp me.”

And then abruptly he drew his hand from under hers and stood up.

“They provide tea in the cottage up there,” he said. “Come along and have some.”

He drew her up from the bench, and gripped her hand hard when she stood beside him, forcing a smile to his lips.

“This spot stirs the emotions,” he said. “I shall always think of it as the Place of Memories...”

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## Chapter Twenty Five.

It is a sad moment in a woman’s life when she realises that she does not possess the heart of the man she loves. If one may use a sordid simile in this connexion, her position resembles that of the owner of a beautiful home in possession of which the bailiff has been placed through the indiscretion of another. In this instance Honor was in possession with full power to hold, and without personal interest in the value of what she held, and what she would never claim for her own. But her right robbed the other of all the joy of ownership. An empty jewel casket has little intrinsic value, and stands only as a reminder of the precious thing it was intended to contain.

It was impossible for Brenda to hide altogether from Matheson the difference which his confidence had made to her. She endeavoured to maintain their former relations of pleasant and intimate comradeship, but he detected behind the assumed brightness of her manner the increasing restraint, the shy reserve, beneath which she sought to cloak her feelings, and the pain of her disappointment. He realised with considerable dismay that his matrimonial plans were in danger of further defeat. The fear of defeat goaded him and gave a keener edge to his desire. He could not, he found on making the attempt, reconcile himself to the thought of losing her. For one entire, unforgettable week he refrained from going near her. He had no means of discovering whether she missed him, but he missed her almost intolerably. In the end he threw over his resolves and went in search of her.

Again it was on a Sunday that he sought her after his brief avoidance. On the previous afternoon he had been at the Aplins. Something he heard there stripped his last scruple from him and determined him to see Brenda on the morrow. Mrs Aplin had pressed him to stay to dinner, and he had stayed; he did not know why; he had not wished to, and he had demurred on account of being in flannels. They waived the matter of dressing. No one would dress, Mrs Aplin announced; the girls would merely change their blouses.

The change had been somewhat elaborate, and only stopped short of being full evening dress. Instead of rousing his admiration, as had been intended, it kept alive a consciousness of his own negligent attire, which did not add to his enjoyment. He had never felt so unutterably bored with the inconsequent chatter of Rosie, nor more annoyed with May’s noisy performance on the piano. She sang popular songs with choruses in which every one joined; and when this form of amusement wearied they all repaired to the billiard-room, just to knock about the balls, Mrs Aplin said, beaming, thoroughly satisfied, having started the young people playing games, that they were having a good time.

Before he left she contrived with an openness that was not diplomatic to get a few words alone with him. Her insistence on a little private talk robbed her confidences of the air of being casual which she had intended to give them, and prepared him against surprises.

“The girls monopolise you,” she said pleasantly. “I never seem to get the opportunity for a talk.”

He wondered what was coming and felt apprehensive; but his wildest conjectures could not anticipate what she had it in mind to say. She started on irrelevant topics, wandered rather aimlessly from one subject to another, and finally came to her point.

“I am so pleased you came to-day,” she said. “We began to feel neglected. The girls tell me they see you sometimes in town; and of course at the theatre last week... I don’t think you saw us though. You were with the Uptons.”

“I saw you,” he answered, and felt himself flushing awkwardly. “But I wasn’t sure... I thought perhaps... You see, Miss Aplin told me there was a little difficulty...” He looked at her squarely and shifted his ground. “It was a jolly fine play, wasn’t it? And the acting was quite good.”

“I thought it a little sensational,” she replied, and disposed of that, smiling at him with almost maternal solicitude as she added: “It was thoughtful of you to consider my prejudices. Having girls, you see, I have to be very careful. But I am sorry for Brenda Upton. She is thrown with undesirable associates, and has been talked about in connexion with men. Her mother is always striving to get her married. That sort of thing is very bad for a girl; and with their history they ought to be *so* careful. She is naturally anxious to marry for the sake of a home; and I hope she will succeed in finding some honest man in her own sphere who will overlook what is undesirable in her past. She is not after all responsible for her father’s failings.”

“I should think not,” he answered, with a curtness he was unable to prevent. He felt almost uncontrollably angry. He apprehended quite clearly that Mrs Aplin was desirous of warning him against a mésalliance, and he considered it not only an unwarranted impertinence, but a mischievous and scurrilous aspersion of Brenda’s reputation. “I doubt whether any man of average common sense would think twice about that,” he said.

“You know her quite intimately, I suppose?” she ventured.

“Yes,” he answered, and added with a certain dry malice: “I imagine I am the only man in connexion with whom she has ever been talked about.”

“Really, Mr Matheson!” Her tone was as shocked as her look. He laughed savagely.

“Oh! it’s an entirely innocuous scandal. To be honoured with Miss Upton’s friendship is a guarantee of discretion. Believe me, you have been doing her a grave injustice.”

“I don’t wish to be unjust.” Mrs Aplin surveyed him with displeased, protesting eyes. “And I am sure if I had known you were such *great* friends I wouldn’t have spoken. But I know so *much* more of them than you can possibly know.”

“I know only good of her,” he returned quietly, and was immeasurably relieved that May should choose that moment for breaking in upon their talk, which he felt was getting altogether beyond his patience.

“You look,” she said, assuming a graceful pose by the head of the sofa upon which she leaned, “abnormally serious. I believe mother has been fault finding. Come and sit over here, and I’ll comfort you.”

He laughed, and answered her jestingly; but he did not avail himself of the invitation. That was the general idea in that house, that a man must be comfortably placed, and submit to being petted. Possibly some men liked petting, but that sort of thing was not in his line.

“It’s getting late,” he said, with an attentive eye on the clock, the big hand of which seemed to drag with such exasperating slowness. He felt grateful for the first time in their acquaintance to Mrs Aplin for silencing her daughter’s protests against his leaving so soon.

“Whatever did you say to him to make him so huffy?” Rosie asked when he had gone. “I always knew he had a horrid temper.”

“I warned him against that Upton girl. Those people are shameless in their pursuit of him. But he wouldn’t hear a word. If he spends all his spare time with the girls in the cafés, I don’t think it advisable to ask him out here any more.”

“It will be a triumph for her if she succeeds in marrying him,” May opined.

“Oh! he won’t marry her. Men don’t marry those sort of girls.”

As an outcome of that unfortunate talk Matheson went the following afternoon in search of Brenda. It was a cold dark day. A south-east gale was blowing, and the town was enveloped in a sticky dust that clung to the clothes and hair. Grit and small pebbles were carried by the force of the wind and stung the unprotected faces of the few pedestrians who ventured abroad in the teeth of the gale. The clouds hung dense and low upon the mountain, pouring over the rocky sides with the effect of cascades of foam tumbling over a precipice. Matheson, with his head down, buffetted against the gale, and arrived damp and rather breathless at his destination. He was early. He had timed his arrival in the hope of getting Brenda to himself. He asked for Brenda on being admitted. She came to him almost immediately, and it was manifest from her manner that his visit was unexpected.

She shook hands, looked out at the lowering sky and the waving branches of the trees, and smiled.

“You are brave to venture out in this,” she said.

“I’ve been lonely for a week,” he replied, as though that explained everything, as perhaps it did; “an earthquake couldn’t have kept me away to-day.”

The wind rattled the window, and flung a shower of tiny stones against the glass.

“God! how it blows!” he cried. He drew her to the sofa, and seated himself beside her.

“I’m not in the way, am I? You weren’t lying down?”

“No.” She laughed brightly. “I don’t do those nice reposeful things even on a Sunday afternoon. Mother is resting though, and I imagine every one else in the house. There is nothing much to do with a black south-easter blowing.”

“We won’t disturb them,” he said, and smiled at her. “I am needing at the moment only you. You don’t mind if I stay?”

She looked surprised at this question, and answered in the negative.

“You’ve made me dependent on you somehow,” he explained. “I’ve never felt so intolerably lonely as during this past week. You ought not to teach me to rely on you and then send me into banishment. It isn’t kind.”

“But,” she protested quickly, a soft amazement in her voice, “I never suggested that I didn’t wish to see you.”

“I know,” he said, “but...”

He paused, and regarded her fixedly. Their eyes met for a moment; then she turned her gaze from his deliberately and looked out through the window, an expression of distressed embarrassment sweeping over her face. He stretched an arm along the back of the sofa behind her and leaned slightly towards her.

“That isn’t enough,” he said—“not as things stand. You see, I can’t always have your comradeship that way. The time will come—it’s approaching now—when my work will take me away from here. What’s the good of friendship then? When I go, I’ll miss you—as I have missed you this week. I can’t face it. I’ve grown to want you. I want to keep you with me. There’s only one way to do that, and I’m not sure you’ll agree to it. Had I been sure I’d have said all this weeks ago. But you... you haven’t let me somehow. You’ve held me off. And since that day at the Monument I’ve

been conscious of—a sort of estrangement. You made me feel that I haven't enough to offer—"

"No," she interrupted sharply. "Surely not that?"

The tears rose in her eyes: slowly they overflowed and rolled down her cheeks. She made no effort to stay them. She sat still with her face averted and wept silently.

"I'm a clumsy fool," he said; "I hurt you without intending it. And you're so sweet and kind... Dear, if you will marry me I will do everything a man can do to make you happy."

Never one word of love! ... Not one word of love had he ever let fall in all their talks together. She dropped her quivering face suddenly between her hands to hide its sorrow from him.

"All that I have to give is yours," she whispered—"everything... If all my love can help you just a little I will be glad. I've loved you—from that first morning when you spoke to me on the beach."

He put his arms about her and drew her close and held her, still weeping, with her face hidden upon his shoulder—giving all of herself to him, taking the little that he offered, because she was a woman in love who must have denied the crumbs of his affection.

"I couldn't bear to lose you," she sobbed... "I couldn't bear it. I've thought I couldn't marry you even if you wished it, but—I can't—give you up."

Without answering her, he kissed her, if not with passion, with a great tenderness and an almost reverential gratitude; and in his heart he resolved that he would make good to her in every way in which it was humanly possible for the one thing which he could not give her—that which was given already, and which no one can give twice—the pure flame of a first passion. The love which he had for her was the steady glow which succeeds the fierce upward flash of the white flame that leaps from the heart and leaves behind only memories.

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## Chapter Twenty Six.

It seemed to Matheson that with his engagement events multiplied with such amazing rapidity that the deep significance of the step he had taken was lost sight of; its importance was swamped in the whirlpool of calamitous happenings that marked the year of 1914 in bloody letters upon the calendar of the world.

It was in July that he became engaged, and within a week of his proposal the world war had made its puling start with the faked dispute over an assassinated archduke. The insignificant start swelled to compelling significance; and the world awaited with suspended breath each new development of the most appalling disaster in the history of the nations. From the first Matheson had no doubt that Great Britain would be forced into the struggle. There was no choice about it; it was a question of national safety as well as of honour. He began to consider the subject in connexion with himself. Plainly if the country went to war it was his duty to see the matter through. Quite apart from inclination the man of military age and fitness was called upon to serve.

He talked to Macfarlane about it. Macfarlane was cautious and reserved his opinion.

"You've got a girl now," he said. "You've got to consider her."

"But that's all the greater reason why a man should stand by his country," Matheson insisted.

"Better talk it over with her first. And, look here!" Macfarlane became more alert. "This trouble, if it involves England, is going to reach out here. Have you forgotten your talk about a Boer rebellion? I thought you were rotting at the time—but you weren't. You are something of a prophet, you know, Matheson. If England is full up with her own affairs, that's just the time the Boers will seize for getting hold of this country. It's all cut and dried, you can depend on that. Should there be trouble out here," Macfarlane added in a hard decisive voice, "I am for helping to quell that anyway. If your talk of colonisation is worth anything, you will do the same."

Matheson made no immediate answer. Macfarlane's speech somehow visualised for him the whitewashed walls of Benfontein, and Honor's face showing wanly in the moonlight while the low-pitched voice breathed its earnest question: "I wonder if you will ever see into the heart of the veld?"

"I can't tell what I'll do," he answered after a long silence, and got up and went away with rather surprising suddenness.

July ended and August came in on the pathetic note of Belgium's appeal against the savage bestiality of this new-born oppression which overran her territory, an appeal to which there could be but one answer. The hour for Great Britain's intervention struck with that piteous cry for help.

To Matheson, after the first shock of amaze wore off, it did not appear so much a question of a European crisis as of the deepening of that sinister shadow which stretched its forbidding length across this land. Dark though the cloud of war loomed in Europe, this lesser cloud, which lay like a black stain upon the sunlit peacefulness, was even more tragic in the bitter personal nature of its animus. If no human agency could disperse this cloud, brother would be against brother, friend against friend.

Matheson did not believe that anything would avert the disaster. Quite clearly he saw it coming. Every word in Holman's letter was indelibly fixed in his memory—the letter which Honor had read to him, and which breathed through every line the insidious cunning of the spy who is paid to organise rebellion. It was coming surely, and it

would come soon.

The first intimation of active trouble revealed itself in the impudent invasion of the Union by a German force from South-West Africa, an act of war that could have originated only in a confident assurance of a prompt and general rising of the Boers.

Matheson applied to his firm for leave to volunteer, and received immediate permission. He was in a state of considerable indecision. His interest in the country inclined him to stay to defend it. Had it been a matter simply of fighting the Germans there would have been no hesitation in respect of choice; but he felt an increasing reluctance to take the field against Honor’s people. They were wrong, they were wholly mistaken; but at bottom, the motives which actuated the majority of them were pure in conception. If later in the heat of conflict, and with a free rein given to hatred, some among them lowered their ideals and committed base acts, these were in the minority. He knew what they would fight for—Liberty. Man has sought after and fought for his ideal of liberty since the beginning of time.

One result of the war was to precipitate his marriage. Whether he went to Europe, or whether he remained in the Colony and joined the Union forces, now commanded by the Premier since General Beyers’ resignation of troops he knew he could never take over with him in his treacherous alliance with the Germans, the question of Brenda’s future could not remain unsettled.

He took her for a walk and discussed the matter with her.

“I can’t, you see,” he said, “go away and leave you at the café. I want to provide for you. It will be an inadequate provision, but it will be an improvement on the café. I can’t leave you there. I don’t like your being there. I’ve never liked it. It’s rather inconsiderate to hurry you like this... Do you mind?”

“No. I can be ready as soon as you wish. But if you go to Europe I’ll go too. I could put my hand to something to help. At least,” she said, smiling, “I could undertake canteen work. I’m qualified for that. You wouldn’t object to my doing that—for the war?”

“No. I suppose I never imagined you would be satisfied to sit still and look on.”

He felt for her hand and held it, and they walked on together in the dusky starlight, rather silent and preoccupied, thinking of many things.

“This settles any chance of honeymooning,” he said presently. “We’ll have to have that later. It’s rough on you all round.”

She drew closer to him.

“I’m not minding that. Those things don’t seem to matter any more. If only you come through!”

He squeezed her hand hard, and they were silent again. The possibility of losing him had wrought a considerable change in Brenda’s view of things. Her own phrase perhaps best expressed this alteration:

“Those things don’t seem to matter any more.” The sting of bitterness had gone out of her sorrow. Those minor distresses, the jealousy of another’s claim, and the knowledge that she did not possess his entire heart, shrunk to inconsiderable dimensions in the face of this greater disaster—before the haunting spectre of possible death for him. The fear of losing him in a sudden and tragic manner made him very precious to her. There was no room in her mind for any but loving thoughts.

“What a lot of things have happened,” he said presently, “since you and I first mooned about this beach! I remember having a feeling in those days that you had come into my life to some purpose... come to stay. One knows somehow instinctively the people who are going to count.”

He stooped suddenly and kissed her lips.

“Salt kisses,” he said... “like the salt kisses I first took from you.” He held her chin in his hand and tilted her face upward slightly. “The spray has got into your dear eyes... There were no tears there on that other occasion.”

She smiled at him and attempted to wink the tears away.

“It’s only spray... don’t heed that. Go on talking... I want to hear you talk. These remembrances... I love to hear them.”

“Confidence for confidence,” he said teasingly. “Tell me something of your early impressions. Did you ever dream of me?—I’ve dreamed of you.”

“No.” She laughed happily. “I don’t dream. But I used to lean from my bedroom window and think and think and think.”

“What about?” he asked.

“You... You peopled my world from the outset. There were nights when I lost count of time, and leaned there and watched the dawn break.”

“That last night?” he asked.—“When we said good-bye under the oleanders?”

“That last night of course,” she answered. “I stayed at the window until the sun rose.”

“Dear little lonely watcher!” he said. “I wish I could have been with you... And you were in trouble too that night.”

“I hadn’t time to think of that. I was enjoying in retrospect my perfect hour. The troubles began next day.” She rubbed her cheek against his shoulder caressingly. “We won’t talk of that I refuse to remember unpleasant things.”

“Wise little woman! ... Stand here a moment. I want to listen with you to the wash of the waves between the rocks. How often have we stood here like this?” he said with his arm about her. “There is no other music—is there?—like the music of the sea.”

“With you beside me—no. When I listen to it in your absence it will be as sound divorced from the spirit of music.”

Bending over her, he asked quickly:

“You wouldn’t wish to keep me back?”

He thought of Macfarlane’s words: “You’ve got a girl now. You have to consider her.” He had not considered her in this matter at all. He had not even consulted her. He had taken her approval for granted.

“Of course I wouldn’t keep you back. Only I hate war. You can’t expect me to be glad.”

“There isn’t much in it to occasion any one gladness,” he replied. “It’s a bad business however one lodes at it.” The old reckless smile shone for a moment in his eyes. “Though, if it wasn’t for a certain young woman, I think I could find the prospect somewhat alluring. Man was born to kill his enemy.”

“It’s high time man had outgrown his primitive instincts,” she said, smiling with him.

“That he will never do,” he answered with conviction. “Love and hate, the primordial emotions, hang together—the antithesis of each other, irreconcilable yet inseparable. Humanity without love is inconceivable—and so is a world without hate. At best civilisation teaches us to control these elemental passions—and our control is about as effective in a crisis as the outer petals which conceal the canker in the heart of a flower. If you look close enough you see the stain of evil showing through.”

He discussed their immediate plans for a while, and referred to the growing difficulties of the South African situation. Her own brothers had joined the Union forces: he felt that it caused her surprise that he did not do the same. Her mother had taken it for granted that he would. He found it more difficult to deal with Mrs Upton; she required explanations. He was a little uncertain how she would receive the news of their immediate marriage. Although she liked him, and approved of the engagement, she had expressed the hope that they would do nothing hastily, but would learn to know one another more thoroughly before taking any decisive step.

He went back with Brenda that night to break the news to her, braced to meet opposition, and bent on overcoming it. But when he faced her and made his half-defiant announcement, he saw by the look in her eyes that there was no opposition to fear. She lifted a serious, unsurprised face to his, and said quietly:

“I’ve been expecting this... You want to marry before joining up?”

“Yes. It’s awfully jolly of you to take it like this.”

She smiled briefly.

“When it comes to war,” she said, “we stand aside and yield your sex first place. It’s your hour. You’ve a right to consideration. But for the war, I would rather you had waited—years.”

“You don’t mean that?” he said, and scrutinised her closely. “There is a little distrust at the back of your mind which I haven’t succeeded in allaying.”

She changed colour, showing signs of embarrassment, and turned away a little disconcerted at this outspoken attack.

“Do you suppose any mother ever thinks a man good enough for her girl?” she asked with a slightly nervous laugh.

“If that’s all...” he said, and waited.

She faced round again and held out both her hands to him in an impulsive appeal.

“You will be good to her?” she cried... “Oh! you will be good to her?”

“Surely,” he answered earnestly, “you know I will be?” and took her hands and kissed them.

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## Chapter Twenty Seven.

There was a task which, when he had little knowledge of the nearness and the overwhelming nature of the tragedy that had since befallen, Matheson had allocated to himself with every intention of going through with it; the task included fixing the guilt of incitement to rebellion on to Holman. He meant to bring Holman to account for his treachery.

Amid the hurried preparations for his wedding, which was to precede his enlistment for Home service, he had no thought of evading this task. It was inconvenient at the moment to give his time to outside matters; but the tracking down of this man—this German spy who for years had been fostering a spirit of hatred among the Boers to the end

that these people whom his country was deluding would, when the hour struck, serve his country to their own undoing—the confronting him with his treachery and the bringing of him to justice was a matter of vital importance to him. In his desire to punish Holman he was moved primarily by resentment, fierce, bitter resentment that was mainly concerned with Honor, with the pernicious effect of this mischievous doctrine upon Honor's warm responsive nature. It seemed to him that the punishment of Holman, the punishment of all those who had planned and assisted in this devil's work, was an act of bare retribution, incomplete and wholly inadequate though the utmost punishment meted out to the individual could be in consideration of the evil resulting from the insidious poison inculcated for many years into the receptive minds of a simple and credulous people—a people labouring under a sense of past injustice. It had been an easy task for a nation accomplished in crooked measures, this sowing and untiring cultivation of the seed of rebellion. For years this work had been going forward in the Colony unsuspected. Germans who had lived on seemingly friendly relations with their English neighbours for nearly a lifetime had been steadily pursuing this system of intrigue, and secretly sowing dissension among the peoples of the country. Now the trouble had come to a head and the persons most criminally responsible had for the greater part fled to Europe.

So far as Matheson knew, Holman might also have gone. He had no knowledge of his whereabouts. The most likely source from whence to glean any information concerning him was the man's own office in Johannesburg, though in all probability he would find the office deserted if he made the journey. There was, however, the clerk: if he could discover this youth he might possibly learn something of his employer's movements. In any case it was worth the attempt.

He decided to start immediately; and found himself wondering how he should explain this abrupt journey to Brenda. Finally he decided to explain nothing, and left her to infer that business took him up the line. She was much occupied in getting ready for her marriage, and preparing to sail for Europe if necessary with her husband. If he served in France, she purposed serving also in some capacity behind the fixing line. It was understood between them that where he went she would follow whenever practicable. In all things they were to be comrades: only in the matter of Honor did he keep her outside his life. He had confided to her the essential facts in regard to his relations with Honor Krige; he did not deem it expedient after that to go into further detail. That part of his life was finished—he believed it to be finished; but a man cannot finish with a part of his life at will: life has a habit of facing about upon the person who would ignore it. It was so in Matheson's case. When he had, as he fancied, closed this chapter which related to the past for ever, the chance breeze of an accidental encounter ruffled the pages and turned them bade.

On the day before he had arranged to go to Johannesburg he came face to face with Herman Nel in the fine oak avenue outside the Botanical Gardens. He was on his way to fulfil an appointment with Brenda; but when he saw Nel —Nel looking handsome and business-like in the serviceable uniform of the Union Defence Force—he forgot everything for the moment in sheer amaze at this unexpected meeting.

It was never clear to him who saw the other first; the recognition seemed to be simultaneous: the grip of their hands was spontaneous and eager.

"I never expected to see you here," he said, and wrung Nel's hand warmly. "What's the farm doing in your absence?"

"Looking after itself," Nel answered with a shrug. "I've come away to defend it. Leentje imagines she is seeing after things while Cornelius is engaged in espousing the German cause." His face was grave. "Come into the Gardens here, and sit down and let us talk."

Matheson accompanied him in silence and sat down with him on a seat near the entrance. Nel looked hard at him, looked from his face to his clothes; and Matheson felt that the shrewd eyes were mutely inquiring why he also was not in uniform.

"I've been in Cape Town only a few days," Nel volunteered. "I'm following Botha wherever he leads. His lead is straight always, and for the good of the country. Cornelius can't see that—yet."

"So he has joined the rebellion?" Matheson said.

"Yes. He's with his commando—and Andreas Krige. They have joined Maritz. It's a bad business. One cannot help feeling sorry for men who deliberately cut their own throats. There is a sort of predestination in it."

"And what," Matheson asked quickly, "are they doing at Benfontein?"

Nel shook his head.

"I've not been received at Benfontein since the beginning of August," he said. "My engagement is terminated—temporarily." He smiled in his old whimsical way. "The outlook is dark at the moment; but always I look forward to the dawn of a to-morrow. And now tell me about yourself. You are remaining outside all this?"

His voice was puzzled; there was a ring, Matheson fancied, of disapproval behind its surprise. He took up his own defence eagerly.

"No, indeed!" he answered. "Who could remain outside? ... Certainly no one with any interest beyond his own immediate affairs. I intend to volunteer for service in Europe."

"Why in Europe?" Nel asked. "There is quite important work to be done in this country."

"I know it."

Matheson was silent for a while. Presently he said:

"I've a feeling—I can't explain it—against fighting out here. If it was simply fighting the Germans I wouldn't hesitate,

but—the Boers... No; I can't do it. Simply I can't do it."

Nel scrutinised him closely, a kindly, rather wistful, expression lighting his grave features.

"That's the very reason," he said at length, "why you ought to remain out here. It's men who feel as you do about it that we want... Do you suppose that it is easier for me, who have to take the field against the brother I love? ... Do you think it is easy for Botha to fight against men who once fought shoulder to shoulder with him in a just though unequal cause? Botha took the field before for his people; he takes it to-day for the good of South Africa, which before everything else he has at heart. He is fine—a simple and honourable man. I would follow him to the death."

Nel stretched out a hand and laid it on the other's knee.

"It is in no vindictive spirit that we go to war," he added. "Always it will be in our minds to spare life where that is possible. It is for this reason, and because you have no animosity in your heart against the Dutch, that I say to you with the greatest earnestness, you can do more good here in helping to quell this ill-advised rebellion than ever you can do in Europe. Stay and see it out."

For a while they were silent, looking at one another. Then Matheson said:

"I never looked at it like that before."

"Good!" Nel smiled suddenly. "You begin to recognise that your work lies here?"

"Yes. I think you have shown me that."

"Then don't delay. Join up at once."

Matheson thought for a moment. He was no longer in any doubt as to his ultimate decision; but there was one thing that remained to be done before he joined up. He spoke of it to Nel—told of his intention to trade down Holman, and of his projected journey on the morrow.

"You won't find Holman in Johannesburg," Nel assured him. "On and off for the past three months he has been at Benfontein. He was there, I believe, when I left. But that it seemed to me I had more responsible work to accomplish, I would have shot him like a jackal. I don't know what he is after at Benfontein, but I don't trust him. He has been Krige's evil genius from the beginning. And the women... they simply worship him. His is the hand of the friend stretched forth to deliver them from the oppressor. As though a friendly hand was ever advanced by a stranger nation from entirely disinterested motives! They can't see that this so strong hand of Germany would make a tool of them."

For a while he remained without speaking, staring abstractedly ahead of him; then with a sudden movement he looked round sharply, and added:

"They are quite sincere in desiring their country's good. That—the good of one's country, is right in principle, only they look at it crookedly. Botha sees straight: always he works unselfishly for his country's welfare. That is a principle it would be well for all nations to adopt. Good cannot come to any country through war."

He looked thoughtfully away across the sunlit glory of the gardens, in which the vivid beauty of subtropical flowers and shrubs flourished prodigally, and his face was sad.

"I have watched this country grow and expand," he said. "I have seen it shrivel beneath the devastation of war, and have watched its struggle until it blossomed forth anew. Now I see it bent and scorched before the fires of rebellion. That is the worst event that has yet befallen. But the land survives these things; only man, with his paltry ambitions and his insignificant span, goes under, paying for the folly of others with all that he has to give. It's senseless, this business of fighting—a puerile defiance of the laws of life."

"And yet," Matheson said, "you and I are drawn into it."

Nel smiled swiftly.

"Yes; you and I are drawn in. And if we have to pay the full price we shall consider the end worth the sacrifice. I recognise sincerity, Mr Matheson, when I meet it. From that first morning when you visited my rondavel I knew that we should be friends. I don't know how deeply you are interested in South Africa, but if you live here long enough the land will grip you."

"It grips me already," Matheson said. "I am ready to help purchase the peace of this country without counting the cost."

Nel's eyes brightened with a sudden fire; his voice, quiet and controlled though it was, vibrated with a ring of triumph.

"Boer and Briton!" he said, and laughed quietly... "Boer and Briton! I would merge such distinctions in the comprehensive title of South African. To us—to you and to me—this land belongs by virtue of the reason that we live by it, and are willing to defend it with our lives. The land is our inheritance. Imperial claims concern me very little. A man who has a life's lease of his homestead doesn't take much account of the landlord. You haven't come yet to feel that way?"

"No. I don't suppose an Englishman ever does." Matheson glanced at his watch. "I'll have to be going," he said, and laughed a little consciously. "I've an engagement for three, and am overdue now."

He stood up. Nel rose with him. For a second or so they remained still in the path steadily regarding one another.

“I’m going to be married,” Matheson said abruptly—“in three weeks’ time.”

“Yes!” Nel’s gaze was searching. “I’m glad to hear it, Mr Matheson,” he said. “You are more fortunate than I. Is she English?”

“Yes... born out here. I hope some day you’ll meet her. But to-morrow I leave, as you know.”

“You are going to Benfontein?”

Nel’s tone was discouraging. Matheson answered in the affirmative.

“Well, don’t forget,” the Dutchman added cautiously, “that your life is of infinitely greater value to the country than Holman’s death could be. It will be a desperate man you face, remember. Take care of yourself.”

“Yes; I’ll do that,” Matheson assured him, and held out his hand. Nel grasped it.

“You’ll find the rondavel open and provisioned,” he said. “You may have a use for it.”

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## Chapter Twenty Eight.

On parting from Nel, Matheson started to walk briskly, aware that already he was some minutes late for his appointment. It was the first occasion on which he had kept his fiancée waiting. He did not anticipate that she would be vexed; the delay had been unavoidable, and the meeting with Nel had saved him an unprofitable journey. A knowledge of Holman’s whereabouts simplified his quest and would economise time, which was an important factor; the settlement of this business had to be accomplished while he was free to attend to private matters.

In his hurried walk he overtook the Aplin girls, very gay and important, bedecked with tricolour ribbons and wearing the Union Jack badges in their hats. They were frightfully busy, they informed him, collecting for Christmas parcels for the troops. It was great sport, begging, but desperately tiring.

“One likes to feel that one is helping,” Rosie explained.

Their manner towards him was more gracious than it had appeared of late. On the few occasions when they had met since his engagement they had contrived to convey a sense of aggrieved disapproval, and had pointedly refrained from offering him their congratulations on his forthcoming marriage. They never referred to Brenda.

“Mr Macfarlane told us you were going to Europe,” May said. “When do you sail? I’ve promised to write to half a dozen boys who have joined up for overseas.”

“I’ve changed my mind about that,” he said. “There’s work to be done out here first.”

Immediately their interest waned.

“If I were a man, as I told Mr Macfarlane, I’d want to go where the big things are doing,” May asserted. “I wouldn’t be bothered with these horrid rebels.”

“Somebody must,” he said, and refrained from further comment. It would be wasted labour, he felt, to question their point of view.

“But it would be such a lark, going to Europe. It’s the chance of a lifetime. I wish mother would let me go.”

“Nursing?” he inquired.

“Oh, nursing! That’s horrid work. No. I’d like to drive an ambulance wagon, or do something smart... and wear a uniform like the men.”

“Yes,” he answered, and laughed. “I remember you had always a leaning towards fancy dress. I daresay you’ll find something to do even here.”

“Oh! we’re having a perfectly gorgeous time,” put in Rosie, “And we are really working—not just stupid sewing meetings, you know, but hard work. We are organising a fancey fête for the relief of the poor Belgians. It will be great fun. We are raising the funds all right.”

“After that we start recruiting,” May added, smiling. “The slackers will have a bad time of it. Every man ought to be a soldier.”

“You *are* busy,” he said, and wondered whether they ever took anything seriously. The war was not a world disaster, but a huge excitement with possibilities of interesting developments. It gave them something fresh to think about. “I turn in here,” he added, pausing outside the gate leading to Brenda’s lodging.

Rosie’s glance travelled towards the windows of the house, and then back again slowly to his face.

“I suppose Miss Upton has had something to do in influencing your decision to remain out here?” she said. “She wouldn’t like you to go to Europe.”

“She is satisfied either way,” he answered. “Had I sailed for Europe she would have accompanied me. That was

settled from the first."

They parted from him unconvinced, and with a slight return of the chill displeasure he had grown to look for from them. The halt at Brenda's gate had seemed to them an affront.

"Of course she stopped him from going," May declared. "She knows if she lets him out of her sight she risks losing him. She was always an artful little thing. I believe he would get out of that engagement if he could. It seems to have flattened him."

"He hasn't been the same since," Rosie admitted, and looked away down the leafy avenue with sentimental eyes. "It's such a pity; he's so awfully good looking," she said, and sighed.

Brenda was on the stoep waiting for him when Matheson reached the house. She must have witnessed the parting between him and the Aplin girls, which had been sufficiently leisurely to excite resentment in view of her long wait. He forestalled any remark by apologising for his lateness.

"I'm awfully sorry," he said. "Twice I was stopped on the way here. I ought to have been with you half an hour ago. I met a man—a Dutchman—Nel: he kept me. He wants me to join Botha's army."

She scrutinised him closely.

"And you're going to?" she said.

"Yes."

"These changes are a little unsettling," she observed after a brief reflection. "I was quite prepared for Europe."

"You don't mind?" he asked quickly.

"No." She stood touching his coat softly, caressingly, with her fingers; and her eyes wore a look of quiet satisfaction, almost of relief. "I've dreaded France for you. Out here a man has a chance—a sporting chance; over there it's a war of chemicals. No; I'm not brave. I never wanted you to go."

"One has to defend the Empire," he said.

"Oh! yes." She smiled suddenly. "No woman really admires the man who thinks otherwise. But..."

She broke off abruptly, and pulled him towards a seat on the stoep and sat down beside him.

"Tell me, who is this man? Why should a Dutchman influence you so strongly? I tried from the first to persuade you to join the Union Forces. I'm jealous of this Dutchman."

He laughed and possessed himself or her hand and pressed it warmly.

"He's a Boer I met up country—one of the finest men I know. He has the welfare of South Africa at heart—like Botha and Smuts."

"Oh! a loyal Boer," she said.

Matheson made a gesture of impatience.

"That term is applied so differently," he said. "He is one of the men who are on our side, if you mean that."

"Well, but that's being loyal, isn't it?" she said.

"Loyal to one's conception of right—yes. I imagine one needs to be Dutch to see the thing clearly. He is not a son of Empire; he's a South African, heart and soul. His brother is on the other side."

"Ah!" she said. "A rebel. That's painful for him."

"Yes," he agreed. "It cuts him, of course, badly. But he regrets this difference rather than condemns it. That's where the wider understanding of race comes in: he discriminates between sedition and mistaken ideals."

"And he has tutored you?" she said.

"He—and others."

He looked away from her, aware of her searching scrutiny. Did she guess, he wondered, that Nel was somehow connected with the story of Honor? His sympathies with the Dutch, he felt, must wound her in a sense.

"I'll tell you why he wants you to join Botha's army," she said, after a short pause; and Matheson was conscious that the fingers of the hand he held closed suddenly tighter about his own—"why you mean to do that rather than go to Europe—because you also understand... You've gone into this question, and you can regard it without prejudice. I wish I could do that."

"Any one can," he asserted. "It's merely a matter of analysing motives."

"No." She shook her head. "I know that admittedly there are two sides to every question; but each side sees inevitably its own point of view; occasionally one may obtain an imperfect view of the other side; but it is given only

to the largest vision to see both sides clearly. The wider vision lights the path to a more complete understanding. I wish I possessed it."

"Are you so sure you don't?" he asked, and took her chin between his fingers and turned her face towards his and held it for a while. "They see a long way, those wise brown eyes. Some one once tried to make me see into the heart of Africa... You penetrate deeper than that—you see into the heart of humanity; and there you have the key to everything."

Matheson did not speak of the other change in his plans which the meeting with Nel had brought about Brenda still supposed he was going to Johannesburg; and he allowed her to think that. But he felt some embarrassment when she asked him to send her word of his arrival, and a telegram to let her know when to expect him back.

"If I miss writing on my arrival," he said, and felt mean at the equivocation, "I'll wire you news of my return. It will be such a hurried affair, I doubt whether there will be much time for writing—and none for receiving any reply from you. I'll get back as soon as I can."

"I'll be there at the station to meet you," she said.

"Well, of course."

He experienced a new tenderness for her, a sort of protective love, unlike any other emotion he had felt, as he sat beside her on the tiny ill-kept stoep and talked fragmentally of unimportant things in a determined effort to steer wide of the tragic doings of the times, and to avoid further discussion of his own immediate plans. It afforded him pleasure to reflect that shortly they would be married; that when all this business of fighting was over they would have a home of their own, and this dear girl chum would be his wife and daily companion. He put his arm about her shoulders with an unwonted display of affection that caused her a thrill of shy pleasure. She never invited his caresses; they were the more precious on account of their rareness.

"You're such a chum," he said. "I think I'm a very lucky fellow to have secured so dear a comrade to march by my side through life."

"That's all I ask to be, your comrade through life," she said, and looked up at him with big worshipful eyes, secure in the knowledge that comradeship is the surest foundation upon which to base a successful marriage. The union thus founded is more assured of continuing happiness than a marriage between unequals as the result of physical attraction. Passionate love has its limitations; but comradeship, which is born of a perfect understanding, strengthens with the years.

It was odd, Matheson reflected while gazing steadily into Brenda's quiet eyes, that the encounter with Nel should have brought nothing of the past very vividly back. He wondered whether in returning to the scene of those emotional stresses he would experience anew something of the pain and keen resentment of frustrated desire which had gripped him at the time with what had seemed unforgettable anguish.

It struck him, while he pondered these things, as disloyal to Brenda, this contemplated journey to Benfontein; the fact that he kept his destination secret from her was proof in itself of a consciousness of wrong. He was not acting on the square. He was not even sincere with himself. Why should he undertake the punishment of Holman? It was clearly a case for the military authorities, and his duty to furnish the necessary information and leave the matter with them. He recognised that. But the complex motives which drove him to seek out Holman, to confront him with his villainy, and deal personally with this insidious poisoner of innocent minds, were compelling. In striking at Holman he not only struck at a national enemy, he would strike also at the insinuating subtlety which had thrust between himself and Honor; which thrust between Honor and happiness, and trampled ruthlessly over the virgin soil where the tender seed of love lay germinating, and disturbed it and bruised it and left in its stead the unlovely seed of hate, striking its tenacious suckers deep into the ground. There was no punishment to fit this infamy; but at least he could make certain that the lying tongue was silenced and could do no further harm.

The urgency of his desire reduced his scruples to a minimum. But he felt shame none the less as his glance rested on the girl beside him, the girl whose entire heart was given into his keeping. It was not much of a return he was making her. Contrasted with the richness of her gift, the poverty of his was painfully apparent.

"Come!" he said, grown suddenly restless before the rush of his own thoughts. "We are wasting our afternoon. We've a lot to crowd into the next few hours."

She stood up and faced him, laughing.

"Man of moods," she said, "I was just wondering how long you would be satisfied to sit here staring at the gum trees... Let us go out into the sunlight and the wind—and just talk..."

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## Chapter Twenty Nine.

Sweeping swiftly, as quickly scudding clouds will sweep athwart a wind-swept sky, memories that were not wholly bitter flashed across Matheson's mind with each mile that he covered on his journey to Benfontein. Some odd thought or phrase or emotion leapt out of the past into prominence and held him with all the vital qualities of a thing newly realised. Always in imagination he was speeding towards Benfontein, though Nel's rondavel, and not the farm of Andreas Krige, was his ultimate destination.

From some unexplained, and indeed inexplicable, reason, he had shrunk from being seen off on this journey by his fiancée. She had proposed being at the station for that purpose; but he had raised so many difficulties that she had

reluctantly given way to his obvious wish for solitude; and when the time for departure came there was no one on the platform to speed his going.

He felt relieved at this; nevertheless the mood in which he started was heavy, overcast like the day which, bright with promise in the dawn, had later clouded darkly with every prospect of a gathering storm. The darkness of the day fitted his mood. Not since the hour when he had turned his back upon the white walls of Benfontein and driven beside Oom Koos Marais across the blackened veld, had he experienced such heaviness of spirit. Some unexpected spring of emotion had been uncovered by this turning back, and its bitter sweet waters were bubbling to the surface in a succession of reawakened memories which he had cheated himself into believing were buried for ever. No one has ever succeeded in burying memory in a sufficiently deep grave; however untiringly one labours over its interment, the first chance breeze of some recurrent thought or seeming likeness, blows back the loose soil and discovers the stark form that had been laid to final rest. Memory ranks with the immortals: it is vain to attempt to bury what cannot die.

Matheson thrust these reminiscent thoughts from him as he travelled northward, and tried to concentrate upon the immediate prospect of his meeting with Holman. It was his intention to hire a horse at De Aar and ride out to Nel's farm and take possession of the rondavel. A saddle horse would be a necessity to him; he could not appropriate to his use any of Cornelius Nel's horses. It was moreover possible that the horses on the farm had been commandeered, and had been taken when their master left to join Maritz. This he found later was the case: the farm had been stripped of everything that could prove of use to aid the rebellion.

The rondavel, however, remained as its owner invariably left it, fully provisioned, and fit for immediate habitation. One servant was left in charge of things, a light-coloured Kaffir who answered to the name of Butter Tom by reason of his fair skin, which, the colour of old parchment, suggested a mixture of alien blood. Butter Tom had been Nel's body servant in the old days, and he recognised and greeted Matheson with a broad smile of welcome.

“Me take the baas' horse,” he said. “The baas will find everything he want by the rondavel. Me come bimeby and get the baas something to eat.”

Matheson swung himself out of the saddle.

“Well, I'm hungry, and that's a fact, Butter Tom,” he said.

The Kaffir gazed at him reproachfully the while he took the reins in his hand.

“Me not fat,” he said seriously, rebuke in his tones and a grave anxiousness in his questioning eyes.

Matheson did not attempt an explanation of the mistake: the native ear was confused with the unfamiliar English. He looked closely at the well-knit figure and smiled.

“No; so I see,” he said. “You get me supper pretty quick, Butter Tom. I'm plenty hungry.”

Whereat Butter Tom laughed quietly. To be plenty hungry was something he did understand.

Matheson entered the rondavel and took a survey of his temporary quarters. Everything was as Nel had left it, neat and orderly; the bed behind the reimpe curtain was made as though in preparation for immediate use: the atmosphere and appearance of the hut suggested a recent occupant. There were a pair of boots, which did not belong to Nel, which were not only smaller but more fashionable in make, under a chair; and on the brightly polished surface of the circular table lay a familiar object—a meerschaum pipe, with quaintly carved bowl, which he remembered to have seen Holman smoking innumerable times. The pipe had lain on the desk beside his hand during their last interview in the dingy office at Johannesburg. It was intolerable presumption, he reflected, that this German whom Herman Nel held in such deep abhorrence should make free with the tatter's possessions, and pollute in its owner's absence his home with his treacherous presence.

On the appearance of Butter Tom he made inquiries, and elicited the information that Baas Holman did occasionally use the rondavel, though he had not been there for some days.

“If he come again,” the Kaffir announced sturdily, setting a dish of buttered mealies gently down upon the snowy cloth, “me tell him this baas come from my baas. I serve this baas only. Baas Holman come with the missis two moons since.”

So Cornelius Nel's wife had lent her brother-in-law's house to his enemy. Indirectly Holman was responsible for the breach between the two brothers; he had been the evil genius of Cornelius as well as of Andreas Krige. Leentje Nel was aware of Herman's dislike; her conduct therefore in lending his rondavel to the object of his aversion seemed to Matheson peculiarly detestable: it betrayed an utter absence of good taste on her part in offering, and on his in accepting, in the owner's absence hospitality which would not have been extended had Herman Nel been on the spot.

But the fact that Holman used the rondavel, that, having left part of his property there, he meant presumably to return at no distant date, promised well for the meeting he sought with this man who had compassed so much evil and evaded himself any dangerous participation therein. He had no wish to go to Benfontein for the purpose of facing him; it would please him better if Holman descended upon him at the rondavel, where, secure in the knowledge of his right in being there, he would have the advantage over this German, whom Herman Nel would have shot like a jackal as an act of simple justice.

He cautioned Butter Tom not to speak of his presence at the rondavel, and bade him be on the alert against surprise; he had no wish to be caught unaware. More particularly he dreaded discovery by Cornelius Nel's wife: a man when he

is an enemy is openly an enemy, but a woman can be secretive and very bitter. Usually she makes the more relentless foe.

Butter Tom, with the limited intelligence and blind loyalty of his race, understanding only that this baas who was the friend of his baas did not wish his whereabouts known, was satisfied to keep watch without other explanation: the wish of the baas was a command; it was of itself a sufficient reason why he should guard against intruders. Save when engaged on his duties as servitor, he seldom stirred from his post of observation in the shade of the wall, where he squatted on his haunches, and smoked the tobacco which Matheson provided, and kept a vigilant eye on the approaches to the rondavel.

When he was confident that he was unobserved, even by his faithful henchman, Matheson took the precaution to look in the chest where Nel kept the rope ladder with which he mounted to his secret chamber. He felt reassured on finding the ladder rolled up in its accustomed place. No one beside Nel, unless perchance he had disclosed the secret to his fiancée, knew of that hiding place in the roof. In the event of a surprise visit, he intended to make use of his knowledge. He could from the upper chamber observe without being seen all that went on in the room below, could listen without fear of detection to any conversation that was being carried on.

Later, he experimented with the ladder, fixing it as he had watched Nel fix it to the cross beam in the roof. He climbed up it, and removed with very little difficulty the thatch door, and crawled through the opening, closing the thatch behind him. When closed there was a thin division in the thatch through which it was quite easy to look into the room beneath. Satisfied with this trial that he was safe against surprise, he made the descent and rolled up the ladder and returned it to the chest.

The next few days were spent in anticipation of a visit from Holman, who did not appear. Until dusk each day he remained a voluntary prisoner within the rondavel; after sundown he left Butter Tom in charge and ventured forth in search of exercise; Butter Tom was to watch for his return and warn him by signal in the event of a visitor during his absence. But the days passed and left him in undisputed possession of his quarters. If he meant to see Holman it began to look as though he would have to go to Benfontein after all.

This continued immunity from intrusion rendered him less cautious in his actions. He took to sitting outside the hut, and one afternoon went for a walk while it was yet daylight in defiance of being observed by any one on the farm. There was no reason why he should not be seen, save his own wish to surprise Holman. But beyond a native herd and one or two Kaffir women, he met no one; and he returned to the rondavel towards the hour for supper revolving in his mind whether or no he should set forth for Benfontein on the morrow?

It was a matter for surprise to him on nearing the rondavel to find Butter Tom, whom he had left guarding the entrance, no longer at his station. It was the first sign of defection Butter Tom had given; the Kaffir's negligence set him wondering whether in trusting him implicitly he was acting altogether wisely? He looked about for some sign of him, and discovering none, concluded that he must be in the smaller hut preparing the evening meal, having settled, in his indecision between the rival claims of these separate duties, on the primary importance of attending to the baas' food.

Matheson entered the rondavel expecting to find the table laid for supper; but no preparation for the meal had been attempted, and no sound came from the native quarters. The rondavel remained to all appearance as he had left it.

And yet, despite the fact that the place was empty, that there was no evidence of any one having been there during his absence, a sense of uneasiness held him—a feeling of being observed, though there was no one visibly present, which was acutely disquieting. Without understanding his reason in doing so, he crossed to the chest beneath the window where the rope ladder lay concealed, and lifted the lid. For a second or so he remained there motionless, holding back the heavy lid with his hand, staring into the empty chest. Some one had been there before him: the rope ladder was gone.

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## Chapter Thirty.

Abruptly Matheson dropped the lid, faced about and looked up. The sensation of being observed, of not being, for all that the hut appeared to be empty, alone, was explained. Some one—he had no means of knowing who—was familiar with Nel's secret. Whoever it was, it appeared very certain that he was at the moment watching him from the room above, was aware moreover through his incautiousness that the hiding place was equally well known to the man who stood staring up at the movable thatch in amazed and thwarted curiosity.

To Matheson it was the most astonishing and perplexing moment in his life. He remained riveted to the spot staring, staring helplessly at the innocent-looking grass roof, trying to discern the intruder; seeing no one and hearing no sound of movement, yet acutely aware that some one lay concealed in the roof, some one who had thought to hide from him, who was undoubtedly even then observing him, secure in the knowledge of remaining himself unseen.

Matheson felt his disadvantage and stood for a space irresolute. The sensation of being furtively observed was uncanny. He had no means of knowing whether it were an enemy who hid thus, or some one who, like himself, enjoyed Nel's confidence and hesitated to discover the secret to a stranger, even though the stranger by his action had made it clear that he shared the knowledge with him.

The uncertainty was nerve-racking. To continue in ignorance of the identity of the intruder he felt to be impossible: by some means or other he must ascertain who it was who lay concealed up there and gave no sign of his presence. While the unseen person had the advantage in one respect, the greater advantage of holding him there virtually a prisoner was his. He drew a chair out from beneath the table and seated himself astride it, and taking a revolver from his pocket, leaned with his arms folded on the back of the chair and his gaze lifted to the roof.

If the intruder's purpose were innocent the chances were he would proclaim the fact rather than remain a prisoner at the other's pleasure; if, on the other hand, it was Holman who had concealed himself there he was likely to be armed also, in which event the advantage would again lay with him.

Matheson sat rigid and very much on the alert, and awaited developments. In the unnatural stillness the ticking of the watch in his pocket was distinctly audible. There was no other sound. But that he felt the presence of the unseen watcher through that sense which apprises one of the nearness of another human being, he would have doubted whether any one could be in the upper chamber, so absolutely still did he remain. By making it so obvious that he suspected his presence, Matheson had thought to provoke the other into giving some sign; every moment he expected to see the thatch open; but there was no movement from above; whoever was hiding there had no wish to be discovered.

The minutes dragged wearily. An hour passed in watchful suspense. He wondered why Butter Tom did not come with the supper. It was after the usual time, but there was no preparation for a meal. This neglect on the part of Nel's trusted servant puzzled him. It was not, he believed, accidental: there was treachery afoot. Whoever the mysterious visitor was, he had by some device or other got rid of the Kaffir. The device must have been fairly plausible to have deceived Butter Tom, prepared as he was against surprises of this nature; that the Kaffir had willingly entered into a conspiracy against him he did not for a moment believe.

He felt that he must speak, must question this hidden person—force him into making some sign—into revealing himself. It was impossible to sit through the night with his finger on the trigger of his revolver, waiting for he knew not what; alert and wakeful in the darkness, with the concealed foe above like some hidden danger ready to strike. At least he would get a light and wait for darkness to overtake him and add the uncertainty of gloom to the perils of the situation.

There was a lamp on the table. He moved towards it, taking the precaution always to face the danger, and holding his revolver in readiness against a surprise attack. The business of removing the globe and striking a match thus hampered took time. It was still quite light in the rondavel, though the shadows were falling quickly; he had no difficulty in seeing clearly. His glance travelled continually from the lamp he was occupied with to the roof, some instinct warning him that the utmost vigilance was necessary for his safety. During the brief moment while he struck a match and held it to the wick, his attention temporarily diverted, he became aware of a sudden noise, so faint and so instantly ceasing that, had his senses not been so keenly alive to any sound, he might have fancied himself mistaken in supposing he heard more than the rustling of the wind without. Instantly his eyes lifted to the roof, his hand arrested in the act of lighting the lamp, the match spluttering out between his fingers. The thatch had moved ever so slightly, and through the aperture thus made he saw distinctly the muzzle of a gun pointing in his direction.

It was the work of a second to spring aside. The report from the gun followed his movement. Quick as thought he levelled the revolver and blazed away at the opening in the thatch. There was a second loud report from the gun. He felt the sting of the bullet in his shoulder. The revolver dropped from his hand to the floor. Dazed with the noise as much as by the pain of the wound, he remained for a moment inactive, till, brought sharply back to the realisation of his danger, he stooped, moved by a passionate anger at the outrage, and seized the fallen weapon in his left hand and fired again at the opening.

The grass panel slid back noisily, and with an oath, the discharged gun in his hand, a man dropped from the roof on to his shoulders, bringing him to the ground with a force that partially stunned him. Bewildered and dazed though he was, Matheson was quick to appreciate the fact that his assailant was lighter in weight than himself. With the consciousness of his own superior muscular strength the power returned to his arms. He forgot his wound; his brain cleared surprisingly, became active and extraordinarily keen. The man, vainly trying to pin him down while he raised the empty gun to use as a club, was Holman; and Holman he knew was no match for him physically.

He flung aside the revolver and seized his assailant by the throat. Holman loosened his grasp on his own weapon for purposes of self-defence, and struck wildly at the fierce, resolute face that stared back at him with the grim determination of implacable enmity in the eyes. He struck at these eyes blindly; again and again he struck with little effect; then with a snarl of rage he flung himself across the other man and fixed his teeth in his neck. Matheson felt sickened: hate of the man maddened him. It was like fighting with a wild beast, this horrible struggle with a creature that tore and bit, and uttered a snarling whine between the parted lips that was scarcely human in sound. He choked the whine into silence under the pressure of his fingers till the desperate resistance slackened, the limp body dropped inert. One minute more and he would squeeze the life out of him and fling his body out on the veld.

A fierce exhilaration thrilled him. For the first time in his life the lust of killing held him; he was dominated by a passion greater, more brutal in quality, more relentless, than anything he had felt before. He experienced a savage joy in the thought of taking life. All of evil which this man had accomplished to his knowledge flooded his brain and inflamed it while he held him pinned powerless to the ground, and stared pitilessly into the protruding, agonised eyes from which terror even could not drive the malevolent hatred they expressed.

And then in a moment everything was altered. With a swiftness, a silence, a curious unreality, that suggested an apparition rather than a human presence in the stupefying unexpectedness of its approach, a woman's figure emerged out of the shadows, as though, lurking there invisible, it now assumed shape for some definite purpose, and detaching itself from the gloom, became significant, alive, compelling—a power, a deterrent power, quiet and insistent, with eyes that blazed horrified reproach into the surprised, upturned gaze of the man who, kneeling there with murder in his heart, yet let his fingers insensibly relax their grip, and slowly rose to his feet, and stood shaking from head to foot like a man seized with an ague, as he faced fully the woman whom he had last seen on the morning when he had asked her to be his wife.

While he faced her all the love he had ever felt for her surged anew in his heart, till the pain of it was wellnigh unbearable. What was she doing there? And why had she through her coming saved the life of a scoundrel whose

destiny overshadowed her own?

Without speaking, she passed him and approached the prostrate figure and knelt beside it on the mud floor. At her touch Holman stirred, groaned once, and sat up. He stared about him wildly, and, seeing Matheson, caught at Honor's dress as though for protection, and shrank further away. Matheson stood and surveyed their grouping with a numb sensation of utter weariness stealing over him. He was too physically used up even to think connectedly. Holman was choking and spluttering. He caught his breath on a sob, and turned his face and spat noisily on the floor. Doubtless he felt a necessity for expectorating; but the act appealed to Matheson as disgusting, and unseemly in Honor's presence. He expected her to wince. Observing that she made no sign of repugnance, he wondered whether her compassion exceeded her fastidiousness; and felt vaguely disappointed in her for showing so great a forbearance.

Very gently she loosened the injured man's collar, and assisted him to an easier position, tending him with such solicitude that Matheson, watching her in surprised silence, was moved to a yet greater hatred of the man whose life her coming had spared. Could she be so completely dominated by racial antagonism as to be dead to every other consideration? It seemed to him that the tragedy of her mother's life, the division between the Nels, who in every respect save their sense of right in allegiance to opposite causes, were fraternal in feeling, could not fail to have some effect on her. He could not understand her attitude of unrelenting enmity. Even allowing that from her point of view his country had done her people a real injury in the past, surely she must realise that in this struggle for right against tyranny, every country which spent its strength in the defence of the weaker nations was to be honoured for the sacrifices it was called upon to make? For any injustice Great Britain had been guilty of in the past she was making a splendid atonement.

While he pondered these things, dizzy from the effects of his wound and the recent struggle, Honor rose to her feet and confronted him with so kindly a look that he was led to believe that her solicitude for Holman went no deeper than a womanly compassion which any suffering would excite—which she might have shown towards himself had his condition seemed to call for sympathy. She had not observed that he was hurt. In the gathering dusk the blood that was soaking through his coat showed only as a dark stain which passed unremarked in the agitation of the moment.

"Go," she said in a quiet voice, and lifted an arm and pointed towards the open doorway. "Your presence excites him. You have hurt him. What had he done to you that you should seek to kill him?"

"Honor!" he said, and hardly recognised his own voice, so hoarse and strange it sounded in the stillness. He made a step towards her, gazing hungrily into the beautiful, upraised face. "Honor!" he repeated dully.

He saw, without appreciating in his dazed condition the significance of the action, Holman groping upon the floor for his gun, saw him feel in his pocket for ammunition. He was aware that the man was loading the gun; but he paid no heed to that in the stress of emotion that gripped him in the presence of this girl whose power over him exceeded any other influence that had ever swayed him. He saw the blood warming the pale face while he gazed at it with such strained and eager intensity, and noticed the look of distressed embarrassment in her eyes, the sudden shrinking away before his approach. There was neither dislike nor distrust in her look, only a quick, unaccountable nervousness which he attributed to the unexpectedness of their meeting, with its tragic and ugly introduction.

"You shouldn't have come," she said. "You didn't come as a friend. You thought to do him an injury... I know... You hate him because of the letter I foolishly read to you. I made a mistake—but I thought I could trust you."

"A damned Englishman is never to be trusted," Holman's voice broke in raspingly behind her. "He'd sell you all... Why couldn't you blasted English keep out of this war?" he demanded aggressively. "It's not your quarrel. You've come in for selfish ends, and you'll get shot to pieces for interfering when you weren't called up."

Honor turned her head suddenly at a sound from his direction. Looking over her shoulder she saw the gun raised to his shoulder, his finger crooked round the trigger.

"Stand aside," he commanded her roughly.

She swung round quickly and faced him, standing resolutely between him and the man he would have shot down before her eyes.

"I will never let you do that," she said firmly. "You can only shoot through me. We may be rebels, we aren't murderers, Heinrich."

He lowered the gun, scowling at her, and answered nothing. Matheson laid a hand on her arm and pushed her aside. Something in the calm proprietary tones, despite the service she had rendered him, goaded him to fury. There was a quality in her look and manner when addressing the German that roused him to a pitch of jealous bitterness which he was unable to control. Still gripping her shoulder, he stared into her eyes.

"What's he to you?" he asked harshly. "Why do you interfere? What is this German spy to you, other than an enemy?"

"He has never been my enemy," she answered proudly. "We Dutch have the virtue of gratitude, and he has served our cause faithfully. Be careful how you miscall my husband to me."

For a long moment he continued to stare at her, incredulous, angry, amazed; then he seized her left hand and raised it and saw, encircling her finger, the plain gold band which proclaimed her married state.

Without a word he dropped her hand, and turned abruptly and walked unsteadily from the hut out into the warm dusk; and as he went, stumbling and feeling his way like a man suddenly blinded, a sound reached his ears, the

sound of a man's sneering laugh of triumph. A wave of unrestrained passion swept over him. He stood still, hesitated, and looked back: then, still stumbling as he walked, he hurried on into the shadows.

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## Chapter Thirty One.

What happened to him during his hurried flight from the rondavel Matheson never knew. He was conscious only of walking, walking heavily and unseeingly, forward into the dusk, when night abruptly overtook him and wrapped him in a darkness more complete than anything he had ever imagined. When again it was light he woke, with an unrefreshed feeling and a sense of having been victimised by an ugly dream of extraordinary vividness, to find himself lying comfortably in Herman Nel's bed in the rondavel, with an utter absence of any knowledge of how he came there. He could not recollect going to bed overnight.

Resting quietly on the pillow in semi-wakefulness, his drowsy thoughts occupied themselves with speculating on what had happened. Little by little the events of the previous evening recurred to him, but always with that dreamlike sense of unreality that left him unable to determine what was actual and what only imaginary. The sudden sharp pain of his wound which, when he moved abruptly, he felt for the first time since waking, brought bade clearly to his memory the scene of the struggle with Holman and Honor's intervention, assuring him that this was no dream but ugly reality. He had seen again the woman he loved; had been unfaithful in thought to the woman who loved him; had been at death-grips with his enemy; and now lay sick from the wound he had sustained—more side in mind than in body, conscious chiefly of the stupefying fact that this woman whom he loved so dearly was the wife of the man he had sought to kill, that that fact rendered his enmity innocuous; he could not strike at Honor through any one she loved.

While he lay there, staring at the daylight through partially closed lids in a misery so acute that his physical suffering seemed as nothing compared with the anguish of his mind, he became aware that he was not alone. Seated at some distance from the bed, engaged on work the nature of which puzzled him to determine for a time, till he made out that she was busy rolling and stitching bandages, was Mrs Krige, looking very much as he had last seen her, her expression sad but calm in its earnest confidence, and with a new purpose in the patient eyes. Her thoughts, as she rolled the strips of linen to be used for the men who were fighting for their right to recognition as an independent race, were with her dead husband, her dead son, and the son who had gone forth to strike for the old Republics. For the moment she had forgotten the patient she was there to nurse; he had slept so long, had lain since waking so quiet that she fancied him sleeping still.

A slight movement on his part caused her to look up, and she surprised his gaze riveted on her and on the work in her hands, and read in the mute inquiry in his eyes the questions he would have asked.

Swiftly and noiselessly she laid aside her work, and rose and approached the bed, carrying a cup filled with milk, which she held to his lips. He drank the contents and lay back again on the pillow and regarded her with the hint of a smile in his eyes.

"I little thought when last we parted to meet you again like this," he said. "I'm afraid I've been giving trouble. And I'm filled with curiosity. It puzzles me to understand how I came here—in bed. The last thing I recall is walking on the veld."

He raised himself slightly on his elbow and surveyed her with an expression of perplexed inquiry. Her presence was another surprise amid the rush of amazing events. To wake and find her seated in the room, as quietly established as if she were in her own home, occasioned him greater wonderment than anything that had befallen.

"I wish you'd enlighten me," he said. "I want to know how you came to be here."

"Don't you think you had better lie still and just accept things?" she suggested. "I am here to look after you. You will feel better after a good rest."

"But I can't rest," he persisted. "I keep wondering about things. I want to know... please."

"Butter Tom brought you in," she said. "You dropped from exhaustion. The wound in your shoulder... It bled rather much."

"But that doesn't account for your presence," he said. "Butter Tom didn't fetch you to my aid?"

"No." She turned aside and busied herself at the table. "I'm staying with Mrs Nel," she added after a moment's pause for reflection. "It wasn't far to come, you see."

It was not difficult to fill in the blanks in her halting explanation. Matheson lay back on the pillow and was silent for a time, while Mrs Krige, believing that his curiosity was satisfied, resumed her seat and her occupation. Matheson watched her from the bed, rolling and stitching the strips of linen and placing the finished bandages in orderly rows on the table. There was something significant and disturbing in the calm methodical process; it worried him unaccountably.

Actuated by a sudden resolve, he moved his shoulder to test how far it incommoded him. It felt stiff and painful, but he had an idea that if he could get to the station he would be able to manage the journey to Cape Town. It was become a matter of urgent importance to him to get away back to the coast. There was nothing he could accomplish by remaining; and to remain in Honor's vicinity was intolerable. He put up a hand and felt his shoulder. It had been bandaged with a skill that suggested hospital training. He wondered who had done him this service. Curiosity prompted him to inquire.

“Some one has dressed my wound,” he said. “Was that you?”

“No.” Mrs Krige looked up quickly. “Hadn’t you better lie quiet?” she said.

He picked at the coverlet with impatient fingers.

“I can’t,” he answered. “I can’t rest. I want to be up and out of this. If I had a conveyance I could get to the station, and the rest would be easy. There’s nothing much the matter with me. This wound—it’s trifling. Besides, I must get back.”

“In a day or so,” she answered soothingly. “Is it so irksome to have me waiting on you for so brief a time?”

He smiled faintly.

“You are making me out ungrateful. It isn’t that, believe me... You are so kind; I know you will forgive my seeming ungraciousness. It is really important that I should return to the coast. There is some one in Cape Town who expects me. I am going to be married shortly.”

He was conscious as he said this of the sudden brightening of Mrs Krige’s face. She glanced towards him with eyes that expressed interest and an immense relief.

“I’m so glad,” she said.

She got up and moved away to the window, and remained with her back towards the bed, so that Matheson was no longer able to watch her face. She was, as he was perfectly aware, thinking of the confidence he had once reposed in her, when he had talked to her of his hopeless attachment for Honor, and had seemed to reproach her for the misdirection of Honor’s views. Those days appeared far away now; so much had happened in the interval; and yet the distress of them was painfully alive.

“Tell me about her... her name, and where she lives,” Mrs Krige said presently, without turning round. “You know I’m interested. I always hoped that—that something of the sort would happen.” She faced about and came back to the bed and sat down beside it. “I wish I knew her. Help me to know her through you... Talk to me about her. If you describe her I shall have a picture of her in my mind.”

The pleasant eyes bent upon him were so kind and inviting of confidence; the voice, asking for details of the girl he was so soon to marry, expressed such real sympathy and understanding, that Matheson found himself confiding in her fully the story of his engagement and the events which had led up to it. He painted the worth of his little fiancée in no mean colours, and admitted his own good fortune in having won the most priceless of all possessions, a good woman’s earnest love. But he did not speak of his own love. Possibly the mother of Honor understood that for him the shadow of the past lay darkly yet across the sunlit prospect of this later love, and, lingering, obscured the brightness of the newly won happiness in the gloom of unforgettable things. But no shadow hovers eternally in life’s sky: the darkest clouds must pass.

He told her of Brenda’s home life, and touched upon the sadness of her girlhood, and the plucky fight she was putting up when he met her.

“She’s such a brave, bright little soul,” he finished. “I want to make up to her if I can for the things she’s missed. I’m going to devote my life to that end. Only sometimes I doubt...”

He broke off and moved restlessly on the pillow, and looked up to discover the kind, comprehending eyes scrutinising him attentively, and flushed beneath their gaze.

“She’s such a capital chum,” he said. “I’m not really worthy of her.”

“Oh! I think she stands a fair chance of being very happy,” Mrs Krige observed with conviction. “And from what you have told me, I should say you have been fortunate enough to discover the right woman. A big nature and a warm heart comprise a generous dowry. I would like to meet her.”

He looked pleased.

“Yes,” he said; “you would like her. Perhaps, some day—when all this beastly fuss is over...” He put out his unhurt arm and took her hand. “It’s such a pitiful mistake,” he muttered. “Why did you let him join?”

She shook her head.

“It was not my doing,” she answered. “Andreas felt the call. Life leads us whither we must go. When a person has something taken from him which he prizes, he endeavours to recover what he has lost. That is how it is with us.”

“But it isn’t any sort of use,” he urged. “Besides, it is only a nominal loss. The country belongs to the people who live in it. Ask Herman Nel. They won’t succeed, you know—Andreas, and the others.”

“God knows!” she answered. “General de Wet will never rest until he has hoisted the flag in Pretoria. They are brave men, and they have right on their side.”

“Well, of course, it’s all according to the point of view,” he conceded. “But Botha is a brave man—and Herman Nel. They too have right on their side. It’s a sad business when there is division in the household.”

“Yes,” she admitted, and glanced involuntarily at the bandages upon the table, and sighed. “Each war that befalls

lays a foundation for the next. Men don’t consider the ties of blood when the question of fighting arises.”

“And women cease to consider the claims of love in like circumstance,” he returned grimly.

She had no difficulty in following his meaning. Her face clouded momentarily.

“That depends largely on the woman’s outlook on life,” she answered. “With some women love is all-satisfying; but the woman with the highest conception of love does not allow her ideals of life to be dominated by passion. It is not always the woman who loves least who puts love outside her life. But—you’ve talked enough.” She got up abruptly and returned to the table and her former occupation. “If I allow you to discuss these matters, your temperature will run up, and I shall be blamed.”

“Blamed by whom?” he asked.

She bent her head lower over her work and answered quietly:

“Both my daughters have been through a course of hospital training.”

“In preparation for this rebellion?” he suggested with a touch of irritation in his tones.

“In preparation for the rising of their people,” she replied with a gentle dignity of manner that rebuked his anger.

He made no answer, but lay still in a thoughtful silence and watched her while she worked.

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## Chapter Thirty Two.

The day wore slowly away. No one visited the rondavel. Although he knew the wish to be preposterous, Matheson nevertheless felt a strong desire to see Honor. He did not want to talk to her; he merely wished to see her. He would have been satisfied had she entered to confer with her mother, and left again without paying any heed to him—had she even passed the open door so that he might, unseen, have watched her go by.

But Honor did not come.

Butter Tom appeared at regular intervals, moving with unnecessary caution on tip-toe, his bare feet, always noiseless, making no sound on the smooth floor. He brought food for Mrs Krige, and soup for the sick baas, and laid and cleared the table with surprising swiftness and care. Butter Tom’s mind was troubled with regard to the baas’ accident. He felt himself blameworthy in having failed to keep guard. But the young missis with the face that was like a lily in the moonlight had sent him with a message to the farm. He had not liked to refuse to do her bidding: now he wished that he had refused. His own baas when he returned would be displeased with him, and the sick baas would reproach him; there would be no tobacco and no more good English money for him.

He stole repeated furtive glances towards the bed; but the baas lay with his gaze fixed on the open doorway and never looked his way. That was proof enough for Butter Tom that the baas was angry.

Matheson was not thinking of Butter Tom: he had ceased to wonder at the latter’s defection; subsequent events had blotted that out for the time. All his mind now was intent upon Honor to the obliteration of everything—Honor, who, apart from her marriage, was lost to him, and should have ceased to occupy his thoughts. In allowing this obsession to hold him he knew that he was behaving discreditably; but a man, though he may control his emotions up to a certain point, cannot always entirely subdue them: desire confronted with the object which inspires it can become an overpowering passion. Out of her presence, with distance and the knowledge of the hopelessness of his love separating them, he had grown resigned to the inevitable; but the sight of her again, the sound of the rich soft voice, the touch of her, had been more than he could bear with stoicism. He was moved to a sick longing for her, a longing which overlooked another man’s prior claim, and the claim of the girl who loved and trusted him. If occasionally the memory of Brenda obtruded itself, he thrust it aside with a sick man’s irritably impatience towards disturbing thoughts. Brenda had no place here. This side of his life was a thing apart, a slice of life detached and complete in itself. Here in this odd corner of the world he had experienced all the romance he was to know: it began here, and ended when he left. He would dig its grave and bury it when he went away. There was nothing else left to do.

He worked himself into a fever as the day advanced, and, flushed and restless, turned continually on the pillow and stared out at the hot sunshine that flooded the world without, and poured in through the opening of the rondavel and lay, a golden stream, along the shining floor. No trees surrounded Nel’s hut to shade it from the fierce rays of the sun, and the days were sultry at that time of the year.

Mrs Krige sat beside him and fanned him with untiring patience. The slow regular movement of her arm worried him; but he was grateful to her, and he appreciated the faint draught thus created: when she paused to rest the heaviness of the atmosphere oppressed him so that he felt almost suffocated. It was a relief when the sun went down, and the sky, blood-red from the afterglow, reflected luridly upon the darkening veld; though the dusk, as it closed in slowly, robbed him of his final hope of seeing Honor. Honor would not come to him... Perhaps it were wiser so.

He fell asleep after a while, and woke later to find the rondavel dimly illumined by the lamp which, turned low, was screened from the bed. He was alone. The quiet figure which he had last seen seated at the table rolling those endless strips of linen, was no longer there. Mrs Krige had left and had taken with her the result of her long hours of industry; there was nothing, save the fan lying on the chair beside the bed, to remind him of her presence. He wondered whether Butter Tom remained within call, or if he were entirely alone. The thought of being alone troubled him, why he did not know. He hesitated to call the Kaffir for fear of receiving no response; doubt, he felt, in the uncertainty of any one being near, was preferable to knowledge.

For a while he lay and watched the dimly burning lamp, and watching it lost consciousness of his surroundings in sleep once more.

When he woke again the dawn was breaking, and the cool fresh air of the early morning stole softly in through door and windows and fanned his fevered brow. He drank in long breaths of it eagerly, and looking forth at the increasing brightness, as it forced its way inside the silent room and slowly dispelled the shadows lurking there, he was made suddenly aware of another shadow that was not a part of the night, that did not vanish with the darkness but assumed more definite shape, appeared, while never moving, to draw nearer to him, to become less shadowy as the lesser shadows fled. It was a trick of the imagination he believed that formed out of the shadows in the dusky room the slender woman's figure which he descried dimly outlined against the reimpe curtain, with the dawn touching the pale hair, and falling wanly on the white still face. Was it a dream, he wondered; and feared to move for fear the dream would fade.

Quietly he lay and watched, feasting his eyes on the vision; and momentarily the day waxed brighter, and the shadowy form grew more distinct, took more substantial shape, became instinct with life and movement.

Slowly the reimpe curtain fell into place. With soft, inaudible footfall Honor advanced and stood beside the bed and looked down on him, a gentle solicitude in her steady eyes. He did not speak. He was afraid still that if he moved or made a sound she might vanish as unexpectedly as she had come. He could not have borne the disappointment had she suddenly turned and left him.

And then she spoke. Her voice broke the spell and sent the blood coursing once more madly through his veins. This was no dream. He was awake, and Honor stood there in the dawn beside his bed.

“You have slept well,” she said. “You are better?”

“I am quite fit,” he answered. “It was all I needed, a good sleep. How did you come? I never heard you enter.”

She laughed softly.

“I've been here with you all night.”

“You've been here? ... all night?” His tone was eloquent, eyes and voice bespoke his disappointment. “And I never knew! To sleep like that... and you here!”

“If knowledge of my presence would have kept you awake, I am glad you did not know,” she said. “You were a little feverish. We did not like to leave you alone. But you've slept well.”

She touched his neck lightly with her hand, the dear soft hand he longed to hold and kiss—the hand which he had taken and almost flung from him when he first heard of her marriage.

“The fever has gone,” she added. “You will soon be all right.”

“I'm all right now,” he insisted. “I feel quite fit. It's awfully good of you to have bothered, but you ought not to have sat up; it wasn't necessary.”

“I wasn't sure,” she returned, “how badly you were hurt. I didn't realise at first that you were hurt. I am sorry... I want you to—forgive that injury.”

“Oh, that!” he said, and thought of the greater injury Holman had contrived. “I ran that risk with my eyes open. I'm not counting that.”

She fell on her knees beside the bed and laid her two hands with swift impulsiveness upon his breast.

“I know,” she said, speaking very quickly and in lowered tones, her face close to his, the soft eyes holding his eyes filled with an eager pleading which it was difficult to resist—“I know you and Heinrich are enemies... For that matter *we* are enemies—you and I—”

“No,” he interrupted sharply... “No... You and I, enemies! ... Honor...”

“Ah!” she breathed softly, and the hands on his breast pressed more firmly. “I didn't mean that—not actually. Always in my heart I've known that couldn't be. You're my—”

“Lover,” he interjected hoarsely.

She winced and her face went white.

“Friend—my dear friend,” she corrected, but so gently, and with so little real conviction in her voice that it was rather as though she admitted his definition of the relationship. “You are my friend. You must remain my friend... I want to keep—just that.”

There were tears in her eyes now. She did not attempt to hide them: they welled there, priceless diamonds from a mine of ungathered wealth, welled, and overflowed, and fell on the man's breast. Matheson lay still, staring at her, and made no response.

“This is the last time we shall meet,” she went on quietly, striving after and regaining something of her old composure. “You must not come this way again. It would have been better for us both if you had not come now. Why did you come?”

“I did not expect to see you,” he replied, and evaded her eyes.

“I will tell you,” she said. “You are seeking Heinrich—to kill him. You meant to kill him...”

“I don’t know.” He moved uneasily. “I suppose that was it. He’s a spy. He has been guilty of the worst form of sedition... I didn’t know—how should I?—that—that you— Oh! my God! Honor, I would rather you had died than married him.”

“Hush!” She placed a finger on his lips and silenced him. “You mustn’t say those things to me. All that he has done he has done with my approval—for me and mine. He has worked for the Dutch cause for years...”

“And because of that,” he interrupted savagely, “you felt it necessary to reward him with all that you had to give... As though he hasn’t been well rewarded by his country, which pays its spies well for spreading sedition. And you’re no longer Dutch—you are a German subject. You’ve renounced your people by your marriage. He’ll renounce them too when it suits him.”

She drew back, hurt and angry.

“I am not German,” she contradicted proudly. “Heinrich’s interest is identical with mine.”

“Oh, well!” he said wearily. “It doesn’t matter anyway. At least it isn’t any business of mine. I’m sorry... but being sorry won’t undo things. Your feet are on the road now which they always wanted to travel. And you can’t see whither it is tending...”

“Can you?” she asked scornfully.

“I see it leading to disappointment and sorrow,” he returned. “This pitiful rebellion which you have assisted in bringing about is going to make a sad difference in this land. And only hurt can come to you. It is going to throw a still darker shadow across your path. My dear, I’m grieved about that. If it were possible I would sweep all the shadows out of your life and leave it fair and untroubled; but that is a power no human will can compass. Why couldn’t you leave the bitterness of strife to men, and turn your thoughts to gentler things? It’s unnatural for women to cherish hate. Hate never accomplished anything but destruction. In this case it will be the destruction of your hopes and ambitions.”

“We *must* win,” she asserted doggedly. “This is our chance. We are bound to seize it. Your country can’t send big armies to fight us now: you have bigger armies against you. You will lose this war, and we shall come again into our own. If only all the Dutch were with us! ... I can’t understand those Boers who go over to the British. It isn’t loyal; it is abject servility.”

“You are altogether mistaken,” he said. “You don’t understand the position. It isn’t a question of going over to the British, but of protecting this country from a serious menace. These men lode deeper than you do; they have the welfare of the country at heart; they have bigger stakes to occupy themselves with than nursing a spirit of revenge. They think for the future generations—for their children, whose heritage this country is. You are thinking only of your grievances: you live in the past. The maker of history must live in the future. Can’t you see, Honor, that you are fighting for your generation to the hurt of the generations to come? The statesman may not reckon for his own brief span; he has to look ahead.”

She made no verbal response, but looked at him with quickening interest, her dark eyes glowing, the breath coming quickly from between her parted lips. Matheson caught her wrist and held it firmly while he talked.

“What will it benefit you,” he asked, “to hoist your flag over the body of your brother, and the bodies of the sons and husbands of women who think with you? Life is too good a thing to spill it wantonly at the feet of a bloodless ideal. And you are too good and fine and gentle to waste your life in hate.”

“Not hate,” she corrected, the hot tears welling afresh. “Patriotism is not hate. Aren’t you ready to spill your blood for your country?”

“You’ve got me there,” he said, and smiled. “I’m going to defend this country from German avidity, anyhow.”

“Ah!” she cried. “You preach against hate, yet you hate the Germans. That isn’t consistent. You do hate the Germans?”

“Yes,” he admitted; “I suppose that’s true. But I never hated a German before their bestial ravishment of Belgium. I never imagined anything so brutal could defame the prestige of a great nation. They will never live that down. The things they’ve done... And the spying and underhand work... Yes, I hate them all right.”

“You hate Heinrich,” she persisted.

“I hate the things he has done.”

“I know,” she said. “But what he has done, he has done for me. Always, when I was still a child, he loved me. Can you wonder that I feel grateful to him? I am sorry you hate him. I don’t want harm to come to him through you... not through you. Promise me that you will go away and never seek to harm him in the future... Promise me that—for my sake.”

Had Matheson not already realised that the punishment of Holman was no longer work for him he must have yielded to the earnest entreaty in Honor’s voice and eyes, as with nervous insistence she urged her request that he would spare her husband; but her pleading stabbed him, and excited afresh his enmity towards the man.

“There is no need to wring promises from me,” he said, a hardness he could not prevent steeling his voice. “The fact that he is your husband is sufficient. Had I known that sooner I should not be here now. As it is, more harm has come to me than to him. It was not compassion on his side that prevented him from murdering me.”

“He was desperate,” she pleaded; “he feared you. He fears you still.”

“Perhaps,” he exclaimed with angry suspicion, “he sent you to intercede for him?”

“No,” she cried quickly—“not that I came because—because—” Her voice broke on a sob. “You are so hard,” she said. “I cannot touch you. Have you no pity—for me?”

“Pity!—for you?” he cried, and raised himself sharply in the bed. “My God! I love you, and you know it... What need have you to ask for pity? Rather should your compassion go out to me. I give everything... and take nothing away with me—nothing.”

Suddenly she bent over him, her eyes alight, her face transformed with a tender spiritual beauty that held him spellbound, breathless, drinking in her beauty with his eyes. Leaning towards him she pressed her lips to his.

“Something,” she whispered—“not much—but something to take away, and to keep, from me...”

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## Chapter Thirty Three.

The sunlight flooded the rondavel and played in a golden radiance about Honor’s figure. The gleam of it was in her hair; it shone dazzlingly on her white dress, and sparkled with a hard brilliance on the plain gold circlet on her finger. Matheson caught the glint of the ring, and from that moment it seemed to him that all the light in the room became contracted and centred in that narrow band, darting forth its refracted rays with a fiery challenge that hurt the eyes.

He put up a hand to shut out the sinister gleam of it, and lay quiet and in silence. Honor had risen and moved away from the bed. She stood with her face partly averted, watching the beauty of the sunrise through the uncurtained open window. An immense embarrassment held her, an embarrassment that made itself felt and in which the man shared. A sense of wrongdoing robbed them both of all pleasure in that long caress in the dawn, when their lips had met and lingered in the first kiss they had interchanged. He had kissed her once before on the brow; that kiss had been one of renunciation; the kiss he had given her that morning held the quality of passion in its eager warmth, a passion to which the woman was not insensible, to which she had in a measure responded. It had been the act of a moment in obedience to the impulse of the moment, and it left them both a little overcome and excited and enormously self-conscious.

Honor was startled. There was an expression akin to fear in the eyes that looked out at the sunlight, a warm colour in the beautiful face as if the rosy light in the sky had caught and flushed her cheeks. Her breathing was hurried, and the hand hanging at her side, the hand with its shining circlet, clenched and unclenched itself nervously. What had she done?—she, the bride of a few weeks. It was her fault, entirely her fault; she had always known that he loved her—had realised when she kissed him that she was touching fire. And yet after all what harm was there in what had passed between them? Why should she deny him that small satisfaction? She turned impulsively towards him, and stood transfixed, surprised and disconcerted at the sight of him lying with his eyes shielded by his hand. Why did he lie like that? Why would he not lode at her?

“Mr Matheson!” she said softly.

He uncovered his eyes immediately and met her inquiring gaze.

“Oh, hang it all!” he exclaimed. “Why don’t you call me Guy? We’ve got beyond formalities.”

He turned on his elbow.

“Come here,” he said. “I can’t talk to you from a distance. It’s all right. I’ll not forget again. I’ve been seeing that damned ring on your finger till I’m wellnigh blinded by it. It stands between us. I’m not likely to forget that. And there’s something else between us—something... I ought to have remembered sooner. But the sight of you...”

He broke off with jerky abruptness. Honor, observing him wonderingly, drew nearer in obedience to his wish, and seated herself in the chair near the bed. She folded her hands in her lap, and the ring was hidden from him. He noticed that, and wondered if she concealed it intentionally.

“I want to get away,” he said. “You must help me. I want some kind of conveyance... You’ll see to it? ... It doesn’t matter about this morning... After I leave I shall never see you again. I wish I had not seen you—ever. I wish I could forget you, but I know that is out of the question. I’ll never forget... your face... your voice... these will live in my memory. I am going to be married almost immediately, to the best little girl who ever loved a man not worthy of her. I’ve a warm affection for her—a warm affection, and an immense respect... but I have given the best of myself to you. That fact I am afraid is going to spoil life for both of us—for her and for me, I mean.”

“Need she know?” Honor asked quickly, in a voice that was not quite steady.

“She knows already. I had to tell her that before asking her to be my wife.”

“I’m sorry,” she said. “Oh! I’m sorry.”

She was silent for a moment; then she burst forth with a sudden soft vehemence that surprised him. He fell to

listening, wondering, while he watched her working face, as expressive of the emotion that swayed her as the full rich tones giving voice to the flow of resentful thoughts that expressed their owner's discontent with life, why this complicated business of life and love should be dependent upon infinitesimal human needs; why the disconnected individual existence should act and interact upon each separate existence it came in contact with until certain lives became interwoven with its own and, in adding to its completeness, divorced it from its former state of comfortable detachment? To love much is to suffer much; to love not at all is to remain unacquainted with happiness. And it is never a matter of choice: the lover is fashioned by circumstance; he is not his own creator.

"I think you were unwise to tell her," Honor said, speaking low, and looking away from him, gazing abstractedly at the golden path that stretched from the doorway to her feet with wide unseeing eyes. "Your confidence only aggravates the wrong. Life hurts enough." She pressed her hands the one upon the other tightly in her lap, and her face was sad. "Life has its beginning in pain; it struggles painfully through the years to the inevitable end. We regard life dishonestly; we're afraid to face the truth. We speak of the beauty of Nature, her kindliness and compassion; and we look about us and behold the drought, and the beasts dying of hunger and thirst; that is not beauty, it is ugliness: we see men striving in a hated rivalry, competing always—killing one another; that is not kindliness; kindliness is not born of the lust of hate. Throughout creation, from the meanest organic life to the highest, one thing preys upon another and kills in order to live; that is not compassion. Beauty and serenity exist only in inanimate objects. Perhaps that is why inanimate nature endures while we pass away.

"I love this land," she added, in soft impassioned accents, "as a woman loves her child. I wish I were a man that I could fight for it. Your country in annexing ours tears my child from my arms. And you talk to me of the futility, the wrong, of my wish to reclaim it... Go back to the girl who loves you, marry her, and have children of your own; and then perhaps you will understand. She will forget when her first child lies in her arms that its father's love was ever given elsewhere. And you will forget too. No human passion is so acute that time cannot dim its keenness. I want you to forget. I want you, if you ever think of me, to think of me kindly as a friend."

"Friend!" he ejaculated scornfully.

"It's the sweetest word in all the English language," she returned gently, "when it is applied sincerely."

"That may be," he admitted, and thought how ill the term applied in his case.

It incensed him that she could talk in that dispassionate manner about friendship with his burning kisses hot upon her lips. He believed that she was dissembling for the purpose of hiding from him her real feelings. He had never really understood her. She was capable of an immense reserve; not once in their most intimate moments had she permitted herself to be entirely frank with him.

"Perhaps in the future," he said, "I may come to regard this thing with the same cool detachment as yourself; but I can't think of you as a friend—yet. And it is dishonourable for me to think of you in any other way. I hadn't heard of your marriage. I can't get used to the idea. It seems to me fantastic and unreal I met Herman Nel in Cape Town; he never mentioned it."

"I doubt whether he knew of it," she answered. "Herman has not been to Benfontein for some months. Freidja is away nursing. She has quarrelled with him."

"Is she going to spoil her life and his?" he asked with sharp impatience, recalling Nel's face with its slightly wistful smile when the Dutchman had spoken to him of the rupture of his engagement.

Honor looked surprised.

"No," she said. "After the war she will marry him. She loves him. Herman is a good man, and he is Dutch. They will live here."

"And you?" he asked. "Are you going to forsake Benfontein?"

She smiled at the question. The farm on the Karroo was more precious to her than the fairest places of earth. She had come to Benfontein as a child. Every tree and kopje, every flower that blossomed in the veld, was dear to her with the priceless value of long familiar things. To quit Benfontein would be to tear herself up by roots too deeply set to bear such ruthless transplanting.

"Heinrich is working the farm for Andreas in his absence," she explained; "he rents half the farm. We shall build a house for ourselves on the land, and I shall live near my mother. When Andreas marries, she will come to us."

"You make plans," he said, surprised at her confidence in the future. "One cannot think beyond the present these days. I do not look so far ahead."

"I forgot," she said, glancing at him swiftly. "You are going to fight—against us..."

"I am going to join Botha's force as soon as I am married," he answered.

"You've talked with Herman... He has persuaded you?"

Her tone held a note of suspicion. For all his talk of love for her, he had not been ready to yield to her persuasions. He was even prepared to fight against her people, to look upon her people and herself as rebels. That was not consistent with love.

"Herman has persuaded you," she said again.

“He helped to convince me, I admit.”

“I tried to convince you,” she said quickly. “I did my utmost to prove to you the justice of our cause... Why couldn’t you at least have kept out of it? Why must you strike at me?”

“Oh! Honor,” he protested. “You look at this thing so differently. It isn’t a personal question at all.”

“It is,” she cried passionately—“between you and me.” She leaned towards him, her face quivering, and flushed with angry shame. “No one knows better than you do all this means to me. I’ve told you so much. I’ve trusted you. And in return—in return you take up arms against me. You talk of love—you, who cannot be true either to the woman you profess to love, or to the woman you are pledged to marry! Your love is not worthy any woman’s acceptance.”

“I’ve deserved that,” he replied, with a quick change of colour, and averting his gaze from the stormy reproach in her eyes. It came to him in a swift illuminating flash that intense natures such as Honor’s were not only difficult to understand, they were difficult also to deal with; possibly they would be difficult to live with.

He found this fresh mood disconcerting and distressing. And the reproach to his honour came ill from her. He felt suddenly very tired. He needed food. In her excitement she had forgotten the nourishment that stood ready for him on the table, slowly cooling while they talked.

“It isn’t altogether my fault,” he asserted with almost sullen insistence. “I’m not myself. I’m unnerved. You come to me when I’m altogether unprepared, and—my God! how the sight of you tempts me! But you are hard, Honor. All that is gentle in your nature has been deliberately suppressed.”

“I’ve been tutored in a hard world,” she replied oddly. “It is well, perhaps, that I am hard. A woman needs an armour of steel to protect herself from the selfishness of men’s love I believed in you once... I cared... You know I cared. But you wanted everything, and would give nothing. That is your way. For men like Beyers and Christian de Wet I would die, if it would benefit them at all. They are brave men with a single purpose in life. You call them rebels; we regard them as heroes. Had you joined us, I would have done anything for you. Instead, you side with the men who are trying to defeat our cause. Can you wonder that I am bitter when you speak to me of love and strike with the other hand?”

She got up abruptly, and stood for a moment irresolute, looking down at him, the anger dying slowly out of her eyes.

“It isn’t any use—it isn’t any use at all to speak of these things now. You will go your way, I mine. But it might have been so different. Last year, when you went away, I hoped you would change your mind and come back. I didn’t know then of this girl. Heinrich told me about her. You went back to her, and my influence ended.”

So Holman had enlightened her about Brenda. Doubtless he had done so in order to prosper his own suit. It was a card he would not have scrupled to play.

“I could never have embraced your cause,” he said gently. “I know what you have suffered, and I feel for you. But the affairs of nations are outside individual grievances. One has to accept a broader outlook. I shall never forget that I owe it to you that I learnt to see your point of view so clearly that I look upon this movement less as a rebellion than the persistence in a righteous if mistaken cause by a people who have never known discipline. In relying upon Germany you rely upon a ruthless enemy; the protection of the British flag alone secures your independence. This Colony is governed largely by the Dutch, in the interests of the Dutch collectively with the British, and for the good of the native community. You cannot improve on that. Let well alone, Honor, and heal old wounds. Herman Nel’s method of winning is the better and surer way.”

“Ah, Herman!” she said, and smiled. “Herman is a dreamer.”

“He dreams sanely,” he answered with conviction.

“Which means that he thinks as you do.”

She moved away to the table and took up the neglected food.

“See what a bad nurse I make,” she said, assuming a lighter manner. “I would starve you while I attempt to show you the error of your ways. It would appear that where you are concerned I must fail in everything.”

She brought the cup to the bedside. He took it from her hand and drained the contents eagerly.

“You were famished,” she said reproachfully. “Yet you wouldn’t ask me for food.”

“I hate to give so much trouble,” he answered. “If you wouldn’t mind calling Butter Tom presently, I will get up and dress with his assistance. It’s all humbug, my lying here, and taking slops. I could eat an ox.”

“I’ll dress your wound first,” she said. “That is something I can do for you better than Butter Tom.”

“You dressed it before?” he asked. “I wondered. I thought possibly I owed that to you. Honor...” He looked at her appealingly. “You are not going to let us part with a sense of ill will between us? I want to believe that when I am gone you will sometimes think kindly of me.”

Honor did not at once reply. She stood With the empty cup in her hand, the sunlight warming her face, shining on the white surface of the vessel into which she gazed in thoughtful abstraction, brightening her whole figure, and the room which formed a quaint and fitting background for this girl who belonged to the wilds, and whose beauty suggested always to the man who watched her sunlit spaces and warmth and the scent and the winds of the veld.

She lifted her gaze suddenly and met his *eyes*.

“Don’t let us talk of these matters,” she said. “It is wiser with the coming of morning to cease to dwell on the dreams which belong to the night that is past. I’ve dreamed my dreams—you too. We are awake now, and the day calls us to other activities. Just for a moment while sleep drugged our senses we forgot. But we are neither of us people who forget for long the path of honour.”

His gaze fell before her steady eyes. She was right. Their paths in life were no tractless ways; they stretched straight ahead, clearly defined and mile-stoned with duties, leading always in opposite directions to the accepted goal—the goal of individual endeavour which contributes its effort to the unending scheme of life.

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## Chapter Thirty Four.

There was a thoughtful look in Honor’s eyes when, leaving Butter Tom to the unaccustomed task of valeting the wounded baas, she stepped forth into the sunshine and walked with a certain weary reluctance towards the homestead. She was tired with her overnight vigil, and the emotional scene in the rondavel was succeeded by a feeling of exhaustion and nervous reaction. For the first time within her knowledge the thought of her cause failed to sustain her; and more than once the question formed itself in her mind whether after all this sacrifice of life were justified even in the securing of national independence? She had never doubted before. She had been as positive of the right and the urgency of their cause as she had felt certain of its ultimate success. Despite Herman Nel’s opposition, she had believed, until results proved the error of her hopes, in the whole-hearted co-operation of the entire Dutch community. Heinrich had assured her that the Boers would rise to a man. The treaty of Vereeniging was but another scrap of paper which the Teutonic mind lightly disregarded. Honor had disregarded it also, as a contract signed under compulsion by the leaders against the will of the majority; she felt that it was in no sense binding on the Dutch as a whole. Matheson’s statement that they were a people who had never known discipline stuck in her mind. Broadly it was true. The Boer does not submit readily to being governed, even by his own leaders. It is a nation in the making, without any of the traditions of an older race to guide it, but with sufficiently fine ideals from which to evolve traditions of its own. Clear-sighted men, like Nel, realised that there was nothing to be gained by fighting; the peaceful development of the country would best serve their interests.

That morning, in a state of physical and mental fatigue, Honor allowed her thoughts to dwell for the first time on the possibility of failure. Matheson had shaken her confidence; and in reminding her that her own brother’s life might be sacrificed to the cause she so ardently espoused, he had caused her enthusiasm a rude check. She had not considered the toll in human life that would be exacted: the grim ugliness of war had been lost sight of in the dazzling prospect of victory. It did not seem to her possible that Andreas could be killed. If that should happen, the triumph of their cause would prove a hollow mockery, and her mother’s tragic life would end in added sadness. It was too big a price, Honor felt in her overwrought and dispirited mood—too big a price to pay even for victory.

As she neared the homestead, coming towards her, she recognised her husband. She was unprepared to meet him there at that hour. He had ridden over from Benfontein. She wondered a little impatiently what brought him. His presence there so early in the morning disconcerted her. Although he was aware that she was sharing with her mother the care of the sick man, and had given her permission to dress Matheson’s wound and aid Mrs Krige with her professional knowledge, his acquiescence had not included sitting up with the patient at night: he had supposed she would sleep beneath Leentje Nel’s roof. It never occurred to him that Matheson’s case called for particular care. The wound was not serious—a flesh wound only; he saw no reason why the women should make a fuss over a mere scratch. In his opinion his own hurt called for greater consideration. His throat was sore and swollen; he had difficulty in swallowing. But Honor had expressed little sympathy with him. She had left him alone all night to care for the man who had injured him. He felt resentful; and he was angry with her because of her concern for the Englishman. What was this cursed Englishman to her that she should feel it her duty to tend him?

“You are over early,” she said, when she came up with him. “I didn’t expect you.”

“So I supposed,” he answered roughly, and turned and walked back beside her. “I’ve been to the farm. Leentje told me you were at the rondavel. I was going to fetch you. What were you doing there? I don’t choose that my wife should spend the night with any man, sick or well.”

She flushed warmly.

“Some one had to watch beside him,” she said with immense restraint. “There was no one else to do it.”

“Absurd!” he replied angrily. “The nigger is good enough to wait on him. There was no one to look after me.”

“You were not so badly hurt,” she returned, in a voice which despite its quiet tones should have warned him of her rising anger. She did not look at him; her eyes searched the landscape ahead of her, and rested with tired satisfaction on the dew-drenched sparse vegetation, cobwebbed with silver threads.

“I feel sick enough,” he said savagely. “But that’s nothing to you. Leentje Nel wouldn’t nurse her husband’s murderer.”

Honor smiled briefly.

“You are very aggressively alive for a murdered man,” she said. She touched his sleeve diffidently. “Don’t be cross, Heinrich. I’m tired—so very tired. And this morning I am racked with anxious fears—fears for Andreas—fears for the cause. The country is not with us.”

Holman made an angry gesture and spat upon the ground.

“White-livered curs!” he muttered. “Everything was in our hands. They’ve sold us—these pitiful Boers. They’re afraid for their blessed skins.”

Her anger flamed forth at this unjustifiable aspersion on the part of a man who was taking only an inactive share in the war. At no period in their history had the Boers earned that reproach—the people who had paid in blood for their right to a place in the dark continent.

“That comes ill from you,” she said. “At least, we don’t shirk the fighting. Men who fear for their skins don’t take up arms against one another. There is evidence enough in this district alone to refute your accusation of cowardice. There isn’t a farm within miles of us but some of its men have joined the fighting.”

“But they don’t hang together,” he persisted sullenly.

“They don’t all think alike,” she allowed; “but they possess the courage of their different convictions, and the courage to fight for them.”

“I spoke in the heat of the moment,” he conceded ungraciously. “It makes me sick to see this great opportunity wasted. You have your chance now to secure independence; it may never come again. And men like Botha and Smuts are simply tying your hands. Leentje has received a message from Cornelius; it came through this morning. Colonel Brand has sent an insulting letter to de Wet. Everywhere Botha’s following is superior to our forces. Our commandoes are simply giving way and fleeing before them. It’s a rout, unless they combine and stand firm; but they give way before the opposition they didn’t anticipate. They aren’t putting up anything of a fight.”

“Cornelius and Andreas won’t give way,” she said proudly.

“Cornelius and Andreas are but two men,” he answered bitterly; “and the voices of two men in a commando are apt to be drowned by the rest.”

Honor walked on without speaking; and in her thoughts the phrase beat insistently: “What will it benefit you to hoist your flag over the body of your brother?” Hot tears welled in her tired eyes, her steps dragged wearily. It did not seem to her at the moment to matter much which side won if only Andreas came through.

“Oh, this war!” she said sadly... “This war! it tears at the heart-strings. Nothing can make good to a woman for the lives of the men she loves.”

“Oh, that!” he returned indifferently. “I didn’t expect to hear such talk from you. That’s the view of the sentimentalist. One doesn’t reckon lives with so much at stake.”

So much at stake! What stake could be greater than the flower of the nations’ manhood which was being sacrificed?

In the farmhouse when they reached it commotion reigned. Leentje Nel was talking in loud excited tones, and two of the children, who were frightened by the noise and whom their mother had slapped soundly in her anger, added their cries to the uproar which greeted Honor’s arrival. Mrs Krige was doing her utmost to restore peace. When Honor entered she found her mother with one wailing child in her arms and another clinging to her skirt, soothing them as best she could, while Leentje held forth bitterly on the pestilential English—the English who had promised to protect them, and who instead had set English magistrates over them to harass them with fines, and make life intolerable, so that they couldn’t flog a native even without having to pay for it in hard cash. Such a state of things could not be endured. The South African Dutch would not submit to being ruled any longer by the pestilential English. The English would be beaten by the Germans, and then South Africa would belong to the Boers.

It struck Honor while she listened as a wholly inadequate and very paltry reason for which to risk valuable lives. It was not any reason at all; it partook rather of the nature of a long-cherished revenge for past wrongs which later events had ceased to justify. Matheson had summed up the situation correctly: the country was governed for the benefit of the white races impartially and for the good of the native community. That state of affairs could not in any event be improved upon.

Leentje turned eagerly as Honor entered, followed by her husband, and, confident of her audience, broke forth anew.

“Here’s a pretty letter from Cornelius,” she cried, and flourished the paper in Honor’s face. “His commando is retreating. They run like buck before the hunter. Naturally they expected the South African Dutch to stand as one man to crush this unholy scandal. When they find through the ungodly policy of Botha that they are opposed to their own people they give way. The men are surrendering, Cornelius says, individually and in small parties. Pah! May the Almighty desert these cowards in their hour of need. May they die and rot and be prey for the jackals. And those Dutch who won’t give up their horses to them, and everything else they possess, may they rot likewise and die miserably. Our men are short of mounts, short of ammunition, short of everything.” Her voice rose to a shrill scream. “For years we have been planning this, and when the hour strikes nothing is ready. Every horse on this farm is commandeered. There is only the miserable horse the cursed Englishman brought with him. That must be taken. If you had the courage of Jael, Honor, the Englishman would never leave the rondavel to fight against us.”

Swiftly, on an impulse, she turned towards Holman, the fire of inextinguishable hate in her eyes.

“Why don’t you shoot this English dog for us? We are only women; but if you won’t do this thing, I will.”

Holman shrugged his shoulders and turned away.

“You will have the English magistrates after you, Leentje,” was all he said, purposely goading her.

She smiled grimly.

"The English magistrates won't frighten me," she said. "They are set over the districts to cow the men."

She folded the letter in her hand and thrust it savagely in her bosom, and stared meaningly at Honor.

"'She put her hand to the nail, and her right hand to the workman's hammer,'" she quoted softly. "'Blessed shall she be above women in the tent... The mother of Sisera cried through the lattice. Why is his chariot so long in coming? Why tarry the wheels of his chariot?' ... There is work here worthy of Jael, the wife of Heber the Kenite."

Slowly, without speaking, Honor left the room. She passed through into the kitchen, and from the kitchen went out into the hot unshaded yard. For a minute or so she waited, as one who expects to be followed, then, with steps as light and fleet as a fawn's, she sped away in the direction of the rondavel.

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## Chapter Thirty Five.

Butter Tom was busy outside the rondavel shaking the dust from the skin mats which covered the floor. He glanced up at Honor's approach, and smiled with a cautious deference that concealed his vague distrust of her more effectually than it hid his nervousness. The missis with the face of a lily in the moonlight possessed the cunning of a devil. Already she had worked evil towards the baas he served. Her appearance now he believed portended further evil. He was afraid of her with the unreasoning fear of a man who realises his inability to resist a superior will. If she commanded him to do a thing, he would do it because he dared not refuse. He likened her to the fleet-footed powers of evil which outdistanced the chameleon, the tardy messenger of the gods, who failed through its dilatoriness to deliver the World from the ills which afflict mankind. She came towards him swiftly, as evil travels, with the speed of the wind, and halted beside him, warmly flushed and panting for breath. Butter Tom gathered up his mats, and, grinning nervously, prepared to retreat with them; but Honor stayed him with a gesture.

"Put those down," she said authoritatively, "and go to the stable quickly, and fetch out the old spider which Baas Herman uses. Inspan Baas Matheson's horse without loss of time. The baas will drive to the town, and you will drive him there and bring the spider back. Do you understand?"

"Ja, missis. Me take the mats inside, then me go."

For a second it seemed as though she would not permit this delay; then with another gesture she signified her consent to the disposal of the mats, but bade him be quick as she would wait for him.

Butter Tom retired within, and spread his mats carefully on the floor. The baas was attempting to shave himself with the razor grasped in his left hand, and was making a sorry business of it. He looked round at Butter Tom's entrance to inquire who it was he had heard talking outside the hut.

"Young missis will send Butter Tom to the stable," the Kaffir vouchsafed, with an appealing look at the baas in the hope that the latter would raise some objection to his obeying the strange behest.

But the baas, letting the razor fall, and receiving it without comment from the dark hand which hastily forestalled his request by returning it to him, merely said:

"If the young missis wants you, go at once."

Then he resumed the business of shaving himself with a hand considerably less steady than before. What need had Honor for employing Nel's servant? And why had she returned?

As if in answer to his unspoken questions. Honor entered the rondavel, having satisfied herself that Butter Tom had departed to do her bidding. She entered with a certain hesitation, and seeing Matheson's occupation, advanced with greater assurance and took the razor from his unresisting hand.

"There isn't any time for this," she said. "You can get this done in the town. In a few minutes Butter Tom will have the spider ready. It's a long drive for one horse, but you must do it, and you must start at once."

"But why?" he asked, amazed. "It is early. Half an hour can't make much difference anyway; and I look such a ruffian."

She closed the razor with a snap. As she did so Leentje's words recurred to her with a new and more sinister meaning. "She put her hand to the nail, and her right hand to the workman's hammer." ... A razor was quite as effective a weapon as a hammer in the hand of jael. Quickly she returned the razor to him, contemplating him with thoughtful anxious eyes. Instinctively she knew that she must not apprise him of his danger. He would not flee before a German, nor even from a modern Jael.

"There is no time to lose," she said. "They might raise objections to my lending the spider. I am giving you the only chance of a conveyance. If you don't take it now you will have to wait until you can ride into town; and quite possibly your horse will be commandeered. All the horses on the farm have been taken."

"Nel's horses—yes," he said. "But they can't take mine."

"They won't ask your permission," she answered. "Please do as I ask you. The spider belongs to Herman; you need not scruple to use it. Butter Tom will drive you... Reward him well; he will possibly be blamed when he returns."

She did not think it necessary to inform him that Butter Tom would most probably be flogged for obeying her orders. Holman would wreak his vengeance on the Kaffir because he would not dare to reproach her. She had known him flog

a Kaffir before; it was his method of enforcing a discipline he could not otherwise maintain.

“But such haste partakes of the nature of flight,” he objected. “I don’t really see the need for it.”

“You wanted to get away before,” she reminded him. “You asked me to help you. This is the only way in which I can help. If you delay it will be embarrassing for me. You are well enough to travel, aren’t you?”

Again she scrutinised him closely, with renewed anxiety in her gaze. He did not look equal to a great deal of fatigue. Never before had he felt so painfully conscious of weakness; but he made light of it.

“I’ll be all right,” he said. “It isn’t that... Of course, if you think it best, I am ready to start at once.”

Her relief at his compliance was manifest. She was nervous and unstrung, and the sudden reaction shook her fortitude. She turned her face aside to hide its emotion from him; but he saw the tears in her eyes, and was immensely disconcerted at the sight of this distress which he failed altogether to understand. He advanced a few paces towards her, hesitated, and stood irresolute, regarding her with an exasperated sense of his own inadequacy.

“I say!” he said awkwardly. “Don’t! ... Please, don’t... I’m awfully sorry that my presence has so upset you. I’ll go. I’ll go at once, Honor.” Then a doubt crept into his mind. He approached quite close to her and put out a hand and touched her sleeve. “You want me to go?” he asked.

“Yes,” she cried quickly—“yes... Of course.” She moved away. “Drive straight for the town,” she added. “And don’t spare the horse.”

Without once looking at him she left the rondavel, hiding her tear-wet face from him, and hurrying away in the sunshine with steps as fleet as those she had used in coming, but followed a less direct route for the purpose of allaying suspicion as to where she had been in the event of meeting any one on the way back. She had done her utmost for him; his safety was now his own affair.

Matheson remained for a while inactive, watching her retreating figure. He followed her to the doorway, and stood in the brilliant sunshine, looking after her, as she sped away with never a backward glance, the gold of the sunlight upon her and the morning wind ruffling her hair.

Innumerable doubts troubled him while he stood there, doubts which she had set fermenting in his brain. She was not happy. The change in her was very marked. When he had first met her she had been afire with enthusiasm and eager interest in life; now she was a woman, grave and thoughtful, on whom cares and responsibilities pressed heavily. She had sold her birthright of joy, sacrificing it to a long-cherished dream of vengeance; and already she was discovering how unsatisfying was the bargain she had made. Nel was right. There was a predestination in these matters beyond human control.

A sense of utter futility gripped Matheson, a sort of sick disappointment more distressing than physical nausea. His passion for Honor assumed a new significance: it became less personal—more of a formal worship of beauty for beauty’s sake than the love of man for woman for simple and primitive ends. He realised that temperamentally they were entirely opposed, as the north wind is opposed to the south, the east to the west. In no circumstance could they have mated with felicitous results. He had loved her beauty and the quick fire of her imagination; she had attracted him as the fierce untamed land she loved attracted him, by reason of its untrammelled freedom, its unconquerable savagery and beauty. But these qualities do not make for the sublime happiness of domestic peace. The human need demands something more satisfying than passionate discords in its relations with life. A man may enjoy climbing to exalted altitudes; but he lives preferably in the valleys among quiet and orderly things.

It seemed to Matheson that he saw life clearly for the first time. He was regarding things from the detached standpoint of an unbiassed onlooker—regarding himself, as a person takes note of some acquaintance and determines his place in the scheme of the universe. He had a place, quite unimportant and prosaic, but with certain clearly defined duties and work to perform. Always he came back to that. There was work for him to do—work for every one. He had been idling in the backwaters of good intentions long enough. Too often a man idles away his best years in dreaming, and overcrowds his middle age with much that might have been accomplished during his youth. Youth is the period for activities; and most surely is youth the time for marriage—useful marriage for the raising and rearing of healthy and beautiful children.

Then, breaking in sharply upon his musings, came the sound of wheels and the noise of Butter Tom’s guttural exhortations to the recalcitrant bony horse which Matheson had hired at De Aar, and which, accustomed to the saddle, displayed mule-like tendencies between the shafts. Butter Tom sawed at the reins and swore at it in Kaffir, while Matheson looked on with apathetic indifference, thinking drearily of the long drive before him in the heat, with his wounded shoulder and the useless right arm for which Honor had improvised a sling from a scarf of her own.

With the moment of departure it occurred to him what a fool he had been to come. He did not know what he had expected from the visit. It had proved a wild, impossible venture. A man may not take the law into his own hands even in Africa. Had he killed Holman he would have found himself placed in an awkward dilemma. It would not have been easy to establish a sufficient reason for the act. He had nothing but circumstantial evidence to produce against Holman, evidence which would have implicated Honor, and which therefore he could not have made use of. He realised clearly that he had been actuated by a strong personal animus, the result of his recognition of the man’s responsibility for the poisoning of Honor’s mind, and the systematic fostering of her brother’s disloyalty. It had never been with him a question of German treachery against England, but of the injury done to himself through the woman he had loved His sense of justice had not sprung from any lofty motive; therefore its failure of accomplishment, though humiliating, was not deserving of many regrets.

He climbed into the spider with difficulty and seated himself beside Butter Tom, who, by dint of a vigorous application

of the whip, induced the stubborn horse to break into an uncomfortable trot.

“This horse bad schelm,” the Kaffir observed critically. “Him got seven debels in him.”

Matheson looked back towards the rondavel, remembering now that they were moving the few things he had brought with him and which he had forgotten to pack. He was about to tell the Kaffir to return in order to fetch his possessions when he became aware of Leentje Nel’s figure in the distance, running towards them, and changed his mind. The Dutchwoman gesticulated violently, and shouted to Butter Tom to stop. Butter Tom heard her, and looked back; then, with his whip arm upraised, he glanced inquiringly at the baas’ imperturbable face.

“Drive on,” Matheson commanded.

The whip fell relentlessly across the animal’s lean flanks. Butter Tom stood up to the business, and narrowly escaped being thrown out on to the veld as the horse, after an indignant plunge and two ineffectual attempts to splinter the splashboard with its hoofs, broke into a furious gallop, bumping the spider behind it like a toy cart over the rough stony ground. Matheson, hanging on with his left hand, watched, with a light of understanding for Honor’s urgency breaking in upon him, Leentje Nel’s pursuing figure pounding after them in futile and angry chase.

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## Chapter Thirty Six.

The dark cloud which had so long overshadowed South Africa, which stretched now blacker than it had ever appeared across the sky of the Union’s prosperity, was none the less surely passing, rolling backward with sullen reluctance before the strong opposing breath of leading opinion.

This German organised rebellion owed its defeat largely to the fact that the Dutch in the Colony knew by experience how little reliance was to be placed in German promises. The Boer is beginning to recognise that the word of a German is binding only in as far as it serves his own end. The memories of men who fought in the late Boer war are not all as conveniently short as their German advisers hoped. Brand, in his historical letter to de Wet, emphasised this point in his reply to de Wet’s earnest exhortation to him to depart from the policy he had adopted and join the rebellion, which he insisted arose out of a spirit of deep indignation at the unholy act of the Government in attacking German South-West Africa.

“I am satisfied,” Colonel Brand wrote in reply, “of the justice of the standpoint taken up by me. Even better than myself you know how deeply disappointed we were in the people whose case you so arduously espouse to-day. Not only did we receive no help from them in the last war, but the Kaiser even went to the extent of advising the British Government how to attack and destroy us. What an insult to our people when the late State President of the Transvaal personally applied to them and was turned back on the border.”

These things are not easily forgotten, and they are less easily pardoned. The good faith of a nation cannot rest upon lies.

Matheson knew nothing of the letter Cornelius had written to his wife; but he gathered from what he heard in De Aar, and from the talk of some Dutchmen with whom he travelled to the coast, that the rebellion was half-hearted, that already the men were realising that they had been misguided and were forsaking their leaders and going quietly back to their farms. In a few months it was prophesied Botha would have crushed the rising and restored order in the country. And the men who were now so bitter against him would come to admit the wisdom of his policy, and respect him for the generous nature of his opposition, which followed consistently the principle of suppressing the rebellion with firmness, of sparing life when mercy could be judiciously extended, and of pardoning the offenders. It is possible only for great natures to be generous and for wise natures to be impartial. The Union was fortunate in its time of crisis in having at its head a man in whom both these qualities were combined. The quashing of their carefully planned schemes in South Africa was one of Germany’s bitterest blows.

Matheson had sent a telegram to Brenda from De Aar to acquaint her of his return. He believed that she would be at the station to welcome him, nevertheless as an afterthought he had added the words: “Please meet train.” A keen desire to see her welcoming face on the platform on his arrival moved him to send the message. He wanted her, as he always wanted her when he was depressed and out of tune with life. Her bright companionship and ready understanding of his moods, her unwearying patience and kindness, had taught him to lean unconsciously on her. He wanted her with the formless need of the individual for a tried human friendship which in no circumstance could fail in understanding and sympathy. He never analysed his feeling for her; but he knew that she had grown somehow very dear and necessary to him; he also knew that there was no sort of passion in his steadily growing love for her. She was always his dear chum.

As he neared his destination a horrible feeling of nervousness gripped him. He was obsessed with the dread that something would prevent her from being at the station. She might not have received his telegram. Such things had happened before. She might have been out when it arrived—it might have been stuck in the rack and forgotten. A dozen such possibilities occurred to him.

He stared out of the window at the gathering darkness, watching the black formless shapes flitting by like sinister shadows in the night, dimly illumined by the light of the passing train. And then his gaze came back unwillingly, his musing interrupted by the bustle of his fellow travellers reaching up to the rack for their baggage in preparation for disentraining. Their cheerful energy fretted him. The journey had tired him, and his shoulder felt stiff and uncomfortable. He still wore Honor’s scarf as a sling. It was soiled now and crumpled, but it had been of great service. He glanced down at it and thought of the owner, of how she had tied it for him and pinned the empty sleeve of his coat across his breast, and buttoned the coat with great care for his injured arm. He pictured the beautiful face as it had leaned so near to him, and recalled the scent and the sheen of her bright hair. All that belonged to the past

—was a separate chapter in his life—a still-born romance. It was a dream of beauty which had no place in the world of realities. But the dream would live in his memory. In the gold and crimsons of the sunset, amid the vast solitariness of the veld, and the splendour of moonlit nights, he would dream the dream again, would see in imagination a woman's perfect face with its halo of pale hair shading the mystery of her eyes. She was becoming for him a symbol of womanhood, a symbol of all that was beautiful and strange and moving in nature. The flowers in the veld suggested her; the curve of a hill recalled the graceful flow of her shoulders; the heat of the noontide was as the passionate warmth of her nature; while the remote serene dusk conveyed the remembrance of her gentler moods when she looked into the heart of Africa with pity for its unhealed wounds.

He gazed out again upon the darkness, and the picture of Honor faded.

The lights of the city became visible and the dark outline of the sea. He sat up straighter and gripped the window with his left hand and peered out at familiar objects looming large in the gloom as the train ran on towards the terminus. Something one of the men in the carriage was saying arrested his attention. It recalled in a measure Herman Nel's theories in regard to the rising; only the speaker spoke with less restraint than Nel habitually used, and with less sympathy with the rebels.

“They boast that they are fighting for the independence of the old Republics,” he was saying. “Perhaps a few of them are. But it is racial prejudice and political jealousy which has maddened the leaders. And for the rest, rebellion is always an easy method of making a living.”

A big fair Dutchman, standing in the middle of the swaying compartment, paused in the act of reaching up for a wonderful carpet bag which was serviceable rather than a thing of beauty, to remark with a slow shrug:

“Judas was not the only man to take blood-money. They come to a bad end, these men who sell human lives for greed.”

Do they? Matheson felt that the speaker generalised over-freely. If Justice were always discriminating and inexorable in her dealings with malefactors, she worked too secretly for the ordinary man to follow her methods. It was altogether a fallacy in regard to this life that the wicked suffer and are punished in proportion to their offence.

The train ran into the station. He got out quickly. He had no baggage to concern himself with, and was one of the first to descend from the train. He searched the platform eagerly for Brenda; and when he caught sight of her and saw the light of welcome in her face, he realised how great his disappointment would have been had she failed him.

She came forward swiftly, a pleased shyness in her look, love for him shining behind the smiling gladness in her eyes. He stooped and kissed her. It was an unusual demonstration from him in public; but the sight of her welcoming face was good; it surprised him into a betrayal of greater tenderness than she was accustomed to from him. She drew him towards a lamp and scrutinised him attentively, and he saw her quick startled glance directed towards his empty sleeve, and felt unaccountably embarrassed.

“It's nothing,” he said jerkily in an attempt to reassure her. “I'll tell you about that some other time.”

Her eyes lifted from the empty sleeve to his face.

“You look very tired,” she said. “You've been ill... You *are* ill.”

He tucked his hand within her arm and led her outside the station.

“I got hurt,” he said, “and I ought, I suppose, to be resting my arm, but it wasn't possible. It's nothing to worry about.”

He put her into a cab and seated himself beside her.

“It's good to be back—with you,” he said.

She pressed closer against him.

“I was surprised to get your telegram from De Aar. Why didn't you write from Johannesburg? ... All these days, and never a line!”

“I wasn't in Johannesburg,” he answered. “I never got beyond De Aar. The man I wanted was there. Do you remember the man you saw me with on the beach that first morning? ... I went to settle a debt with him.”

She turned quickly towards him, a light of comprehension dawning in her eyes.

“He did this for you,” she said, and touched the empty sleeve. “I don't want you to tell me,” she added; and he judged from her voice and from her manner that this journey of his to De Aar with its ugly consequences was associated in her mind with the story he had confided to her at the Monument before their engagement. She wanted him to realise that she trusted him.

“I've no secrets from you,” he said.

“I know. But there are some things one understands without any need for discussing them. I think I guessed when you didn't wish me to see you off.”

“I didn't suppose...” he began, and broke off and stared at her. “I met her,” he confessed baldly; “but it wasn't a thing planned. I wanted to see the man. She is married to him; but I didn't know that when I went there.”

Silence fell between them. It seemed to the man and to the girl, seated so still beside him, that the presence of this other and fairer woman intruded between them, was with them, listening to their disconnected talk.

“It’s finished anyway,” he said abruptly. “I’m glad you know.”

He stole a look at her quiet face.

“There is a dark shadow,” he went on presently, “that lies across this land—the shadow of discontent and racial prejudice. That will pass away eventually—from the minds of many it has passed already. I have heard it described as the shadow of the past. Across the lives of numberless people some such shadow falls. They pass, these shadows.”

She stretched out a hand and found his advanced to meet it. He pressed her fingers warmly.

“It isn’t any sort of use to pretend that it hasn’t mattered to me,” he said; “but it belongs to the past now. I can look ahead to the future with a glad confidence... You aren’t afraid to trust your future in my keeping?”

She looked up in his face with a smile lighting the earnest eyes, and answered simply:

“I’ve never been afraid of shadows, Guy... And I love you. Love and trust are inseparable.”

She drew her hand away from his and leaned back against the cushions and was silent for a while, listening to the hum of the streets and the soft rustle of the night wind as it blew in through the open windows and fanned her face. Hers was not a jealous temperament; but she realised, and felt sad in the knowledge, that in the years that lay ahead she would have her husband’s love to win. The heart which waits and trusts and gives generously reaps a full reward.

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