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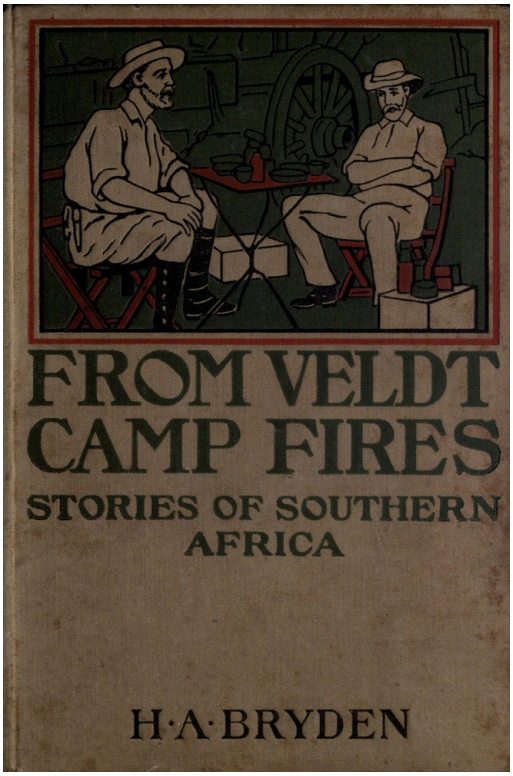

From Veldt Camp Fires

by H.A. Bryden

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Chapter One.
A Secret of the Orange River.

Many are the stories told at the outspan fires of the South African transport riders—some weird, some romantic, some of native wars, some of fierce encounters with the wild beasts of the land. Often have we stopped for a chat with the rugged transport riders, and some strange and interesting information is obtained in this way.

The transport rider—the carrier of Africa—with his stout waggon and span of oxen, travels, year after year, over the rough roads of Cape Colony and beyond, in all directions, and is constantly encountering all sorts and conditions of men—white, black and off-coloured; and in his wanderings, or over his evening camp fire, he picks up great store of legend and adventure from the passing hunters, explorers and traders.

One night, after a day's journey through the bush-veldt, we lay at a farmhouse, near which was a public outspan. At this outspan two transport riders were sitting snugly over their evening meal; they seemed a couple of cheery, good fellows—one an English Afrikander, the other an Englishman, an old University man, and well-read, as we afterwards discovered—and nothing would suit them but that we should join them and take pot-luck. Attracted by their hospitable ways and the enticing smell of their game stow, for we were none of us anthobians, we sat us down and ate and drank with vigorous appetites. Their camp-pot contained the best part of a tender steinbok, and a brace or two of pheasants (francolins); and we heartily enjoyed the meal, washed down with the inevitable coffee.

Supper finished, some good old Cango (the best home-manufactured brandy of the Cape, made in the Oudtshoorn district) was produced, pipes were lighted, and then we began to "yarn." For an hour or more we talked upon a variety of topics—old days in England, the voyage to the Cape, the Colony, its prospects and its sport.

From these, our conversation wandered up-country, and we soon found that our acquaintances were old interior traders, who in the days when ivory and feathers were more plentiful and more accessible than now, had over and over again made the journey to 'Mangwato and back. 'Mangwato, it may be explained, is the trader's abbreviation for Bamangwato, Khama's country, the most northerly of the Bechuana States; and of Bamangwato, Shoshong was formerly the capital and seat of trade. Then we wandered in our talk to the Kalahari, that mysterious and little known desert land, and from the Kalahari back to the Orange River again.

"'Tis strange," said one of our number, "how little is known of the Orange River—at all events west of the falls; I don't think I ever met a man who had been down it. One would think the colonists would know something of their northern boundary; as a matter of fact they don't."

"Ah! talking of the Orange River, reminds me," said the younger of the transport riders, the ex-Oxonian, and the more loquacious of the two, "of a most extraordinary yarn I heard from a man I fell in with some years back, stranded in the 'thirstland,' north-west of Shoshong. Poor chap! he was in a sorry plight; he was an English gentleman, who for years had, from sheer love of sport and a wild life, been hunting big game in the interior. That season he had stayed too late on the Chobi River, near where it runs into the Zambesi, and with most of his people had got fever badly. They had had a disastrous trek out, losing most of their oxen and all their horses, and when I came across them they were stuck fast in the doorst-land (thirstland) unable to move forward or back. For two and a half days they had been without water, and from being in bad health to begin with, hadn't half a chance; and, if I had not stumbled upon them, they must all have been dead within fifteen hours. I had luckily some water in my vatjes, and managed to pull them round, and that night, leaving their waggon in the desert in hopes of being saved subsequently, and taking as much of the ivory and valuables as we could manage and Mowbray's (the Englishman's) guns and ammunition, we made a good trek, and reached water on the afternoon of the next day. I never saw a man so grateful as Mowbray; I believe he would have done anything in the world for me after he had pulled round a bit. Poor chap! during the short time I knew him I found him one of the best fellows and most delightful companions I ever met. Unlike most hunters, he had read much and could talk well upon almost any subject, and his stories of life and adventure in the far interior interested and impressed me wonderfully. But the Zambesi fever had got too strong a hold upon him. I

dosed him with quinine and pulled him together till we got to Shoshong, where I wanted him to rest, but he seemed restless and anxious to get out into the open veldt again, and after a few days we started away. Before we had got half-way down to Griqualand, Mowbray grew suddenly worse and died one evening in my waggon just at sunset. We buried him under a kameel doom tree, covering the grave with heavy stones, and fencing it strongly with thorns to keep away the jackals and hyenas.

"Many and many a talk I had with poor Mowbray before he died; sometimes he would brighten up wonderfully and insist on talking to me for hours, as he lay well wrapped up, in the evening, underneath my waggon sail. One evening, in particular, he had seemed so much stronger and better, and, later on, as we sat before the camp fire on the dewless ground, where I had propped him up and made him comfortable, he told me a most strange story, a story so wonderful that most people would scout and laugh at it as wildly improbable; yet, remembering well the narrator and the circumstances under which he told it to me, with the shadow of death creeping over the short remaining vista of his life, I believe most firmly his story to be true as gospel.

"Poor chap! He began in this way: 'Felton, you have been a thundering kind friend to me, kind and tender as any woman (which, by the way, was all nonsense), and I feel I owe you more than I am ever likely to repay; yet, if you want wealth, I believe I can put it in your way. Do you know the northern bank of the Orange River, between the great falls and the sea? No! I don't suppose you do, for very few people have ever trekked down it; still fewer have ever got down to the water from the great walls of desolate and precipitous mountain that environ its course, and, except myself and two others, neither of whom can ever reveal its whereabouts, I believe no mortal soul upon this earth has ever set eyes upon the place I am going to tell you about. Listen!

"In 1871, about the time the diamond fields were discovered, and people began to flock to Griqualand West, I was rather bitten with the mania, and for some months worked like a nigger on the fields; during that time I got to know a good deal about stones. I soon tired of the life, however, and finally sold my claim and what diamonds I had acquired, fitted up a waggon, gathered together some native servants, and trekked again for those glorious hunting grounds of the interior, glad enough to resume my old and ever-charming life. Amongst my servants was a little Bushman, Klaas by name, whom I afterwards found a perfect treasure at spooring and hunting. Like all true Bushmen, he was dauntless as a wounded lion, and determined as a rhinoceros, which is saying a good deal. I suppose Klaas had had more varied experience of South African life than any native I ever met. Originally, he had come as a child from the borders of the Orange River, where he had been taken prisoner in a Boer foray, in which nearly all his relations were shot down. He had then been 'apprenticed' in the family of one of his captors, where he had acquired a certain knowledge of semi-civilised life. From the Boer family of the back-country, he had subsequently drifted farther down into the colony, and thence into an elephant hunter's retinue. He had accompanied expeditions with Griquas, Dutch and Englishmen all over the far interior. The Kalahari desert, Ovampo-land, Lake Ngami, the Mababi veldt, and the Zambesi country, were all well known to him, for in all of them he had traded, hunted and, on occasion, fought. As for the Western Orange River and its mysteries—for it is a mysterious region—he knew it, as I afterwards discovered, better than any man in the world. Well, we trekked up to Matabeleland and, after some trouble, got permission to hunt there; and a fine time we had, getting a quantity of ivory, and magnificent sport among lions, elephants, buffaloes, rhinoceros, sable and roan antelopes, koodoo, eland, Burchell's zebras, pallah and all manner of smaller game.

"One day, Klaas, who was sometimes a bit too venturesome, got caught in the open by a black rhinoceros, a savage old bull. The old brute charged and slightly tossed him, making a nasty gash in his right thigh, but not fairly getting his horn under him, and was just turning to finish the poor little, beggar, when I luckily nicked in. I had seen the business and had had time to rush out on to the plain, and, just as Borele charged at poor Klaas to finish him off as he lay, I got up within forty yards, let drive, and, as luck would have it, dropped him with a 500 Express bullet behind the shoulder. Even then the fierce brute recovered himself and tried to charge me in turn, but he was now disabled and I soon settled his game. After that episode Klaas proved himself about the only grateful native I ever heard of, and seemed as if he couldn't do enough for me.

"One day, after he had got over his wound, he came to me, and said, 'Sieur! you said one day that you would like to know whether there are

diamonds anywhere else than at New Rush (as Kimberley was then called). Well, sieur, I have been working at New Rush and I know what diamonds are like; and I can tell you where you can find as many of them in a week's search as you may like to pick up. Allemaghte! Ja, it is as true, sieur, as a wilde honde on a hartebeest's spoor.'

"'What the devil do you mean, Klaas!' said I, turning sharply round—for I was mending the disselboom (waggon-pole)—to see if the Bushman was joking. But on the contrary, Klaas's little weazened monkey face wore an expression perfectly serious and apparently truthful. The statement seemed strange, for I knew the little beggar was not given to 'blowing,' as so many of the Kaffirs and Totties are.

"'Ja, sieur, it is truth; if ye will so trek with me to the Groote (Orange) River, three or four days beyond the falls, I will show you a place where there are hundreds and hundreds of diamonds, big ones, too, many of them to be found lying about in the gravel. I have played with them and with other "mooi steins" too, often and often as a boy, when I used to poke about here and there, up and down the Groote River. My father and grandfather lived near the place I speak of, and I know the way to the "vallei" where these diamonds are well, though no one but myself knows of them; for I found them by a chance, and, selfish like, never told of my child's secret. I will take you to the place if you like.'

"'Are you really speaking truth, Klaas?' said I severely.

"'Ja! Ja! sieur, I am, I am,' he earnestly and vehemently reiterated, 'you saved my life from the "rhenoster" the other day, and I don't forget it.'

"Again and again I questioned and cross-questioned the little Bushman, and finally convinced myself of his truth; and I had too much respect for his keen intelligence to think he was himself misled or mistaken.

"'Well, Klaas,' said I at last, 'I believe you, and we'll trek down to the Orange River and see this wonderful diamond valley of yours.'

"Shortly after this conversation we came back to Shoshong, where I sold my ivory, and then, with empty waggon and the oxen refreshed by a good rest, set our faces for the river. From Shoshong, in Bamangwato, we trekked straight away across the south-eastern corner of the Kalahari, in an oblique direction, pointing south-west; it was a frightfully waterless and tedious journey, especially after passing the Langeberg, which we kept on our left hand. Towards the end of the journey we found no water at a fountain where we had expected to obtain it, and thereby lost four out of twenty-two oxen (for I had six spare ones), and at last, after trekking over a burning and most broken country, we were beyond measure thankful to strike the river some way below the great falls. Klaas had led us to a most beautiful spot, where the terrain slopes gradually to the river (the only place for perhaps thirty or forty miles where the water, shut in by mighty mountain walls, can be approached), and where we could rest and refresh ourselves and our oxen. Here we stopped four days. It was a lovely spot; down the banks of the river, and following its course, grew charming avenues of willows, kameel dooms (acacias) and bastard ebony; two or three islands, densely clothed with bush and greenery, dotted the broad and shining bosom of the mighty stream; hippopotami wallowed quietly in the flood, and fish were plentiful. The thorny acacia was now in full bloom, and the sweet fragrance of its yellow flowers everywhere perfumed the air as one strolled by the river's brim. Rare cranes, flamingoes, gorgeous kingfishers and many handsome geese, ducks and other water-fowl, lent life and charm to this sweet and favoured oasis.

"I had some old scraps of fishing tackle with me, and having cut myself a rod from a willow tree, I employed some of my spare time in catching fish, and had, for South Africa—which, as you know, is not a great angling country—capital sport. The fish I captured were a kind of flat-headed barbel, fellows with dark greenish-olive backs and white bellies, and I caught them with scraps of meat, bees, grasshoppers, anything I could get hold of, as fast as I could pull them out, for an hour or two at a time. Once I ran clean out of bait, and was nonplussed; however, I turned over a stone or two, killed a couple of scorpions, carefully cut off their stings, and used them as bait, and the fish came at them absolutely like tigers. I soon caught some thirty pounds weight of fish whenever I went out. The mountains rose here and there around in magnificently serrated peaks, and the whole place, whichever way you looked, was superbly beautiful. There was a fair quantity of game about; Klaas shot some klipspringer antelopes—hereabouts comparatively tame—up in the mountains, and there were koodoos, steinbok and duykers in the bushes and kopjes.

"After the parching and most harassing trek across the desert; our

encampment seemed a terrestrial paradise. The guinea-fowls called constantly with pleasant metallic voices from among the trees that margined the river, and furnished capital banquets when required. Many fine francolins abounded, and at evening, Namaqua partridges came to the water to drink in literally astounding numbers. We had to form a strong fence of thorns around us, for leopards were numerous and very daring, and there were still lions about in that country. At night, as I lay in my waggon, contentedly looking into the starry blue, studded with a million points of fire, and mildly admiring the glorious effulgence of the greater constellations, I began to conjure up all sorts of dreams of the future, of which the bases and foundations were piles of diamonds, culled from Klaas's wondrous valley.

"Having recruited from the desert journey, and all, men and beasts, being in good heart and fettle, we presently started away down the river for the valley of diamonds. I had, besides Klaas, four other men as drivers, voerlopers and after-riders, and they naturally enough were extremely curious to know what on earth the 'Baas' could want to trek down the Orange River for—a country where no one came, and of which no one had ever even heard. I had to tell them that I was prospecting for a copper mine, for, as you probably know, there are many places in this region where that metal occurs. After our four days' rest by the noble river we were all greatly refreshed, and quite prepared for the severe travel that lay before us. As we were doubtful whether we should find water at the next fountain that Klaas knew of, owing to the prevalence of drought—and as it was an utter impossibility (so Klaas informed me) to get down to the river on this side for several days, owing to the steep mountain wall that everywhere encompassed it—I filled the water vatjes and every other utensil I could think of, and then, all being ready and the oxen inspanned, we moved briskly forward.

"We had now to make a détour to the right, away from the river, and for great part of a day picked our painful footsteps over a rough and semi-mountainous country. Towards evening, we emerged upon a dreary and interminable waste that lay outstretched before us, its far horizon barred in the dim distance by towering mountains, through which we should presently have to force our passage. That evening we outspanned in a howling wilderness of loose and scorching sand, upon which scarcely a bush or shrub found subsistence. After a night not too comfortable and broken by some hyenas that prowled restlessly about, we were up betimes next morning. As soon as the oxen were inspanned and ready to move forward for the mountains to which Klaas had directed our course, I rode off for a low kopje that rose from the plain away in the distance hoping to see game beyond. I was not disappointed; a small troop of hartebeest was grazing about half a mile off, and by dint of a little manoeuvring with my Hottentot after-rider, whom I despatched on a détour, I managed to cut across the herd and knocked over a fat cow at forty yards. We soon had her skinned, and taking the best of the meat, rode on for the waggon. Again we had an exhausting trek over a burning sandy plain; the heat of this day was something terrible. I have had some baddish journeys in the doorst-land on the way to the great lake, but this was, if possible, worse. Towards four o'clock the oxen were ready to sink in their yokes, their lowing was most distressing, and as the water was now nearly at an end, and we might not reach a permanent supply for another day, nothing could be done to alleviate their sufferings. At nightfall, more dead than alive, we outspanned beneath the loom of a gigantic mountain range, whose recesses we were to pierce on the following morning. Half a day beyond this barrier lay the valley of diamonds, as Klaas whispered to me after supper that night, with gleaming excited eyes; for, noticing my growing keenness, he, too, was becoming imbued with something of my expectancy.

"That night, as we lay under the mountain, was one of the most stifling I ever endured in South Africa, where, on the high table-lands of the interior, nights are usually cool and refreshing. Even the moist heat of the Zambesi valley was not more trying than this torrid, empty desert. The ovenlike heat, cast up all day from the sandy plain, seemed to be returned at night by these sun-scorched rocks with redoubled intensity. Waterless, we lay sweltering in our misery, with blackened tongues and parched and cracking lips. The oxen seemed almost like dead things. Often have I inwardly thanked Pringle, the poet, of South Africa, for his sweet and touching verse, written with the love of this strange wild land deep in him, for his striking descriptions of its beauties and its fauna. As I lay panting that night, cursing my luck and the folly that brought me thither, I lit a lantern and opened his glowing pages. What were almost the first lines to greet my gaze? These!

“A region of emptiness, howling and drear,
Which man hath abandoned, from famine and fear,
Which the snake and the lizard inhabit alone,
With the twilight bat from the yawning stone;
Where grass nor herb nor shrub takes root,
Save poisonous thorns that pierce the foot;
And here, while the night-winds around me sigh,
And the stars burn bright in the midnight sky,
As I sit apart by the desert stone,
Like Elijah at Horeb’s cave alone,
‘A still small voice’ comes through the wild
(Like a father consoling his fretful child),
Which banishes bitterness, wrath and fear,
Saying, ‘Man is distant, but God is near.’

“We hailed, the passage of the mountains next morning with something akin to delight; anything to banish the monotony of these last two days of burning toil. We were up as the morning star flashed above the earth-line. We drank the remaining water, which afforded barely half a pint each to the men, none for the oxen and horses. With difficulty the poor oxen, already, in this short space, gaunt and enfeebled from the heat and for lack of food and drink, were forced up into their yokes. Klaas, as the only one of us who knew the country, directed our movements, and with hoarse shouts, and re-echoing cracks from the mighty waggon-whip, slowly our caravan was set in motion. Our entrance to the mountains was effected through a narrow and extremely difficult poort (pass), strewn with huge boulders and overgrown with brush and underwood that often barred the way and rendered Stoppages frequent. After about a mile, the kloof into which this poort debouched suddenly narrowed and turned left-handed at right angles to our course. Accompanied by Klaas, I walked down it, and was soon convinced by the little Bushman that our passage that way was ended. As Klaas had warned me, our only way through and out of the mountains now lay in taking, with our waggons, to the steep and broken hill sides, a proceeding not only perilous, but apparently all but impossible. Yet the thing had to be done, and we at once set the spent oxen in motion and faced the ascent obliquely. After consultation with Klaas, I got out some ropes, which I had fastened to the uppermost side of the waggon, while some stout long poles, which I had had previously cut for such an emergency while outspanned at the Orange River, served to prop up our lumbering vehicle from the lower side. Slowly and wearily, and yet, withal, with a sort of dogged stubbornness, the poor oxen toiled on, half-hour after half-hour, urged by our shouts, by the cruel waggon-whip, mercilessly plied, and the terrible after-ox sjambok. Many times it seemed, as our cumbrous desert ship crashed across a boulder or down a stair-like terrace of rock, that it must inevitably topple over and roll crashing to the bottom; but our guy-ropes and the supporting poles saved us again and again.

“I had fastened one of the ropes with a stout band of leather round the chest of my hunting horse; the other two ropes were held by the strongest of my servants and myself, while two other men held the poles against the lower side of the waggon as they stood down hill below it. My old horse, guided by a Bechuana boy, as usual, proved himself as sensible as any Christian, knew exactly what he had to do, and, when we came to crucial points and the waggon shivered as it were upon empty space, he and my Kaffir and I tugged away, while the fellows below shoved with might and main. And so time after time we averted a catastrophe, so dire that I shuddered to think of it; for in some places, if the waggon had gone, the wreck must have been irreparable and the yoked oxen hurled with it in a broken and mangled heap to the bottom far below us. Well, occasionally halting for a blow, long hours of the most distressing labour I ever experienced were at last got through; we had surmounted and left behind the first huge mountain-side, had plunged into a valley, had passed obliquely over the shoulder of another great mountain, and now halted in a deep and hollow kloof lying below a singular flat-topped mountain, conical in shape, that stretched across our onward path. This mountain was flanked on either hand, as we fronted it, by yawning cliffs, and was only approachable from this one aspect. Here we outspanned for a final rest before completing our work, if to complete it were possible. Shading my eyes from the fierce sunlight, I looked upward at the long slope of mountain, broken here and there, and occasionally shaggy with bush; over all the fierce atmosphere quivered, seething and dancing in the sun-blaze. I looked again with doubt and dismay at the gasping oxen, many of them lying foundered and almost dead from thirst and fatigue, and my spirits, usually brisk and unflagging, sank below zero. Klaas had told me previously of a most wonderful pool of water that lay on the crown of a mountain where we

should outspan finally before entering upon the portals of the diamond valley. Now he came to me and said, pointing upwards, ‘Sieur, de sweet water lies yonder op de berg. It is a beautiful pool, such as ye never saw the like of; if we reach it we are saved and the oxen will soon get round again; ye must get them up somehow, even without the waggon.’

“The tiny yellow blear-eyed Bushman, standing over me as I sat on a rock, pointing with his lean arm skywards, his anxious dirt-grimed face streaming with perspiration, was hardly the figure of an angel of hope; and yet at that moment he was an angel, of the earth, earthy, ’tis true, yet an angel that held before us sure hope of rescue from our valley of despair; for despair, black and grim, now lay upon the faces of my followers and in the eyes of my oxen. Remember, we had tasted no water to speak of for close on three days, and had had besides a frightfully trying trek.

“We lay panting and grilling for an hour or more, and then I told my men that water in any quantity lay at the mountain top and that we must, at all hazards, get the oxen up to it. By dint of severe thrashing with the after-ox sjambok, we at last got the oxen on to their legs—all but two, which could not be made to rise, and then, leaving the waggon, but taking three or four buckets, we moved upwards. Only a mile of ascent, or a little more, lay before us; but so feeble were the oxen that we had the greatest difficulty to drive them to the top, even without the encumbering waggon. At last we reached the krantz, and after a hundred yards’ walk upon its flat top, we came almost suddenly upon a most wonderful and, to us, most soul-thrilling sight.

“Dense bushes of acacia thorn, spekboom, euphorbia, Hottentot cherry and other shrubs grew around, here and there relieved by wide patches of open space. The oxen, getting the breeze and scenting water, suddenly began to display a most extraordinary freshness; up went their heads, their dull eyes brightened and they trotted forward to where the brush apparently grew thickest.

“For a time they found no opening, but after following the circling wall of bush, at length a broad avenue was disclosed—an avenue doubtless worn smooth by the passage of elephants, rhinoceroses and other mighty game, in past ages—and then there fell upon our sight the most refreshing prospect that man ever gazed upon. Thirty yards down the opening there lay a great pool of water, about 200 feet across at its narrowest point, and apparently of immense depth; the pool was circular, its sides were of rock and quartz, and completely inaccessible from every approach save that by which we had reached it. It was indeed completely encompassed by precipitous walls about thirty feet in height, which defied the advent of any other living thing than a lizard or a rock-rabbit. Upon these rocky walls grew lichens of various colours—blood-red, yellow and purple, imparting a most wonderful beauty to the place. The avenue to the brink of this delicious water was of smooth rock somewhat sloping, and in the rush to drink we had the greatest difficulty in preventing the half-mad oxen from plunging or being pushed in, in which case we should have had much trouble to rescue them.

“How the poor beasts drank of that cool, pellucid flood, and how we human beings drank, too! I thought we should never have finished. The oxen drank and drank till the water literally ran out of their mouths as they at last turned away. Then I cast off my clothes and plunged into the water; it was icy cold and most invigorating, and I swam and splashed to my heart’s content. After my swim and a rest I directed my men to fill the four buckets we had brought, and then, leaving the horses in charge of one of their number, we drove the cattle, loth though they were to leave the pool, back to the waggon, going very carefully so as not to spill the water.

“At length we reached the valley, only to find our two poor foundered bullocks lying nearly dead. The distant lowing of their refreshed comrades had, I think, warned them of good news, and the very smell of the water revived them, and after two buckets apiece of the cold draught had been gulped down their kiln-dried throats, they got up, shook themselves, and rejoined their fellows.

“We rested for a short time and then inspanned and started for the upland pool. The oxen, worn and enfeebled though they were, had such a heart put into them by their drink, and seemed so well to know that their watery salvation lay up there, only a short mile distant, that they one and all bent gallantly to the yokes and dragged their heavy burden to the margin of the bush-girt water. We now outspanned for the night, made strong fires, for the spoor of leopards was abundant, stewed some bustards, ate a good supper, and turned in; when I say turned in, I should be more correct in saying I turned into my waggon, while the men

wrapped themselves in their blankets or karosses, lay with their toes almost into the fire and snored in the most varied and inharmonious chorus that ears ever listened to.

"I suppose we had not been asleep two hours when I was awakened by the sharp barks and yelpings of my dogs, the kicks and scrambles of the oxen, and the shouts of the men. Snatching up my rifle and rushing out, I was just in time to see a firebrand hurled at some dark object that sped between the fires.

"'What is it, Klaas?' I shouted.

"'Allemaghte! it is a tiger (leopard), sieur,' cried the Bushman, 'and he has clawed one of the dogs.'

"True enough, on inspecting the yelping sufferer, Rooi-kat, a brindled red dog, and one of the best of my pack, I found the poor wretch at its last gasp, with its throat and neck almost torn to ribbons. Nothing could save the unfortunate animal, the blood streamed from its open throat, and, after a convulsive kick or two, it stretched itself out and lay there dead. Cursing the sneaking, cowardly leopard, I saw that the replenished fires blazed up, and again turned in.

"It must have been about two o'clock in the morning, the coldest, the most silent, and the dreariest of the dark hours—that fatal hour betwixt night and day, when many a flickering life, unloosed by death, slips from its moorings—when I was again startled from slumber by a most blood-curdling yell. Hunters, as you know, sleep light and seem instinctively to be aware of what passes around them, even although apparently wrapped in profoundest sleep. I knew in a moment that that agonised cry came from a human throat, and headlong from my kartel I dashed. God! what a din was there again from dogs, men, and oxen, and above all, those horrid human screams. I had my loaded rifle, and rushing up to a confused crowd struggling near the firelight, I saw in a moment what had happened.

"The youngest of my servants, a mere Bechuana boy, was hard and fast in the grip of an immense leopard, which was tearing with its cruel teeth at his throat, and at the same time kicking murderously with its heavily clawed hind legs at the poor fellow's stomach and thighs. One of the men, Klaas of course, bolder than his fellows, was lunging an assegai into the brute's ribs, seemingly without the smallest effect, others were thrashing it with firebrands, and the dogs were vainly worrying at its head and flanks. All this I saw instantaneously. Thrusting my followers aside, I ran up to the leopard, and, putting my rifle to its ear, fired. The Express bullet did its work at once; the fiercest and most tenacious of the feline race could not refuse to yield its life with its head almost blown to atoms, and loosening its murderous hold, the brute lay dead. But too late! the poor Bechuana boy lay upon the sand wounded to the death. His right shoulder and throat were terribly ripped and mangled by the fore claws and teeth of the deadly cat; but the cruellest wounds lay lower down. The hinder claws of the leopard had absolutely torn the abdomen away; it was a shocking sight. Recovery was hopeless, and indeed, although we did what we could for the poor sufferer, he only lingered an hour insensible, then died. After his death my men told me how the thing had happened. In this solitary region the leopards and other ferae, as I have often heard, never being disturbed by gunners, are extraordinarily fierce and audacious. The leopard, a male, was evidently very hungry, as its empty stomach testified, and after once tasting blood—that of the dog—it soon got over its temporary scare. The young Bechuana lay farthest from the fire, for his elders took up the warmest positions, and the leopard had crept cat-like in upon him and got him by the throat before he knew where he was. Then came the awful shrieks I had heard, and then began the tussle for life; alas! an altogether one-sided one. My men, in the scramble, and scared, too, no doubt, forgot the guns which were in the waggon, and only Klaas had thought of his assegai. So bloodthirsty was the brute, that nothing, except my rifle, could make it relax its hold, even although it was manifestly unable to get away with its victim. After these horrors sleep was banished, and as the grey light came up we prepared for day.

"The morning broke at length in ruddiest splendour, and as the terrain was slowly unfolded before my gaze, I realised the desolate magnificence of the country. Mountains, mountains, mountains of grim sublimity rolled everywhere around. Far away below, as I looked westward, a thin silvery line, only visible for a little space, told of the great river flowing to the sea, inexorably shut in by precipitous mountain walls that guaranteed for ever its awful solitude.

"Klaas stood near, and as I gazed, he whispered, for my men were not far away: 'Sieur, yonder, straight in front of you, five miles away, lie the

diamonds. If we start directly after breakfast we shall have four hours' hard climbing and walking to reach the valley.'

"All right, Klaas," said I, "breakfast is nearly ready and we'll start as soon as we have fed." A good fire was going, the pot was already steaming, the oxen had been watered, and I myself, stripping off my clothes on the brink of that delicious pool, dived deeply into its unknown depths. After a magnificent swim in the cold and bracing water I felt transformed and ready for breakfast; but although the bathe had to some extent revived my spirits, I could not forget the sad beginning of our search—the death of poor Amazi, now, poor fellow, lying buried beneath a cairn of stones just away beyond the camp.

"Well, breakfast was soon over, and then I spoke to my men. I told them that I intended to stay at this pool for a few days, and that in the meantime I was going prospecting in the mountains bordering the river. I despatched two of them to go and hunt for mountain buck in the direction we had come from, where we had noticed plenty of rhebok, duyker and klipspringer, the others were to see that the oxen fed round about the water, where pasture was good and plentiful, and generally to look after the camp. For Klaas and myself, we should be away till dusk, perhaps even all night; but we did not wish to be followed or disturbed, and unless those at the camp heard my signal of four consecutive rifle shots they were on no account to attempt to follow up our spoor. My men by this time knew me and my ways well, and I was convinced that we should not be followed by prying eyes; indeed, the lazy Africans were only too glad of an easy day in camp after their hard journey.

"Taking some biltong (dried flesh), biscuits and a bottle of water each, and each shouldering a rifle, Klaas and I started away at seven o'clock. The little beggar, who, I suppose, in his Bushman youth had wandered baboon-like all over this wild country, till he knew it by heart, showed no sign of hesitation, but walked rapidly down hill into a deep gorge at the foot, which led half a mile or so into a huge mass of mountain that formed the north wall of the Orange River. This kloof must at some time or another have served as a conduit for mighty floods of water, for its bottom was everywhere strewn with boulders of titanic size and shape, torn from the cliff walls above. It took us a long hour of the most laborious effort to surmount these impediments, and then with torn hands and aching legs we went straight up a mountain, whose roof-like sides consisted of masses of loose shale and shingle, over which we slipped and floundered slowly and with difficulty. I say we, but I am bound to admit that the Bushman made much lighter of his task than I, his ape-like form seeming indeed much more fitted for such a slippery breakneck pastime.

"At length we reached the crest, and then, after passing through a fringe of bush and scrub, we scrambled down the thither descent, a descent of no little danger. The slipping shales that gave way at every step, often threatened, indeed, to hurl us headlong to the bottom, which we should most certainly have reached mere pulpy masses of humanity. At last this stage was ended, and we found ourselves in a very valley of desolation. Now we were almost completely entombed by narrowing mountain walls, whose dark red sides frowned upon us everywhere in horrid and overpowering silence. The sun was up, and the heat, shut in as we were, overpowering. Moreover, to make things more lively, I noticed that snakes were hereabouts more than ordinarily plentiful; the bloated puff-adder, the yellow cobra, and the dangerous little night adder several times only just getting out of our path.

"The awful silence of this sepulchral place was presently, as we rested for ten minutes, broken by a posse of baboons, who, having espied us from their krantzes above, came shoggling down to see what we were.

"They were huge brutes and savage, and quah-quahed at us threateningly till Klaas sent a bullet into them, when they retreated pell-mell. We soon started again, and pressed rapidly along a narrow gorge some fifty feet wide with perfectly level precipitous walls, apparently worn smooth at their bases by the action of terrific torrents, probably an early development of the Orange River when anciently it made its way through these grim defiles. The ground we walked upon was, I noticed, composed of sand and rounded pebbles, evidently water-worn and of various kinds. Some of them were round masses of the most beautiful transparent crystal-spar, often as large as a man's head.

"Presently the causeway narrowed still more, and then, turning a sharp corner, we suddenly came upon a pair of leopards sauntering coolly towards us. I didn't like the look of things at all, for a leopard at the best of times is an ugly customer, even when he knows and dreads firearms, and here, probably, the animals had never even heard the

report of a gun.

“The brutes showed no intention of bolting, but stood with their backs up, their tails waving ominously and their gleaming teeth bared in fierce defiance. There was nothing for it, either we or they must retreat, and having come all this frightful trek for the diamonds I felt in no mood to back down, even to *Felis pardus* in his very nastiest mood. Looking to our rifles, we moved very quietly forward, until within thirty-five yards of the grim cats. They were male and female, and two as magnificent specimens of their kind as sun ever shone upon. The male had now crouched flat for his charge and not an instant was to be lost; the female stood apparently irresolute. Noticing this, and not having time to speak, we both let drive at the charging male; both shots struck, but neither stopped him. The lady, hearing the report, and apparently not liking the look of affairs, incontinently fled. With a hoarse, throaty grunt the male leopard flew across the sand, coming straight at me, and then launched himself into the air. I fired too hurriedly my second barrel, and, for a wonder, clean missed, for in those days I seldom failed in stopping dangerous game; but these beggars are like lightning once they are charging. In a moment the yellow form was flying through space, straight at my head; I sprang to one side, and Klaas, firing again, sent the leopard struggling to earth, battling frantically for life, amid sand and shingle, with a broken back. Lucky was the shot, and bravely fired, or I had probably been as good as a dead man ere this. Another cartridge soon finished off the fierce brute. We noticed on inspection that one of our first two bullets had ploughed up the leopard’s nose and glanced off the forehead; the other had entered the chest and passed almost from end to end of the body, while the third had broken the spine. Klaas soon whipped the skin off the dead leopard and hid it under some stones, and we then proceeded, the whole affair having occupied but twenty minutes.

“Another mile of this canal-like kloof brought us to an opening, and here a most singular sight lay before my vision. Hitherto we had been so shut in that the sun failed to penetrate between the narrowing cliffs, except, probably, for a short while as it passed immediately above them.

“Suddenly, as the gorge widened on either hand, a blaze of sunlight glowed and glistened on the upright walls to the left hand of us. As I looked thither, one of the most marvellous sights in nature was, in an instant, laid bare; a sight that few mortals, even in aeons upon aeons of the past, have ever gazed upon in these remote and most inaccessible regions of the Orange River. The wall of mountain on our left stood up straight before the hot sunlight a dark reddish-brown mass of rock, I suppose some five hundred feet in height, and then sloped away more smoothly to its summit, which overlooked the river, as I should judge, about a mile distant. As we came out into the sunshine, Klaas, pointing to the cliff, ejaculated, in quite an excited way, ‘De paarl! de paarl! kek, sieur, kek!’ (The pearl! the pearl! look, sir, look!) Looking upwards at the pile of rock, my eye was suddenly arrested by a gleaming mass that protruded from the dead wall of mountain. Half-dazzled, I shaded my eyes with my hand and looked again. It was a most strange and beautiful thing that I beheld, a freak of nature the most curious that I had ever set eyes on. The glittering mass was a huge egg-shaped ball of quartz, of a semi-transparent, milky hue, flashing and gleaming in the radiant sunshine, with the glorious prismatic colours that flash from the unlucky opal. But yet more strange, above the ‘paarl,’ as Klaas quaintly called it, and overhanging it, was a kind of canopy of stalactite of the same brilliant opalescent colours. It was wonderful! Klaas here began to caper and dance in the most fantastic fashion, and then, suddenly ceasing, he said, ‘Now, sieur, I will soon show you the diamonds; they are there,’ pointing to a dark corner of the glen, ‘right through the rock.’

“‘What made you call that shining stone up there “de paarl”?’ said I, as I gazed in admiration at the beautiful ball of crystal.

“‘Well, sieur, I was once with a wine Boer at the Paarl, down in the Old Colony, and a man told me why they called the mountain there “De Paarl,” and he told me, too, what the pretty gems were that I saw in the young vrouw’s best ring when she wore it; and I then knew what a paarl was and that it came from a fish that grows in the sea. And I remembered then the great shining stone that I found up here, when I was a boy, on the Groote River, and I thought to myself, “Ah! Klaas, that was the finest paarl ye ever saw, that near where the pretty white stones lay.” I mean the diamonds yonder, sieur.’

“At last, then, we were within grasp of the famous stones, concerning whose reality I had even to the last had secret misgivings. It was a startling thought. Just beyond there, somewhere through the rock-walls,

whose secret approach at present Klaas only knew, lay ‘Sindbad’s Valley.’ Could it be true? Could I actually be within touch of riches unspeakable; riches, in comparison with which the wealth of Croesus seemed but a beggar’s hoard?

“I sat down on a rock and lit a pipe, just to think it over and settle my rather highly-strung nerves. The Paarl, as I could now see, was an unique formation of crystal-spar, singularly rounded upon its face. It and the glorious canopy of hanging stalactite above it must have been reft bare by some mighty convulsion that had anciently torn asunder these mountains, leaving the ravine in which we stood.

“As we drank from our water-bottles and ate some of the dried flesh and biscuits we had brought with us, I noticed Klaas’s keen little eyes wandering inquiringly round the base of the precipice in our front. He seemed puzzled, and as we finished our repast and lit our pipes again, he said, ‘The hole in the rock that leads from this kloof to the diamonds should be over there,’ pointing before him. ‘But I can’t quite make out the spot, the bushes have altered and grown so since I was here as a boy, years and years ago.’

“We got up and walked straight for the point he had indicated and reached the foot of the precipice. All along here, where the sand and soil had been swept in bygone floods, or had formed from the slow disintegration of fallen rock from above, cactus, euphorbia, aloe and brush grew thickly, and in particular the curious Euphorbia Candelabrum, with its many-branching arms, stood prominent. The Bushman hunted hither and thither in the prickly jungle with the fierce rapidity of a tiger-cat after a running guinea-fowl; but, inasmuch as he was sometimes prevented from immediately approaching the rock-wall, he appeared unable to hit off the tunnel that led, as he had formerly told me, to the valley beyond. Suddenly, after he had again disappeared, he gave a low whistle, a signal to approach to which I quickly responded. Quietly pushing my way towards him, I was astonished to see within a small clearing a thick and high thorn fence, outside of which Klaas stood. Inside this circular kraal was a low round hut, formed of boughs and branches strongly and closely interlaced Klaas was standing watching intently the interior of the hut, which seemed to be barred at its tiny entrance by a pile of thorns lying close against it.

“What could it mean, this strange dwelling, inaccessible as it seemed to human life? Klaas soon found a weak spot in the kraal-fence, and, pulling down some thorns, we stepped inside and approached the hut. Here, too, Klaas pulled away the dry acacia thorns from the entrance and was at once confronted by a tiny bow and arrow and behind that by a fierce little weazened face. Instantly, my Bushman poured forth a torrent of his own language, redundant beyond expression with those extraordinary clicks of which the Bushman tongue seems mainly to consist.

“Even as he spoke, the bow and arrow were lowered, the little head appeared through the entrance, and the tiniest, quaintest, most ancient figure of a man I had ever beheld stood before us. Ancient, did I say? Ancient is hardly a meet description of his aspect. As he stood there, blinking like an owl in the fierce sunlight, his only covering a little skin kaross of the red-rhebok, fastened over his shoulders, standing not more than three feet eight or ten inches in height, he looked indeed coeval with the rocks around him. I never saw anything like it. Poor little oddity! Dim though his eyes were waxing, feeble though his shrivelled arms, dulled though his formerly acute senses, he had, with all the desperate pluck of his race, been prepared to do battle for his hearth and home.

“In his own tongue, Klaas interrogated this antediluvian Bushman, and then, suddenly, as he was answered by the word ‘Ariseep’ a light flashed across his countenance. Seizing his aged countryman by the shoulders, he turned him round and carefully examined his back. Lifting the skin kaross and rubbing away the coating of grease and dirt that covered the right shoulder, Klaas pointed to two round white scars just below the blade-bone, several inches apart; then he gave a leap into the air, seized the old fossil by the neck and shrieked into his ears the most wonderful torrent of Bushman language I have ever heard. In his turn the old man started back, scanned Klaas intently from head to foot, and in a thin pipe, jabbered at him almost as volubly.

“Finally, Klaas enlightened me as to this comical interlude. It seemed incredible; this old man, Ariseep by name, was his grandfather, whom he had not set eyes on since, long years before, the Boer commando had broken into his tribal fastness, slain his father, mother and other relatives and carried himself off captive. The old man before us had

somehow escaped in the fight, had crept away, and, after years of solitary hiding in the mountains around, had finally penetrated to this grim and desolate valley, where he had subsisted on Bushman fare. Snakes, lizards, roots, gum, bulbs, fruit and an occasional snared buck or rock-rabbit; these, and a little rill of water that gushed from the mountain-side hard by, supplied him with existence. Here he had lingered for many years, alone and isolated. His only fear had been, as he grew older and feebler, the leopards infesting the neighbouring mountain. Against their attacks had he built the strong thorned fence, carefully closed at night, and the door of thorns which he wedged tightly into the entrance way.

"A strange meeting indeed it was, but after all not stranger than many things that happen in the busy world. So far as I could learn from Klaas, who himself was between forty and fifty, the ancient figure before us was laden with the burden of more than ninety years. Think of it! ninety summers of parched Bushmanland, of burning Orange River mountains; ninety seasons of hunger and thirst and dire privations; great part of the earlier period varied by raids on the flocks of the Boers and battles for existence with the wild beasts of the land!

"After nearly an hour's incessant chatter, during which I believe Klaas had laid before his monkeylike ancestor an epitomised history of his life, he told the old man we wished to get through the mountain and that he had lost the tunnel of which he had known as a boy.

"Ariseep, who it seems, in the years he had been there, had explored every nook and cranny of the valley, knew at once what he meant, and quickly pointed out to us, not a hundred paces away, a dense and prickly mass of cactus and euphorbia bush; here, after half an hour's hewing and slashing with our hunting knives, we managed to open a pathway, and at last a cave-like opening in the mountain, about seven feet in diameter, lay before us. Grandfather Ariseep, questioned as to the tunnel, said that, upon first discovering it, which he had done quite by accident while hunting rock-rabbits, he had once been through, years before, but, as he had found the passage long and dangerous, and the valley beyond appeared to him less interesting than his present abiding place, he had never repeated the journey. However, he gave us warning that snakes abounded and might not impossibly be encountered in the twenty minutes' crawl, which, as Klaas had told me, it would take to get through.

"This opinion, translated by Klaas, was not of a nature to fortify me in the undertaking, yet, rather than leave the diamonds unexplored, I felt prepared to brave the terrors of this uncanny passage.

"It was now three o'clock; the sun was marching steadily across the brassy firmament on his westward trek and we had no time to lose.

"'In you go, Klaas,' said I, and, nothing loth, Klaas dived into the bowels of the mountain, I at his heels. For five minutes, by dint of stooping and an occasional hands-and-knees creep upon the flooring of the tunnel, sometimes on smooth sand, sometimes over protruding rock and rough gravel, we got along very comfortably. Then the roof of the dark avenue—for it was pitch dark now—suddenly lowered, and we had to crawl along, especially I, as being taller and bulkier than Klaas, like serpents, upon our bellies. It was unpleasant, deuced unpleasant, I can tell you, boxed up like this beneath the heart of the mountain. The very thought seemed to make the oppression a million times more oppressive. It seemed that the frightful pile of rock, towering far above us, was bodily descending to crush us into a horrible and hidden tomb. The thought of lying here, squeezed down till Judgment Day, was appalling; or, perhaps, more mercifully one's bones might, ages hereafter, be discovered as these regions became settled up, in much the same state in which mummified cats are occasionally found in old chimneys and hidden closets when ancient dwellings are pulled down in England. Even Klaas, plucky Bushman though he was, didn't seem to relish the adventure and spoke in a subdued and awe-stricken whisper. Sometimes since, as I have thought of that most gruesome passage, I have burst into a sweat nearly as profuse, though not so painful, as I endured that day. At last, after what seemed to me hours upon hours of this painful crawling and Egyptian gloom, we met a breath of fresher air; the tunnel widened and heightened, and in another five minutes we emerged into the blessed sunlight. Little Klaas looked pretty well 'baked,' even in his old leather 'crackers' and flannel shirt; as for myself, I was literally streaming, every thread on me was as wet as if I had plunged into a river. We lay panting for awhile upon the scorching rocks, and then sat up and looked about us.

"If the Paarl Kloof, as Klaas called it, from whence we had just come,

had been sufficiently striking, the mighty amphitheatre in which we lay was infinitely more amazing. Imagine a vast arena, almost completely circular in shape, flat and smooth, and composed as to its flooring of intermingled sand and gravel, reddish-yellow in colour. This arena was surrounded by stupendous walls of the same ruddy brown rock we had noticed in Paarl Kloof, which here towered to a height of close on a thousand feet. An inspection of these cliffs, which sheered inwards from top to bottom, revealed the fact previously imparted to me by Klaas, that no living being could ever penetrate hither save by the tunnel passage through which we had come. The amphitheatre, which here and there bore upon its surface a thin and scattered covering of bush and undergrowth, seemed everywhere about half-a-mile across from wall to wall. In the centre of the red cliffs, blazing forth in splendour, ran a broad band of the most glorious opalescent rock-crystal, which flashed out its glorious rays of coloured light as if to meet the fiery kisses of the sun. This flaming girdle of crystal, more beautiful a thousand times than the most gorgeous opal, the sheen of a fresh-caught mackerel, or the most radiant mother-of-pearl, I can only compare in splendour to the flashing rainbows formed over the foaming falls of the Zambesi, which I have seen more than once. It ran horizontally and very evenly round at least two-thirds of the cliff-belt that encircled us. It was a wonderful and amazing spectacle, and I think quite the most singular of the many strange things (and they are not few) I have seen in the African interior.

"Well, we sat gazing at this crystal rainbow for many minutes, till I had somewhat feasted my enraptured gaze; then we got up and at once began the search for diamonds. Directly I saw the gravel, especially where it had been cleansed in the shallow spruits and dongas by the action of rain and flood, I knew at once we should find 'stones'; it resembled almost exactly the gravel found in the Vaal River diggings, and was here and there strongly ferruginous, mingled with red sand and occasionally lime.

"I noticed quickly that agates, jaspers and chalcedony were distributed pretty thickly, and that occasionally the curious banddoom stone, so often found in the Vaal River with diamonds, and, indeed, often considered by diggers as a sure indicator of 'stones' was to be met with. In many places the pebbles were washed perfectly clean and lay thickly piled in hollow water-ways; here we speedily found a rich harvest of the precious gems. In a feverish search of an hour and a half, Klaas and I picked up twenty-three fine stones, ranging in size from a small pigeon's egg to a third of the size of my little finger nail. They were all fine diamonds, some few, it is true, yellow or straw-coloured, others of purest water, as I afterwards learned, and we had no difficulty in finding them, although we wandered over not a twentieth part of the valley. I could see at once from this off-hand search that enormous wealth lay spread here upon the surface of the earth; beneath probably was contained fabulous wealth. I was puzzled at the time, and I have never had inclination or opportunity to solve the mystery since, to account for the presence of diamonds in such profusion. Whether they were swept into the valley by early floodings of the Orange River through some aperture that existed formerly, but had been closed by volcanic action, or whether, as I am inclined to think, the whole amphitheatre is a vast upheaval from subterraneous fires of a bygone period, is to this hour an unfathomed secret. I rather incline to the latter theory, and believe that, like the Kimberley 'pipe,' as diggers call it, the diamondiferous earth had been shot upwards funnel-wise from below, and that ages of floods and rain-washing had cleansed and left bare the gravel and stones upon the surface.

"From the search we had had, I made no doubt that a fortnight's careful hunting in this valley would make me a millionaire, or something very like it. At length I was satisfied, and as the westering sun was fast stooping to his couch, with a light heart and elastic step I turned with Klaas to depart. The excitement of the 'find' had quite banished the remembrance of that awful tunnel passage so recently encountered.

"'We'll go back now, Klaas,' said I, 'sleep in your grandfather's kraal, and get to the waggon first thing in the morning; then I shall arrange to return and camp a fortnight in Paarl Kloof, leaving the waggon at the pool. In that time we shall be able to pick up diamonds enough to enrich ourselves and all belonging to us for generations. I don't mind then who discovers the valley; they can make another Kimberley of it if they choose, for aught I care.'

"At half-past five we again entered the tunnel. It was a nasty business when one thought of it again, but it would soon be over. As it flashed across my brain, I thought at the moment that two such journeys a day for six or seven days would be quite as much as even the greediest

diamond lover could stomach. As before, Klaas went first, and for half the distance all went well. Suddenly, as we came to a sandy part of the tunnel, there was a scuffle in front, a fierce exclamation in Bushman language, and then Klaas called out in a hoarse voice, 'Allemaghte, sieur, een slang het mij gebissen!'" (Almighty, sir, a snake has bitten me!)

"Heavens, what a situation! Cooped up in this frightful burrow, face to face with probably a deadly snake, which had already bitten my companion! Almost immediately Klaas's voice came back to me in a hoarse guttural whisper, 'I have him by the neck, sieur; it is a puff-adder and his teeth are sticking into my shoulder. If you will creep up and lay hold of his tail, which is your side of me, we can settle him, but I can't get his teeth out without your help.' As you will remember, the puff-adder's striking fangs are very curved and are often difficult to disengage once it has made its strike. Poor Klaas! I felt certain his days must be numbered, but there was nothing for it; I must help him.

"Crawling forwards and feeling my way with fright-benumbed fingers, I touched Klaas's leg. Then softly moving my left hand I was suddenly smitten by a horrible writhing tail. I seized it with both hands, and finally gripped the horrid reptile (which I felt to be swollen with rage, as is the brute's habit) in an iron grasp with both hands. Then I felt, in the black darkness, Klaas take a fresh grip of the loathsome creature's neck, and with an effort, disengage the deadly fangs from his shoulder. Immediately I felt him draw his knife, and after a struggle, sever the serpent's head from its body. The head he pushed away to the right, as far out of our course as possible, and then I dragged the writhing body from him, and, shuddering, cast it behind me as far as possible.

"At that moment I thought that, for the first time in my life, I must have swooned. But, luckily, I bethought me of poor faithful Klaas, sore stricken, and I called to him in as cheerful a voice as I could muster, 'Get forward, Klaas, for your life, as hard as you can, and, please God, we'll pull you through.'

"Never had I admired the Bushman's fierce courage more than now. Most men would have sunk upon the sand and given up life and hope. Not so this aboriginal. 'Ja, sieur, I will loup,' was all he said.

"Then we scrambled onward, occasionally halting as the deadly sickness overtook Klaas; but all the while I pushed him forwards and urged him with my voice. At last the light came, and as my poor Bushman grew feebler and more slow, I found room to pass him and so dragged him behind me to the opening into Paarl Kloof. Here I propped him for a moment on the sand outside, with his back to the mountain, and loudly called 'Ariseep,' while I got breath for a moment.

"The sun was sinking in blood-red splendour behind the mountains, and the kloof and rock-walls were literally aglow with the parting blush of day. Nature looked calm and serenely beautiful and hushed in a splendour that ill-accorded with the agitating scene there at the mouth of the tunnel. All this flashed across me as I called for the old man. I looked anxiously at Klaas and examined his wound; there were two deep punctures in the left shoulder, and from his having had to use some degree of force to drag off the reptile, the orifices were more torn than is usual in cases of snake-bite. Klaas was now breathing heavily and getting dull and stupefied I took him in my arms and carried him to Ariseep's kraal, whence the old man was just emerging. At sight of his grandfather, Klaas rallied and rapidly told him what had happened, and the old man at once plunged into his hut for something.

"Then Klaas's eyelids drooped and he became drowsy, almost senseless. In vain I roused him and tried to make him walk and so stay the baleful effects of the poison now running riot in his blood; he was too far gone. Ariseep now re-appeared with a small skin bag, out of which he took some dirty-looking powder. With an old knife he scored the skin and flesh around Klaas's wound and then rubbed in the powder. I had no brandy or ammonia to administer, and therefore let the old Bushman pursue his remedy, though I felt, somehow, it would be useless. So it proved; either the antidote, with which I believe Bushmen often do effect wonderful cures, was stale and inefficacious, or the poison had obtained too strong a hold. My poor Klaas never became conscious again, though I fancied eagerly that he recognised me before he died, for his lips moved as he turned to me once. His pulse sank and sank, his face became dull and ashen, his eyelids quivered a little, his breath came hard and laboured, and at last, within an hour and a half from the time he was bitten, he lay dead.

"So perished my faithful and devoted henchman; the stoutest, truest, bravest soul that ever African sun shone upon. I cannot express to you the true and unutterable grief I felt, as, with old Ariseep, I buried poor

Klaas when the moon rose that night. We placed him gently in a deep sandy spruit, and over the sand piled heavy stones to keep the vermin from him.

"Then, laying myself within Ariseep's kraal, I waited for the slothful dawn. As it came, I rose, called Ariseep from his hut, and bade farewell to him as best I could, for we neither of us understood one another. I noticed, by-the-bye, that no sign of grief seemed to trouble the old man. Probably he was too aged, and had seen too much death to think much about the matter.

"The rest of my story is soon finished. I made my way back to camp, told my men what had happened, and indeed took some of them back with me to Klaas's grave and made them exhume the body to satisfy themselves of the cause of death—for these men are sometimes very suspicious—then we covered him again securely against wandering beasts and birds.

"I trekked back to the Old Colony, sold off my things and came home. The diamonds I had brought away realised in England 22,000 pounds. I have never dreamt of going to the fatal valley again; nothing on earth would tempt me after that ill-starred journey, heavy with the fate of Klaas and the Bechuana boy, Amazi. As for the tunnel, I would not venture once more into its recesses for all the diamonds in Africa, even if they lay piled in heaps at the other end of it. Except old Ariseep, Klaas had no relation that I knew of, and it was useless to think of spending the diamond-money in that quarter. The old fellow had, so far as I could make him understand me, utterly refused to accompany me from the kloof, where he evidently meant to end his days; even if he had come, what could I have done for him? At his time of life, and with his peculiar habits, he could hardly have begun the world again, even if I had brought him home, bought him a country house, taken rooms in Piccadilly, dressed him in the height of fashion and launched him upon society.

"Therefore I left him as I found him. Klaas I have never ceased to mourn from that day to this. Part of the 22,000 pounds I invested for some relatives, the balance that I kept suffices, with what I already possessed, for all possible wants of my own. Then I came back to my dearly-loved South Africa for the last time, and a few weeks later made the journey to the Chobi River, from which you rescued me in the thirstland."

Such was the story related to us by the transport rider, in a clear and singularly graphic manner, to which these pages do scant justice. Our narrator wound up by telling us that Mowbray had further imparted to him the exact locality of the diamond valley, but, he added, "I have never yet been there, nor do I think that, for the present, it is likely I shall go. Some day before I leave the Cape I may have a try and trek down the Orange River; but I don't feel very keen about that secret passage, after poor Mowbray's experiences."

We had sat wrapt listeners for some hours of that soft, calm, African night. The glorious stars looked out from above us in their deep blue dome; the Southern Cross shone in serene effulgence, as if, too, its sparkling gems claimed an interest in the legend of the lost diamonds. It was now two o'clock, and the camp fire of the transport riders burned low; just one more soupje we had with our friendly entertainers, and then, with hearty expressions of thanks and good-will, rose to seek our beds. That night, before falling asleep, I pondered long upon the strange narrative we had heard. Often since have I done so. Often, too, have I thought of the lone grave of the English hunter, Mowbray, far out upon the verge of that dim and mysterious desert, the Kalahari.

Chapter Two.
The Story of a Tusk.

It was a fine spring morning in the City: even in the great dingy warehouse, where Cecil Kensley was engaged in cataloguing a vast store of ivory in preparation for the periodical sales, the sun beamed pleasantly. It lit up the dark corners of the building, and played everywhere upon hundreds of smooth, rounded elephants' teeth, varying in colour from a rich creamy yellow to darkest brown—from the gleaming tusk, fresh chopped within the last year from the head of a young bull, to the huge, dark, discoloured, almost black-skinned tooth, that for a hundred years had lain unnoticed in some mud swamp, or for generations had decorated the grave or kraal-fence of some native chief. There they lay, those precious pillars of ivory—solid scrivelloes, Egyptian soft teeth, Ambriz hard irregulars, billiard and bagatelle scrivelloes, bangle teeth, Siam, Niger, Abyssinian, Bombay, West Coast, Cape, and all the rest of them—upon which the world sets so great a store, and for which mankind is so rapidly exterminating a species.

Those wonderful teeth, dumb memorials, so many of them, of dark tales of blood and suffering, of slave raids, plundered villages, murders, floggings, terrible journeys to the coast, unutterable scenes of horror and woe—what histories could they not unfold? But the tusks lay there, hugging their grim secrets, silent and mute enough.

Cecil Kensley, the person cataloguing these treasures of ivory in a purely matter-of-fact way, was a good-looking, fair-bearded man of thirty, partner in a wealthy firm, a bachelor, somewhat of a man of pleasure out of office hours, but in business smart, shrewd and hard-working. The cataloguing of such an accumulation of ivory as that great warehouse held was a lengthy business; and all day, until four o'clock, Kensley was engaged, with the help of the warehousemen, sorting, turning over and writing down. Before taking a short rest for luncheon, his eye fell upon one magnificent tusk—long, perfectly shaped and balanced, massive, highly polished, and, in colour, of the richest chrome yellow. It lay somewhat apart, and appeared to have no fellow; a careful inspection of the rest of the warehouse, and a single glance at that peerless tooth, showed that, even out of all that vast collection, no possible match for it could be found.

Kensley had been working all the morning at the far end of the warehouse; he now stood by the tusk which had so taken his eye.

"Hallo, Thomas!" he said, interrogating the man who stood by him, "what have you got here? What a grand tooth! Where's the fellow to it? Is it an odd one?"

"Yes, sir," replied the man, "it's an odd tooth, and a rare beauty. It's years since I saw the like of it. It's a grand tusk, as you say: I ran the measure over it, and it went 9 feet 2 inches, and it weighs just on 170 lb. It's as nigh perfect as can be, but there's just one little bit of a flaw down there by the base—an old wound, or something of the kind. There's a sight of good ivory in that tooth, and it must be as old as the hills a'most."

Kensley had seen, in the fourteen years of his experience, thousands of fine teeth; yet, connoisseur though he was, he thought, as his eye ran lovingly over that magnificent nine feet of ivory, splendid in colour, curve and solidity, that he had never seen such another. He stooped to look at the flaw the man spoke of. Within a foot of the darker portion at the base, just beyond where the ivory had manifestly emerged from the flesh of the gum, there appeared a curious fault in the graining of the tooth, elsewhere perfect. The growth had been disturbed by some foreign substance, and the graining, instead of being as regular and even as a pattern woven by machinery, swept in irregular curves round the centre of the flaw.

Kensley rose to his feet again. "It's not much of a fault," he said, "and the tooth's a real beauty. I've been meaning this long time past to have such a tusk at my rooms, to decorate a corner or hang upon the wall. I think I'll take that fellow, Thomas, and pay for it; it will be a long time before I come across a better. See that it goes up to my flat to-morrow, will you, and take care how it's carried. I don't want it spoiled."

"All right, sir," replied the man, "I'll see to it myself. I'll give it a bit of a clean up and take it up for you to-morrow morning."

Two evenings after this conversation, Cecil Kensley left the office and walked, as was often his custom, steadily westward. He made his way by the Embankment and Pall Mall, then up Saint James's Street, and so to

Mount Street, where his dwelling was situated. Arrived at Mount Street, he let himself into his flat. It was a pleasant set of rooms on the first floor, furnished in very excellent taste with most luxuries that the cultivated male mind can suggest. In one corner, leaning against the wall, stood the ivory tusk, which, now cleaned and polished, formed, if an unwonted, a very noble ornament to the chamber. Kensley's eye rested on it with pleasure; he went to the corner and carefully examined his new possession. It was now six o'clock; the cold spring evening was closing in and the light fading. At eight o'clock three friends were dining with Kensley, preliminary to a night of cards. Having drunk some tea, which his man brought in for him, and lighted a cigarette, Kensley drew his comfortable armchair towards the pleasant firelight and smoked contentedly. He had been late for several nights past—he was never a very early man—and now, having cast away the end of his cigarette, he lay back in his chair and blinked drowsily at the red glow of the firelight. In ten minutes he was fast asleep and dreaming. Now, although Cecil Kensley sometimes dozed for half an hour or an hour before dinner in this way, it was seldom that he dreamed. His dreams this evening were fantastic and most strange—so strange that they are worth recording. Here is what he saw:—

In an open clearing among pleasant African hills, covered for the most part with bush and low forest, lies a collection of huts, circular and thatched, as are all native huts. Just above them, on rising ground, and surrounded by a strong stockade, stands a larger and more important dwelling, oblong in shape, its interior screened from the fierce sun by a low veranda, and thatched, as to its roof, with grass in the native fashion. It is a hot morning in the glowing tropical summer—the season of rains—vegetation and flowers are everywhere in their freshest verdure and beauty. Fleecy clouds lie at this early hour of morning upon the face of the eastern sky, and hang in a long line midway upon the sides of a high mountain some miles distant. Seated just outside the stockaded inclosure is a European, clad in the broad-brimmed hat, doublet, loose breeches, and buff riding boots of a bygone time. Somehow the face of this European, with its sallow cast, peaked beard, and fierce moustaches, is strangely familiar to the eye and brain of the dreamer, though he cannot in his sleep exactly recall how. Round about the Portuguese, for he is of that race, are half a dozen soldiers of his country, in buff coats and steel caps, bearing in their hands antique pieces—snaphaunces. Squatting in front are thirteen or fourteen naked Africans, waiting the white man's will.

"Well," speaks the commander, for such he is, "is the gold all here? Stand forward, Kanyata."

A native steps out from his fellows, and hands the commander a quill of gold—gold dust and tiny nuggets—the fruit of a week's hard toil and labour of himself and his family. Each native in turn stands forward with his precious store, and tremblingly hands it to the fierce, sour-looking white man. In his turn a young man sullenly comes out of the rank, and hands in his quill. There is a very dangerous look in the commander's eye as he takes the quill, holds it out and surveys it. "So," he interrogates, "that is your week's work, Zingesi?"

The young man answers in a hopeless, yet half defiant way: "My lord, I have toiled for seven days in the river sands, and all that I have gained I bring to you. You took from me my wife; if it had been otherwise, the quill might have been full. I have no one to help me. I can do no more."

"Thou dog!" snaps out the commander, with a look of black passion, "I told thee seven days agone that thou mightest take the wall-eyed maid to wife, to help thee. Why hast thou neglected my warning?"

"Oh! my lord," replies the native, "I like not Mokela, the wall-eyed maid, and I will not take her to wife,"—then, passionately, "Where is my own wife? There, in thy vile hut, thou thief and robber! Do thy worst: I will find no more gold for thee."

"Away with him!" roars the commander, now in a fury of passion, to his soldiers; "tie him up and give him two hundred lashes."

The soldiers seize the unfortunate, take him to a tree hard by, and tie him up. But now, before a stroke is given, an old native, somewhat fantastically adorned, who has been standing among the villagers at a little distance, comes forward and salutes the officer.

"Great chief of the Bazunga (Portuguese)," he says, "spare, I pray thee, Zingesi. He is my only son, and the punishment is great. Let him work for thee for another week. Perchance he has been bewitched. I will brew him strong medicine, and he shall bring thee more gold."

"Out with thee, Mosusa, thou evil-minded witch-doctor!" cries the

commander. "'Tis too late. Thou shouldst have used thine arts with Zingesi before. Begone, or they shall serve thee as they serve Zingesi!"

With a hopeless yet terrible gesture, Mosusa quits the crowd, and retires to his hut on the village outskirts. Meanwhile, Zingesi being tied up, two Portuguese soldiers, casting off their buff coats, and tucking up their sleeves, take each in hand a cruel whip of hippopotamus hide, and begin their task. They flog by strokes of fifty; each, in presence of that grim taskmaster, laying on the blows with all his strength. With the first ten cuts the blood spouts freely from the unfortunate native, whose cries and groans might surely touch the hardest heart. But there is no mercy. Zingesi's back at the hundredth stroke is a mass of raw and bleeding flesh; his face has assumed an ashy pallor. At a hundred and fifty his head falls over upon his shoulder, he swoons, and can feel no more. The man wielding the whip halts for an instant, looks at the commander, and says, "Shall I go on, Captain?"

"Go on, of course, and be damned to you, till he has had the full two hundred," answers the captain venomously, as he rises from his chair and goes into his hut again.

The horrible task proceeds, and the soldiers, not daring to slacken their blows, complete the two hundred strokes. By that time Zingesi, his frame already weakened by recent fever, is beyond the reach of further ills. His body, unloosed from the tree, falls limply upon the hands of the soldiers, and is laid upon the shamed earth. Life has clean fled from that poor mangled piece of flesh and blood.

It is night. The short African twilight has vanished; the moon has not yet arisen. Far away in the depths of the forest there crouches over a fire of wood Mosusa, the old witch-doctor, father of the dead Zingesi. His face, lit up by the red flames, has lost the sullen misery of the morning. His eyes glare with the intensity of a fierce passion, the sweat drips from his brow, every muscle of his body quivers. He rises, paces slowly round the fire, keeping always within the limit of a circle which he has traced in the sand, uttering as he passes a low monotonous chant. Now and again he casts into the fire the skins of snakes and lizards, bones, the dried livers and hearts of certain animals, poisonous bulbs and herbs, and other paraphernalia of the native wizard. Anon he pauses in his chant, listens, and gazes intently into the gloom of the forest. On one side of the fire lies coiled up a huge serpent, a python, whose cold glittering eye watches intently Mosusa's every movement. Mosusa approaches the great snake, and says, "Will he come, think you, O my friend? The forest is wide, and the great one wandered far this morning." The serpent lifts its flat head, darts out its long forked tongue, and rubs its nose caressingly against Mosusa's leg; then, swiftly uncoiling, it glides to the other side of the fire and lies with its head pointing to the forest. Mosusa goes and stands by its side. Presently a rumbling noise is heard; nearer and louder it comes, and then from the pall of the forest there looms within reach of the firelight a huge dark form—the form of an immense bull elephant. The great creature, bulking there dark and mysterious within the ring of firelight, bears but one tusk, long, thick and even; its head moves very slowly up and down; its outstretched trunk gently quivers as it tests every air of the night; and its small sunken eye, fixed keenly upon Mosusa, indicates expectation.

"O great one," says Mosusa, saluting with upstretched right hand, "lord of the forest, wisest of the creatures, thou hast come at my summons. Hear me! Thou and I were born long ago upon the same night, in the same country. Long have we known one another, long have been friends—since the day when thy mother was slain by the spears of Monomotapa, and thou and I grew up together as children within the kraal of the king. But now I wax old, and near my end, while thou art in thy prime, still young and lusty, and like to live an old man's lifetime and more. And before I leave this earth for the land of shadows one thing I have to ask of thee. Thou rememberest, long, long years ago, how I whispered to thee, when thy tusk was budding and thy captivity grew dangerous to thyself, that now was the time to seek the forest and escape. And thou wilt remember how in thy first youth, when Monomotapa, king of the tribes, had his first hunt for ivory, and slew fifty of thy kindred within the ring of fire, I warned thee the night before by the great serpent, grandfather of Tari here, and thou fleddest away and saved thyself! To-morrow, O great one, I want thine aid. The captain of the Bazunga goes forth to hunt in the forest. This day he has slain my son. To-morrow be thou within the forest, and when he comes slay me this evil man, the cruel persecutor of thy race and mine. No harm shall come to thee. So shall we be quits, and in the land of shadows I shall remember thee and joyfully await thy coming!"

The elephant moves silently a pace or two forward, just touches Mosusa delicately upon the shoulder with its trunk-tip, then turns and disappears again into the darkness.

Again the scene shifts before the mind's eye of the dreamer; the witch-doctor and his firelight fade out, and broad daylight once more streams upon the African forest. The Portuguese captain is marching through the wilderness in search of elephants. In front of him are two trackers, who walk swiftly upon the spoor of a troop of the great tusk bearers. Not far in the rear, mingling with other hunters, is Mosusa, whose dark countenance wears this morning a very singular expression.

Presently, after passing some low hills, the white man posts himself in some thick cover in a shallow gorge commanding a broad, worn path. The bulk of the native hunters are sent far in front in a wide semicircle, to drive in elephants towards the ambush. There is a long interval, and then, crashing through the bush, appear at a slow trot the forms of five cow elephants. At the nearest of these the commander discharges his piece. The great creature, sore stricken, charges this way and that; at length, bristling with fifty spears, spouting the red blood from her trunk, and struck by other bullets from the white man's snaphaunce, she falls heavily to earth. But while the party are gathered round the fallen beast, and the natives busy themselves in extricating their spears from the carcase, a sudden noise is heard behind. There, trumpeting hideously, comes a mighty single-tusked elephant—Mosusa's elephant of the last night. The black men, naked and disencumbered, fly, all of them save one, far down the gorge, and scatter into the forest beyond. The white man, truth to tell, is bold and brave enough. Trusting to his heavy piece and his own pluck, he stands his ground. It is late indeed to fly, encumbered as he is with weapon and European clothing. As the grim monster charges down upon him, he steadily raises his snaphaunce and fires. But, just as he pulls trigger, Mosusa, standing behind his shoulder, jerks his right arm, the bullet flies wide of its intended mark, and strikes the elephant at the base of the great solitary tusk, just where the ivory is sheathed in the flesh. Mosusa leaps aside, there is a wild curse in Portuguese; in the same instant the savage scream of the enraged elephant thrills upon the hot morning air, the white man is flung to earth, and the great gleaming tusk drives deep through his body. Zingesi is avenged. The elephant withdraws his tusk, kneels upon the yet living man, and crushes the last remnants of humanity into a hideous, shapeless mass.

All this Mosusa has witnessed with bright eyes and the fiercest satisfaction. And now, raising his right hand, again he salutes the monstrous beast and speaks. "O thou great one, mighty chief, lord of the forest, I thank thee for what thou hast done. My time grows short: I die quickly. But thou, O my friend, live thou, live to slay the accursed white men, who pursue thy kindred and bring death and worse than death into this land of thine and mine." As he runs on, Mosusa's voice seems as the voice of one possessed; his eyes are fixed and open, as though gazing far into futurity. "And when thine appointed time comes," he goes on, still addressing the mighty beast before him, "let thy tusk carry with it yet more of death and evil to the white man. There is blood now upon it: let blood be with it in its passage through the years to come, until it shall once more mingle with the earth again. And now, great one, one thing more has to be done. Let my blood mingle here with the white man's: slay me, O my friend, and all shall be finished."

But the elephant stands there in front of the frenzied African, its little eyes fixed upon his eyes, its body swaying ever so slightly from side to side, its trunk held out as if inquiring.

"I see what thou requirest, O great one," cries Mosusa. "Thy blood too must flow, and at my hands!"

Suddenly he raises his spear, plunges it into the creature's trunk, and as suddenly withdraws it. The beast screams with pain, the blood gushes forth from the spear-thrust, and in a moment, with a blow of the wounded member, the elephant has beaten the old native to the ground. In the next moment the re-infuriated beast kneels quickly upon Mosusa and crushes the life from his frame, as it had crushed the white man's. The two bodies lie there together, misshapen, mangled, yet still warm. And now the elephant, having completed his work, turns slowly away and plunges into the jungle.

The scene had again faded from the dreamer's eyes; yet its memory lingered clear, as Cecil Kensley awoke cold and shivering from his sleep. The fire burned low, the room was in darkness.

"Gad! what a curious dream!" he said to himself, as he rose stiffly from his lounge chair. "I never felt so cold in my life." By the dim low firelight he made his way to a corner of the room, touched a button and switched on the electric light. The room in an instant assumed its normally bright and cheerful aspect. First putting some coals upon the fire, Kensley went to the sideboard, poured himself out a liqueur glass of brandy, and drank it down. "That's better," he said to himself. "I must have slept a deuce of a time. Can't think why I got so cold." He turned and looked at the clock. "Half-past seven, by Jove! I must dress sharp: these fellows will be here directly."

First opening a door into an adjoining room, where he saw the dinner-table already prepared, he went to his bedroom and quickly dressed. He returned just in time to welcome his friends, who arrived almost simultaneously.

Of the three guests, two were Englishmen—average types of their race; the other a dark, good-looking foreigner, of engaging manners. Barreto, as they called him, spoke excellent English, and seemed to have a perfect knowledge of all topics—mainly pertaining to racing, matters theatrical, and cards—which came uppermost in the course of the evening. During the five minutes before dinner was announced one of the visitors caught sight of the tusk standing in the corner of the room.

"Hallo, Kensley!" he said, "what's this? Something new, isn't it?"

"Yes," returned his host; "it's a big tooth I came across in the warehouse lately. On the whole, it's about the finest bit of ivory I ever saw; and so, as such specimens grow scarcer every year, I collared it. Makes a nice ornament, doesn't it?"

"Magnificent!" rejoined Barreto, who had meanwhile approached, and was intently examining the tusk. "I've seen a good many tusks in my time, but I have never seen the fellow of this."

"Why, where did you pick up your knowledge of ivory, Barreto?" asked Kensley. "I knew you were up to most things, but I didn't know that you were a judge of elephants' teeth."

"Well, you see," returned Barreto, "my family have had to do with Africa for between two and three hundred years. Several of them have left their bones there. I served as a lieutenant with the Portuguese troops in Mozambique when I was a youngster. After that I came home what you call invalidish—no, invalided—with fever; and, as I didn't intend Africa to have my bones, I left the army and went into diplomacy."

"I see!" replied Kensley. "Well, that tusk," patting the great tooth affectionately, "must have been once something of a neighbour of yours. It came from behind Mozambique or Sofala. The elephant that carried it has, I take it, been dead many a long year. From the look of the ivory, and the way it's been preserved, I should imagine that tooth has lain in some chief's hut for best part of a century. Possibly it has been some cherished fetish. It could tell some tall stories, I'll bet, if it could speak. But come along, you fellows: here's dinner at last."

The four men strolled into the pleasant ruby-lighted dining-room, sat themselves at the sparkling table, and for an hour devoted themselves heartily to excellent viands and wine, and to the exchange of much merry conversation.

At a quarter to ten, after some lingering over cigars and coffee, the party returned to the drawing-room, where card tables were laid. Two other men came in, and "poker" was started. The fortunes of the game waxed and waned, as they will do; but somehow, half-hour after half-hour, the luck ran dead against Barreto. It was easy to see that the Portuguese was a skilful and a smart player, yet, do what he would, bluff boldly or lie low, he steadily lost.

"Hullo, Barreto!" said one of the men to him, in a short pause for whiskies-and-soda, "what's up with you? You couldn't go wrong last week. To-night your luck's dead out."

"Yes," replied the Portuguese, who throughout the play had retained his equanimity, and lost with a good grace, "there's something mysterious in the air to-night. I have felt a great depression ever since I came into this room. I can't tell you why. I felt better at dinner, but back here again I'm wrapped in a wet blanket. A change of weather coming, I suppose. A man who's had African fever can generally foretell it."

The play went on for another half-hour, by which time, as the clock chimed the quarter-past one, Barreto had lost between 30 and 40 pounds. Kensley's English guests now rose to go, laughingly promising

Barreto and their host, who also had lost some 20 pounds, their revenge on a future occasion. After a parting libation, the two men lighted cigar and cigarette, and left the flat, Kensley turned to Barreto. “Feel like an hour’s écarté?” he interrogated.

“By all means,” answered the Portuguese, with a pleasant smile.

Kensley brought out fresh cards, and the two sat down facing one another, the table between. It seemed at écarté that Barreto could not lose. The stakes were heavy, and Kensley’s deficit began to mount up ominously. He was a practised player, and well used to the ups and downs of card luck; yet, easy as was his manner, a looker-on might have noticed a grimmer and graver look deepening about the lines of his mouth.

Suddenly Kensley sprang to his feet, his eyes flashing, his face flushed with anger.

“You damned cheat!” he gasped, throwing down his cards. “For a long time I couldn’t believe my eyes, but there’s no other word for it—you’re a common swindler. I saw you pass that card,”—pointing to a king—“I’ve seen you doing the same thing before. Not one cent will you get out of me. Leave my rooms, and take care neither I nor my friends ever see the face of you again. If we do there’ll be trouble.”

At first, as the Englishman blurted out his indignation—which, it may be said at once, was perfectly honest and deserved—Barreto attempted, with a gesture of courteous deprecation, to offer explanations. At last he obtained speech. “You are mistaken, utterly mistaken,” he said calmly. “I think you must be mad. Anyhow I have won this money fairly, and I demand it. If you don’t pay, I shall make the fact public.”

“You damned villain!” gasped Kensley; “get out of my rooms at once, before I put you out.”

The expression upon Barreto’s face changed now instantly from a plausible calm to one of wild and deadly hate. He saw that Kensley was firm, and not to be played upon. He glanced round the room. As ill luck would have it, there hung, among other trophies upon the wall near him, an Indian knife in its sheath. In an instant Barreto grasped the handle, drew the knife flashing from its cover, and turned upon Kensley. “Now, Mr Kensley,” he said, with a very unpleasant look upon his face, “you will pay me that 55 pounds, and withdraw what you just now said, or take the alternative.”

Few Englishmen care for knife play; unlike the men of Southern Europe, they seem to have an instinctive horror of the weapon. Kensley little liked the job; the adversary before him looked very evil—far more evil than he could ever have imagined him; yet, being a man of courage and of action, he took the only course that seemed at the moment open to him. He flung himself in a flash upon Barreto, trying to seize the man’s arm before he should strike. He was not quick enough to avoid the blow; the keen knife ripped through his smooth shirt-front, and penetrated the upper part of his chest, just under the collar-bone. Kensley’s fighting blood was now up; the wound, though a nasty one, was not disabling; he grappled with Barreto, forced his right arm and dagger behind his back, and then, twining his right leg round his opponent’s, put forth all his strength and threw him, falling upon him as he did so. The room was thickly carpeted, and the fall, though a heavy one, made no great noise. The Portuguese gave a choking cry, and shuddered, as Kensley thought, very strangely. Barreto had ceased struggling from the instant he fell, and, in a strangely altered voice, gasped once in Portuguese, “I am a dead man.” Kensley cautiously released his grip; he feared treachery—some trick. But Barreto moved no more. One glance he gave as Kensley rose; his eyes rolled, then he lay quite still. A horrible fear dawned upon the Englishman. He gently lifted the man, and looked at his back. The right arm lay listless now, and had released its grip of the knife. Alas! that long knife, fashioned by some cunning artificer for wild hill men, so keen and deadly for the taking of life, had done its work. By some ghastly misfortune, it had penetrated the ribs and pierced Barreto’s heart. The man lay there, flabby and inert—as Kensley soon convinced himself, dead beyond all hope of recovery.

As Kensley rose, and with a sickening feeling at his heart surveyed the dead man’s face, something in its appearance touched a chord of memory. “Great God!” he said to himself, “is it reality, or am I still dreaming? This is the face of the Portuguese soldier I saw as I sat asleep before the fire this evening!” His eye wandered from the dead man’s face to the great yellow tusk gleaming there still and silent in the corner of the chamber. As he looked, a new light seemed to leap into his mind. Again he saw, as in a flash, before the eye of memory, those strange scenes in the African forest.

Now, whether it was coincidence, fate, black magic—call it what you will—the ivory tusk, standing there in the corner of that silent room, now a chamber of death and horror, was the tusk of the elephant seen by Kensley in his singular dream—vision it might rather be called—of that fateful evening. The name of the dead man upon the carpet there was Manoel Barreto. The name of the Portuguese captain whom Kensley had in his dream seen slain by the single-tusked elephant, more than two hundred years agone, was Manoel Barreto too. The one was a lineal descendant of the other. Zingesi's death was again avenged. All this, however, Cecil Kensley, as he stood there, haggard and white-faced, knew not—he only surmised dimly some part of it.

The clock chimed out two in soft, resonant tones. Kensley went to the spirit-stand, poured out some brandy in a tumbler and drank it down. Then he touched the electric bell. His man came to the door, heavy-eyed and sleepy. At sight of Barreto's body, the scattered cards upon the floor, his master's shirt-front soaked in blood, he turned ghastly pale and opened his mouth to make exclamation.

"Thompson," said his master, "there has been terrible work. Go into the street and fetch a policeman and a doctor."

Pressing a handkerchief to his wound, he sank into a chair as his man went forth upon the errand.

The great tusk, the key to that grim tragedy, still gleamed there behind him, cold, inscrutable, majestic, its history of blood not yet ended.

Chapter Three.
Jan Prinsloo’s Kloof.

Far away in the gloomiest recesses of a range lying between Zwart Ruggens and the Zwartberg, Cape Colony, not far from where the mountains of that wild and secluded district give place to the eastern limits of the plateau of the Great Karroo, there lies hidden, and almost unknown, a kloof or gorge, whose dark and forbidding aspect, united to the wild and horrid legend with which it is invested, prevents any but the chance hunter or wandering traveller from ever invading its fastnesses. This kloof is about seven miles from the rough track that in these regions is dignified by the name of road; it is approached by a poort or pass through the mountains, and the way is, even for South Africa, a rough and dangerous one, although there are indications that a rude waggon-track did formerly exist there. Standing upon the steep side of this kloof are the remains of what must have once been a roomy and substantial Boer farmhouse; but the four walls are roofless, the windows and doorways naked and destitute of sashes, the euphorbia, the prickly pear, and clambering weeds grow within and without, the lizard and snake abide there, and the whole appearance of the place denotes that many years have elapsed since Prinsloo’s Kloof was tenanted by human life.

In many respects the wild kloof gives evidence that the Boer who first tarried there had an eye for good pasturage for his flocks and herds. The spekboom and many another succulent bush, dear to the goal breeder, flourish amid the broken and chaotic rocks with which the hill sides are strewn. A strong fountain of water runs with limpid current from the mountain at the back of the house; the flat tops of the hills around are clothed with long waving grasses, and the valley is, manifestly, well fitted to be the nursery of a horse-breeding establishment. A tributary of the Gamtoos River flows deeply, if fitfully, below the sheer and overhanging cliffs in a chain of pools, called zee-koe gats (sea-cow or hippopotamus deeps)—the hippopotamus, though his name lingers behind, no longer revels in the flood—and the bottom of the valley is in many parts fertile and suited for the growth of grain and fodder crops.

Broken and uncouth as are many portions of the Witteberg and Zwartberg, the neighbourhood of Prinsloo’s Kloof far surpasses them. There the volcanic action of a bygone age has perpetrated the most extraordinary freaks. The mountains are torn into shapes so wild and fantastic, that, viewed in profile against the red glow of the setting sun, all manner of weird objects may be conjured before the imagination. In some places, as the kloof runs into the heart of the hills, the cliff sides are so deep, so precipitous, and so narrow, that but little sunlight can penetrate beneath, and even on a hot day of African summer a chill strikes upon the spectator passing through.

It is not difficult to understand, from a Boer point of view, that this stern valley was a well chosen spot in which to build a farmhouse. The distance from a roadway, is, in Boer eyes, of no great account, and, as a rule, the farther from human habitation the Dutch farmer can get the better he is pleased. As for the forbidding aspect of the kloof, the stolid, unimaginative Boer would be little troubled on that score; he has no eye whatever for picturesque or scenic effect, and will plant himself as readily upon the treeless wastes of the Orange Free State, or the most stony, barren mountain-side of the Old Colony, as in the most beautiful and wooded country that South Africa can give him.

When Jan Prinsloo trekked into the kloof, towards the end of the last century, the place must have been a very paradise and nursery of game. In the river the hippopotamus played, elephants roamed through the valleys and poorts everywhere around, the zebras ran in large troops upon the mountain tops, and many of the larger game, such as koodoo, the buffalo, and the hartebeest, wandered fearlessly and free; while of the smaller game, such as rhebok, duykerbok, and klipspringer, judging from the abundance of the present day, there must have been literally multitudes. To Jan Prinsloo, then, wild and sombre as the place was, it must have appeared, as he trekked down the pass, a veritable Boer elysium. But Jan, having played his part in the world—a part more fierce and turbulent even than was usual to the marauding frontier Boers of a hundred years ago—made his exit from the scene in a manner cruel and horrible enough to match fitly with the rest of his wicked and violent existence.

Since Jan Prinsloo’s fearful ending, which will be hereafter alluded to, the kloof has borne an evil reputation. Now and again a Boer has taken

the farm, tempted by its pastoral advantages and its low purchase-money, but somehow, none have ever stayed upon it for long. The last tenant, an Englishman, quitted it hastily nearly forty years ago, and ever since then the house has become year by year more sombre and more desolate, the footsteps of human beings now rarely penetrate thither, and even the very Kaffirs avoid the place.

In September of the year 1860, a young English Afrikander, Stephen Goodrick by name, who had, from the time he could handle a rifle, been engaged in the far interior in the then lucrative, if dangerous, occupation of elephant-hunting, having amassed, at the age of thirty, some four or five thousand pounds, after fourteen years of hunting and trading in Northern Bechuanaland and the Lake Ngami region, threw up the game, and trekked down to Grahamstown with his last loads of ivory. These disposed of and his affairs settled, he took unto himself for a wife, a handsome, dark-eyed girl, the daughter of Scotch parents, living near his own family in the Western Province, and then set about looking for a farm, having determined to settle down to the more peaceful pursuits of pastoral farming. After a month of riding hither and thither, inspecting farms in the districts of Swellendam, Oudtshoorn, and George, none of which pleased his fancy, he turned his attention to the Eastern Province.

Goodrick had been long and continuously away from the Cape, and in the brief intervals when he had rested from his hunting and trading expeditions he had usually stayed with his father, an old colonist, in Swellendam, a district to the south-west of the Colony. His knowledge, therefore, of the Eastern Province was necessarily somewhat restricted. Stephen, by chance, heard one day from a Boer trekking by with fruit and tobacco, that another Boer named Van der Meulen was leaving his farm near the end of Zwartberg. Losing no time, Stephen saddled up, paid temporary farewell to his wife, whom he left at his father’s house, and, traversing Lange Kloof and crossing the Kougaberg, he entered, on the afternoon of the third day, Prinsloo’s Kloof, whither he had been directed.

It was a glorious hot afternoon in early summer, the sun shone as only it can in Africa, and under its brilliant rays and with the wealth of vegetation and flower life springing up everywhere around, the kloof, savage though it appeared, put on its mellowest aspect; and as Goodrick rode up to the farmhouse and noticed the flocks and herds, all sleek and in good condition, he thought that there might be worse places in which to outspan for life than this beautiful, if solemn valley.

At the farmhouse he was welcomed by the owner. Van der Meulen, and after a stroll round the kraals and supper over a business conversation took place before the family retired to rest, which, as it seemed to the young Englishman, they did hurriedly and with some odd glances at one another. Next morning all were up early, and Goodrick rode round the farm—all good mountain pasture, embracing some 19,000 morgen (rather more than 40,000 acres) in its area. The Boer, in his uncouth, rough way, warmly praised the farm; the price he asked was extremely small, and the annual Government quit rent very trifling. Van der Meulen explained as his reason for selling the place, apparently so much below its value, that he had been offered, at an absurdly small price, a very fine farm in the Transvaal by a relation who had lately annexed the best of the land of a native chief; and, as many of his blood relations, Voertrekkers of 1836, were settled there, he wished to quit the Colony quickly and join them. Finally, Goodrick agreed to buy the farm, together with part of the stock, and, early on the following morning, left the kloof. The purchase was shortly completed at Cape Town, where the vendor and purchaser met a week afterwards, and, the Van der Meulens having trekked out with all their household goods and belongings, the Englishman and his wife prepared to enter upon their property.

Stephen Goodrick, then, with two waggons, carrying his wife, her white female servant, and a quantity of furniture and household and farming necessaries, and taking with him four Hottentots and half-a-dozen horses, trekked again through Lange Kloof, over the Kougaberg, and thence through a country partly mountain, partly karroo, until one afternoon early in October, the waggons crossed the deep and dangerous drift of the river, and went up through the poort that led into Prinsloo’s Kloof. After a most difficult and tedious piece of travelling for some seven miles—for the half-forgotten waggon-track lay up and down precipitous ascents and declivities, littered here and there with huge boulders, or hollowed out into dangerous spruits and holes—at length the stout but wearied oxen faced the last steep hill to the farmhouse, and with many a pistol crack of the great whip, many a Hottentot curse directed at Zwartland, Kleinboy, Engelschman, Akerman, and the rest, dragged their heavy burdens up to the open space that had been cleared

in front of the homestead. It had been arranged that Van der Meulen's eldest son should remain upon the farm until Goodrick and his wife had arrived, and further, that an old Hottentot, Cupido by name, who knew the farm and its ways well, and two young Kaffirs, who had lately arrived from the Transkei in search of work, should transfer their services to the new-comer.

These four being therefore ready, having already brought in and kraaled the goats for the night, they assisted the Englishman to outspan his oxen and unload the waggons. After two or three hours' hard work, a good portion of the waggons was unloaded, and part of the furniture arranged in the house; three of the horses were placed for the night in the rough building adjoining the dwelling-house that served for a stable, while the remainder had been turned into a large stone kraal which lay on the other flank of the house. Meanwhile the white servant had prepared the supper, which partaken of, the wearied travellers retired to rest. About the middle of the night Goodrick and his wife were suddenly aroused by a great commotion in the stable; the horses were trampling, plunging and squealing as if suddenly disturbed or scared. Then there rose upon the night, as it seemed just outside the house, a wild scream, hideous in its intensity and full of horror.

Hastily thrusting on some clothes and taking a lantern, Goodrick ran round to the stable. The night, though there was no moon, was not dark, and the stars shone clear in the firmament above. Nothing was to be seen, no sound could be heard save the snorting of the horses, and the weird cry of a leopard (strangely different, as the hearer well knew, from the scream heard just previously) that sounded from the rocks a mile or so away on the right. Quickly entering the stable, Stephen was astonished to find the horses in a profuse sweat, trembling, their halters broken, their eyes startled and excited, and their whole demeanour indicating intense fear. What could be the cause? There was, apparently, no wild animal about, nothing in the stable calculated to excite alarm; the animals were old comrades, and not likely to have been fighting. Goodrick was altogether puzzled, and, leaving the stable, went to a shed in rear of the house, where the natives slept, and roused the old Hottentot. The man could give no reason for the disturbance. Wolves (hyaenas) were not likely to approach the house, and the tigers (leopards) had not been very troublesome lately, and he could think of nothing else to explain the matter. There was a scared look in the old man's face, which Goodrick thought nothing of at the time, but which he afterwards remembered. After some little trouble, fresh halters were procured, the horses tied up and soothed, and the two again retired, Cupido being cautioned to keep his ears open against further disturbance. Nothing further occurred during the night.

Next morning, after seeing the goats unkraaled, watered and despatched to their day's pasturage in charge of the two Kaffir herds, Goodrick asked the young Boer at breakfast if he had heard the noise among the horses, and the wild scream, and what could be the cause, and if there was any cattle-stealing about this wild neighbourhood. Young Van der Meulen's heavy, immovable countenance changed slightly, but he replied that he could give no explanation except that perhaps a leopard might have been prowling about; they were pretty numerous in the kloof. Stephen explained that he and the Hottentots had spoored everywhere around the stable for leopards, but could find no trace.

Here the subject dropped, and Van der Meulen relapsed into silence, except when the Englishman asked him what game there was about the hills. "You will find," he said, "plenty of small buck—klipspringers, rhebok, and duykerbok, and there are still a fair number of koodoo which, however, take some stalking. Then on the berg tops there are several troops of zebras, as well as hyaenas and leopards; but the zebras we have seldom shot, they take so much climbing after, and you know we Dutchmen prefer riding to walking. You will find also lots of springbok and steinbok and some black wildebeest (gnu) on the plains beyond the mountains. Yes, I have had many a *mooi schiet op de plaats* (pretty shoot on the farm)." Suddenly the young man's heavy features changed again as he said, "Allemaghte! (Almighty) but I shall be glad to get out of this place; I hate it! I want again to get on to the Transvaal high veldt, where I trekked through two years ago, and where you can shoot as many blauuw wildebeest (brindled gnu), blessbok, quagga, springbok, and hartebeest as you want in a day's ride. Ja! that is the land for me; these gloomy poorts and kloofs are only fit for leopards and spooks (ghosts). Then, you know, Mynheer, the Transvaal is free; we never loved your Government, which is always wanting from us this, that and the other, and I shall be glad to trek out. Up in Zoutpansberg we shall be able to

hunt the kameel (giraffe), and the zwart-wit-pens (sable antelope), and elephant, as much as we like, and for our winter pasture we shall not have to pay a single rix-dollar. Ja! I have had enough of Prinsloo's Kloof, and never wish to see it again." This long speech delivered, the Boer relapsed into silence. There was a curious look on the young man's face as he had spoken, which Goodrick and his wife could not quite define or understand.

An hour afterwards Van der Meulen had slung his rifle on his back, packed some biltong (sun-dried meat) in his pockets, saddled up his horse, and bidden farewell to the tenants of the kloof. The Englishman and his young wife watched his retreating form as it slowly proceeded down the valley, and presently disappeared amidst a grove of acacia trees that margined the river; then they turned to the house. "I don't quite understand that fellow," said Stephen, "do you, Mary? I can't help thinking there was something behind what he said. Why were his people so eager to leave this farm? However, dearest, the farm is a good one and a cheap one; we are young and strong and ought to be as happy as any two people in the Colony."

"Yes, Stephen," said his wife, "I thought there was something queer in what the young man said, but it could have been only fancy. I am sure we ought to be happy and contented, and with you by my side, I shall always be so."

In a few weeks' time Goodrick had increased his stock of goats, and had bought a sufficient number of horses to start a stud farm upon the mountains around. Things seemed to be going well with him. The pasture was in splendid condition, the valleys and kloofs that led into the mountains literally blazed with flowers of every conceivable hue, from the great pink or crimson blossomed aloes, that gave warmth to the towering brown rocks above, to the lovely heaths, irises, and pelargoniums that clothed as with a brilliant carpet the bottom grounds. The house had been thoroughly cleansed, put into order, and the new furniture settled into it, and young Mrs Goodrick busily employed her days in household duties. Her husband had had several good days' shooting about the hills, and had brought in two koodoos (one of the largest and most magnificent of South African antelopes), whose noble spiral horns now adorned the dining-room, besides many a head of smaller antelopes and innumerable francolins, pheasants, ducks, and other feathered game.

Yet, somehow, though things had so far gone well, the young couple were not quite comfortable. The disturbances among the horses, although not repeated for several nights, had occasionally happened; the same horrid scream had been heard, and their causes had so far completely baffled Stephen Goodrick. He had tried all sorts of plans, changed the horses, and even had them all turned loose together in the great stone kraal, but with the same results. They were found over and over again at night, mad with fear and drenched with sweat, trampling and plunging in the stable, or tearing about the inclosure.

Cupido and the Kaffirs, and his own Swellendam Hottentots, had been questioned and cross-examined, but to no purpose. Twice had Goodrick remained on the watch all night. On one occasion he believed he had seen a figure move quickly past him in the darkness, and the horses had been disturbed at the same time; but nothing further could be traced and no spoor of man or quadruped was ever discovered. The thing was a mystery. At length, one moonlight night, Goodrick ran out, hearing the now familiar noises, and, taking with him his great brindled dog, which had often hunted elephants, rhinoceros, buffalo and lion, he quickly went round to the stable.

At this moment the two Kaffir herds also came running out on hearing the noise. Just as they approached the stable together they beheld a figure pass through the open doorway, as they supposed, and swiftly glide away to the hillside. The dark figure was clad in a broad-brimmed Boer hat and quaintly cut old-fashioned dress, as Goodrick could plainly notice. Stephen shouted, and with the Kaffirs gave chase, but after a few minutes' running the man suddenly vanished into the bushy scrub that grew on the mountain-side, and no further trace could be found, although the Kaffirs hunted everywhere around.

Meanwhile Stephen turned for his dog, surprised that the animal, usually so fierce and impetuous, had not led the chase. To his utter astonishment, "Tao" was close at his heels, his tail between his legs, his hackles up, and with every symptom of terror upon him. The thing was incomprehensible; the dog had never feared man or beast in his life before, and many a time and oft had faced, as they turned at bay, the fierce and snarling lion, the dangerous sable antelope with his scimitar-

like horns, and the wounded and screaming elephant. At length, turning back, they entered the stable; to their surprise the door was locked, and on being opened the horses as usual were loose and in the last extremity of fright. Nothing more could be done that night. In the morning the Kaffirs and Hottentots searched everywhere for spoor, but could find no trace of the midnight marauder. Cupido, indeed, shook his head, rolled his bloodshot-looking eyes, and appeared to take the occurrence as a matter of course.

Three mornings afterwards the two Kaffirs came to Stephen, declared that they had seen on the previous night the same dark figure just outside their sleeping shed; that the terrible expression on the face of this apparition, which they saw distinctly in the moonlight, had made them utterly sick and terror-stricken; that the thing was a thing of witchcraft, and that nothing would induce them to stay another night on the farm.

"We like the N'kose (chief or master) well," they said, "but we dare not stay in this country or we shall be slain by the witchcraft we see around us; why do you not get a 'smeller out' to cleanse this place from the evil?" The two men, who, in daylight, were, as most Kaffirs are, bold, hardy fellows, were evidently in earnest in what they said, and though Goodrick, who could ill afford to part with them at a moment's notice, offered them increased wages, they steadfastly declined. At length finding he could not shake their resolution, he reluctantly paid them their money and let them go. Goodrick learned some months afterwards from a friend, that these men had marched straight for the boundary of the Colony, crossed the Kei, and rejoined their own tribe, the Gaikas, in Kaffraria.

Goodrick now began to think somewhat seriously of the matter, and to ask himself with inward misgivings what it all meant. Brave man though he was, like most mortals he was not quite proof against superstition, and he began to find himself half fearing that there was something not quite canny about the place. How else could he account for the locked door, the suddenly vanishing figure, the sickening yell, and the lack of footmarks? However, he kept his thoughts from his wife, and made some excuse about a quarrel with the Kaffirs as to wages, to explain their sudden departure. She, although accepting the explanation, seemed uneasy, and at last burst out, "Oh, Stephen, I think there is something wrong about this kloof—some dreadful mystery we know nothing of. Have you ever noticed that even the Kaffirs in the kraal a few miles beyond the poort never enter here? Not a soul amongst the farmers comes near us, and as for 'Tao' he never seems happy now and is always restless, suspicious and alarmed."

That same night the wild, unearthly scream rose again; the same tumult was heard in the stable; Stephen rushed out, and once again, under the clear moonlight, he saw the figure passing in front of him. This time he had his rifle loaded, and after calling once, fired. Still the figure retreated; another shot was fired, but to no purpose; the figure apparently glided imperceptibly onwards, and then suddenly disappeared, as it seemed, sheer into the earth. Goodrick knew so well his powers with the rifle, with which he was famous as a deadly shot, that he could not bring himself to believe he had missed twice within fifty yards. From this incident he could form no other conclusion, and he shivered as he thought so, than that the night disturber was not of human mould.

Meanwhile the horses were becoming worn to shadows, their coats stared, they lost flesh and looked altogether miserable. Fresh horses had been brought in, but the effect was ever the same. Shortly after, two of the Swellendam Hottentots left, and the other two, with Cupido and Mrs Goodrick's servant, alone remained. Goodrick was now in great straits; he could not immediately procure other native servants, and only managed to get through his farm work with the greatest trouble and exertion.

Things drifted on uncomfortably for another week or two, and each day as it came and went, seemed to Goodrick and his wife to increase the gloom and uncertainty of their life in the kloof. At length a climax arrived. Christmas, but a sombre one, had sped, and South African summer, with its heat, its flies, and other manifold troubles, was now at its height.

On the 15th of January, 1861, a day of intense heat was experienced. All day the landscape had sweltered under a still oppression that was almost unbearable, and the very animals about the farm seemed touched and depressed by some mysterious influence.

Towards nightfall dark clouds gathered together suddenly in dense

masses; in the distance, long, rolling thunder-peals were heard approaching in strangely slow, yet none the less certain movement. Cupido, the old Hottentot, had fidgetted about the house a good deal all the evening, and finally, just before ten o'clock, he asked his master if he might for that night sleep on the floor of the kitchen, in order, as he put it, to attend more quickly to the horses if anything scared them. Goodrick noticed that the old man looked agitated, and good-naturedly said "Yes."

Still slowly onward marched the stormy batteries of the sky, until at eleven o'clock they burst overhead with a terrific crash (preceded by such lightning as only Africa can show) that literally seemed to tear and rend each nook and corner of the gorge, reverberating with deafening repetition from every krantz and hollow and rocky inequality in the rude landscape. Rain fell in torrents for a time, then ceased. Again and again the thunder broke overhead, while the lightning played with fiery tongue upon mountain and valley, showing momentarily, with photographic clearness, every object around. Sleep on such a night was out of the question, and Goodrick and his wife sat together listening with solemn faces to the hideous tumult. At length, at about twelve o'clock, the storm for a brief space rolled away, only to return in half an hour with increased severity.

Goodrick had gone for a few moments to the back door, which faced partly towards the entrance to the kloof, and found Cupido standing there, seemingly listening intently. As the tempest approached again with renewed ferocity, some strange confused noises, shrieks and shouts as it seemed, were borne upon the strong breeze that now preceded and hurried along the thunder clouds.

"Hallo!" said Goodrick, "what the deuce is that? There surely can't be a soul about on such a night as this?" Again a hideous scream was borne up the valley. "Good God! that's the very yell we've heard so often round here at night," repeated the Englishman. "It's not leopard, it's not hyaena; what on earth is it, Cupido?" The Hottentot was now trembling in every limb; his yellow, monkeylike face had turned ashy grey, and his bleared eyes seemed full of some intense terror. "Baas," he stammered out, "it's Jan Prinsloo's night, and if you're wise you'll shut the doors fast, pull down the blinds, and not stir or look out for an hour."

"What do you mean, man?"

"I mean that the ghosts of Jan Prinsloo, who was slain here years ago, and his murderers, are coming up the kloof." At that moment the cries and shoutings sounded closer and closer up the valley, and it seemed as if the rattling of horses galloping along the rock-strewn path could be distinguished through the storm. Just then the other two Hottentots, who at length had also heard the din, rushed across from their shed and huddled into the kitchen. Mrs Goodrick at the same instant ran into the room. "What's the matter, Stephen?" she cried; "I am certain there is some dreadful work going on."

"Yes, wife, there is some devilish thing happening, and I mean to get to the bottom of it. I haven't hunted fifteen years in the interior to be frightened by a few strange noises." So speaking, the young farmer went to the sitting-room, took down and rapidly loaded two rifles and his revolver, and returned to the kitchen. Handing one rifle to the Hottentot, he said, "Here, Cupido, take this; I know you can shoot straight, and, if needful, you'll have to do so. Wife, give the Totties a soupje each of brandy."

This was quickly done; the result seemed, on the whole, satisfactory, and the Hottentots somewhat reassured. In a few more seconds the storm burst again in one appalling roar; after it could now be heard the clattering of hoofs up the hillside, mingled with shrieks and shouts. This time the tempest passed rapidly overhead, the dense black clouds rushed on, and suddenly the moon shone out with wonderful brightness.

Onward came the strange noises, sweeping past the side of the house as if up to the great stone cattle kraal, that lay sixty yards away. Then was heard the loud report of a gun. Stephen could stand it no longer. "Come on, you fellows, with me," he exclaimed, as he ran out towards the kraal. Cupido and Mrs Goodrick, who would not be left behind, alone followed him; the white servant woman and the remaining two Hottentots stayed in the kitchen, halfddead with fright, the one on a chair, her apron clasped to her head and ears, the others huddled up in a corner. The three adventurers were not long in reaching the kraal, whence they heard proceeding the same dreadful cries and shrieks, mingled with the trampling of feet Goodrick first approached the entrance, which he found wide open. The sight that met his eyes, and those of his wife and Cupido close behind, was enough to have shaken

the stoutest heart.

Under the clear illumination of the moon, which now shone forth calm and serene, the inclosure seemed as light as day. In the far corner, to the right hand, seventy paces distant, the half-dozen horses that had been turned in stood huddled with their heads together like a flock of sheep. On the opposite side from the entrance, a frightful looking group was tearing madly round. First ran a tall, stout figure, clad in the broad-brimmed hat and quaint old-fashioned leathern costume, which Goodrick in a moment recognised. In its hands it grasped a huge, long, old flint "roer," a smooth-bore elephant gun, such as the Boers used in earlier days. The figure, as it fled, had its face half-turned to its pursuers, who consisted of six half-naked Hottentots armed with assegais and knives. As the chase, for such it was, swept round the kraal and the figures approached the entrance, every face could be plainly discerned; and this was the horrible part of it. These faces were all the faces of the dead, gaunt, ghastly, and grim, and yet possessed of such fiendish and dreadful expressions of anger, cruelty, and lust for blood, as to strike a chilling terror to the hearts of the three spectators. Brave man and ready though he was, Goodrick felt instinctively that he was in the presence of the dead, and his rifle hung listlessly in his hand.

Closer the fearful things approached the spellbound trio, till, when within thirty yards, the leading figure stumbled and fell. In an instant, with diabolical screams, the ghostly Hottentots fell upon their quarry, plying assegai and knife. Again the awful scream that the kloof knew so well rang out upon the night; then followed a torrent of Dutch oaths and imprecations; and then the dying figure, casting off for a moment its slayers, stood up and laid about it with the heavy "roer" grasped at the end of the barrel.

The three living beings who looked upon that face will never to their last days forget it. If the expression of every crime and evil passion could be depicted upon the face of the dead, they shone clear under the pale moonlight upon the face of the dying Dutchman—dying again though dead. Once again with wild yells the Hottentots closed on their victim, and once more rang the fiendish dying yell. Then, still more awful, the Hottentots, as it seemed in an instant, stripped the half-dead body, hacked off the head and limbs, and tore open the vitals, with which they bedabbled and smeared themselves as they again tore shrieking round the kraal. Flesh and blood could stand the sight no longer; Mrs Goodrick, who had clung to her husband spellbound during the scene, which had taken in its enactment but a few seconds, fainted away. Goodrick turned to take his wife in his arms with the intention of making hurriedly for the house. At that instant the horrid din ceased suddenly, and was succeeded by a deathly silence. Turning once more to the kraal gate, Goodrick at once perceived that the whole of the enactors of this awful drama had vanished. He rubbed his eyes in vain to see if they deceived him, but a nod from the half-dead Cupido convinced him that this was not so. No, there was no doubt about it, the waning moon cast her pure and silvery beams calmly and peacefully upon a silent scene. Not a trace of the bloody drama remained; not a whisper, save of the soft night breeze, told of the dreadful story.

"Baas," whispered the Hottentot, "they'll come no more to-night." Quickly Goodrick raised his fainting wife and carried her into the house, where, after long and anxious tending, she was restored to consciousness. Placing her in the sitting-room upon a couch which he had himself made from the soft skins, "brayed" by the Kaffirs, of the antelopes he had shot, he at length induced her to sleep, promising not for a moment to leave her, and with his hands clasped in hers.

At length the night wore away, the sun of Africa shot his glorious rays upward from behind the rugged mountain walls of the kloof, and broad daylight again spread over the landscape. Goodrick was glad indeed to find that with the bright sunshine his wife, brave-hearted woman that she was, had shaken off much of the night's terrors; but her nerves were much shaken. For the last time the goats were unkraaled and sent out, with the two somewhat unwilling Hottentots, to pasture. Breakfast and some strong coffee that followed this operation made things look brighter; and then, taking the couch and setting it upon the stoep (veranda), just outside the windows of their room, and placing a chair for himself, Goodrick went out to the back and called Cupido in with him to the "stoep," where he made the little ancient yellow man squat down. "Cupido," said he, "I am going to inspan this morning, load up one of the waggons, and send my wife and servant under your charge out of this cursed place to Hemming's farm—the next one, twenty-five miles out on the karroo. To-morrow, with the help of some Kaffirs I shall borrow from Mr Hemming, I shall get down the horses from the mountain, load up

both the waggons with the rest of the furniture and farm tackle (as soon as you return, which you will do very early), and trek out of the kloof, never again to set foot in it. But first of all, you will tell me at once, without lying, why you have never said a word to me of this horrible secret, and what it all means. Now speak and be careful."

"Well, baas," said Cupido, speaking in Boer Dutch, the habitual language of the Hottentots, "you have been a kind baas to me, and the jevrouw," (nodding to his mistress) "has been good to me too; and I will tell you all I know about this story. I would have warned you long ago, but Baas Van der Meulen, when he left, made me promise, under pain of being shot, not to say anything. I believe he would have kept his word, for he often gave me the sjambok, and I dare not speak. I was born here in the kloof many years ago, many years even before slavery was abolished and the emigrant Boers trekked out into the Free State and Transvaal, and you will know that is long since.

"My father lived as a servant under that very Jan Prinsloo, whom you saw murdered last night in yonder kraal, and many a time has he told me of Prinsloo and his evil doings and his dreadful end. Well, Jan Prinsloo was a grown man years before the English came across the shining waters and took the country from the Dutch. He was one of the wild and lawless gang settled about Bruintjes Hoogte, on the other side of Sunday River, who bade defiance to all laws and Governments, and who, under Marthinus Prinsloo (a kinsman of Jan's) and Adriaan Van Jaarsveld, got up an insurrection two years after the English came, and captured Graaff Reinet.

"General Vandeleur soon put this rising down, and Marthinus Prinsloo and Van Jaarsveld were hanged, but Jan Prinsloo, who was implicated, somehow retired early in the insurrection, and was pardoned. Some years before this, Jan was fast friends, as a younger man, with Jan Bloem, who, as you may have heard, was a noted freebooter who fled from the Colony across the Orange River, raised a marauding band of Griquas and Korannas, and plundered, murdered, and devastated amongst many of the Bechuana tribes, besides trading and shooting ivory as well. The bloody deeds of these men yet live in Bechuana story. Jan Bloem at last, however, drank from a poisoned fountain in the Bechuana country and died like a hyaena as he deserved. Then Jan Prinsloo took all his herds, waggons, ivory and flocks, came back over the Orange River, sold off the stock at Graaff Reinet, and came and settled in this kloof. He had brought with him some poor Makatese, and these people, who are in their way, as you know, great builders in stone, he made to build this house and the great stone kraal out there, where we saw him last night. He had, too, a number of Hottentots, besides Mozambique slaves, and those he ill-treated in the most dreadful manner, far worse even than any Boer was known to, and that is saying much. At last one day, not long after the Bruintjes Hoogte affair, he came home in a great passion, and found that two of the Hottentots' wives and one child had gone off without leave to see some of their relatives, Hottentots, who were squatted some miles away.

"When these women came back in the evening, Prinsloo made their husbands tie them and the child to two trees, and then and there, after flogging them frightfully, he shot the poor creatures dead, child and all. As for the husbands, he sjambokked them nearly to death for letting their wives go, and then turned in to his 'brandwein' and bed. That night all his Hottentots, including seven men who had witnessed the cruel deed—God knows such deeds were common enough in those wild days—fled through the darkness out of the kloof, and never stopped till they reached the thick bush-veldt country, between Sunday River and the Great Fish River. Just at that time, other Hottentots, roused by the evil deeds of the Boers, rose in arms, and joined hands with the Kaffirs, who were then advancing from beyond the Fish River.

"Well, the Kaffirs and Hottentots, to the number of 700, for some time had all their own way, and ravaged, plundered, burned, and murdered, among the Boers and their farms, even up to Zwartberg and Lange Kloof, between here and the sea. While they were in that neighbourhood, a band of them, inspired by the seven Hottentots of Prinsloo's Kloof, came up the Gamtoos River, in this direction, and met with Jan Prinsloo and a few other Boers, who were trekking out of the disturbed district with their waggons, and who had come to reconnoitre in a poort, fifteen miles away from here. All the Boers were surprised and slain, excepting Prinsloo; and while the Kaffirs and other Hottentots stayed to plunder the waggons, Prinsloo's seven servants, who were all mounted on stolen horses, chased him, like 'wilde honde' hunting a hartebeest, for many hours; for Jan rode like a madman, and gave them the slip for three hours, while he lay hid up in a kloof, until, at last, as night came on, they

pressed him into his own den here.

“It was yesterday, but years and years ago, just when the summer is hottest and the thunder comes on, and just in such a storm as last night’s, that the maddened Hottentots, thirsting for the murderer’s blood, hunted Prinsloo up through the poort. They were all light men and well mounted, and towards the end gained fast upon him, although Jan, who rode a great ‘rooi schimmel’ (red roan) horse, the best of his stud, rode as he had never ridden before. Up the kloof they clattered, the Hottentots close at his heels now; Prinsloo galloped to the great kraal there, jumped off his horse, and ran inside, like a leopard among his rocks, fastening the gate behind him, and there determined to make a last desperate stand for it.

“The Hottentots soon forced the gate and swarmed over the walls, not, however, before one was killed by Prinsloo’s great elephant ‘roer.’ Round the kraal they chased him, giving him no time to load again; at last, as you know, he fell and was slain, and the Hottentots cut off his head, and arms, and legs, and tore out his black heart, and in their mad, murderous joy and fury, smeared themselves with his blood. Then the men looted the house, set fire to what they could, and afterwards rejoined their comrades next morning. They told my father, who had known Prinsloo, the whole story when they got back. These six men were all killed in a fight soon afterwards when the insurrection was put down, and the Kaffirs and Hottentots were severely punished.

“Well, ever since that night the thing happens once a year upon the same night. Many Boers have tried to live in this place since that time, but have always left in a hurry after a few weeks’ trial. I believe one man did stay for nearly two years; but he was deaf, and knew nothing of what was going on around, until one Prinsloo’s night when he saw something that quickly made him trek I once saw the scene we witnessed last night; it was many years ago, when I was a young man in the service of a Boer, who had just come here—before then I had been with my father in the service of another Boer, forty miles away towards Sunday River. Next morning after seeing Prinsloo and his murderers, my master trekked out horror-stricken. I never thought to have seen the horrible thing again, but eight months ago, when the Van der Meulens came here, I was hard up and out of work, and though I didn’t half like coming into the kloof again, I thought, perhaps, after so many years, the ghosts might have vanished. I hadn’t been many nights here, though, before I knew too well I was mistaken. Even then I would have left, but Van der Meulen swore I should not. He and his family came here soon after Prinsloo’s night, and left before it came round again; but after the old man and his sons had twice been face to face with Jan’s spook prowling about the stable and kraals, and even looking in at the windows, they were not long before they wanted to clear out, and now you know their reason, baas.”

“Yes, Cupido, to my cost, I do,” said Goodrick, “I don’t suppose I shall ever come across that delightful family again, for it is a far cry to Zoutpansberg, in the north of the Transvaal, and a wild enough country when you get there. But tell me, why is it that this dreadful thing is always in and out of the stables and kraals frightening the horses?”

“Well, baas, I am not certain, but I believe, for my father always told me so, that Prinsloo was very fond of horseflesh, extraordinarily so for a Boer; for you know as a rule they don’t waste much time on their horses, and use them but ill. He had the finest stud in the Colony, and took great pains and trouble with it; and they say that Jan’s ghost is still just as fond as ever of his favourites, and is always in and out of the stable in consequence. Anyhow, the horses don’t care about it, as you know, they seem just as scared at him as any human being.”

Cupido, like all Hottentots, could tell a story with the dramatic force and interest peculiar to his race, and the bald translation here given renders very scant justice to the grim legend that came from his lips. After the quaint little yellow man had finished, Mrs Goodrick gave him some coffee, and immediately afterwards the party set about loading up one waggon with a part of the furniture. This done, and Mrs Goodrick and her servant safely installed, Cupido, the oxen being inspanned, took the leading riems of the two first oxen and acted as foreloper, while Goodrick sat on the box and wielded the whip.

Twelve miles away beyond the poort that opened into the kloof there was a Kaffir kraal, and having arrived there, Goodrick was able to hire a leader, and Cupido having relieved his master of the whip and received instructions to hasten to Hemming’s farm as quickly as possible with his mistress, Goodrick saddled and bridled his horse, which had been tied to the back of the waggon, and rode back to his farm. The night passed quietly away; the two remaining Hottentots begged to be allowed to

sleep in the kitchen, and this favour their master not unwillingly accorded them. Next morning, at ten o'clock, Cupido, who had trekked through a good part of the night, arrived, and with him came Mr Hemming, the farmer, and four of his Kaffirs. Hearing of his neighbour's trouble, and having seen Mrs Goodrick comfortably settled with his own wife, he had good-naturedly come to his assistance. "So Jan Prinsloo has driven you out at last," said he, upon meeting Goodrick. "I heard from your wife last evening what you had seen the night before. I was afraid it would happen and would have warned you in time if I had known. But I never even heard that the Van der Meulens had sold the farm till they had cleared out and I met you about a month after you had been here; and as you were a determined looking Englishman, and the half-dozen people who have tried the farm in the last twenty years have been superstitious Dutch, I thought perhaps you might succeed in beating the ghost where they failed. I haven't been in the kloof for many years, and after this experience, which bears out what my father and others who knew the story well have always told me, I shan't be in a hurry to come in here again. It's a strange thing, and I don't think, somehow, the curse that seems on the place will ever disappear."

"Nor I," said Goodrick, "I'm not in a hurry to try it. I never believed in spooks till the night before last, for I never thought they were partial to South Africa; but after what I saw I can never again doubt upon that subject. The shock to me was terrible enough, and what my wife suffered must have been far worse."

With the willing aid of his neighbour and his Kaffirs, as well as his own Hottentots, Goodrick got clear of the kloof that day, and, after a few days spent at Mr Hemming's, trekked away again for Swellendam, to his father's house. Six months later he finally settled in a fertile district not far from Swellendam, where he and his wife and family still remain. Cupido died in his service some fourteen years since. After much trouble Goodrick sold his interest in Prinsloo's Kloof and the farm around for a sum much less even than what he gave Van der Meulen for it; it is only fair to say he warned the purchaser of the evil reputation of the place before this was done. It is a singular fact that on his way to take possession of the kloof the new purchaser fell ill and died, and the place has never since been occupied.

Although it is nearly forty years since these events took place, and Mrs Goodrick is now an old lady, with children long since grown to man and womanhood, she has never quite thrown off the terror of that awful night. Even now she will wake with a start if she hears any sudden cry in her sleep, thinking for the moment it is the death scream of Prinsloo's Kloof. As for the haunted kloof, it lies to this day in desolation black and utter. No footfall wakes its rugged echoes; the grim baboons keep watch and ward; the carrion aasvogels wheel and circle high above its cliffs, gazing down from their aerial dominion with ever-searching eyes; the black and white ravens seek in its fastnesses for their food, looking, as they swoop hither and thither, as if still in half mourning for the deed of blood of bygone years; and the antelopes and leopards wander free and undisturbed. But no sign of human life is there, or seems ever likely to be; and if, by cruel fate, the straying traveller should haplessly outspan for his night's repose by the haunted farmhouse on the night of the 15th of January, he will yet see enacted, so the neighbouring farmers say, the horrible drama of Jan Prinsloo's death.

Chapter Four.
The Bushman’s Fortune.

Kwaneet, the Bushman, had lost his wife Nakeesa, and was just now a little puzzled what to do with himself. Nakeesa, poor thing, had been slain by a lion on the Tamalakan River in an attempt to rescue her man. (See “Tales of South Africa,” by the same Author.) The attempt was successful so far as Kwaneet was concerned, but Nakeesa and the babe she carried had fallen victims. Kwaneet had quickly got rid of Nakeesa’s child by her first husband, Sinikwe. It was a useless encumbrance to him, and he had sold it for a new assegai to some Batauana people near Lake Ngami.

The Masarwa was how at a loose end. The companionship of Nakeesa during their year and a half of union—married life it could scarcely be called among these nomads—had been very pleasant. Nakeesa was always industrious, and had saved him an infinity of trouble in providing water, digging up roots and ground-nuts and picking the wild fruit when game was scarce, and a score of other occupations pertaining to the Bushman’s life. Now she was gone, and he must shift for himself again, which was a nuisance. But, chiefly, his mind was just now exercised, as he squatted by himself at a small desert fountain, as to what he should do with himself in the immediate future. Suddenly an old and long-cherished plan flashed across his mind. Years before, as a young lad, his father had taken him on a long hunting expedition to a distant corner of that vast desert of the Kalahari, in which the Masarwa Bushmen make their home. He remembered the stalking of many ostriches, and the acquisition of great store of feathers; he remembered a long, long piece of thirst country through which they had toiled; and he remembered most of all coming presently to the solitary abode of a white man, planted in that distant and inaccessible spot, an abode almost unknown even to the wild Masarwa of the desert. From this white man his father had obtained for his feathers, amongst other things, a good hunting-knife—a treasured possession which he himself now carried. That white man, his waggon—there were no oxen, he remembered, nor horses—the house he had built for himself, and its fascinating contents; the strong fountain of sweet water which welled from the limestone hard by; all these things he remembered well. But most of all he recalled an air of mystery which enveloped everything. When he and his father had approached the white man’s dwelling, they had seen him, before he set eyes on them, digging in a depression of the open plain a mile from the house. Much of the grass had been removed, and piles of sand and stones were heaped here and there, and there were heaps, too, he remembered, near the house. Kwaneet’s father had, when they left that secret and unknown place, strongly impressed upon his son the absolute necessity of silence concerning the white man and his abode. The white man gave value for feathers—good value in a Bushman’s eyes—which the harsh and bullying Batauana people of Chief Moremi at Nghabe (Lake Ngami) never did. On the contrary, the Batauana robbed the poor Bushman of all his spoils of the desert whenever they got a chance, which happily was not often.

Now Kwaneet had plenty of time upon his hands and no settled plan. The mystery of the lone white man had always fascinated him. He would go now and see if he still lived. It was some winters ago, but he might still be there. So Kwaneet filled three ostrich eggs and a calabash with water, made fresh snuff against the journey, and next morning, long before the clear star of dawn had leaped above the horizon, started upon his quest. He was well equipped for a Masarwa. His giraffe hide sandals, not needed till the thorns were traversed, and his little skin cloak, neatly folded, were fastened to one end of his assegai. At the other end hung the full calabash of water. His tiny bow, quiver of reed arrows, bone-tipped and strongly poisoned, and a rude net of fibre containing three ostrich eggs of water were slung over his back. Some meat and a supply of ground-nuts, the latter skewered up in the dried crops of guinea-fowls, completed his outfit.

It was a long, long journey, but Kwaneet, travelling leisurely at the rate of twenty or thirty miles a day—he was in no violent hurry—steadily progressed. He had not been through that part of the Kalahari since, as a lad, he had accompanied his father; yet, thanks to the wonderful Bushman instinct, the way through the flat and pathless wilderness seemed as plain to him as the white man’s waggon road from Khama’s to Lake Ngami. Despite the thirst, it was not an unpleasant journey. The various acacias, hack-thorn, wait-a-bit, hook-and-stick thorn, and the common thorny acacia, with its long, smooth ivory needles, were all

putting forth their round, sweet-scented blooms, some greenish, some yellow, against the coming of the rains. Leagues upon leagues of forest of spreading giraffe-acacia (mokaala) were in flower, and their big, round, plush-like pompons of rich orange-yellow blossom scented the veldt for miles with a delicious perfume. Even to the dulled senses of the Bushman these symptoms of renewed life at the end of a long drought were very pleasant. As the Masarwa plunged further and further into the heart of the wilderness, game was very plentiful. Great troops of giraffe wandered and fed among the mokaala forests; steinbuck and duiker were everywhere amid grass and bush. Upon the great grass plains, or in the more open forest glades, herds of magnificent gemsbok and of brilliant bay hartebeests grazed peacefully in an undisturbed freedom; not seldom fifty or sixty noble elands were encountered in a single troop. All these animals are almost entirely independent of water, and found here a welcome sanctuary. The country was absolutely devoid of mankind. Many years before a number of Masarwas had been massacred at a water-pit by a band of Sebituane's Makololo, then crossing the desert. The tradition of fear had been perpetuated and the region was seldom visited by Bushmen.

One morning, after sleeping within the welcome shelter of some thick bush, Kwaneet steps forth upon a great open plain of grass. Kwaneet remembers the plain at once. Upon it his father and he had slain ostriches years before, on their way to the white man's; and across the broad, thirty-mile flat lay a water-pit, the last before the white man's dwelling was reached. The Bushman looks with a keen interest out upon the plain. He expects to see ostriches, and he is not disappointed. He at once begins preparation for a hunt. First he takes from his neck three curious-looking flat pieces of bone, triangular in shape, scored with a rude pattern. One of these is more pointed than the others. He pulls them from the hide strip on which they are threaded, shakes them rapidly between his two palms, and casts them upon the earth, after which he stares with intense concentration for a long half minute. These are his dice, his oracles, which disclose to him whether the hunt is to be a good or an unsuccessful one. Apparently the result of the first throw is doubtful. The Bushman picks up the dice, shakes them, and throws them again. This time the more acute-angled piece points away from the rest. The Bushman's eyes gleam, he mutters to himself in that odd, high, complaining voice which these people have, giving a cluck or two with his tongue as he does so, and throws once more. Again the oracle is propitious. Well pleased, the Masarwa re-strings his dice, fastens them about his neck, and hastens his preparations.

He now divests himself of all his encumbrances; water vessels, food, cloak, assegai, and sandals are all left behind. Stark naked, except for the hide patch about his middle, and armed only with his bow, arrows, and knife, he sets forth. The nearest ostrich is feeding more than a mile away, and there is no covert but the long, sun-dried, yellow grass, but that is enough for the Bushman. Worming himself over the ground with the greatest caution, he crawls flat on his belly towards the bird. No serpent could traverse the grass with less disturbance. In the space of an hour and a half he has approached within a hundred yards of the tall bird. Nearer he dare not creep on this bare plain, and at more than twenty-five paces he cannot trust his light reed arrows. He lies patiently hidden in the grass, his bow and arrows ready in front of him, trusting that the ostrich may draw nearer. It is a long wait under the blazing sun, close on two hours, but his instinct serves him, and at last, as the sun shifts a little, the great ostrich feeds that way. It is a splendid male bird, jet black as to its body plumage, and adorned with magnificent white feathers upon the wings and tail. Kwaneet's eyes glisten, but he moves not a muscle. Closer and closer the ostrich approaches. Thirty paces, twenty-five, twenty. There is a light musical twang upon the hot air, and a tiny yellowish arrow sticks well into the breast of the gigantic bird. The ostrich feels a sharp pang and turns at once. In that same instant a second arrow is lodged in its side, just under the wing feathers. Now the stricken bird raises its wings from its body and speeds forth into the plain. But Kwaneet is quite content. The poison of those two arrows will do his work effectually. He gets up, follows the ostrich, tracking it, after it has disappeared from sight, by its spoor, and in two hours the game lies there before him amid the grass, dead as a stone. The Bushman carefully skins the whole of the upper plumage of the bird, cuts off the long neck at its base, takes what meat he requires, and walks back to his camping-place. There he skins the neck of the bird, extracting the muscles and vertebra; and, leaving the head, sews up the neck again, inserting into it a long stick and some dry grass, and lays it on one side. The hunt and these preparations have consumed most of the day.

Kwaneet now feeds heartily, drinks a little water, indulges himself in a pinch or two of snuff, and then, nestling in his skin cloak close to his fire, his back sheltered by a thick bush, sleeps soundly till early morning.

So soon as it is light an ostrich stalks from the Bushman's "scherm" and moves quietly on to the plain. All its motions are as natural as possible. It holds its head erect, looking abroad for any possible danger, as these wary creatures will, puts its head down to feed at times, scratches itself, all in the most natural fashion. The ostrich is no other than Kwaneet, disguised with the greatest care and deftness in the skin of the slain bird. He manoeuvres the neck and head on the long stick inserted yesterday. All this is part of a Bushman's education, and Kwaneet is merely profiting by desert lessons acquired from his father years before. The Bushman-ostrich moves quietly out on to the flat, and presently joins a knot of birds feeding amid the grass. His approach is so skilful that he is able, without suspicion, to lodge an arrow in the finest male bird of the troop. From this troop, moving as they move when alarmed and keeping always with them, he kills four birds during the morning, all of which he rifles of their best feathers. During three days' hunting upon the plain Kwaneet thus kills eight fine cock ostriches, and gains a noble booty of prime feathers. These feathers having carefully fastened together, he proceeds on his journey. It takes him a long day to cross the plain. He rests at the limestone water-pit on the other side, recruits his water calabash and eggshells, and then sets himself for the wearisome two days of waterless journey to the white man's settlement. He travels faster now, and late in the second afternoon reaches the well-remembered spot. The digging upon the grass plain seems to him as he passes it much larger than of old. Many heaps are now grass-covered and even overgrown with low bushes. But chiefly Kwaneet notices that the dry bed of an ancient stream, which ages since ran here, has been greatly excavated. The banks are piled up with soil, and the channel is much deeper than when he last saw it. Kwaneet smiles to himself and marvels at the white man's profitless labour. The man is alive, that is certain, his spoor plainly tells that tale. In another mile, following the path worn long since, the Masarwa walks into the pleasant open glade just upon the outskirts of the camelthorn forest, where the dwelling stands. It is exactly as Kwaneet remembers it, a low cottage of wattle and daub, neatly thatched. The old waggon still stands there under the spreading acacia fifty yards to the left. It is now rotten and dilapidated, almost falling to pieces; the white ants have been busy with it. There are signs of cultivation. Away to the right, near the fountain, a patch of mealie and tobacco ground is almost ready for the rains that soon must fall.

In front of the red mud walls of the hut, now glowing warmly beneath the rays of the dying sun, sits the white man in an old waggon chair. As Kwaneet walks up, he starts, rises, and, looking hard at the Bushman, says: "Who is it?" Then, looking still harder, "Surely Dwar, the Masarwa?"

"Nay," answers Kwaneet, "it is not Dwar, but Kwaneet, the son of Dwar. Dwar died in the drought, in the season that three lions pulled down the giraffe by the pool of Maqua."

The white man laughs grimly. "That is the answer of a true Masarwa," he says. "How can I tell when Dwar died? But now I remember you, Kwaneet. You were here as a lad with your father, and you are as like Dwar as one kiewitje's egg is like another. What do you do here? The Masarwa seldom comes this way."

"Oh, my lord," returned Kwaneet, "I lost my wife on the Tamalakan River and I wished to wander again. I thought I would hunt this way and see if the white man still abode here. Here are feathers which he may wish to buy."

The white man was long silent and gazed hard at Kwaneet, and as he gazed his eyes seemed to wander dreamingly into the past. Meanwhile Kwaneet, squatting there in the red sand in front of him, had time to observe him well. The white man had changed a good deal. His glance, which the Masarwa remembered as shifting and uneasy, was the same, but otherwise he was different from the strong man he had last seen. He stooped and was very thin, his face was deeply lined, the flesh followed tightly the contour of the bones. The beard and hair, which the Bushman remembered as an intense black, were now thickly streaked with white.

While the two men sit thus silent, let us look into the white man's past —that past which at this moment he himself retraces within the mazes of his brain. James Fealton, fifteen years before, was a Namaqualand trader, who knew the interior and its natives well, and had prospered moderately. He had not a very good reputation. When diamonds were

discovered and the rush took place to the Vaal River, he happened to be down-country. He joined the rush, and, chumming with an Englishman fresh from the old country, spent many months in digging. The two men lived hard, and had no luck for six months, by which time most of their capital had come to an end. Then came a big stroke of fortune. They found a huge stone of many carats, worth some thousands of pounds. Not a soul in the camp knew of the find. But one day Fealton had disappeared, his partner was found in their tent stabbed to the heart, and a hue and cry arose. The hue and cry did not last long; the camp was far too busy in those days with its own affairs to trouble greatly about bringing felons to justice. Fealton had carefully covered up his traces and the search presently died away. Fealton had, as a matter of fact, ridden off on a fleet horse by night and had secured three good days' start. Avoiding all dwellings, he rode across the veldt, and presently reached a kraal on the north bank of the Orange River, where he had left a waggon, oxen, and some stores some six months earlier, just before he had been bitten with the diamond fever.

Within six hours of his arrival at the kraal he had inspanned his oxen and trekked away north into the heart of the Kalahari. At first he had luck; there were plenty of wild melons (tsama) about the desert, and, failing water, his oxen subsisted on these for some weeks. At Lehuditu, a Kalahari kraal, where the only native he had with him lived, he paid off the man and thence trekked on alone. But as he pressed yet north the tsama failed, and one after another the oxen fell in their yokes and died of thirst and exhaustion. It was a ghastly struggle for life. Fealton managed to reach the pleasant fountain where Kwaneet found him and there halted. He had reached a remote place, surrounded by "thirsts"—a place unknown to white men—here he would rest for a year or two. The remnant of his oxen, save two, soon after died from eating a poisonous plant—"Tulp," as the Boers call it—and he was stranded whether he liked it or no. But the place suited him very well. He was haunted by the gnawing fear of detection. The crime itself—the foul murder of his friend—troubled him little at present in the haste and toil of flight, but the consequences of it, the terror of retribution and of justice, dwelt with him incessantly. He would stay here till things were forgotten, and then escape north far into Portuguese territory and so to Europe. Meanwhile there was plenty of game around him. He had a plentiful store of ammunition—enough for many years, with care—and was fond of sport. He would hunt ostrich feathers, and thus collect wealth to add to the value of that wonderful diamond, which he carried ever about him. And so he had built himself a hut, and made himself a home in the wilderness.

Rambling with his gun about the country near the place of his settlement, he had found one day a dry river-bed, where water had evidently run in ages past. Some of the gravel here and there, left uncovered by the light sand of the desert, struck him. He brought a spade and searched carefully, and presently from a washing picked out a small diamond. The discovery electrified him. That here in this secret place, happened upon by the merest accident in that desperate flight from the great diamond stretches of the Vaal River, he should have lit upon another field, seemed the wildest improbability of a dream. Yet so it was. He found a week or two later another stone. They were not large diamonds, but they were wonderfully pure gems, white and flawless. He now set to work with feverish energy. He would amass a huge fortune in a year or two and then get away to some civilised country and enjoy that life of luxury and indulgence for which inwardly his soul had always pined. He had a few trading tools on his waggon, among them picks and spades. These easily sufficed him. He worked steadily for three years in the dry river-bed, until the time when Kwaneet and his father had made their way to his hut. His success had not been very great, thus far the stones were scarce and far apart and not very large. Moreover, the toil of carrying the stuff to his fountain for washing purposes was great, and took up much time. But, four years after the Bushman's visit, a turn came. Moving farther along the dry channel he had at length hit upon much richer soil. Fine diamonds of considerable size were occasionally to be found after the washings, and slowly the man's store of gems increased. Yet, always hoping for some yet greater streak of luck, he toiled on. Now at last, in the leather bag, locked in a corner of his waggon-chest, he had a great fortune. But for the last two years his health had begun to fail. Some internal trouble sapped at his strong frame. He lost flesh and grew old and wrinkled. The fitful beating of his heart, palpitations, and even sudden pangs, alarmed him. He gave up digging, he had barely enough energy at times to shoot or snare game and keep himself in meat. He must escape from the desert, which he now

loathed, and get to Europe and obtain medical advice. No doubt he could be put right again.

For months he had been casting about for some means of escape from what was now in his weakened state a prison. He doubted whether he could struggle on foot to the next water—sixty long miles of heat and thirst—and there were other long thirsts to be traversed before he could even strike a native settlement and buy a horse or oxen. And here, in the midst of his perplexities, the Bushman had turned up! Nothing could have been more fortunate, it was absolutely providential. Fealton felt that evening more cheerful than he had done for years past. His troubles would vanish now. That night he treated Kwaneet to a magnificent feed—for a Bushman—opened his last bottle of brandy—the long-treasured remnant from a case of two dozen—and, under the mellowing influence of the liquor and companionship, his spirits rose immensely. The old bright dreams, which had been fading in the last year or two, rose clear before him. He understood the Koranna dialect, which much resembles Masarwa, and he had no difficulty in conversing with the Bushman. From him he gleaned a little—a very little—of what was passing in the native states around him. Moremi reigned at Lake Ngami. Khama had succeeded Macheng and ruled the Bamangwato. Secheli still lived. The white men came oftener into the country, the game grew scarcer. He could glean little else than these bare facts from the desert man. Yet it was wonderfully pleasant to use his tongue, to break the long silence of the lonely wilderness, to exchange ideas even with a Masarwa. The two men talked for a couple of hours, then Fealton motioned Kwaneet into a corner of the hut, and himself lay down upon his rough bed.

Kwaneet curled himself up under his hartebeest skin cloak and was soon fast asleep. He woke as usual very early, but Fealton was awake before him. Peering from under his cloak, Kwaneet saw in the dim light of early morning that the white man was sitting on his bed. He had in his hands a skin bag. He opened this and poured out its contents on the couch. The Bushman could not see all, but he saw a little heap of pebbles, which the hand of the white man levelled and spread over the blanket. Several of the larger stones he picked up and examined closely and weighed in his hand. It was clear to Kwaneet from the white man’s movement that he set great store by these pebbles. The Bushman stirred. Fealton swept the stones into the skin bag again, put them into his waggon-chest, which stood close to the bed, and locked it.

That morning, after breakfast, Fealton unfolded his plans to the Masarwa. He was to go with some ostrich feathers to a trader at Lake Ngami and barter two good pack oxen on which the white man could make his escape. He could ride one and pack his belongings on the other. The Masarwa had more than once tended cattle for the Bechuanas, and understood them. Oxen would traverse the “thirst” better than horses—even if horses could be obtained, which was doubtful—and Kwaneet did not understand horses. For the Bushman’s protection in this business—lest he should be robbed or cheated of the feathers by the way—Fealton wrote a note in an assumed name and hand, authorising the cattle to be delivered in exchange for feathers. He represented himself briefly as a traveller who had broken down in the desert. He enjoined upon Kwaneet complete secrecy as to his long settlement in the Kalahari. The reward to Kwaneet for the due despatch of this piece of business was in the Bushman’s eyes a very great one. The white man promised him a breech-loading rifle and ammunition and some goats. Kwaneet had ambitions, for a Masarwa, and began to look forward to setting up as an aristocrat, such, for instance, as the Batauana or Bamangwato people, who lorded it so greatly over the poor children of the desert.

Kwaneet performed his mission secretly and well, he procured the two pack oxen, got them safely across the desert—luckily it was the beginning of the rains—and arrived one day at the white man’s hut. He approached the place with a swelling sense of satisfaction. He had accomplished a difficult mission for a desert-bred man. The white man would be vastly pleased. The reward, that magnificent Snider rifle, which always he had carried in his mind’s eye, the cartridges, the goats—all, all were soon to be his. Within fifty yards of the hut something caught the eye of the Masarwa—something that sent a thrill down his back. Here was now, since the rain had fallen, fair green grass starred with flowers. Big pink and white lilies stood in their short-lived bravery near the fountain, and amid these wild lilies lay bleached bones and pieces of torn cloth. The white man was dead, and here was the last of him. Kwaneet turned over the bones. Many of them were broken by hyenas and jackals, but there was no mistaking the fragments of clothing amid which they lay. The Bushman’s aid had come too late. Fealton’s fate had at last

overtaken him. He had died suddenly of the ailment that had been so long sapping at his life, and the birds and beasts of the desert had been his undertakers.

Here at first was a bitter disappointment for Kwaneet. Presently, however, on thinking it all over, the affair looked not quite so blank for him. Here in this secret place was wealth—a good rifle, some ammunition still remaining, as he knew, the two oxen he had brought. Why should not he himself live here and enjoy this pleasant spot and these good things? So Kwaneet took possession of the hut and its contents, clothed himself in an old pair of trousers and a flannel shirt, and entered upon the life of a great man. He built a little kraal for his two oxen, and for a time was as happy as an English squire with a heavy rent roll in the good days. He tried the rifle, and after a time even overcame the alarming difficulty of letting it off. But it was a serious undertaking, and upon the whole he preferred his bow and arrows.

Presently Kwaneet, Masarwa though he was, yearned once more for companionship. He would try to get a wife again. He had found the white man's bag of pebbles. He felt convinced somehow, from the care the man had bestowed upon them, that they were valuable. He would take these and the best of the ostrich feathers to the trader and obtain more cattle for them, and on his way thither he would pick up a wife at the water of Ghansi. This last was not a difficult task. At Ghansi he bought the girl he needed, paying for her his father's old hunting-knife, which he had replaced by a better one found in the white man's hut. Kwaneet's appearance with a couple of pack oxen and a big load of feathers, and other indications of immense wealth, created some sensation among the Masarwas squatting at Ghansi. One of them in particular, Sakwan, made it his business to inquire further into the matter. He had an old grudge against Kwaneet—it had happened over a stray tusk of ivory found in the desert; it irked him yet more to see his rival thus prospering. After Kwaneet with his new wife had left Ghansi for the Lake, therefore, Sakwan followed secretly upon their spoor. Kwaneet found no difficulty in marketing his wares at the end of his journey. He interviewed the trader by night. The man was staggered at sight of the magnificent lot of ostrich feathers which Kwaneet turned out of the skin coverings that enveloped them; yet more staggered was he when the Bushman produced his bag of pebbles, and poured them upon the deal table. The trader knew diamonds in the rough perfectly well. Here, he assured himself, was the price of a king's ransom. Where did they come from? Were there more of them? To these questions Kwaneet returned evasive answers. He knew nothing more than that he had found them in the desert. There were no more of them. What then, asked the trader, did Kwaneet want for the lot—feathers and pebbles? They were not worth much to him, but he would buy them. Kwaneet had thought all this out His fortune was worth to him, he conceived, ten head of cows, a bull, twenty goats, some Snider ammunition, a hat, a suit of trade clothes, and a shawl for his wife. He shook a little with excitement as he proposed these enormous terms. The trader laughed to himself at the Masarwa's idea of wealth; he knew well that that wonderful bag of diamonds alone was worth some tens of thousands of pounds. And the feathers—magnificent "prime bloods," long and snow-white, represented three or four hundred pounds at least. He haggled a little to save appearances, and finally closed the bargain.

Two days later, Kwaneet and his wife started away from a quiet cattle post belonging to the trader, which lay at some distance from the native town. It was part of the bargain that the trader should see the coast clear, so that the Bushman might get away unknown to the Batauana. This was safely accomplished. The two bush people, driving their fortune before them, plunged straightway into the desert. It was an anxious yet a delightful journey for Kwaneet. He had made his pile; henceforth he would rear flocks and herds in that dim corner of the desert and grow ever richer—as rich as a Bechuana. What Masarwa before him had ever accomplished, had ever even dreamt so much?

Thanks to the rains, which held late that season, Kwaneet got all his stock safely over the journey and reached his goal. It was a fine clear morning as they drove the cattle and goats up to the pleasant fountain, now brimming over with the rains, which Kwaneet knew so well. There stood the hut and the waggon just as he had left them. Partridge-like francolins were calling sharply near the water. Brilliant rollers and wood-peckers, and bizarre hornbills, with monstrous yellow bills, were flitting to and fro among the trees of the mokaala grove. Beautiful wild doves cooed softly from the spreading branches of the great giraffe-acacia, beneath which the old waggon stood. Bands of sand-grouse were drinking, splashing, and stooping at the water. The grass was still green;

flowers still flourished; the place looked very fair. All that day Kwaneet and his young wife toiled hard, cutting thorns and making a temporary kraal for the cattle. Then they ate some food and, turning into the hut, slept.

Two hours later—before the moon rose—a dark form crept up to the doorway. The cry of a hyaena was heard. Kwaneet came forth and was met not by any prowling beast but by the sharp blade of an assegai which pierced his heart. That deadly thrust was made by Sakwan, who had shadowed for weeks past the career of his hated rival. Thus miserably ended the fortunes and hopes of Kwaneet the Bushman. Perchance if he had lived he might have founded here in this remote place, as he had sometimes in these last weeks dreamed to himself, a tribe—perhaps even a dynasty—of the desert! Why not! Lehuditu, that strange village of the central Kalahari, sprang from no greater a beginning! But all these aspirations had been ruthlessly ended by Sakwan's spear-head. They sank there into the thirsty sand with Kwaneet's life-blood. As for Sakwan, he took possession of the Masarwa girl, squatted at the fountain till they had killed and devoured Kwaneet's cattle and goats, and then, with his wife, betook himself once more to the roaming life of his kind.

Kwaneet's bones rest there amid the Kalahari grass, mingling with those of the white man, mute records of ruined hopes, the pitiful relics of the first and last Masarwa Bushman that dared to have ambition. Sometimes the jackal turns them over with his sharp snout, but they are very white and very clean now, and not even a jackal can find consolation in them. The diamonds collected so painfully by the murderer Fealton, and so lightly parted with by the simple Kwaneet, are scattered too; but at least they have built the fortunes of the white trader, who now lives in England upon their proceeds the life of a man of wealth. He can little guess, nor, I suppose, would he be greatly interested to know, the sorry ending of the desert nomad to whom he owes his luck.

Chapter Five.
The Conquest of Christina De Klerk.

The few hunters, traders, and Trek Boers who cross the dreaded Thirstland of the Northern Kalahari, and, upon their long and trying journey towards Lake Ngami, strike the Lake River (marked upon the maps Zouga or Botletli River), well know the pleasant outspan at Masinya's Kraal. Masinya's is a small village of Bakurutse natives, planted a mile or so from the southern bank of the Lake River. Between the kraal and the river, amid a thin grove of spreading giraffe-acacia trees, set upon a little islet of rising ground, lies the outspan where travellers bound to and from Ngami usually halt. On the right, a hundred and fifty yards from the tall, oak-like motjeerie tree, which every hunter knows, lies a deep depression, which, fed by the overflow of the Lake River, assumes the aspect of a handsome lagoon, at some seasons full and deep, at others a mere shallow vlei. Beyond the lagoon lie the hard, sun-baked alluvial flats which border the sluggish river. Upon the southern and western sides of the charming oasis of Masinya's Kraal stretch the great open grass plains, flecked with springboks, and dotted here and there with a troop of larger game, which fifteen or twenty miles away are checked by the endless and waterless forest and bush of the Kalahari—that vast desert which, thanks to its lack of surface water, lies to this day dim, unknown, and mysterious to all races of mankind, save the wandering Bushmen and Vaalpens who inhabit it.

Upon the 28th of December, 1878, towards four o'clock in the afternoon, a great Cape waggon, conspicuous by its new white tilt and spick-and-span paint, toiled heavily across the flat towards Masinya's Kraal. Presently, urged by the excited yells of the driver and the pistol-like cracks of his great whip, the eighteen stout oxen rose the slight sandy ascent, and a little further drew up their burden under the shade of a spreading acacia. A white woman, young, dark, and good-looking, her face shaded by a broad-brimmed straw hat, sat upon the box; and as the great waggon halted she descended with light foot to the dry, grassy soil, shook herself a little, adjusted her hat, and looked about her. The first thing her brown eyes lit upon was another waggon and encampment some hundred and fifty yards to her right.

Kate Marston was a colonial-born girl, and understood the ways and signs of the veldt well enough. Something about the look of the encampment, the old buck-sail stretched from the waggon to a couple of friendly tree stems (thus forming an apartment in itself), the travel-worn waggon, its tilt patched with raw hides, and a general air of untidiness, convinced her that it belonged to a Boer owner. The sight of a female figure sitting under the lee of the waggon in a squat chair, and her immense Dutch kapje, or sun-bonnet, at once settled that conviction.

But Kate Marston had plenty to do at present before troubling herself about a visit to her neighbour. Her husband, Fred Marston, was away in the veldt, hunting, and she wished to have her camp settled, her tent-sail fixed, some of her belongings got out of the waggon, the fires lighted, and the evening meal prepared against his return, which she expected towards sundown. In half an hour's time, thanks to her brisk and energetic ways, things were settling themselves as she wished. The tent-sail was fastened down, the little folding camp-table—flanked by a couple of waggon chairs—in its place and covered with a clean table-cloth (even in the wilderness, Kate, with her English ways, loved to be neat), a fire of wood blazed cheerfully, the game stew was simmering in the big Kaffir pot. These things being attended to, Kate had washed her hands and face after the day of trekking, brushed her thick, dark hair; and now, in her thin light brown stuff dress, clean collar and cuffs, and broad sun-hat, looked as fresh, bright, and cheerful as if she had just issued from her bedroom in some well-found house, instead of from a mere rude travelling home in the wilderness. Kate Marston, the daughter of a well-to-do British settler in Griqualand West, had recently married, and was now, two months after her wedding, travelling in the hunting veldt with her husband—a trip she had looked forward to with the keenest anticipation for more than a year past. It was the dream of her life. Although very well-educated at the Cape, Kate, brought up on a colonial farm, loved the free, unfettered life of the veldt. She rode well, was a good shot with the fowling-piece, and, before settling down on a Transvaal farm in Marico, had persuaded her husband to take her with him on an expedition into the far interior. Rough though the journey had been through Bechuanaland, Khama's country, and across the parched wastes of the Kalahari, Kate had loved it all. To her each day brought

with it new delights—scenes and memories, of which, to the latest day of her existence, she could never be deprived. Fred Marston, her husband, a man of two-and-thirty, had done very well for years past as a trader and elephant hunter. He was about settling down for life in the Transvaal—now for a year past proclaimed a British possession; and before retiring from the wild life of the wilderness he was thus trekking with his wife, on a journey of pure pleasure and hunting, towards Lake Ngami.

A native boy had strolled across from the Boer camp, and from him Kate Marston had learned the name of the Dutch woman sitting over yonder. It was de Klerk. Her husband was an elephant hunter from the Northern Transvaal. They had a good load of ivory, gleaned during a year or two of adventure, and the wife, husband, and two children were now on their way down-country. Kate was not very sure of her reception if she went across. The Transvaal Dutch were, since the annexation of their country, not only disaffected towards the British Government, but rude and uncivil towards individual English folk. However, Kate understood the Dutch and their language exceedingly well, and her cheerful nature inclined her to be friendly. She had often before now thawed the stubborn reserve of a Boer huis-vrouw. She would go across and pay the Dutch camp a visit. A walk of less than two hundred yards, and she stood by the de Klerks' waggon.

Now Vrouw de Klerk had heard from her native servant, sent casually across to pick up news, who and what the new arrivals were. She was not much comforted. She had hoped to see the faces of Dutch folk. Here were only English, whom she hated. However, she was not to be caught napping. She had washed her children's faces and hands and her own, pinned a big bow of blue ribbon at her throat, and put on a clean kapje, and had even donned a nearly new black alpaca apron. She sat under the waggon sail, cutting up dried onions into a tin dish; but as Kate Marston approached she made no attempt to meet her. She was not a bad-looking woman, Christina de Klerk, as Boers—who are not noted for female beauty—go. She had plenty of light brown hair, drawn tightly back from her face and knotted under her great sun-bonnet; but the face was—as is so often the case with Afrikander Dutch women—broad, high boned, and absolutely lacking in colour; the blue eyes were somewhat pale and colourless; and although she was a young woman—little more than three-and-twenty—a dull, stolid, even hard expression was already settling itself for life upon her lineaments. Christina was a tall, big woman, but her figure was thick, heavy, and altogether devoid of grace; stiff and unyielding it was as her own nature.

Bred up in a remote back-country in Waterberg—scarcely educated at all—if reading with no great ease from the great family Bible can be called education, Christina had, like most of her fellows, a mind almost untouched by civilisation; a mind narrow, bigoted, and prejudiced to a degree almost inconceivable to denizens of modern Europe. But when all was said and done, allowances were to be made for Christina de Klerk. The grandchild of one of those Dutch families which had quitted the Cape and thrown off English rule in the Great Trek of 1836; the daughter of a frontiersman, who, after making himself a home in the wilds of the Northern Transvaal, had seen his beloved republic entered and possessed by the very British from whom he and his parents had trekked; she had from infancy been nurtured in a blind and unreasoning hatred against all English people. Just now, as Kate Marston advanced and stood before her tent, her naturally grave and impassive face had assumed a very sour and unpleasant look. Christina had surveyed with rapid sidelong glances the Englishwoman's approach; she now took a full, steady, but by no means friendly look at her as Kate halted and spoke. In these glances and in that look she had time to observe that the Englishwoman was young, very good-looking, and—in a Boer woman's eyes—well-dressed. All this tended little to lull her wrath. The woman, she felt, was her superior. She hated her for it. And as Kate spoke in a soft, clear English voice, with that lip speech which, to users of the rough, thick, guttural Dutch, seems mincing and super-refined, Christina detested her yet more. Her husband hated the English, her father and grandfather had hated them; now at this moment her spirit rose in a burning flame of resentment against the woman who had come to speak to her.

"Good evening, Vrouw de Klerk," said Kate pleasantly.

"Good evening," repeated Christina in a low, subacid voice, looking away into her bowl of sliced onions.

"We have just come up-country and I hear you are on your journey out I thought I should like just to step across and ask if there is anything we can do for you. We have plenty of stores on our waggon. You may be

short of coffee, sugar, or other things? And I thought, too, perhaps, as you have been away in the veldt so long, you might like to have news from down-country."

Christina no longer looked away, but now stared straight into the Englishwoman's face. A faint flush had risen upon her dull cheeks; her anger, the pent-up hatred of years, was now at boiling point.

"I want to know and hear nothing," she replied in a hard, set voice, with much energy. "The English have stolen our Transvaal country; we have nothing to say to them until we have got that country back. You took the Old Colony from us. You took Natal, which we won with our blood. Now you have taken the Transvaal. Ach! and yet you are surprised that we hate you. If I were dying I would not take one drop of cold water from an Englishwoman. We are enemies. You know it. And yet you must pursue us even here in the veldt. I want to have nothing to do with your people at all or at any time!"

Kate was a good deal staggered at this outburst, but she knew the Dutch and their uncouth ways; she knew that their bark is often far worse than their bite. In a perfectly calm tone, but with some spirit, she replied:

"Your welcome is surely a churlish one, Mevrouw de Klerk, and your accusations are very absurd. I am an Afrikander, like yourself, and I know of these things. I will grant that perhaps the Dutch in the Old Colony had some reason for their Great Trek. But that is a tale more than eighty years old, which should surely be forgotten. As for Natal, there were, as I happen to know—for my mother was a Natal colonist—English traders at Port Durban years before the Boers trekked into the country. And for the Transvaal, surely you must admit that your weakness and misgovernment was so great that the English Government had to step in to save your country and the rest of South Africa from Zulu and other native dangers."

Vrouw de Klerk was preparing to answer vigorously. Kate Marston raised her hand. "Stop," she said, "I won't argue the matter further. I'll just say Good evening and go back to my waggon. Perhaps when you come to think it over you will see that you have been rude and unreasonable to a stranger in the veldt—even an English Afrikander has feelings. If I can help you in any way, if you want anything, send over to our waggon and you can have it with pleasure. Your children there,"—looking at the two fat Dutch kinder, staring with blue eyes and moon faces at the dreadful Englishwoman—"may want something, perhaps." So speaking, Kate turned on her heel and walked back to the camp.

Christina de Klerk sat glaring for a full minute at Kate's back as she walked away. She was turning over in her dull, slow-moving mind some scathing retort upon her adversary's statements. But Kate was now too far away. She rose with a snort of defiance, and, muttering angrily to herself, went off to the fire with her sliced onions. These she threw into a three-legged pot, adding to the meat already there a pinch or two of salt and pepper, and then bestirred herself towards the cookies of Boer meal baking among the embers.

Kate Marston, not a little vexed and put out at her unexpected reception, strolled back to her waggon, and then, moving fifty yards beyond, sat down with her back to a tree to enjoy the sunset and watch for the approach of her husband. She was upon the edge of the grove, and the great grass plains stretched away at her feet in illimitable monotones of green and yellow—green where the natives had fired the veldt, and the recent rain had induced fresh vegetation; yellow where belts and patches of last year's grass, which had escaped the fire, yet remained. It was nearing sundown; the western sky was ablaze with colour; far up towards the zenith the gorgeous hues of crimson and orange faded off to amber, and yet higher the heavens were of a wondrous clear, pale sea-green. The plains were just now bathed in a rich warm glow. As Kate looked she could see droves of springbok dotted here and there, their white backs and under parts showing up curiously in the mellow light of evening. It was a wonderful hour, and amid that vast calm and the soothing glamour of the scene Kate's ruffled feelings soon assumed their wonted peacefulness.

Her eyes, ranging over the vast expanse, presently lit upon something that arrested her attention. There were two figures far away in the sea of grass; surely one of them would be her husband? She watched, and presently made out that one of the objects was much taller than the other. What could it mean? A little while and the two figures rose clearer before her gaze. Now, at last, she understood what they meant Fred Marston had found a number of giraffe, and turned one out of the troop, and, aided by a masterly use of the wind, had succeeded in driving the

tall creature in front of him right up to his own waggon. Skilled South African hunters can achieve this feat with the eland and giraffe, but the giraffe is usually far more difficult to ride into camp than the eland.

Closer came the strange group. The giraffe was tiring, and now, instead of galloping in its clumsy yet swift fashion, paced with giant, shuffling strides across the veldt, with something of the gait of a camel. A hundred yards from where Kate sat, quietly watching this singular spectacle, the great dappled giant stood. It had caught sight of the waggon and of figures moving among the trees, and would go no further. The tall quadruped, full seventeen feet in height, its rich, dark, chestnut-pied coat gleaming warmly beneath the flush of sunset, stood for a full minute absolutely motionless, as these animals will do. It looked like some strange figure of bronze, the creature of a vanished age. Thirty paces to the right Fred Marston had reined in his horse and stood expectant.

“There you are, Kate!” he shouted, cheerily, as his wife rose. “A real good giraffe cow, fat as butter, and in splendid coat. I’ve had the dickens’ own trouble with her, though. She was as obstinate as a mule.”

Kate clapped her hands together. “Oh, how wonderful!” she exclaimed. It was the first giraffe she had ever set eyes on.

The cow still stood, and Fred Marston rode nearer to his wife. He was a strong, good-looking, fair-bearded man, and, sitting there easily in his saddle, his shirt sleeves rolled up, his rifle butt resting on his right thigh, the dying light full on his sunburnt face and arms, he looked, as Kate thought, a true man of the veldt.

“How wonderful!” she repeated; “and what a height, and what a lovely colour. It seems a sin to shoot her!”

“My dear Kate,” answered her husband, “we want meat for the camp badly, and the Masarwa spoorers expect it. I can’t let her go.”

“Well,” responded Kate, “I won’t see her shot, poor thing,” and with one last look at the tall creature still standing there, an almost pathetic sight, with a half sigh she turned and went back to the waggon. As she moved, the giraffe swung round and shuffled off. But her time had come. Marston cantered a little wide and ahead of her. As she came past, his rifle went up, the report rang out, and a Martini-Henry bullet drove into the great cow’s heart. She staggered, tottered twenty paces, and then with a mighty crash fell to the earth dead.

Kate and her husband, after a cosy supper, sat long, chatting by the camp fire that evening. She told him of her reception at the Boer waggon. He related his adventures in the veldt that day. A little before ten, they turned into their waggon, in the forepart of which a comfortable kartel-bed was slung, closed the fore-clap (curtain), and their camp presently rested in a profound peace.

But at Christina de Klerk’s camp there was no peace that night. At ten o’clock her husband’s native after-rider, “September,” a Hottentot, who had before dawn on the previous morning ridden out with his master across the plains, walked up to the camp fire, leading his lame and foundered pony behind him. The man was himself far gone with fatigue. His mistress had long since retired to her waggon, but he had ill news, and he called her up. His news was this:

They had found a good troop of giraffe soon after they entered the forest; but in a long run up to the game Adriaan de Klerk had sustained a bad fall, pitching upon his head. He recovered in a couple of hours’ time, thanks to the Hottentot’s care; but after that, September said, he had behaved like a madman. The fall had turned his brain somehow. He insisted, against September’s entreaties, in pursuing the giraffes, which had now got far too great an advantage. But de Klerk said, angrily, he wanted “kameel” skins (Kameel, literally Camel, the Boer name for giraffes), he could get 2 pounds 10 shillings apiece for them in Marico, and he would ride till he came up with them. All through the hot afternoon they rode without off-saddling; the Baas had a terrible thirst, and drank up most of the water they carried. At nightfall, with jaded horses, they off-saddled in the bush and lay down to sleep. It was a bad night, said September. The Baas was very restless, and constantly moaned and talked in his sleep. Before dawn he was up again, and insisted upon going on. September begged and pleaded. He warned his master that with failing horses and no water they might easily be cast away and die of thirst. All Adriaan de Klerk could say was that he was going on till he came up with the giraffes. He told September to ride back to camp for water. The Hottentot said he would not go without his master. De Klerk was plainly beside himself. He raised his rifle and told the man if he did not turn his horse’s head and go he would shoot him.

And so September had ridden home. His horse was lame and knocked up; there was not another in camp. What was he to do? If the Baas was not rescued within forty-eight hours he would die of thirst.

Christina had a stout heart, as have most of the Afrikander Dutch women-folk, but September's story, and above all his manner, convinced her that her husband, alone, without water, his mind wandering, was in supreme danger. She rose from the kartel—like most up-country Boers she slept in her clothes—buttoned her bodice, and came to the fire. An inspection of September's pony at once convinced her that the animal was unable to travel further. As it was, September had been compelled to walk by its side during most of that day's journey home. It was dead lame and suffering from the effects of fatigue and two days' thirst.

What was she to do? Christina stood there with the Hottentot by the fire-blaze, discussing every possible plan. They might carry water by the aid of natives. But that would involve waiting till the morning, and even then a journey of probably more than forty miles would have to be taken on foot. And then, as September pointed out, it was more than likely that Masinya's people, who were not over fond of the Boers, would point-blank refuse to go. And all this time Adriaan de Klerk, his mind unhinged by his fall and set upon one impossible object, might be plunging yet further into that waterless and inhospitable wilderness. His image rose clear before her mind's eye: the thirsting, haggard man, the sinking horse, and then the terrible end, and the vultures streaming down from the sky! She knew but too well the danger. What, oh God! what should she do? Leaving the tired Hottentot to squat over the fire, she paced frantically up and down near the waggon, turning over impossible projects in her agonised mind.

It was a glorious night. The moon, shining in unspeakable majesty, cast its silvery spell over the distant plain and upon bush and grass near at hand; its amazing light pierced the foliage of the acacias and wrought wondrous patterns beneath her feet. The clear army of the stars, the deep blue mysterious vault above, the ineffable calm of night; all these things availed nothing to the woman's troubled soul. Her agony of mind increased. Suddenly her eyes fell upon the white waggon tilt of the Englishman's camp. There, of course, was a way out of the difficulty. There were fresh horses, four or five of them. With these, help and water could be carried to her husband!

But then, upon the instant, her thoughts ran back to the afternoon, to her rough, unkindly reception of the Englishwoman. She knew in her inmost soul that she had not done the right thing, thus to meet a stranger in the veldt—even if that stranger were an Englishwoman. Was her trouble a judgment upon her? But here her stubborn Dutch pride came to her aid. Could she go across to that camp and ask help?

Never! Never!

The night slowly passed, and still Christina de Klerk paced up and down the grove, sometimes resting for a brief spell upon the disselboom of her waggon. In her agony of mind it seemed that the day would never dawn, the light in the east never pale the sky.

At seven o'clock next morning, as Kate Marston, fresh and beaming, was putting the finishing touches to her toilet under the waggon sail, which, flanked by canvas screens, served as her dressing-room, her husband called to her. She came forth, and there, wan and dishevelled, her eyes red with weeping, stood Christina de Klerk. She told her piteous tale. She acknowledged that she had been unpardonably rude the afternoon before. It was a judgment upon her. A judgment sent by the Heer God to humble her pride. And now would the Englishwoman and her husband forgive and help her? She could not live without her husband. She had children. They would take pity on her in her trouble. In all her life, never had Christina de Klerk known a bitterer moment, thus to humble herself before the detested English.

The tears sprang into Kate's eyes at the poor woman's story, her too evident distress. "Why, Me'Vrouw de Klerk," she said cheerfully, "of course my husband will help you. Will you not, Fred? We should be a poor kind of English folk, indeed, if we could listen to a trouble like yours without doing all we could for you."

"Wait ten minutes, Me'Vrouw de Klerk," said Marston, taking her by the hand, "while I swallow some breakfast and get the nags saddled, and we'll go at once with water on your husband's spoor." In fifteen minutes, taking a spare horse loaded up with two vatjes of water, and September, the Hottentot, on another fresh nag, to act as guide, he set forth.

"Never fear, Me'Vrouw de Klerk," he said, cheerily, as, putting aside her heartfelt, sobbing thanks, he rode off. "We shall bring your husband

back all right.”

As a matter of fact Fred Marston knew that he had a difficult and dangerous task before him, to rescue a man half out of his mind, wandering in that terrible Thirstland. He accomplished his task, but, as he had expected, with the greatest difficulty. He and September, taking up the spoor of the wanderer, had followed it hour after hour into the parched forest country. Not until half-way through the second day did they find de Klerk, lying insensible, a mile or two beyond his dead horse, himself nearing his end. Resting all that afternoon and evening, they revived the Boer with the aid of water, brandy, and a little food, and, riding all that night and part of the next day, brought Christina de Klerk her man, safe and sound, though terribly worn and jaded, into camp. All were fagged and knocked up; without water the horses could have held out but a few hours longer.

How Christina passed those miserable two days of suspense she never afterwards quite knew. But for the kindly help and sympathy of Kate Marston, she declares she never could have got through. The next day was New Year. De Klerk, after a long rest, was nearly his own man again, and nothing would content the Marstons but that all should dine together in the English camp. Sitting under the great acacia tree, where the Marstons had outspanned, they enjoyed together a right merry New Year’s dinner.

Christina de Klerk never forgot that time of trial. They trekked down to the Transvaal, and Adriaan de Klerk, it is true, rode out with his fellow-countrymen and fought in the successful Boer War of 1881. But in their estimate of the English, individually, their feelings have never wavered since that New Year’s-tide of 1879.

“There may be bad English as there are bad Dutch,” says Christina, as she sometimes tells the tale of her man’s rescue to some of her countrywomen. “And Rhodes and Chamberlain! Ach! they are too good for shooting even. But I believe most of the English folk have good hearts. For my part, so long as I live, and I hope so long as my children shall live after me, there shall be always a welcome for the English in this house. Adriaan and I owe them far too much to forget the kindness we received at their hands. Is it not so, Adriaan?”

And Adriaan, ponderously yet heartily, answers, “Yes.”

Chapter Six.
A Christmas in the Veldt.

At six o'clock upon a hot morning of African December, Lieutenant Parton, of the Bechuanaland Border Police, came out of his bedroom at the Vryburg Hotel, equipped for a long two days' ride. He was a smart officer, and the cord uniform, big slouch hat, looped up rakishly at one side, riding boots, and spurs, became his tall figure well enough.

In itself the blazing two days' ride and the prospect of some trouble at the end of it were hardly sufficient to warrant the air of deep thoughtfulness now gathered upon his dark and serious face; yet, as he strode across the little courtyard beneath the mean shade of the two or three straggling blue gum-trees, the grim knitting of his brows indicated that somehow he was not altogether pleased with the journey that lay before him.

But the lieutenant had some reason for his burden of care. The object of the expedition upon which he was setting forth was the arrest of some native cattle-stealers at a Bakalahari kraal, far out to the westward, in the more desert portion of British Bechuanaland. There had been a sudden call for troopers of the Bechuanaland Border Police up in the northern protectorate, and it happened that the only man Parton could take with him as orderly upon this particular morning was the very last person in the world with whom he would have chosen to spend several days—probably a week or more—in the closest intercourse. Trooper Gressex, now waiting outside in front of the hotel, was that man.

Although the one was a lieutenant close upon his captaincy, the other plain trooper in the frontier force, the two men had once been social equals at home, and, at school and elsewhere, upon terms of considerable intimacy. Gressex (formerly known as Tom Mainwaring) had migrated from London society and a career of sport and pleasure, after coming somewhat suddenly to the end of his financial tether. He had made his plunge into obscurity and had re-appeared as an unknown trooper in the Bechuanaland Border Police.

Parton had quitted service in a line regiment in India, where he saw little prospect of promotion, and had accepted a commission in the same Border Police force. The two men had first encountered one another, in their now altered circumstances, some three months back. Upon the South African frontier such striking changes of condition are being constantly met with, and are borne by the less fortunate, almost invariably, with a good-humoured, if somewhat reckless, philosophy.

In this instance Partons discovery of his old schoolfellow's altered lot had not been altogether a welcome one; and on this particular December morning he had, as has been hinted, a special reason for desiring any other trooper as his orderly upon the expedition in front of him.

The lieutenant entered the coffee-room of the squat, corrugated-iron hotel, and ate his breakfast. In ten minutes he appeared upon the street, ready for his horse. Trooper Gressex, who was leaning against the stoep, holding his own horse and Parton's, saluted as his officer came forth, and answered the formal "Good morning, Gressex," with an equally formal "Good morning, sir."

The two men mounted and rode away, no slightest sign having fallen to denote that they had ever occupied any other relations than those of officer and man.

Having ridden quietly half-a-mile out of the town, Parton lighted his pipe and set his horse into a canter. Gressex rode upon his flank, and the two steadily reeled off mile after mile of the vast sweep of grassy, undulating plains over which their route lay. Hour after hour they rode through the blazing day, off-saddling every three hours and giving their nags a brief rest according to invariable South African custom. At night, having compassed more than fifty miles, they finally halted, and prepared to camp just within the shelter of a patch of woodland, which here broke the monotony of the grass veldt. The horses, after a longish graze, were tied up to a handy bush; the two men, having eaten a supper of tinned "bully beef" and brewed a kettle of coffee, lay upon their blankets and smoked by the pleasant firelight. The few scraps of conversation which they exchanged related solely to the expedition before them, Gressex having more than once made the journey to Masura's kraal.

Aloft the infinite calm of the far-off, dark-blue heaven, now spangled with a million stars, seemed to invite deep and peaceful sleep after a hard day's riding. A refreshing coolness now moved upon the veldt, the

tender airs whispered softly through the long grasses, a cicada droned drowsily in the thorn-bush; all nature promised rest. At nine o'clock both men, lightly wrapped in their blankets, with their feet to the fire and their heads pillowed in their saddles, were fast asleep.

At one o'clock in the still, early morning Gressex was awakened by the sound of a voice. He rose softly upon his elbow and looked about him. The stars shone more gloriously than ever, but the Southern Cross had fallen from its erect position and now lay over upon its side. The veldt was perfectly quiet, save for the plaintive wailing of a far-off jackal, which had got their wind and was crying out the news to his fellows. Even the cicada had ceased its weary drumming. As Gressex lay upon his elbow listening, he perceived that the sounds he had heard came from Parton, who was talking fitfully in his sleep. It is hard to follow a man whose tongue labours with the difficulties of a slumbering brain, and Gressex was not much interested in puzzling out the intricacies of his officer's drowsy speech, but one word fell upon his ear which instantly fixed his attention. The word was "Ella."

"Ella," muttered the sleeping man, in a curiously sententious way, "I tell you I can't do it. It's not the least use thinking further about him. You'll never see him again; why harp upon a broken string? Some day I hope you'll be kind and give..."

Gressex had, after that one word, small difficulty in following the halting speech of the sleeping man. He waited impatiently for other sentences, but the voice was hushed again. That name, "Ella" told him a good deal. It told him that, although in their long ride of the previous day Parton had not reverted in the slightest degree to their former friendship and its environments, his mind now, during the hours of sleep, was running busily in old channels. The word "Ella" and its associations roused many a pang and many a memory in the soul of Gressex, as he lay there under the silent stars. A hundred questions and doubts shaped themselves in the trooper's mind for the next hour or more. At last sleep again overtook him and he remembered no more till pale dawn came round and he awoke. Already the little coqui francolins—the prettiest of all the African partridges—were calling with sharp voices to one another near the pan of water fifty yards away, and an early sand-grouse or two were coming in for their morning drink. It was time to be breakfasting and away. The embers were blown up, fresh wood was put on, and the kettle boiled for coffee. The two men, after an exchange of "Good morning," breakfasted almost in silence, the horses were got in from their feed of grass, saddled up, and the journey was resumed.

The blazing morning passed, as in all these long veldt rides, in monotonous fashion. At three o'clock, in the hottest period of the afternoon, the two men emerged from a long two hours' stretch of bastard yellow-wood forest. Suddenly Parton, who was a little in front, reined up with a "Sh!" upon his lips. Gressex followed the lieutenant's glance and saw what had arrested his progress. Half a mile to the right, just outside the forest, a troop of noble gemsbok were resting beneath a patch of acacia thorn trees: some were lying down, some standing, but all, even the usually tireless sentinel nearest the waggon-track, were overcome by the heat, and—for such suspicious game—a little relaxed in their watchfulness. Such an opportunity was too tempting to be passed by. A plan of operations was quickly evolved as the two men withdrew their horses within the shelter of the wood. It was curious to observe how instantly the prospect of sport had broken down the thick hedge of reserve between them. They now whispered together rapidly and with intense animation.

Gressex turned his horse's head and rode back through the forest in a semicircle towards the game. Presently he dismounted, fastened his horse to a bush, and then with the greatest caution stole towards the troop. At last, from behind a screen of bush, he has the game well before his gaze. They are a hundred and fifty yards away; between them and the watcher's clump of bush is open grass veldt, and there is no possibility of getting a foot nearer. Gressex sits down, sidles imperceptibly to the left hand, and now has in front of him a fair shot. Even now there is not a breath of suspicion among the dozen great antelopes out there in the open. Gressex can note easily their striking, black and white faces and spear-like horns. The shade of the acacias is somewhat scanty, and he can see plainly the splashes of the sunlight gleaming through the foliage bright upon their warm grey coals. Now he takes aim at the bull nearest, draws a long breath, and pulls trigger. The Martini-Henry bullet flies true, and claps loudly, as upon a barn door, on the broadside of the gallant beast. The gemsbok leaps convulsively forward and scours away up wind. In the same instant there is dire commotion among the troop; the recumbent antelopes spring up wildly, and with their fellows stretch

themselves at speed—and few animals can rival this antelope in speed and staying powers—in rear of the stricken bull. Gressex hurriedly fires another shot and misses clean.

And now, as Parton had foreseen, his opportunity has come. The troop will cross his front within less than half a mile. He gallops full tilt from the sheltering woodland and rides his hardest to cut them off. He is perfectly successful—so successful that he cuts off the main troop from the two leading antelopes, and, while the animals stand for a moment in utter bewilderment, he jumps off and gets his shot. The bullet flies high, yet luckily. The vertebra of the big cow he aimed at is severed on the instant, and she falls in her tracks, “moors dood,” as a Boer would say—as dead as mutton.

At the report of Parton’s rifle, the troop scatters and flees again. Parton jumps into the saddle and tears after Gressex’s wounded bull, which, three hundred yards in front, is manifestly failing fast. The stout pony, now thoroughly excited with the chase, gains rapidly; the gemsbok is pumping its life-blood from mouth and nostrils, and cannot stand up much longer. But, suddenly, without warning, Parton’s nag puts its foot into a deep hole hidden by the long grass and goes down. Parton is shot violently over its head and comes heavily to the veldt. In the next three seconds Gressex’s gemsbok fails suddenly, and, sinking quietly to earth, breathes out its last.

Gressex himself is quickly on the spot and first applies himself to Parton, who now sits ruefully with his hat off, gathering his scattered senses and nursing a broken left arm. Gressex has once helped to set a man’s arm in the hunting field, and he now goes to work. First he cuts quickly from a piece of fallen wood two flattish splints, then he unwraps one of the “putties” from his legs. This winding gear makes an admirable bandage. Next he proceeds to set the damaged limb. Luckily it is the fore arm, and after a painful ordeal of pulling, endured with set teeth by Parton, Gressex adjusts the broken bone and binds on the splints. With the other “putty” a sling is then extemporised. Parton has some brandy in a flask in his saddle-bag. He takes a pull at this, and while Gressex cuts off the heads, tails, and some of the meat from the slain gemsbok and fastens them upon the saddles, he sits with somewhat more ease and contentment smoking a welcome pipe which the trooper has filled and lighted for him after the operation. Half an hour later the journey is resumed again. It was a long twenty miles to the Bakalahari village to which they were travelling. The pace was slow, out of consideration for the wounded arm, and it was not until well on into the night that they rode into the beehive-like collection of round native huts, and called up the two Border policemen stationed there.

For two days the swollen and painful state of Parton’s arm prevented him from taking further action in the affair of the cattle-stealers, which had necessitated his sudden patrol. Meanwhile he rested, gleaned quietly all the intelligence that was to be gleaned, and prepared for action.

He interviewed, of course, Masura, the native chief settled here, and made a casual inquiry as to the stolen cattle, but he was careful not to let it appear that he had made a special journey on that account. The chief, it was well known, was not well affected to Government; but he protested that no stolen cattle or cattle-stealers had come into his country, and appeared to be anxious to aid in any inquiries that might discover the marauders. To lull his suspicions, Parton, on the second day of his arrival, requested him to send out runners to his various cattle posts so as to ascertain whether fresh stock had lately come in. This the chief promised to do on the following day.

But Parton had meanwhile, thanks to the alacrity of the two troopers quartered in the town and to a native spy of theirs, gained exact information of the whereabouts of the stolen cattle and their thieves.

They stood at a remote and little known cattle post of this very chief, some twenty-five miles from the town, and Parton had now laid his plans to ride out during the night and make their recapture early next morning. There might be some resistance, and he settled therefore to take with him the two troopers stationed here, as well as Gressex and a couple of natives upon whom he could depend. Meanwhile, although busied in his official work, Parton had had time in these two days to be much exercised by the private anxieties that galled incessantly his mind. For several days he had borne their harassing companionship. Two letters, one read and re-read many times within the last five days, the other unopened and unread, which lay within the breastpocket of his tunic, contained the secret of all this mental harassment; these letters burnt upon his conscience much as a blister burns the flesh against

which it is laid.

Since their arrival at the village Parton's demeanour towards Gressex, which had suddenly altered after the episode of the hunt and the broken arm, had changed again. During the excitement of the chase and under the quick and kindly attentions of Gressex when his arm was broken, his old friendliness had reasserted itself. Twice the name Mainwaring had escaped his lips as he thanked his trooper gratefully for his ready and tender help. And upon that long evening's ride his manner had softened greatly; almost in the dim starlight he had gone back to the old days again.

Yet something within him had just stayed his tongue and had hindered a recognition which in itself would have been a mere act of grace, lessening no whit the discipline and respect ordained by their present difference in rank.

As for Gressex he had ceased to wonder at his old friend's curious demeanour. The mental exclamation that rose within him—"He's a proud devil, after all. I should hardly have thought it of Parton!"—very well expressed his feelings, and he now made the best he could of the companionship of the two troopers—very good fellows they were—with whom he was quartered.

At twelve o'clock upon the third night of his arrival in the Kalahari village, Parton, who had now made every preparation, rode very silently and with every circumstance of caution, out into the night. With him were his three troopers and the two native allies—one a Bushman, the other a Griqua—who had acted as his spies and were now to show him the road. His broken arm was by no means yet at ease; but Parton, whatever else his demerits, had plenty of pluck, and just now, in his state of mental tension, inactivity was a very curse to him.

The huts where they were quartered lay upon the outskirts, and the party quitted the village so silently that not even a native dog raised its alarm. Sometimes walking their horses rapidly, sometimes cantering—though the action caused Parton to grind his teeth with pain—they passed in less than five hours over the wilderness of grass and bush that lay between them and the cattle post they sought. The Griqua, who had a horse of his own, rode, the Bushman trotted always in front of the party, finding his way in the starlight with an unerring and marvellous precision. There were four huts at the cattle post. These were speedily rushed in the dim early morning, just as the faintest hint of dawn began to pale the night sky. The inmates were all asleep, but the final rattle of horse hoofs and the furious barking of the kraal dogs roused them. It was too late. Gressex and his fellow troopers each carried and secured without a blow their respective huts, which contained a few Bakalahari men, women and children.

Parton, by a stroke of ill luck, happened to walk into a hut in which four Bechuanas—three of them the very cattle thieves he was in search of—lay together. These men were all disaffected and turbulent border ruffians, and they had arms ready at hand. In a few words of Sechuana the lieutenant, as he stood within the hut, called upon them to surrender. It was pretty dark, and the first reply Parton got to his summons was an assegai through his shoulder, which brought him down. His revolver went off uselessly, and in an instant he had three out of the four men on top of him Gressex, in the next hut a few yards off, heard the shot and Parton's stifled cry, and, leaving the Griqua to take charge of his capture, dashed round to his lieutenant's relief. In five seconds he was in the fray. The three men struggling with the wounded officer were impeding one another, and beyond a gash or two with their assegais had done little injury. Gressex ran in among them, loosed off his carbine at the nearest man and settled him, struck another with his empty weapon a blow on the arm which broke it and disabled its owner, and threw himself upon the remaining native, who had Parton still by the throat. But in that instant the fourth occupant of the hut who had been standing back in the dark shade watching the struggle, came in. He lunged with the assegai he had snatched up at Gressex's broad back. The sharp blade shore through the trooper's tough cord tunic and flannel shirt and drove deep into his right lung. At this moment another trooper appeared with a blazing wisp of grass. By the light of it, as he flung it upon the floor, he could take in the whole scene. His carbine was undischarged; he levelled it instantly at the man attacking Gressex and dropped him with a bullet through the heart.

Here then was the situation. The cattle post was captured, two of the thieves were slain, another disabled; the rest of the dozen inhabitants of the kraal were safe under guard, the Bushman—delighted to pay off some old scores—standing sentinel over one hut with a long Martini in

his hand and a diabolical grin of exultation on his face. The stolen cattle, as was presently ascertained, were safe in the ox-kraal, with the rest of the stock running at this post. But against this, Gressex was badly wounded and the lieutenant somewhat cut and battered.

Gressex stood stooping in the hut, the assegai sticking half a foot into his back. Despite that horrible thrust he had still all his wits about him.

"Warton," he said grimly through his teeth to the trooper, who still stood with smoking carbine, "thanks for settling that chap. Now pull this damned thing out of me. Pull before I fall down. I feel a bit sick."

Warton laid hold of the spear and, exerting his strength, managed to extract the spear-head. A little torrent of blood poured forth. While Parton, who had now got to his feet, pressed his right hand upon the wound, Warton managed to strip off Gressex's tunic Gressex was now very faint. They laid him upon his side, pulled away his flannel shirt, and then bound up the hurt as tightly as possible. Then from the lieutenant's flask they managed to pour some brandy between the wounded man's lips, from which blood was already oozing. There was only one thing to be done with the sufferer. The bleeding must be stopped somehow, and he must lie where he now lay. Only the extremest quiet could save him.

In an hour Parton had recovered from his own hurts. He had luckily received nothing worse than a nasty gash in his left shoulder and sundry cuts and bruises. His broken left arm was unhurt, thanks to Gressex's careful setting. The struggle seemed to have cleared the lieutenant's head. His eye was bright, his mind made up. Gressex had for the second time in a few days done him a great service. He had risked his very life this time for a man to whom he owed little enough, if he but knew all, and he now lay apparently at the point of death.

Parton's doubts and struggles had all vanished into thin air. The fight and Gressex's ready bravery had braced him—as a fight braces always a good Englishman—and brought to the surface all his better nature, and he now sat down to write certain letters with a calm mind. He had his pocket-book and an indelible pencil, and having seen that all his captives were secure, and the cattle safe in the adjacent veldt, where they were feeding under charge of the Bushman, he sat down in the red sand, with his back against a hut, and began to write. Before his writing is completed, it will be well to glance at those two letters in his breast pocket, of which mention has been previously made. Here is the opened letter, addressed to Lieutenant B.F. Parton, Bechuanaland Border Police:—

"International Hotel, Cape Town, 12th December, 189—

"Dear Mr Parton,—

"The address of this letter will probably surprise you. I received your letter in London on the morning I left for South Africa, whither I have come with my uncle, Colonel Mellersh, and my cousin, Kate Mellersh, on a trip we have long planned. We are staying at Cape Town for a few days, and are then going on to Kimberley to see the diamond mines, and perhaps make an expedition into the Transvaal or Bechuanaland.

"I must first reply to your letter. I am sorry, more sorry than I can express, that you should have reopened that old topic, which I quite thought and hoped, for the sake of your own peace of mind, had been finally dismissed, if not forgotten, nearly three years ago. My mind is as fully made up as it was when I last saw you, nor is it ever likely to change in the way you seem to suggest and hope for. I grieve very much to have to again say this to one whom I respect and like, but it is better to make clear at once that there is not the slightest prospect of any change in my sentiments.

"I must tell you frankly that I have the very strongest of all reasons for this—the reason that my affections have long since drifted in another direction—the direction (I may as well at once say here) of our mutual friend, Mr Mainwaring.

"You say in your letter that if ever you can be of service to me I may command you at any time. I take that expression to be a sincere one, and I am going to put it to a very severe test. Mr Mainwaring, before he left England, purposely avoided seeing me—quite from a mistaken motive—but wrote me a letter telling me of his affection for me, and saying good-bye, as he supposed, for ever. If he had seen me instead of sending that letter, a great deal of misery might have been avoided. I

have been unable to glean the slightest hint of his whereabouts until a week before I left England. Mr Mainwaring has within the last few weeks come into some considerable property from an old uncle (from whom he expected absolutely nothing) who has quite lately died, and has now no reason to remain in exile longer. For more than two years I have been moving heaven and earth to get at his whereabouts, and I only received a letter, three days before I sailed, from his cousin and family lawyer, Mr Bladen, who had always refused absolutely before this to disclose his whereabouts, telling me that Mr Mainwaring (under the name of Gressex) is a private in the Bechuanaland Border Police, stationed either at Mafeking or Vryburg. Mr Bladen at the same time informed me of his cousin's piece of good luck, and assured me that he was only waiting for certain legal documents to write out to Mr Mainwaring informing him of his fortune. As there seems a doubt about his actual address, I am now going to ask you to deliver the inclosed letter, if possible, into Mr Mainwaring's hands, or, if you cannot see him personally, to send it by special messenger or post it. I am asking, I know, a great deal from your friendship, but I trust to you to help me in this matter, which is to me of very vital importance. You know me sufficiently, I think, to be aware that I am not trying to find Mr Mainwaring because 'his ship has come in.' I have—I am almost ashamed to say it—ample means of my own, and Tom's good luck has nothing to do with the question. But I do want to find him at once, and I can only think of you, as an officer of his regiment, as the likeliest person to help me. Pray, pray, forgive me the double burden that I fear I may be putting upon you by this letter.

"We shall be at Kimberley on the 15th inst. Please address any letters or telegrams to me at the Central Hotel there.

"Believe me, yours always sincerely,—

"Ella Harling."

Ella's letter, addressed to "Mr John Gressex, Bechuanaland Border Police. (To be forwarded)," still lay unopened in Parton's pocket. It had remained there these five days past, although the man to whom it had been addressed had ridden and rested for some days within six feet of it. Fifty times a day had Parton cursed himself for a villain in detaining it, and yet—and yet—he could not give Ella up and help Tom Mainwaring, and so—even after the affair of the broken arm—it had stayed there within his tunic.

Parton's first note was to Ella Harling, telling her of Gressex's (Mainwaring we may now call him) serious condition, and begging her, if possible, to come up by rail at once from Kimberley to Vryburg and thence drive as rapidly as possible the hundred miles across the veldt to Masura's-town, where she would find a trooper who would bring her out to the cattle post where Mainwaring lay. That, as Parton said to himself, was something off his mind. It was some little expiation for the wrong he had done Ella and his old friend, and he felt pounds better already.

His next letter was to the officer in command at Vryburg during his absence, reporting affairs, and requesting that two more troopers should be at once sent to Masura's-town, to aid in bringing in the prisoners and cattle, and to keep in check any attempt by the disaffected Masura to create trouble. He requested also that a light waggon might be dispatched for the wounded man, with certain nursing comforts and drugs that might be useful. He begged that, if possible, a doctor should also be sent, as the case was an urgent and serious one. One of the troopers, mounted on the best horse—the lieutenant's—was despatched with these letters, with directions to put Miss Harling's note into an envelope, carefully addressed, before posting it at Vryburg. The trooper was partially told Mainwaring's story, and put upon his honour not to read the contents of the letter, at present envelopeless. He was a good fellow, and made a big ride, covering the 120 odd miles to Vryburg in two days on the single horse.

For the next seven days Parton had his hands pretty full at the desert cattle post. He had to guard carefully his prisoners, to see that the cattle were not re-stolen or re-captured, and to overawe Masura, who came out to know why his men were being killed and his cattle seized; and above all he had the heavy charge of nursing Tom Mainwaring, who for some days was spitting blood and in a state of high fever.

For three days and nights Parton nursed him most tenderly and carefully, feeding him with milk and thin mealie-meal gruel and beef-tea made from a slaughtered ox.

Thanks to a sound constitution, Mainwaring turned the corner, and on the fifth day from the affray began slowly to mend. He was still so weak that Parton, burning though he now was to complete his expiation and ease himself of his remaining load of trouble, feared to risk the telling of strange and exciting news. On the morning of the seventh day, however, Mainwaring seemed so much stronger, and the arrival of Ella Harling, if she came at all, must be so near at hand, that Parton delayed no longer. He made a full confession of his delinquencies, told Mainwaring all that had happened, of his recent stroke of good fortune, and finally handed him Ella's letter.

"Tom," he said at the end, "I have behaved to you all through the piece like a perfect beast. You, on the other hand, have played the game like a man. You helped me over the broken arm and finally saved my life in that scrimmage—very nearly at the expense of your own. I think I must have been mad. I can only humbly beg your pardon and ask you to try to forgive and forget, and to remember that if I fell I was sorely tried and tempted."

Tom Mainwaring put up his hand—it had become a very thin hand in these few days, though the tan had not gone from it—and said in a husky voice, for he was very feeble:

"Don't say another word, old chap. You have made a mistake—ran out of the course a bit—but you're all right at the finish. And you've nursed me like a brick. I should have been a dead man by now if it hadn't been for all your kindness and thought. Don't let's ever have another word about the past. You've done the right thing, and few men would have cared to be tried as high as you have been. I've had the luck this journey; yours will come."

The two men shook hands silently, and the past, with its tortures, its miseries and mistakes was almost wiped away.

It was now the 24th December. Parton anxiously expected and hoped that Ella Harling and her friends would arrive during the day. He wanted some comforts too for Mainwaring, now that he was within hail of convalescence. All he had in the kraal was some mealie-meal, milk, coffee, and sundry cattle—Tom's beef-tea as he called them.

All that day he watched and waited impatiently, sitting much with Tom Mainwaring, and keeping him as quiet as possible. At last, towards sunset, the little Bushman, who had been perched upon the hut roof as a lookout, cried excitedly that he could see a cloud of dust from the direction of Masura's-town. In less than an hour quite a considerable cavalcade came in. Ella Harling, looking very handsome, and, considering her journey, wonderfully spick and span, drove in with her uncle and pretty cousin in a Cape cart. The doctor and two fresh troopers rode alongside, and a light spring waggon, drawn by half a dozen mules, laden with many luxuries and comforts, followed no great way behind.

Parton led Miss Harling silently to Mainwaring's hut, and, with a wistful look on his face, turned round and quitted her side as she entered the open doorway. The meeting between Ella and Tom Mainwaring was a very tender and yet a very serious one—few more touching have ever taken place in the African wilderness. Presently the doctor came in; Tom was put under his care, and the little party proceeded to make themselves comfortable for Christmas. A tent was pitched for the ladies, another for the colonel and the doctor, the stores were got out, and the place made as cheery and as habitable as possible. The troopers had shot a buck and some partridges and guinea-fowl, and an ox had been slaughtered, so that there was no lack of fresh meat.

Few stranger and yet happier Christmas days have been spent in the veldt. Even Tom Mainwaring, weak though he still was, with Ella beside him and the prospect of long years of life before them both, was as happy as a man with a big spear-wound in his back possibly could be. As for the rest of the company, they had a great and glorious time. There was rifle-shooting at targets in the morning, a big dinner under a shady giraffe-acacia tree at two o'clock, and yarns and much smoking all the afternoon and evening. Colonel Mellersh had thoughtfully loaded a case of champagne, some tinned plum puddings, several boxes of cigars, and some whisky on the spring waggon, and nothing was wanting to complete the proper festivity of the season. Even Parton, having thrown aside his cares, resigned himself, almost with cheerfulness, to the inevitable, and did his best to contribute to the general happiness.

Tom Mainwaring and Ella Harling were married at Cape Town within the next three months—so soon, in fact, as Mainwaring could get his discharge from the Border Police. He and his wife often recall that strange Christmas in the veldt, which, indeed, is not likely to be forgotten by any member of the gathering.

Chapter Seven.
Their Last Trek.

The sun was setting as usual in a glow of marvellous splendour as Alida Van Zyl came out from her hartebeest house—a rough wattle and daub structure, thatched with reeds—and, shading her eyes, looked across the country. The little house stood on the lower slope of the Queebe Hills, no great way from Lake Ngami. It was a wonderful sunset. In the north-west a thousand flakes of cloud flushed with crimson lake, just as they had flushed above the vast plains of that wild Ngami country a million times before. Near the sky-line, in a blaze of red and gold, the sun sank rapidly, a mass of fire so dazzling that Alida's eyes could not bear to dwell upon it. Far upwards the cool and wondrous calm of the clear and translucent pale green sky contrasted strangely with the battle of colour beneath.

Alida shaded her eyes again, looked keenly down the rude waggon-track that led up to the dwelling, and listened. As she had expected—for she had news of her husband's coming from the Lake—she presently heard the faint cries of a native; that would be Hans Hottentot, the waggon driver, and then through the still air the full, thick, pistol-like crack of the waggon-whip. At these sounds her somewhat impassive face lightened and she turned into the hut again.

In twenty minutes' time the waggon had drawn up in front of the dwelling, and Karel Van Zyl, a big, strong Dutchman of seven and twenty, had dismounted from his good grey nag and embraced his wife, who now stood with a face beaming with joy, clasping her two year old child in her arms ready to receive him.

"Zo, Alie," said Karel, holding his young wife by the shoulders and looking first tenderly at her broad kindly face and then at the yellow-haired child lying in her arms, "here we are at last. It has been a long hunt, but a pretty good one. I left a waggon-load of ivory, rhenoster horns, and hides at Jan Stromboom's at the Lake and got a good price for them I traded fifty good oxen as well and sold them at 3 pounds 10 shillings a head to Stromboom also, after no end of a haggle. It was worth a day's bargaining though; the beasts cost me no more than thirty shillings apiece all told."

Then laying the back of his huge sunburnt hand against the cheek of the sleeping babe, which he had just kissed, he added, "And how is little Jan? Surely the child has grown a foot since I left him?"

Alida smiled contentedly, patted her man's arm and answered, "Yes, the child has done well since the cool weather came, and he grows every day. He gets as *slim* (cunning) as a monkey and crawls so that I have to keep a boy to watch him, the little rascal. But *kom binnen* and have supper. You must be starving."

Van Zyl gave some orders to his Hottentot man, as to his horse, the trek oxen and some loose cows and calves, and went indoors.

Half an hour later husband and wife came forth again, and, sitting beneath the pleasant starlight, talked of the future. Their coffee stood on a little table in front of them, and Van Zyl, stretching out his long legs and displaying two or three inches of bare ankle above his velschoons—the up-country Boer is seldom guilty of socks—puffed with huge contentment at a big-bowled pipe.

"Karel," said his wife, after hearing of his last expedition, "I am getting tired of this flat Ngami country, with never a soul to speak to while you are away. When shall we give it up and go back to the Transvaal? I long to see the blue hills again and to hear the voices of friends. Surely you have done well enough these last few years. You can buy and stock a good farm—6,000 morgen at least. (A morgen is rather more than two acres.) And you told me when we married—now three years agone, Karel,"—she laid her hand upon his as she spoke, "that you did not mean to spend all your life, like your father, in the hunting veldt."

"No, Alie, I don't," rejoined Van Zyl, taking his wife's hand into his two and pressing it tenderly. "You shall go back to the Transvaal, my lass, and we will buy a farm in Rustenburg and live comfortably and go to Nachtmaal (Communion) once a quarter. And if I do want a hunt now and again, why I'll cross the Crocodile River and try the Nuanetsi and Sabi River veldt, where Roelof Van Staden and his friends travel to. But we must have one more trek together, Alie, and this time you and the child shall go with me. Coming to the Lake, on my way home from this last hunt, I met messengers from Ndala, captain of a tribe far up the Okavango, who asks me to take my waggon up to his kraal and hunt

elephants in his country. He promises me the half of all ivory shot, and will find spoorers and show me his best veldt and give me every help. Twice before has Ndala sent to me thus, and once to my father in years gone by. I believe it is a splendid hunting veldt. Elephants as thick as pallah in river bush, thousands of buffalo, plenty of rhenoster and lots of other game. We ought, with luck, to pick up four hundred pounds worth of ivory. And so, wife, we'll pack the waggon, get more powder and cartridges at the Lake and trek up to Ndala's."

"And this shall be your last trek in this country, Karel?" asked his wife.

"Myn maghtet, the very last," said Van Zyl. "How soon can we start?"

"I shall be ready in three days," returned Alie.

"In three days be it," said Van Zyl in his deep voice. And then, with a mighty yawn, he stretched himself, knocked the ashes from his pipe, and, putting his arm round his wife's waist, went indoors for the night.

Two months later the Van Zyls were nearing Ndala's kraal on the Okavango, sometimes called the Cubangwe River—that great and little known stream flowing from the north-west towards Lake Ngami. They had had a hard trek of it past the Lake; across a score or two of streams and small rivers, skirting many a swamp and lagoon, and now at last, one hot afternoon, as they looked up the broad, shining river, they set eyes on a green island lying in midstream, dotted about with huts, and knew that they were in sight of Ndala's kraal. Hans, the Hottentot, had once been up to this place and knew Ndala, and Hans pointed out the captain's hut and showed them where their waggon should stand by the river bank, and so they outspanned and prepared to make themselves comfortable. Across the river, beyond the island, the country undulated gently in well-wooded, bush-clad, sandy ridges, with here and there a palm or a baobab to catch the eye. Reddish boulders of sandstone projected from the river's brim, between the southern shore and the island, forming a little cataract over which the swift waters poured with a pleasant and not too angry or unseemly swirl. And as they unyoked the tired oxen and Alida Van Zyl, tired with sitting, descended from the waggon to look about her, all seemed fair and pleasant and peaceful to the travel-stained trekkers. For they had had a hard passage up the river, and the cattle were in need of rest and good feeding, if they were to drag the great waggon back to the Lake and thence—Alida's soul rejoiced as she thought of it—to the dearly-loved Transvaal once more.

And now long, narrow, dug-out canoes shot out from the island and came paddling across the stream with envoys from the chief, to know whose was the waggon and what was the business of the newcomers, and to bring a message of greeting and peace from Ndala, the lord and ruler of all this wild and little known country.

Whilst his wife unpacked some of her waggon gear, and Zwaartbooi, the foreloper, got out the pots and kettle and lit a fire to prepare the evening meal, Van Zyl, taking with him Hans as interpreter, ferried across in one of the native canoes to interview Ndala.

The chief, a tall youngish Cubangwe, with a rather shifty eye, received them in his kotla, an open inclosure adjoining his hut, surrounded by a tall reed fence. He expressed himself pleased to see Van Zyl and hoped that he might have much fortune with the elephants in his country. Then Van Zyl, having thanked the chief for his courtesy, ordered his Hottentot, Hans, to lay before Ndala the presents which had been brought for him. These were a fine blanket of gaudy colours, a quantity of beads, a cheap smooth-bore musket, and some powder, bullets and caps. As these articles were temptingly laid before Ndala, the chief's eyes gleamed approvingly and, in spite of his efforts, a broad grin overspread his features. Then more conversation followed between Ndala and Hans—conversation which Van Zyl was unable to follow—and presently, after half an hour's interview, the reception was at an end. Van Zyl was paddled back to his waggon, and during supper related to his wife the friendly reception he had met with from the Cubangwe captain.

Next morning at about eight o'clock Ndala in person came over to the Boer's camp. Never before had he seen a white man's waggon, and he was naturally burning with curiosity to set eyes upon the treasures gathered within the recesses of that mysterious house on wheels. He brought with him as presents a goat, some Kaffir corn, and a tusk of ivory weighing about 30 lbs. Nothing would content him but that he should mount the fore-kist (box) of the waggon and pry into that strangely fascinating interior. He saw many things that stirred his cupidity. Two fine rifles, cartridges, bags of sugar and coffee, cases of trading gear—store-clothing, cheap knives, blankets, beads, looking-glasses, powder, lead, and other rich and rare things which were being got out for purposes of trading and with a view to re-settling the

contents of the waggon after the confusion of a long trek. And, with the greedy delight of a miser with his gold, he plunged his arms up to the elbows in a case of blue and white bird's eye beads, which lay too temptingly exposed to his gaze, and asked that the whole of this fabulous treasure should be despatched to his kraal. To this Van Zyl demurred. He would give the chief a portion of the beads, a complete suit of cord clothes, a shirt and a pair of velschoons. After a long and heated argument, conducted through the interpretation of Hans, Ndala somewhat sulkily gave way and expressed himself content to take what the Boer offered him. As for Van Zyl, his eyes flashed angrily, as, turning to his wife, sitting in the shade near the back of the waggon, he said, "They are all alike these kaal (naked) Kaffir captains. Thieves and schelms, only desiring to rob of his all the white man who ventures into their country. I thought, from what Hans had said, that this Ndala was a better fellow; but, Allemaghte! he's no better than the rest of the dirty cattle. However, there's ivory to be got here, without doubt, and we must have patience."

"For my part," Alida replied, "I like the appearance of this man not at all. Watch him, Karel. I believe he will try to do you an ill turn before you have finished with him."

Meanwhile Ndala had been holding conversation with Hans, as he peered about the camp and inspected the cattle, and especially that, to him, wonderful curiosity the Dutchman's hunting horse. Van Zyl had started from the Queebe Hills with three nags. Of these one had died of horse-sickness, while another had been killed by lions, so that only his grey, a tried old favourite, "salted" against the sickness and a splendid beast in the hunting veldt, remained to him. Ndala gazed long and curiously at the shapely grey, as Hans indicated its good points and expatiated on its manifold virtues.

Once more the chief wandered back to the waggon, where Van Zyl was measuring out some of the blue and white beads into a skin bag. His greed was too much for him, and again through Hans he demanded that the Dutchman should hand him over the whole case full, pointing out that, considering his importance as monarch over all these regions, so trifling a present ought not to be denied to him.

But Van Zyl was, like many of the Dutch Afrikanders, a man of quick temper, little accustomed to be dictated to by natives who in his own country were mere hewers of wood and drawers of water to the white man. The blood sprang to his face, his eyes flashed angrily, and, flinging down the leather bag of beads, which he had just tied up, he turned angrily upon the chief.

"Tell him," he said, with an impatient gesture to Hans, "that he may take it or leave it. I have offered gifts enough until I see elephants and gather ivory. If Ndala is not content, tell him I'll inspan the waggon again and trek out of his country and go into some other veldt, where elephants are at least as plentiful and chiefs more accommodating."

Ndala had taken one quick glance at the angry Boer, as he burst forth, and now stood, till he had finished speaking, motionless, impassive, with eyes downcast. He uttered not another word to Van Zyl, but with a swift motion of his hand from Hans to the bag of beads, said to the Hottentot:

"Carry it to the boat. I will go across again."

Accompanied by three of his headmen who had come across with him, Ndala stalked down to the shore, talking meanwhile quietly to Hans. Arrived at his boat, he saw his presents carefully bestowed, and then taking his seat was poled over to his kraal.

Late that night, while the Van Zyls slept peacefully in their waggon, Hans, the Hottentot, crept stealthily down to the river, without waking a single member of the camp, and was ferried across to Ndala's by a couple of strong-armed natives waiting for him with their canoe. Arrived at the island, he was conducted to the chief's hut, and there alone with Ndala he sat in deep and secret colloquy for a full hour or more. Presently he was ferried back very quietly to the south shore again, where, creeping into his own camp, he regained the shelter of his blanket without having awakened a soul.

Next morning a canoe came across early from Ndala, laden with a number of sweet water melons, some more grain and another goat as a present to the Van Zyls. At the same time the chief sent a message to Van Zyl to say that, if he were ready for a hunt on the following day, some of his tribesmen would be ready to act as spoorers and show him a troop of elephants which was known to be frequenting some bush about half a day's journey from the kraal. This was excellent news, and Van Zyl brightened up instantly.

“Myn maghtet, Alie!” he said to his wife, after taking a huge pull at his kommetje of coffee, “the carle is not so bad as I thought him. Tell his headman, Hans,” he said to his Hottentot, “that I’ll swim the horse across as soon as day breaks to-morrow and go after the elephants.”

For the remainder of that day the whole camp was busily employed; Van Zyl and his two men in completing a big and strong thorn kraal for the cattle, against the attack of lions; Alida Van Zyl in finishing off some bültong (dried meat), cooking bread, tidying up the stores and putting together various articles required by her husband while away hunting. Towards afternoon Van Zyl, having finished his work at the ox-kraal, opened a keg of powder, heated some lead and zinc, and sat himself down to the work of reloading some cartridges for his elephant rifle.

Near him, in the shade of the spreading acacia tree by which the waggon was outspanned, crawled on a couple of blankets little Jan, his two year old child. Now and then the big Boer would pause from his work to admire the strong, chubby limbs of his little son, or would stretch forth a big hand to tickle the restless little rascal, eliciting from him crows, gurgles and screams of childish laughter. Once Alida came from her cooking to look at the pair.

“Maghte!” said her husband, as he looked up at her from playing with the boy. “How the child grows. If he goes on like this, he will be strong enough to carry a rifle by the time he is ten years old.”

They retired early that night—before eight o’clock—and at the earliest streak of dawn Karel Van Zyl had drunk his coffee, eaten some meat and a rusk and said farewell to his wife and child. He kissed Alida’s broad, smooth cheek and, yet more tenderly, his sleeping child, lying there up in the waggon, on the kartel-bed, in the big hole which his sire had lately quitted. And then, taking with him Hans and his horse, he went down to the stream. The good grey had swum rivers before and understood the business; yet he paused for a moment on the brink, looking forth over the broad, swift stream, and snuffed the air once or twice.

“Crocodiles, *oude kerel* (old fellow)?” said his master, patting him on the neck. “They shall not harm you.”

The grey tossed his head, shook his bit, and Hans, looking at him, said to his master:

“He is all right, Baas. He trusts you. Witfoot will swim.”

So, unfastening the long raw-hide reim from the head stall, they lead Witfoot down, got into a couple of canoes and pushed off. Witfoot swam quietly and cleverly between the two canoes, and presently, passing below Ndala’s island, they reached the northern bank. Here Ndala was waiting for them with a number of his tribesmen. They exchanged greetings, and then the Cubangwe captain picked out a dozen of his best hunters to accompany Van Zyl and his Hottentot and show them where the elephants were. And so, bidding friendly farewells, they parted.

Hans marched just ahead of Van Zyl, carrying, as he always did, till game was known to be near, his master’s rifle and a bandolier full of spare cartridges. One of Ndala’s men carried the second rifle, with which Hans himself was usually intrusted. For three hours they marched north-west under the blazing sun, over heavy sand-belts, through bush and thin forest, until high noon, when Van Zyl reined up his horse, pulled off his broad-brimmed hat and wiped the sweat from his brow with his big cotton print handkerchief.

“Hans,” he said, looking round for Ndala’s hunters, “those schepsels are surely spreading out very wide for the spoor. I haven’t seen one of them for half an hour past.” As he spoke he climbed leisurely from the saddle and loosened the girths. Hans, who alone knew why the men had vanished, answered him:

“I don’t think you will set eyes on them again, Baas. You may say your prayers, for your last hour is nigh and I am going to shoot you.”

Van Zyl heard the clicks of two hammers being cocked and turned swiftly round.

“That is a verdomned impudent joke of yours, Hans,” he said, “for which I shall welt you handsomely when we get back to camp. Give me the gun.”

But Hans, standing within ten feet of his master, had the rifle at the ready, and there was a fiendish look in his eyes which Van Zyl had never before remarked.

“Don’t move a step nearer,” said the Hottentot, “but say your prayers, for before God I am going to shoot you dead.”

Van Zyl saw that there was something more in the man’s demeanour than he had bargained for. He turned a thought paler beneath his tan.

“What do you mean, Hans?” he said.

“I mean this,” returned the Hottentot, still keeping his rifle ready. “I haven’t forgotten the cruel floggings I have had from you and your father in years gone by, and I am dog-tired of your service. Ndala has made me a good offer. We shall go halves in your goods and I am to take your wife for my own vrouw. And,” added the man, with a brutal leer, “I shall make her a very good husband, if she behaves herself.”

At that last foul insult Van Zyl clenched his fists, swore a great oath and rushed at the Hottentot. But the man was too quick for him. He levelled his rifle, pulled trigger, and a heavy bullet crashed through the brain of the unfortunate Dutchman and passed out at the back of his skull, leaving a huge gaping wound at the point of exit. Van Zyl dropped heavily upon the hot sand and never stirred again.

Regardless of the pool of blood, welling swiftly from the warm body, the Hottentot proceeded leisurely to strip his late master of his clothes, into most of which he introduced his own squat and meagre figure. Then, mounting the grey horse, which had meanwhile been patiently grazing hard by, he rode off. A quarter of a mile away, before entering a patch of bush, he drew rein and looked back. As he expected, the vultures were already descending from the sky, prepared for their foul banquet. Some of them were even now collected in a thorn tree near the body. In a few hours their task would be finished and only Karel Van Zyl’s bones would remain for the jackals and hyaenas.

An hour before sunset that same afternoon Alida Van Zyl sat in her waggon sewing. On the kartel by her side lay her little son Jan, playing with a wooden doll carved for him by April, their Basuto herd boy and foreloper. April himself was just now squatting by the camp fire, looking after the stew-pot and solacing his ease with an occasional pinch of Kaffir snuff. It was a lovely late afternoon, the heat of the day was passing, a pleasant breeze from the southeast moved upon the veldt, and as Alida expanded her lungs and inhaled the pure, invigorating air, and rested peacefully, after a day of work and washing, life, even in this remote wilderness, seemed very pleasant. Once or twice she looked up from her work and let her eyes rest upon that fair scene in front of her. The ever-moving river, running its perpetual course south-eastward, looked wondrously beautiful; its murmurs, as it swept over the low cataracts and swirled onward, sounded very sweet to the ear and suggested a perennial coolness. Bands of sand-grouse were coming in from their long day in the veldt to drink at the river’s edge. Their sharp but not unpleasing cries sounded constantly overhead as they sped swiftly to the stream and then, after wheeling hither and thither once or twice, stooped suddenly to the margin, alighted and drank thirstily. Skeins of wild duck passed up and down the stream. Now and again splendid Egyptian geese took flight and with noisy “honks” flew on strong pinions to some other part of the water or to the trees fringing the river-course. Dainty avocets, sandpipers and other wading birds were to be seen here and there in the shallows, while ashore the francolins were calling sharply to one another.

As she sat in the kartel, with her feet resting on the waggon-box, Alida Van Zyl’s thoughts ran in a pleasant current back to her Transvaal home. She pictured to herself the long, trying trek over, Lake Ngami and the weary Thirstland passed, Khama’s and Secheli’s countries traversed, and beautiful Marico in the Western Transvaal entered. And from there Rustenburg, with its fair hills and valleys and smiling farmsteads, was, as it were, but a step. Three or four months of elephant-hunting here at Ndala’s, and her man would have finished his wanderings in these regions and they would be inspanning and turning their faces for home again. And then peace from wanderings and a comfortable homestead and the faces of kinsfolk and friends. A pleasant, pleasant thought.

While she thus dreamed her day dream of the future, a canoe had, unnoticed by her, shot across the stream and made its landing on the shore a hundred yards or so behind the waggon. In a few minutes the sound of approaching footsteps made her look up from her sewing.

She saw—for the moment she believed her eyes must have deceived her—not five yards from the waggon, Hans, the Hottentot—Hans carrying her husband’s rifle and tricked out in clothing, notwithstanding that sleeves and trousers were liberally turned up, at least three sizes too big for him. There was a strange look in the man’s eyes, half guilty, half triumphant, as he glanced up at his mistress. What in the name of the Heer God could it all mean? And then a pang gripped her heart. Surely something had happened, else why was Hans here at the waggon and alone? But Alida was a stout-hearted woman; her husband had never yet met with a severe mishap. Surely, surely all was well?

“Hans,” she cried in the sharp commanding voice she always used to her native servants, “what in the name of Fortune are you back here for and dressed like a figure of fun? Whose are the clothes, and where is your master?”

Hans looked with an evil leer at his mistress and replied:

“The clothes were the Baas’s, je’vrouw, and they are now mine. Surely you can recognise them? As for the Baas, he is dead. Ndala and I have settled all that, and we have divided his belongings, and you, Vrouw Van Zyl, are now to be my wife.”

The man advanced close up to the waggon-box and again leered hatefully at his mistress. Alida turned pale as death, but she mastered herself and replied with angry scorn:

“What is this cock-and-bull story about the Baas being dead? You are drunk, man. I shall have you well thrashed for your lying when your master comes home. Be off and get under the waggon and go to sleep. Loup, yo schelm!”

“The Baas will never come back again,” returned the Hottentot, “he is dead. I shot him in the veldt.” He put his finger to a dark crimson stain upon the collar of his coat. “See, that is Karel Van Zyl’s blood. Dead he is, I say. And now get down from the waggon and let me kiss you. You are to be my wife in future and, mind you, you’ll have to behave yourself.”

Something, as she looked at the Hottentot and his absurd clothing and the dark stain of blood, told Alida Van Zyl that all this was God’s or the Devil’s truth she was listening to. But, like most of her race, she was a strong-minded woman, bred through long generations of ancestors to a life of rough toils and many dangers. She was horror-stricken, but not in the least likely to faint. Suddenly she half rose, stretched up her hand to the side of the waggon and took down from the hooks on which it rested a loaded carbine which Karel Van Zyl always left for her protection. Cocking the weapon, she pointed it at Hans and threatened to pull the trigger. Hans ducked as the carbine was levelled and sprang out of harm’s way. Darting round to the side of the waggon, he yelled in a shrill, angry voice:

“I shall come for you later on, my fine Vrouw, and when it is dark I shall know how to manage you. Put away that gun or you may come to the same end as your husband.”

He passed away down to where the canoes lay and held converse with some of the tribesmen there, and there was silence in the camp. But, as Alida felt, the silence was in itself very ominous.

In a little while, as the swift African twilight fell, April, the Basuto, crept up to the waggon and whispered to his mistress. Alida, who for the last half-hour had been very busy with certain preparations in the interior of the waggon, came to the fore-kist, carbine in hand, and listened to him. April with a scared face told her rapidly that things were so wrong that he was going to make a bolt for it and take to the veldt and so try and make Moremi’s town at Lake Ngami. Hans had threatened to shoot him, and he could expect no protection from Ndala. What to advise his mistress he knew not. She asked him if her husband was really dead, and whether she could herself expect aid from Ndala and his people. Alas! April assured her that the Baas had, indeed, been slain, so much he had gleaned from Ndala’s people. As for the chief himself, he had the worst opinion of him, and upon the whole he, April, thought his mistress had better submit herself to the Hottentot. Later on help might come, if he himself could get safely to the Lake.

But April would stay no longer, not even at his mistress’s earnest entreaty, and crept away. A minute later Alida heard the stamp of feet, sounds of a scuffle, and then a blood-curdling scream rang through the growing darkness. More struggling, the sound of thuds, a muttered groan, and then all was silence. Alida, listening with awed white face and nerves at their fullest tension, shuddered and drew back to her child. That was poor April’s death scream beyond a doubt.

She lighted a lantern and then, sitting far back in the waggon, close to her sleeping child, waited for the next scene of this dark tragedy. Who can picture the distress of this poor creature, strong, able-bodied, yet helpless against a cruel destiny. To quit the waggon would be madness. If she attempted to escape with her child into the veldt, a few hours of spooring by the morning light would bring her enemies upon her. Dark and bitter as have been the hours of many a Dutch Afrikander woman in her times of trial, few can have endured the tortures that now racked the soul of Alida Van Zyl. With pale, set face she sat there in mute, yet stubborn, despair, waiting, watching, praying to the God who, it seemed,

had now clean forsaken her.

An hour after dark Hans came up to the waggon again.

“Well, Vrouw,” he said, before showing himself, “is it peace?”

“Ay,” returned Alida in a dry voice and with a strange hard look in her face, “it is peace. I am in your hands. You may climb up.”

Hans appeared at the front of the waggon and looked at his mistress. She had no gun in her hand. Apparently all was well. He climbed to the waggon-box and turned to face her. At that moment Alida Van Zyl seized the candle from her open lantern and dropped it into an open cask of gunpowder which stood ready just behind the kartel. The darkness was for one awful moment broken by a blaze of hellish fire; a frightful explosion rocked the earth and rent the air for miles; and in that dire catastrophe Alida Van Zyl, her child, Hans the Hottentot, and half a dozen natives, prying round the waggon to watch the progress of affairs, were, with the waggon itself, blown to a thousand pieces.

Thus miserably ended the last trek of Karel and Alida Van Zyl.

Chapter Eight.
The Luck of Tobias De La Rey.

Tobias De la Rey was one of those pastoral, hunting Boers who are still to be found in some numbers in the remoter parts of the North and East Transvaal. His farm was a poor one, he had no great head of stock, sheep did very ill upon that veldt, and Tobias, like others of his class, finding it hard to make ends meet, was in the habit annually, as his father had been before him, of making a hunting trip beyond the Transvaal during the season of winter and bringing back as much ivory and as many skins of giraffe, hippopotamus and the larger antelopes as he could get together during six months' hunting. This cargo he took down to Zeerust, in the Marico district, and sold there. Once or twice he had been led so far afield in search of elephants that he and the other Boers hunting with him had remained away two seasons. But still Tobias was a poor man. He had no luck with his stock, his land was not good enough to grow tobacco, and now at the age of twenty-four, when most good Boers are married and have children about them, he remained in single wretchedness; for in the judgment of the uxorious Boer, by the age of twenty-two, every Dutch Afrikander, if he is worth his salt, ought to be married and settled. It was not De la Rey's fault by any means. He had more than once offered himself for the hand of some well-to-do neighbour's stout daughter, but his advances had, hitherto, purely by reason of his poverty, been civilly declined.

The South African winter season was just now setting in—it was the month of April—and Tobias, who meant having another hunt this year, had already made all his preparations. His waggon was refitted and overhauled, his trek oxen were ready and his servants at hand. His hunting horses, three of them—two unsalted—including his old, salted, ewe-necked garron "Blaauwbok," a gaunt, knowing old "blaauw-schimmel" (blue roan), which had carried him already four seasons in the hunting veldt, were pastured near the house and fed occasionally with mealies, to give them heart and condition for the hard life that lay before them.

And Tobias himself had this year obtained permission from Khama, chief of Bamangwato, to pass through his country—following the route of the Trek Boers, who had gone through two seasons before—and had determined to hunt in the wild and little known country far to the north-west of Lake Ngami.

But before setting forth, Tobias had a visit to pay. He had viewed with increasing favour this last year or two Gertruey Terblans, niece of Mevrouw Joanna Terblans, with whom she lived. Truey was an orphan and had some land and stock of her own. She was a dark, brown-eyed, sturdy girl of sixteen, and Tobias De la Rey regarded her and her farm and stock as highly desirable acquisitions. This morning, therefore, he saddled up his best looking nag and trippled briskly off, with that curious ambling gait—something between a trot and a canter—so greatly affected by the Dutch Afrikanders. Tobias had dressed himself with some care. He wore a new broad-brimmed hat, decked with a couple of short white ostrich feathers. He had struggled with immense difficulty into a collar, and was resplendent in a blue satin necktie. And he wore a suit of new corduroy store clothes, purchased for his hunting outfit. His spurs, too, were new and shining. Tobias meant to make a bit of a splash to-day, and although he was not prepared for the solemnity of an "opsitting" (that all-night form of courtship, dear to the heart of the Boer), and had therefore no candle in his saddle-bag, he wished to leave upon the minds of Truey and her aunt, on this leave-taking, the most favourable impression possible. Tobias himself was a huge, loose-limbed Boer, standing six feet two in his velschoons. He was a rough, unkempt-looking fellow, even at his best to-day. His straggling beard and moustache and long shaggy hair were of a fiery red. His broad, freckled face and smallish grey eyes were vacant and expressionless in all ordinary affairs of life—even in presence of the fair Truey herself. Only the excitement of hunting could rouse the man. Then he was, like most of his fellows, a different being, transformed from a dull, listless, stupid-looking giant to a man of action, alert, active and energetic even as an Englishman. The horse he bestrode was the youngest and best looking of his stud, a not bad-looking bay five-year-old, which to-day was resplendent in a new cheap curb bridle of that frightfully severe pattern always affected by the South African Dutch. His saddle was not new, but a gorgeous red and yellow saddle-cloth, in De la Rey's eyes, fully atoned for that defect.

Tobias rode steadily north up the Nylstroom River, and in three hours'

time came in sight of the Terblans homestead, “Vogelstruisfontein” (ostrich fountain), an ordinary Dutch farmhouse, built of Kaffir bricks and whitewashed, and backed by goat and cattle kraals, a grove of fruit trees—peach, apricot and quince—and a weeping willow or two. Sitting in the shade of the stoep was old Jan Terblans, now turned seventy, and, from fevers and privations of early days, long past work. The old man still had the use of his eyes, however, and, catching sight of De la Rey, he called to him to off-saddle and come in. Tobias obeyed, and, after shaking hands with Terblans and chatting a few minutes, went at his host’s request indoors. In the living room, at the top of the table, by the coffee urn, sat Tant’ Joanna Terblans, second wife of the old man outside, an enormous matron of five-and-forty, whose eighteen solid stones of flesh filled to overflowing the capacious armchair that supported her. Tant’ Terblans had been a little taken by surprise, it is true, but she had had time to send for her best apron, and had smoothed her dull brown hair, and her great, full-moon face was now turned inquiringly towards Tobias as he entered.

Tobias held out his hand, took the Vrouw’s fat paw in his own, and returned her greeting with a “Dag, Tant’.”

“Why, bless the man,” remarked the matron, “how smart you are to-day. And what may you have come over about? No ‘opsitting’ mind, Tobias! Remember what I told you six months ago. Truey with her fortune is to make a good match, and a wandering elephant hunter like yourself need never think of her. We are glad to see you over, of course, in a neighbourly way, but not with any ideas of Truey.”

Tobias meekly replied that he had but come to say farewell before starting on a long hunting trip. “And perhaps,” he added, “if I have luck this time and bring back a waggon-load of ivory you may see things differently, Tant’? Remember I have more stock than I used to have. Another trip or two, with luck, should set me up fairly.”

“Nay, nay,” rejoined the Vrouw, as she handed him his second cup of coffee and pushed the tobacco towards him, “’tis not to be thought of—unless indeed you can come back from your hunt a thousand pound better man than you are now, which is not likely.” Tobias shook his head sadly, as if that tremendous sum were utterly beyond hope, and at that moment the door opened and Truey herself came in.

Truey had seen with sharp eyes Tobias De la Rey spurring across the flat in the final sharp canter up to the house. She had changed her dirty print frock for a stuff one, had brushed her dark hair, tied a pink ribbon to the thick single plait that fell down her back, and had even washed her face and hands. In truth Gertruey had a soft corner in her heart for Tobias. After all he was her devoted admirer—she knew that. And then he was a first-rate hunter, a good veldt man, who had killed many an elephant, and had met death fairly and squarely time after time these eight years past. And indeed, he was not so ill looking; there were few good-looking bachelors within a radius of fifty miles of Vogelstruisfontein, and Tobias was no worse than his neighbours. He was poor, certainly, but he was less poor than he used to be, and she had land and stock of her own—or would have when she came of age.

Truey came in, then, passably well-dressed and on good terms with herself, and there was quite a pleased look in her honest brown eyes as they caught Tobias’s first glance. Tant’ Joanna viewed her niece’s little personal preparations for the visitor with something very like disapproval, and Truey, whose countenance had, under her aunt’s dragon-like gaze, assumed a fitting humility, was soon dismissed to the kitchen to hasten on preparation for “middagmaal.” During the long afternoon, before Tobias saddled up and rode for home, he had the opportunity of exchanging but two or three sentences with Truey alone. Still those sentences carried consolation. Tobias was a terrible coward with women, but he had in sheer desperation ventured to remark that Tant’ Joanna meant her niece to marry a rich man, and that no doubt he should find her settled with her own husband on his return. Tracy had answered stoutly, with reddening cheeks, that she should have a good deal to say to that, and that for her part Tobias might be very sure she should not be married before he returned again. There was something in the girl’s voice and look that gave the faint-hearted Tobias fresh hope, and he said hastily—for he heard Tant’ Joanna coming in from the stoep, —“Then you will wait, Truey?” And Truey answered under her breath, yet very steadfastly, “Yes. I will wait, Tobias.” And there was a very warm pressure of the hand between these two—far different from the usual lifeless handshake of the Boers—as they said farewell.

Tobias climbed briskly to his saddle at four o’clock, touched his nag with the off spur to make him show himself a little, and from his safe

eminence fired his parting shot at Vrouw Terblans: “Farewell, Tant’, I shall be back in twelve months a thousand pound better man, with the waggon loaded up with ivory.”

“Ach! Tobias, man, you will be too late,” rejoined the huge dame from the stoep, in her sharp voice. “Too late, I tell you. Never mind, good luck to you, and farewell.”

But behind her, as she spoke these words, stood Truey, shaking her head, and her head-shake and the look in her kind eyes, just now dim with tears, were consolations good enough and reassuring enough for Tobias De la Rey as he rode off.

It was a glorious mellow evening, that, as Tobias galloped home in a frame of mind not often usual to one of his sluggish breed. If he had killed a brace of elephants, with teeth averaging fifty pounds apiece, he could not have felt more lively. Long, long afterwards did Tobias recall that shining evening as he rode home from Vogelstruisfontein. Never had the grass veldt looked more fair, the bush more green, the distant mountains more ruddy with the flush of sunset; never had life itself seemed more worth the living.

Leaving a kinsman to look after his farm and stock, De la Rey trekked next morning for the far distant hunting grounds that were his goal. A year later he and his shooting-fellow, Klaas Erasmus, a first-rate hunter like himself, were outspanned with their waggons in a wild region, unknown even to the Trek Boers in their wanderings, towards the Cubangwe River. It was plainly apparent, from the look of their outfits, that the hunters had had a very rough time of it during these twelve months. Their waggons were worn and battered; the tents had long since been torn to shreds by the thorns and were now replaced by the hides of game. Their combined stud—they had started with seven—had now dwindled to a pair of jaded-looking nags, one of which was De la Rey’s old salted schimmel “Blaauwbok,” now looking, if possible, more gaunt and antique than ever. The two men had had no great luck hitherto. It had taken them four good months to reach the elephant country, and after eight months’ hunting they had shot and traded between them little more than fifteen hundred pounds weight of ivory. They had determined, therefore, to hunt for a second season. Twice or thrice in the unhealthy season just ended had they been each very near to death from fever and dysentery, and both looked yellow and pulled down. Yet in the last few days, luck had turned; they had stumbled by chance upon a veldt thick with elephants; they had slain three yesterday and were now hot upon the spoor of an immense troop, which on the coming morning they hoped to attack.

At seven o’clock, having supped and smoked their pipes, they turned into their waggons and slept. Hunters, and especially Dutch hunters, rise early, and seek their kartels betimes, after a hard day in the veldt. An hour before dawn they were stirring, coffee was drunk, some food swallowed, the horses were saddled up, the rifles got out, cartridge belts buckled on; the hunters mounted, and with their native spoorers, set out upon the trail just as the light was breaking through the white mist of early morning.

Three Bushmen spoored for them, and besides these, two native servants, fair shots and reliable hunters, carried rifles and accompanied the Boers on foot.

Hour after hour the keen Bushmen held upon the broad trail of the retreating herd, upon whose skirts they had now been hanging these three days past. It was a mighty troop—as near as could be judged by the trail left, at least 150 strong. The sun rose and rose and beat hotly down upon the thick bush in which the party were now involved. Hour after hour they pressed steadily on, and still the big troop kept its lead. At two o’clock, in the hottest, weariest hour of afternoon, they began the ascent of a steepish hill, up which the elephants had climbed in their retreat. Their horses were showing signs of collapse. It was a matter of absolute necessity that they should off-saddle for half an hour and give them a much needed rest. The spoorers, too, wanted rest and a drink from their calabashes and a welcome pinch of snuff—that ineffable blessing to the worn and jaded black man. While they off-saddled and the horses rested and fed a little, the native hunters were in deep consultation; the Bushmen, especially, were jabbering in their queer inarticulate language —in whispers, of course—and their gestures indicated that something very exciting was stirring in their minds. Presently Lukas, the Griqua, who carried a gun, came to the two Boers and translated. What the Bushmen wanted to point out was this. Below the hill, on the farther side, lay an immense marsh, which was just now in its most treacherous condition. A week before it was under water and no elephants would

have faced it. A week later, under the influence of the fierce sun, it would have dried sufficiently to bear the weight even of an elephant. If, said the Bushmen, the elephants, which were now assuredly nearing the summit of the hill, browsing slowly as they climbed, could be driven down the steep into the marsh they would be hopelessly embogged. The big troop, the Bushmen said (they knew every herd of game in that vast veldt, just as the average Kaffir knows his own cattle), had been driven far out of their own feeding grounds and this part of the country was strange to them. The two Boers listened with a fierce intensity to this absorbing scheme. They pulled at their beards, knit their brows, and leaped hungrily at each word as it came from the mouth of Lukas, the Griqua. Here was the chance of a lifetime, and they knew it.

In half an hour the plan of campaign was settled, the horses were saddled up and the seven hunters, spreading out in a widish line, advanced upon their game. They reached the summit of the hill. There, three hundred yards below, in a broad opening of the bush, moved very slowly at least sixty huge elephants, most of them carrying long white teeth. In other parts of the thick bush the dusky forms and pale gleaming tusks of other mammoths could be counted.

The Boers dismounted, left their horses behind them, and, one upon either flank, crept in; the two natives carrying guns were in the centre; the three Bushmen, armed only with assegais, served to maintain the thin line of the advance. Half-way down the hill, the Boers fired their rifles into the herd, now close in front of them, the native gunners followed suit, and then, with loud yells, the whole party dashed in upon the elephants. It was a risk, but the plan succeeded to admiration. Half the herd tore terror-stricken down the remaining three hundred yards of hill and entered headlong upon the flat marsh in front of them. Half scattered, and, turning short round, broke back through the thin cordon of hunters. Of these, two big bulls and a cow, all bearing magnificent teeth, fell victims. Leaving these to die, as they quickly did, of their wounds, the hunters ran on and reached the edge of the marsh. Quite a respectable troop was already stuck fast in its treacherous depths. The hunters fired, and fired, and fired again, shot after shot, and as the victims fell, the remainder of the troop, in their desperate exertions to free themselves and escape, only buried themselves yet deeper in the black mud of the smooth, green-looking swamp. It was a scene never to be forgotten. The gunners, black and white, in the fiercest stage of excitement, shouting, screaming, swearing, firing; the Bushmen, mad with the lust of blood, venturing with light feet upon the swamp and spearing the hopelessly embogged elephants; the screaming and trumpeting of the great pachyderms themselves, frantic with helpless rage and terror, created in this erst silent wilderness an infernal pandemonium. By sundown the last elephant but one of all that troop was slain, and seventy-three of the great tusk bearers lay dead upon the marsh. One young bull, lighter than its fellows, had marvellously crossed the swamp in safety and escaped. Some of the finest tusks in Africa lay here under the red rays of the dying sun. Few were under thirty pounds in weight. Many were well over fifty pounds apiece. The two biggest bulls carried teeth that, when dried out, pulled the beam at over ninety pounds apiece. It took the hunters and their natives more than a week to chop out the tusks and get them stowed in their waggons. In the last few days, although the marsh had become firmer and work more easy, the two Dutchmen were unable to withstand the dreadful effluvia of the rotting carcases, and the natives completed the loathsome task alone save for the throngs of vultures that kept them company.

Six months later Tobias De la Rey had reached the far Transvaal border on his return home, had crossed a drift of the Limpopo, and was now approaching Vogelstruisfontein. Despite the toils and dangers of his last eighteen months in the wilderness, his heart was light and there was a look upon his broad and stolid face that told of much happiness. The house was reached at last, and Tobias’s travel-worn waggon, loaded to the tilt with ivory, halted fifty yards away from the door. Vrouw Terblans, aroused by the cracking of whips, the cries of the drivers, and the heavy creaking of the waggon, stood outside upon the stoep.

“Well, Tant’ Joanna,” cried Tobias, as he rode up, “there is the finest load of ivory that has come into the Transvaal for many a long year. More than a thousand pounds’ worth. I have kept my word Ja! I have made my last hunt and brought home three thousand pounds weight of ivory. Allemaghte! It was the greatest hunt ever known in South Africa. Seventy-six elephants we killed in a single day. But where are Truey and Terblans?” De la Rey, in the joy of this unspeakably triumphant moment —looked forward to so eagerly during every waking hour of the last six months—had not noticed the stout huis-vrouw’s black stuff gown and her

lugubrious expression.

“Alas!” she replied. “Have not you heard, Tobias? Truey caught a fever four months since and died, poor child, in my arms. My man died too—he had been long ailing—six months after you had trekked. I have had sore trouble, but the Heer God who chastens can bring the healing. It is a blessed thing to see the face of an old friend again. Will ye not off-saddle and come in, Tobias? I want your help and advice.”

Tobias had stared at Tant’ Joanna as she spoke these words, his slow mind not fully comprehending their terrible import. He leaned down towards her from his horse and said in a low, fierce, guttural voice:

“What was that you said, woman?—Truey dead?”

Vrouw Terblans was whimpering now and had a kerchief to her eyes.

“Yes, Tobias,” she answered feebly, “dead indeed.”

With a deep groan, but without another word, De la Rey jerked fiercely at his horse’s bit and turned to his waggon. “Trek on for home,” he said huskily, and himself rode forward.

For six months, De la Rey, his dream shattered, his brightest hopes dispelled, shut himself up, away upon his lonely farm, and nursed the bitter sorrow that had overtaken him. But, after all, the Dutch Afrikanders are an eminently practical race, and Tobias began presently to look abroad again. Tant’ Joanna and he in due time met each other once more. She was now very ready to play the consoler; a wealthy widow is always a source of deep attraction, even to a Boer twenty or thirty years her junior; their farms adjoined; and so within a year De la Rey and she made up their minds, trekked to Pietersburg and were married at the Dutch Reformed Church.

Tobias De la Rey is now a comfortable man, respected for his wealth and well known throughout the Northern Transvaal as one of the two hunters who slew in a single day six-and-seventy elephants. But there come to him at times, undoubtedly, bitter moments, and, looking with the mind’s eye past the immense figure of his grim and elderly vrouw, he sees again the kind brown eyes and the pleasant face of his lost Truey. These thoughts, for very good and sufficient reasons, he keeps severely to himself. For Tant’ Joanna is, it must be owned, a jealous and an exacting spouse.

Chapter Nine.
The Mahalapsi Diamond.

It was a fine warm evening at Kimberley, and Frank Farnborough, just before the dinner hour at the “Central,” was fortifying his digestion with a glass of sherry and bitters, and feeling on very good terms with himself. He had put in an excellent day’s work at De Beers, that colossal diamond company’s office, where he had the good fortune to be employed, and had that morning received from his chief an intimation that his salary had been raised to four hundred pounds per annum. Four hundred per annum is not an immense sum in Kimberley, where living is dear all round; but for a young man of five-and-twenty, of fairly careful habits, it seemed not so bad a stipend. And so Frank sat down to the excellent menu, always to be found at the “Central,” at peace with the world and with a sound appetite for his dinner. Next to him was a fellow-member of the principal Kimberley cricket team, and, as they were both old friends and enthusiasts, they chatted freely. Everywhere around them sat that curious commingling of mankind usually to be seen at a Kimberley *table d’hôte*—diamond dealers, Government officials, stock-brokers, detectives, Jews, Germans, Englishmen and Scots, and a few Irish, hunters and traders from the far interior, miners, prospectors, concessionaires, and others. A few women leavened by their presence the mass of mankind, their numbers just now being increased by some members of a theatrical company playing in the town.

As for Frank and his companion, they drank their cool lager from tall tankards, ate their dinners, listened with some amusement to the impossible yarns of an American miner from the Transvaal, and, presently rising, sought the veranda chairs and took their coffee. In a little while Frank’s comrade left him for some engagement in the town.

Frank finished his coffee and sat smoking in some meditation. He was on the whole, as we have seen, on good terms with himself, but there was one little cloud upon his horizon, which gave pause to his thoughts. Like many other young fellows, he lodged in the bungalow house of another man; that is, he had a good bedroom and the run of the sitting-rooms in the house of Otto Staarbrucker, an Afrikander of mixed German and Semitic origin, a decent fellow enough, in his way, who ran a store in Kimberley. This arrangement suited Frank Farnborough well enough; he paid a moderate rental, took his meals at the “Central,” and preserved his personal liberty intact. But Otto Staarbrucker had a sister, Nina, who played housekeeper, and played her part very charmingly. Nina was a colonial girl of really excellent manners and education. Like many Afrikanders, nowadays, she had been sent to Europe for her schooling, and having made the most of her opportunities, had returned to the Cape a very charming and well-educated young woman. Moreover, she was undeniably attractive, very beautiful most Kimberley folks thought her. On the mother’s side there was blood of the Spanish Jews in her veins—and Nina, a sparkling yet refined brunette, showed in her blue-black hair, magnificent eyes, warm complexion, and shapely figure, some of the best points of that Spanish type.

These two young people had been a good deal together of late—mostly in the warm evenings, when Kimberley people sit in their verandas—stoeps, they call them in South Africa—cooling down after the fiery heat of the corrugated-iron town. It was pleasant to watch the stars, to smoke the placid pipe, and to talk about Europe and European things to a handsome girl—a girl who took small pains to conceal her friendliness for the well set-up, manly Englishman, who treated her with the deference of a gentleman (a thing not always understood in South Africa), and withal could converse pleasantly and well on other topics than diamonds, gambling, and sport Frank Farnborough, as he ruminated over his pipe this evening out there in the “Central” fore-court—garden, I suppose one should call it—asked himself a plain question.

“Things are becoming ‘steep,’” he thought to himself. “I am getting too fond of Nina, and I half believe she’s inclined to like me. She’s a nice and a really good girl, I believe. One could go far for a girl like her. And yet—that Jewish blood is a fatal objection. It won’t do, I’m afraid, and the people at home would be horrified. I shall have to chill off a bit, and get rooms elsewhere. I shall be sorry, very sorry, but I don’t like the girl well enough to swallow her relations, even supposing I were well enough off to marry, which I am not.”

As if bent upon forthwith proving his new-found resolve, the young man soon after rose and betook himself along the Du Toit’s Pan road, in

the direction of his domicile. Presently he entered the house and passed through to the little garden behind. As his form appeared between the darkness of the garden and the light of the passage, a soft voice, coming from the direction of a low table on which stood a lamp, said, “That you, Mr Farnborough?”

“Yes,” he returned, as he sat down by the speaker. “I’m here. What are you doing, I wonder?”

“Oh, I’m just now deep in your ‘Malay Archipelago.’ What a good book it is, and what a wonderful time Wallace had among his birds and insects; and what an interesting country to explore! This burnt-up Kimberley makes one sigh for green islands, and palm-trees and blue seas. Otto and I will certainly have to go to Kalk Bay for Christmas. There are no palm-trees, certainly, but there’s a delicious blue sea. A year at Kimberley is enough to try even a bushman.”

“Well,” returned Frank, “one does want a change from tin shanties and red dust occasionally. I shall enjoy the trip to Cape Town too. We shall have a pretty busy time of it with cricket in the tournament week; but I shall manage to get a dip in the sea now and then, I hope. I positively long for it.”

As Nina leaned back in her big easy-chair, in her creamy Surah silk, and in the half-light of the lamp, she looked very bewitching, and not a little pleased, as they chatted together. Her white teeth flashed in a quick smile to the compliment which Frank paid her, as the conversation drifted from a butterfly caught in the garden, to the discovery he had made that she was one of the few girls in Kimberley who understood the art of arraying herself in an artistic manner. She rewarded Frank’s pretty speech by ringing for tea.

“What a blessing it is,” she went on, leaning back luxuriously, “to have a quiet evening. Somehow, Otto’s friends pall upon one. I wish he had more English friends. I’m afraid my four years in England have rather spoilt me for Otto’s set here. If it were not for you, indeed, and one or two others now and again, things would be rather dismal. Stocks, shares, companies, and diamonds, reiterated day after day, are apt to weary female ears. I sometimes long to shake myself free from it all. Yet, as you know, here am I, a sort of prisoner at will.”

Frank, who had been pouring out more tea, now placed his chair a little nearer to his companion’s as he handed her her cup.

“Come,” he said, “a princess should hardly talk of prisons. Why, you have all Kimberley at your beck and call, if you like. Why don’t you come down from your pedestal and make one of your subjects happy?”

“Ah!” she returned, with a little sigh, “my prince hasn’t come along yet I must wait.”

Frank, I am afraid, was getting a little out of his depth. He had intended, this evening, to be diplomatic and had manifestly failed. He looked up into the glorious star-lit sky, into the blue darkness; he felt the pleasant, cool night air about him; he looked upon the face of the girl by his side—its wonderful Spanish beauty, perfectly enframed by the clear light of the lamp. There was a shade of melancholy upon Nina’s face. A little pity, tinged with an immense deal of admiration, combined with almost overpowering force to beat down Frank’s resolutions of an hour or two back. He bent his head, took the girl’s hand into his own, and lightly kissed it. It was the first time he had ventured so much, and the contact with the warm, soft, shapely flesh thrilled him.

“Don’t be down on your luck, Nina,” he said. “Things are not so bad. You have at all events some one who would give a good deal to be able to help you—some one who—”

At that moment, just when the depression upon Nina’s face had passed, as passes the light cloud wrack from before the moon, a man’s loud, rather guttural voice was heard from within the house, and a figure passed into the darkness of the garden. At the sound, the girl’s hand was snatched from its temporary occupancy.

“Hallo! Nina,” said the voice of Otto, her brother, “any tea out there? I’m as thirsty as a salamander.”

The tea was poured out, the conversation turned upon indifferent topics, and for two people the interest of the evening had vanished.

Next morning, early, Frank Farnborough found a note and package awaiting him. He opened the letter, which ran thus:

“Kimberley—In a dickens of a hurry.

“My dear Frank,—

“Have just got down by post-cart (it was before the railway had been pushed beyond Kimberley), and am off to catch the train for Cape Town,

so can't possibly see you. I had a good, if rather rough, time in 'Mangwato. Knowing your love of natural history specimens, I send you with this a small crocodile, which I picked up in a dried, mummified condition in some bush on the banks of the Mahalapsi River—a dry watercourse running into the Limpopo. How the crocodile got there, I don't know. Probably it found its way up the river-course during the rains, and was left stranded when the drought came. Perhaps it may interest you; if not, chuck it away. Good-bye, old chap. I shall be at Kimberley again in two months' time, and will look you up.

"Yours ever,—

"Horace Kentburn."

Frank smiled as he read his friend's characteristic letter, and turned at once to the parcel—a package of sacking, some three and a half feet long. This was quickly ripped open, and the contents, a miniature crocodile, as parched and hard as a sun-dried ox-hide, but otherwise in good condition, was exposed.

"I know what I'll do with this," said Frank to himself; "I'll soak the beast in my bath till evening, and then see if I can cut him open and stuff him a bit; he seems to have been perfectly sun-baked."

The crocodile was bestowed in a long plunge bath, and covered with water. Frank found it not sufficiently softened that evening, and had to skirmish elsewhere for a bath next morning in consequence. But the following evening, on taking the reptile out of soak, it was found to be much more amenable to the knife; and after dinner, Frank returned to his quarters prepared thoroughly to enjoy himself. First he got into some loose old flannels; then tucked up his sleeves, took his treasure finally out of the bath, carefully dried it, placed it stomach upwards upon his table, which he had previously covered with brown paper for the purpose, and then, taking up his sharpest knife, began his operations. The skin of the crocodile's stomach was now pretty soft and flexible; it had apparently never been touched with the knife, and Frank made a long incision from the chest to near the tail. Then, taking back the skin on either side, he prepared to remove what remained of the long-mummified interior. As he cut and scraped hither and thither, his knife came twice or thrice in contact with pieces of gravel. Two pebbles were found and put aside, and again the knife-edge struck something hard.

"Hang these pebbles!" exclaimed the operator; "they'll ruin my knife. What the dickens do these creatures want to turn their intestines into gravel-pits for, I wonder?"

His hand sought the offending stone, which was extracted and brought to the lamp-light. Now this pebble differed from its predecessors—differed so materially in shape and touch, that Frank held it closer yet to the light. He stared hard at the stone, which, as it lay between his thumb and forefinger, looked not unlike a symmetrical piece of clear gum-arabic, and then, giving vent to a prolonged whistle, he exclaimed, in a tone of suppressed excitement, "By all that's holy! A fifty carat stone! Worth hundreds, or I'm a Dutchman."

He sat down, pushed the crocodile farther from him, brought the lamp nearer, turned up the wick a little, and then, placing the diamond—for diamond it was—on the table between him and the lamp, proceeded to take a careful survey of it, turning it over now and again. The stone resembled in its shape almost exactly the bull's-eye sweetmeat of the British schoolboy. It was of a clear, white colour, and when cut would, as Frank Farnborough very well knew, turn out a perfect brilliant of fine water. There was no trace of "off-colour" about it, and it was apparently flawless and perfect. South African diamond experts can tell almost with certainty from what mine a particular stone has been produced, and it seemed to Frank that the matchless octahedron in front of him resembled in character the finest stones of the Vaal River diggings—from which the choicest gems of Africa have come.

Many thoughts ran through the young man's brain. Here in front of him, in the compass of a small walnut, lay wealth to the extent of some hundreds of pounds. Where did that stone come from? Did the crocodile swallow it with the other pebbles on the Mahalapsi river, or the banks of the adjacent Limpopo? Why, there might be—nay, probably was—another mine lying dormant up there—a mine of fabulous wealth. Why should he not be its discoverer, and become a millionaire? As these thoughts flashed through his brain, a hand was laid on his shoulder, and a merry feminine voice exclaimed, "Why, Mr Farnborough, what have you got there?"

Frank seized the diamond, sprang up with flushed face and excited eyes, and was confronted with Nina and her brother, both regarding him

very curiously.

Otto Staarbrucker spoke first. “Hullo, Frank! You seem to be mightily engrossed. What’s your wonderful discovery?”

The Englishman looked keenly from one to another of his interrogators, hesitated momentarily, then made up his mind and answered frankly, but in a low, intense voice:

“My wonderful discovery is this. Inside that dried-up crocodile I’ve found a big diamond. It’s worth hundreds anyhow, and there must be more where it came from. Look at it, but for God’s sake keep quiet about it.”

Staarbrucker took the stone from Frank, held it upon his big fat white palm, and bent down to the lamp-light. Nina’s pretty, dark head bent down too, so that her straying hair touched her brother’s as they gazed earnestly at the mysterious gem. Presently Otto took the stone in his fingers, held it to the light, weighed it carefully, and then said solemnly and sententiously, “Worth eight hundred pounds, if it’s worth a red cent!”

Nina broke in, “My goodness, Frank—Mr Farnborough—where did you get the stone from, and what are you going to do with it?”

“Well, Miss Nina,” returned Frank, looking pleasantly at the girl’s handsome, excited face, “I hardly know how to answer you at present. That crocodile came from up-country, and I suppose the diamond came from the same locality. It’s all tumbled so suddenly upon me, that I hardly know what to say or what to think. The best plan, I take it, is to have a good night’s sleep on it; then I’ll make up my mind in the morning, and have a long talk with your brother and you. Meanwhile, I know I can trust to you and Otto to keep the strictest silence about the matter. If it got known in Kimberley, I should be pestered to death, and perhaps have the detectives down upon me into the bargain.”

“That’s all right, Frank, my boy,” broke in Staarbrucker, in his big Teutonic voice; “we’ll take care of that. Nina’s the safest girl in Kimberley, and this is much too important a business to be ruined in that way. Why, there may be a fortune for us all, where that stone came from, who knows?”

Already Otto Staarbrucker spoke as if he claimed an interest in the find; and although there was not much in the speech, yet Frank only resented the patronising tone in which it was delivered.

“Well, I’ve pretty carefully prospected the interior of this animal,” said Frank, showing the now perfectly clean mummy. “He’s been a good friend to me, and I’ll put him away, and we’ll have a smoke.”

For another two hours, the three sat together on the stoep at the back of the house, discussing the situation. Staarbrucker fished his hardest to discover the exact whereabouts of the place from whence the crocodile had come. Frank fenced with his palpably leading questions, and put him off laughingly with, “You shall know all about it in good time. For the present you may take it the beast came from his natural home somewhere up the Crocodile River.” (The Limpopo River is in South Africa universally known as the Crocodile.) Presently the sitting broke up, and they retired to their respective rooms. Nina’s handshake, as she said good-night to Frank, was particularly friendly, and Frank himself thought he had never seen the girl look more bewitching.

“Pleasant dreams,” she said, as she turned away; “I’m so glad of your luck. I suppose to-night you’ll be filling your pockets with glorious gems in some fresh Tom Tiddler’s ground. Mind you put your diamond under your pillow and lock your door. Good-night.”

Otto Staarbrucker went to his bedroom too, but not for some hours to sleep. He had too much upon his mind. Business had been very bad of late. The Du Toit’s Pan mine had been shut down, and had still further depressed trade at his end of the town, and, to crown all, he had been gambling in Randt mines, and had lost heavily.

Otto’s once flourishing business was vanishing into thin air, and it was a question whether he should not immediately cut his losses and get out of Kimberley with what few hundreds he could scrape together, before all had gone to ruin.

This diamond discovery of Frank Farnborough’s somehow strongly appealed to his imagination. Where that magnificent stone came from, there must be others—probably quantities of them. It would surely be worth risking two or three hundred in exploration. Frank was a free, open-hearted fellow enough, and although not easily to be driven, would no doubt welcome his offer to find the money for prospecting thoroughly upon half profits, or some such bargain. It must be done; there seemed no other reasonable way out of the tangle of difficulties that beset him.

He would speak to Frank about it early in the morning. Comforted with this reflection, he fell asleep.

They breakfasted betimes at the Staarbruckers, and after the meal, Nina having gone into the garden, Otto proceeded to open his proposal to the young Englishman, who had stayed this morning to breakfast. He hinted first that there might be serious difficulty in disposing of so valuable a diamond, and, indeed, as Frank already recognised, that was true enough. The proper course would be to “declare” the stone to the authorities; but would they accept his story—wildly improbable as it appeared on the face of it?

No one in England can realise the thick and poisonous atmosphere of suspicion and distrust in which the immense diamond industry of Kimberley is enwrapped. Its miasma penetrates everywhere, and protected as is the industry by the most severe and brutal—nay, even degrading—laws and restrictions, which an all-powerful “ring” has been able to force through the Cape Parliament, no man is absolutely safe from it. And, even Frank, an employé of the great De Beers Company itself, a servant of proved integrity and some service, might well hesitate before exposing himself to the tremendous difficulty of proving a strong and valid title to the stone in his possession.

“Well, Frank,” said Staarbrucker, “have you made up your mind about your diamond? What are you going to do with it?”

“I don’t quite know yet,” answered Frank, taking his pipe out of his mouth. “It’s an infernally difficult puzzle, and I haven’t hit on a solution. What do you advise?” Here was Otto’s opening.

“Well, my boy,” he answered, “I’ve thought a good deal over the matter, and in my opinion, you’d better keep your discovery to ourselves at present. Now I’m prepared to make you an offer. I’ll find the expenses of a prospecting trip to the place where your crocodile came from, and take a competent miner up with us—I know several good men to choose from—on the condition that, in the event of our finding more stones, or a mine, I am to stand in halves with you. I suppose such a trip would cost three hundred pounds or thereabouts. It’s a sporting offer; what do you say to it?”

“No, I don’t think I’ll close at present,” returned Frank; “I’ll take another few hours to think it over. Perhaps I’ll mention the matter to an old friend of mine, and take his advice.”

Staarbrucker broke in with some heat: “If you’re going to tell all your friends, you may as well give the show away at once. The thing will be all over ‘camp,’ and I wash my hands of it. Let me tell you, you’re doing a most imprudent thing.”

(Kimberley is still called by its early name of “camp” among old inhabitants.)

“Really,” said Frank, coolly enough, “the stone is mine at present, and I take the risk of holding it. I haven’t asked you to run yourself into any trouble on my account.”

“No,” returned the other, “but you are under my roof, and if it became known that I and my sister knew of this find, and of its concealment, we should be practically in the same hole as yourself. Now, my dear boy, take my advice, keep your discovery to yourself till we meet this evening, and let us settle to run this show together. You won’t get a better offer, I’m sure of it.”

“Understand, I promise nothing,” said Frank, who scarcely relished Staarbrucker’s persistency. “I’ll see you again to-night.”

After dinner that evening, the two men met again. Frank reopened the topic, which had meantime been engrossing Staarbrucker’s thoughts to the exclusion of all else.

Frank at once declared his intention of going to see the manager next day, to tell him of the find and take his advice.

Otto Staarbrucker made a gesture of intense annoyance. “You are never going to play such an infernal fool’s game as that, surely?” he burst out. “I’ve made you a liberal offer to prospect thoroughly at my own expense the place where that stone came from, on half shares. If you accept my offer, well and good. If you don’t, I shall simply tell your little story to the detective department, and see what they think of it. Think it well over. I’ll come and see you to-morrow morning, early.”

He turned on his heel, and went out of the house.

Frank had felt a little uncomfortable during Otto’s speech, but now he was angry—so indignant at the turn affairs had taken, and at the threat, idle though it was, held out to him, that he determined next day to quit the house and have done with the man altogether. He had never liked

him. True, there was Nina. Nina—so utterly different from her brother. He should be sorry indeed to leave her. She had a very warm corner in his heart. He would miss the pleasant evenings spent in her company. What should he do without her merry *camaraderie*, her kindly, unselfish ways, the near presence of her bewitching face, and her evident preference for his company? At that moment Nina entered the room. Frank looked, as he felt, embarrassed, and the girl saw it at once.

"What's the matter, Frank? You ought to look happy with that eight hundred pound diamond of yours; yet you don't. Aren't things going as you like, or what is it?"

"No," answered Frank, reddening, "things are not going quite right. Your brother has made me a proposition, which I don't quite see in his light, and we've rather fallen out about it. However, my tiff with Otto need make no difference between you and me. We haven't quarrelled, and I hope you won't let our old friendship be broken on that account."

"Indeed, no," returned Nina, "why should it? But I shall see Otto and talk to him; I can't have you two falling out about a wretched diamond, even although it is a big one. Since you came here, things have been so much pleasanter, and,"—the girl paused, and a flush came to her face, "well, we can't afford to quarrel, can we? Friends—real friends, I mean—are none too plentiful in Kimberley."

Nina spoke with a good deal of embarrassment for her, and a good deal of feeling, and she looked so sweet, such an air of tenderness and of sympathy shone in her eyes, that Frank was visibly touched.

"Nina," he said, "I'm really sorry about this affair. Perhaps in the morning it may blow over. I hope so. I have had something on my mind lately, which perhaps you can guess at, but which I won't enter upon just now. Meanwhile, don't say anything to your brother about this row. Let us see what happens to-morrow. Heaven knows I don't want to quarrel with any one belonging to you."

Early next morning, while Frank sat up in bed sipping his coffee and smoking a cigarette, the door opened, and Otto Staarbrucker entered the room. He had been thinking over matters a good deal during the night, and had made up his mind that somehow he and Frank must pull together over this diamond deal. His big, florid face was a trifle solemn, and he spoke quietly for him. But he found Frank as firm as ever against his utmost entreaties.

"I've thought it all out," Frank said; "I don't like your plan, and I mean to show our manager the stone to-day, and tell him all about it. I think it will be best in the long-run." He spoke quietly, but with a mind obviously quite made up.

The blood ran to Otto's head again; all his evil passions were getting the upper hand. "Frank, take care," he said. "You are in a dangerous position about this diamond. I don't think you quite realise it. Once more I warn you; don't play the fool. Make up your mind to come in with me and we'll make our fortunes over it."

Frank began to get angry too. "It's no use harping on that string further," he said, "I'm not coming in with you under any circumstances, and you may as well clearly understand it, and take no for an answer." Then, half throwing off the light bed-clothing, "I must get up and have breakfast."

Otto glared at him for a second or two before he spoke. "For the last time I ask you, are you coming in with me?"

There was clear threat in the deliberation of his tones, and Frank grew mad under it.

"Oh, go to the dickens," he burst out, "I've had enough of this. Clear out of it; I want to get up."

Otto stepped to the door. "I'm going now to the detective office; you'll find you've made a big mistake over this. By Heaven! I'll ruin you, you infernal, stuck-up English pup!"

His face was red with passion; he flung open the door, slammed it after him, and went out into the street.

Frank heard him go. "All idle bluff," he said to himself. "The scoundrel! He must have taken me for an idiot, I think. I've had enough of this, and shall clear out, bag and baggage, to-day. Things are getting too unpleasant."

He jumped up, poured the water into his bath, and began his ablutions.

Meanwhile, Otto Staarbrucker, raging with anger and malice, was striding along the shady side of the street, straight for the chief detective's house. Despite his tinge of Jewish blood, there was in his system a strong touch of the wild ungovernable temper, not seldom

found in the Teutonic race. It was not long before he had reached the detective's house, and announced himself. Carefully subduing, as far as possible, the outward manifestation of his malicious wrath, he informed the acute official, to whom he was, at his own request, shown, that his lodger, Mr Farnborough, was in possession of a valuable unregistered diamond, which he stated he had found in a stuffed crocodile's interior, or some equally improbable place. That to his own knowledge the stone had been unregistered for some days, although he had repeatedly urged Farnborough to declare it; that the whole surroundings of the case were, to his mind, very suspicious; and, finally, that, as he could not take the responsibility of such a position of affairs under his roof, he had come down to report the matter.

The detective pricked up his ears at the story, reflected for a few moments, and then said: "I suppose there is no mistake about this business, Mr Staarbrucker. It is, as you know, a very serious matter, and may mean the 'Breakwater.' Mr Farnborough has a good position in De Beers, and some strong friends, and it seems rather incredible (although we're never surprised at anything, where diamonds are in question) that he should have got himself into such a mess as you tell me."

"I am quite certain of what I tell you," replied Staarbrucker. "If you go up to my house now, you'll find Farnborough in his bedroom, and the stone's somewhere on him, or in his room. Don't lose time."

"Well," responded the detective, "I'll see to the matter at once. So long, Mr Staarbrucker!"

Mr Flecknoe, the shrewdest and most active diamond official in Kimberley, as was his wont, lost not an instant. He nosed the tainted gale of a quarry. In this case he was a little uncertain, it is true; but yet there was the tell-tale taint, the true diamond taint, and it must at once be followed. Mr Flecknoe ran very mute upon a trail, and in a few minutes he was at Staarbrucker's bungalow. Staarbrucker himself had, wisely perhaps, gone down to his store, there to await events. Vitriolic anger still ran hotly within him. He cared for nothing in the world, and was perfectly reckless, provided only that Frank Farnborough were involved in ruin, absolute and utter.

Mr Flecknoe knocked, as a matter of form, in a pleasant, friendly way at the open door of the cottage, and then walked straight in. He seemed to know his way very completely—there were few things in Kimberley that he did not know—and he went straight to Frank's bedroom, knocked again and entered. Frank was by this time out of his bath, and in the act of shaving. It cannot be denied that the detective's appearance, so soon after Staarbrucker's threat, rather staggered him, and he paled perceptibly. The meshes of the I.D.B. nets are terribly entangling, as Frank knew only too well, and I.D.B. laws are no matters for light jesting. Mr Flecknoe noted the change of colour.

(I.D.B., Illicit Diamond Buying, a highly criminal offence in South Africa.)

"Well, Mr Flecknoe," said the younger man, as cheerily as he could muster, for he knew the detective very well, "what can I do for you?"

"I've come about the diamond, Mr Farnborough; I suppose you can show title to it?"

"No, I can't show a title," replied Frank. "It came into my possession in a very astounding way, a day or two since, and I was going to tell the manager all about it to-day and 'declare' the stone."

Frank then proceeded to tell the detective shortly the whole story, and finally, the scene with Staarbrucker that morning.

Flecknoe listened patiently enough, and at the end said quietly: "I am afraid, Mr Farnborough, you have been a little rash. I shall have to ask you to come down to the office with me and explain further. Have you the stone?"

"Yes, here's the stone," replied Frank, producing the diamond from a little bag from under his pillow, and exhibiting it on his palm. "I won't hand it over to you at this moment, but I'll willingly do so at the office in presence of third parties. Just let me finish shaving, and I'll come along."

"Very well," said Mr Flecknoe, rather grimly, taking a chair. "I'll wait."

That evening, some astounding rumours concerning a De Beers official were afloat in Kimberley. Farnborough's absence from his usual place at the "Central" *table d'hôte* was noticed significantly, and next morning the whole town was made aware, by the daily paper, of some startling occurrences. Two days later it became known that Frank Farnborough had been sent for trial on a charge of I.D.B.; that his friend Staarbrucker had, with manifest reluctance, given important and telling evidence against him; that bail had been, for the present, refused, and that the

unfortunate young man, but twenty-four hours since a universal Kimberley favourite, well known at cricket, football, and other diversions, now lay in prison in imminent peril of some years' penal servitude at Capetown Breakwater. The town shook its head, said to itself, "Another good man gone wrong," instanced, conversationally over the bars of the "Transvaal," "Central," and other resorts, cases of the many promising young men who had gone under, victims of the poisonous fascination of the diamond, and went about its business.

But there was a certain small leaven of real friends, who refused utterly to believe in Frank's guilt. These busied themselves unweariedly in organising his defence, cabling to friends in England, collecting evidence, and doing all in their power to bring their favourite through one of the heaviest ordeals that a man may be confronted with.

The morning of the trial came at last. The season was now South African mid-winter; there was a clear blue sky over Kimberley, and the air was crisp, keen, and sparkling under the brilliant sunlight. The two judges and resident magistrate came into court, alert and sharp-set, and proceedings began. Frank was brought in for trial, looking white and harassed, yet determined.

As he came into court, and faced the crowded gathering of advocates, solicitors, witnesses, and spectators—for this was a *cause célèbre* in Kimberley—he was encouraged to see, here and there, the cheering nod and smile, and even the subdued wave of the hand, of many sympathising friends, black though the case looked against him. And he was fired, too, by the flame of indignation as he saw before him the big, florid face—now a trifle more florid even than usual from suppressed excitement—and the shining, upturned eyeglasses of his arch-enemy and lying betrayer, Otto Staarbrucker. Thank God! Nina was not in the assembly; she, at least, had no part or lot in this shameful scene. And yet, after what had passed, could Nina be trusted? Nina, with all her friendliness, her even tenderer feelings, was but the sister of Otto Staarbrucker. Her conduct ever since Frank's committal had been enigmatical; her brother, it was to be supposed, had guarded her safely, and, although she had been subpoenaed upon Frank's behalf, she had vouchsafed no evidence, nor given a sign of interest in her former friend's fate.

Counsel for the prosecution, a well-known official of Griqualand West, opened the case in his gravest and most impressive manner. The offence for which the prisoner was to be tried was, he said, although unhappily but too familiar to Kimberley people, one of the gravest in the Colony. One feature of this unhappy case was the position of the prisoner, who, up to the time of the alleged offence, had borne an unimpeachable character, and had been well known as one of the most popular young men in Kimberley. Possibly, this very popularity had furnished the reason for the crime, the cause of the downfall. Popularity, as most men knew, was, in Kimberley, an expensive luxury, and it would be shown that for some time past, Farnborough had moved and lived in a somewhat extravagant set. The learned counsel then proceeded to unfold with great skill the case for the prosecution. Mr Staarbrucker, an old friend of the prisoner, and a gentleman of absolutely unimpeachable testimony, would, with the greatest reluctance, prove that he had by chance found Farnborough in possession of a large and valuable stone, which the prisoner—apparently surprised in the act of admiring it—had alleged, in a confused way, to have been found—in what?—in the interior of a dried crocodile! One of the most painful features of this case would be the evidence of Miss Staarbrucker, who, though with even more reluctance than her brother, would corroborate in every detail the surprising of the prisoner in possession of the stolen diamond. He approached this part of the evidence with extreme delicacy; but, in the interests of justice, it would be necessary to show that a friendship of the closest possible nature, to put it in no tenderer light, had latterly sprung into existence between the prisoner and the young lady in question. Clearly then, no evidence could well be stronger than the testimony, wrung from Miss Staarbrucker with the greatest reluctance and the deepest pain, as to the finding of Farnborough in possession of the diamond, and of the lame and utterly incredible tale invented by him on the spur of the moment, when thus surprised by the brother and sister. The evidence of Mr and Miss Staarbrucker would be closely supported by that of Mr Flecknoe, the well-known Kimberley detective, who had made the arrest Mr Staarbrucker, it would be shown, had urged upon the prisoner for two entire days the absolute necessity of giving up and "declaring" the stone. Finally, certain grave suspicions had, chiefly from the demeanour of Farnborough, forced themselves into his mind. One more interview he had with the prisoner, and then, upon his again declining absolutely to

take the only safe and proper course open to him, Mr Staarbrucker had, for his own protection, proceeded to the detective department and himself informed the authorities of the presence of the stone. No man could have done more for his friend. He had risked his own and his sister's safety for two days—he could do no more. The prisoner's statement to the Staarbruckers and to Mr Flecknoe was that the crocodile skin came from the Mahalapsi River in North Bechuanaland, and that the stone must have been picked up and swallowed by the living reptile somewhere in those regions. He, counsel, need hardly dwell upon the wildness, the ludicrous impossibility, of such a theory. Three witnesses of the highest credibility and reputation, well known in Kimberley, and in the markets of London and Amsterdam, as experts in diamonds, would declare upon oath that the so-called "Mahalapsi Diamond"—the learned counsel rolled out the phrase with a fine flavour of humorous disdain—came, not from the far-off borders of the Bechuanaland river, but from the recesses of the De Beers mine—from Kimberley itself!

(It is perfectly well known in South Africa that diamond experts can at once pick out a particular stone and indicate its mine of origin. Practice has created perfection in this respect, and stones, whether from De Beers, Du Toit's Pan, Bultfontein, the Kimberley mine, or the Vaal River, can be at once identified.)

Here there was a visible "sensation" (that mysterious compound of shifting, whispering, and restless movement) in court. "Yes," continued the advocate, "the stone is beyond all shadow of a doubt a De Beers stone. It is not registered. The prisoner has no title to it; the diamond is a stolen diamond; and if, as I have little doubt, I shall succeed in proving my facts to you clearly and incontestably, the prisoner must take the consequences of his guilt. If indeed he be guilty, then let justice, strict but not vindictive justice, be done. Kimberley, in spite of the severest penalties, the most deterrent legislation, is still eaten up and honeycombed by the vile and illicit traffic in diamonds."

The advocate warmed to his peroration, and, as he was a holder of De Beers shares, he naturally felt what he said. The court was already becoming warm. He took out his handkerchief and wiped his brow. It is hot work delivering an important speech in South Africa. "In the name of Heaven, I say," he continued, striking the desk with his clenched fist, "let us have done with this vile and monstrous traffic, that renders our city—one of the foremost cities in South Africa—a byword and a laughing-stock among the nations."

Otto Staarbrucker was the first witness called. He gave his evidence with great clearness, and conveyed, with consummate skill, the impression of his extreme reluctance and pain at having thus brought his former friend into trouble. Only the natural instinct of self-protection, on behalf of himself and his sister, and the absolute refusal of the prisoner to "declare" the diamond, had induced him to take the extreme step of informing the authorities. One item, and that an important one, was added to the evidence tendered by him upon the occasion of the prisoner's committal. He had omitted then to state that on two evenings, shortly before his discovery of the diamond in Farnborough's possession, he had seen the prisoner, not far from the house, in earnest conversation with a native. The time was evening, and it was dark, and he was unable to positively identify the "boy." This evidence, as was suggested by counsel for the prosecution, tended manifestly to couple the prisoner with a native diamond thief, and thereby to tighten the damning chain of evidence now being wound about him. Staarbrucker suffered it to be extracted from him with an art altogether admirable. He had not mentioned the fact at the former hearing, thinking it of trifling importance. The prosecuting advocate, on the contrary, exhibited it with manifest care and parade, as a most important link in the case.

This piece of evidence, it may be at once stated, was a bit of pure and infamous invention on Otto's part, an afterthought suggested by seeing Frank once give an order to a native groom. In the hands of himself and a clever advocate it did its work.

In cross-examination, Otto Staarbrucker suffered very little at the hands of the defending advocate, skilful though the latter proved himself. The prisoner's theory (and indeed, perfectly true story) of his, Staarbrucker's, repeated offers of a prospecting partnership, and of his ultimate rage and vexation upon Frank's refusal, he treated with an amused, slightly contemptuous surprise. The man was a finished actor, and resisted all the assaults of counsel upon this and other points of the story with supreme skill and coolness. The touch of sympathy for the prisoner, too, was never lost sight of. Frank Farnborough, as he glared

fiercely at this facile villain, reeling off lie after lie with damning effrontery, felt powerless. What could he do or say against such a man? To express the burning indignation he felt, would be but to injure his case the more fatally. With difficulty indeed, while he felt his fingers tingling to be at the slanderer's throat, he restrained himself, as Otto's calm eye occasionally wandered to his, expressing, as plainly as might be for the benefit of all present, its sympathy and sorrow at the unfortunate situation of his former friend.

The next witness called was "Miss Nina Staarbrucker." Again there was a manifest sensation. Miss Staarbrucker was well known in Kimberley, and every eye turned in the direction of the door. There was some delay; at length a passage was made through the crowded court, and Nina appeared.

Before she steps into the witness-box it may be well to explain Nina's attitude and feelings from the morning of the day upon which Frank's arrest had been made.

After cooling down somewhat from the paroxysm of rage and revenge, which had impelled him to turn traitor upon his friend, and deliver him into the none too tender hands of the detective authorities, Otto Staarbrucker had suffered a strong revulsion of feeling. He regretted, chiefly for his own ease and comfort, the rash step he had taken, and would have given a good deal to retrace it. But the die was irrevocably cast; having chosen his path, he must perforce follow it.

He was well aware of Nina's friendship—fondness he might call it—for Frank; her sympathy would most certainly be enlisted actively on the young man's behalf immediately upon hearing of his position. At all hazards she must be kept quiet. Shortly before tiffin, he returned to the house. Calling Nina into the sitting-room, he shut the door and sat down.

"Nina," he said, "I have some bad news for you. Don't excite yourself, or make a fuss, but listen carefully and quietly to what I tell you, and then we'll put our heads together and see what is best to be done."

Nina turned pale. She feared some news of disaster to Otto's business, which latterly, as she knew, had been none too flourishing. Otto went on:

"I heard, late last night, from an unexpected quarter, that the detective people had an inkling of an unregistered diamond in this house. You know very well what that means. I went to Frank Farnborough both late last night and early this morning. I begged and entreated him, for his own sake, for all our sakes, to go at once first thing this morning and hand over and declare the stone. This he refused to do, and in a very insulting way. I had no other course open, for my own safety and yours, but to give the information myself. I am afraid matters have been complicated by the discovery that the diamond is a De Beers stone, undoubtedly stolen. Frank is in a temporary mess, but we shall be able to get him out of the difficulty somehow."

Nina had uttered a low cry of pain at the beginning of this speech. She knew too well the danger, and, as Otto went on, her heart seemed almost to stand still within her.

"Oh," she gasped, "what is to be done? What shall we do? I must see Frank at once. Surely an explanation from us both should be sufficient to clear him?" She rose as she spoke.

"My dear Nina; first of all we must do nothing rash. We shall no doubt be easily able to get Frank out of his trouble. The thing is, of course, absurd. He has been a little foolish—as indeed we all have—that is all. For the present you must leave every thing to me. I don't want to have your name dragged into the matter even for a day. If there is any serious trouble, you shall be consulted. Trust to me, and we shall make matters all right."

By one pretext or another, Otto managed to keep his sister quiet, and to allay her worst fears, until two days after, by which time Frank had been sent for trial and was safely in prison. Nina had meanwhile fruitlessly endeavoured to possess her soul in patience. When Otto had come in that evening and told her of the news, "Why was I not called in evidence?" she asked fiercely. "Surely I could have done something for Frank. You seem to me to take this matter—a matter of life and death—with very extraordinary coolness. I cannot imagine why you have not done more. You know Frank is as innocent as we are ourselves. We ought to have moved heaven and earth to save him this dreadful degradation. What—what can he think of me? I shall go to-morrow and see his solicitors and tell them the whole of the facts!"

Next morning, Nina read an account of the proceedings in the newspaper. It was plainly apparent, from the report of Otto's evidence, that there was something very wrong going on. She taxed her brother

with it.

“My dear Nina, be reasonable,” he said. “Of course Frank has got into a desperate mess. I was not going to give myself away, because I happened to know, innocently, that he had an unregistered diamond for two or three days in his possession. I have since found out that Frank knew a good deal more of the origin of that diamond than I gave him credit for, and it was my plain duty to protect myself.”

This was an absolute fabrication, and Nina more than half suspected it.

“But you were trying to make arrangements with Frank to prospect the very place the stone came from,” said the girl.

“I admit that, fully,” replied Otto calmly. “But I never then suspected that the diamond was stolen. I imagined it was innocently come by. It was foolish, I admit, and I am not quite such an idiot, after giving the information I did, to own now that I was prepared to go in for a speculation with Frank upon the idea of the diamond being an up-country one. Now, clearly understand me, not a word must be said upon this point, or you may involve me in just such a mess as Frank is in.”

Nina was fairly bewildered, and held her peace. Matters had taken such astounding turns. The diamond, it seemed after all, was a stolen one, and a De Beers stone to boot; she knew not what to think, or where to turn for guidance and information. And yet, something must be done to help Frank.

For the next few days, the girl moved about the house like a ghost, seldom speaking to her brother, except to give the barest replies to his scant remarks.

Several times she was in a mind to go straight to Frank’s solicitor and tell her version of the whole affair. But then, again, there were many objections to such a course. She would be received with great suspicion, as an informer from an enemy’s camp. After almost insufferable doubts and heartaches, Nina judged it best to wait until the day of trial, and then and there to give her version of the affair as she knew it. Surely the judge would give ear to a truthful and unprejudiced witness, anxious only to save an honest and cruelly misused man! Surely, surely Frank could and should be saved!

About a week before the trial, she was subpoenaed as a witness on behalf of both prosecution and defence, and finally, the day before the terrible event, Otto had a long interview with her upon the subject of her evidence. Her proof he himself had carefully prepared and corrected with the prosecuting solicitor; excusing his sister upon the ground of ill-health and nervousness, but guaranteeing her evidence at the trial. He now impressed upon her, with great solemnity and anxiety, the absolute necessity of her story coinciding precisely with his own. Nina listened in a stony silence and said almost nothing. Otto was not satisfied, and expressed himself so.

“Nina,” he said sharply, “let us clearly understand one another. My tale is simple enough, and after what has occurred—the finding of a stolen diamond and not an innocent stone from up-country—I cannot conceal from myself that Frank must be guilty. You must see this yourself. Don’t get me into a mess, by any dangerous sympathies, or affections, or feelings of that sort. Be the sensible, good sister you always have been, and, whatever you do, be careful; guard your tongue and brain in court, with the greatest watchfulness. Remember, my reputation—your brother’s reputation—is at stake, as well as Frank’s!”

Nina dared not trust herself to say much. Her soul sickened within her; but, for Frank’s sake, she must be careful. Her course on the morrow was fully made up. She replied to Otto: “I shall tell my story as simply and shortly as possible. In spite of what you say, I know, and you must know, that Frank is perfectly innocent. I know little about the matter, except seeing Frank with the diamond in his hand that night. You may be quite content. I shall not injure you in any way.”

Otto Staarbrucker was by no means satisfied with his sister’s answer, but it was the best he could get out of her. He could not prevent—it was too late now—her being called as a witness. Come what might, she was his sister and never would, never could, put him into danger.

At last the time had come. Nina made her way, with much difficulty, to the witness-box; steadily took her stand and was sworn. All Kimberley, as she knew, was looking intently and watching her every gesture. She had changed greatly in the last few weeks, and now looked, for her, thin and worn—almost ill. The usual warmth of her dark beauty was lacking. An ivory pallor overspread her face; but her glorious eyes were firm, open and determined, and honesty and truth, men well might see, were in her glance. She looked once quickly at the two judges and the magistrate

sitting with them, and then her eyes met Frank's, and for him a world of sympathy was in them. It did Frank good and he breathed more freely. Nina, at all events, was the Nina of old.

The prosecuting advocate opened the girl's evidence quietly, with the usual preliminaries. Then very gently he asked Nina if she was well acquainted with the prisoner. Her reply was, "Yes, very well acquainted."

"I suppose," continued counsel, "I may even call him a friend of yours?"

"Yes," replied Nina, "a very great friend."

"Without penetrating unduly into your private affairs and sympathies, Miss Staarbrucker," went on the advocate, "I will ask you to tell the court shortly what you actually saw on the night in question—the night, I mean, when the diamond was first seen by yourself and your brother."

Here was Nina's opportunity, and she took advantage of it. She told plainly, yet graphically, the story of that evening; she portrayed the amazed delight of Frank on the discovery of the stone, his free avowal of his find, the knife in his hand, the open crocodile on the table, the pebbles previously taken from the reptile's stomach. She went on with her story with only such pauses as the taking of the judge's notes required. Counsel, once or twice, attempted to pull her up; she was going much too fast and too far to please him; but the court allowed her to complete her narrative. She dealt with the next two days. Mr Farnborough had kept the diamond, it was true. He was puzzled to know what to do with it. He had, finally, announced his intention of giving it up and declaring it, and he would undoubtedly have done so, but for his arrest. The stone might have been stolen, or it might not, but Mr Farnborough, as all his friends knew, was absolutely incapable of stealing diamonds, or of buying diamonds, knowing them to be stolen. The stone came into his possession in a perfectly innocent manner, as she could and did testify on oath. As for her brother's suspicions, she could not answer for or understand them. For two days, he at all events had had none; she could not account for his sudden change. Spite of the judge's cautions, she concluded a breathless little harangue—for she had let herself go completely now—by expressing her emphatic belief in Frank's absolute innocence.

She had finished, and in her now deathly pale beauty was leaving the box. There were no further questions asked by counsel upon either side. Nina had said far too much for the one, and the advocate for the defence judged it wiser to leave such a runaway severely alone. Who knew in what direction she might turn next? He whispered regretfully to his solicitor: "If we had got hold of that girl, by George! we might have done some good with her—with a martingale and double bit on."

The senior judge, as Nina concluded, remarked blandly—for he had an eye for beauty—"I am afraid we have allowed you a good deal too much latitude. Miss Staarbrucker, and a great deal of what you have told the court is quite inadmissible as evidence."

As for Otto, he had stared with open mouth and fixed glare at his sister during her brief episode. He now heaved a deep breath of relief, as he watched the judges.

"Thank God!" he said to himself savagely under his breath, "she has overdone it, and spoilt her own game—the little fool!"

Nina moved to her seat and sat, now faint and dejected, watching with feverish eyes for the end.

The case for the prosecution was soon finished. Three witnesses, experts of well-known reputation and unimpeachable character, testified to the fact that the stone was a De Beers stone, and by no possibility any other. Evidence was then put in, proving conclusively that the diamond was unregistered.

Counsel for the defence had but a poor case, but he made the best of it. He dwelt upon the unimpeachable reputation of the prisoner, upon the utter improbability of his having stolen the diamond, or bought it, knowing it to be stolen. There was not a particle of direct evidence upon these points. The testimony of experts was never satisfactory. Their evidence in this case was mere matter of opinion. It was well known that the history of gold and gem finding exceeded in romance the wildest inspirations of novelists. The finding of the first diamond in South Africa was a case very much in point. Why should not the diamond have come from the Mahalapsi River with the other gravel in the belly of the dead crocodile? Mr Farnborough's friend, Mr Kentburn, would prove beyond doubt that he had brought the mummified crocodile from the Mahalapsi River, where he had picked it up. The greatest offence that could by any

possibility be brought home to his client was that he had this stone in his possession for two days without declaring it! That was an act of sheer inadvertence. The stone was not a Griqualand West stone, and it was a puzzling matter, with a young and inexperienced man, to know quite what to do with it. If the stone were, as he, counsel, contended, not a stone from the Cape districts at all, it was an arguable question whether the court had any rights or jurisdiction in this case whatever. Would it be contended that a person coming to South Africa, innocently, with a Brazilian or an Indian diamond in his possession, could be hauled off to prison, and thereafter sentenced for unlawful possession? Such a contention would be monstrous! The great diamond industry had in South Africa far too much power already—many men thought. Let them be careful in further stretching or adding to those powers—powers that reminded unbiassed people more of the worst days of the Star Chamber or the Inquisition, than of a modern community. Had the prisoner attempted to conceal the diamond? On the contrary, he had shown it eagerly to Mr Staarbrucker and his sister immediately he had found it. That was not the act of a guilty man!

These, and many other arguments, were employed by the defending advocate in a powerful and almost convincing speech. There were weak points, undoubtedly—fatally weak, many of the spectators thought them. These were avoided, or lightly skated over with consummate art. The advocate closed his speech with a touching appeal that a young, upright, and promising career might not be wrecked upon the vaguest of circumstantial evidence.

The speech was over; all the witnesses had been called, the addresses concluded. The afternoon was wearing on apace, and the court was accordingly adjourned; the prisoner was put back into jail again, and the crowded assemblage flocked into the outer air, to discuss hotly throughout the rest of the evening the many points of this singular and absorbing case.

Again, as usual in Kimberley at this season, the next morning broke clear and invigorating. All the world of the corrugated-iron city seemed, after breakfast, brisk, keen, and full of life as they went about their business. The Cape swallows flitted, and hawked, and played hither and thither in the bright atmosphere, or sat, looking sharply about them, upon the telegraph wires or housetops, preening their feathers and displaying their handsome, chestnut body colouring. The great market square was still full of waggons and long spans of oxen, and of native people, drawn from well-nigh every quarter of Southern Africa.

Out there in the sunlit market-place stood a man, whose strong brain was just now busily engaged in piecing together and puzzling out the patchwork of this extraordinary case. David Ayling, with his mighty voice, Scotch accent, oak-like frame, keen grey eyes, and vast iron-grey beard, was a periodical and excellently well-known Kimberley visitant. For years he had traded and hunted in the far interior. His reputation for courage, resource, and fair dealing was familiar to all men, and David’s name had for years been a household word from the Cape to the Zambesi. Periodically, the trader came down to Kimberley with his waggons and outfit, after a year or two spent in the distant interior. Yesterday morning he had come in, and in the afternoon and evening he seemed to hear upon men’s tongues nothing else than Frank Farnborough’s case, and the story of the Mahalapsi diamond. Now David had known Frank for some few years, and had taken a liking to him. Several times he had brought down-country small collections of skins, and trophies of the chase, got together at the young man’s suggestion. He had in his waggon, even now, some new and rare birds from the far-off Zambesi lands, and the two had had many a deal together. Frank’s unhappy plight at once took hold of the trader’s sympathies, and the Mahalapsi and crocodile episodes tended yet further to excite his interest. Certain suspicions had been growing in his mind. This morning, before breakfast, he had carefully read and re-read the newspaper report of the trial, and now, just before the court opened, he was waiting impatiently, with further developments busily evolving in his brain. There was a bigger crowd even than yesterday; the prisoner and counsel had come in; all waited anxiously for the end of the drama. In a few minutes the court entered, grave and self-possessed, and the leading judge began to arrange his notes.

At that moment, David Ayling, who had shouldered his way to the fore, stood up and addressed the court in his tremendous deep-chested tones, which penetrated easily to every corner of the chamber.

“Your Honours,” he said, “before you proceed further, I should like to lay one or two facts before you—not yet known in this case. They are

very important, and I think you should hear them in order that justice may be done, and perhaps an innocent man saved. I have only just come down from the Zambesi and never heard of this trial till late yesterday afternoon."

Two persons, as they listened to these words and looked at the strong, determined man uttering them, felt, they knew not why, instantly braced and strengthened, as if by a mighty tonic. They were Frank, the prisoner, hitherto despairing and out of heart, and Nina Staarbrucker, sitting at the back of the court, pale and trembling with miserable anticipations.

"You know me, your Honour, I think," went on David, in his deep Scotch voice.

"Yes, Mr Ayling, we know you, of course," answered the senior judge (every one in Kimberley knew David Ayling), "and I am, with my colleagues, anxious to get at all the evidence available, before delivering judgment. This is somewhat irregular, but, upon the whole, I think you had better be sworn and state what you have to say."

David went to the witness-box and was sworn. "This crocodile skin here," he went on, pointing to the skin, which was handed up to him, "I happen to know very well. I have examined it carefully before your lordship came in; it is small, and of rather peculiar shape, especially about the head. I remember that skin well, and can swear to it; there are not many like it knocking about. That skin was put on to my waggon in Kimberley seventeen months ago, and was carried by me to the Mahalapsi River."

The court had become intensely interested as the trader spoke, the judges and magistrate pricked up their ears and looked intently, first at the skin, then at David.

"Go on," said the judge.

"Well, your Honour," resumed David, "the skin was put on to my waggon in February of last year, by Sam Vesthreim, a Jew storekeeper, in a small way in Beaconsfield. There were some other odds and ends put on the waggon, little lots of goods, which I delivered in Barkly West. But the crocodile skin, Sam Vesthreim said, was a bit of a curio, and he particularly wanted it left at some friend's place farther up-country. I was in a hurry at the time, and forgot to take the name, but Sam said there was a label on the skin. The thing was pitched in with a lot of other stuff, and lay there for a long time! Lost sight of it till we had got to the Mahalapsi River, where the waggon was overturned in crossing. I offloaded, and the crocodile skin then turned up with the label off. We were heavily laden; the skin was, I thought, useless; we were going on to the Zambesi, and I had clean forgotten where the skin ought to have been left. It seemed a useless bit of gear, so I just pitched it away in the bushes, in the very spot, as near as I can make it, where Mr Farnborough's friend, Mr Kentburn, found it, nearly a year later, as he came down-country. That is one remarkable thing. I would like to add, my lord, that the Mahalapsi is a dry river, never running except in rains; and in all my experience, and I have passed it some scores of times, I never knew a crocodile up in that neighbourhood. The chances of there being any other crocodile skin in that sandy place and among those bushes, where Mr Kentburn found this one, would, I reckon, be something like a million (David pronounced it mullion) to one.

"There is one other point, your Honours. Long after Sam Vesthreim delivered that skin on my waggon, I read in the newspapers that he had been arrested for I.D.B.—only a few weeks after I saw him—and sentenced to a term of imprisonment. I have been puzzling mightily over this case, and I must say, the more I think of it, the more unaccountable seems to me the fact of Sam Vesthreim sending that dried crocodile skin up-country. If it had been down-country, or to England, I could understand it; but in this case it seems very much like sending coals to Newcastle. I never knew that Sam was in the I.D.B. trade till I saw his imprisonment in the paper. I think he had some peculiar object in getting that skin out of his house. And I cannot help thinking, your Honours, that Sam Vesthreim, if he could be found, could throw a good deal of light on this crocodile and diamond business. In fact, I'm sure of it. It's quite on the cards, to my thinking, that he put the diamond in that crocodile himself."

Some questions were put to the witness by counsel for both sides, without adding to or detracting from the narrative in any way. The court seemed a good deal impressed by David's story, as indeed did the whole of the crowded audience, who had breathlessly listened to its recital. Mr Flecknoe, the detective, was called forward. He informed the court that Sam Vesthreim was now at Cape Town undergoing a long term of imprisonment. He was no doubt at work on the Breakwater.

The senior judge was a man of decision, and he had quickly made up his mind. After a short whispered consultation with his colleagues, he spoke. “The turn this case has taken is so singular, and the evidence given by Mr Ayling has imported so new an aspect, that in the prisoner’s interest we are determined to have the matter sifted to the bottom. I will adjourn the court for a week, in order to secure the convict Vesthreim’s attendance here upon oath. Will this day week suit the convenience of all counsel in this case?”

Counsel intimated that the day of adjournment met their views, and once more the crowded court emptied. As David Ayling turned to leave, he caught Frank Farnborough’s eye. He gave him a bright reassuring nod, and a wink which did him a world of good. Altogether, Frank went back to another weary week’s confinement in far better spirits than he had been for many days. There was, at all events, some slight element of hope and explanation now. And it was refreshing to him as a draught of wine, to find such a friend as David Ayling fighting his battle so stoutly, so unexpectedly.

Nina Staarbrucker stole silently out of the court, only anxious to get home, and escape observation. There were many eyes upon her, but she heeded them not at all. Thank God! there seemed some ray of light for Frank; for herself, whether Frank came out triumphantly or no, there was no outlook, all seemed blackness and gloom. Otto’s part in this wretched business had made ruin of all her hopes. Her brother’s treachery had determined her upon seeking a career of her own; work of some sort—anywhere away from Kimberley—she must get, and get at once, so soon as the trial was over, and whatever its result.

Once more, in a week’s time, the court wore its former aspect, the characters were all marshalled for the final act. The new addition to the caste, Mr Samuel Vesthreim, a lively, little, dark-visaged Jew of low type, seemed on the best of terms with himself. For more than fifteen months he had been hard at it on Cape Town Breakwater, or road-scarping upon the breezy heights round the Cape peninsula—always, of course, under the escort of guards and the unpleasing supervision of loaded rifles—and really he needed a little rest and change. This trip to Kimberley was the very thing for him. What slight sense of shame he had ever possessed, had long since vanished under his recent hardening experiences; and as the little man looked round the crowded court, and saw the well-remembered faces of many a Kimberley acquaintance, it did his heart good. He positively beamed again—in a properly subdued manner, of course.

The senior judge remarked to the advocates, “Perhaps it will save the time of all if I put some questions to this witness myself.” The suggestion was gracefully received, and the judge turned to the little Jew, now attentive in the witness-box.

“Samuel, or Sam Vesthreim, you are a convict now undergoing a term of penal servitude at Cape Town, I think?”

“Yeth, my lord.”

“It may perhaps tend slightly to lessen or mitigate the extreme term of your imprisonment if I receive perfectly truthful and straightforward answers to the questions I am going to ask. Be very careful, therefore. Any future recommendation on my part to the authorities will depend upon yourself.”

“Yeth, my lord,” answered Sam, in his most serious manner—and he meant it.

“About seventeen months ago you were in business in Beaconsfield, were you not?”

“Yeth, my lord.”

“Do you know Mr Ayling here?” pointing to the trader.

“I do, my lord.”

“Do you remember intrusting Mr Ayling with some goods about that time to take up-country?”

“I do, my lord.”

“What were they?”

“There were three cases of groceries to be delivered in Barkly West, and a crocodile skin to be left at the place of a friend of mine near Zeerust, in Marico, Transvaal.”

“Take that skin in your hands.” The crocodile was handed up like a baby. “Do you recognise it?”

“Yeth, my lord, that is the identical skin, I believe, that I handed to Mr Ayling.”

“Now, be careful. Was there anything inside that crocodile skin?”

The little Jew saw now exactly which way the cat jumped, and he saw, too, that only the truth could be of use to him in the weary days and years yet to come on Cape Town Breakwater. The court was hushed by this time to an absolute silence. You could have heard a feather fall, almost.

"Well, my lord," the little Jew replied, "there *wath* something inside that crocodile. I had had a little bit of a speculation, and there was a big diamond inside the crocodile skin. I put it there myself. You see, my lord," he went on rapidly, "I had been doing one or two little transactions in stones, and I fancied there was something in the air, and so I put away that diamond and packed it off in the crocodile skin, safe, as I thought, to a friend in the Transvaal. It was a risk, but just at that time it was the only way out of the difficulty. I meant to have had an eye on the skin again, myself, a few days after, but I had a little difficulty with the police and I was prevented."

As Sam Vesthreim finished, Frank could have almost hugged him for the news he brought. An irrepressible murmur of relief ran round the crowded court, a murmur that the usher was for a minute or two powerless to prevent. The judge whispered to an attendant. The diamond was produced and handed to the Jew. "Do you recognise that stone?" said the judge.

"I do, my lord," answered Vesthreim emphatically. "That is the stone I put inside the crocodile. I could swear to it among a thousand." The little man's eyes gleamed pleasurably yet regretfully upon the gem as he spoke.

Here, then, was the mystery of the fatal, puzzling diamond cleared up. There were few more questions to ask. The little Jew frankly admitted that the stone was a De Beers stone, stolen by a native worker; there was little else to learn. Frank was a free man, practically, as he stood there, jaded and worn, yet at least triumphant. It was a dear triumph though, only snatched from disaster by the merest chance in the world—the coming of David Ayling. And the tortures, the agonies he had suffered in these last few weeks of suspense! He knew that nothing—the kindly congratulations of friends, the tenderer affection of relations, the hearty welcome of a well-nigh lost world—none of these good things could ever quite repay him, ever restore to him what he had lost.

In a very few minutes Frank had been discharged from custody. The judges in brief, sympathetic speeches, congratulated him on his triumphant issue from a very terrible ordeal, and trusted that the applause and increased respect of his fellow-citizens would in some slight degree make up to him for his undoubted sufferings.

Frank left the court, arm in arm with David Ayling, whom he could not sufficiently thank for his timely and strenuous assistance. A troop of friends escorted him to the Transvaal Hotel, where his health was drunk in the hearty Kimberley way, with innumerable congratulations. All this was very gratifying, as was the magnificent dinner which a number of friends gave to him a day or two later, at which half Kimberley assisted. But, for the present, Frank desired only to be left severely alone, with the quieter companionship of his few most intimate friends. He was still half stunned and very unwell; some weeks or months must elapse before he should be himself again.

One of his first inquiries was after Nina Staarbrucker, whom he wished sincerely to thank for her brave and honest defence of him at the trial. He learned, with a good deal of surprise, that she had left Kimberley on the morning after the trial, alone. He learned too, with less surprise, that Otto had quitted the town on urgent business in the Transvaal, and was not likely to return for some time. Beyond these bare facts, he could gather little or nothing of Nina and her whereabouts. He rather suspected she had gone to some relations near Cape Town, but for the present her address was undiscoverable.

Very shortly after the result of the trial, Frank Farnborough was granted by his company six months' leave of absence, with full pay in the meantime. It was felt that the young man had been injured cruelly by his imprisonment, and that some atonement was due to him; and the great Diamond Company he served, not to be behind in the generous shake of the hand, which all Kimberley was now anxious to extend to a hardly used man, was not slow in giving practical manifestation of a public sympathy. The stolen stone had been proved a De Beers diamond, and Frank, its unfortunate temporary owner, had not only been deprived of a valuable find, but for his innocent ownership had suffered terribly in a way which no honest man could ever possibly forget. In addition, therefore, to his grant of leave of absence and full salary, Frank was handed a cheque for five hundred pounds, being, roughly, a half share of

the value of the recovered gem.

Frank at once set out upon an expedition on which he had long fixed his mind—a hunting trip to the far interior. His preparations were soon made, and, a few weeks later, he was enjoying his fill of sport and adventure in the wild country north-east of the Transvaal, at that time a veldt swarming with great game.

After three months came the rains, and with the rains, fever—fever, too, of a very dangerous type. Frank directed his waggon for the Limpopo River, and, still battling with the pestilence, kept up his shooting so long as he had strength. At last came a time when his drugs were conquered, the fever held him in a death-like grip, and he lay in his kartel gaunt, emaciated, weak, almost in the last stage of the disease. The fever had beaten him, and he turned his face southward and trekked for civilisation.

The waggons—he had a friendly trader with him by this time—had crossed the Limpopo and outspanned one hot evening in a tiny Boer village, the most remote of the rude frontier settlements of the Transvaal Republic. Frank, now in a state of collapse, was lifted from his kartel and carried into the back room of the only store in the place—a rude wattle and daub shanty thatched with grass. He was delirious, and lay in high fever all that night. In the morning he seemed a trifle better, but not sensible of those about him. At twelve o'clock he was once more fast in the clutches of raging fever; his temperature ran up alarmingly; he rambled wildly in his talk; at this rate it seemed that life could not long support itself in so enfeebled a frame.

Towards sundown, the fever had left him again; he lay in a state of absolute exhaustion, and presently fell into a gentle sleep. The trader, who had tended him day and night for a week, now absolutely wearied out, sought his own waggon and went to sleep. The storekeeper had retired, only a young woman, passing through the place, a governess on her way to some Dutchman's farm, watched by the sick man's bed.

It was about an hour after midnight, the African dawn had not yet come, but the solitary candle shed a fainter light; a cock crew, the air seemed to become suddenly more chill. The woman rose from her chair, fetched a light kaross (a fur cloak or rug) from the store, and spread it gently over the sick man's bed. Then she lifted his head—it was a heavy task—and administered some brandy and beef-tea. Again the young man slept, or lay in torpor. Presently the girl took his hand in her right, then, sitting close to his bedside, she, with her left, gently stroked his brow and hair. A sob escaped her. She kissed the listless, wasted hand; then with a little cry she half rose, bent herself softly and kissed tenderly, several times, the brow and the hollow, wasted cheek of the fever-stricken man. As she did so, tears escaped from her eyes and fell gently, all unheeded, upon Frank's face and pillow.

"Oh, my love, my love!" cried the girl, in a sobbing whisper, "to think that never again can I speak to you, take your hand in mine! To think that I, who would have died for you, am now ashamed as I touch you—ashamed for the vile wrong that was done to you in those miserable days. My love, my darling, I must now kiss you like a thief. Our ways are apart, and the journey—my God—is so long."

Once more, leaning over the still figure, she kissed Frank's brow, and then, relapsing into her chair, cried silently for a while—a spasmodic sob now and again evincing the bitter struggle within her. The cold grey of morning came, and still she sat by the bedside, watching intently, unweariedly, each change of the sick man's position, every flicker of the tired eyes.

During the long hours of the two next days, Frank lay for the most part in a torpor of weakness. The fever had left him; it was now a struggle between death and the balance of strength left to a vigorous constitution after such a bout. Save for an hour or so at a time, Nina had never left his side. Hers was the gentle hand that turned the pillows, shifted the cotton Kaffir blankets that formed the bedding, gave the required nourishment, and administered the medicine. On the evening of the fourth day, there were faint symptoms of recovery; the weakened man seemed visibly stronger. Once or twice he had feebly opened his eyes and looked about him—apparently without recognition of those at hand.

It was in the middle of this night that Frank really became conscious. He had taken some nourishment, and after long lying in a state betwixt sleep and stupor, he awoke to feel a tender stroking of his hand. Presently his brow was touched lightly by soft lips. It reminded him of his mother in years gone by. Frank was much too weak to be surprised at anything, but he opened his eyes and looked about him. It was not his mother's face that he saw, as he had dreamily half expected, but the face

of one he had come to know almost as well.

Close by him stood Nina Staarbrucker, much more worn, much graver, much changed from the sweet, merry, piquant girl he had known so well at Kimberley. But the dark friendly eyes—very loving, yet sad and beseeching, it seemed to him dimly—of the lost days, were still there for him.

Frank opened his parched lips and in a husky voice whispered, “Nina?”

“Yes,” said the sweet, clear voice he remembered so well, “I am here, nursing you. You must not talk. No, not a word,” as he essayed to speak again, “or you will undo all the good that has been done. Rest, my darling (I can’t help saying it,” she said to herself; “it will do no harm, and he will never hear it again from my lips); sleep again, and you will soon be stronger.”

Frank was still supremely weak, and the very presence of the girl seemed to bring peace and repose to his senses. He smiled—closed his eyes again, and slept soundly far into the next day.

That was the last he ever saw of Nina Staarbrucker. She had vanished, and although Frank, as he grew from convalescence to strength, made many inquiries as the months went by, he could never succeed in gaining satisfactory tidings of her. He once heard that she had been seen in Delagoa Bay, that was all. Whether in the years to come they will ever meet again, time and the fates alone can say. It seems scarcely probable. Africa is so vast, and nurses safely within her bosom the secret of many a lost career.

Chapter Ten.
A Tragedy of the Veldt.

The circumstances attending the fate of Leonard Strangeways were very extraordinary, and the three years of silence and doubt that followed the discovery of his body in the veldt seemed but to enhance among white men in the Bechuanaland Protectorate the mystery of that most singular affair. The whole tragedy, from the very remoteness of the place in which it was enacted, was little known south of the Orange River. I have, therefore, thought it worth while to rescue from complete oblivion the grim, strange, and unwonted circumstances of that dark business.

Leonard Strangeways was, in the year 1890, when I first met him, one of the pioneers who entered Mashonaland. He was one of those devil-may-care, reckless, wandering fellows, so many of whom are to be found upon the frontiers of civilisation in Southern Africa. I first saw him, outspanned at breakfast, near Palla Camp on the Crocodile River, with a number of other men, going into Mashonaland upon the same errand as himself. He was the life and soul of the party, and was superintending the "bossing-up" of the meal. For the next week our waggons moved on together and I saw a good deal of Strangeways. He was a tall, handsome fellow of thirty or thirty-one. He seemed to be a general favourite with his party—mainly, I imagine, because he was one of those capable men who excel in everything they undertake. He shot most of the francolins and other feathered game for the half-dozen chums he was travelling with; he had not been long in South Africa, and yet he seemed to comprehend the ways of the native servants and the methods of travel exceedingly well; he evidently understood horses thoroughly, and personally superintended the score of nags that were travelling up with the waggons. He could inspan and outspan oxen, and was already master of other useful veldt wrinkles, which usually take some time to acquire. He could paint remarkably well, I have seen him, in a short hour's work with water-colours, turn out a very charming sketch of African scenery. And at night, by the camp fire, Strangeways' banjo and his deep, rich voice were in inevitable request. It is not judged well to inquire too closely into the antecedents of men in the South African interior. I gathered, during the week of travel alongside of Strangeways, that he had led a wandering life for some years, and had recently come across to the Cape from Australia, where he had done little good for himself.

I parted from Strangeways and his fellow pioneers at Palachwe, and saw no more of him for rather more than a twelve-month, when I met him coming down-country, at Boatlanama, a water on the desert road, between Khama's old town of Shoshong and Molepolole. In latter days this was not the usual route to and from Palachwe and Matabeleland, but having been several times by the Crocodile road, I happened to have taken the more westerly route for a change. On waking up next morning, after a hard and distressing trek from the nearest water in this thirsty country—Lopepe—I was surprised to see another waggon outspanned almost alongside. Still more surprised was I to find one of its two occupants Leonard Strangeways, also with a fellow pioneer travelling down-country. Our greeting was a hearty one, and indeed, I, for my part, was exceedingly well pleased to have encountered once more so genial and pleasant an acquaintance.

Strangeways had passed a year in Mashonaland, and, like most of the other Mashonalanders of that distressful season, '90-'91, had had some pretty tough experiences. However, he had weathered the storm, had sold his pioneer farm, and the options over a number of mining properties, for cash at a good price, and was now going down to Cape Town to enjoy himself, and, as he expressed it, to "blow some of the pieces." He was in the highest spirits. He had trekked down by this more westerly route for the purpose of getting some shooting. He was a keen sportsman, and was anxious as he came down-country to secure the heads of the gemsbok and hartebeest, two large desert-loving antelopes, not found in Mashonaland. He had succeeded in bagging two gemsbok to the westward of Lopepe, and, after breakfast, was riding out in search of hartebeest.

I had had a hard ride in the sun on the day preceding, and my horse was knocked up. I was not inclined to accompany Strangeways on his quest, therefore I did not see him again till late in the evening, when he returned with a native hunter. It was an hour or two after dark when they came up to the camp fire, where we were drinking our coffee and enjoying a quiet smoke. He rode into the cheerful blaze and dismounted.

He had upon his saddle-bow the head and horns of a fine hartebeest bull, the trophy he had coveted, and behind were the skin and a good quantity of meat from the same antelope. “There!” said he, flinging down the head triumphantly, “that’s been a devilish tough customer to bring to bag, but we did the trick after all. If it hadn’t been for Marati, here,” jerking his head at a grinning Bechuana boy, “we should have lost the buck. We followed the blood spoor for five mortal hours, and but for Marati I should have given it up as a bad job. By Jove! I’m fairly beat.”

“Your supper’s in the pot,” I replied, “and there’s enough coffee to float you. Sit down and the boy will bring you a plate and cup. Put your coat on first though, it’s getting chilly.”

As I lay on my rug, Strangeways stood above me in his flannel shirt sleeves, a fine figure of a man, in the flickering blaze. Suddenly his eye caught the white tent of another waggon, which had come in during the afternoon, and was on its way up-country. “Hallo!” he said, “what’s this?”

“Oh, don’t bother about it,” I replied, “they are a mining party going up to Mashonaland. They won’t interest you. Sit down and have your supper.”

But Strangeways was curious; I often think that if he had been less curious he would have been alive at this moment. The third waggon stood about sixty yards away.

“Get my supper ready,” he said, “I’ll be back in a moment,” and walked across to the other camp fire.

I directed his native cook-boy to bring plates and a cup, and have all in readiness for his master’s supper. In less than three minutes Strangeways strode up to the fire again. As he approached, he looked furtively behind him I never saw a man so utterly changed within the space of three short minutes. His face was ghastly pale, he trembled visibly. He said not a single word, but went straight to his horse, which was being off-saddled. He picked up the saddle again, clapped it on the poor tired brute’s back, and to my intense astonishment put his foot in the stirrup and mounted.

“Strangeways,” I said, “what in Heaven’s name are you going to do. Come and sit down and let the nag alone.”

He turned on me a white, terror-stricken face.

“Sh! for God’s sake,” was all he said, under his breath. One glance he threw towards that other camp fire, and then, kicking his horse with the spur, he passed behind our two waggons and rode straight out into the gross darkness of the veldt.

I was so astounded at this extraordinary proceeding, that I confess I let Strangeways ride away without any further protest than the few words I had uttered. I now jumped to my feet and followed in the direction he had taken. I saw and heard nothing. I was about to shout his name, but I had been so impressed with the terror depicted on his face, that I forebore to cry out after him. Somehow, it struck me that he wanted silence. I had always found him a most sensible, level-headed fellow. He had some reason undoubtedly for this sudden fear and strange departure. I waited by the fireside for half an hour, all sorts of doubts and hypotheses thronging my brain. What could it mean? Here was a man, tired, worn-out and hungry, and, above all, desperately thirsty, after a hard day’s hunting and eleven hours spent in the saddle under a burning sun, suddenly flying off from his supper, his rest, and the pleasant camp fire, mounting his tired horse and riding straight out into the veldt with some strong terror gripping at his heart. And such a veldt as it was here. Sheer desert, except for a scanty pit of foul water now and again at long intervals. He could not be mad. He was sane as a judge before he visited the other camp fire; what in God’s name could it mean? I worried my brain for half an hour, and then gave it up. I now roused Strangeways’ pioneer comrade, who had retired early and had been asleep all this time, and talked the thing over with him. We could find no solution.

The other camp fire seemed to contain the only possible explanation of this strange event. We walked across to it. I had previously spoken to these wayfarers, who consisted of a mining engineer and three prospectors. The engineer received us civilly. He inquired in a bantering way after our friend, who, he averred, had come across, stared like a stuck pig for a moment, and then suddenly turned on his heel and vanished. Two of his prospectors, one a Cornishman, the other a Yankee, sat by the fire, smoking. They were decent, quiet, civil-spoken men. The third, an Italian, had, they informed me, turned into his waggon and gone to sleep. We had a quarter of an hour’s chat, and then, finding that

we could make nothing of the mystery over here, we went back to our own fire again. We had not thought it necessary to enlighten the mining party as to Strangeways' sudden departure; nor, indeed, did they manifest any further interest in him. They had caught but a fleeting glimpse of his face, and then, as they said, he had turned and bolted.

Halton, Strangeways' comrade, and I returned to our camp fire, waited up till eleven o'clock—a late hour for the veldt—and then, seeing that nothing further was to be done that night, we turned in, tired enough, and slept soundly.

I was awake at six next morning. My native boy brought me, as usual, my coffee.

"Baas," he said, "did Baas know that a man from the other waggon came over here in the night with a lantern and looked in Baas's waggon and into the other waggon too." No, I knew nothing of this, and I told the boy so. I looked into Strangeways' waggon. Halton was just getting up. He, too, had slept heavily, and had neither seen nor heard of any one's approach during the night.

We swallowed our coffee and ate some breakfast, debating with serious faces what step we were to take next. While we sat by the embers of the overnight fire thus employed, the engineer from the other camp came across. He had fresh food for bewilderment. His Italian prospector was missing. His native driver averred that Rinaldi had risen before dawn, taken some food and a water bottle, saddled a horse, and just as daylight came left the camp. He came, the man said, in our direction, and then disappeared behind the waggons and into the veldt.

The mystery was clearly thickening. Halton and I now took the engineer into our confidence, and told him of the strange occurrence of the evening before. We finished breakfast, and then decided to proceed at once with the adventure. First we called up a first-rate Bakalahari hunter, who had been for some time attached to my camp, and was an extraordinarily skilful spoorer. After a cup of coffee and a pinch or two of snuff, both inestimable luxuries to a poor, despised desert man, he quickly got to work. His narrative lay there in the sand before him, as clear to his bleared, half-shut eyes as God's daylight itself.

First he traced the progress of Strangeways. After some little trouble about the camp, where the trail was much mingled with others, he presently got the spoor away into the bush, to the west of the outspan. Shortly, with a cluck of the tongue, the native drew our attention to other marks. Here, he said, Strangeways' trail had been joined by that of another, a man walking with his horse. The man, said the Bakalahari, was following the spoor of Strangeways, and had got off his horse for the purpose. As the ground became clearer and the country more open, this man had mounted and followed more quickly upon the trail. At times, the tale was plain enough even to the eyes of us Europeans.

Well, to make a long story short, we followed the two spoors all through that long hot day. We had water and food with us, and we meant to see the thing out. At first, in the darkness, Strangeways had evidently wandered a good deal from the straight line, but as light had come, he had travelled due west, and then after mid-day struck in a southerly direction. I guessed his purpose, to seek the road and water south of Boatlanama. Towards sundown, when we had ridden between thirty and forty miles, we saw by the trail that Strangeways' horse was failing. The wonder was that after two days of such work it had stood up so long. Night fell before we could arrive at any solution of the mystery. We made a good fire, drank some water, ate some supper, and then lay down upon the dry earth and slept. At earliest daylight we were moving again. We followed the two spoors for something more than an hour, and then, rather suddenly, in some thickish bush, came upon a sight that smote us all with horror. A cloud of vultures fluttered heavily from the dead body of Strangeways' horse, which lay stretched upon the sand, now nearly devoid of what flesh it had once carried upon its bones. Under a pile of thorns, close by, was the body of Strangeways himself.

The body, for some extraordinary reason, which I was then not able to fathom, had been carefully protected by these thorn branches, and the vultures had not been able to accomplish their foul work upon it. We pulled away the thorns, and examined the poor dead body; it was marked by two bullet wounds, one in the right shoulder, the other, fired at close quarters, through the head. The flannel shirt, in which Strangeways had ridden, had been torn roughly off the upper part of the body, and upon the broad chest had been slashed, with the point of a sharp knife, these letters, MARIA. The blood, now dark and coagulate, had run a little, but there was not the least difficulty in making out the name. There were traces of the Italian and his horse about the spot, and then the

murderer's spoor led away northward.

Even with this sad and infernal discovery before us we were no nearer the elucidation of this strange mystery. Revenge seemed to be at the bottom of it, but the reason of that revenge was absolutely hidden from us. We held a long council on the body, took what few trifles there were upon it, Strangeways' watch, his hunting belt and knife, spurs, and a silver bangle upon the wrist. Then we buried him in that desolate spot. Our horses were already suffering from lack of water. It was madness to think of following the Italian, who would probably himself perish of thirst. We turned for our waggons, therefore, and with great difficulty reached them late that night. The next thing to do was to report the murder and set the Border Police upon the affair. This was done as speedily as possible. I remained with Halton for the space of a month in the Bechuanaland Protectorate, hoping to hear of the Italian's capture. Nothing whatever was heard of him, however, and I resumed my journey south, and returned to Europe.

For three years I heard—although I made repeated inquiries, and read each week the few newspapers of Bechuanaland and Rhodesia—not a whisper that would elucidate this incomprehensible tragedy. Then, as I travelled once more through Bechuanaland, the cloud suddenly lifted and the mystery stood revealed.

Upon reaching Vryburg, the capital of British Bechuanaland, I found the little town in a state of intense excitement. The Italian, Rinaldi, had been captured, after three years of a wandering life, far up-country; in a trader's store, near the Zambesi. He had been arrested and brought down for trial. Halton and other witnesses had been procured from Matabeleland to give evidence against him. But Rinaldi had not attempted to escape the consequences of his crime; on the contrary, he gloried in it, and had given in his broken English, in open court, his version of the whole miserable business and its origin. Briefly condensed, this was his tale.

His name, he said, was Guiseppe Rinaldi, and he was a native of Sardinia. Nine years before, he had met Strangeways, who was then an artist wandering through Sardinia. Rinaldi himself was deeply attached to Maria Poroni, a beautiful girl of his village, whom he hoped to marry. But he had to be away at his work at the lead mines, thirty miles off, and only saw her occasionally. Strangeways came on the scene, became acquainted with Maria, had grown quickly infatuated with her, and had persuaded her to leave the island with him. After living some months with her in various parts of Italy, he left her with a certain sum of money in Rome, and finally abandoned her. The poor girl crept back home with a child, and died, a broken woman, two years later. Rinaldi had known Strangeways and swore to take a terrible revenge if occasion ever offered. But he had no money. Tired of poverty in Sardinia, he went out to Argentina and from there drifted to South Africa. It was by the merest accident in the world that he had obtained employment as a miner with the outfit going up from Cape Town to Mashonaland. And it was still more of an accident that he had seen Strangeways' face at the camp fire that night at Boatlanama. The rest is briefly told. He had crept across in the darkness and found that Strangeways was not in his waggon. At earliest dawn he had taken a horse, provisions, water, and a rifle, and followed his spoor into the desert. Thanks to his life in the mountains of Sardinia, and his experience of cattle ranching in the Argentine, he was an expert tracker, and had no difficulty in following the trail. He had come up with Strangeways, whose horse had foundered, just at sundown. Strangeways fired a shot, which grazed Rinaldi's ear. Rinaldi's first bullet brought his victim down and he had then finished him. He had scored the name MARIA upon the dead man's chest, covered him with thorns that the mark of his vengeance might not be obliterated by the wild beasts, and left him. He had then escaped north and wandered to the Zambesi.

Rinaldi's own end was a bloody one. He broke prison the night before his execution was to take place, was followed by mounted police into the Kalahari, and, as he refused to surrender, was shot dead in the scuffle that ensued.

To me, the strangest part of this tragedy lies in the fact that Strangeways' death came to him, apparently, by the merest accident in the world. It is absolutely certain that Rinaldi had no knowledge whatever—until he set eyes on him at the camp fire that night—of Strangeways' presence in Africa. Was it, indeed, pure chance—or was it, in truth, the subtle machinery of a remorseless fate—that induced him to take the desert road south, by Boatlanama? It was a still stranger accident—apparently—by which the mining party took the wrong route

north, and trekked by the same westerly road upon which the two men had met. Accident—or inexorable retribution? That is a question I often ask myself.

Chapter Eleven.
Queen’s Service.

It was nearly four o’clock in the afternoon of a desperately hot October day, 1899, in British Bechuanaland. The rains, although close at hand, had not yet fallen. For the last twenty-four hours the weather had been of that peculiarly oppressive kind, familiar in South Africa towards the end of the dry season. The wind came from the heated north-west, laden with the parched breath of a thousand miles of sun-scorched plains. Yet, strangely enough, around the little English farmstead on the Setlagoli River, the low forests of camelthorn acacia were, although untouched by moisture, already putting forth greenery and fresh leafage—even at this dire time of drought—against the coming of the rains.

May Felton, a pleasant looking, brown-eyed girl of nineteen, came out on the shadier side of the square, low, grass-thatched house, and stood beneath the shelter of the veranda, her face held up a little towards the air. She had come out for the third time within the hour to see if some faint breath of fresher atmosphere might not be detected towards sundown from out of that withering north-west breeze. Alas, there was none! It meant, then, another night of stifling discomfort within doors. The climate of this part of Bechuanaland is normally so clear, so brilliant, and so exhilarating, save for the few weeks before the summer rains, that this period of heat seems doubly trying to the settlers. May Felton sighed, and looked around. She had a kettle on the fire within doors, preparing against afternoon tea—a pleasant thought in this depressing hour—and, meanwhile, looked about her for a few minutes. The place seemed very dull. Her father and two brothers had ridden off three days since, driving before them all their cattle and goats, with the intention of placing the stock as far as possible out of the reach of the Transvaal and Free State Boers, just then raiding and free-booting across the border. Vryburg, some fifty miles south, was practically defenceless, and lay, too, in the midst of a Dutch farming population, already more than disaffected towards the British Government. Mafeking, forty or fifty miles to the north, thanks to Baden-Powell’s energy and military talent, was in a good state of defence, but was already practically invested by a strong Boer Commando.

May’s father, John Felton, was well known and liked by many of the Dutch farmers on either side of the border. But in the time of war and stress, which he saw close upon him, he knew well enough that friendly feelings would speedily give place to racial hatred, plunder, and marauding. He had, therefore, carried off all his stock, with the intention of putting them as far as possible beyond the grasp of raiding Dutchmen, at a remote run on the edge of the Kalahari, nearly a hundred miles away to the westward. This ranch belonged to an English Afrikander friend of his, and he had every hope that there his cattle—a goodly herd—and some hundreds of goats might be safe.

May looked round rather disconsolately upon the hot quiet landscape. The acacia groves which girdled in the little homestead, behind the dry river-bed, showed small signs of life. A grotesque hornbill sat in a tree near, gasping under the heat, as these birds do, occasionally opening its huge bill, crying “toc-toc,” in a curious yelping tone, opening its wings restlessly as if for air, and lowering its head. In a bush, on the left hand, a beautiful crimson-breasted shrike occasionally uttered a clear ringing note. Two hundred yards away, a scattered troop of wild guinea-fowl, returning to the last remaining pool in the now parched and sandy river-bed, after a day of digging for bulbs in the woodlands, were calling to one another, with harsh metallic notes, “Come back! Come back! Come back!”

May looked at the absurd hornbill, with its long yellow beak, and smiled faintly. Just at that moment it seemed almost as much exertion as she felt capable of in the withering heat. She leaned against one of the posts supporting the veranda, her slim, shapely form expressing in its listless attitude the relaxation of that melancholy hour. For two or three minutes she stood thus listlessly, then, remembering the kettle boiling within doors, bestirred herself and turned away. Just at that moment there came a faint cry from among the camelthorn trees on the right of the homestead. It sounded strangely like a man’s voice. She stood listening intently. In ten seconds the cry came again; this time it seemed more faint.

The girl threw off her langour upon the instant. “Seleti!” she cried, in a clear ringing voice, “Seleti, *Tlokwaan*!” (come here).

In two minutes Seleti, a Bechuana youth, clad in a ragged flannel shirt and a pair of his master's discarded riding breeches, came shuffling round. She spoke to him in Sechuana.

"Seleti," she said, "I heard some one calling in the trees there not very far away. Go and look. Straight beyond that biggest tree there!"

The lad went off, walked two hundred yards into the woodland, becoming lost amid the timber, and then his voice sounded back towards the house.

"Missie May! Missie May! Here is Engelsman. Come quick." Snatching up a broad-brimmed straw hat from within doors, the girl went quickly in Seleti's direction. In less than three minutes she was by his side, among the trees and tall grass, leaning over the body of a young sunburnt Englishman, which the Bechuana supported in his arms. The man had no coat on, and May Felton saw at once, from the blood-stained flannel shirt, that he was badly wounded, he looked just now so lifeless that he might well be dead; yet the girl remembered that only a few minutes before she had heard him call. She had plenty of courage, and, young as she was, in that rough farming life amid the wilderness she was accustomed, as a matter of course, to many things that a girl at home would shrink from.

As she looked intently at the inert figure before her, she noted that the man still breathed; once he groaned very softly. There was nothing for it but to pick him up and carry him to the house. It was a heavy task, but with May carrying him by the legs and Seleti supporting him under the arms, they managed, with great exertion, to get him to the stoep.

There they laid him down for a moment, while May ran indoors and fetched out her mother.

As they came out to the stoep, bearing brandy and water, it was apparent that the young man's wound had broken out afresh. Blood was slowly soaking through the already blood-soddened shirt, and silently forming a pool on the stone flooring. There was no time to be lost. They got him to bed and washed and bound up his wound. A bullet had gone right through the shoulder, making clear ingress and egress, but cutting some vein in its passage, and he had lost evidently quite as much blood as he could afford. Then they gave him brandy and water, and presently he came round from his long faint. When he had had some soup and a little bread later on, he was able to tell them something of his tale.

His name was James Harlow. He was a Volunteer under Lieutenant Nesbitt, in an expedition in an armoured train, which had been turned over and shelled at Kraaipan, on the border, some twenty miles away. After keeping the attacking Boers at bay for several hours, things began to look queer for the small British party. Nesbitt and a number of his men were wounded, the Dutch were creeping up.

Nesbitt had a letter which he wanted delivered somehow at Vryburg. It was urgent, and he gave it to Harlow to get away with and carry somehow to its destination. Harlow crept away through the grass, but, just as he thought he was getting out of range, and raised himself for a moment to reconnoitre, a bullet pierced his left shoulder and laid him in the dust. He rose presently and crawled on. Out of sight of the Boer fighting men, he had got to his feet, and, notwithstanding his wound, walked westward. A friendly native had given him a lift for twelve or fourteen miles on a led horse, but, towards sundown, having sighted three or four mounted men, had become alarmed and abandoned him. After a miserable night, he had crept about—sometimes walking feebly, sometimes moving on hands and knees—all that blazing day, trying to find some house or farmstead. No water or food had touched his lips. Towards evening, just as he had given up all hope, and sunk down despairingly, he had set eyes on the Feltons' homestead through the trees. His last remaining strength was ebbing from him—his consciousness failing; but he raised two feeble shouts and then fell senseless. The rest May and her mother knew.

"And now," said the poor fellow, with a painful grin at his own weakness, "how am I to get my dispatch down to Vryburg? Somehow Mr Tillard, the resident magistrate there, must have that letter by to-morrow evening. I know it's important I doubt if I can ride to-morrow. What's to be done?"

"Certainly you can't ride to-morrow; you couldn't sit a horse if you tried; so don't think about it," said May, decidedly. "I scarcely know what's to be done. Our two native boys are poor, trembling creatures, scared at the mention of a Boer. I'll go myself. It's barely fifty miles from here, and I know the road well."

"My dear May," put in her mother. "You couldn't think of such a thing.

Why you might be stopped by Boers. It's quite possible they will be holding the old road by this time. I can't have you go, really!"

"My dear mother," returned the girl, with a bright look in her dancing brown eyes. "I *must* go. This letter has to be delivered. It is probably of the greatest importance, and may even mean the safety of Vryburg. You and father pride yourselves on being loyal subjects of the Queen. You wouldn't have me hold back from so small a piece of service. Why I can ride the distance easily on 'Rocket' in eight hours, allowing for off-saddles."

May was a girl accustomed to having her own way in the Feltons' household, and so, with a sigh and a protest, her mother gave in and the thing was settled.

At sunrise next morning, after looking in on the wounded trooper, who had had a feverish night, May, kissing her mother tenderly, mounted her chestnut pony and rode off. The precious dispatch, stained with Harlow's blood, she had neatly sewn up in the inner part of her stays. She carried with her in her saddle-bag some sandwiches, another letter, requesting the Vryburg doctor to come up and see the wounded trooper, and a water bottle full of limejuice and water hung from her saddle. Pulling her broad-brimmed felt hat over her eyes, the girl cantered off and was soon lost to view amid the woodlands.

She struck, in the first instance, by a rough track across country, for the old post-road, running south from Setlagoli to Vryburg. Her good pony sped along with free elastic strides, and at a steady pace they reeled off mile after mile. It was hot, but not so oppressive as the day before. Presently, cutting the old road, they pushed steadily on beneath that aching void of sky above them—a sky of brass with just a suspicion of palest blue far up in the zenith. Fifteen miles were traversed and they stood at Jackal's Pan, a lonely little oasis on the road, where they could off-saddle, and the horse could be watered.

Half an hour's rest, and then on again. The blazing ride now became infinitely monotonous. From Jackal's Pan to the next stopping place, Monjana Mabeli, the flat veldt road runs alongside the telegraph wires. How sick May became of that gaunt, unending line of posts stretching before her. She counted them—seventeen to the mile they went—oh! how often! and then hated herself for having counted them.

No sign of life cheered her ride, save now and again a desert lark, which rose suddenly from the grass, clapping its wings loudly, for twenty or thirty feet, uttered an odd, sustained, single note, and sank to earth again. May felt grateful even to the dull, speckled brown lark for its presence; anything to break that wearisome monotony. Even her good pony, "Rocket," seemed to feel the isolation, the endless void of that mighty grass plain. He seemed depressed and dull. Still when his mistress spoke to him and patted his neck, he pricked his ears gaily, shook his bit, and reached out with never tiring stride.

At last! at last! May sighted in the distance the twin, rounded hills of Monjana Mabeli, and in another three quarters of an hour had ridden up to the farmhouse. Three waggons were outspanned there, and, before she could realise her danger, the girl found herself in the centre of a little knot of the Boers of the district, on their way to welcome their brethren of the Transvaal, now raiding across the border. A quarter of a mile away she had some thought of turning from the road to avoid the outspan and its risks, but it was too late. She saw that she was watched, that mounted men were ready for a pursuit, and so she judged it better to go boldly on. The leader of the band interrogated her as to her business. She produced her letter to the Vryburg doctor and stated her mission. Her story was evidently only half believed, and she was requested to step into the farmhouse and submit to be searched by the Commandant's wife, a grim-looking Boer woman, who seemed quite in earnest over her task. The door of the inner room being shut and locked, May made the best of a hateful business, and, taking off some of her things, let the woman search her. She could have struck with her clenched fist that dull, emotionless face so close to hers, had she dared, but it would not do. Neither would it do to appear backward. Boldness might save her. She slipped off her stays and carelessly offered them for the woman's inspection. The woman looked at them, turned them over, and handed them back. The girl's heart, which had stood still for a thrilling second or two, beat easily again. She had triumphed. The missive, so cunningly hidden within her stays, still reposed snugly in its hiding-place. Her wonderfully neat sewing had passed muster. She was safe—safe, that is, if she could get away. The search was at length over, and the Vrouw Erasmus, in a grumbling way, expressed herself satisfied. As she buttoned the last button of her holland riding bodice, May turned,

with flashing eyes, upon her tormentor. She spoke Cape Dutch fluently and her words told.

“I shall not forget your insulting search, Mevrouw Erasmus,” she said, “as long as I live. I know quite well who you are and where you come from. You have made a big mistake. You think your people are going to get the best of this war. You know nothing about the strength of England. You don’t know, and I suppose you won’t believe until it is too late, that the Queen of England will send out ten thousand men after ten thousand, until your insolent attack is beaten down and put an end to. When it is all over,” she went on, in more cutting tones, “you will look very foolish. You and your husband will lose your good farm here in Bechuanaland, and what will you do then? Instead of being prosperous on your own farm, under a good Government, you will become mere wretched Trek Boers, without a morgen of land you can call your own. You really ought to be ashamed of yourselves, coming out to fight against a Government, which, here in British Bechuanaland, has done nothing but good for you!”

The girl had better have held her tongue. Vrouw Erasmus was mad, her huge, pallid face was flushed to a deep crimson.

“You schepsel!” she cried, “to speak to me, the wife of a good burgher, like that! I have a mind to take a sjambok to you. You shall stay in this house no longer. This is my man’s farm now. You English never had a right in the country, and the Burghers will in future enjoy the land. Go you out, and sit there under the waggon shade, and keep a civil tongue in your head!”

May was more than pleased; she had no wish at all to remain indoors. She walked out to the nearest waggon, found her saddle, took her sandwiches from the saddle-bag, and, with the help of her limejuice and water, made a good lunch.

Meanwhile Vrouw Erasmus went up to her husband, who with the rest of the Dutch farmers was saddling up for some expedition, and spoke earnestly to him. She was evidently impressing commands, for in a minute or two he came up to May and told her she was not to go for the present. She would stay at the waggons till evening, when he and some of his men would be back. Then he would see what should be done with her. May protested, but unavailingly, and the big Dutchman moved away, mounted his horse, and rode off with the rest of the Boers waiting for him.

In spite of her practical duress, there were two little gleams of satisfaction radiating in the mind of the English girl. One of these arose from the fact that there was not a single Dutchman left at the camp; the other for the reason that she saw an instrument of release lying almost ready to her hand. When Commandant Erasmus had taken down his Mauser rifle from the inside of the waggon just in front of her, she noted that he had left another weapon hanging on its hooks. From the same hooks depended a bandolier, well filled with cartridges. There was only one doubt in her mind. Did those cartridges fit the Martini-Henry carbine hanging there? She was a courageous girl, quick-witted, and knowing her own mind. If the cartridges were right, she meant to make a bold stroke for freedom.

For half an hour she sat there, demurely enough, in the shade of the waggon, now keeping an eye on the retreating forms of the Boer horsemen disappearing westward, now looking at the grim, massive Boer woman sitting under the shelter of a waggon sail on the far side of her husband’s waggon. At length the last Dutchman’s head had vanished in the warm distance.

It was very hot, and Vrouw Erasmus, sitting guard there over the English girl, palpably dozed at her post. She had lately dined, and she was in the habit of sleeping after the mid-day meal. Her eyes closed. May rose, crept to the waggon, climbed softly to the box; in another second she had taken down the carbine from its hooks, slung the bandolier over her shoulder, opened the breech of the weapon and pushed in a cartridge. Thank Heaven it fitted! She was safe! The click of the breech action roused the sleeping woman. She opened her eyes, looked across to the other waggons, her prisoner was gone! She rose hastily, came forward, and there, on the voor-kist of her own waggon was this terrible English girl, pointing her husband’s carbine at her. She retreated a few paces at the apparition.

“Now, Mevrouw Erasmus,” said May, smilingly, in Dutch, “it is my turn. See, this carbine is loaded,”—she opened the breech, took out the cartridge and replaced it, and snapped the action to again. “I know how to use a rifle, and I mean to shoot if you try to hinder me. Your ‘boys’ are all away in the veldt with the trek oxen. I heard your man say so. I know

there is only that one Griqua lad about, and I am not afraid of him. Remember, I shoot if I am interfered with."

The woman was paralysed at the audacity of her prisoner. She could do nothing. She looked across the empty plain and then at the ragged Griqua herd lad, sitting there on his heels at the ashes of the fire, scraping out a cooking pot with a piece of wood, and grinning at the mad English girl, and she found no help. There was not another gun handy; nor, if there were, did she know whether, with this formidable, accursed, well-armed girl, she or the boy would dare to lay hold of it. She muttered something very unpleasant between her teeth, and then spoke aloud, in her sourest tones, to May Felton.

"Have your own way," she said, "I cannot prevent you. What do you want?"

"I mean to saddle up and be off," returned May, in her most angelic voice, "I know, dear Mevrouw Erasmus, that you hate English company, and as I don't approve of your husband having so many weapons about him in these troublous times, I am going to take this rifle and these cartridges with me. They belong fairly—considering that your man is playing a traitor's game—to the British Government."

Vrouw Erasmus took a step forward, as if she would have made for the girl, but, as May raised her weapon, thought better of it. Once in her huge arms, she could have easily mastered the girl, but the risk was too great.

"If you take the gun," she said, threateningly, "it is stealing, and if we catch you again we shall try you under Transvaal law. We are all Transvaalers now, or shall be directly," she added, triumphantly.

"There you are quite wrong, dear mevrouw," returned May, in her sweetest tones. "Now if you had behaved nicely and politely, as I know you can do, I might, yes, really, I think I might have returned the gun. But you know perfectly well that it is fairly forfeited, and I shall hand it over to the resident magistrate at Vryburg."

Vrouw Erasmus ground her teeth again, shook her head, and growled dissent. How she hated this bantering English girl.

"Now, mevrouw," pursued May, "if you will seat yourself nicely under the tent-sail there, and if your boy remains quietly where he is, I shall do you no injury."

The vrouw sat down heavily on her waggon chair, with an air of gloomy resignation. There was nothing to be done. May went to her pony, which stood tied up to the waggon wheel, and still holding her carbine and keeping a watchful eye on her two guardians, picked up her saddle, adjusted it, girthed up, and put on the bridle. Then she mounted and rode off at a smart canter.

"Farewell, dear Mevrouw Erasmus," she cried as she went. "We'll take great care of the carbine; don't forget to give my compliments to your husband."

The Boer woman waited till she had gone a hundred yards or more, and then roused the Griqua lad. "Get a rifle and cartridges," she cried, pointing to the house. "Indoors, yonder. Quick, you schelm!"

The lad rose and went indoors, none too willingly, and brought out a sporting rifle and a cartridge belt.

"Put in a cartridge and shoot, you fool," shrieked the enraged vrouw, pointing to the retreating figure. "Hit the horse! Hit the girl; stop them somehow!" The Griqua lad put in a cartridge and raised the rifle. The girl was now two hundred and fifty yards away, galloping fast.

"No, mevrouw," he said, lowering the gun again, "you can sjambok me, but I can't fire. If I hit her, it's murder, and I daren't do it."

Speechless almost with rage, the woman struck him in the face with her hand.

"You dog," she shouted. "By the Almighty, you shall suffer for this."

Meanwhile May Felton was speeding along over the eighteen miles of veldt road that led her to Vryburg and comparative safety. (It was before Vryburg had been surrendered.) She galloped it in one piece, and, thanks to her good pony, compassed the distance in rather more than two hours, having ridden close on fifty miles since dawn.

Arrived at Vryburg, she delivered her dispatch, together with the captured rifle and cartridges, to the resident magistrate, receiving his hearty congratulations in return. Next day, accompanied by the doctor, and a couple of policemen, she started for home again. Making a long détour, and avoiding Monjana Mabeli, they reached her father's homestead just at sunset.

Chapter Twelve.
A Transvaal Morning.

They were sitting by a big camp fire, close to the junction of the Marico and Crocodile Rivers—on the Bechuanaland side, where the old trade road to the interior runs—a motley and yet very interesting gathering of hunters, transport riders, and traders, and as usual they had been yarning. It was nearing Christmas, 1891; the weather was waxing very hot, and the night was so warm that even the oldest man of the party, "old John Blakeman," easily to be recognised by his white head and grizzled beard, sat in his flannel shirt, without a coat, his sleeves rolled up, his brawny, sunburnt arms folded across his chest. The night was very still; scarcely an air of wind stirred; occasionally a kiewitje plover uttered its mournful, chiding cry; the not unmusical croak of frogs was heard, bubbling softly from a swamp a little way off; these, with an occasional cough from the trek oxen, as they lay peacefully at their yokes, were the only sounds that here broke the outer silence of the veldt. Tales of adventure are a never failing source of interest at these fireside gatherings, and a number of hunting stories, more or less well-founded, had been trotted out. A somewhat assertive up-country trader, lately returned from the Ngami region, had just finished a highly-coloured narrative, in which a couple of lions had been easily vanquished. According to his theory these great carnivora are as readily bagged as wild duck at a vlei.

"That's all very well," rejoined old John Blakeman, taking his pipe from his mouth and a pull at his beaker of whiskey and water. "You may have had a stroke of luck, Heyford, and killed a brace of 'em without much trouble or danger, but in my judgment lions are not to be played with. A hungry lion, and more especially a starved, worn-out old 'mannikie,' who can't kill his natural food properly, is, on a dark, stormy night, the most dangerous, cruel, and persistent beast in Africa—the very devil incarnate. Guns and gunners have a good deal tamed the extraordinary boldness of lions in the last thirty years. I can remember the time when they killed cattle, ay, and even Kaffirs, in this very country where you now sit, in open daylight. Why! Katrina Visser, wife of a Marico Boer, lost her child, a lad of six years old, by a lion, in broad daylight, killed at four o'clock in the afternoon, within fifty yards of her door. That happened four and thirty years ago, in 1857, in the Marico country, within less than sixty miles of this very outspan. I remember it but too well. The following morning, which happened to be Easter Day, was one of the saddest and at the same time the most exciting I ever experienced."

"Tell us the yarn, John," clamoured a number of voices together. "Yours are always worth listening to."

"Well, lads," went on the stout old fellow, filling his pipe and relighting it with much care and deliberation from a smouldering ember, "it's a long story, but I'll cut it as short as possible. It happened in this way. I began trading up here in the early fifties. In those days, as you know, and a good deal later, it was a long and serious business, and each trip always spoilt a year. We used to trek up through Natal, climb the Drakensberg, then cross the Free State plains—there was plenty of game there in those days—and, looking in at Mooi River Dorp—Potchefstrom, as we call it now—pass on through Marico. I hunted as well as traded in those days and knew very well all the Marico Boers, with some of whom I sometimes joined forces. They were a rough but very hospitable lot of fellows, and some of them—Jan Viljoen, Marthinus Swartz, Frans Joubert, and others—some of the finest shots and pluckiest hunters in the world. I hunted elephants towards the Lake for two seasons with Gerrit Visser, husband of Katrina, the woman I'm going to tell you about. They lived in a rough 'hartebeest house' of wattle and reeds in a magnificent kloof on a tributary of the Marico. Well, in '57, Gerrit and I met, as we had arranged, at one of the farmhouses near the Barolong border, prepared for a big trip towards the Tamalakan River.

"I got on, as I say, very well with the Dutch frontier fanners; my trading goods were very acceptable to the 'vrouws' and 'meisjes,' and the owner of the farm where I was outspanned kept open house during the week I was there. What with shooting gear and clothing for the men, and sugar, coffee, groceries, and trinkets, stuffs, and prints for the women, I offloaded a good part of my trading outfit while outspanned at this place, and did, as usual, a rattling good business. We had no end of junketing. Dances, dust, and liquor at night, and horse-racing and target-shooting in the day time. The bottles seemed always on the table, but these Dutchmen are pretty hard headed, and there was some tall

shooting in spite of the festivities. Jan Viljoen, who had trekked with his wife from the Knysna, in Cape Colony, towards the end of the thirties, and had fought against Sir Harry Smith at Boomplaats in 1848, was, with Marthinus Swartz, about the best of a rare good lot of rifle shots. We shot usually at a yokeskey or a bottle at one hundred and one hundred and fifty yards, and then Viljoen would call for an Eau de Cologne flask, standing little higher than a wine-glass, and we blazed at that I was pretty good with the gun in those days, but two or three of the Marico Boers usually got the best of me.

"Well, after a week of this kind of thing, the trading was finished and I had had enough of Dutch festivities, and so Genit Visser and I trekked for the Bamangwato stadt, where Machen, Khama's uncle, was then chief. Here I traded for another week, and then Gerrit and I set our faces for the north-west, crossed the Thirstland, and trekked along the north bank of the Lake River. We got plenty of giraffe, gemsbuck, eland, hartebeest, blue wildebeest, springbok, zebra, and so on, for the first month; and along the Botletli we killed some sea-cows and buffaloes, which swarmed in those days. But we had no luck with elephants till we struck the Tamalakan River. Here and along the Mababi, and from there towards the Chobi River, we did very well, bagging in four months' hunting between sixty and seventy elephants, many of them carrying immense teeth. Towards the Chobi, where very few guns had at that time been heard, we had remarkable sport. We shot also a number of rhinoceros, some of them, the 'wit rhenosters' (white rhinoceros), with magnificent forehorns. Altogether we had a fine season, one of the very best I ever remember. But it was desperately hard work; the bush was awful; water was often very scarce; and every tusk we got was, I can tell you, hardly earned. Lions were sometimes very troublesome. We lost a horse and two oxen by them and had some nasty adventures ourselves.

"When we reached the Chobi River, I never saw anything like the herds of buffalo. There were thousands of them. Sometimes you might see a troop as thick as goats in a kraal. We shot eighty buffaloes on this trip, and might have got any quantity more. I had my best hunting nag killed under me by an old wounded bull, and should have been done for myself but for Visser, who came up in the very nick of time, and shot the brute as I lay on the ground almost under his horns. I was so bitten with the life of the veldt and the wandering fever in those days that I should have liked to have stayed out another year and pushed far up the Chobi, which was then as now little explored. After the parched Thirstlands we had come through, the river with its broad blue waters, its refreshing breezes, its palm islands, and the astounding wealth, not only of heavy game, but of bird life, that crowded its banks and islets, seemed a very paradise on earth. Even Gerrit Visser, as stolid, matter-of-fact a Dutchman as you should meet in South Africa, was struck by the marvellous beauty of the river scenery.

"But Gerrit hated punting about in the wobbly, crank, dug-out canoes, in which the natives took us from one island to another; and, for him, half the fun of the hunting was spoiled by the navigation necessary to obtain it. And so, very reluctantly on my part, we made our way back to the waggons, which had been standing for weeks outspanned on the southern bank of the river, in charge of our men. It was now December, the weather had become very hot, and Gerrit was fretting and fuming all the time to get back home—'huis-to' (to the house), as a Boer would say. The worst of hunting with these married Dutchmen is that, after about six months in the veldt, away from their wives and 'kinder,' they are always fidgetting to be off home again. There never were such uxorious chaps in this world, I do believe. Get a Britisher, married though he be, once away in the veldt, and the passion for travel and adventure fairly lays hold of him—it's in the blood—and he'll stay out with you, knocking about, for a couple of years if you like. Look at Livingstone! Fond though he was of his wife and children, the wandering fever, the 'trek-geist,' as a Boer would call it, was too much for him, and he was latterly away from wife and children and home for years at a time. And so Gerrit Visser and I set our faces 'huis-to,' and trekked for Marico again.

"We had a long and hard spell of travel across the 'thirst,' and reached the Transvaal as lean as crows ourselves, and with our oxen, horses, and dogs mere bags of bones. Nothing would content Gerrit but I should go with him to his place, Water Kloof, and spend Easter there. Pushing our jaded spans along as fast as possible, and travelling from Easter Eve all through the night, Gerrit and I mounted our horses at daybreak and cantered on ahead of the waggons to rouse the vrouw and have breakfast. It was a most glorious sunrise as we entered the shallow valley, known as Water Kloof. There had been recent rains; the valley was carpeted with fresh grass and littered with wild flowers; the bush

was green and fragrant; and the little clear stream that ran to join the Marico River, rippled merrily along at our feet. The mealie gardens were thriving magnificently, and the whole place looked as fair and prosperous as a man could wish to see. Gerrit was in the highest spirits. 'Man,' he said to me, as we rode up to the rough wattle and daub house, thatched with reeds, 'it is a good farm this, and I shall give up elephant-hunting, build a good stone house here, and settle down. Look at the fruit trees,'—pointing to a charming green grove below the house—'in two years' time the oranges will be in full bearing. Allemaghte! It is too good a "plaats" (farm) to leave so long, this.'

"We rode up to the house very quietly. Gerrit wanted to surprise his wife. Not a soul stirred. It was now 'sun-up.' I was astonished that no one was moving. We dismounted, threw our bridles over the nags' heads, and approached the house. 'Katrina!' shouted Gerrit in a cheery voice, 'Katrina! Beter laat dan nooit. Hier is ekke en Jan Blakeman.' (Katrina! Better late than never. Here am I and John Blakeman.) As we approached the door we heard at last some one stirring inside. The latch clicked, the door opened back, and Katrina Visser appeared, not cheerful and full of joy, and with little Hendrik, the child, by her side, as we had expected, but with hair dishevelled, cheeks soddened with tears, black shadows beneath her eyes, and the eyes themselves red and bloodshot with long weeping. She threw herself with a sob on Gerrit's breast, and burst afresh into an agony of tears. 'You are too late, Gerrit, too late,' she sobbed forth at last. 'The lion killed little Hendrik yesterday afternoon, and he lies there dead in the house.' I could not help looking at Visser's face at this moment. He had turned deadly white. He swayed. I thought for the moment he must have fallen. 'Oh, God!' he cried, 'it cannot be true, wife.' The woman felt instinctively that the blow was almost too grievous and too sudden for her husband. Her own grief was put aside for the moment. She released herself, kissed her man tenderly, and took his hand. 'Come inside, Gerrit,' she said softly, through her tears, 'and see all that remains of our poor little Hendrik.' She turned to me. 'Come you, too, Jan Blakeman,'—as she always called me—'You were always a favourite of the child.' It was true. I was very fond of the merry, little yellow-headed chap; and had always some sweetstuff and other treasure at my waggon for him. He and I were the best of friends.

"I followed them softly into the rude dwelling, now a chamber of death. Katrina led her husband to the wooden couch in the corner. There lay the poor little chap, his once warm face, so fresh and ruddy, now cold, and marble white, his prattling mouth for ever hushed. A blanket covered the body, but the little hands had been laid outside. One of them, I noticed, had been terribly clawed by the lion. The poor mother had washed it, and the deep crimson gashes and scorings of the cruel claws showed very plainly. I suppose the poor little six-year-old child had made some effort for his life, and the fierce brute had resented it. The mother began to draw aside the blanket and show her husband the deadly wounds. Gerrit's great frame was now racked with irrepressible sobs. I could witness their mutual agony no longer, and crept out. At the back of the house I came upon a Hottentot servant, who told me the story of the tragedy. The Marico country had by this time (1857) been fairly well cleared of lions, but stragglers occasionally wandered in from the wilder parts of the Transvaal, and a pair—lion and lioness—had been spoored up the Marico River quite lately.

"No danger, except to the cattle and goats, was, however, anticipated; the kraals had been duly strengthened, and two or three neighbouring Boers were shortly coming down to shoot the marauders. On the afternoon of the previous day little Hendrik had been playing by the stream not fifty yards from the house. Suddenly screams were heard; the Hottentot, his mistress, and a Kaffir rushed forth, and a big yellow-maned lion was seen dragging the poor little fellow by the middle into some jungle which grew alongside the water. The shouts and cries of the three as they rushed down towards the brute, and probably the report of the gun which Cobus, the Hottentot, had picked up from the house and loosed off as he ran, had driven off the brute, but too late. The child had been terribly bitten, right through the loins, and died in his mother's arms almost before they reached the house again.

"Well, the long and short of the story was this. Nothing would satisfy Katrina but that her husband and I should follow up the lion and lake revenge for the murder of the poor child. Gerrit and I were nothing loth, and after a mouthful of bread and some coffee we went down to the stream and took up the spoor. Gerrit and I each carried our rides, Cobus, the Hottentot, had a smooth-bore 'roer,' and Katrina, who insisted on coming with us, brought an old flint and steel horse pistol, which she had loaded up. We spoored the lion for half a mile down the river to a piece

of dense jungle, where it had lain up over the remains of a small buck, which it had killed, probably on the previous evening. It was a nasty place, but we had dogs, and presently the brute was roused. He showed himself once and Gerrit got a snapshot, which, as we subsequently discovered, wounded him only slightly—just sufficiently to render him really savage. Again the dogs went in and bayed the brute. This time the bush was more open. As a rule the Boers, good shots as they are, are extremely cautious about tackling a lion in covert. But Gerrit's blood was up. He meant to avenge his child, and he went at once towards the sound. I was running round to assist, when I heard a report, a dull thud, and then renewed barking and fierce deep growls. I ran through the open jungle. Katrina Visser, her pistol at full cock, was close behind. We turned an angle of the bush, and there in an open glade lay Gerrit, motionless beneath the paws of the lion, which half squatted, half stood over him. At a respectable distance beyond, half a dozen big dogs dashed hither and thither, yelping furiously. The lion's teeth were bared, and, as he caught sight of us, his tail, which had been waving from flank to flank, suddenly stiffened up behind him. I knew that signal too well, and, as Katrina cried 'schiet! schiet!' (shoot! shoot!), I fired. The bullet entered the fierce brute's chest, raked his heart and lungs, and he sank quietly upon the instant, dead upon the body of Visser. Calling up the Hottentot, we dragged the lion's body from off the Boer. The instant I saw Gerrit's face I knew all was over. It was very clear what had happened. The lion had sprung upon him unawares. He had missed his shot, and with one blow of its fore-paw the brute had slain the big strong Dutchman. The right part of the skull was literally smashed in. Well, strangely enough, Katrina Visser was not so overcome by this horrible event as I had expected. I think the doubling of the horror of the previous evening had been too much for her, and had numbed something of her feelings. She was extraordinarily calm, and throughout the next four and twenty dreadful hours bore herself wonderfully. We buried poor Gerrit and his little lad next day under a thorn tree a trifle to the west of the farmstead and fenced the place in strongly. Few Dutchmen, as you know, are ever buried in consecrated ground in South Africa. It is seldom possible up-country.

"That's practically the whole of the melancholy yarn. Katrina married again a few years later. Dutch women seldom remain widows very long. But she was never quite the same woman again, after that terrible Easter time. She still lives at Water Kloof. I saw her only last year. Her hair, like mine, is very grey, and she has a second family growing around her. She likes me to look round for a chat if I am ever in Marico, and so, for old acquaintance sake, I usually outspan for a day if I am anywhere near Water Kloof.

"Well, you fellows," concluded the old trader, "that's the true story of the saddest Easter morning I ever remember to have experienced or even heard of. Englishmen who come into this country scarcely, I think, make sufficient allowance for what the Transvaal Dutch have gone through in the conquest and settlement of their territory. Few families there are among the Boers but can tell you of some such experience as I have given you to-night. To my mind, it is scarcely wonderful that these people cling so tightly to the soil on which so much of their best blood has been spilt. Good-night, all. It's late and I must turn in." And the old fellow rose from the fire, knocked the ashes out of his pipe, stretched himself, and climbed into his waggon.

Chapter Thirteen.
The Mystery of Hartebeest Fontein.

Upon a morning of early December in the year 1880, Arend Van Driel, the Trek Boer, stood upon his waggon-box anxiously scanning the plains for any sight of game. Leaning upon the tilt and shading his eyes from the already powerful sun, his feverish glance swept the great grass plains for the faintest token of animal life. Alas, it appeared that here the veldt was deserted. The big Dutchman's eyes ran fruitlessly over the waste again and again, until they rested upon a little chain of brown hills, just now rose-tinted by the flush of the early morning sun, but nothing in the shape of a herd of game was to be seen. With a deep sigh the Boer climbed slowly down from the waggon and joined his family at their miserable breakfast, by the remains of the overnight camp fire. And, indeed, Arend Van Driel had good cause for dejection.

Two years before, he and his family had quitted the Transvaal with a great body of Trek Boers, who had made up their minds to leave a country upon which misrule and misfortune had long rested, and which now lay beneath the hands of the hated British Government. The misfortunes of that ill-fated Trek have long since become historical in the annals of the Transvaal Dutch. Thirst, famine, fever and dysentery were soon busy among the members of one of the most disastrous and ill-managed expeditions ever known in South Africa. The trek cattle perished by hundreds in the Thirstlands of the Northern Kalahari, the flocks and herds, left masterless, wandered and strayed, and disappeared by thousands. Along the rivers and swamps of Ngamiland and the Okavango, sickness and suffering destroyed whole families. The trek had set forth with the highest and most exaggerated hopes, chiefly based upon the gross ignorance of these misguided and fanatical farmers. They moved north-westward towards some unknown Land of Canaan, where, as they fondly imagined, great snow mountains stood, where the veldt was always rich and flourishing, where clear waters ran abundantly, and where the wild game wandered as thick as sheep in a fold. Some even believed, as their fathers had believed, when they moved into the Transvaal country, that somewhere in this new and unknown land, the great Nile river itself would be found. After more than two years of disastrous trekking, most of these vain imaginings had been rudely dispelled, but still, their faces set ever doggedly westward, these stubborn people toiled on.

During the expedition, the trekkers had necessarily become much scattered; thus Arend Van Driel and his family stood alone this December day of 1880 by a small pan of muddy water, where they had halted to recruit their exhausted trek oxen and the two horses that remained to them. They had quitted the Transvaal with two hundred head of cattle and six hundred sheep and goats. These once thriving flocks and herds were now represented by some two score of miserable sheep and goats, mere bags of bones, which could scarcely drag one limb after another. It was absolutely necessary to husband even these slender resources, and Van Driel had therefore been anxiously surveying the surrounding veldt for some herd of game from which he could secure a meal or two for his starving family. He now moved up to the camp fire with disappointment written plainly upon his gaunt, sun-tanned and bearded face. His wife knelt in a ragged old stuff dress stirring some thin porridge of Kaffir corn—their only present sustenance—in an iron pot. She looked up from underneath her sun-bonnet, and, catching the gloom upon her husband's face, ejaculated, "Nie wilde, Arend?" ("No game, Arend?") "Nie wilde, nie," returned Arend disconsolately. "I think the Lord means us to die after all in this desert. Cursed was the day we ever left the Transvaal." He sat himself down in the red sand by his children, after they had been helped to a small plateful of porridge each, and took and ate his own portion. There were four children left to the Van Driels. There had been seven when they quitted the Transvaal. Three had died of fever at Vogel Pan, a little to the south of the Okavango. Of those remaining, Hermannus, a big lad of fifteen, seemed fairly strong; the other three, a boy and two girls, ranging from five to twelve, looked, poor things, pale, weak and dispirited from fever, misery and semi-starvation. The clothes of all were tattered and ragged and hung loosely about them.

The interior of the big waggon hard by looked very bare for a Dutchman's. But, as a matter of fact, almost all the little stock of furniture and house gear had been perforce abandoned. Ploughs, farming implements, tables and chairs, and other impedimenta, all now

lay in the middle of that dire Thirstland between Khama's and the Botletli River, where they had long since been cast away to lighten the load. Even the very waggon chairs—dear to every Boer—had been thrown away. Hermannus, the eldest lad, was the first to finish that meagre breakfast of ground millet, boiled in water. He now rose and in his turn climbed to the waggon and took a survey over the country. Suddenly an exclamation broke from his lips. "Father, there's game half a mile away, just moving from behind that patch of bush. I think they are hartebeest."

The stolid, melancholy-looking Boer was roused in an instant from his apathy. He climbed quickly to the waggon, and in his turn gazed intently at the game. "Yes, that's right enough, Hermannus," he said; "they're hartebeest—they must have slept behind those bushes last night—and they're coming straight this way. Ah! see, they have got our wind." Even as he spoke the troop of game, some thirty in number, suddenly halted, turned in their tracks, and cantered in that heavy, loping fashion, which these fleet antelopes adopt in their slower paces, towards the heart of the plain.

Calling to the two Kaffir servants still remaining to him to bring in the horses, just now feeding, knee-haltered, upon the veldt a hundred yards away, Van Driel and his son looked to their saddles and bridles, filled a water bottle, reached down their Westley-Richards rifles and bandoliers from the waggon hooks, and buckled on a rusty spur apiece.

"We shall be back before sunset, wife," said Van Driel. "I think, after all, the Heer God means us to have a right good dinner." And so, mounting, he rode off with Hermannus.

"The Heer God be with you both," echoed Vrouw Van Driel, "and may you bring meat—we want it badly enough." The three younger children cried luck after their father and brother, and waved their hands, and so, watching the horsemen cantering away, gazed and gazed until the two forms presently faded from mere specks into absolute oblivion, and were swallowed up in the immensity of the great plain.

Meanwhile the two hunters rode steadily upon the spoor of the hartebeest. It was a good troop, and although the chase might be a long one the Boers were so accustomed to bagging the game they followed that they looked confidently to a dead buck or two before afternoon. Surely, they thought, as half-hour after half-hour they followed steadily upon the footprints, now clear in the firm sand, now amid the long grass, hardly to be distinguished, even by the wonderful instinct of these sons of the veldt, the hartebeest will presently stand and rest, or feed again. But no. The antelopes had secured a good start and had long since cantered at that deceptive pace of theirs clean out of sight; and the tell-tale spoor indicated, as mile after mile was reeled off, that they were still moving briskly and that their point was some far distant one.

The two ponies, rough and unkempt, and angular as they were, were perhaps in better condition than the rest of the camp—whether human beings or stock—put together. Their well-being was absolutely necessary to the safety of the party; without them game would be desperately hard to come at; they had, therefore, been fed pretty regularly on Kaffir corn, and still retained condition. Moreover, they came of that hardy Cape breed which produces some of the toughest, most courageous, and most serviceable horseflesh in the world. The nags were all right, and hour after hour they cantered steadily on.

It was now twelve o'clock, the sun was desperately hot, they had ridden nearly five hours, with but one short off-saddle, and it was absolutely necessary to give the horses another rest. Father and son, therefore, off-saddled at a patch of thin bush, knee-haltered the nags, which at once rolled and began to feed, and themselves rested under the scant shadow of the brush. For nearly an hour Arend smoked in silence. Meanwhile the lad lay prone upon his stomach, gazing straight in front of him in the direction in which the game still headed. Out there now rose before the two hunters, swelling solidly from the plain of yellowish-green grass, the low chain of hill, which, as they viewed it from the waggon-box that morning, had seemed so far away. But they had ridden eighteen good miles since breakfast; the hill stood now but four miles away, and each cleft, krantz, and precipice of its scarred and weather-worn sides, each dark patch of bush and undergrowth, now showed plain and naked before their eyes.

"That's where the hartebeest have made for, father," said the lad, at last; "shall we catch them there, think you?"

"Yes," answered the big Boer, cocking his tattered, broad-brimmed hat yet more over his eyes, and looking very hard at the line of hill. "They've gone in there, right enough, Hermannus; in by that dark kloof yonder.

But whether the kloof leads right through the hill to the country beyond I can't tell. If it does, we shall have a long hunt and be out all night on the spoor; if it doesn't we shall catch them in a trap, I hope. Maghte! But my stomach aches for a bit of good flesh, and your mother and the children want soup and meat badly, poor souls. Fetch in the horses, lad. They've had rest, and we must push on again."

Hermannus rose, walked out on to the veldt, drove up the nags, and once more they saddled up and mounted. They went very warily now, looking keenly along the base of the little range of kopjes, to see that the hartebeests were not feeding quietly among the scattered bush that grew about the lower slopes. But no; the spoor still held straight ahead, and in half an hour they were at the entrance of the kloof. It was a narrow ravine, which appeared to have been violently rent by nature right into the heart of the hills, but which, doubtless, the action of water, erosion, and ages of time had worn slowly and with infinite quiet, century after century, deep into the hard rocks. After two hundred yards of this narrow ravine, the kloof suddenly turned at a right angle and then broadened out into an open valley about half a mile long. The spoor had told the hunters very plainly that the antelopes had entered the kloof. But it was not yet evident why they had travelled all that way thither. Father and son now settled upon a plan of action. It was clear, upon looking up the valley, that no exit was to be found at the far end. If, however, they rode straight up the kloof they would probably drive the game right over the hills, where to follow would be difficult and shooting not easy.

"I cannot make out why the buck have come in here," whispered Van Driel, meditatively, as they stood beside their horses, and, well screened by bushes, gazed up the valley. "It's not like hartebeest ground at all. There must be water or new grass, or some such attraction at the head of the kloof. We will leave the nags here fastened to the bush." He took up a handful of sand and let it fall lightly through his fingers. "The wind is right enough, it blows fair down the kloof. There is plenty of cover along the bottom here. If we leave the nags and creep very quietly among the bush we shall probably get a fair shot or two each. The game here is seldom hunted, and as far as we can judge the place is never visited by man. Come along!"

The two crept slowly up the valley, moving, from bush to bush, with infinite care and caution, their soft, home-made velschoons of water-buck hide making little or no noise as they pressed forward. Now and again they crossed the neat spoor of the antelopes, imprinted deep in the smooth, red, sandy soil. Then they looked at one another and their eyes gleamed responsively. It was clear that the game had fed slowly and carelessly towards the head of the kloof; their rifles were loaded and cocked; the time of action was very near.

In a quarter of an hour, or a little more, they were drawing very close to the end of the valley; the bush grew thicker, which was all the better for their purpose. With extraordinary pains they picked their way, the spoor still guiding them. Suddenly Arend Van Driel, stretching back his hand in warning, dropped from his stooping walk down upon one knee. Hermannus instantly followed his example. Van Driel motioned his son very softly forward, and, creeping up, the lad saw through a small opening in the bush what had arrested his father's progress.

It was a glorious sight, truly. The end of the valley, bounded on three sides by the steep and rough hill, lay before them. The ground was nearly open, and in the centre of the rich, dark red soil flowed, over a rocky bed, a sparkling stream of the clearest water, which issued from the hillside to the right, and disappeared, apparently, beneath a litter of rocks on the left. Close to the stream, within sixty to eighty yards of where the hunters were concealed, were the hartebeests, most of them lying down; some few standing with heads down in sleepy fashion; others, again, plucking lazily at some green young grass, which here and there masked the good red soil. Only one of them, a knowing-looking old cow, was really on the alert. The long, black faces, corrugated horns, and bright bay coats of the big antelopes united, with the fair surrounding scenery, to form a striking picture of feral life.

Attracted by the pleasantness of this green, charming, and well-watered spot, numbers of birds, many of them of brilliant plumage, were flitting hither and thither, crying, some sweetly, some vociferously, one to another. Here were gorgeous emerald cuckoos on their way south, honey birds, kingfishers, and bee-eaters of the most resplendent plumage, and various finches and small birds. Seldom had the two Dutchmen set eyes on a more lovely scene.

But the aesthetic charm of the place was not for the Boers, gaunt with

hunger and privations. A look and a nod from father to son; the rifles were levelled; the targets selected, and the loud reports rang out, terrifying the wild life of this gem-like oasis, and rattling from krantz to krantz along the rough hill sides. Two hartebeests instantly went down and lay struggling in their death agonies. One of these staggered to its feet again; but Hermannus had shoved another cartridge into his breech, and a second shot finally stretched the animal upon the earth again, this time for good. Meanwhile, as the terrified troop sprang to their feet and tore frantically past his right front, Arend Van Driel rose quickly, slewed half round, and fired another shot. The bullet sped home, raking obliquely the lungs of another antelope, which was later on found dead two or three hundred yards down the kloof.

The two Boers walked forward to the stream, surveyed for a minute or two their dead game, a fat cow and a young bull, both in high condition, and then kneeling at the water, drank long and deep, and laved their faces, arms, and hands. The lad was now despatched at once to the bend of the kloof for the horses, which could not only drink and feed here, but were to be freighted with as much meat as they could carry for the camp. Before setting to work to skin the game. Van Driel walked along the margin of the stream to the spot whence it issued—a natural fountain among the rocks. Here, casting about, he came upon a discovery that electrified him—first the whitened bones of a man and a pair of spurs, afterwards an old weather-worn percussion gun, rotten and rusty, a powder-horn, and a good-sized and very heavy metal box. Opening this metal box with great difficulty, the Boer found it full of what he recognised instantly as gold nuggets, many of them of considerable size. Searching yet further among the rocks, the Boer discovered, just as Hermannus rode up with the led horse, a carefully laid pile of much bigger nuggets, worth manifestly a large sum of money. Who was the man whose poor remains lay bleaching in the sand there? When had he entered the kloof? How had he died? These were questions impossible to answer.

Van Driel could only surmise, from the make and shape of the old percussion smooth-bore and powder-horn, that the owner must have died there thirty or forty years before. Looking again closely at the powder-horn, Hermannus discovered the initials “H.D.,” carved neatly upon the side. But H.D.’s life and death and history lay hidden among these pathetic relics, mysteries impenetrable, insoluble. That sweet and secret valley alone knew the truth of them.

They turned out the box of nuggets, counting up their treasure. At the very bottom, half hidden among sand and rubble, lay a scrap of paper, yellow, faded, and discoloured. Hermannus, who could read, eagerly opened it. Inside, in a tottering hand, were a few lines scrawled in pencil. But the writing was not in Dutch, and, spell at the sentences as he might, Hermannus could make nothing of them.

Setting to work with a will, father and son rapidly skinned and cut up as much of the hartebeest meat as their nags could carry; the rest of the carcases they carefully covered up from the vultures and wild beasts. It was now dusk, darkness would be swiftly upon them. They determined to camp for the night and ride back to their waggon with the first streak of dawn. They made a roaring fire, tied up their horses to a tree close at hand, cooked some meat, enjoyed a hearty meal, and then smoked their pipes with stolid contentment. Then, making pillows of the inner parts of their saddles, and with their feet to the fire, they sank into profound sleep.

It must have been towards midnight that Arend Van Driel was awakened suddenly by the movement of his horse, which was tugging nervously at the branch to which its head-reim was fastened, as if startled by some prowling beast of prey. “Lions!” muttered the Boer to himself. He stirred the fire, threw on more wood, and, rising, patted and reassured his horse, which, with dilated nostrils, snuffed at the night air and stared with wild eyes out into the darkness.

Van Driel picked up his rifle, lit his pipe, and sat by the fire, watching and waiting. It was very eerie in this far and remote valley, but the Trek Boer is a man used to solitude and a wild life, and his nervous system is, happily for himself, not very highly developed. All the man troubled himself about was his horseflesh. Horses are scarce in the far recesses of the interior, and Arend had no intention of losing either of his nags by the attack of lion or leopard. Suddenly his horse snorted at the breeze again and pulled fiercely at his reim. Something approached—something that scared intensely the nervous animal. With ears and eyes strained, the Boer looked out into the darkness, beyond the ring of firelight. Hark! what was that? And then something—Van Driel could not make out what

—moved past some twenty paces away on the other side of the fire. It looked about the height and size of a lion. The Boer's rifle went to his shoulder, he took rapid aim, and fired. The report of the Westley-Richards rattled out from the rocks behind them, and, mingled with the sound, rose a strange, wild, shuddering cry, half human, half bestial. It was no lion's or leopard's cry, as Van Driel knew instantly. What in God's name could it be? A baboon perhaps?

Hermannus, at the rattle of the fire arm, had sprung up from his deep slumber, and, rifle in hand, was now glaring about him. They listened. Strange moaning wails came to them on the soft night air from the blackness beyond the fire there. They were terribly human. The men looked at one another with scared faces, but uttered no word.

The sounds grew fainter and fainter and presently ceased.

"What was it, father?" asked the lad at last.

"Naam van de drommel! I cannot say," returned the Boer. "I thought it was a lion. It is no lion, surely; it may be a baboon."

They sat waiting, listening intently, for another ten minutes. Then Hermannus sprang to his feet. "Whatever it was," he exclaimed, "the thing is dead. I shall see what it is."

He plucked a big brand from the fire, and, grasping his rifle, stepped forward. His father followed his example, and with great caution they moved out beyond the flickering circle of the firelight. Thirty paces away their torches showed them something. It rested on the veldt there, silent, completely motionless. Again they advanced and stood over the thing.

It lay there at their feet, naked, hairy, something on the figure of a man, yet surely not a man. Blood was oozing softly from a big wound in the back, where Van Driel's bullet had entered.

"An ape of some kind, father," queried Hermannus, "but not a baboon. What do you make of it?"

"Alas, no ape, I fear," returned Van Driel, with a shudder. "This is a bad night's work. 'Tis a wild man. I have heard of such things, but never yet have I set eyes upon one. Pick it up by the legs there, we will carry it to the fire."

At the firelight they examined with repugnance and even fear the thing that had met its death. It was a man! Nay. It had once been a man; it was now but a travesty of mankind. Deeply tanned all over; with its shock of dark hair and beard, now going grey, and a shaggy growth almost covering the loathsome body, it looked a mere beast of the field. The thing had gone mostly upon hands and knees—or upon hands and feet—and the parts that touched the soil were thickened and callous. How many years this poor terrible relic of humanity had lived here alone; how it had gained its living; how escaped the fierce carnivora of the desert, were mysteries that no man could answer. The silent rocks, the grass, the trees, the air—these were the only witnesses, and they were for ever unite.

There was no more sleep for the Van Driels that night. They sat talking in low, subdued tones until dawn, and then, taking up the spoor of the wild man, ran the trail down to a cavern among the rocks, where the poor creature had made its lair. Here were bones; the remains of animals, of lizards, birds, locusts, even fish, upon which, with berries, bulbs, and wild roots, the thing had existed for all these years!

Returning to the fire, they picked up the now stiff form, more hideous and loathsome than ever by broad daylight, and carried it to its den. This they sealed from the wild beasts with heavy rocks and stones.

Then they saddled up and rode off for the waggon, which was reached by mid-day. They and their bountiful supply of meat were received with a chorus of welcome from the starved and ailing family, and in that lone and distressful wilderness they presently enjoyed together a right hearty meal.

Next morning Arend Van Driel had settled upon a plan of action. He despatched his native "boys" on a month's journey, far back to one of the standing camps of the Trek Boers, upon the Okavango. So soon as they were out of the way, he trekked with his family for Hartebeest Fontein, as they now called the place of mystery. Arend had seen something of gold mining at Lydenburg, in the Eastern Transvaal, and, from the discoveries he had already made, he guessed that the valley was rich in alluvial gold. He was not mistaken. In less than a month's search in the rich alluvial soil at the head of the kloof and along the bed of the stream, he and his family picked up many a good nugget; so that, with the store already gathered by their dead predecessors, they trekked away, carrying with them enough gold to set themselves up in a fair way for the rest of their lives. They were not sorry to quit the valley, with its grim

secrets, and presently, after much hard and toilsome travel, reached Transvaal soil again.

The Dutch Afrikanders are a secretive race and keep their own counsel. Moreover, they are the last people in the world to trumpet forth gold discoveries for the benefit of the detested Britisher, who threatens in time to over-run the whole of South Africa. Arend Van Driel is now one of the wealthiest farmers in the Transvaal. His son, Hermannus, who is married and lives on an excellent farm near, is just as comfortably off. Their Rustenburg neighbours have puzzled for years—and still puzzle—over the return of this family from the Mossamedes trek and their great and inexplicable accession of wealth. But Van Driel and his good vrouw, who started on that terrible expedition strong and hearty people on the right side of six-and-thirty, without a grey hair between them, and came back lined and grey, and apparently far on into middle age, are never likely to yield up their secret. Nor is Hermannus, nor are the rest of the family. The quiet valley of Hartebeest Fontein, with its strange discoveries and uncanny inhabitant, remain mysteries locked safely within the breasts of each one of them.

Hermannus, by the way, soon after their arrival in the Transvaal, got, from an Englishman at a Klerks-dorp store, a translation of the writing upon that pathetic bit of paper found in the box of nuggets. The translation ran thus:

"I am camped here, with my little son, on my way prospecting from Namaqualand. My comrade, John Finch, died at Fish River. Waggon looted by Namaqua Hottentots. Found my way here, but horse dead of sickness and can go neither forward nor back. Plenty of gold, but no present chance of escape. What will become of my boy James, nine years old? God help us, I am very ill and doubt how things may end. Henry Dursley. August, 1847."

That poor stained letter, which contains the secret of Hartebeest Fontein, old Arend Van Driel, strangely enough, still cherishes in its battered metal box, locked up securely in the dark recesses of his ancient waggon-chest, which itself rests beside the big family bed.

Chapter Fourteen.
Charlie Thirlmere’s Lion.

On a March morning Charlie Thirlmere and his wife were at breakfast in their pretty flat near Park Lane. A cloud sat on Charlie’s fresh, good-looking face. He looked at his wife curiously, and then launched into the business that worried him.

“Sybil,” he said, “we must pull up. I want to have a serious talk with you.”

“Oh, for heaven’s sake, don’t begin business at this unearthly period,” replied Sybil. “I am going out riding in less than an hour, and I haven’t time.”

“You can spare ten minutes, old girl,” he said; “and things are getting into such a hobble that we must pull up and make an alteration. If we don’t, another year or two will see us stony, so far as I am concerned.”

“Well, go on,” returned Sybil, putting her red lips to a cup of tea, “and do compress your lecture. At eleven Cecil Cloudesley will be here with a new pony we want to look at.”

Charlie’s brows knitted into a little frown. “Oh! hang Cecil Cloudesley and his ponies!” he exclaimed. “Three years ago when we married,” he went on, “we had sixteen hundred a year between us. You had seven hundred, I had nine hundred. Well, I’ve often told you we’ve been going the pace far too much—it’s been my fault, I admit, quite as much as yours—and now this is how we stand. I’ve had to break into my capital—four times in three years, as Jesson and Fosbery remind me—and now my income is reduced to something over four hundred. Your money, thank goodness, is tied up. Eleven hundred would do us passably well, living quietly in the country; and to that we shall have to make up our minds. I’ve given up my nags, as you know. After July we must sell off, give up the flat, and retrench seriously. I’ve had enough of this sort of thing, and I’m getting heartily sick of it. I’m getting soft and hipped, and I loathe this incessant keeping up appearances, and living beyond one’s means. And there’s the baby. Poor little chap, he sees precious little of us, living as we do. We must give him a chance. I’m sure he needs fresh air and a country life far more even than we do!”

This reference to her two-year-old child was rather a sore subject for Sybil. She knew that in the whirling life she led, she had really neglected the youngster. But her spirit rose instantly to combat the suggestion.

“Oh, Arthur’s all right,” she returned with some sharpness. “He was at the mater’s for a month at Christmas, and he’ll be there again in May or June. But we can’t live on a thousand a year, that’s certain. I suppose you can get something to do. I can’t—I really can’t—be buried alive in the country.”

“Well,” returned her husband, a little hot at the cool way in which she had met his advance. “I’ve been thinking over things. I shall sell out another thousand or so and go off to Rhodesia, and try and pick up some mining claims or town lots. You must live on 900 pounds a year somehow, and I’ll do the best I can to pick up some oof. Anyhow I’m tired of this sort of life. I see very little of you, and you can put up with my absence for a year, I suppose.”

“I might perhaps even exist for two years without the light of your countenance, Charlie, if I tried *very* hard!” retorted Sybil.

A little flush had risen to her cheeks, and a rebellious sparkle flashed in her dark eyes. She had not reckoned upon this proposition. Charlie was useful, nay, necessary to her in a hundred little ways, and she hated the idea of parting from him. She was angry with herself and with him.

“Well, that settles it,” rejoined her husband coolly. “I’ll try and make some coin in Mashonaland, and you stay at home and pull in a bit. We shall be better friends when I come back. Somehow this town life doesn’t suit either of us. We hit it off a thousand times better when we lived at the Grange.”

He rose and lit a cigarette.

“I’ll settle up all outstanding things,” he went on; “and if you stay in town you’ll have to do with one pony for riding, and hire a Victoria when you want it I should advise your staying with your mother for six months. She’ll be delighted to have you and the youngster.”

“I can’t part with either Dandy or The Barber,” returned Sybil hotly, “and you really needn’t bother me as to my movements. I can take care of myself very well during your absence.”

Thirlmere glanced at his wife. She was not looking his way, her thoughts ran elsewhere. He was extremely fond of her, and, at this moment, just as he was about leaving her, she looked, he thought, more charming than ever. He went to her side, stooped, and kissed her soft cheek. The caress was accepted with something very like indifference.

"Very well, old girl," he said. "Don't worry yourself. I know you are right enough. You have plenty of wits and abounding common sense. Give up some of the crowd you are swimming with. I dare say when I'm gone you'll make a change and pull in. I don't demand it. I hope it, and expect it, from your good sense, and I know you as well as you know yourself."

"There, don't preach, Charlie," replied his wife. "I'm awfully busy this morning. Do go and look after your own work. If you're off to Rhodesia, you must have heaps to do."

Thirlmere quitted the room, and Sybil breathed a sigh of relief.

Two months after this morning in March, Charlie Thirlmere was in Mashonaland, wandering about the country in the company of a mining prospector, shooting and exploring. They had for months very little success. Most of the likely spots for gold had been already pegged out by their forerunners. They returned to Salisbury and fitted out an expedition for the Zambesi Valley. They were away seven months, discovered indications of a coalfield, and then, on their way into Salisbury again, stumbled, within fifty miles of the town, upon a strong gold reef. It was in a broad, rich-looking valley, of romantic beauty, well-wooded in parts with acacia, Kaffir orange, and other trees, and hemmed in by massive granite kopjes—huge masses of rock, strewn as if by the hands of giants—with a pleasant little river, fringed with palmetto, meandering beneath the rock-walls. So rich, apparently, was the reef, that they pegged out at once, procured some native labour, built a couple of huts, and, sending into Salisbury for dynamite, roping and windlass, and fresh implements, determined to camp for some months, and go in for a systematic opening up of the reef.

The weeks ran by. The hot season, the second since Thirlmere had left England, was approaching. Already the rains were upon them, and they had begun to experience some of the miseries of living under constant tropical downpours in leaky native huts, thatched carelessly with grass by lazy Mashonas. Yet the mine prospects were so good that they hung on.

It was now December. They had sent in a native servant with their last remaining donkey to bring out supplies and some few luxuries, and awaited his return impatiently. They had reached the valley with four donkeys, the poor remnants of their long Zambesi string; but lions, which were troublesome and daring, had killed three, as well as their sole remaining horse. The camp was very quiet, only two or three native workers were with them, and from these they extracted precious little labour at their shafts and other operations. John Brightling, a Cornish miner, a capital fellow, Thirlmere's constant companion in his prospecting operations for a full year past, was down with fever. Thirlmere himself was feeling none too fit, but was still well enough to tend his sick comrade.

Night fell. It was a dark night, with no moon, and a threatening of heavy rain. Charlie Thirlmere had had a fire kindled between the two huts—their own and the natives'—but at nine o'clock, a drenching thunderstorm, which came roaring and reverberating with fierce lightnings and deafening re-echoes among the kopjes, effectually put an end to it, Brightling had felt better towards night. After a day of racking pain, the sweating stage had reached him; his head was clear, the fever had left him, and he had been able to sup some of the game-broth that Thirlmere had prepared for him. He was now sleeping quietly.

At ten, Charlie heard the moaning roar of lions not far away. Shortly after followed the sharp, dissonant yells of the Mashonas from their hut, fifty yards distant. Lions were abroad, plainly. Thirlmere opened the hut door and fired a couple of cartridges, by way of scaring off the night prowlers. Then he lay down on his skin couch, pulled his blanket over him, and dozed off.

How soon afterwards it was he could never tell, but he was awakened in the black darkness by hearing some noise at the door of the hut. He picked up his loaded carbine, and went softly that way. Gently lifting the latch, he opened the door and peered out. Almost in the same instant, his left hand, which was thrust a little forward, was seized in the jaws of some savage creature, armed with frightful teeth. With a yell that leapt from rock to rock of the quiet valley, and seemed to split the very darkness, the unfortunate man lifted his carbine and belaboured the

brute that held him fast, fiercely about the head. But the lion—for such it was—held on grimly, chewing, and crunching, and tugging hard at the hand now gripped so ruthlessly in those ferocious jaws. During this frightful struggle Thirlmere felt, curiously enough, little of actual physical pain. He was conscious of some sudden shock, just such as he remembered from a heavy fall in hunting; but, chiefly, his mind was concentrated in a determination to free himself at all hazards from his captor. He ceased hitting the brute with his carbine, and instinctively poked at the lion's head with the muzzle end. Suddenly he encountered something soft. It was the brute's eye. His forefinger slipped from the trigger-guard to the trigger itself and pulled. The bullet crashed deep into the lion's brain, and upon the instant the fierce creature fell dead at his feet, dragging him to earth in its fall. Then his mind reeled into unconsciousness and he remembered no more.

Three minutes later, John Brightling, who had started from his bed of fever at the sound of Charlie's yell and the report of the rifle, had lit a lantern, and was outside. He could scarcely believe his senses when he found, just beyond the doorway, the body of the dead lion, with his comrade's senseless form lying across the grim beast's forelegs, his left hand still imprisoned in that terrible grip.

Rousing the trembling natives from the adjacent hut, John, after some trouble, succeeded in prising open the huge teeth, forcing the jaws apart, and releasing the mangled hand—or rather, what remained of it. For the lion had bitten three parts of that member from the rest of the limb. They got Thirlmere into the hut; and then, while he lay still insensible, Brightling tied a ligature tightly round the wrist, trimmed off the ghastly wound, washed the poor maimed stump, and wrapped it in linen. Then he administered a stiff dose of brandy and water, and Thirlmere presently began to come round. In a little while he had pulled himself together wonderfully, and they discussed the situation. It would take two days at least to get the doctor from Salisbury; and they had no carbolic, meanwhile, to keep the wound sweet. What was to be done? A pot of liquid pitch stood in one corner of the hut. Into that they inserted the still bleeding stump, and bound up the wound again. It seemed the only thing to be done, rude and barbarous as was the precaution. At the first streak of dawn they despatched the fleetest among their native boys, with an urgent letter to Salisbury for help. Fired by the promise of two sovereigns on his return, the man set off at a steady jog-trot, vowing he would be in at the township that evening. By eleven o'clock next day Brightling was down again in a hot fit of malaria, while Charlie Thirlmere lay in his corner, feeling the fever of his wound coursing through his veins and mounting to his brain. Presently he wandered in a delirium; strange shapes and scenes passed before his distempered mind; his tongue rambled. He called incessantly for Sybil. So the two men lay: the hours passing on leaden wings.

And Sybil herself was near. For a month or two after her husband's departure for Africa, she had led pretty much her old whirling life of pleasure and excitement. Then things began to pall a little, and she took breath and thought. After all, without Charlie, life seemed somehow different. She missed him in a thousand ways. Even Cecil Cloudesley began to seem empty and inane, and, after all, horseflesh and the society of smart people have their limitations. By the time Goodwood was reached Sybil had made up her mind. She had been chiefly to blame; she would try and do something for dear old Charlie, grinding in the hot sun, in some horribly uninteresting place, out there in Rhodesia. She sold off her ponies, gave up the flat, went down to her mother's, and announced that she and her child had come to stay for six months. The stay resolved itself into much more than that period. A year and more went by; Sybil wrote often to Charlie, but, during his long absence towards the Zambesi, very few letters of his reached her. She became more and more uneasy, and presently, hearing at last that he had settled for a time near Salisbury, she determined to go out to him. Persuading her brother to accompany her, the pair sailed for Cape Town, trained thence to Mafeking (the then limit of the railway), and made their way by road to Salisbury. As fortune willed it, they reached that place early in December, and made preparations to take Charlie Thirlmere by storm. Their Cape cart and a buggy were loaded up with a supply of good things, and they were to start at daybreak next morning. Late that evening the Salisbury doctor came round to their hotel with a grave face. He had had serious news of Thirlmere by a native runner; an accident had happened; could he accompany them early next morning?

The matter was urgent; they set off with four horses in each trap, two hours before sun-up, and, travelling rapidly, reached Charlie Thirlmere's hut soon after three o'clock. Right or wrong, Sybil could not, would not, be gainsaid. She slipped down, ran to the hut, and, standing at the open door, looked at her husband lying there, drawn, pale, and dishevelled, in the corner. All her heart leaped out to him. He was conscious, and knew her.

"Sybil!" he cried feebly. "Where in God's name have you sprung from?"

"My darling old boy," she returned, kneeling at his side, and kissing him tenderly, "it is I, surely enough, come to nurse you and get you well, and," (she whispered in his ear) "never to let you go again, my husband."

She kissed him again and again, and then the doctor came forward. It was a very near thing. Another dozen hours or so, and mortification would have set in. They amputated above the wrist, and, after a most anxious and most miserable time, pulled Charlie Thirlmere through towards Christmas. He lost his left hand, it is true; but, as he always says, it was cheap at the price of his subsequent happiness.

They sold the gold claims excellently well, and the Thirlmeres now live the happiest of lives in a pleasant English country home. No two married people can be more devoted, or faster friends and comrades. One of the most treasured mementoes of their African days stands in their big, cosy hall. It is the grim, white skull of the lion, whose grinning teeth so nearly ended Charlie Thirlmere's existence.

The End.

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