

THE LEAGUE
OF THE
LEOPARD
—
HAROLD BINDLOSS

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HAROLD BINDLOSS

**THE LEAGUE OF THE
LEOPARD**



"AT DAWN THEY WERE STILL RIDING"—[Page 230](#)

THE LEAGUE

OF THE LEOPARD

BY
HAROLD BINDLOSS

AUTHOR OF "PRESCOTT OF
SASKATCHEWAN," "THE LONG
PORTAGE," "RANCHING FOR SYLVIA," ETC.

*WITH A FRONTISPIECE IN COLOR
BY CARLTON GLIDDEN*



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THE LEAGUE OF THE LEOPARD

CHAPTER I

A DANGEROUS BEQUEST

It was very hot in the little West African factory where trader Niven lay dying. The sea breeze had died away, and though sunset drew near, it was not yet time for the spicy airs from the inland forest to mitigate the temperature. The dust lay still in the sun-scorched compound, about which the palm fronds hung motionless, and only the roar of breakers on the beach broke through the drowsy silence.

Two white men lounged in cane chairs upon the veranda which encircled the building. Both were limp, gaunt of frame, and pallid in face, because the climate they lived in is particularly unhealthy. Neither had enjoyed much education, or felt the lack of it in the trade they followed, while the cocktail jug on the little table betokened their favorite relaxation. Redmond and Gilby were West Coast traders who lived far remote from intercourse with their fellows, except for the two French rivals with whom they periodically quarreled. They concerned themselves with little beyond the well-being of their factory, and indulged each appetite on opportunity, knowing that on the morrow they might suddenly die. Yet they had their strong points, including a tenacious regard for their employers' interests, which led them to toil twelve hours daily when sick of fever if trade was good, and sometimes defy the French authorities, and an inconsistent generosity, as the result of which they had camped in the store shed, and turned over their own quarters to the man who stood behind them, and his stricken companion. The former was of very different type.

"You have done your best for the poor devil," said Redmond, glancing regretfully from him toward the empty jug. "But if I know anything about coast fever—and I ought to—Niven will get his release to-night. Still rambling about that fortune, I suppose?"

Carsluith Maxwell nodded, and Gilby commented meditatively: "It may be all a fever fancy, and it may be true. Niven was well known in this afflicted colony years ago, and there is gold up yonder. In fact, right away from here to the Volta you can find the color in the rivers, but there's very little of it that will pay for the washing, and few British mining companies that distribute much in dividends. Still, the old Portuguese took a good deal out, if the tales are true, and one gets small lots now and then put up in quills."

Redmond laughed maliciously.

"The last quills Gilby took in contained brass filings, and the firm wrote off their nominal value against our commission. Gilby had been drinking cocktails all that day. He may be right about the gold, but it's my firm opinion that unless the French send up a strong column and root out the Leopards, no white man will ever find it. You have heard about them, Maxwell?"

Maxwell was a man of discretion, and though he had ventured beyond the fringe of the Leopards' country, he only said:

"I don't know much about them. Do you?"

"He does not," said Gilby. "Neither does any white man; unless perhaps it's Rideau, or Niven. They are supposed to be members of one of the secret leagues run by the bush magicians in connection with the cult of the Ju-Ju; and if you want to know just what kind of devil a Ju-Ju is, you need not ask me. Anyway, from what one hears, those fellows can't be all impostors. They could apparently give our amateur necromancers points in hypnotism, and what they don't know

about poisons is not worth learning. They're no fools at bush politics either; and have managed to run Shaillu's kingdom, and keep white men out of it pretty successfully. It is believed that Shaillu would be glad to rule it without them, in his own way."

Maxwell knew all this, and a little more which his informant apparently did not; but he made no comment, and asked only one question:

"Who is Rideau?"

"He says he is a Frenchman," answered Gilby. "One would suppose that he ought to know; but after a dispute about the count of some monkey skins, Clancy of Axim once asked in public if there was not a dash of the tar brush in him, and was taken ill suddenly that night—which may, of course, have been a coincidence. In any case, he goes trading inland; and though he brings down a little gum, nobody knows exactly what he buys or sells. As you have heard, it's a ghastly country, and there's a heavy penalty for supplying niggers with modern rifles. The little French commandant would give a good deal to fix a charge on him."

"Thanks. I will remember if I meet him; but it is about time I returned to my patient," said Maxwell, and the other two looked after him until he disappeared round a corner of the dwelling.

"A curious man," Gilby commented. "He's probably like the parrot, for he says very little. Still, it is not everybody who would have turned back with his expedition on the very odd chance of saving a crazy countryman. It is just possible, however, he was glad to, after the bushmen had scared him."

"African parrots never think, unless it's about the pricking inside them," said Redmond. "You wouldn't either, if a nigger had fed you with broken glass, so you'd die as soon as he'd sold you, and keep the demand up. You're wrong, as usual, in other ways, too. If I'm a

judge of character, there are no niggers in Africa who could scare that man."

Meanwhile Maxwell had seated himself on the opposite veranda, and, after a glance at a trestle couch which showed him that Niven was apparently asleep, was gazing out to sea. He was close on the age of thirty, of average stature, but spare and sinewy. His sallow face had been further darkened by the African sun, and though now its expression and that of the dark eyes was thoughtful, it was the face of a resolute man. Carsluith Maxwell was also, in a somewhat somber fashion, a handsome man; and though some of his fair acquaintances described him as too silent, and others as too sardonic, all agreed that he was interesting. Maxwell described himself as an individual of unsettled habits, born with fastidious tastes and no means to gratify them—which, he said, explained his wanderings in search of a fortune. He did not add that his chief ambition was to restore to its former prosperity an old Border stronghold which, with every acre of its grass parks and stony plowland heavily encumbered, stood behind the shores of Solway. Carsluith Maxwell, who some day would be master of Culmeny, had inherited more than a trace of the silent grimness of the old moss-troopers from whom he sprang.

Turning presently, he saw that Niven was wide awake and looking out to sea. Their acquaintance had been brief, and dated from the night when Niven reeled into the camp of a small French expedition, alone, fever-stricken, and half-crazy. Seeing that he would die in the forest when the expedition continued its march, Maxwell abandoned his prospecting journey and turned back to the coast with him. The African malaria often attacks a white man's brain as well as his body; and during most of the time Niven had talked erratically. Now, however, Maxwell noticed that he appeared sensible and sane.

"Good to come back to, isn't it?" he said, glancing at the sea, athwart

which the track of the sunset beat luridly. "I used to long for it in the forest when Lyle and I first set up the one factory which ever stood more than twelve months in Shaillu's country. That reminds me! I have a good deal to tell you, and, considering that I may not last out to-morrow, it's high time I began. I have given you a good deal of trouble, but you may not regret it when I have done."

"I shall not regret it in any case," said Maxwell quietly. He was seldom emphatic in speech.

"You are like Lyle, and that's partly why I'm going to tell you. He and I went up into Shaillu's country long ago, and the Leopards tried to poison us. They wanted no white men there, and did not like free trade. They also tried other ways; but if our lives were in our own hands, we held them tight—and any man might face the devil with a partner like Lyle. You will understand presently why I'm commencing at the beginning. Well, we nursed each other through fevers, and twice stood behind a stockade with the rifle barrels burning our hands; but we made money, and I think the Leopards grew afraid of us because we lived in spite of them. Of course, we had our friends, because the brown traders from the North had to pay a heavy toll to the Leopards before we came; and some of them told us about gold having been washed out of a far-off river by niggers who had a poor idea of its value. We were too busy to trouble about ventures of that kind; and as the river flowed through No Man's Land there was nobody to sell us a marketable concession."

The sunset was fading off the waters when Niven paused to gather breath, while his strained voice sank to a deeper tone as he proceeded:

"There was a dispute as to who owned some gum we had paid for, and two men were shot before we convinced the niggers that nobody could lay violent hands upon our property. Then one of Shaillu's sub-

headmen, who said there had been a mistake somewhere, summoned us to a palaver to talk the question over. We went, with twenty armed Krooboyes scared almost to death, who feared Lyle more than they did the niggers, and were given a fair hearing. Several of the big Leopard men were there, but the headman held us justified, and when we had made everybody a present the palaver ended in revelry. I warned Lyle; but to fear nothing, and be equally ready with smile or pistol, was always my comrade's way.

"We came back safely; but he dragged himself up the stairway with his face all twisted the next night, and I knew what had happened before he told me. 'Those devils have poisoned me,' said he."

It was almost dark now, and the white mist from the forest slid in ghostly wreaths past the little factory. Niven shivered before he proceeded:

"Have you ever seen a comrade poisoned by the bushmen—when they meant to hurt him? No! Then you have something to be thankful for. Lyle, by worse luck, was young and strong, and took an unconscionable time dying; I don't know that I did well when I took the pistol from him. For three mortal hours I suffered all with him, and there was no power left in me when at last he let his head drop on the table. There are things it is not fit to remember which one can never forget. Then I knew all that the man had been to me; and what I must do was plain before me.

"I sent the chief Leopard man a message, with a token which, in accordance with his own superstitions, made it more impressive, that sooner or later I would demand full satisfaction, or, if I died too soon, would pass the debt on in a way he understood; and I had not forgotten when a new trading combination made me general manager. You see, I needed money, and could wait very patiently. I also made money, and, when badly sick, let the firm send me home,

a fairly prosperous man, to recruit in England. It was there I met the woman I married; and she was worlds too good for me. I even forgot Lyle, and what we had done in Africa; and—for one looks at things differently over there—hoped for nothing better than to end my days in peace and security."

Niven so far had spoken sensibly, but he ceased when the thick hot African darkness rolled down like a curtain, and was silent a space. The land breeze had delayed its coming, the temperature was almost insupportable, and the roar of the breakers set the whole factory vibrating in unison. It is possible that the fever gathered strength, as it often does, at nightfall; for the sick man's speech was slow and disjointed when he began again. It was also evident that he was a little hazy in his mind.

"Poor Elsie died, and left me very lonely. Without her the life grew tame, and I would lie awake thinking of Africa and Lyle. He was growing impatient, and tried to warn me it was time I went back again. The warnings grew plainer, and at last I went. I had, so far as it was in me, trusted one man and loved one woman, and both of them had gone. The trading firms had forgotten my name, but I remembered the gold in the Leopard's country, and determined, if I could find it, to hire my own fighting boys, and hunt down the whole accursed league. There is no law but the right of the strongest hand in Shaillu's country. I went up with fifty Krooboys; and perhaps the Leopards remembered and were afraid of me, for we had almost reached the place in safety, when one of the sicknesses common up there seized us. I left most of the boys behind in camp with my headman, and pushed on for the river where the gold was said to be. I found it—or Lyle found it for me."

Maxwell thought that no sane man would have attempted single-handed to try conclusions with the almost omnipotent league, but he sat still, with a composure that was characteristic of him, asking no

questions, though the simple statement had roused his most eager interest. It was some time before Niven proceeded.

"I turned back to camp, and found none of all the boys I left there. Perhaps the headman had sold them. He had, you must remember, a curious cross-shaped scar upon his forehead. I don't know where the rest went, or what I did, being fever-crazy, and it must have been Lyle who brought me to the Frenchman's camp. Of course, Lyle is dead—I buried him with my own hands under the first big cottonwood behind the factory long ago—but he has never forgotten me. There was good alluvial gold in that river; and when I go you will find a record of my journey, with sketches and compass bearings, under my pillow. I'll bequeath it to you, with my curse upon the men who killed poor Lyle, on this condition: If you meet the Leopards—and whoever goes up there will—you will remember my quarrel with them, and how my partner died."

"After what I have heard about their doings, I can promise that," said Maxwell quietly.

"I think we both can trust you. You look that kind of man," said Niven. "I should never have told you if you hadn't. The two things go together, for the Leopard headmen will know I have passed the quarrel on. You can't take one without the other."

Niven sank into sleep or unconsciousness presently, and Maxwell sat beside him considering what he had heard. He could see that there was a burden attached to the legacy; but he had no profession, and was not a rich man. It was true that he would shortly succeed to Culmeny, and had inherited the family pride in the ancient estate; but, when the interest had been paid, the rental of the poor, encumbered lands would provide the barest living. He determined that if there was gold in the Leopards' country he would stake his life on the chance of finding it. After coming to this decision he called a Krooboy to watch

the sick man, and retired to snatch a few hours' badly needed sleep. Sleep, however, was some time in coming. The mildewed building was insufferably hot, and the thunder of the surf sufficient to keep awake any man who had lately emerged from the hush of the twilight forest; but at last Maxwell sank into fitful slumber. It afterward was evident that the Krooboy, too, had slumbered.

Several hours had passed when Maxwell awakened suddenly, and sat up listening. Through the deep monotone of the breakers he could hear the land breeze sigh eerily about the building. A snake rustled in the thatch, and loose boards creaked as they soaked in the damp; but although there was nothing suspicious in all this, Maxwell felt that something unusual had roused him. Men acquire an almost instinctive prevision of danger in the eternal shadow of the African bush.

Suddenly a detonation shook the building. Maxwell, leaping from his couch, ran along the veranda and burst, breathless, into Niven's room. Bright moonlight streamed in through the window, and he saw the sick man lying propped up on one elbow, with a pistol smoking in his hand. Niven appeared perfectly sane, and his voice was steady when he spoke.

"My fingers are shaky, and this is a hard pull-off, or I'd have shown you the man who betrayed me," he said. "It was my book he wanted."

Maxwell, who was quick in action, sprang out upon the veranda and made a circuit of the building. The dusty compound beneath it was clear as noonday under the moon, but, save for two startled Krooboy and trader Redmond who crossed it at a run, nobody moved therein, and Maxwell hardly considered it possible that any fugitive would have had time to reach the bush. He returned and told Niven so.

"You must have been mistaken," he said.

The sick trader laughed harshly.

"I am not in the least mistaken. I saw the man with the scar on his forehead as plainly as I see you. He must have been one of the Leopards; and, whether it's magic or trickery, those fellows are fiendishly clever. You won't be astonished at stranger things before they have done with you. Take the book now, and keep it, if you can. If a man called Rideau ever hears you have it and wants to trade with you, distrust him as you would the devil. If he says I ever made any bargain with him, it will be a lie!"

Maxwell went out and allayed Redmond's curiosity by a promise to confer with him in the morning; then he returned to watch beside Niven, who slept tranquilly during the remainder of the night. After breakfast Maxwell told Redmond as much of the story as appeared judicious; but the trader did not, as he partly expected, laugh at it.

"Of course, it may have been all a delusion, and it may not," he said. "If so, it's a coincidence that I heard Rideau has just arrived at the next beach; and one of my boys, who seemed afraid of it, picked this up in the bush. It's a trifle that has a significance in the country your sick friend rambled through."

The trader handed Maxwell a little tuft of leopard's fur braided with fiber.

"If Niven has told you any of his secrets it might be good policy not to mention it," he cautioned; "and Gilby and I are not curious. This factory is sufficiently remunerative and deadly for us."

Niven grew rapidly weaker all day, and when Maxwell asked him at sunset whether he had any messages to send to friends in the old country, he did not appear to recognize him.

"They're all dead a long time ago," he said ramblingly. "Poor Elsie, who was worlds too good for me, lies in clean English earth a long

way across the sea; but Lyle, who understands everything and why I forgot him, is waiting for me. I could not have a better comrade wherever he is."

These were his last comprehensible words, for he passed out of existence, sleeping, with the chill of early morning, and was, as usual, laid to rest that day. Maxwell returned thoughtfully from the simple funeral, feeling that the legacy might well prove an unmixed blessing.

On reaching the veranda stairway, he heard somebody moving softly about what had been the sick man's room. He had good ears, and felt tolerably certain that the next sound he caught was that made by cotton garments being quickly unfolded or wrapped together. Somebody, it appeared, was searching Niven's apparel. In spite of Maxwell's quickness, he had not reached the doorway when a man came out of it and advanced, smiling toward him. He was rather dark in face and full in flesh for an European who had dwelt any time in Western Africa. He also was more elaborately dressed, in spotless white duck, fine linen, and silk sash, than the average trader; but if his lips were a trifle thick, and his eyes cunning, he had an easy, good-humored air, and saluted Maxwell gracefully.

"Monsieur Maxwell, is it not? I have the honor to present myself—Victor Rideau," he said. "By grand misfortune, I arrive too late to change the adieux with my friend of long time, the estimable Niven, and so wait to ask if he left any paper for me. We have affair together, and there is small debt he owe me, *voyez vous?*"

Maxwell was a man of keen perceptions, and he would have distrusted the speaker even if he had not been warned against him.

"He left you no papers. Neither, so far as I can discover, did he leave a single franc piece in money."

"Grand misfortune!" exclaimed Rideau. "Possible it is he tell you of

his affair. The estimable Niven, you understand, was old friend of me. That is why I have the pleasure of wait your company."

"He told me very little about his business affairs, and the rest was spoken in strict confidence," said Maxwell; and for a few seconds the two men eyed each other—Maxwell curious but expressionless in face; Rideau somewhat uneasy. The advantage was with the Briton, for he was seldom loquacious, while the man of Latin extraction seemed to find the silence irksome.

"You are perhaps busy," he said at length. "You grieve for the estimable Niven. Me, I grieve for him also. So, if it is not intrusion, to-morrow, by the morning, I come for condole with you."

Rideau withdrew, and Maxwell first packed his few belongings—a homeward bound steamer was due to call on the morrow—and then sat down to make a copy of the dead man's itinerary, with the sketches attached to it. He was surprised to find that, mad or sane, Niven had noted the magnetic direction of each day's march, as well as taken cross bearings of prominent objects wherever there was open country. These details increased his hopefulness; and when he had enclosed the copy in a sealed envelope and handed it to the French postmaster, he buttoned the original in an inside pocket and sat down on the veranda, smoking thoughtfully.

"It appears that other men beside myself believe Niven actually did find gold up there, as two attempts to steal his diary seem to prove," he reflected. "Whoever goes up to look for it will probably have to deal with Monsieur Victor Rideau as well as the Leopards; and a little delay in setting about the search may throw him off the scent. The first necessity is a reliable partner, and I can think of nobody better than Hyslop."

The homeward bound mailboat arrived before Rideau the next day, and when she stopped at the first port connected by cable, Maxwell

despatched a message to London:

"Wire Hyslop to meet me by Malemba."

Before the steamer proceeded he received the answer:

"Hyslop dead South America, according to Dane."

"Poor Andrew!" thought Maxwell. "That is check number one. Still, there must be many suitable men at home, and I dare say I shall find one. Who Dane is, Carslake, parsimonious as usual, does not explain."

CHAPTER II

AN UNDERSTANDING

It was a pleasant summer evening when Hilton Dane leaned against a beech trunk outside Thomas Chatterton's villa which stands upon a hillside above the Solway shore. He was a tall, fair-haired man who looked older than his age, twenty-five, with steady blue eyes, and usually a somewhat masterful air; but just then his eyes were wistful, and his face, which betokened an acquaintance with the tropical sun, expressed somewhat tempered satisfaction. He had certainly cause for the latter feeling, because, after toiling hard at railroad building in a foreign land, it was comforting to know that he had earned the right to rest a while in that peaceful retreat.

The sun still touched the velvet lawn, though the shadows lengthened across it, and the larch wood behind the red-tiled building diffused resinous odors. The grass sloped to a river which came down amber-tinted from the stretch of heather growing black against the east, and, curving round two meadows, flashed through the gloom of fir branches into a deep pool. All this was pleasant to the wanderer newly returned from the glare of the desolate pampa and the turmoil of dusty construction camps; but Dane found the keenest pleasure in watching his companion.

Lilian Chatterton, niece of the childless owner of The Larches, was worth inspection. She was a year or two younger than the man, and lay in a low chair opposite him, her fingers busy with a ball of colored thread, while the last of the sunlight sparkled in her hair. Dane noticed how its bronze color flashed into lustrous gold, and decided that the

changing lights in the hazel eyes matched it wonderfully well. Nevertheless, he had seen them burn with quick indignation, for the girl possessed a spice of the Chatterton temper, which was never remarkably equable. Presently he allowed several loops of thread to slip from the skein he held, and she looked up with a trace of indignation.

"That is the second time! You cannot be tired already," she said.

Dane smiled a trifle grimly. He had toiled for twelve hours daily under burning heat and then spent half the night poring over plans, not long ago.

"I am not quite worn out; but is it not an unfair question, considering my present employment? This skein is getting mixed, and I was wondering if you would allow me to help you in straightening it."

Miss Chatterton glanced at him keenly before she shook her head. It was not surprising that she had grown used to masculine homage, but none of her other cavaliers had quite resembled this one. He was slower and more solid, and, while he had a way of anticipating her wishes, he lacked their versatility. Sometimes she wished, with a sense of irritation, that she could dismiss him as summarily as she had done the rest, but that could not be done without incurring Thomas Chatterton's displeasure, which was no small thing to risk.

"No," she said decisively. "I believe you tangled it yourself. Don't you think it would run more smoothly if you gave the thread more length? Well, why don't you act upon the suggestion?"

"I was thinking," the man answered with a meditative air; and Miss Chatterton laughed.

"It is a bad habit of yours. Of the famous mining pump, or the lawsuit, presumably?"

There was something in the speaker's manner which qualified the smile in her hazel eyes, and warned the man that his companion was merely bent on discovering how far he was disposed to respect the wishes she had not directly expressed. He, on his part, was wondering how he could best intimate that certain fears she entertained were groundless. He laughed softly, though a tinge of darker color crept into his tanned face as he remembered the uncompromising frigidity with which she had at first received him.

"I feel that I ought to say something civil," he said. "How could one think of the things you mention in such surroundings?"

The girl was in a variable mood, and she smiled mischievously.

"That is not civil. It implies that I expected you to. Tell me instead how the pump is progressing."

"The pump is not progressing," said the man. "In fact, it is standing still; and, though the court upheld my patent, it will probably continue to stand still for lack of capital. Capital is hard to acquire, you know."

"But you were well paid, and promoted several times on your merits in South America, were you not?" asked Miss Chatterton.

"I was lucky," Dane said quietly. "It was due to no merit of mine that my superiors died off with yellow fever; but when the inventor desires a fair share of the profit himself, it requires a good deal of money to start off pumps and similar inventions successfully."

"You are growing avaricious," declared Miss Chatterton, and let her eyes fall a little under the man's gaze.

"You are right," he said. "I would sell half my life to any one for the few thousand pounds the invention would repay twenty-fold; and somehow I shall get them."

The listener fancied that this was possible, for there was a stamp of force and endurance upon the man; but she did not inquire why he was so anxious for wealth. While she considered her answer, and he wondered how he could best express what must be said, there was an interruption; for it happened a few moments earlier that the owner of The Larches flung down the balance-sheet he was perusing in a room which did not look out upon the lawn.

"Those new directors are a pack of fools," he observed. "They are throwing away all I so painfully built up. I'm going to catch a trout in the moss pool; and, as I saw Maxwell's rascals putting up the fence again, I'll demolish his iniquitous obstruction on my way. Helen, where have these stupid people hidden my flybook again?"

Mrs. Chatterton smiled a little, and, reminding her husband that the book was in his pocket, followed him to the door.

Thomas Chatterton and the father of Hilton Dane had set up a little wire mill when both were struggling men, and, though Dane's rolling machinery had started them on the way to prosperity, its inventor died too soon. Chatterton was always considered an upright man; but, because Dane's widow did not long survive her husband, nobody knew exactly whether his success was due to his own energy or the dead man's invention. Chatterton, however, recognized a moral debt, and would have discharged it, but that Hilton Dane had inherited his mother's pride as well as his father's skill. When the famous business was sold to a company, the iron-master, purchasing a small estate in Scotland, aspired to play the part of a country gentleman, in which he was not wholly successful. He was at once too autocratic and too democratic; and the local magnates of ancient descent resented his habit of doing exactly what pleased himself in defiance of their most cherished traditions. He had accordingly embroiled himself with Maxwell of Culmeny over what he contended was an ancient right of way.

When he reached the door he turned and smiled significantly at his wife.

"They seem well contented, do they not?" he said.

Mrs. Chatterton understood him, though she did not smile as she glanced at the two on the lawn. Lilian's white-robed figure was forced up sharply in a manner that emphasized its comeliness by the somber background of larches; and the last of the ruddy light deepened the faint, warm tinge in her cheeks. Dane's face was in the shadow, as he looked down upon the girl, but his form showing darkly against the light was that of a vigorous, well-made man; and Mrs. Chatterton, knowing his disposition, reflected that her niece might make a less desirable choice. It was, however, she thought, unfortunate that her husband was seldom addicted to leaving those he desired to benefit any choice at all; and she considered that he had made his intentions respecting Dane and his niece too plain, for Lilian had a tolerably strong will of her own.

Chatterton moved forward, and the two turned sharply at the sight of the stout, thick-necked, elderly gentleman, in vivid red leggings and slouch hat adorned with gaudy flies.

"We had neither time nor taste for needle-work when I was young, Hilton, but these are degenerate days," he said, with a twinkle in his eyes. "Do you feel inclined to help me to catch a trout during the evening rise?"

Dane glanced appealingly toward his companion. He would have felt no great inclination for being sent into the river to free the iron-master's line, which usually formed part of the program on such excursions, even if he had not a better reason for refusing.

"I am afraid the water is too clear, sir, for an indifferent angler; and it might spoil this skein if I left it partly wound," he answered lamely.

Lilian, however, possibly for Chatterton's benefit, ignored the appeal.

"So far you have only succeeded in entangling it," she said.

Dane had no choice left but to express the pleasure it would afford him at least to carry his host's landing net; and he did it as well as possible, though uneasily conscious that Chatterton was amused at him. Then they waded together through long damp grass which soaked Dane's thin shoes through, while Chatterton discoursed learnedly upon lines and flies. He was as cholerick and obstinate as he could be generous when the impulse seized him, and he had ruled stubborn operatives so long that the use of the strong hand had become habitual to him. Presently he halted, fuming with indignation, before a hedge.

"That confounded Maxwell has built it up stronger than ever!" he exploded. "Look at that, and see how he respects a public right of way! Don't you consider it perfectly scandalous, Hilton?"

Dane saw an irate elderly gentleman, and a neatly mended gap in the hedge; but being uncertain as to what answer would best soothe the former, he wisely held his peace until he should furnish further particulars. Chatterton, however, espying a stout stake in the grass, commenced a spirited attack upon the hedge. So vigorous was it that his face grew flushed and his hat fell off, while Dane looked on with suspicious gravity, smothering a desire to laugh.

"If you really want that gap opened, I dare say I could assist you, sir," he said.

Chatterton panted wrathfully.

"Do you suppose I am doing this for exercise? It's a public duty! I have battered it down twice already, and defied Culmeny to sue me."

He plied the stake again until, glancing from a root, it smote him on the ankle. Desisting then, he commented upon his neighbor's conduct viciously while Dane proceeded to attack the obstruction with marked success. Chatterton, when he noticed this, watched him admiringly; and when Dane tore his hand on a strand of barbed wire, he positively beamed on him.

"I'm sorry, Hilton; but, in one way, it's almost a pity you did not tear it worse," he said. "Still, I dare say it will rankle sufficiently to give us something to claim damages from Culmeny upon. Meantime, go home and ask Lily to tie it up. Nobody could do it more neatly."

"I certainly hope it will not, sir," said Dane, with a trace of irritation; though, being thankful for the excuse, he lost no time in returning.

Meanwhile, Lilian Chatterton sat where he had left her, in a contemplative frame of mind. She and Dane had been playmates in their younger days, and the latter had afterward shown his admiration for her in youthful fashion. That was before he went abroad; but her cheeks tingled as she remembered how she had been made to feel, a few weeks earlier, that it was Chatterton's desire that their youthful friendship should speedily ripen into something further. Lilian was grateful to the iron-master, who had denied her nothing, and brought her up as his daughter; but she was also sensitive, and accordingly shrank from Dane, wondering, with a sense of shame, what had been said to him, and whether he, too, considered her own opinion as of no importance. The man's conduct had, however, partly reassured her, for he made no advances; she did not know that he had, during several years spent in strenuous effort, carried her memory and a stolen photograph about with him.

Had she been a free agent she might have been inclined to approve of Hilton Dane. She knew he was honest, resolute, and capable, while as regards physique, nature had treated him well; but as it was,

and because there were no friends she could find an excuse for visiting, it appeared essential that he should be made to recognize that there could be no more than a mutual toleration between them. Miss Chatterton had just arrived at this conclusion when the man came toward her across the lawn. Again it struck her that the bronzed face beneath the straw hat was that of an honest man, and that the blue eyes had a kindly gleam in them; but she brushed such thoughts aside impatiently.

"What has brought you back so soon?" she asked.

"The need of assistance," Dane answered with a laugh, and the girl's mood changed swiftly as she glanced at his injured hand. Her eyes grew sympathetic.

"Will you wait a few moments until I find some arnica?" she said.

Dane would have waited a long time in return for such a glance, and, when the girl rejoined him, he felt that the pain was a very small price to pay for the pleasure of letting his torn hand rest in her little cool palm. When it had been bound up with a dainty handkerchief, Lilian smiled prettily.

"I think," she said playfully, "with due care you should now recover."

"Do you know that I feel tempted to go back and tear the other?" returned the man.

Lilian regarded him with some uneasiness.

"Such speeches do not become you," she said. "No doubt there are idle men who consider that they prove irresistible to most of us; but you—you are different."

"Yes," Dane assented somewhat grimly. "I suppose my lot is to drag the measuring chain and do the hard work more famous men get

paid for; but a little variety is refreshing—and there were times when you did not seem to find any levity on my part wholly irksome."

The girl's color rose a little, and there was a sparkle in her eyes. She understood that this was a challenge, but she did not guess that it had been thrown down for her sake out of kindliness. Unfortunately, she recalled several incidents connected with the days to which her companion referred, and she recollected that he had an unpleasantly good memory.

"We were only boy and girl then," she said. "One forgets such nonsense as one grows older. Still, I am almost glad you mentioned it, because—can't you see the uselessness of remembering?"

Dane, though he did not say so, saw most clearly the impossibility of ever being able to forget; but he was considerate, and had sense enough to see what he would lose by taking advantage of the position. He had noticed how, until his conduct reassured her, she held aloof from him.

"What could an unfortunate man answer?" he asked with a mirthless smile. "Do you expect me to admit that I am pleased to consider it is so?"

Lilian looked down at the grass to hide the anger in her face.

"Please don't—I am not wholly foolish," she said; and added abruptly, "I have almost decided on going to London for a course of art study shortly."

Dane leaned forward a little, and forced her to look up at him.

"That is, you are going away to avoid me," he said. "Have you considered that this might not only render circumstances unpleasant for you, but be unnecessary?"

Lilian looked at him steadily, for she was not lacking in courage.

"I am my own mistress; and they are distinctly unpleasant already."

Every word of the answer cost Dane an effort, but he determined to finish his task.

"I can realize that they must be so," he said. "I am not clever at expressing myself, and what I have to say is difficult to me, but I cannot allow you to be driven away. We are both master of our own inclinations, are we not?—and you have my word that, if you can trust me, it really isn't necessary."

There was no doubt about the relief in Lilian's face; and though it hurt the man to see it, he held out his hand.

"We shall be good friends once more; and that implies a good deal, does it not?" he said. "Promise so much, and I will engage that you have no further perplexity."

Lilian felt very grateful.

"I think I can promise that, now that we understand," she replied.

"Then it is a compact," said Dane, hiding his own regret manfully. "As a change, you might tell me why your uncle finds such satisfaction in destroying his neighbor's fences. He even said it was a pity I did not tear my hand more seriously."

Lilian was glad to change the subject.

"He fancied that Maxwell of Culmeny closed the gap to annoy him," she explained. "Unfortunately, when tearing down the first barrier, he hurt his foot, which naturally made him more determined to maintain ancient privileges. In one way, the feud is amusing; in another, vexatious; because we are lonely here, and the Misses Maxwell cannot well call upon us. Their brother Carsluith has lately returned

from Africa, and would have made you a pleasant companion."

"Carsluith Maxwell?" said Dane. "It is curious that I was of some service to a friend of his, named Hyslop, in South America. The poor fellow struck our camp pulled down by sickness and apparently in want of money, and we were able to find him employment."

"Did you not mention that the contractors would not replace the assistants who died of fever?" asked Lilian. "Did they endorse your action?"

"I can't say they did," was the answer. "They were not required to."

"Oh! Then who paid Hyslop's salary?"

"It was arranged," Dane answered ambiguously. "You see, he was a countryman; and the poor fellow died soon afterward, anyway. I think I shall walk over to Culmeny."

Lilian asked no further questions. She felt that any one in trouble could trust the man beside her. She smiled as she said:

"I am afraid that would not be judicious. Your host would consider it an act of treachery."

They went back to the house together; and in the meantime, Thomas Chatterton, who was not a skilful angler, whipped several pools unsuccessfully, hooking nothing but weeds, and once, by accident, a water hen. Thus it happened that he had not returned when darkness fell, and Mrs. Chatterton despatched Dane in search of him. The moon was rising when the latter came down a path through the fir wood and stopped beside a deep, black pool. A streak of silver light crept up to the roots of an alder beside a ruined wall, and he paused to watch the wrinkled current flash athwart it. The odors of the firs and the stillness of the night were soothing: the sacrifice he had lately made had been a heavy one. Dane had not abandoned his hopes,

but knew that he might have to wait long for their consummation, if they were ever realized.

Presently there was a sound of footsteps, and Dane guessed that the approaching shape was Chatterton by the red glow of his cigar. The iron-master stopped beside the alder, and it seemed that something which caused a ripple near its roots caught his eyes. Dane suspected that some poacher had set a night line.

Now, the wall marked the boundary between Chatterton's riparian rights and those of Culmeny; and it was out of idle curiosity that Dane watched his host instead of hailing him as, first looking about him, he descended the bank and hauled in the line. An exclamation of disgust followed as a writhing eel was flung out upon the grass; but there were nobler fish attached, and presently Chatterton stood up holding a splendid trout. Dane remembered that his father had sworn by Chatterton's commercial integrity, but he was not wholly astonished when the man slipped the fish, and a second one which followed it, into his creel. Then, surmising that the angler would not have desired a witness, he turned back softly and met him in the wood, flattering himself that he had arranged the meeting neatly.

"Had you any luck, sir?" he asked.

"The water was low, but here is something to convince the mockers," Chatterton answered, holding up a handsome trout; and Dane expressed admiration but no astonishment, which might not have been complimentary.

They walked home together, and Lilian met them in the hall. She surveyed the trout suspiciously, then laughed as she said:

"You look hot and muddy, and almost guilty. Are you quite sure you have not been poaching?"

Miss Chatterton was a shrewd young lady, and for a moment the iron-

master, who had quelled several strikes unaided, looked positively uneasy.

"Young women were taught that flippancy did not become them when I was young," he rebuked.

Late that night the two men sat talking together.

"You have told me little about your affairs, Hilton," Chatterton said; "but I presume you will stay at home and put your pump on the market instead of accepting the foreign commission. There should be a good demand for it among the deep mine owners."

"I'm afraid not, sir," was the answer. "The patent lawsuit proved expensive, and to start an article of that kind successfully requires a good deal of money. I shall therefore go abroad to earn a little more as soon as the firm sends me."

"And risk your life for a thousand pounds," said Chatterton severely. "Don't you know that there are men with money who would be willing to finance you?"

"All I have met demanded three-fourths of the possible profits in return; and this is my invention."

"It is a valuable one," declared Chatterton with unusual diffidence. "But can't you think of anybody who would lend you the money out of good-will at a very moderate interest?"

Dane looked at the speaker steadily before he answered.

"I think I could; and I'm grateful; but unfortunately I can't bring myself to borrow money from such people. It would be abusing their kindness; and I might lose it for them."

Chatterton frowned.

"You are like your father—and as confoundedly hard to do a favor to," he said.

He retired shortly after this; and Dane went out into the moonlight, and leaned over the rails of a footbridge, watching the river slide past. He found a faint solace in the sounds and scents which filled the shadows, and knew that though he had taken the one course possible, if he was to retain his own self-respect and Lilian's esteem, there would be no sleep for him that night.

CHAPTER III

AT THE ELBOW POOL

While waiting for his foreign commission, Dane found the summer days slip by almost too rapidly, though there were occasions when, after a long afternoon spent in Lilian's company, he fancied he could understand the feelings of Tantallus. The girl appeared completely reassured, and treated him with sisterly cordiality, while Chatterton, who knew nothing of their compact, nodded sapiently as he observed their growing friendship. Dane sometimes wondered if he were not heaping up future sorrow for himself; but, with infrequent exceptions, he found the present very good, and, being a sanguine man who could wait, he made the most of it.

Lilian was troubled by no misgivings. Once, when her aunt asked a diplomatic question, she smiled frankly as she said: "Yes. I am in one way very fond of Hilton; you will remember that I always was. We understand each other thoroughly; and he is so assured and solid that one feels a restful sense of security in his company. You will remember the Highland chieftain's candlesticks—the men with the claymores and torches, Auntie. Well, I fancy that worthy gentleman must have felt the same thing when he dined in state with them about him. He had but to lift his finger and they would disappear, you know."

Mrs. Chatterton looked slightly grave as she answered: "Don't forget that they were also men with passions, and very terrible men, sometimes—for instance, at Killiecrankie. It would not surprise me if you discovered that there is a good deal of very vigorous human nature in Hilton Dane."

Thomas Chatterton still went fishing, generally with indifferent success, but once Lilian caught Dane examining his creel, which was surprisingly well filled.

"I am puzzled, Hilton," she said. "I made a wager with Uncle that he would not catch a dozen good trout in a month, and now I fancy that he will win it."

"Well?"

"Men are deceivers ever—especially when it is a question of catching fish. I have noticed that when your host goes fishing by daylight he rarely catches anything but eels, which, as everybody knows, do not rise to a fly, while when he rises early or returns in the dusk he brings a really fine trout or two. I cannot, however, believe that this one died only two hours ago. Can you suggest an explanation?"

"Charity," said Dane gravely, "suspecteth nothing. Don't you know that trout rise most freely just before the dusk?"

Lilian shook her head.

"You are not sufficiently clever to set your wits against a woman's," she declared.

Dane laughed, a trifle grimly; and the girl, momentarily startled by something in his merriment, decided that she must have been mistaken; but she abandoned the subject with some abruptness.

That very evening, perhaps sent forth by fate, because much depended upon his fishing, Thomas Chatterton took up his rod and landing net, and, as he did not return by nightfall, his wife once more despatched Dane in search of him.

"I think you know where to find him; and I wish I did, for he has only to

take two more trout to win," Lilian added significantly.

Dane proceeded by the shortest way to the big elbow pool, but it was almost dark when he reached it. There had been heavy rain, and all the firs which loomed through thin white mist were dripping. The water came down beneath them thick with the peat of the moorlands in incipient flood. Dane could hear its hoarse growl about the boulders studding the tail rapid, and surmised that there ought to be several trout on the poacher's line. Having, nevertheless, no desire to surprise his host red-handed, he did not immediately proceed toward it, but sat upon the driest stone he could find, listening for his coming. There was no sound but the clamor of the river and the heavy splashing of moisture from the boughs above, some of which trickled down his neck, until he heard a rattle of falling stones, and a shadowy figure, which he guessed was Chatterton's, crawled down toward the alder roots.

A splash was followed by a hoarse exclamation as the man slipped into the water up to the knee; then Dane heard the thud of a flung out fish, and sat very still, for it would clearly be injudicious to present himself just then. He noticed a minute twinkle of brightness among the boulders across the pool which puzzled him. It was too small for the light of a lantern, and he remembered nothing that shone in just the same fashion. While he wondered what it could be, another dark object rose beside the alder, gripping what looked like a heavy stick.

"I'm thinking I have ye noo!" a gruff voice exclaimed. "Ye sorrowful wastrel, stealing a puir man's fish!"

Thomas Chatterton stood upright, knee-deep in the river, with an exclamation; and Dane, knowing there was much deeper water close behind him, sprang to his feet. That the irascible iron-master would show fight if necessary, he felt certain, and equally so that a portly elderly gentleman would make a poor match for a brawny laborer.

Hardly had he got to his feet, however, than the keeper, sliding down the bank, dropped silently into the river, and disappeared as if by magic, while, as Dane wondered what had startled him, another voice rang out.

"Run straight in on the alder while I head him off from the first!" it directed; and a whistle was followed by the sound of trampling feet.

Somebody came smashing through the undergrowth, and Dane was never quite certain as to the cause for what happened next, though he surmised that Chatterton's dread of becoming a laughing-stock to his enemy proved momentarily stronger than his reason. In any case, he must have endeavored to follow the keeper's lead, and lost his footing, for a side swing of the stream swept him out from shore, while Dane, realizing that an elderly gentleman in heavy boots and leggings was hardly likely to make much head against a flooded river, plunged from the bank in the flattest dive he could compass, though horribly afraid that he might strike his head against a submerged stone. It was a good plunge, for he rose almost in mid-stream, and heard a great splashing and panting close before him. A few moments later, he had Chatterton by the shoulder, and braced himself for a struggle.

Chatterton, though driving sideways down the stream, could apparently swim a little, and did not appear unduly alarmed. Indeed, Dane had cause for believing he feared nothing except ridicule; but he was very heavy, and panted stentoriously, while muddy froth beat into the younger man's eyes and nostrils, and the rebound, which surged in a whirling eddy from a central rock, swept them down together toward the white race between the boulders at the tail of the pool. Dane had no intention of being hammered against them if it could be avoided, and did his utmost, thrusting with one hand on Chatterton's shoulder and swimming on his side. Still, the boulders swept up-stream past them, the larches flitted by, and though they

drew clear of the fastest rush, it seemed impossible that they could make a landing in time to escape the rapid. Chatterton was apparently swallowing water, and choking badly now.

"For heaven's sake, make a last effort, sir!" spluttered Dane; and the iron-master splashed furiously.

A strip of shingle grew nearer, but they would hardly have reached it had not a man floundered in almost shoulder-deep and clutched them as they passed. All three went down together, Chatterton undermost; but when Dane's head broke the surface, a hand was twined in his hair, and a half-choked voice said:

"You are in wading distance, man. Get up and walk!"

Dane felt sliding shingle beneath him, and tightening his grip on Chatterton he struggled for a foothold; and finally they reeled, breathless, dazed, and dripping, out among the boulders. Then somebody turned back the slide of a darkened lantern, and the half-drowned Chatterton gasped, for it was evident that his rescuer was Carsluith Maxwell, the son of his enemy. Maxwell stared at Chatterton, and the iron-master gaped at him; but while blank astonishment was stamped on both their faces, it was Maxwell who recovered his senses first.

"Robertson, hail Jim to run over to The Larches, and say that Mr. Chatterton, who fell into the river trying to capture a poacher, is coming home with me to change his clothes," he ordered, and then turned toward the dripping pair. "It was very plucky of you, sir, and you were only a few seconds too late. I thought you would secure the depredator. It is two miles round by the footbridge, and you hardly look fit for the walk, so you are coming to Culmeny with me. There is really no use protesting."

Thomas Chatterton did not look capable of much exertion, but he

hesitated.

"It is very kind of you, but your father and I, unfortunately—"

Maxwell laughed.

"I believe you had some trifling difference; but this is a Christian country, and the reason given quite insufficient for letting you freeze to death. Mr. Dane, I presume? You will help me to persuade your host."

Chatterton, although exhausted, yielded dubiously, and it was not long before the pair shed their dripping garments beside a blazing fire in Culmeny, and struggled into the dry ones provided, both sets being of average size. Dane, however, was tall and long of limb; Chatterton was short and broad, and when his toilet was finished, he stood up half-choked, with every button straining about him.

"This is worse than a strait waistcoat, Hilton," he fumed; "and I'd rather forfeit five pounds than go down and meet them as I am. By the way, I believe I never thanked you; but I will not forget our swim. But tell me how you came to turn up so opportunely."

Chatterton betrayed some anxiety in the last words, but Dane managed to frame an answer which reassured him as he surveyed himself in a glass and hoped the Misses Maxwell would not put in an appearance. The wet hair plastered down his forehead showed a washed-out straw color against the darkened skin. His brown wrists and ankles projected ridiculously from the borrowed garments, and somebody's slippers would not cover more than a portion of his feet.

"We are neither of us particularly prepossessing at first sight, but I suppose we must make the best of it; Maxwell asked us to come down when we were ready," he said.

They went down, Chatterton fuming, Dane struggling with a desire to laugh; and two men rose to meet them when they entered a long, low-

ceilinged room. That meeting was fraught with far-reaching consequences, and Dane could afterward recall it vividly. The old place of Culmeny was an ancient and somewhat decrepit edifice, owned for many generations by the Maxwells, and the wainscot of the room was dark with age. Quaintly embroidered curtains were drawn across one end of it; there were few pictures, and these old; while the whole place wore a somber air, almost intensified by the light of the wax candles on the great uncovered table, which supported a steaming bowl. This, Dane noticed, was of oak hooped with tarnished silver. It was, however, the two men who fixed his attention. The elder, a spare gray-haired man with a white moustache, came forward holding out his hand.

"I must congratulate you upon your escape, Mr. Chatterton," he said. "I am glad that Carsluith had sense enough to bring you home with him; and I can recommend a ladleful of this mixture as a preventative against a chill, while regretting that, because the fires were low, we could not send you a dose earlier. The customs of Culmeny are not altogether what they used to be."

The pair formed a striking contrast when Chatterton turned toward his host, glass in hand. The one was softly spoken, spare to gauntness, and characterized by a subtle air of distinction; the other, short, florid, abrupt in speech, and more often aggressive than dignified in manner. Then, because Chatterton was also a man of impulse, who cared for neither place nor tradition when anything stirred him, as his host's welcome evidently did, he bowed to Brandram Maxwell with more grace than Dane deemed him capable of.

"Here's to our better acquaintance, sir; and my best thanks," he said. "I'm a plain, self-taught man, and may have blundered in enforcing what I thought my rights. If so, I regret it."

What Brandram Maxwell answered Dane did not remember, but he

expressed it very neatly; and while the feud was patched up, his son smiled curiously at the younger man. He was like his father, but taller in stature, dark in color of eyes and hair, and slightly olive-tinted in complexion, while his movements suggested a wiry suppleness. Dane surmised that he was of reserved, if not slightly sardonic, disposition.

The bowl of punch was emptied with every sign of amity; and when it was finished Thomas Chatterton, who had absorbed the major portion and declared that he had never tasted anything better, said: "I hope we shall see much more of each other in future, and, as an earnest of the wish, I will expect you shortly at The Larches, where Mrs. Chatterton will thank you for your kindness better than I can."

While Brandram Maxwell started some topic of conversation with his elder guest, his son, to whom Dane had mentioned the affair of the Englishman in South America, drew him aside.

"Hyslop and I were once good friends, and I consider myself your debtor for what you did for him," he said. "Did he tell you much about his wanderings, or that he and I came near successfully exploiting a Mexican mine?"

"No," said Dane. "He told me very little. What went wrong with the mine?"

Maxwell laughed.

"The unexpected happened. It generally does when one awaits the consummation of an ingenious scheme. I am especially sorry Hyslop has gone."

Dane longed to ascertain whether his new friend suspected any other explanation than the one he had seized upon for Chatterton's plunge into the river, and endeavored to do so, without success; for even when he afterward learned to know and trust him well, he never found

it easy to glean more from Carsluith Maxwell than he wished to tell. An accident, however, favored him, and he thought more of the man for his reticence when, as the master of Culmeny was exhibiting some new artificial minnows in his gun-room, he heard his son, who had slipped away, say to somebody in the darkness beneath the open window:

"You remember the pheasants' eggs incident, Kevan? You need not repeat your explanations, because I have no intention of raking it up, and merely wish to suggest that you find means of preventing your comrades from talking too much about what happened to-night. When a gentleman of Mr. Chatterton's years allows his excitement to overcome him to such an extent that he follows a poacher into a flooded river, he naturally would not like his adventures made public property."

"I'm a wee bit puzzled, sir," answered an invisible person; and Maxwell's voice rose faintly through the sound of retreating footsteps:

"I am not puzzled in the least; and that ought to be sufficient. You are sure you understand my wishes?"

He came in a few moments later to inform his guests that the dog-cart was waiting.

As they drove home, Chatterton said sententiously:

"We all make mistakes at times, Hilton; and that was most excellent punch. For instance, when one comes to know him, Maxwell is what might be termed a very good fellow. Hard up like the rest of them, of course; land and buildings, as everybody knows, burdened to the hilt, but—I suppose it was born in him—he bears the stamp, and his son wears it too. You and I are different, you know, though travel has done a good deal for you. I have handled a good many men in my time, and I like that fellow's looks. He would be a very bad kind to tackle

when the devil that smiles through his black eyes wakes up; and I think he'd stand by the man who played him fair through the damnedest kind of luck."

Dane, who fully endorsed this opinion, was afterward to discover that Thomas Chatterton was no bad judge of his fellow-men.

"They are neither of the type one associates with this part of the country," he commented.

"No," said Chatterton. "They were, I understand, always an adventurous family, and some of them who took part in the wars there in the old days intermarried with the Spaniards then holding the Low Countries. A strain of that kind takes a long time to work out, you know."

Chatterton's fishing was not without results, for in spite of, or perhaps because of, their different character and experience, it was the commencement of a friendship between himself and Maxwell of Culmeny. The iron-master had hewn his own way to fortune, and, being troubled by no petty diffidence, was, if anything, overfond of recounting his earlier struggles. The wild blood of the old moss-troopers still pulsed in the veins of the Maxwells, and the impoverished gentleman, who listened with interest, sighed as he remembered the sordid monotony of his own career, during which he had, by dint of painful economy, somewhat lightened the burden with which his inheritance had been saddled by the recklessness of his forbears.

Carsluith Maxwell took even more kindly to his new acquaintances; and there sprang up between himself and Dane a comradeship which was to stand a bitter test, while, as summer merged into autumn, he would sometimes wonder at himself. He said nothing about his African venture, and spent much time considering old rent books and the cost of moss-land reclamation schemes. The rest he spent shooting with Dane, or lounging at The Larches, if possible in Lilian Chatterton's vicinity; but, although he could rouse himself to temporary brilliancy, Maxwell was usually oversilent in feminine

society, and Dane felt no jealousy. The latter rested content in the meantime with the knowledge that Lilian found a mild pleasure in his company; and only Mrs. Chatterton felt any misgivings respecting future possibilities. Being a wise woman, she kept her suspicions to herself until they became certainties, when one day Miss Margaret Maxwell, perhaps not wholly by accident, gave her a significant hint.

"I hear that your brother has undertaken an extensive drainage scheme," said the elder lady.

"We are hopeful that he will settle down at last," responded Margaret Maxwell. "My father's health is failing, and he has long desired his son's company; but Carsluith was always ambitious, and used to say he would never vegetate in poverty at Culmeny. Of late, however, we have been pleased to see that he is taking an almost suspicious interest in the improvement of the estate, and is now investing the money he made in Mexico in the reclamation of Langside Moss. As Carsluith seldom does anything without a reason, his sudden change of program puzzles us."

Mrs. Chatterton fancied she could supply the reason, but she made no comment. Lilian, she decided, had a right to choose for herself, and might make a worse selection than a Maxwell of Culmeny.

In the meantime, Dane still awaited his foreign commission, and might have waited indefinitely, but that once again a poacher played a part in the shaping of his destiny. There were plenty of them in that neighborhood; while rogue, and clown, and commonplace individual of average honesty usually outnumber either the saints or heroes in life's comedy. The poachers were netting the Culmeny partridges, and Dane promised to assist his comrade in an attempt to capture them.

CHAPTER IV

THE POACHER

It was a chilly night when Dane crouched in very damp clover beside a straggling hedge, waiting for the poachers, and wishing he had been wise enough to remain at home. Rain had fallen throughout the day, and now heavy clouds drifted overhead, while a chilly breeze shook an eery sighing out of the firs behind him. The moon was seldom visible, but a subdued luminescence filtered through, and he could just see Maxwell crouching in a neighboring ditch which was not wholly dry.

"What are you meditating upon, Hilton?" Maxwell asked.

"I was just thinking what a fool I was to come at all, and that it is almost time I went home again. When a man has had tropical fever it is his own fault if he suffers from indulgence in amusements of this description."

"I am not entirely comfortable either," Maxwell said dryly. "My boots are full of water, and my hair is thick with sand; but I dare say both of us have had worse experiences. If those fellows don't come in the next ten minutes I'll turn back with you."

Neither said anything further for a space. The firs moaned behind them, the dampness chilled them through, and the odor of wet clover was in their nostrils. When, instead of ten minutes, nearly half an hour had passed, there was a low whistle from a hidden keeper, and Dane could dimly see several indistinct figures in the adjoining meadow.

"Kevan and the constable should head them off," whispered Maxwell. "I'll race you for the first prisoner, Hilton!"

It was characteristic of Maxwell that he had worked an opening ready in the hedge, and slipped through it, while Dane hurled himself crashing upon the thorns. He broke through them, somehow, and noticed very little as he raced across the dripping aftermath except that two men strove to drag something over the opposite hedge. Before he could reach it, Maxwell had separated from him, and because the moon shone down through a rift in the clouds, he saw him clear the hedge in a flying bound. The next moment he had his hand on the collar of one man brought up by the thorns. Dane saw his face for an instant, and then, when the other kicked him savagely on the knee, he shifted his hand to his throat, and was doing his best to choke the fight out of him when he heard footsteps behind him, and something descended heavily upon his head. He fell with a violence that shook the remaining senses out of him, and lay vacantly listening to the sound of running feet and hoarse shouts which grew fainter in the distance, until Maxwell, returning, shook him by the arm. It was dark again now, for the moon had vanished, and a thin drizzle was falling. Dane's head ached intolerably, and a warm trickle ran into one of his eyes.

"Are you badly hurt, Hilton?" asked Maxwell, stooping and holding out a flask.

"No," Dane answered dubiously, as, gripping his comrade's hand, he staggered to his feet. "Mine is a pretty thick cranium, but somebody did their best to test its solidity with the butt of a gun. Did you get them?"

"We did not." Maxwell, who seldom showed what he felt, evinced no chagrin. "The constable managed to stick fast in the one gap in the second hedge; but we got their net, and, although I don't wish to

trouble you if you are not fit, if you could describe the fellow you grappled with, we should know where to find him."

Dane did so to the best of his ability.

"It's young Jim Johnstone!" the keeper exclaimed; "an' after this we should grip him trying to slip off by the night train. I'm minding Mr. Black told me he'd e'en be sitting up in case yon rascals killed onybody, an' ye needed authority. He's a pleasant-spoken gentleman, an' this is a clear case o' unlawful woundin'."

"Start at once with that fool of a policeman!" said Maxwell. "Now, Hilton, if you can manage to walk as far as the road, I will drive you home."

He held out his arm, but grew tired long before they reached his trap: Dane was no featherweight, and he leaned upon him heavily. When Maxwell helped his comrade down before The Larches there were lights in the lower windows, though it was very late, and its owner stood upon the steps awaiting them.

"I could not sleep until I heard whether you had caught the rascals," he began. "But what's this? Have they hurt you, Hilton?"

"Not much, sir," answered Dane.

Seeing Mrs. Chatterton in the hall, he shook off Maxwell's arm, and attempted to enter it unassisted to prove his assertion. The attempt, however, was a distinct failure. He tripped upon a mat, reeled forward drunkenly, and, clutching at the nearest chair, sank into it, presenting a sufficiently surprising spectacle, for his collar, as he subsequently found, was burst, while there were generous rents in his garments, and the red trickle flowed faster down his face. Then there followed confusion, for Mrs. Chatterton was a gentle but easily disconcerted lady, and her husband addicted to over-vigorous action. So, while the one proceeded in search of bandages, and, not finding

them, returned to ask useless questions and, in spite of his feeble protests, pour cold water over Dane's injured head, Chatterton smote a gong and hurled confused orders at the startled servants. This lasted until a dainty figure came swiftly down the stairway, and chaos was reduced to order when Lilian took control with a firm hand.

"Don't trouble him with questions, Aunty, but get some brandy, quick!" she said. "Uncle, please do not make any more useless noise, but ask one of these foolish women to bring hot water. Annie, bring me the arnica, and the first piece of clean linen you can find. Now, Hilton, you are not hurt very badly, are you?"

She bent down, with the light of a big hanging lamp upon her, and, forgetting the faintness and pain, which was considerable, Dane felt his heart bound within him. In spite of her swift orderliness, the girl's eyes were anxious as well as very pitiful, and there was a tension in her voice.

"No," he replied, as carelessly as he could, for all his pulses were throbbing. "I am just a little dizzy, and shall be better presently. I am chiefly ashamed of making such a scene, Lily."

It did the man good to see the relief in his attendant's face. Miss Chatterton flushed a little under his gaze and became once more strictly practical.

"The wound is worse than you suppose," she said, with a slight but perceptible shiver. "Take a mouthful of this brandy, and I will fix a dressing. Aunty, hold the bandage, and give me the scissors!"

She did all very cleverly, then slipped away; and ten minutes later Dane was glad to bid Chatterton and his wife good-night. His head still throbbed painfully—for the trigger-guard which struck his forehead had bitten deep—and, having seen what pleased him greatly, he desired to be alone to think.

When he had gone, Mrs. Chatterton looked at her husband.

"Did it strike you as significant that Lily should come down at a few moments' notice dressed just as she left us?" she asked.

"Am I quite a fool?" said Chatterton, and then added in oracular fashion: "Hilton Dane will make his mark some day; and it was his father's roll which started me on the way to prosperity."

As it happened, Lilian Chatterton had also food for reflection, and sat long by an open window looking out into the night. There was no doubt, she admitted, that she found Hilton Dane's society congenial. His swift deference to all her wishes pleased her; and as he had intimated that he desired nothing more than her friendship, there was no reason why it should not be granted him. Under different circumstances the girl fancied that her interest might have carried her farther; but Thomas Chatterton's thinly veiled command was a fatal barrier. Even then she frowned, remembering the summary manner in which he had purposed to dispose of her as though she were a chattel. Nevertheless, she had been badly startled by the sight of the wounded man; and the fact remained that when her eyes first rested upon him she grew almost faint with a sudden and wholly unexplainable fear. Lilian wondered, with a crimsoning of her face, whether she had betrayed the relief she certainly experienced on discovering that his injuries were not serious; and then she closed the window with somewhat unnecessary violence.

The next sun had not long risen when Dane went out shakily into the freshness of the morning. His brain had refused duty during the preceding night, and there were questions to be grappled with. Hilton Dane possessed a long patience, but, although a chivalrous person, he was not a fool. He shrank from the thought of allowing the iron-master's ward to be forced into a union with him, even if that were possible—about which, however, knowing the young lady's character,

he was very doubtful. Also, he was at present a comparatively poor man, and though he believed there was a moderate fortune in his invention, he saw that some time must elapse before he could realize it. Abusing his host's interference fervently, he decided that because the continual effort to keep silence was wearing his resolution down, it would be well to avoid further temptation by leaving The Larches.

He had just arrived at this decision when Chatterton came upon him.

"You do not look at all fit, Hilton," said the elder man. "The cut on your forehead would, of course, account for that; but it has struck me lately that something is troubling you. I refrain on principle from prying into other folks' affairs; but, considering the time I have known you, if you have any difficulty, I think you might confide it to me."

Dane understood what lay behind this, and he felt that it was the last thing under the circumstances he would think of doing.

"You have made my stay here so pleasant that if I remain much longer I shall never be fit for work again," he said. "I have accordingly decided to run up to London, and, if the railroad builders have not my work cut out, look round for another foreign commission."

Thomas Chatterton started a little, and tried to hide a frown.

"I thought you had changed your mind after the letter you showed me, and decided to stay in this country. It strikes me as downright folly to risk accidents and fevers abroad with such a patent in your hands. Your pump would beat the best pulsometer ever put into a mine. If you don't approve of the offers you have received, and my suggestions, why can't you sell it to the public through a limited company?"

Dane laughed a little.

"As I said before, sir, by the time I paid promoters and directors, there would be very little left for me. If the pump, which cost years of

thought and experimenting, is to enrich anybody it shall be its inventor; and another good foreign commission should supply me with the necessary money."

"Listen to me," said Chatterton. "It is time I spoke plainly. I have been called a hard man, but I hope I am equally just, and I had to fight desperately for a foothold at the beginning. Well, I kept a mental ledger, and no man ever robbed or assisted me but I made against his name a debit or credit entry. Some of those debts were heavy, but in due time I paid them back in full."

For a moment Chatterton certainly looked a hard man as he shut his hand slowly, and with a very grim expression in his heavy-jawed visage, stared steadily at Dane. Then the grimness vanished as he added:

"There is still a sum standing to the credit of Henry Dane, and I feel ashamed often that I have let it stand so long. There is still one way in which you could help me wipe it off, if none of those mentioned already suits you. My niece will not leave me dowerless—and—for if it had not been so I should not have spoken—you expressed your admiration pretty openly some years ago."

Dane had no enviable task before him, but, remembering his compact, he was determined to accomplish it, even if it should be necessary to use a little brutality.

"I am afraid I see two somewhat important objections, sir," he answered quietly. "In the first place, it is not apparent that the lady approves of me."

"Pshaw!" said Chatterton. "When I was your age I never allowed such trifles to daunt me. You surely did not expect her to say she had been patiently waiting for you?"

"I think I mentioned two objections, sir, and the second is of almost

equal importance," Dane responded gravely. "I am at present a poor man, you see."

Thomas Chatterton faced round on him again with his jaw protruded, and a deeper hue in his generally sufficiently florid countenance.

"You need not be, unless you are fond of poverty. You mean——"

"That a boy and girl attachment seldom lasts long—on either side."

Chatterton moved a few paces forward, with the dry cough which those who knew his temper recognized as a danger signal, then wheeled round upon his heel and strode toward the house; and Dane noticed that he kicked an unoffending dog he usually fondled.

As luck would have it, the next person Dane met was Lilian, and she looked very winsome as she stood bareheaded under the morning sunshine in her thin white dress. Dane's lips set tight as he watched her, then suddenly his face softened again.

"I am glad to see you recovering, Hilton," she greeted him. "That hat hides my bandages nicely. Do you feel able to walk slowly over to Culmeny with me to-day?"

It was a tantalizing question: Dane felt not only able but very willing to walk across the breadth of Scotland in Lilian Chatterton's company. He feared however, that his moral strength would prove unequal to the strain the excursion might impose, for it was growing very difficult to observe the conditions of the indefinite compact.

"I am very sorry, but I have letters to write," he said.

Lilian Chatterton was a trifle quick-tempered, and though Dane knew it, and considered it not a fault but a characteristic, he wondered at the ways of women as she answered:

"I could not, of course, expect you to delay your correspondence, which is no doubt important. Have you run out of those new powder cartridges?"

Dane felt that, under the circumstances, this was particularly hard on him, but he smiled dryly.

"The correspondence relates to my departure for London. I want you to listen, Lilian. I have just had an interview with your uncle, which makes my absence appear desirable. Perhaps you can guess its purport, and the gist of what he said."

The clear rose-color deepened a little in the girl's cheeks, but she answered steadily.

"I will admit the possibility. The most important question is what you said to him."

Now Dane had not only subdued mutinous alien laborers, and held them to their task, but he had even been complimented by a South American Spaniard upon the incisive vocabulary which helped him to accomplish it. Nevertheless, at that moment he felt almost abject, and found speech of any kind very difficult.

"Are you ashamed of your answer?" asked the girl.

"I am," Dane admitted. "There was, however, only one way in which I could satisfy Mr. Chatterton without running the risk of allowing him to apply considerable misdirected energy to the task of convincing a second person. Therefore, though I did not like it, I took that way. He was not pleased with me."

"You told him——" Lilian began, coloring still more.

"I did," said Dane grimly. "Horribly unflattering, wasn't it; but it was the best I could do for you."

The girl first experienced a wholly illogical desire to humiliate the speaker; but, recognizing the unreasonableness of this, she reflected a moment, and then laughed mirthlessly.

"It should certainly prove effective. Still, a woman would have found a neater way out of the difficulty!"

Lilian left him, and when the man passed out of earshot into the shrubbery, he used a few pointed and forbidden adjectives in connection with what he termed his luck.

He was leaning moodily upon a gate, looking down on a sunlit stubble-field the following afternoon, when the next link was forged in the chain of circumstances which, beginning with Chatterton's fishing, would drag him through strange adventures. There was late honeysuckle on the hedges, and festoons of warm-tinted straw. Running water sang soothingly beneath the pine branches overhanging a neighboring hollow; while all the wide vista of river, moor, and fell was mellowed by the golden autumn haze. Dane, however, was far from happy. He was in no way jealous of Carsluith Maxwell, which was perhaps surprising; but, in addition to his other troubles, it did not please him that the latter should have accompanied Miss Chatterton home on foot from Culmeny. They had also been an inordinate time over the journey.

Presently, a little brown-faced child came pattering barefooted down the lane, and stopping, glanced at him shyly, as though half afraid. She was a pretty, elfish little thing, though her well-mended garments betokened industrious poverty. She apparently gathered courage when the man smiled at her.

"Whom are you staring so hard at, my little maid?" said he.

The child fished out a strip of folded paper from somewhere about her diminutive person, and held it up to him.

"Ye will be the Mr. Dane who's staying at The Larches?"

Dane nodded, and the girl glanced up and down the lane suspiciously.

"Then Sis telt me to give ye this when there was naebody to see."

"And who is your sister, and what's it all about?" asked Dane; and the little thing smiled roguishly.

"Just Mary Johnstone. Maybe it would tell ye gin ye lookit inside it, sir."

She vanished the next moment, with a patter of bare feet, leaving Dane to stare blankly at the folded paper.

"Now, who is Mary Johnstone, and what can she want with me?" he wondered, as he prepared to follow the child's advice and read the missive. When this had been done, however, he was not greatly enlightened.

"I'm taking a great liberty," it ran. "I am in great trouble, and you are the one person who can help me. If you would not have two little children go hungry all winter, you will meet me by the planting at Hallows Brig in the gloaming to-morrow. I saw you at The Larches, and thought I could trust you."

"Very confiding of Miss Johnstone, whoever she is, but I'm thankful my conscience is clear," thought Dane. It was unfortunate that he did not obey the first impulse which prompted him to destroy the note. Instead of this, he lighted another cigar, and sat down to consider the affair.

Just then the local constable, who on an eventful occasion had also stuck fast in the hedge, came tramping through the stubble with elephantine gait.

"Grand weather the day, sir," he beamed. "Ye will have heard we grippit the man who broke yere heid."

"I'm summoned as a witness; but who is Mary Johnstone?" asked Dane. "You should know everybody about here."

"Old Rab Johnstone's daughter; and that's no great credit to the lass. Rab's overfond of the whisky, and never does nothing when he can help it, which is gey often, I'm thinking. The daughter's a hard working lass—sews for the gentlefolks; and she and her brither between them keep the two mitherless bairns fed. It's him we've got in the lock-up for breaking yere heid."

"Oh," said Dane, as a light dawned upon him. "Then Mary Johnstone would be the pretty, light-haired girl I saw sewing for Miss Chatterton?"

"That same, sir," answered the constable, with professional alacrity. "Miss Chatterton has missed nothing, has she?"

"Of course not!" Dane said impatiently. "I was only inquiring out of curiosity. You need not mention it. Would this coin be of any use to you?"

The official admitted that it might be; but when he appeared to smother a bovine chuckle, Dane turned upon him.

"What the deuce is amusing you so?"

"Naething, sir," the man answered sheepishly. "I'm taken that way whiles in hot weather."

The constable furnished further particulars about the poacher's family before he departed; and Dane, reflecting that his must be the most damaging testimony against the prisoner, understood why Mary Johnstone had sent for him. It was perhaps foolish, but the child's

face had attracted him; and deciding that the lot of the pretty seamstress, struggling to bring up her sisters under the conditions mentioned, must be a hard one at the best, he resolved at least to hear what she had to say.

CHAPTER V

THE TRYST AT HALLOWS BRIG

It was a clear, cool evening when Carsluith Maxwell leaned on the rails of a footbridge which spanned the river, looking up at the old place of Culmeny. It rose from the stony hillside, a straggling pile of time-worn masonry, with all its narrow windows aflame with the evening light, and the green of ivy softening its rugged simplicity. A square tower formed its major portion, and this had been built with no pretense at adornment in troubled days when the Maxwells had won and held their possessions with the mailed hand. They had been, for the most part, soldiers of fortune, and their descendant recalled the traditions of his race as, turning, he looked south and east across the shining flood-tide toward the Solway sands.

More of his forbears had, when there was scarcity at Culmeny—which was generally the case—ridden that way in steel cap and dented harness than ever rode back, and Carsluith Maxwell had hitherto fulfilled the family destiny, chancing his life in modern ventures where the risks were perhaps as heavy as any the old moss-troopers ran. Now, however, he had come to a turning-point in his career, and that night must decide whether he applied his energies to the slow conversion of barren mosses into arable land, or went forth again to seek his fortune over seas. The wandering life appealed to his instincts; and fortune had not wholly evaded him; but he had recognized of late that unless he could share it with one woman, even prosperity would have little value for him. There was a trace of melancholy almost akin to superstition in his nature, and it was with a curious smile that he turned toward Culmeny to put his fate

to the test. If Lilian Chatterton would not listen, it was high time to begin his search for the African mine.

In the meantime, Hilton Dane sat in the hall of Culmeny waiting for a word with Maxwell, and also until it was time to keep his appointment at the Hallows Brig. Three narrow, diamond-paned windows with rose lights in the crown of their lancets pierced one end of the hall, and the fading sunlight beating through, forced up into brightness the pale-tinted dresses of his companions. They were young and comely women, and, because the rest of the dark-paneled room was wrapped in shadow, neither face nor dainty figure suffered from being silhouetted against a somber background. A cluster of late roses in a silver bowl, and the tawny skin of an African leopard on the polished floor, both touched by the tinted gleam, formed by contrast glowing patches of color. Nevertheless, Dane's eyes most often rested upon Lilian Chatterton, who sat near an open window with a ruddy glory blazing in her hair, while the dark oak behind it emphasized the delicate chiseling of her face. There was a stamp of decision upon it as well as refinement.

"Is it not wonderfully peaceful to-night?" she said, glancing out across the velvet lawn. A few roses still flowered along one side of it, a tall clipped hedge hemmed it in, and, beyond the lawn, fir wood, yellow stubble, and meadow rolled down to the silver shining of the sea. The whole lay steeped in the sunset, serenely beautiful; but the black shadow of the firs lengthened rapidly across the grass.

"You are all very silent," the girl continued. "Why does not somebody agree with me? Don't you think it peaceful, Margaret? This might be an enchanted garden, and yonder hedge a barrier impassable to care. It is good to talk nonsense occasionally; and to-night one could almost fancy that no cause for trouble might enter here."

As she spoke, Dane noticed that the gloom of the firs had swallowed

most of the lawn, and the coincidence struck him as an unfortunate augury. Lilian had known little of either sorrow or care; and having learned by painful experience that the balance of light and darkness is determined by immutable law, the man trembled for her.

Margaret Maxwell laughed a little.

"You are distinctly fanciful. Culmeny has seen very little of either peace or prosperity. The spot where this very garden stands was once worn down by the hoofs of stolen cattle, and the feet of armed men bent on exterminating the gentle Maxwells who plundered them. We also read that the serpent entered Eden, and have the authority of Milton and others for picturing the Prince of Darkness as a somewhat courtly gentleman; while one notices that when there is unusual harmony, trouble not infrequently follows the advent of a man. It is a coincidence, but that ditty should herald Carsluith's coming."

A voice rose out of the adjoining meadow chanting a plaintive ditty in an unknown tongue. The air resembled nothing Lilian had heard before, and she leaned forward listening, for the refrain, pitched in a mournful minor key, was equally striking.

"I did not know your brother sang so well; but I do not like that song. It strikes one as uncanny," she said.

Margaret Maxwell nodded.

"It is West African, and that, I understand, is an uncanny country. My brother spent some time there. He really sings—as he does most things when he thinks it worth while, which is not always—tolerably well."

The song died away as Carsluith Maxwell came lightly across the lawn, and Dane noticed that the last of the sunlight faded and the shadows shut in both himself and Lilian Chatterton when the newcomer entered through the open window.

"I did not know I had such an audience, or I should have been too diffident to play the nightingale," Maxwell laughed.

"Miss Chatterton did not like your song, though she admired its rendering," said Margaret mischievously. "But what put that doleful composition into your head to-night?"

"Association of ideas, most probably," answered Maxwell, with a smile on his lips, but none in his eyes. "I met the post-carrier, and must decide forthwith whether I shall follow up my African scheme or not. It is curious, but by the same token I'm standing with my heel on the neck of the leopard, and I feel inclined to say God send it be a true augury. You have your foot upon him, too, Miss Chatterton; and that is a very ill-omened beast."

"How so?" asked Lilian. "It cannot be very large or terrible, to judge by its skin."

"It holds a country larger than Scotland in terror," replied Maxwell. "There are whole tribes of black men who tremble at the sight of a tuft of leopard's fur."

"As an insignia, I suppose; but the beast is clearly vulnerable." Lilian stooped and pointed to the fur. "Surely that is the work of a bullet."

"You have keen eyes," said Maxwell. "The taxidermist did his best to hide it. That hole was made when I first pitted myself against the leopard by shooting one to convince my carriers the thing was mortal. For some time I suspected that was the beginning of a duel."

"And now?" interposed his sister, with a trace of anxiety.

"Now I almost hope I was mistaken," said Carsluith Maxwell. "With your permission, I have one or two things to see to, and should like a word with Hilton."

They went out together, and presently Dane returned alone to bid Miss Maxwell adieu.

"You have been very patient during the last hour," said that lady. "Now that you have seen Carsluith, one could not, of course, expect too much from you."

"I have been very self-indulgent," said Dane, who had seen the elfish child again and promised to meet his correspondent. "Still, there is a limit to everybody's opportunities for enjoyment, and unfortunately I must tear myself away."

Margaret Maxwell glanced at him sharply, for she fancied that he spoke with sincerity, as indeed he did; but Dane, having given his promise, intended to keep it. She also glanced at Lilian, and decided that Miss Chatterton was not wholly pleased.

"Carsluith proposed to drive you both home. Can you not wait until he is ready?" she suggested.

"I fear I cannot," answered Dane, with a trace of confusion. "The fact is, I have an appointment to keep."

He left them a trifle abruptly, and Miss Maxwell turned to Lilian.

"Whom can your guest have an appointment with? He looked positively guilty. I fear that he must have fallen into the toils of some rustic beauty, which, considering his opportunities, shows a deplorably defective taste."

If Lilian felt any resentment she showed no sign of it; but she was a little more quiet than usual while they awaited the return of Carsluith Maxwell.

Dane, remembering Lilian's glance of interrogation, hurried toward the Hallows Brig in a somewhat uncertain humor. Though the hillside

was still projected blackly against a pale gleam of saffron above, it was nearly but not quite dark when he reached the bridge, and the water sang mournfully through the deepening gloom of the firs. The cool air was fragrant with the faint sweetness of honeysuckle, and the calling of curlew rose from a misty meadow; and it seemed to Dane that the slight, shadowy figure which presently flitted toward him was in keeping with the spirit of the scene. When the girl halted beside him there was still just sufficient light to show that her face was comely. Hilton Dane was not given to wandering fancies, and had long carried Lilian Chatterton's photograph about with him; but he felt compassionate when he saw the anxiety in the thin face, and noticed that the girl's lips were quivering.

"Miss Johnstone, I presume?" he said. "Will you please tell me why you sent for me?"

"I will try, sir," was the answer. "I have two little sisters to bring up on what I earn by my needle, and what Jim can spare; but work has been ill to get at the quarries, and, now when Jim's in prison, and winter's no far away, I'm afraid to wonder what will be the outcome if he is convicted."

"He should have considered such risks before he attempted to steal another man's partridges," said Dane, with a poor attempt at severity.

"Poaching is not stealing, sir!" There was a ring in the girl's voice. "Sorrow on the game that steals the farmer's corn to make a rich man's pleasure, and tempts a poor man to his ruin! May ye never learn, sir, what it is to choose between stealing and starving."

"The question is, what do you wish me to do?"

"To let Jim off, sir," was the answer; and the girl's eyes were eager to tearfulness as she fixed them on the man, who frowned, perhaps

because he felt the appeal in them almost irresistible. "It was a dark night, and maybe ye could not be quite certain. It was the others who tempted him. He will go no more poaching if he once wins clear, and if the fiscal sends him to prison the bairns will be hungry often or the winter's through. It's for their sakes I'm asking; and the neighbors say there will be no conviction if ye cannot swear to Jim."

Perhaps it was Dane's duty to sternly rebuke the pleader, but she appeared half-fed and desperately anxious; and the face of her tiny sister, with its look of childish confidence, rose up before his fancy. He had once, and with little compunction, cut down with a shovel a frenzied Italian laborer who led a mutiny, but now, though he set his lips firmly for a moment, his eyes were pitiful.

"I am afraid what you suggest would not be right," he said presently. "Does your father not help you at all?"

The girl's "No," expressed a good deal, and the despair in her voice completed the man's discomfiture.

"I'm sorry; I had no right to ask," he said. "I am sure, at least, that it was not your brother who broke my head, because—because he was not in a position to attack anybody just then—and, for the sake of the little ones, if there is any doubt at all—and I dare say there will be, he shall have full benefit. But I cannot set him at liberty to continue poaching; and the neighboring land-owners will probably see that he gets no more work at the quarries; so he must take a letter from me to a contractor who will no doubt find him employment."

Here, to the consternation of Dane, who did not know that his underfed and overworked companion had done a courageous and, in the eyes of her neighbors, a very suspicious thing, the girl broke out into half-choked sobbing.

"You really must not cry," he pleaded awkwardly. "It is distressing to

me; and it is not my fault that your brother's friends cut my head open. However, as I am the unfortunate cause of your distress, if the little ones have suffered already it would be my duty to—to see they didn't—you understand me?"

The girl, though still tearful, drew herself up with some show of pride.

"I'm not asking ye for money. The relief was just overmuch for me; but, and it's a last favor, ye will not tell Miss Chatterton. Her good word means work and bread to me."

"I am not likely to tell Miss Chatterton," the man assured her; then added in haste: "If I did, she would not blame you."

"Maybe! Ye will not tell her," the girl said enigmatically, and then once more caught her breath.

Dane, being unpleasantly uncertain what she might say or do in an hysterical attack, felt it incumbent on him to soothe her, and laid a hand reassuringly on her shoulder. It is possible that his companion found comfort in the grasp, or instinctively recognized the touch of an honest man, for she made no effort to evade it. As it happened, the lane was grass-grown and sandy, and the river frothed noisily down a rapid beyond the bridge. Thus neither of them heard the fall of hoofs until a sudden glare of light beat into the face of the man. Fate had decreed that the driver of the approaching vehicle should not only light the lamps a little earlier than usual, but choose the longest road.

The result was unfortunate, for Dane, acting on impulse, drew the girl farther back into the shadow of the hedge, and stood before her with his hand still on her arm. The light had partly dazzled him, but he recognized in the occupants of the dog-cart Lilian Chatterton and Carsluith Maxwell, and barely choked back an expletive. Neither, if they had seen him, showed any sign of recognition, which, however, was hardly to be expected under the circumstances. Then, as the

vehicle jolted on, the girl, seeing the chagrin in the man's face, gazed at him curiously, and with half-coherent thanks hurried away, leaving Dane in a state of savage dismay.

"It is confoundedly hard on an unfortunate and innocent man! This is a situation which will require considerable explaining, and I shall probably never have an opportunity for attempting it," he muttered.

In the meantime Lilian Chatterton felt the hot blood surge upward from her neck, and was thankful that the darkness partly hid her face. It is true that she had effectively, so she hoped, put an end to any aspirations Dane might have cherished; but when he had once accepted the position there was no longer any necessity to conceal the fact that to a certain degree she found his society congenial, or to consider how far her interest in him might carry her. His complaisance had been the more gratifying because she fancied it was not every woman who could bend such an individual to her will. Lilian, however, had not only set up a somewhat elevated standard of conduct for herself, but was inclined to judge harshly those who fell beneath it; and now she was unmistakably, if illogically, angry. The knowledge that the man had gone out fresh from her presence to keep such an assignation stung her pride to the quick, and brought the crimson to her very forehead. It was, she considered, an unforgivable insult. Still, she had but seen him dimly for a second, and might be mistaken, and so she turned toward her companion.

"It is curious that I should fancy there was something familiar in the voices we overheard," she said as lightly as she could.

Maxwell had learned discretion.

"Voices are always deceptive," he answered. "One should never trust to a fanciful resemblance. The bridge is a favorite trysting-place for rustic lovers; as one result of the sudden appearance of a pair of them, this excitable beast managed to upset me the last time I

approached it."

Carsluith Maxwell had done his best for his friend, and it was not his fault that he had only confirmed the girl's suspicions, and set her wondering if all men were equally perfidious.

"That being so, was it not very thoughtless of you to drive me this way?" she inquired, with some asperity.

"Guilty," laughed Maxwell. "May I plead in extenuation that it is the longest?"

He sprang down and looped the reins round a gatepost when they reached the winding drive which led up to The Larches.

"Do you mind alighting here, Miss Chatterton?" he asked.

"No," said Lilian. "But may I inquire the reason?"

"A desire not to risk your safety a second time. The drive is very dark, the horse addicted to bolting on opportunity; and it would be hard to do justice to what I must tell you if I were forced to watch him. The task is sufficiently beyond me already; I would give a good deal for the power of eloquence."

Lilian was startled, for the speaker had certainly not worn his heart on his sleeve.

"Could you not wait until to-morrow?" she asked with some trepidation.

"I am afraid not," said Maxwell, a trifle grimly. "I fear this must be a surprise to you, but circumstances prevent my waiting, and it is even better to hear one's sentence than to remain in suspense. Won't you listen?"

Lilian, seeing there was no escape, bent her head; and, if Maxwell

had not the gift of eloquence, he could compress a good deal into a few brief sentences. There was no superfluous protestation. The man spoke abruptly, but Lilian could not doubt the earnestness in his voice, or, as he stood hat in hand under the lamplight, mistake the look in his eyes. She saw that what he offered was the enduring love of one who could be trusted to the utmost, and the few pointed words revealed depths of tenderness she had hardly suspected in him.

"I am sorry, very sorry—but it is impossible," she said softly.

Maxwell moved a pace or two forward, and his face seemed to have grown suddenly haggard.

"Think," he urged hoarsely. "This means so much to me. Will it always be impossible? I shall not change."

Lilian fancied she could believe him. She looked him fully in the eyes as she answered.

"It can never be possible. I am sorry. If I had known, I should have tried to warn you. You must forget me."

Maxwell recognized finality in her tone. For the space of several seconds he turned his head away. Then he faced round again, speaking very quietly:

"You have nothing to reproach yourself with. The mistake was mine. I shall, however, never forget you; and I want you to promise that if any adversity overtakes you—which God forbid—you will remember me. I sail for Africa shortly, and it may be long before we meet again. Now I will walk with you up the drive."

He held out his arm, and Lilian wondered a little at his composure as she laid her hand on it and they passed together into the blackness of the firs.

Miss Chatterton had not long joined her aunt when Dane came in, and glanced in her direction as he made some not oversapient observation to Chatterton. She did not avoid his gaze, but met it coldly, and, gathering up some needlework, moved without ostentation, but deliberately, out of the room. No speech could have been plainer, and Dane grew hot, while the fingers of one hand contracted without his will.

"You don't look well, Hilton," remarked Thomas Chatterton. "Is your head troubling you?"

"No," said Dane. "I must have walked tolerably fast, and I am perhaps a trifle shaky yet. With Mrs. Chatterton's permission I will go out and smoke a cigar."

He passed out, and the iron-master smiled as he looked at his wife.

"Can you tell me what is the meaning of this?" he asked.

"Your inquiry is indefinite; and why do you ask me?"

"Because I think you ought to know," Chatterton answered dryly.

"Women generally have a finger in it whenever there is trouble."

"Even if true, that is not strikingly original," Mrs. Chatterton retorted. "I have not noticed anything unusual."

"Then listen," and Chatterton pointed toward the window. "When a young man goes out for a stroll he does not usually stamp in that savage fashion upon the gravel. Now, I want your candid opinion."

"You shall have it," said the lady, smiling. "I believe that no good ever resulted from a choleric elderly gentleman's interference in affairs beyond his comprehension."

Meanwhile Carsluith Maxwell stood talking to his sister in the hall of Culmeny.

"After what has happened, the sooner I get out on my African venture the more pleasant it will be for all concerned," he said gloomily. "It is a good country where one can forget one's troubles; in fact, there are so many peculiarly its own that I don't know a better."

"Poor Carsluith! It will be a heavy disappointment to father. He is failing more rapidly than I care to notice, and had begun to lean on you. I don't think I can forgive her. Yes; go out, and forget her."

"It was not Miss Chatterton's fault," Maxwell declared quickly. "She never, to use the inappropriate phrase, encouraged me. It was my own folly to hope that she could stoop to me."

"Without any wish to flatter you, I consider that Miss Chatterton might have stooped a good deal farther," said Margaret Maxwell.

"However, we need not go into that; and I am only sorry you are so hardly hit. I wonder if it was because of Dane?"

"No," Maxwell answered with decision. "I can't exactly tell you why, but I am certain it was not because of Dane."

His sister said nothing further, though she was not convinced. Her heart was heavy for her brother, because she knew the Maxwell temperament, and that he was not the man to change.

Carsluith passed out into the darkness, and leaning against a fir, spoke half aloud:

"No man Miss Chatterton had smiled upon could scatter his affections as Dane seems to have done. Pshaw! The thing is perfectly impossible!"

This was, perhaps, a greater tribute to the speaker's loyalty than to his knowledge of human nature, though Carsluith Maxwell was usually accounted a shrewd man.

CHAPTER VI

DANE'S SILENCE

It was in a combative humor that Hilton Dane presented himself in court on the day of the poacher's trial. It was impossible to ignore the summons, which alone had delayed his departure from The Larches; but the time he spent there waiting had passed very uncomfortably. Lilian had, so far as she could do so without attracting attention, sedulously avoided his company; and he fancied that both Chatterton and his wife regarded him with suspicion. Dane, knowing the iron-master's opinions, surmised that Chatterton would not have blamed him had he frankly related all that had passed; but he had pledged himself to secrecy, and it never occurred to him to break his promise.

Therefore he kept his own counsel, and went into court prepared for battle, further fortified by a contempt for the assumed omnipotence of petty local magnates which men of his kind, who have tasted power in the vigorous life of the newer lands, acquire. He decided that the prisoner, who was very young, looked free from inherent vice, and worthy of a chance to prove himself, in the main, honest. He was not absolutely certain that the man was the one with whom he had grappled, and he gave him the full benefit of the doubt. His answers provided the neighborhood with a sensational topic for conversation, and, while there were some who laughed at the legal functionaries' discomfiture and the witness's nonchalance, the game preservers in the vicinity were emphatic in their indignation.

In any case, Dane left the court amid the plaudits of the assembled quarrymen, which the officials could not restrain. He hated the rôle of

popular hero but he felt a certain grim satisfaction, though he guessed that every word he had spoken might cost him dearly. Also, because he did nothing by halves, he sought the discharged prisoner.

"I don't know whether you are the right man or not, and I don't want to," he said dryly. "If you are a wholly worthless rascal, you will no doubt drift back into the clutches of the police, when it is probable that the worthy gentlemen I addressed to-day will see that you don't get out again. It would not surprise me if they starved you out of this neighborhood; so, if you desire to make a fresh start, you will take this letter to the English waterworks contractor to whom it is addressed—and send your sister as much as possible of what he pays you."

"Would you believe that I'm sairly sorry, sir?" began the lad; but Dane turned upon him with a laugh and a frown.

"Sorry for what? Prove it by turning honest. Do you wish to convince me I did wrong to-day?"

The poacher departed with grateful protestations, and Dane was glad that he had vanished before Maxwell came up.

"I don't know whether I ought to congratulate you on your forensic abilities, or otherwise, but the spectacle was worth the journey," he said. "I hardly suspected that you possessed such talents; but why you displayed them is, of course, another question."

"It is also my particular business," Dane replied stiffly, and frowned when Maxwell smiled significantly.

"Confound you! Do you think——" he broke out; and Maxwell smiled again in ironical fashion as he moved away.

"I might make use of your own rejoinder, and say that I generally find it

saves trouble to keep my opinions to myself," he returned. "However, since you asked me, what would any person of the most modest discernment think?"

Dane groaned inwardly as he climbed into the waiting vehicle, for the last speech placed beyond all doubt the fact that the occupants of the dog-cart had recognized him at Hallows Brig; and he knew that Lilian Chatterton held somewhat puritanical views. He had, it was evident, involved himself hopelessly.

That very evening, just as Dane had finished packing his few possessions, an irate game-preserving gentleman drove over to The Larches to express his indignation.

"I would not like to hurt your feelings, Chatterton, but your young friend did not give wholly unbiased testimony to-day," he said. "Considering his evident desire to shield the prisoner, I e'en felt it my duty to——"

He got no farther, for the choleric iron-master was equally loyal to those he honored with his good opinion, and prompt on any challenge to take up the cudgels.

"If that is all you called to tell me, you might have spared yourself the trouble, Black," he interrupted. "I have known Hilton Dane from boyhood, as I knew his father before him; and I haven't the slightest objection to hurting the feelings of any man who impugns the honesty of my friends."

"I'm thinking ye are very generous," replied Black, relapsing into his native idiom. "Man, do not be so testy, but bide and listen. He described his adversary so well that the police at once identified and arrested him; but he appeared troubled with a distressfully bad memory in court to-day.

"What are ye meaning by the words, 'A man like the prisoner'?" the fiscal asked him; and Mr. Dane answers: 'Just what I say.'

"Can you not swear to him?" asked the fiscal severely; and your young friend smiled. 'Could you swear to the complexion and color of the eyes of any man who, on a dark night, had just kicked you hard upon the knee?' says he.

"It was not even respectful; and when the rabble cheered there was more than me who agreed with the fiscal: 'This place is a court of justice—or it ought to be,' said he."

Black, pausing, betrayed his indignation with a gesture, while Chatterton laughed in aggressive fashion.

"Considering my worthy neighbors' prejudices, I think there was something in that last remark," he said.

Just then Lilian, who may have overheard part of the colloquy, appeared in an opening in the tall hedge.

"Did you convict the malefactor, Mr. Black?" she asked.

"No," said that gentleman ruefully. "Unfortunately we did not, although I'm thinking that we did our best."

Lilian smiled a little, and Chatterton's eyes twinkled as he glanced at her encouragingly.

"Was that quite in accordance with the spirit of our glorious constitution?" she asked.

"Eh?" said Black sharply. "What's this I'm saying; and I see ye are laughing at me. I mean his guilt was manifest, but a friend of yours showed considerable audacity, forby a trace of talent, in his efforts to release him. Ye will mind that it's a principle of British justice to give even a poacher fair play, my dear young lady."

"So I was always taught," Lilian replied artlessly.

Thomas Chatterton chuckled again, and pointed toward a man who, in turn, passed through the opening in the hedge.

"I fancy that Mr. Black is anxious to talk to you, Hilton," he said.

Black, however, had evidently found two adversaries sufficient without engaging a third, and, as sometimes happens, he did not recollect the crushing things he might have said until the opportunity had passed; so, after a stiff greeting, he allowed Chatterton, who was rarely ungenerous to a beaten enemy, to lead him away.

Lilian had disappeared, but not before the manner in which she had ignored Dane had roused him to precipitate action. He forgot his prudence in a sudden fit of anger, and, remembering only that he might never have another opportunity for speech with her, he followed the girl. Miss Chatterton, however, had a fair start, and, perhaps being warned by the sound of his hurried footsteps, made the most of it; so that while Dane pursued her down two avenues, and through a shrubbery, the situation grew rapidly ludicrous. The humor of it did not strike him then, and he saw only the flicker of a white dress receding before him. Finally he came upon the fugitive in a narrow path between rows of choice chrysanthemums, where, as there was no room for two to pass, Lilian turned upon him with an ominous light in her eyes. It was evident that Miss Chatterton was seriously angry, as well as a little breathless.

"What brings you here?" she demanded.

Dane was not, as a rule, readily disconcerted; but for a moment the power of lucid speech deserted him.

"I came——" he gasped.

"That is unfortunately evident," retorted Lilian, chillingly. "What I desire to know is why, considering the size of the garden, you must, after

seeing I wished to be alone, choose this particular path!"

Dane had slight cause for merriment, but he actually laughed.

"Any other place would have suited me, but you went so fast!"

This was a blunder, and he realized it as he heard the gravel crunch in a manner that suggested the pressure of somebody's heel. Lilian had clearly roused herself to face the situation.

"Admitting that it was so, will you explain why you cannot take a hint?"

"I will," Dane said quietly, though he was once more maladroit. "I wished to ask why you have avoided me like contagion lately?"

"Is that a necessary question, or is it generous to place the onus of such an explanation upon me?"

"Perhaps not," he admitted. "I am not so quick of wit as I could wish, to-day, but I am going away early to-morrow, and it may be very long before I see you again; so I could not help asking it. We have known each other a long time, Lily, and I would not care to leave England feeling that you were displeased with me."

"Have I told you that I was displeased?" asked the girl.

"Speech was hardly necessary."

Lilian Chatterton was not deficient in courage, and she no longer tried to evade the difficulty. "Please understand that I have neither the right nor the desire to inquire into your motives, but—since you insist—there are limits within which one must restrict one's friendship; and after comparing your own account of your nocturnal adventures with what I heard Mr. Black relate about your conduct in court to-day, it is hardly possible to avoid concluding that you have overstepped them."

"There may be an explanation. Is it fair, as you reminded that very

gentleman, to condemn any one unheard?"

"Can you furnish one?" asked Lilian, with a quickness which was not wholly lost upon her companion. If he had spoken plainly, it is possible that the explanation might have changed a good deal for both of them; but that was just what the man had pledged himself not to do. He was not a casuist, and, having no time for reflection, saw only one course open to him. It was too late when he realized that it was the worst one possible from any point of view.

"I am afraid I cannot, at present," he said.

The girl's eyes grew almost wicked, for his hesitation was fatal, and she was angry that she had even allowed him to draw her into the discussion.

"That is comprehensible," she said. "You must already have taxed your imagination severely, and it is perhaps natural that the testimony of a quite disinterested gentleman should be more convincing. Besides, as I said already, it is certainly not my part to judge you."

"Then I can only hope that you will hear the full truth from some other person you consider more worthy of credit," Dane said somberly.

Miss Chatterton returned no answer, but, drawing her skirt to her side, brushed past the man, who stepped recklessly among the chrysanthemums. She had, of course, no intention of looking back in his direction, but, on turning at the end of the alley, it was almost necessary to do so, and she sometimes remembered, with both a smile and a sigh, how he had stood, a somewhat commanding, as well as a slightly ludicrous figure, staring straight before him, knee-deep among the chrysanthemums. That, however, was afterward, for then Lilian was in a royal rage with herself as well as the man, because she had allowed anything he could say or do to disturb her serenity.

Dane sighed a little, but there was resolution as well as indignation in his face as he moved away, and left the gardener, who had witnessed the scene with indignation, to assess the damage.

"Would nothing fit yon theatrical ijjot but stamping my new quilled Regents flat?" the gardener grumbled.

Early the next morning Chatterton and Dane stood waiting for the South express in the little country station.

"I don't altogether understand what you have been doing, Hilton, and, though nobody seems quite pleased with you, I won't ask," said the iron-master. "I know you had a good reason for it, whatever it was; and if that meddlesome Black or any of his friends feel inclined to make further unpleasant suggestions, I shall enjoy the opportunity for a little plain speaking. If you ever change your mind, remember what I said; and don't close with any offer unless it's tempting, but come back and wait at The Larches for a better. I can't help saying I'm sorry you did not altogether hit it with Lilian. Modern young women, however, often appear to consider cheap smartness more becoming than the genuine cordiality they may feel."

"It was not Miss Chatterton's fault, sir," declared Dane, who, growing slightly confused, wished the iron-master would favor anything else with his fixed attention. He was thankful that the approach of the express prevented the conversation from progressing further in that direction.

A few evenings later, Lilian dismounted from her pony in the shadow of a copse. For some reason she had been restless all day, and sought solace in a ride across the moor. The saddle had slipped a little, and she spent some time tightening the girth. Meanwhile two men came to a standstill in the stubble beyond the hedge, and she recognized Carsluith Maxwell in one spare figure. The sunset beat into his face, and she saw it was stamped with a curious melancholy

as he looked down the deep-wooded valley toward Culmeny. Ridges of brown moorland, whose slopes were streaked by dark firs, hemmed the hollow in, and the tower rose blackly in the mouth of it against the shimmer of the sea.

"It is an inheritance to be proud of, sir," Carsluith said. "Perhaps it is because of the contrast with the rank luxuriance of the tropics, and their stifling heat, but each time I come home to the old place and breathe this keen sweet air, I feel that I love it better."

The second man, turning, laid his hand on the speaker's shoulder, and as he did so Lilian recognized the master of Culmeny.

"It will be yours some day which cannot be very distant now," the elder man replied. "It is a barren heritage, and I have long regretted that, after the girls are provided for, its revenues will do little more than cover the interest on the burden you must take up along with it."

"I hope that day will be long in coming, sir; and I shall never rest contented until by some means I win enough to restore our former prosperity. To-morrow will see me on my way to London, and we must hope that my latest venture will prove successful!"

Lilian could not escape without attracting attention, and she was so close to the two men that she heard Brandram Maxwell sigh.

"I do not approve of it, but know I cannot dissuade you," he said, with a certain pride as well as wistfulness in the glance he cast upon his son. "I had hoped you might have settled here—and think she is good as well as bonny—but that was not to be. Prosperity! The old place was aye needy, and its plenishing has cost the life of many of those who have gone before you. You will mind Andrew's answer when he fell out dying in the retreat from Derby: 'I'm not caring greatly where I lie,' said he. 'Our kirkyard is not contracted. It runs from the Low Countries to the sands of Cree.' Maybe it's your destiny, but you will

not forget that an old man is longing for the sight of you, longing the more because——"

He ceased abruptly, and Lilian noticed that Carsluith Maxwell made the slightest gesture of negation, while his face darkened a little. She recalled an old superstitious tale.

"We have outgrown belief in those fables, sir," he declared.

The ruler of Culmeny made no direct answer.

"The old tale is told over often, and the end is the same. God keep you, and bring you safe home from that dark land," he said solemnly.

Here the pair forestalled the unwilling spectator's intention by moving away, and left her troubled. She had done nothing to raise false hopes in Carsluith Maxwell, and in that respect her conscience was clear; but there had been a strange somberness in both men's faces, and she felt that she was mainly responsible for sending the younger one to Africa. He was of good family and accomplished, and she wondered why, when many another damsel would have gladly listened, she had so promptly declined him as a suitor. Then, even as she reflected that there was no one else she preferred to him, a tinge of color crept into her face, and, dismissing the subject, she mounted, and sent the pony at a gallop across the next meadow.

It was a depressing afternoon when Carsluith Maxwell found Dane lounging in the smoking-room of a London hotel. The air outside was foul with smoke and fog; and it was little more cheerful within. Dane was in distinctly low spirits. He had spent a fortnight haunting the offices of engineering firms, financiers, and company promoters, and had discovered once more that anybody willing to take up his invention would require the lion's share of the contingent profit. He

could hear of no remunerative professional engagement; and the contractors who had promised him the foreign commission stated that the work would not be begun for some time.

"You do not look exactly pleased with either the world or yourself," observed Maxwell.

"I certainly don't feel so," Dane said shortly. "Several things have gone wrong with me lately, and I'm even more troubled than usual by a chronic shortness of capital. I want ten thousand pounds rather more badly than most folks do, and no mental effort will show me where to raise more than five."

Maxwell looked hard at the speaker.

"If you are willing to risk a good deal on a chance of obtaining the money, I think I can show you a way."

Dane laughed harshly.

"There is no risk you could mention which, for the sake of five thousand pounds, I would not run."

"If you join me you will run a good many," said Maxwell. "There were reasons why I could not make the offer until to-day. Give me about ten minutes to explain the venture."

Dane drew in a deep breath when his companion concluded; then held out a big hand.

"It is a bargain," he said simply. "Half the profit, half the expense and peril. I can start any time after to-morrow."

They shook hands on it, while the blue cigar smoke curled about them; and the bargain they made was kept faithfully in the face of manifold perils, and in spirit as well as in letter. Long afterward, Dane remembered that Maxwell's smile was much the same when,

clenching the hot rifle barrels, they watched the flintlocks flashing through thicker wreaths of a more deadly vapor.

All arrangements had been made when Maxwell departed; and Dane sat down to write Chatterton a letter. When that gentleman received it, he first used expressions which should have cost him five shillings, and then, seeking his wife, thrust it down before her with quite unnecessary violence.

"The man has taken leave of his senses!" he exclaimed. "Read that, and tell me if you don't think so."

"Is this the beginning of another ancient-right crusade, or the effect of the lobster salad? You will remember that I warned you," said Mrs. Chatterton.

"This is not a time to indulge in puerile levity! It is that—that confounded idiot, Hilton! He and the other madman, Maxwell, have gone out to look for gold mines in one of the deadliest holes in Africa. He says he wanted five thousand pounds, and, when he knows it was his duty, could not come to me!"

Mrs. Chatterton read the letter, and then tried to flash a warning at her husband before she glanced in her niece's direction. Lilian who had leaned forward as though listening intently, sank back into her chair.

"Perhaps they may find the gold mine; and Carsluith Maxwell is by no means an idiot," she said. "Indeed, he always struck me as a shrewd, determined man."

"Determined enough," fumed her husband. "They're all made that way. Maxwell rebuilt his iniquitous obstruction four times after I tore it up; but there's something in Carsluith's dark face I don't care to see. I've seen the sign on other men, and it implies a tragedy. Besides, from what Black told me, they're an unlucky family, with an hereditary

weakness for dying fully dressed. Any mad venture they could get themselves decently killed in seems to have been irresistible to those men of Culmeny. I'd have given three times the money to prevent Carsluith from decoying poor Hilton. Do the fools fancy nuggets grow on palm trees?"

Chatterton, receiving no answer, retired to what he called his study, where they heard him banging books about. Lilian sat silent with hands crossed in her lap. She, also, she fancied, had seen the shadow in Carsluith Maxwell's face, and she felt both troubled and anxious about him and about somebody else.

A week later Mrs. Chatterton, entering her niece's room in search of some trifle, came upon a book the girl had been reading. She looked thoughtful when she saw that the volume treated of travels in West Africa, and that the marker in it rested between the last pages.

CHAPTER VII

A WARNING

It was a bright morning when the s.s. *Manyamba* rolled south into sight of the Canaries over a white-flecked sea. They rose rather like dim blue clouds than islands athwart the far horizon, with one glistening cone cut off by silver mists from the ocean plain beneath, towering high above the loftiest. Maxwell leaned over the poop rails, while Dane, the middle-aged purser, and Miss Bonita Castro stood near by. The lady's father, a little, olive-faced Portuguese, with shifty black eyes, lounged in a deck chair watching them languidly. There were few passengers on board, and the members of the group, who had made friends somewhat rapidly, were now amusing themselves by shooting at the bottles a steward forward flung into the sea.

A big pistol flashed in Miss Castro's hand. The purser clutched at a stanchion and uttered a quick exclamation; Maxwell wheeled round suddenly. A bottle, ceasing its gyrations, sank into the white wash of the screw, and the lady laughed as she lowered the pistol muzzle.

"*Trés!*" she cried exultantly. "That is three to me! *Carramba!* I have also it seem, as you say, nearly bag the Señor Maxwell."

If Dom Pedro Castro was a typical Portuguese, his wife had been an Andalusian, and his daughter, while speaking several languages rather prettily than well, preferred her mother's tongue, and had inherited a full share of the voluptuous beauty of a race whose women are famous in Spain. She formed an interesting picture as she stood with the blue of the sea behind her, laughter in her dark eyes, and the

pistol still smoking in her hand. They were remarkably attractive eyes; and Maxwell, knowing what to look for, saw more than Dane had apparently seen in their depths, and decided to warn his comrade to beware of them. A faint carmine warmth emphasized the comeliness of the slightly dusky face, while graceful pose and figure were both characteristic of a woman of her extraction as yet well short of the age at which Southern beauty changes into grossness.

"You have not the fright, Señor Maxwell, though a little nearer and we leave you behind?" she added naively.

Maxwell did not look frightened, though he might well have been, for the bullet had passed him close. He answered with a smile which, as Dane had noticed before, appeared to linger on his lips after the gravity had returned to his eyes.

"No, señorita. If a man could choose his last resting-place, wouldn't this blue water be much nicer than a mangrove swamp in Africa. That very little, however, makes a vast difference; and you have won the gloves. You shall have the best in Las Palmas to-night. You will land us by sunset, Mr. Purser?"

"Yes." The Purser sighed with relief when he saw that the contest was over. "Hadn't you better give me that pistol, señorita? Accidents happen when one least expects them, and the Company would hold me responsible if you killed anybody. I don't think the skipper would see quite as much humor in the position as you seem to."

Bonita laughed with the light-heartedness of a child, and glanced demurely at Dane.

"To kill the Señor Maxwell, or my good friend Don Ilton, is catastrophe; but to kill a bad man, it is nothing. Many men are killed in Africa; I myself shoot one. There was in him the blood of the negro, and he forget it when without respect he speak to me."

Dane was a trifle staggered by the matter-of-fact manner in which Miss Castro mentioned the way she had disposed of one whom he surmised had been too venturesome a suitor.

"*Verdad!*" exclaimed Dom Pedro. "The man, by bad fortune, he is not die, and that affair is cost me much *commercio*. My daughter she has, in your English, the spirited way."

The lady's face changed suddenly as she turned toward Maxwell.

"I beat you, Señor, but it is because you are *muy caballero*, and prefer the defeat from me. You have the steady hand and the dangerous eye, and have not the fear. That is well if you go up into the forest in my country. It is different with your friend. The pistol is not for him. No, he remind me of those big fair men with the axes I read of in England. I make you my compliments, Don Ilton, and you show me where the swift Bonita he leap at the bow."

Whether, because Miss Castro was fond of admiration, this was done out of pique at Maxwell's indifference to her attractions, Dane naturally did not know, but he answered with a bow, and the two strolled forward together. There were no porpoises circling, as they often will, athwart the stem, but the lady who perched herself upon a knighthead seemed in no way disappointed. The sun made rainbows in the spray which whirled beneath her, as each blue ridge fell back shattered from the shearing bows; and nowhere else could one realize so well the swift passage of the quivering hull through the white-topped seas, or feel the same cradle-like rise and fall of the warm deck planking.

"All this," remarked Miss Castro, "is very nice; and the Señor Maxwell, who is *muy caballero*, but somber sometimes, he is not here. You have my permission to sit there, and I will talk to you."

Dane afterward wondered why, in place of doing so, she led him on

to talk about his comrade; but it was perhaps not unnatural that he should find a certain degree of pleasure in the society of his comely and versatile companion. He knew little of Miss Castro beyond what the purser had told him, and that Maxwell had met her elsewhere; but he was to learn more in due time. She had been educated in some Spanish convent; but, being born on the fever coast, could withstand the climate, and she spent part of her time there in her father's factory, and the rest with her mother's sister in the Canaries. Dom Pedro was assumed to be a tolerably prosperous trader.

An hour had passed before the two came aft together, and on the next opportunity Maxwell took his friend to task.

"It is perhaps time for me to warn you about playing with fire, Hilton," he said. "Miss Castro is certainly pretty, but her people don't understand the game of flirtation as played in England. In all emotional questions they're unpleasantly in earnest. I may remind you that I met the señorita in Africa."

"I have not so far obtruded my advice on you," Dane returned. "Don't you think this——"

"Is an impertinence?" and Maxwell smiled. "Perfectly. I also admit that the rôle of mentor does not become me. Nevertheless, when Miss Castro casually mentioned how she got rid of her last suitor, there was something in her eyes which might have warned an observer. You needn't trouble about a neat rejoinder, because I'll retire, having done my duty."

"I mean to call upon Miss Castro at the Catalina to-morrow. Your warning, however, is superfluous, as it will be the last time I shall see her. She is remaining here."

There was a trace of mischief in Maxwell's smile as he answered.

"I am going with you. You need not express astonishment. She invited

me."

It was a sunny afternoon when they went ashore together; but they did not find Miss Castro immediately at her hotel. It appeared that the British tourists and invalids who sojourned in the dusty Spanish city had joined hands with its leading inhabitants over the organization of a gala for the benefit of local institutions, and Miss Castro was playing the part of soothsayer in the cause of charity.

Dane found it pleasant, in spite of the dust, to watch the white mists sliding athwart the great volcanic peaks, and the silvery spray toss beneath the white-walled city. The assembly also was interesting. Gaily uniformed Castilian officer, and British tourist fantastically attired, jostled each other. Dark-skinned, black-haired beauties—pleasant to look upon even when they wore Parisian headgear instead of the national mantilla—in filmy draperies, flitted in and out among young Englishwomen, whose indifferent faces and attire emphasized the contrast between their respective characters; while here and there a matron of their own nation stood surveying the scene with the pitying contempt for everything foreign which too many insular Britons consider impresses the benighted alien. Good music mingled with the merry voices, swish of diaphanous dresses, clank of sabers, and patter of feet, and through all rang the monotone of the sea.

"Look at it well," said Maxwell. "It is the last glimpse of civilization you will get for many a day. Henceforward our path leads us into a land of eternal shadow haunted by all things evil; at least, and they have some reason, so the negroes say. There's the señorita, telling fortunes in that striped tent. It is curious that she is beckoning—me."

Maxwell pushed his way through the throng surrounding a gaudy pavilion, where Miss Castro was evidently doing excellent business; and presently he returned, smiling curiously.

"She wishes to tell your fortune. Go in and spend a crown in the cause of charity. I can't say that mine was a very good one, but the señorita showed an accuracy which was, under the circumstances, surprising."

Dane made his way with difficulty into the tent, and when his eyes grew used to the change from brilliant sunshine to shadow, he realized one reason for Miss Castro's success. She wore the dress of the Andaluces, thin, lace-like draperies of black, sufficiently short to reveal the tiny high-arched feet in dainty Moorish slippers. A gauzy black mantilla and a crimson rose adorned her hair, while the graces of her figure were emphasized by a broad zone of African gold, chased with zodiacal characters by sable craftsmen. The costume suited her; and Miss Castro was probably aware of the fact.

"So you will learn a little of the future, Don Ilton?" she said, with unusual gravity. "No, you must not smile. This is not the charlatan's trickery. The ancient Moors they teach us wisdom, and I have study. So, we throw there the crown, and I lay this Aggri in your palm. The Aggri has virtue, though what it is no man know."

She detached from her bracelet an insignificant bead, one of the mysterious Aggri which cannot be counterfeited, and, as Dane afterward learned, can hardly be bought with money in West Africa.

"It is a big, hard hand, and has done much work, perhaps with the shovel, in a hot country—I think the Sud America," she said. "It will also hold the rifle. It is well to hold the rifle straight in Africa."

Miss Castro had splendid eyes, of a kind that it is not wise for a susceptible man to gaze into too steadily while his hand is held in very pretty fingers; and Dane felt it incumbent on him to break the spell.

"This is not all divination, señorita. I told you I was going inland from

the African coast; though I certainly did not tell you I had been in South America. Did you guess it by my darkened skin?"

"It is not the trickery," repeated Miss Castro. "I tell you only the things I know. There is blood on your path through the forest—blood, and a shadow that follows, creeping always behind. Look well to your friend. The shadow follows, but does not rest on—you. If it should, there is a pale, cold woman in England who—but I cannot tell you if she would be sorry, or if you will ever see her again. There is also treasure, but the lines fade and the crosses are many, with only the sign of danger clear. I can see no farther. Only the good saints know the end."

She paused for a moment, leaving Dane somewhat impressed, for, although no believer in palmistry of that description, he had seen that Miss Castro was apparently not speaking without a purpose. Then she laid down the Aggrí and, it seemed to Dane, her mantle of prophetess simultaneously, saying in her usual tone, but with somewhat unusual earnestness:

"And now you will not laugh while I give you the warning. Beware of these three things: a man with the holy cross on his forehead, the carved calabash, and the leopard's skin. You will remember always, but tell only the Señor Maxwell. There is one at least who would not have that shadow overtake you. It may be I shall see you in Africa."

Here the eager crowd outside showed signs of storming the tent, and Dane was forced to take his leave, reflecting that it might perhaps be as well if they did not, as Miss Castro expected, meet in Africa. Rejoining Maxwell, he told him what he had heard, concluding:

"It much resembled the usual professional soothsayer's medley, and I could make neither head nor tail of it. Still, the señorita's manner impressed me."

"How did she look or speak?" Maxwell's glance betrayed his interest.

"As though she believed what she was saying, and wished me to."

"I am inclined to think she did," Maxwell answered thoughtfully. "She was also probably giving you good advice in the one way available. How she knows I cannot tell, but by the light of past experience I can make a good deal of the medley. As you probably surmised, her warning was not the result of divination."

Maxwell did not appear inclined to answer questions, and, dismissing the subject, they proceeded to make the most of their last few hours upon what he termed Christian soil. The black peaks were fading against the saffron in the west, and purple darkness creeping up from Africa across the sea, when the mail gun warned them it was time to return to the steamer.

"We shall have seen, and perhaps suffered, very strange things before we set foot in a civilized land again," said Maxwell. "It is not a tropical sporting trip that we are embarking upon. There remain just five minutes for a valedictory libation."

"Champagne!" Dane said to the Swiss attendant as they passed through the veranda of the hotel; and presently he rose from a little table, holding up the sparkling cup. Maxwell's hints had impressed him, and there was a grimness behind his smile when he spoke.

"Here's death or glory! A swift journey to the heart of the forest!"

Maxwell generally frowned upon anything that approached the theatrical, but, as he touched his comrade's glass with his own, his face was grave.

"Heaven send us both back safe out of it and—because the one implies the other—confound the cross-marked man!"

Dane asked no questions. Maxwell was always slightly oracular, and might not have answered them; and a few minutes later they were

being rowed off to the steamer in company with Dom Pedro Castro.

The *Manyamba* was not a fast boat; she anchored off many surf-hammered beaches before she reached the one where the adventurers had arranged to disembark, and where, as it happened, Dom Pedro had built his principal factory. He proved a pleasant companion, though Dane fancied that he was weak alike in character and in principle. One day as they rolled slowly along the spray-veiled coast with a maze of half-seen mangroves over the port hand, Dom Pedro sauntered across the deck toward Dane.

"You go up into the Leopard's country to look for gold?" he said, glancing at Dane in a manner which puzzled him.

"We are certainly going inland, but I am afraid that is all I can tell you," Dane replied guardedly.

Dom Pedro smiled.

"Then you seek the gold. Even your countrymen do not go into that forest for pleasure. But only one man, I think, has seen that gold since the men of my nation who came after Gama ruled this country. That man he die, as you call it, crazy. How much your expedition cost you, Don Ilton?"

Dane mentioned an approximate sum, expressing his surprise that the questioner should even have guessed their object, but refraining from stating whether the guess was a correct one; and the elder man spread out his yellow palms deprecatingly.

"Where the gold lie is not concern me. I am gentleman of peace and commercio. There is one man, not all the nigger, who think he know, and another not all a white man who will pay him to hinder you. More I only guess at and cannot tell you, but I know you and the Señor Maxwell never pass the Leopard country. Don Ilton, I presume you

bold man who come here to make the money. With the sum you mention I show you how. It is not all for the good will, but for the assistance also of me."

Now Dane might have suspected treachery, but he did not do so. Indeed, he was inclined to fancy the offer and warning were genuine. He declined the offer, however; and consulted Maxwell on the first opportunity.

"I believe what he told you was spoken in good faith," Maxwell said; "and he was perfectly correct. The first man he mentioned is probably the rascal who betrayed poor Niven; and Rideau must be the other. He has, if I am correct in my surmises, had dealings not wholly creditable to either, with Dom Pedro; and it is possible the latter might have found us useful. This, combination may, however, increase our difficulties."

CHAPTER VIII

TREACHERY

The region which lies behind the West African coast is not a pleasant one to traverse, and bad fortune seemed to attend Maxwell's expedition from the time it marched out of the seaboard settlement, where he had had trouble with certain French officials, as well as with the black head man from whom he hired his carriers. All of this Dane remembered when he halted, one burning afternoon, shoulder-deep in the tall grass of a swamp, worn out in body and perplexed in mind. Few Europeans are capable of much exertion in that country, especially during the hottest part of the afternoon; but the hammock boys were too weary to drag their burdens farther, and there was urgent need for haste. Dane accordingly had taxed his strength to the utmost during the last few hours. The tall grass stems were almost too hot to touch, and foul mire bubbled about their roots. At least a league of it, through which, slashed by saw-edged blades and stabbed by broken stalks, the expedition must force its way, stretched toward an inland ridge of higher ground that rose from the morass. Beyond this, in turn, flat-topped hills dimmed by a yellow heat haze cut the horizon.

As Dane halted, a naked carrier stumbled, and, dropping the deal case from his woolly crown, splashed him all over. Another straightway fell over his prostrate comrade, and began a spirited attack upon him when they scrambled to their feet again. Dane was too weary to rebuke either in the fashion they would best understand; but a man of dusky color undertook the duty for him, with the barrel of a gaspipe gun, and the combatants, desisting, found new places in

the straggling line. A few picked men in flowing white draperies with flintlock guns on their shoulders were already floundering through the swamp ahead. Behind them, almost and wholly naked negroes, many wearing on their forehead the blue band which marks the amphibious Kroo, went splashing by, each bearing a deal case or tarred cloth package upon his crown. Then the rearguard, tall and soldierly men with the blood of the Arab in them, who carried old-fashioned rifles in spite of certain regulations, came up with Maxwell. They wore a ragged white uniform, swore by the Prophet, and were, as Dane subsequently discovered, reliable fighting men. The Krooboys carried a cutlass-shaped matchet, a by no means despicable weapon when rubbed keen with a file.

Maxwell differed in outward appearance from the somewhat fastidious gentleman Dane had known in Scotland. His cotton jacket was badly rent, sun-baked mire clung thickly about his leggings, and one side of his big sun-helmet had been flattened in. The raw condition of his face and neck betokened the power of the last few days' sun, and he blinked a little because his eyes had suffered by the change from the forest shadow to the dazzling brightness and the fibrous dust of the grass.

"Don't let your particular scarecrows get too far ahead of you, Hilton," he cautioned. "I should hardly have suspected you of any inclination to stop and admire the scenery after the opinion you recently expressed concerning this country."

"I'd willingly burn or flood the whole of it if I could," Dane replied irritably. "Miss Castro was not mistaken when she mentioned the shadow that crept up from behind. Ill luck has certainly followed us from the beginning, and it is time we turned round and endeavored to settle up accounts with whoever is the cause of it."

"You may have an opportunity to-night, or earlier," said Maxwell.

"When, in spite of warnings, two white men insist on visiting a region which was specially made for black men, they can't expect to be comfortable. What is it that excites your particular indignation?"

The malarial fever contracted in other parts of the tropics had, as not infrequently happens, returned upon Dane in Africa. His head ached intolerably, every joint seemed stiff, and he swept his hand round the horizon as he answered vaguely.

"Everything! Why was it that, after drinking at a village well, two of our carriers died? Why should venomous insects crawl into my boots and from underneath my pillow? Or a guide, who declared he knew the country, bog us waist-deep in a quagmire, where we lost half our ammunition? Doesn't it strike you that the sequence of accidents is not all due to coincidence?"

"And, in addition to all this, you will be wondering why you are prostrate with fever to-morrow, if you excite yourself at the present temperature. Forget your grievances until your turn comes, and then strike the harder. Meanwhile, we have been stalked since we passed the last village, and the sooner we reach yonder dry ground, and build a breastwork, the better."

Knowing that this was good counsel, Dane did his best, finding a savage comfort in the thought that at last he would probably have the satisfaction of seeing his persecutors; but the grass was tall and matted, the temperature suffocating, and when they lost sight of the islet the morass appeared interminable. Such civilization as may be found in West Africa is only skin-deep. That is to say, it pertains to the coast, and is occasionally hard to discover there. In many places it still extends less than a day's march from the black troops' barracks, and the white man who travels beyond that distance takes his own risks, which are sometimes considerable. Dane already had cause to realize this, and he was accordingly thankful when at last the

expedition, floundering out of the swamp, reached the strip of firmer earth. Here a breastwork of deal cases and branches was built, and camp pitched among the giant buttresses staying the cottonwood trunks.

"I think," said Maxwell cheerfully, when they lingered over a frugal meal, "if any misguided bushmen try to rush this camp to-night they will regret it. I will see to the sentries and keep first watch while you rest. You look as though you needed sleep."

Dane certainly did, having enjoyed little sleep worth mentioning since he left the coast. Indeed, he could scarcely keep his eyes open, and he wondered vacantly that Maxwell, who seemed proof against the climate, should show no sign of fatigue. When he unrolled his strip of matting and water-proof inside the little tent, the African sunset was flaming in the west, and the cottonwoods crowning the ridge stood out black as ebony against its almost unearthly brilliancy. Among them fantastic figures, some naked as when they first entered the world, some draped in white and blue, crouched about the cooking fires; while, seen between two mighty buttresses of living wood which stayed ponderous trunks, men with matchets and long guns were curled up beneath the breastwork. The wood smoke drifted in filmy wisps athwart the lonely camp, the swamp steamed like a cauldron, and the chirruping of countless frogs rose out of the vapor. Then the brief brilliancy faded, and thick impenetrable darkness suddenly rolled down. The faint coolness that came with it brought sleep to Dane, and it was midnight when Maxwell's voice roused him.

"Get up and stand by with your rifle! There are bushmen in the grass!" he said.

Half-awake, Dane groped for the breastwork, falling over several negroes on the way, and when he reached it the blackness was Egyptian. There was nothing visible beyond the loom of shadowy

trunks, but Dane could hear unseen men breathing heavily, the click-clack of flintlocks, and the rasp of a file along a matchet blade. Then a faint crackle which drew nearer came out of the grass, and instantly a blaze of weird blue radiance leaped up, showing Maxwell's spare figure perched recklessly aloft upon the breastwork with a port-fire held high above him. Its glare beat along the matchet blades, the gun barrels, and the oily skin of the men beneath, and showed black patches which might have been arms or heads among the grass. Then it died out; and Dane pitched the rifle to his shoulder at Maxwell's shout. There was neither challenge nor parley. They were now beyond civilized jurisdiction, and the right of any man to existence in that country depends upon the strength of his hand.

The heel-plate jarred on his shoulder, the barrel jumped in his left hand, red sparks flickered along the breastwork, and the sputtering roar of the flintlocks was repeated among the trunks. Dane fancied a scream rose in answer from the grass, and once or twice a long gun flashed; then the firing slackened, and it was heartsome to hear Maxwell laugh. He came stumbling toward Dane, and held up a second port-fire whose light showed no trace of any assailant. The silence that followed grew oppressive. It was, however, suddenly broken. A rifle flashed in the rear of the camp, a bullet whirled close by Dane's head; and Maxwell, dropping the flare, set his foot upon it.

"The second time! That was a good rifle, and fired by one of our own men," he said. "Take this nigger, Hilton, crawl in on him, and, disregarding anything which may happen, get that man—alive if you can. He is worth all the rest of the expedition."

Crouching low, crawling on hands and knees, and slipping from trunk to trunk, the pair worked backward in a semicircle, though, instead of following, it was the negro who led the white man. It seemed to Dane that he was making noise enough to waken the dead, but his dusky companion had probably owed his life to his powers of silent motion,

and his progress was as noiseless as that of a serpent. Still, a clamor which broke out at the rear of the camp drowned the sound of Dane's passage, and presently a fire commenced to crackle behind the serried trunks. Rising partly upright, he could see naked figures outlined against it flitting with burdens on their heads into the swamp. Nevertheless, Maxwell's instructions were explicit, and, when the negro beckoned, he sank down again.

The fire tossed higher, and Dane surmised that somebody had lighted the dried grass to divert attention from the deserters or a fresh attack. Its purport, however, was in the meantime a side issue, for, as the radiance came flickering athwart the trunks, it revealed something dim and shadowy crouching among the roots of a neighboring cottonwood. The blurred shape might have escaped notice had not the line of steel before it glimmered once or twice. With infinite caution Dane covered a few more yards, and stooped behind a screen of trailers, with every nerve quivering, and a heavy pistol clenched in his right hand. What had become of the negro he did not know. Once the assassin raised his weapon, and Dane laid the short pistol barrel upon his raised forearm, hoping that the stiffness of the trigger might not spoil his aim; but he lowered it again, for, evidently attracted by the increasing glare, the man he stalked rose partly upright, glancing over his shoulder. His caution betrayed him, for, hurling himself crashing through the creepers, Dane fell upon him, driving the heavy pistol into the center of the dusky face with his full weight behind it. The two went down, the colored man undermost, clawing with greasy hands at his adversary's throat. Their grip was feeble, for the first blow had got home; but time was precious, and Dane, heaving his right shoulder clear, brought the steel-bound butt down again.

There was a hollow groan; several men who came running up fell heavily over the pair, and while one dragged the half-dazed white man clear, the others lashed the prisoner fast with creeper ropes.

Rising shakily, Dane sent up a breathless shout.

"Stand fast and see that nobody gets in your way if you have him safe!" cried Maxwell. "Don't trouble about the grass! It is damp among the cottonwoods, and will soon burn out."

Dane waited ten long minutes, feeling thankful, meanwhile, that the one spot where the ridge could be reached on that side through the quaggy swamp was lighted by the fire. Then Maxwell joined him, and, trusting to their subordinates' vigilance, they made the round of the knoll together. A dozen carriers were missing; and their assailants had vanished as mysteriously as they came.

"We shall miss the boys, but it might be fatal to try to follow them; and at least we know whom we can trust," said Maxwell. "A treacherous servant is worse to deal with than an open enemy. Our assailants were evidently mere bush thieves, and not regular fighting men, or they would probably have got in. Whether they expected help from the deserters, or what share the man you seized had in the plot, I can't decide now; and, in the meantime, it is of no great importance. We shall discover it to-morrow."

Nobody in camp slept during the rest of the night, which was one of the longest in Dane's recollection. Most of it he spent huddled among the roots of a cottonwood while the heavy dew of the tropics splashed upon him, straining ears and eyes alike for any sign of the enemy. There was, however, no sound but the wailing of some night bird from all the tangled grass; and except when now and then a murmur of negro voices rose up, a deep impressive silence brooded over the camp. Dane could hear his watch ticking, and there were times when he found it difficult to master an impulse to cry aloud, or to commit any extravagance which would break the tormenting stillness.

At last, however, the temperature fell a little. A faint chill air shook the dew from the tangled creepers flung from mighty branch to branch,

and the darkness became less dense. The steam of the swamps grew thicker, a streak of radiance broadened in the east, and suddenly as night had fallen, the red sun leaped up. It was once more burning day, and neither the dew-drenched white men, who stiffly straightened their aching limbs, nor the stolid Africans, who rolled over in their lairs among the undergrowth, were sorry to greet the light again. They were a pitiful handful of travel-worn and somewhat dejected men, alone on a contracted islet of dry soil in a limitless sea of mist whose white waves were doubtless filled with unseen perils.

"Another day to be endured," said Maxwell, yawning as he spoke. "Another, and another, until the long weeks swell into months, and then, if nobody poisons or shoots us prematurely, we shall go back to England and fancy we have been dreaming. Has it occurred to you yet, Hilton, that the men who gain fortunes in Africa don't *win* but *earn* them hardly? One might wonder why a beneficent Creator made this country."

"It was His Satanic Majesty who made West Africa, using for a model his own dominions. A good many details prove it beside the temperature!"

It was eight o'clock in the morning and already fiercely hot, while the brightness outside the shade of the cottonwoods grew dazzling, when Maxwell, constituting himself at once prosecutor and judge, summoned the prisoner before an informal court. He was a big man, draped in loose cotton, and rather the hue of ocher than ebony; but his countenance was ghastly as well as malevolent, for the pistol butt had left its mark on it. A slackly rolled turban covered half his forehead, and he leaned with his back against a cottonwood scowling upon his judge. Maxwell sat on a camp-stool, not far away, with a rifle laid across his knee; Dane lay in the grass beside him; and the carriers and the armed men were drawn up in a half-circle behind them. Hitherto the would-be assassin, who acted as headman

or chief of a section, had done nothing to excite Dane's suspicions.

"There is no law in this country but one, the *lex talionis*, while you and I are responsible for the lives of all these about us," said Maxwell. "It is a heavy responsibility, and I dare not allow any attempt to betray them to pass unpunished. You need not translate this, interpreter. Ask that fellow why he twice shot at the men whose bread and salt he has eaten."

What the interpreter, who spoke a little of the fantastic English in use along the coast, said, Dane did not know, but he spent some time over it, and when he had finished the prisoner spat upon the ground contemptuously.

"Damn fool man," explained the sable linguist. "He savvy too much and done say nothing."

"That means he refuses to plead," said Maxwell. "Well, we will proceed to inquire into his offenses as directly as possible. Listen carefully, and don't mix up my questions more than you can help, interpreter."

Maxwell asked questions which astonished his companion, and it was plain that he had for some time suspected a good deal. There was no lack of testimony; for carrier and armed retainer in turn set forth, through the black interpreter or in quaintest English, how the accused had told them gruesome stories of the devils inhabiting the country they were venturing into; had dropped hints that by seizing the provisions they might enrich themselves for life; and had been seen communing with mysterious strangers a few nights earlier. Dane listened with growing indignation, for the simple tales made plain not only how venomous insects got into his boots, but that on two occasions he had narrowly escaped with his life.

"Ask them," said Maxwell grimly, "why nobody had the sense to tell

me this before."

"Them boy say you not done ask them, sah," answered the interpreter convincingly.

"It's African logic, and there's no use expecting too much from any nigger," said Maxwell aside. "The man's guilt is plainly evident; but while presumably neither of us knows much of jurisprudence, I wish to give him a fair chance of making his defense. We will do it in his own speech, though I am inclined to fancy that he understands English. Interpreter, try to make this clear to him."

Maxwell spoke for some minutes, pausing often for the linguist to explain his meaning, and again astonished Dane. He traced the accused's actions with surprising skill, showing how he had inspired a marauding headman to plunder and leave them starving, and induced the carriers to desert in the hope of precipitating a panic among the loyal. He also connected him with several of the mysterious accidents which had delayed the march.

"Tell him I give him a last chance. He has just five minutes to clear himself in."

Maxwell laid his watch on the camp-stool between his knees, pointed toward a lengthening shaft of brightness which approached the roots of a tree, and then opened and closed the breach of his rifle significantly. The dusky man before him showed no sign of fear, and his half-scornful, wholly malevolent scowl, together with the intense silence, the expectant black faces, and the glint of light on weapons, burnt itself into Dane's memory. The five minutes seemed very long to him. Then, as his comrade slowly replaced his watch in his pocket, the prisoner spoke a few words disdainfully, and Dane could feel his fingers contract as he waited for the interpreter's answer.

"Damn fool man," it came. "Say he only sorry he done miss you that

time. Very bad man, sah. Say no white man or coast nigger ever lib for get into the Leopards' country."

"So," said Maxwell dryly. "That is to say, while he can prevent it, which may not be long. Ask these boys what should be done with the man who would have left them starving, or perhaps sold them for slaves to some headman."

The camp boys had followed the evidence, and a clamor of voices answered the query. Big eyes glistened, black thumbs were run along twinkling matchet blades, and Dane distinguished ominous cries.

"You shoot him one time, sah! Give him to us and we done chop him!"

"It is the only possible verdict," Maxwell said with strange quietness. "One returns to primitive customs in this part of Africa; and it is more merciful that one should die than many. A curse upon the country! Must I turn executioner?—but for the sake of all those about us, there is no other way."

"What is your purpose?" Dane asked sharply, jumping to his feet.

Maxwell looked at him steadily with his lips firmly set and the color mottled a little in his face.

"Give him thirty seconds to reach the grass. I might miss; these others certainly would—and it will be a little easier that way. Do you understand me, interpreter? If he can reach the swamp alive no man shall harm him."

"You shall not do it!" Dane exclaimed hotly. "Heaven knows, the brute deserves it; but you can't go home with your hands fouled by that helpless wretch's blood! Pass him that rifle, and give me another, with fifty yards to commence at, if you can't think of anything better. The other is too much like murder!"

For a moment the returning color suffused Maxwell's forehead, and there was a flash of anger in his eyes, but he was generally master of his temper, and he answered calmly.

"I could not afford to lose you, Hilton. As I said, we have these men's lives to answer for; and while that fellow lives theirs and our own are equally in danger. That reminds me, I had forgotten something which may or may not surprise you further. You yonder, strike off his turban!"

A Kroo did it with the haft of his machet, and Dane gasped with astonishment, for there was a curiously shaped scar on the prisoner's forehead.

"The cross-marked man," said Maxwell. "The rascal who betrayed and sold poor Niven's carriers. He has, I think, one white man's death already to answer for."

Dane, stooping, laid a hand on each of the speaker's shoulders. Maxwell was a determined man, with virile brain and no lack of nervous energy; but Dane had the advantage in stature and muscular strength, and was glad that it was so. His leader was helpless in his grasp.

"You are perfectly right, Carsluith," he said stolidly. "If you were not, it would be useless for me to try to convince you; but I give you warning that the death of this man dissolves our partnership; and it will, at least, not be your rifle which fires the fatal shot."

Maxwell smiled curiously.

"Do you suppose I am fond of bloodshed, or sorry that you have forced me against my judgment?" he said. "On your head be it, and you can have the murderer. I hope that neither of us will regret your clemency!"

He beckoned the interpreter, and when the latter had spoken, the prisoner twice spat upon the ground, which was probably the most insulting action that occurred to him; then, turning, without word or sign, stalked into the grass. There was a harsh crackling, and, when his ragged draperies vanished, a murmur of wonder from the camp boys. Maxwell sighed as with relief.

"I am glad it is over; and whether we have done ill or well, time alone will show, but neither of us has seen the last of the cross-marked man," he said. "In the meantime, we want more carriers and supplies. Go back to the coast and get them. You will have much less trouble on the return journey. I will stockade a camp in the hills yonder and wait for you."

CHAPTER IX

TEMPTATION

Dane's preparations for his journey were quickly made, and he was ready to start before the sun was overhead.

"Life is very uncertain in this country, and because we are partners it might be as well if you took this map with you in case you should not find me on your return," said Maxwell. "I worked it out from Niven's notes, and have the knowledge safe within my brain; but you will remember that the information would be of value to another white man, who has already made attempts to obtain it. It might also be well, in case Miss Castro happens to be present at her father's factory, if you conducted yourself with a little more than your usual diplomacy."

"Your advice is a trifle superfluous," returned Dane testily. "Do you think I'm fool or rogue enough to make love to her?"

Maxwell smiled.

"You are one person, and I mentioned two. With all respect to Miss Castro, it is not quite impossible that she might make love to you. Remember that she might either prove a useful friend or a dangerous enemy."

A few minutes later Dane, followed by three men of Moslem faith, was on his way; and eventually limped—hungry, half-dazed, and sick of fever—out of the dim forest, which, it seemed to him, was loth to let its victim go. The glare of sunlight was overpowering, and at first he

could see little more than the two ragged scarecrows, one muttering excitedly as he stretched out a brown hand toward the southern horizon, and the other leaning very heavily on his long Snider rifle. The third man lay full length among the grass. Dane could never recollect all the incidents of that journey through a land of eternal shadow, but he felt tolerably certain that if his dusky followers had not served him faithfully his bones would have lain rotting somewhere among its jungles.

Then, as his eyes grew accustomed to the change of light, he shouted exultantly, in a voice his British friends would not have recognized. The shining to the southward was, beyond all doubt, the sea, and the white blurs among the palms could represent only factories! Turning, he shook his fist at the forest with childish solemnity.

"Tell Amadu to turn that gun away from him, Monday. It might go off, and I be no fit to lose him," he said in coast jargon. "I don't care what your color is, you are fine fellows too much, both of you, and now we'll go on while we have strength left to reach them factory."

How much his followers comprehended did not appear. The man he called Monday grinned from ear to ear, the other slung his rifle, and they went on, staggering at their best pace toward the sea, though Dane had a vague impression that, with one arm beneath either shoulder, the two ragged Africans dragged him most of the way. Some time later a blindingly whitewashed factory rose up before them against a background of tossing spray and equally dazzling sea, and Dane made shift to reach its outer stairway unaided. An elderly man and a lady who sat on the shady veranda rose at the sight of him. Making an attempt to raise his battered sun-hat, he lurched up the stairway. The attempt was not successful. The sun-hat fell over the balustrade, and he saw it long afterward, painted green and blue, upon a Krooboy's head. Clutching at the topmost rail, he

steadied himself by it.

"Unexpected pleasure to see you here, Miss Castro," he said.
"Salutations, Dom Pedro! Sorry to arrive in this fashion; not quite myself to-day."

The elderly man shouted, clapping his hands, the lady moved toward the newcomer; then factory and palm trees went round and round before him, and Dane, loosing his hold, went down with a crash.

What happened next he did not remember, having only a hazy recollection of tossing in burning torment for an interminable space, during which at intervals somebody held a glass filled with cooling liquid to his lips, while now and then gentle hands, whose touch was soothing, raised his aching head. Still, he fancied that at times a white face bent over him, and once, when the dim light of a calabash lamp beat into his eyes, that waves of dusky hair drooped close above his forehead, and that he caught, and held fast with all his strength, the cool fingers that slipped into his own. They seemed to draw him back out of the black abyss into which he was sliding; and, he surmised afterward, they actually did so.

Attacks of malarial fever, however, are usually brief; and not long after his arrival Dane lay, clothed in neatly mended garments and more or less in his right mind, beside an open window of Castro's factory. The words "more or less" are used advisedly, for the malaria leaves a strange lassitude behind it, and the sufferer often takes up the burden of life again, as it were, reluctantly, and with somewhat clouded brain. The sea breeze had set in fresh and cool, but the man lay limp and dejected, scarcely troubling to breathe it in, while a haggard English surgeon from a neighboring British colony sat near by watching him with an irritating curiosity. White men recognize the bond of color in West Africa, and the surgeon had remained to fight hard for the life of a stranger when passing that way. Also, where all dwell under the

shadow in a land where the veneer of civilization wears thin, and the primitive passions show through, the Briton casts aside much of his normal reticence.

"Tolerably bad, was I not?" asked Dane; and the surgeon answered frankly.

"You were. In fact, on two occasions, I concluded you were going to beat me. Wouldn't even take a draught from—me, and one might compliment you on your determined obstinacy."

"I'm much obliged," Dane said slowly. "That's not quite all I mean, but it's the best I'm capable of just now. I don't know who you are, or why you did so much for me."

The surgeon laughed good-humoredly.

"If you must have a reason, you were an interesting case. I'm Dennis Ormond, of the Gold Coast service, and Dom Pedro asked me to look at you. I obliged him, and at first you were not a very encouraging spectacle. Of course, I did my little, but I may say that my medicine was not the only thing responsible for your cure. The señorita assisted me very ably, and—for a man must sleep sometimes—without her help it is quite probable we should have attended the expected funeral."

Ormond said this with an indifference which Dane, because he did not then know how much his little had been, or that his was an eminent name on the fever coast, thought hardly civil; but there was a warning gravity in his tone as he continued:

"It was, of course, my business; but not the señorita's; and you might have changed the pronouns in your last sentence advantageously."

Dane was ashamed of several things he said and did that day, and his answer among them; but few white men are quite accountable for

their actions when recovering from fever, and there was that in the surgeon's glance which aroused his indignation.

"Are you not taking an unfair advantage—considering how much I owe you!" he asked.

"Perhaps so!" said Ormond. "In this land one takes an advantage when and how one can. I dare say I'm a meddlesome idiot; but I conceived a certain respect for you, if only because of the spirited manner in which you resisted my attempts to cure you; and more for the señorita. Now, I don't think Miss Castro, curious combination of ministering angel, child, and—well, the angel's antithesis, as she evidently is, would have done so much for everybody!"

Dane answered nothing. One cannot rebuke the man one owes one's life to. Ormond, however, had not finished with the subject.

"You crawled off your cot in delirium one night, and I found you groping among some papers scattered from your pocket-book about the floor," he said. "It required the assistance of two Krooboys to induce you to lie down again, and Miss Castro helped me to pick up the papers. I, however, found this among them first, and considered it well to take charge of it in the meantime. Miss Castro, you have heard, made an excellent nurse."

Dane felt that the surgeon noticed the way his fingers tightened on the little photograph handed him; but the man went on, with a smile:

"Your sister, presumably, for one could not help glancing at the picture. Still, I can't flatter you by saying that I recognize a family likeness. Therefore—I kept it aside."

Dane thanked him, and Ormond answered lightly:

"The rest of the papers Miss Castro returned to the pocket-book. All you have to do now is to lie still and recover."

"I will try," Dane said. "When can I start again?"

Ormond pointed out through the window toward the sea.

"In a week, if you are prudent—in fact, the sooner you start in that direction the wiser you will be. This country is not healthy for full-blooded Englishmen of your description. If you march inland again, cable anybody interested to double your life insurance."

Dane made a negatory gesture, but Ormond anticipated his answer.

"Of course, I hardly expected you would take good advice, but it was my duty to give it. Just now I'll leave you to your own resources, because Dom Pedro is waiting with the chessmen below. Most gentlemanly old rascal, and you are indebted to him; but I wouldn't tell him too much respecting the supposititious treasure you rambled about if I were you. Henceforward you will have to get better in your own way, because word has just been sent me that my niggers are dying by dozens."

He went out, and left Dane staring at the photograph in his hand. Although not improved by long exposure to tropic heat, or the dampness of the African climate, it had been a good portrait of Lilian Chatterton, and the eyes that looked out from the faded paper seemed to challenge the man. On inspecting the dim picture later he decided it must have been because he remembered them so well. They were clear and searching, honest above all things, but, as it were, demanding equal sincerity from whoever looked into them; and though perhaps this was due to the observer's fancy, the whole face seemed to possess a spiritual beauty. Dane, however, was certainly a little light-headed still, for as he gazed the face grew scornful.

To most Europeans in that country there comes a time of mental weakness and black dejection, and Dane's courage had melted before the fever which left him unstable as water, and fanciful as a

child. Thus it was that, in a sudden access of bitterness, he slipped the picture back into its case. Lilian, he decided, had cruelly misjudged him, and now doubtless enjoyed the sunny side of life in the cool British air, careless of the fact that for her sake he risked life and reason in the pestilential steam of Africa.

There was a rustle of draperies, and Bonita Castro swept into the room with the grace of movement and carriage which characterizes her mother's race. There was, however, nothing spiritual about Miss Castro's beauty, which was of the flesh and of the glowing south, appealing to the senses, delighting the eye; and Dane's pulse throbbed a little faster as she came toward him with a low cry of pleasure. It was the first time he had risen from his trestle cot in the adjoining room. Stooping, she held toward him a great cluster of the spotless African lilies—which, scented ambrosially, spring up wherever decay is rankest—then sank with lithe gracefulness into a chair near his side.

"It is very good to see you better, Don Ilton," she said.

"It is the result of your kindness, señorita. Unfortunately, I don't know how to thank you——"

"Then you will not try." Miss Castro raised a restraining hand. "We do not leave the sick to die. Even if it had been another, there is always enjoined on us the charity."

Dane had lost his sense of humor, and just then Bonita Castro looked all ministering angel, and his attitude expressed rather reverential respect than personal admiration, which, it is possible, did not please the lady so well.

"But you have done so much for one who is almost a stranger," he persisted.

Miss Castro's mood changed swiftly, and spreading out her hands

with a gesture of amusement, and a smile which Dane fancied most men would have given much to win, she was again all a woman, and a very alluring one.

"It is true that you English have not the graceful speech. Are we, then, the mere stranger, Don Ilton? *Carramba!* One takes pride in what one save from the fever, and it was on my lips to call you *cariño*."

Dane had acquired sufficient knowledge of Castilian in South America to appreciate the possible significance of the substantive; and he afterward remembered that he was not wholly displeased with it.

"You make me a vain man, señorita," he said lightly.

Miss Castro laughed again, and Dane lay silent for a while.

"I am the more indebted to your care because every day is precious, and I must rejoin my comrade as soon as possible," he said at last.

The damask warmth deepened just a trifle in his companion's cheek.

"You two still go on into the forest—why?" she asked.

"Because I am a poor man, and, as you have guessed, my comrade believes there is treasure waiting up yonder."

Bonita Castro smiled scornfully, and answered him with the assurance of one stating a definite fact.

"The Señor Maxwell will never bring gold out of the Leopards' country. Two white men have try already and, both of them, they die. You must not go back there, Don Ilton, nor let your comrade go, though I know he is a very clever and fearless man."

"How do you know that?"

Dane found it hard to conceal his astonishment at her tranquil answer:

"I try if he is fearless on board the steamer. I can use the pistol well."

"It is fortunate you did not test my courage in the same fashion. But was there not a third man?"

Miss Castro's fingers closed viciously, and the questioner experienced an instinctive shrinking as he saw the hatred in her deep black eyes.

"The third was not a white man, though he call himself so," she said, with a quietness that was ominous. "*Maldito sea el perro!* To-day again he infect this factory."

Dane could not help feeling that, unless the gentleman were prudent, he might have cause to regret his visit to the factory. He was inclined to admire high-spirited women, but Miss Castro looked more than dangerous just then; though Dane learned afterward that her hatred was justifiable.

Following her glance, he saw a short and very sallow-faced gentleman, neatly dressed in spotless duck, cross the compound below and disappear into the salt shed, evidently in search of Dom Pedro. There was nothing particularly noticeable about him; but another taller figure, draped in blue and white cotton and wearing a crimson turban, followed, and squatted in the hot dust outside the shed. This man was an African, but lighter in color than the seaboard tribes, and his movements reminded Dane of those of the midnight assassin. He decided, however, that the resemblance was fanciful.

"Is that the person you mentioned?" he asked. "It is evident that you dislike him. May I ask why?"

Miss Castro appeared to consider, and then answered frankly:

"Why should I not tell you? You are *muy caballero*, and I think, good friend of me. He was partner with my father, this Victor Rideau. They once go inland to trade with an Emir, who at that time gather much plunder of ivory, and perhaps they give their carrier boy the good rifle and cartridge, for the Emir is treacherous. He is very bad man, and —*pobre padre mio!*—when Rideau is go away he put pressure on Dom Pedro, and demand all his rifle and black carrier boy. What would you? My father he is not desire his throat cut, and he agree. The Emir write safe conduct and agreement, and sent him back with ivory, but this Rideau he guard the scroll in Arabic, and now always demand the silver from my father for fear he denounce him to the authority. One must not sell the black boy, and there is heavy penalty for giving the negro the arm of precision."

Dane grasped the situation, surmising that the Emir in question was one who had, for a time, successfully defied both British and French. He also surmised that the Gallic authorities would deal stringently with whoever had supplied the Moslem soldier with modern weapons at a time when it appeared quite possible he would even march upon the coast. Still, he was not sure that very much pressure had been required to convince Dom Pedro.

Returning to her almost caressing manner, Miss Castro touched his arm:

"Why you need that gold?"

"Gold is generally useful, isn't it?" smiled Dane. "It would help me to earn a little more than my bread when I go back to England."

Bonita Castro laughed, and then grew serious. There was a light in her dark eyes, and her voice grew deeper; and it was only because it appeared necessary that Dane afterward told his comrade part of what followed. Indeed, there was little to relate, but much to be

imagined.

"Is there no other place than England, when all the world is good?" she said. "Is not this much better than your mud and snow, and the sight of the men with anxious faces groping through the fog? *Vaya!* You men of the English cities, you not know how to live."

The speaker pointed out through the open window, and most men would have agreed with her in a measure. If the beauty of the fever coast is that of a whited sepulcher, it is a sufficiently alluring region, and Dom Pedro's factory stood high and healthily upon the summit of a bluff. Tall palms swaying about it before the sea breeze tossed their emerald tracteries against transparent blue. In the cottonwoods' shadow beyond them tall white lilies grew, and the rollers of the southern ocean, flaming dazzlingly, dissolved into spouts of incandescence upon a crescent of silver sand below. The whole scene was flooded with light and color, and permeated by the languorous spell of the tropics, which it is not good for white men to linger under.

"It is all very beautiful," he said; "but I have my bread to win."

"You are very modest, Don Ilton. Is there no place for such as you in Africa? Now I know one who would give much—even a share in the profits of several factories—for the help of two men he could trust. There will be more gold to win than you will ever find in the Leopards' country; and there will be the excitement you hunger for. The man who needs the assistance has a cunning enemy. Will you not listen when again he speaks to you?"

Miss Castro leaned slightly forward.

"It is the life you English long for. There would be adventure; much profit, I think, too, and—for that you like also—an enemy. He is bad enemy of—me. This England of yours is far off, and the wise man he

—is it not so?—takes gratefully what the good saints send him. Is it not enough, Don Ilton?"

Dane was not a vain man, but there was a subtle inflection in the woman's voice which suggested an amplification of the meaning of her last words. England certainly seemed very far away, Maxwell's project a mad one; and Dane remembered that the woman for whose sake he had joined in it had been ready to think ill of him. His companion was very alluring, he was weak in mind and body, very grateful to one who had saved his life for him, and loath to resume the burden which was part of his birthright as a civilized Englishman. A word, even a gesture, would, it seemed, smooth out many difficulties, and, shaking off responsibility, he might henceforward live for the day only; but though intoxicated by the spell of the tropics and the eyes of his companion, Dane had a memory, and he realized that he stood on the brink of a declivity. He had seen the end of other Britons who, selling their birthright for a few years' indulgence, sank beyond the level of the beasts. The face of a countrywoman, no longer cold and disdainful, but innocent and gentle, rose up before him; and the struggle ended.

"It is so much that I do not deserve it," he said humbly, answering her question. "I must accomplish the purpose which brought me here, and then go back to England. Nothing would turn back my comrade."

Miss Castro did not speak for a few moments, but Dane felt that she understood more than he had said. Then she looked at him steadily.

"You are a strange people, but, go when you will, God go with you, Don Ilton. Now, at least from my hands, you will take the medicine."

Dane's hand trembled as he held it out for the glass, for the struggle had left its mark on him; but he felt inclined to resent this climax, which appeared grotesquely ludicrous. Nevertheless, he duly swallowed the medicine, and resisted an inexplicable impulse which

prompted him to smash the glass. Then, with a wondrous unfolding of filmy draperies, his companion rose languidly, and, it seemed to Dane, melted out of the room. Almost simultaneously the crouching figure in the dusty compound rose and vanished too.

Dane decided that it would be well to gather strength with all possible celerity, and leave the factory as soon as he was fit to travel in a hammock. Accordingly, in spite of the protests of Dom Pedro, who, after repeating in definite form the offer made by his daughter, found him supplies and carriers, he presently took his leave, and shook hands with Miss Castro beside the waiting hammock at the compound gate. Her manner had been a shade more reserved of late, but she spoke with friendly earnestness when she laid in his hand a tiny object wrought in silver and ivory.

"You will take this for what you call a keep-a-sake, Don Ilton," she said. "There is always peril in the bush country, and it was given my mother by a holy man. It has the virtue. If you meet Rideau in the forest, remember he is my enemy and beware of him. And now, señor, the good saints keep you."

Dane bent over the little olive-tinted fingers, then Amadu helped him into the hammock, and presently Dom Pedro's factory had faded to a white blur against the sparkling sea.

As he journeyed northward Dane had much to ponder over. He regretted that he had been unable to secure a closer view of Rideau or his dusky follower. He fancied he once heard the Frenchman's voice raised angrily in an altercation with Dom Pedro; but he could learn nothing about the tall negro, who had vanished mysteriously. When the journey was almost accomplished, and he was recovering strength again, there was added another subject for consideration. Searching for the map Maxwell had given him, he failed to find it; but, after the first shock of dismay had passed, he was almost thankful

that time and distance prevented his returning to the factory in search of it. Dane, remembering the surgeon's narrative, felt himself unequal to the task of asking Miss Castro what she had done with it. He pushed on, hoping for the best, and that Maxwell might not ask too many questions.

Maxwell, when he heard the news, sat silent for several minutes.

"We are not beginning well," he then said gravely, "but that is perhaps not material. It seems to me that the future of the mine will be settled when we meet Monsieur Rideau and his lieutenant, as I think we will. Of course it is no use asking where you lost the map."

Dane recognized the significance of the last sentence, and answered accordingly.

"If I had possessed that knowledge I should have returned and found it. I have reasons for believing it was in my pocket-book when I left the factory."

Maxwell glanced at him keenly and smiled.

"After what you told me, I suppose one could expect nothing else from you," said he.

CHAPTER X

RIDEAU'S BARGAIN

Some time after Dane's departure, a smartly uniformed hammock train approached Dom Pedro's factory. That worthy ceased his leisurely pacing up and down the veranda, and watched the bearers wind out from the steamy shadow with ill-concealed anxiety, hoping that he might be mistaken. Then as they came on at a steady trot with the poles of the lurching hammock upon their woolly crowns, he stamped on the flooring; and even a sleepy Krooboy started at his vivid maledictions. There was no longer room for doubt that he was about to be honored by a visit from his former partner, Monsieur Victor Rideau, and it was very evident that Dom Pedro was not pleased to see him. His sister, a portly lady, of doubtful age, sat in a shady corner of the veranda, but she passed much of her time in Africa in peaceful slumber, and was now asleep as usual—or appeared so.

"It is too hot for anger, father," a voice said; and Dom Pedro, turning, saw his daughter leaning languidly over the balustrade. She, too, was watching the hammock with a curious expression.

"There is good cause!" Dom Pedro answered, cutting short his flow of expletives. "This Rideau comes another time to torment me. Why is it that when so many honest men die up yonder this one should always come back safely?"

"He will not always do so. Some day he, too, will be lost in the forest," said Bonita quietly; and the man glanced at her with hope in his eyes,

for several of his daughter's predictions had curiously been fulfilled. This may have been due to coincidence, or a shrewd calculation of probabilities; but Dom Pedro, having lived long in a land where occult influences are believed in, was not free from superstition.

"I would send half, or at least a third, of all I have, to the hospital in Lisboa if that were so," he declared. "Niña, you speak as though you knew."

Bonita laughed a little, though there was anxiety in her face.

"Padre, one might doubt the efficacy of such a bribe. Perhaps I do. It is money he wants, as usual?"

"Yes." There was a certain hesitation in the man's answer which did not escape his daughter. "It is, of course, the silver, and I have not much to give him. You have no regard for this Rideau, niña?"

Bonita's face was a study. Anger, loathing, and the faintest trace of fear were stamped upon it.

"Regard! I have only hatred for *el perro!*"

The emphasis on the last word was significant: while it means simply dog, and is used on occasion to designate a person jestingly, the Castilian can, by change of inflection, make it imply a rabid cur of the lowest degree; and Bonita used the epithet in that manner.

Dom Pedro raised his shoulders, and drew in his breath. He was slightly afraid of his daughter; but, unfortunately for them both, he was more afraid of Rideau, and he did not look at her when he spoke again.

"It is strange the Señor Dane did not return for the book he left, since it shows the path through the forests of Shailu's country, and he cannot find his way without it."

Bonita smiled upon him pityingly.

"You do not know those men as I do. They plan all from the beginning and leave nothing to chance. The Señor Maxwell is a man of system, and he will have safe in his memory all the book could tell him."

"They are a curious people," observed Dom Pedro dryly. "One of those two, however, was surely a trifle blind."

A faint trace of color crept into Bonita's face.

"It is time for you to receive your guest," she said.

Dom Pedro did so with the utmost cordiality, his hat in his hand, and the two men—one of whom despised the other, who feared and hated him—expressed their mutual delight at the meeting with great effusiveness. Bonita Castro watched them meanwhile from a green latticed window, and shivered a little, though the day was as hot as it usually is at that season in West Africa. She slipped her fingers under the laces at her breast, and her face was not attractive when they touched a little piece of wrought silver. It was not a mere adornment, for there was a slender blade of steel attached to it. Again she said, with an intensity of detestation: "*El perro!*"

Dom Pedro played chess and discoursed upon the shortcomings of their rulers with his guest all afternoon, and the five o'clock *comida* had been eaten before either hinted that Rideau could have any possible motive for his visit beyond the pleasure of seeing his former partner. Time has no great value to men of Latin extraction in the tropics; and it is possible that one of them found pleasure in prolonging the other's anxiety. At last, when they sat out on the veranda, the visitor, lighting a maize husk cigarette, thrust his wineglass away.

"It is always a gratification to see my old friend Dom Pedro, and I

have traveled a long way to give myself that pleasure," he observed; and his host, knowing how much this was worth, braced himself to meet what should follow. "Being here, there is, however, a little affair we can discuss together. I have an opportunity for a small investment to lay before you."

"I am honored, but trade is very bad, and silver scanty," Dom Pedro said hastily. "I have received no profits yet on the last venture."

Rideau spread out his palms deprecatingly.

"They are very dishonest men up yonder in the bush, as you, my friend, should know, and have robbed me shamefully; while it was but an hour since I rejoiced at your prosperity. I saw the cloth and gin sheds empty—and they were full not long ago."

Dom Pedro groaned inwardly, but attempted a show of resolution.

"I repeat that trade is bad. It is, I fear, impossible to oblige even you."

Rideau laughed a little, but his merriment was akin to mockery.

"I can only hope you are mistaken, and this time there will be a profit. There is also another affair I would discuss with you. I am a man with a conscience, and something we are concerned in up in the bush country troubles me. It is told me that these troublesome English make protest with the Administration that when the Emir invaded their dominions his men carried good rifles which could only have been obtained from this colony. The Captain Oger stated publicly that it is a stain on the national honor, and there will be strict inquiry. I am a good friend of Dom Pedro, but first of all patriotic Frenchman, me."

There was no need to speak more plainly, because Dom Pedro understood him thoroughly, and inquired forthwith the lowest sum that would set his visitor's uneasy conscience at rest. Rideau promptly named it; and the Portuguese, being desirous of gaining time, shook

his head.

"It is impossible. I also have considered about those rifles often," he said. "Now I think it would be better for me, being an innocent man, to explain to the Administration how the Emir robbed me."

Rideau was not in the least deceived, for he smiled sardonically.

"Is it not a little late, my friend, and the Commandant is a most suspicious man. It is possible he might not believe you, and it is not permitted to arm even one's carriers for protection with rifles; while there is in existence a scroll signed by the Emir and another which shows a voluntary sale. But you say what I ask is impossible. Well, I'll consider, and to-morrow may make a more feasible offer. The last time I came you entertained the sick comrade of the Englishman Maxwell. He has not given you any information about Niven's mine?"

"He did not," said Dom Pedro, with so much earnestness that Rideau did not believe him, and dismissing the subject, airily proposed another game of chess.

The next morning, Dom Pedro, being perhaps anxious to postpone the evil moment, set out for a bush village where he stated he had business; and his guest, feeling sure of his own position, was not wholly sorry to see him go. It would allow him to enjoy Miss Castro's society undisturbed, and also, if circumstances permitted, to glance through the books in her father's office, which he had long desired to do, with a view to discovering how far the man might be taxed. Dom Pedro was not a good bookkeeper, it is true, but his late partner understood his system, or rather the lack of it.

An opportunity did not present itself until all the occupants of the factory had apparently retired, as usual, to sleep in the coolest place they could find during the heat which follows noon. Rideau slipped into the iron-roofed room where Dom Pedro kept his accounts. As it

happened, however, Bonita was rather more wide-awake than usual, and shortly afterward she also entered the office, to find her guest glancing into a big folio with evident interest. He was in no way disconcerted, and smiled upon her affably.

"There was a difference in the weight of the last gums I sent down," he explained. "I would find the entry before I speak to Dom Pedro."

Bonita Castro was quick of wit.

"Then, as I help my father with the accounts, you will give me the details," she said.

Rideau's inventive genius was apparently unequal to the task, for he bowed ceremoniously.

"It is impossible to consider any question of business in the brightness of the señorita's presence."

Miss Castro laughed.

"You have my full permission. Now, as regards this gum?"

Rideau seated himself languidly.

"I am a man of affairs, but I have also sensibility, and shall I trouble the señorita about a bag of gum? To touch those dusty books is a desecration to her fingers."

"Still, it is of business I wish to talk to you, and you will give me your attention, señor," said the girl. "You have the power to cause my father some anxiety."

Rideau leaned forward a little in his chair.

"It is true, but I am too devoted a servant of the señorita's to wish to do so. It is for her sake I have concealed an indiscretion of Dom

Pedro's which would excite the anger of the Administration. As I have said, I would do very much to win the señorita's approval."

"But this is very little, and Dom Pedro pays you well," returned the girl. "The Commandant, who is not a friend of yours, might not credit your story if you told it to him."

Rideau smiled significantly.

"It is very little for me to do if it pleases the señorita; but it is much for Dom Pedro. You will know there is provided confiscation and banishment, and even a worse penalty, for selling the Indigene modern rifles, and I have therefore carefully hidden the Emir's agreement and safe conduct made in the Arabic when he is at war with this colony. It is misfortune that Dom Pedro has written his name to it."

Bonita Castro felt a chill run through her, though her face was calm. The man had shown his power plainly, but the desire in his eyes, as he watched her, caused her greater uneasiness. She could, she fancied, see the African nature beneath the indifferent veneer of civilization, and she trembled, knowing that under sufficient pressure her father might be capable of selling more than forbidden rifles. Therefore, even if she had no other motive, it was of the first necessity to lessen that power.

"Such generosity should not go unrewarded," she said. "You have long desired the gold you think the Englishman Niven found, but, unless I help you, you will never discover it. Even the man with the cross on his forehead does not know where the river lies. What would you give for a map showing Niven's road through the Leopards' country? It is so plain that a child could understand it."

Rideau's eyes glistened, but he was cautious.

"There is only one man who can have such a book; and I know he

would never part with it."

Bonita laughed.

"Yes—the Señor Maxwell. You know he would not part with it? Then you have tried and failed to obtain it from him? The Señor Maxwell is a very clever man. Nevertheless, I have the map. Would you recognize that it was genuine if I showed it to you?"

Rideau rose carelessly, and strolled toward the window. There was nobody on that side of the veranda—the compound lay empty under the pitiless heat below, and a slumbrous silence pervaded the factory. There was a change in him when he turned toward the girl, who held out an unfolded paper so that he could see a portion of it. The man was usually cunning, but it was not without results that he had inherited a strain of native blood, and now the instincts of the savage rose uppermost. Brute passion and unreasoning avarice were stamped on his face. He had hitherto made his admiration for the girl very plain, and had accepted her rebuffs with the serenity of one strong enough to wait. Now, however, his companion conceived it possible that he intended to retain his hold upon Dom Pedro and secure the map as well. It was her person he desired, and whether her good will accompanied it or not was probably immaterial.

"The sun has dazzled my eyes, and you will give it to me for near examination," he said, and his voice was husky. When she made a gesture of negation, he halted close in front of her with the veins on his forehead swollen, and one big, dusky hand partly raised.

Bonita Castro had not studied the native character profitlessly, and she knew that very little was required to cause those fingers—and they were the fingers of a negro—to fasten upon her shoulders, or even about her throat; but she had arranged accordingly. She clapped her hands sharply, and Rideau let his arm drop to his side when a patter of bare feet drew nearer along the veranda. A huge

muscular Krooman in white uniform stood in the doorway, and the girl smiled a little.

"Call Andres, Pobrecito. Tell him to bring the wine and the last of the steamer ice; but stay there on the veranda yourself. I may want you. It is so hot that you will not refuse if I offer you refreshment, señor?" she said.

Rideau's lips twitched a little, and his face was greasy, but the look of the African had faded from it, and he might have passed for a native of southern France when he bowed.

"Who could refuse anything offered by the señorita?"

The wine was brought, and the man, who a few moments earlier might have posed for a study of avarice and passion debased to ferocity, smiled as he compared his companion's eyes to the sparkling ocean when he raised his glass. Then, while the big negro squatted just outside the doorway, Miss Castro read extracts from the notes on the back of the map.

"This would be very valuable to a bold man," she said. "What would you give for it? It is no use offering a small thing."

"I would give"—the man hesitated—"I would even give the agreement in Arabic signed by Dom Pedro and the Emir!"

"Then it is yours," said Bonita Castro. "Now it is too hot for further business, even the underweighed gum. You may sit there and tell me of your adventures in the bush country."

Rideau had a large share of vanity, inherited from both parents, and he was in no wise reluctant; if Miss Castro failed to believe all he told her she did not say so. Indeed, she made the man feel that she accepted him as a hero, and fooled him so tactfully that he was several times on the brink of making confidences which might have

jeopardized his plans. Fortunately for himself, however, he reflected in time, and did not do so. When at last he withdrew, Miss Castro walked somewhat limply to her room, and sank down into a basket chair in the manner of one who has undergone a heavy nervous strain. Her aunt found her there presently, and placed a hand caressingly on her shoulder as she bent over her.

"This Rideau is a bad man. He has terrified you?" she said compassionately.

"No." The girl's voice trembled, though she smiled. "No, I hardly feared the cur. I have sent him to his own destruction. It is my own sin I fear. I have betrayed the man who trusted me; but still I do not think he will suffer from my treachery."

The elder lady shook off her somnolent expression, and nodded sagaciously.

"The big Englishman who was sick?—I comprehend," she said. "I do not ask questions; but take comfort if it was for your father, niña. Also, that Englishman is not clever, but he is very stubborn and strong, and I do not think it will be well for Rideau if he interferes with him."

When Miss Castro found Dom Pedro alone in his sweltering office that night she said to him: "Here is a present, father. I have drawn the dog's teeth."

Dom Pedro's eyes glistened as he clutched at the scroll handed him, then, though he first burned it over the lamp, his forehead grew furrowed, and his jaw fell.

"The cur may have other teeth left, and is of the blood of the African," he said. "Twice I repulsed him when he spoke of marriage. Little one, you have not sold yourself for this?"

The man positively quivered with impatience, but the girl laughed.

"No. I have sold him the blind Englishman. Rideau has the map that belonged to the Señor Maxwell."

"Thanks be to heaven!" Dom Pedro exclaimed piously; but his sallow face grew grave again. "It is a great deliverance, but it is not well to make one's profit from the blood of white men. This Rideau, who is very cunning, will follow and bring disaster upon the Englishmen up yonder. Already, I have suffered many things because of the black men the Emir stole from me."

Bonita's eyes shone.

"You do not see clearly, father, or know the manner of those other men. What is it to me if these strangers do not find the gold—but I would not have them die. I have been in their country, and if the cur dog follows, plotting treachery, as I think he will, the Señor Maxwell will surely kill him."

"*Ojala!* Heaven send it so," murmured Dom Pedro, and would have embraced his daughter, but that, shrinking from him, she slipped out into the moonlit veranda. The little olive-faced gentleman stood staring at the papers before him, and hoping that it might come about as she had predicted.

CHAPTER XI

THE TRAIL OF THE LEOPARD

Maxwell expressed his approval of the recruits Dane brought in, for Dom Pedro had chosen well. They were sturdy, woolly-haired Kroomen from Liberia who had gained some experience of forest warfare in petty skirmishes with the troops of the black republic. It is noticeable that the untamed African cherishes little love for his partly civilized brother. When he had harangued them, the two white men sat talking together.

"I would give a good deal to know what is in Dom Pedro's mind just now," said Maxwell. "It is quite possible that the offer he made you was genuine. There is, if one may say it without appealing to your vanity, a certain air of solidity and force about you which might appeal to a man of his type who could supply all the finesse necessary—and who possesses a troublesome enemy. The map would in any case be of little use to Dom Pedro, who would never venture into the Leopards' country; and I hardly fancy he would give it to Rideau. In the meantime our own program is clear. We start again at sunrise to-morrow."

"Are you not taking too much for granted when you assume that Dom Pedro has the map?" asked Dane; and Maxwell smiled enigmatically but did not answer.

A few days later they halted at sunset beside a stream which, contrary to the custom of most African rivers, flowed clear as crystal over yellow sand. Wooded hills whose hollows were filled with drifting

steam sloped steeply upward from the opposite bank, and the black shadow of a few palms lengthened across the grass behind the waiting men. There was nothing remarkable about the river or its surroundings; but heathen, missionary convert, and dusky Moslem alike shrank back murmuring from its bank.

"This is our Rubicon, and beyond it lies the Leopards' country," said Maxwell. "It is not a very imposing stream, but I believe no white man has ever crossed it without suffering from his rashness, since the days of the early Portuguese. Something has evidently startled the boys. As I partly expected, here it is."

Maxwell pointed to a slender wand set up beside the bank. A tuft of reddened rags was tied to it, and beneath them hung a piece of sun-dried clay rudely modeled into the resemblance of a leopard.

"I would rather have seen fifty men with flint-locks than this trumpery thing," he declared. "You don't quite grasp its significance, Hilton? Well, in this land anything may be made the emblem of the Ju-ju, and that is the insignia of a powerful one I have alluded to several times already."

"I could never understand what a Ju-ju is."

"Very few white men do, but its ministers are a force to reckon with; and this piece of clay signifies that many unpleasant things, varying from slow poisoning to death by violence, may happen to the man who disregards it. You can see that the boys are afraid of it."

"We can't stay here forever because some benighted heathen has tied it to a stick," expostulated Dane. "Here's a challenge to the powers of darkness. Watch and try to understand, you boy! If them thing be no fit to hurt me, it can't hurt you. That's logic, or, as you say, the Lord he give me sense too much, isn't it?"

The eyes of the spectators grew wide with horror as, snapping the

wand across his knee, he next crushed the leopard beneath his heel; and there was a heavy silence while they waited to see what would follow this bold defiance of the forest deity. So real was their terror, and the hush so impressive, that Dane felt his own heart beating faster than it generally did, and when he laughed the laugh rang hollow. But nothing unusual happened; and with murmurs of relief the men followed him as he splashed through the ford.

"It was necessary," said Maxwell with noticeable gravity.

"Nevertheless, we will double our sentries henceforward, and recharge our filters. There is no doubt that the powers of darkness will take up your challenge."

They pitched camp among the cottonwoods at the mouth of a ravine, and, when they had eaten, sat for a time within their little tent poring over a map issued privately for the use of French officials.

Innumerable insects dimmed the light of the lamp above them, and they could scarcely see the lettering.

"We are here," said Maxwell, laying his finger on the paper, "on the threshold of what the niggers call the Leopards' country, which is marked as partly explored territory, with this patch to represent the dominions of King, or headman, Shaillu. A few armed expeditions have traversed it farther east, and found it thinly peopled by petty tribes hostile to Europeans, while nobody knows much about Shaillu except that he abruptly broke off the negotiations he once began with the authorities. That showed the hand of his priests, and brings us back to the Leopard League."

Dane laid down his damp cigar, and listened with keen interest as Maxwell explained.

"As you have heard, secret leagues of all kinds are common in this country, and that of the Leopard is probably one of the most powerful. Its priestly leaders are apparently the power behind the throne in

Shaillu's dominions, and, so the natives say, those they favor with a share of their supernatural qualities can render themselves invisible or take the shape of beasts. Like their namesake, they always strike at night. Dismissing all idea of witchcraft, you can take very ingenious human cunning, a thorough knowledge of poisoning, and no mean strategic skill, for granted. Once the white man settles in their country the power of the bush magician must decline; and the deduction you can draw from that should justify a close watch to-night. It is your turn until twelve o'clock, Hilton."

Dane found it a somewhat depressing watch when the cooking fires had died out and the sounds which gather depth with the darkness emphasized the hush of the forest. There was nothing visible but the faint glimmer of the lighted tent, which suggested a huge Chinese lantern set down among the dripping undergrowth. Behind it loomed dim ghosts of trees. Moisture fell drumming upon the tight-strained canvas; and at intervals some beast in the forest sent up an unearthly scream. The darkness was filled with the scent of wood smoke and lilies, and thickened by wisps of drifting steam.

The time dragged by slowly; but at last Dane was about to make a final round, when a stealthy rustling held him rigidly still, save that his left hand slid farther along the rifle barrel. The sound ceased and began again, and it became certain that something or somebody was crawling toward the tent. It could hardly be one of the carriers, for Maxwell had intimated that any man found wandering in the darkness would promptly be fired upon. Dane could feel his heart throbbing, but his fingers were steady on the cool barrel as he waited, realizing instinctively that death or danger in some strange shape was drawing near. Nevertheless he was silent, fearing to rouse the camp on a false alarm, and also because he wished to make certain of their unseen enemy.

For a space of a few seconds there was no sound at all, and he grew

the more uneasy, knowing that the naked bushman learns by sheer necessity to wriggle almost silently through the undergrowth. Then he found it hard to repress a cry of astonishment as, for a moment, a monstrous shape was silhouetted against the faintly illuminated canvas. It was bulkier than a man, and though it stood upright, its head was that of a beast. Maxwell was clearly in danger, there was no time to lose, and, pitching up the rifle, Dane pressed the trigger. A streak of red fire rent the darkness, and a spark blew into his eyes. He felt the jerk of the barrel, and then, though he scarcely heard the explosion, he caught a thud there is no mistaking—the sound made by the impact of a solid bullet.

As he snapped down the lever and slid home another cartridge, something dim and shadowy rushed past, and the rifle blazed again. Then there was a snapping of undergrowth, a yell from a sentry, the crash of a Snider, and the camp awoke to life. Maxwell, holding up a lamp, sprang half-dressed from the tent, black men rose out of the shadows clamoring excitedly, and Dane's headman, Monday, stood close beside him, peering into the darkness with his long Snider rifle held out before him. Monday was not a timid man, but he looked distinctly uneasy when the light of Maxwell's lantern fell upon his face.

Dane briefly related what had happened; and Maxwell lowered his lantern.

"The Leopards have made their first move, and lost a man, I think," he said. "Most black men are able to carry off considerable lead, but this red trail on the undergrowth is significant. It also appears quite probable that you have saved my life."

Just then, there was a shrill scream in the forest, a scream of human agony, horrible and intense, and afterward a silence that could be felt.

"Them ghost leopard he done go chop some boy!" exclaimed Monday, trembling a little. "We savvy fight black man, sah, but not

them debbil."

"The sound rose from behind the tuft of palms," Maxwell said quietly. "Take six of your best men, Monday, and see who is missing. No—stay where you are, Hilton! It is advisable to break them in to this kind of thing."

Monday went reluctantly, and returned to say that one of the sentries and his gun had vanished completely. Then a half-naked man with a matchet burst through the wondering group which had gathered about the pair, demanding assistance to search for his brother.

Maxwell glanced at him, hesitated, and, while Dane protested, shook his head.

"We could never track them, even in broad daylight; and some of the rescue party would not come back," he explained. "By this time the poor devil is certainly dead, and I feel convinced that we shall find him to-morrow without searching. Amadu, tell your boys to fire on any man trying to leave the camp."

Maxwell kept watch himself henceforward, and Dane retired to the tent, resigned though far from contented. He had learned that, if his ways were a trifle autocratic, his comrade was a leader who could be trusted, and though he longed with a vindictive yearning to search the forest, rifle in hand, he did not consider it judicious to question Maxwell's authority.

It was a relief when morning came, and somewhat silently they began the march again. The path wound up a ravine, through climbing forest that rotted as it grew, where grotesque and ghostly orchids sprouted from each crumbling bough, and there was scarcely room for two men abreast in the rutted trail. It had been worn deep by the passage of naked feet; for gum, skins, and a little ivory came down on the heads of slave trains out of Shaillu's country.

Maxwell, with a few picked men, led the way, after giving Dane orders not to follow him too closely with the main body; but the latter found it hard to restrain his carriers, who desired to leave the site of the camp as far behind them as possible.

Dane had lagged a little behind the long line of colored headgear, cases poised aloft on woolly crowns, white draperies, and patches of sable skin, which wound on before him through the green of the tangled jungle, when Maxwell's voice came back sharply.

"Lead your boys wide into the bush, Hilton! Break through for several hundred yards, and send them on before you. Turn back and rejoin me alone when you strike the trail again!"

It was done, though Dane fell over an ant-heap and into a network of horrible thorny trailers which tore the flesh about his ankles. Hurrying back along the trail, he found Maxwell standing behind a screen of resplendent creepers, lighting a cigar with a hand that was not quite steady. His eyes were positively savage, and a patch in the center of each cheek was gray. Startled as Dane was, it was nevertheless soothing to find that his comrade shared some, at least, of the weaknesses of their common humanity. He could not mistake the intensity of Maxwell's anger.

"Prepare yourself for a surprise, Hilton, and then see what awaits you beyond that bush," he said. "I had partly expected it, but when I came upon it the sight almost sickened me."

Dane's nerves were tolerably good, but when he passed the creepers he experienced a shock of nausea and halted abruptly. Two black men were scooping out a trench, while another crouched near by, crooning something while he ran his thumb caressingly up and down a matchet blade. He looked up at the white man's coming, and his face was a study. Horror was stamped upon it; but a slow, relentless ferocity was written there too. This Dane saw with his first

glance, but after the second he turned his eyes away. Maxwell was right. They had found the missing sentry. The object—for there was little resemblance of humanity left in what lay a foul blotch on the forest before him—was stretched across the trail; and the neck was twisted so that the face, left whole, looked down the pathway the way the expedition should have come, distorted and ghastly, with its changeless grin of pain. Words appeared superfluous, but Dane's sensations demanded relief in speech.

"Horrible! horrible! But what is the matter with Bad Dollar? He looks positively murderous!"

"It is not surprising," answered Maxwell. "The African is not always admirable in his domestic relations, but what lies yonder was his brother."

Dane, stooping, patted the negro's head.

"It will be a bad day for some of the Leopards when he settles that score. Listen to me, Maxwell. Heaven knows whether through greed I am responsible for part of this; but I most solemnly promise that if ever I can find the master fiend who inspired the murderers, I'll avenge that poor devil, as well as Lyle, the trader, whatever it costs me. We're partners in this affair, Bad Dollar!"

It is probable that the naked heathen attached little meaning to the words, but he understood the hoarseness of the white man's voice, and the steely glint in his eyes. He laid his black hands on the speaker's foot.

"It is a bargain," Dane said gravely. "I mean to keep it, Maxwell."

"You are a little impetuous," was the quiet answer. "Some day there will, I hope, be a reckoning; but a wise man says little and awaits his opportunity. Our turn has not come yet. When it does I do not think

you will find me dilatory. Meanwhile, I'm puzzled. There are points connected with this affair which are far from clear; but those fellows have finished and we will go on again."

Beyond instructing Dane and his immediate followers to keep the occurrence secret, Maxwell said nothing further until noon had passed, when Dane asked a question.

"Why did the Leopards make their first move now, when we could, if we wished it, retreat, instead of waiting until we had penetrated farther into their country?"

"It is a pertinent question," said Maxwell. "For one thing, this is, after all, King Shailu's country, and they possibly fear that if we once have speech with him, the headman, who, so the French officers told me, has a hankering after civilization, might extend us protection. But that does not quite account for everything. You remember Miss Castro's mention of the following shadow? Events have proved her predictions signally correct hitherto, and I am inclined to fancy that the worst danger still lies behind us and not before."

Maxwell vouchsafed no further information, and though Dane knew it was well the expedition had for its leader a man unmoved alike by excess of anger or misguided pity, he could not help retorting: "You foresee a good deal, Carsluith. It is unfortunate you could not more often prevent it. Why could you not have told me more of what you anticipated?"

Maxwell laughed good-humoredly.

"Isn't it apparent that what I prevent from happening does not occur? As to the last question, perhaps the African's answer, 'You never asked me,' is the best. One dreads so much that it appeared useless to harrow your feelings until I was certain."

The march through headman Shailu's dominions left upon Dane only

a series of blurred impressions. He was too sick to notice definite details most of the time; but he decided that under no circumstances could it be considered a cheerful country. For days together the expedition floundered through dripping forest so laced and bound with creepers that at noon the daylight could hardly filter down. The atmosphere resembled that of a Turkish bath; moisture splashed upon the broad leaves everywhere, and the heat and the gloom together produced a distressing lassitude. This the white men made strenuous efforts to resist, knowing that they might blunder into an ambush at any moment.

It was evident that their enemies had not lost touch with them; for in spite of their keenest vigilance, a carrier was twice spirited out of camp at night. Once Dane, making the rounds with a lantern, came upon a sentry huddled beneath a cottonwood. He had paid a heavy penalty for his drowsiness. Even Maxwell showed signs of temper at this, and the expedition waited two nights in camp while its leaders prowled through the forest in an attempt to surprise the assassins. It was, of course, a failure. They returned at sunrise, muddy, ragged, and savage, having neither seen nor heard anything suspicious.

The fact that they never did see their persecutors was the most harassing feature of it all; and at last Dane grew by turns murderously resentful and subject to fits of limp dejection, in which the fever had doubtless a share. The few villages they passed were empty. Where a river crossed their path the canoes had been taken away; and at intervals detachments of the carriers fell sick mysteriously. When they limped out into a waste of crackling, sword-edged grass, the glare and dust and heat were bewildering, and after a few days Dane longed for the forest again.

Still they held on, and one evening they marched, blanched in face, and very weary, into sight of one of the strongholds of headman Shaillu.

CHAPTER XII

WEALTH IN SIGHT

A stockade ran round the village, and rows of thatched roofs loomed above the frowning wall of timber, but instead of the usual clamor, there was dead silence as, with some semblance of order, the footsore and spiritless carriers limped in through the open gate. Nothing except a few lizards stirred in the first sandy avenue, and the oppressive stillness remained unbroken by the voice of man or beast. The sun hung low above the parched grass in the west, and crimson splendors blazed behind the huts; but a strange musky odor replaced the pungent fragrance of burning wood which at that hour hangs over each African village.

"The whole land seems dead," Dane said slowly, leaning heavily on his rifle as he spoke. "There are times when one could almost fancy, Carsluith, that you and I were ghosts—indeed, at the present moment you don't look unlike one; but what is the meaning of this latest riddle? This is the black headman's capital, isn't it?"

Maxwell smiled mirthlessly, as he stood, with beaded forehead and shoulders bent, glancing toward the weary carriers. His face was worn and hollow, though his eyes were bright, and his clothing was dropping in tatters from his weary limbs. The glare behind him emphasized the lividness of his pallid skin.

"It is one of them. I believe he has several," he said. "Whether he fears reprisals from some plundered neighbor, or pestilence, I naturally don't know; but, as his absence will save us a good many

presents and much loss of time, it is not material. Still, we might find some clue in one of these huts."

Maxwell entered the nearest, then moved into another, and stayed there some time, leaving Dane in the sandy avenue before it; the carriers were resting at a distance. The sun dipped, and as Dane watched the night creep up swiftly from the east, it struck him that there was a curious uncanny feeling about the place. It was a relief when his comrade returned, looking graver than ever.

"Did you find any one inside?"

"I did," was the answer. "Unfortunately the man, as well as the one in the next hut, was dead, and had, I fancy, been so for some time. He probably died of a plague, which explains why the town is empty. We may find something more conclusive in one of the larger huts."

Dane decided that the discovery of two dead Africans was sufficient, and said so; but Maxwell persisted, and it was almost dark when they halted outside what appeared to be the headman's dwelling. Nothing could be distinguished in the interior, but Dane could hear creeping things rustle in the thatch, and the peculiar odor he already had noticed drifted forth from the hut. This was all, but he felt an instinctive repugnance to entering, and when Maxwell passed him, he caught him by the shoulder to suggest that they should light a lantern first. Hardly had he done so than what appeared to be a puff of colder air sighed close past his ear, and Maxwell, whipping out his revolver, hailed him to run round the hut as he leaped into the room. Dane did so, finding another entrance at the rear, and a broad space between the dwelling and the nearest hut. Nobody, he felt almost certain, would have had sufficient time to cross it, but the space was empty. When he went in Maxwell had torn down and lighted strips of palm-leaf from the thatch, but the name that leaped up showed them no sign of living humanity. Maxwell's countenance was very grim.

"You saw nobody outside there? I hardly thought you would," he said. "Our animal instincts are sometimes more useful than our powers of reasoning, Hilton. It is probable that if you had not checked me, I should now be on my way out of this land of surprises. What we heard was a diminutive arrow, no doubt with the venom there's no cure for upon its point. It could not have been shot at us by either of the Africans yonder."

Dane, glancing at the two awful huddled figures, swore softly and viciously.

"It is time we struck back, Carsluith," he urged. "I'll call up our boys and surround the huts."

"It would be useless," said Maxwell, shaking his head. "You have not realized these fellows' ingenuity, even yet. Further, if the boys saw what we have seen it might be disastrous."

A horror of the whole country where such things were possible came upon Dane and he moistened his dry lips with his tongue.

"I would give ten years of my life to stand face to face with the leader of these devils."

"Perhaps you will some day! I am puzzled among other things by their pertinacity. The heathen is unstable, and one almost feels that there must be something stronger than the native's spasmodic purpose behind what we have endured. In any case, it will be pleasanter to camp outside the town to-night."

They had some trouble in inducing their followers to quit the promised shelter, but both felt easier when they had repassed the stockade gate. That was apparently their enemies' last effort, for they were not molested during the rest of their journey; and eventually Maxwell halted his worn-out men beside a shrunken river. It came down out of a chaos of jungle-covered hills, rippling over sharp sand, with tall

bluffs on the opposite side of it; and within five minutes every carrier was rolling and splashing in the lukewarm stream.

Dane quivered with eagerness as he watched Maxwell, who, looking up from a paper in his hand, smiled inscrutably.

"Yes. From Niven's description we have reached our goal at last. I was almost afraid his memory or imagination had betrayed him," he said. "That must be the bluff he camped on, and this, according to his assertion, the river which sprinkles its sand with gold. However, he hinted that it would pay better to prospect the higher pools. I want you to test his statement, Hilton. The result of the experiment promises to be eventful."

Maxwell's voice was slightly uneven, but his fingers seemed steady as he lighted one of their few last cigars. Dane felt his own knees weak beneath him, and his voice was hoarse when he hailed a carrier whose load consisted of prospecting tools. Carrying a tin dish and a small shovel, he waded into the shrunken river. There was a patch of sand near its center from which he filled the metal basin, and then halted with a curious sickly feeling, afraid almost to test its contents. He had sunk too much of his slender capital in the venture, and his future depended upon that test. Its issues were prosperity and the realization of the hope that had sent him to Africa, or a weary struggle for daily bread; and the climate-weakened man felt that, after all they had dared and suffered, he could hardly face failure. The perspiration trickled into his eyes, and oozed from his hair, and he stood still, knee-deep in the nameless river, for the space of almost a minute.

Then, stooping suddenly, he dipped the vessel and whirled it round and round until partly empty. There was a color about some of the particles remaining that caught his attention; but he would not trust a partial test, and continued the washing until, except for a very trifling

residue, the pan was empty. Still, Maxwell made no comment and asked no question, for, if one was now swift in action, the other was great in silence.

Dane straightened himself, and waded back with dry lips and tickling throat, but with triumph in his eyes; and Maxwell laughed softly as he grasped the hand he stretched out.

"What have you found?" he asked.

"Enough to prove your dead friend right, and encourage us to search for something better!" Dane spoke as calmly as he could. "It is only stream gold, and doubtless readily worked out, but heaven knows how much more there may be up yonder where this came down from."

"You think——"

"That Niven was not mad, but eminently sane! I'm not a practical gold prospector, but I couldn't well help learning a little of the theory when working on the drawings of hydraulic mining machinery. It's a question of the velocity of the current and specific gravity—for even with a stream behind gold grains of any size don't travel far; and their matrix lies in yonder hills, or beyond them, somewhere."

"We'll go on again to-morrow," said Maxwell quietly.

For a week they hewed a way through the jungles on the hillside, or waded up the bed of the river where it promised an easier road; and finally, daring to penetrate no farther, they pitched camp on a palm-crested bluff overhanging a breadth of dry sand and a deep pool beneath a fall. Since leaving Shaillu's stronghold they had neither been followed by their persecutors nor seen anything with life in it. Maxwell left all operations to his friend's direction, and toiled beside him for several days like a galley slave, digging and blowing out with explosives a new channel to empty the pool, besides hewing troughs

to bring down the water from above the fall.

Once more the burning day was drawing toward its close when, with the roar of the last shot rolling across the encircling forest and the water frothing muddily down its new outlet, Dane stood beside his comrade, leaning on a shovel, and wondering greatly that the latter could think of anything beyond the result of their experiment.

"The jungle seems to mock us, does it not?" Maxwell remarked.

"Already its silence has swallowed the feeble din we made; and the next flood will obliterate forever all traces of your workings."

"Then you don't believe that this is the beginning of a new era, and that those who follow us will change the future of this wilderness?" asked Dane with a show of incredulity.

Maxwell pointed to the jungle fading into the dimness of the east.

"I do not. Look at it," he said. "It has stood so from the beginning, a place of everlasting shadow, for the naked bushmen to hunt each other in; and it will be the same long centuries after you and I are gone. It is too old and changeless for even the Briton to subdue. Phœnician, Roman, Arab, and Moor have all tackled this all-absorbing Africa; and while the brown men have left a plainer stamp on it than the white men, how much has any of them done? Still, all this is beside the question, isn't it? It will be enough for you and me if we can return home safely with some small augmentation of our capital. Hadn't you better resume your digging, Hilton?"

Dane did so, stripped to the waist; and great fires were blazing before he came up out of the river, exultant.

"I can't promise a fortune, but there should be sufficient to pay us for all our toil," he said. "Those little grains will realize almost four pounds an ounce."

They set out a carefully treasured bottle of lukewarm wine that night in the tent, and duly emptied it, though, perhaps for the same reason, neither of them ate much; and afterward they sat long talking under the smoky lamp. It was a night to remember, for it is not often one enjoys the same thrill of triumph twice in a lifetime. Maxwell was unusually communicative; and long afterward Dane could remember how he leaned against a deal case, worn, thin, and haggard, but with a smile of satisfaction on his hollow face.

"Success appears within sight at last, but it is well to take good fortune soberly," he said. "I am, however, sensible of an insane desire to do something extravagant when I remember all that word implies. You have seen Culmeny, Hilton, but it is hardly possible that you can realize the affection I have for the old place. It was fast falling into ruin before my father improved its finances a little by painful economy; and, because we generally fought and plotted for the losing side, the poor acres about it have been starved overlong. Now, after many an arduous search for the wherewithal, I can hope it may be granted me to restore a measure of its former prosperity. The Culmeny mosses could be turned into plow-land and pasture with the aid of a little money."

"You are a young man, Carsluith," Dane replied suggestively. "Being merely one of the swarming people, I don't know that love for—an ancient dwelling—would have exacted so much from me. Drainage schemes are no doubt useful, but was the extension of them your only ambition?"

Maxwell laughed good-humoredly, though a trace of shadow crept back into his face.

"No," he said slowly; "there was a time when they took a very secondary place. Every one has his weaknesses, and even now I have not quite got over mine."

The friendship between the two men had never been demonstrative, but it was deep enough to make Dane's comment no liberty.

"I can guess. The old story, no doubt. 'It was the woman who tempted me!' She treated you badly?"

"No," Maxwell answered quietly, looking hard at his companion. "She—God bless her—could treat no one harshly. It was my own folly to dream that she, with her fresh young beauty and the light-heartedness of innocence, could find anything congenial in such a taciturn, somber man as myself. Well, that romance is over, but it has left its mark; and now all that I hope for is that Culmeny will flourish for a brief space under the last of an unfortunate family."

Now there are limits beyond which even one who has sickened and fought and suffered beside a trusted comrade may hardly go, and Dane repressed the question which trembled on his lips. Nevertheless, he afterward fancied that if he had asked it then Maxwell would have answered him; and the revelation probably would have made a vast difference in the future of both of them. Dane did not, however, ask.

He was partly dazed by his own good fortune, and, when at last they ceased from speech, he sat in contented silence conjuring up roseate visions of the future. It was true that he had quarreled with Lilian, or she had quarreled with him; but during the time of stress and struggle the importance of the difference between them had—so it seemed to the man—steadily diminished. He could recall significant trifles which suggested that the time would come when the woman would no longer enforce the terms of their compact; and he felt that it was at least possible that, returning triumphant, he would find that she had already forgiven his supposed offenses. So hope rose victorious over doubts and dejection; and Dane was nodding, dreaming, while still half-awake, golden dreams, when Maxwell's

voice recalled him to the laborious present.

"It is past midnight, and the task before us will tax our uttermost energies. Isn't it time to turn in, Hilton?"

Dane nodded.

"We will begin at sunrise," he said; "work every possible hour, and start back for England whenever the yield falls off. It is better to make sure of a portion than risk the whole by straining for too much; and fortune does not appear to favor white men overlong in this country. Even if we were but half satisfied, it should not be difficult to float a company."

Maxwell shook his head.

"Your first suggestion shows some discernment, Hilton; the second, less. Even a wildcat company promoter would fight shy of this mine; and it is tolerably certain that we have both the cross-marked man and Monsieur Victor Rideau still to reckon with."

Dane stretched himself out on some matting when Maxwell turned out the lamp, but he did not immediately sleep. The hot African darkness hemmed in the little tent, but he could see his comrade's figure dimly outlined against it as he sat rigidly still in the entrance. Then it struck him that they were very far away from all help from civilization, with a secret in their possession which already had cost the lives of other men. The roseate visions faded, and a sense of impending trouble preceded slumber. It was significant that Dane's fingers sought the pistol that lay beside him.

"Not asleep yet?" asked Maxwell. "What is troubling you?"

"I don't quite know," Dane answered. "I was going to ask you the same thing. Carsluith, if Rideau or the other rascal interferes with us further before I have won sufficient to float my patent, some of the

party won't go home again."

The sun had just cleared the forest when, one morning soon after Dane had set his flume and washing gear to work, he sat at breakfast before a swinging table in their extemporized mess tent. Maxwell, who had just risen, stood in the entrance, partly dazzled by the growing brightness. Suddenly some of the Krooboys commenced to chatter excitedly, and a negro's voice rose above the commotion:

"White man lib for across the river!"

Maxwell, springing into the tent, snatched up a pair of binoculars; and the table overturned with a crash as Dane scrambled to his feet.

"The devil!" he exclaimed, staring stupidly at the figure below which saluted them with uplifted arm.

Maxwell frowned as he sharply closed the glasses.

"No," he said, "not exactly. It is Monsieur Victor Rideau."

Ten minutes had passed before the man Dane had seen at Castro's factory came smiling into camp, and the miner glanced at him curiously. He was short, but somewhat burly and broad-chested for a man of pure Gallic descent. His hair was very crisp and black, his face swarthy, and his fingers suspiciously like those of the negro. He was, considering the country, neatly arrayed in white duck and shoes with pointed toes. Monsieur Rideau had evidently traveled in a hammock.

"Felicitations, camarades," he began, with, it seemed to one observer, an excess of amiability. "It please me greatly to meet the friend of my own color in this country of the devil, so I leave all my boy behind there and push on with much expedition to salute you."

"That was very kind," said Maxwell shortly, never moving his eyes

from his enemy. "The eagerness was mutual. My friend here upset our breakfast equipage in his hurry to greet you. The cook, however, will get you some more presently."

Dane fancied he read satisfaction in his comrade's face when the other answered:

"I have the breakfast already. You smoke now. I have these from Cuba—he is smuggle. No? That is the pity; but we talk at least. I have affaire of importance to discuss with you."

"So I presumed," said Maxwell, with no excess of civility. "Our tent is hardly fit to enter, but there is still shade here. Please consider us attentive listeners."

"*Bien!*" Rideau carefully laid a silk handkerchief on a fallen cottonwood before he took his seat. "I come to search the gold mine, and find two men of my own color have find her already. Me, I am not greedy. I say there is the plenty for three. So I make proposal. I go the partner with you."

"Suppose that does not suit us?" Dane broke in.

Rideau lifted one shoulder and stretched out the other arm with an air that was not wholly Gallic, but rather suggested the grimaces of a negro.

"It would be the pity. You know how we say, '*J'y suis*——?' As an American captain I have once small difference with tell me when he establish himself all day on my veranda: 'I'm here, Mr. Shylocker, and until I get what I've come for I stop right where I am.' Shylocker, I tell him, is a compliment not comprehended of me. That was a man of determination, but I vanquish him, my friends."

Hitherto something in the speaker's fastidious neatness and excessive bonhommie had, because his welcome was the reverse of

cordial, prevented Dane from taking him seriously. Now there was a glint in his dark eyes which suggested that he might prove dangerous; and Dane surmised that the last sentence was meant as a warning. In any case, his blood took fire at its veiled insolence.

"It seems to me you could only have found your way here by means of a map stolen from me!" he said hotly, rising as he spoke.

Maxwell silenced him with a gesture.

"That is beside the question, Hilton. Monsieur Rideau is here, and, as he informs us, here he means to stay. The first question is whether, if we do not wish it, he is able to."

Rideau took up the challenge with outward good-humor.

"I have of camp boy two, or perhaps three, for every one I see of you. Most he is also arm with the good rifle. If there is the bad understanding, somebody is possibly get kill, which is distressing to me. Beside, the barbaric indigene he go chop us separables, as the nigger say. United we are invincibles, *voyez vous?*"

"I believe I do," Maxwell answered, in a tone which suggested that he saw considerably more than the other's words revealed; and Dane watched the pair, as for some seconds they lapsed into silence—the Briton motionless and almost too rigid in bearing, with an expressionless face; the swarthy adventurer smiling out of shifty eyes, while his fingers betrayed his impatience.

Then Maxwell spoke abruptly.

"Your proposal demands serious consideration. I would prefer to give you an answer this time to-morrow."

"*Bien*," Rideau acquiesced; and after a detailed account of his adventures, which Dane surmised was wholly fictitious, he took his

leave.

"The savage has his virtues as well as his failings," said Maxwell, looking after him. "That man, however, is neither French nor negro, and such as he usually combine the vices of both sides of their ancestry. What do you think of his proposal, Hilton?"

"I should have dismissed him with four expressive words. Why did you promise to consider it at all?"

Maxwell smiled dryly.

"Because I intend to do so. I will give you my reasons this evening when, after a day's consideration, I shall have them ready in a more definite shape. In the meantime, we had better continue the mining."

CHAPTER XIII

PESTILENCE

The result of the day's work was encouraging, though it cost Dane an effort to concentrate his attention upon his task. Rideau's swarthy face haunted him; he would have felt more cheerful had his companion decided to defy him. Maxwell, however, said little, and appeared to find pleasure in working with concentrated energy.

Evening came at last, and thick darkness closed about the lonely tent. Neither of the men ate much, and when the frugal meal had been cleared away, Maxwell once more spread his map on the table.

"We have to make an eventful decision, and it might be well to consider our position," he said, laying his finger on the map. "We are somewhere here, just beyond the fringe of Shaillu's country, with a difficult and dangerous country between us and civilization, and a little-known land, whose inhabitants are supposed to be predatory tribes, to the north."

"We will take all that for granted," responded Dane. "Can you give me Rideau's record?"

"But little of it. He is evidently of mixed blood, and partly educated, a trader by profession, with a mysterious inland connection. I was told that the authorities suspect him of trafficking in unlawful weapons, or even in black humanity. I have little doubt it was he who hired the man with the scar on his forehead to arrange for Niven's destruction; and, while several points are not clear to me, I fancy he is at least partly responsible for our own misfortunes. Seeing his efforts to circumvent

us fail, he has decided to join us—for a time. Lastly, I am inclined to surmise that by reason of some unlawful speculation, jointly undertaken, he has a hold on Dom Pedro, and so obtained possession of the map you lost. Now, what are we to say to him?"

"Very little, in my opinion!" grunted Dane. "Tell him to go to the devil! If that rouses his indignation, as I hope it will, I should find satisfaction in assisting him."

Maxwell smiled, but shook his head.

"Your ways are delightfully simple, but hardly practicable, Hilton," he said. "In the first place, Rideau means to stay, and has, he tells us, a force much superior to our own. Suppose we succeeded in driving him out by violence, we should have to meet a charge of filibustering when we returned to the coast, or stand a siege if he returned with a host of native allies. The one safe step in that direction would be the entrapping and total annihilation of Rideau and his party, which, presumably, would not recommend itself to you!"

"Heaven forbid!" exclaimed Dane, convinced against his will. "Am I a professional murderer? Since you don't agree with mine, let me hear your views."

"In the first place we must hope that, as he suggests, there may be gold enough for three. Further, I consider Rideau least dangerous when under my own eye, and therefore consider it would be wisest to accept his proposal and watch him carefully. We shall thus have peace for a time, at least, and when necessary must endeavor to match our wits against his guile. That the man's company will not be pleasant, I need hardly say; but we can't afford to be particular with so much at stake. Remember that we came here to make money, and not in search of adventures, or to maintain our dignity."

Dane only nodded, and so the conference concluded. Sooner than

lose what he hoped for he was prepared to concede anything; but it might have been better if he had adhered to his own simple plan; for it is difficult to make a bargain with such a man as Rideau, and keep it without material losses as well as diminished self-respect.

Early the next morning Rideau arrived, bringing with him an imposing number of colored desperadoes; and a written agreement was drawn up. They were to share all risks and expenses, and divide what gold they won on its safe arrival at the coast. Rideau showed bland satisfaction when he read it through; but, before he filled a rusty pen, Dane rose and laid Bonita Castro's keepsake on the table.

"Faith is a question of training, and exactly what each man believes concerns only himself; but probably all of us respect this as a symbol," he said. "Is that not so, Monsieur Rideau?"

Rideau glanced from the speaker to Maxwell, and there was a gleam in his eyes, then he bent his head.

Flinging down his battered sun-hat, Dane laid his right hand on the object on the table, saying: "So I solemnly promise, first to keep this bargain and faith with my partners, if it cost me my life or fortune; and secondly, to demand a full account from either should he betray his trust, as, if I fail them, they shall do to me."

Maxwell in turn recorded his promise with quiet simplicity; but Rideau started when the object was passed on to him. It was a beautifully wrought crucifix of medieval workmanship. For a moment he stared malevolently at Dane, and then a look akin to fear crept into his eyes. But, raising one hand aloft, he pledged himself more solemnly than either, and attached his name first of all to the foot of the agreement. He retired shortly afterward to pitch his camp, for the new partners had decided that their respective carriers would be best kept apart; and Maxwell looked at his comrade.

"Had you mentally rehearsed that scene, Hilton?" he asked. "It was almost a stroke of genius."

"No. I don't claim to be a genius. It was simply the most solemn thing I could think of from his point of view. I meant exactly what I said, and I feel somewhat easier now that Rideau has passed the test."

Maxwell smiled.

"You are very confiding, Hilton—and he did not pass the test. Still, considering the blend between the worthy missionaries' teaching and African superstition which, while it would probably astonish them, accounted for his momentary hesitation, Rideau is either braver or more avaricious than I supposed him. Did it occur to you that he recognized Miss Castro's gift?"

Dane was somewhat astonished.

"How do you know that it was Miss Castro's gift; and what if he did?"

"I saw it once in her possession, and, as she naturally would not sell such a thing, I presumed that you had not stolen it. I heard that Rideau had persecuted that lady with his attentions. It would be well to remember henceforward that ceaseless vigilance is the price of safety."

Thus, with the prospect of treachery on one side, the partnership with Rideau began; but the new carriers were sturdy men, and the gold-washing was carried on with characteristic energy, alike under the burning sun of noon and by the glare of great fires until long into the steamy night. Dane labored with his own hands among his Krooboys, stripped to the waist. Maxwell seconded him loyally, for he had now relinquished the leader's place; and by degrees the pair drilled their dusky subordinates into capable workmen. It is true that they usually suspended operations the moment the white men relaxed their vigilance; but that was only to be expected, and their masters got a

good deal out of them considering that most negroes have a chronic distaste for manual labor. Rideau's detachment, Dane noticed, were the most amenable to discipline, and obeyed all orders with a submission which puzzled the observer, for he knew that meek obedience is not a characteristic of the seaboard African. Their master, who did little beyond expressing his approval of Danes' efforts, grew more cordial as the weeks went by. But Maxwell was civil, and nothing more; and Dane surmised that he was rather more watchful and suspicious than he had been before.

One night when, worn out by physical exertion and aching in every joint, they dragged themselves, dripping with river water, back to their tent, there was a covert sneer in Rideau's laugh as he addressed them:

"You English are a curious people, and there are those who call you mad. The more tired and dirty you are, the more happy. I once see your naval officer on the Niger harness with the indigene, like the mule, to drag the wheel-gun through a robber headman's swamp. One drôle, he tell me it was the glorious fun."

"I dare say he meant it," retorted Maxwell. "It is probably owing to that very form of insanity that, while you—the French, I mean—have with commendable foresight appropriated the best of Africa, we others remain at least its commercial masters."

The pause and apparent correction was not made by accident, and Dane fancied that Rideau grasped its significance. He retired shortly, and Maxwell looked thoughtful.

"I am afraid I was not judicious; but we are only human, and there are times when my dislike for that rascal almost masters me," he said. "I would give much to learn who it is that slinks into his camp at night."

Dane looked puzzled, for Rideau's camp lay across the river, and

was watched by black sentries; no negro was permitted on any excuse to pass its boundaries.

"As you know, I have of late taken an interest in botany," Maxwell laughed. "During my researches I found considerably more specimens of African vegetation in the forest surrounding Rideau's camp than I know the names of, and on several occasions what is of greater interest—footsteps leading toward our partner's tent. The man who made them wore sandals; there is nobody among our combined followers who does."

Dane had no suggestions to make, and therefore kept silent; but that piece of information left him uneasy.

It was a still, oppressive day some months later when Dane stood leaning heavily on a shovel near the edge of the bush. The temperature made exertion almost impossible, and there was a weight in the atmosphere which rendered respiration an effort; for the last two weeks the sun had been hidden all day long and the stars shrouded by haze at night, and the same heavy stillness had brooded over the camp. In such weather sickly white men die off, and wise ones lie still in a hammock whenever possible; but the lust of gold had held two at least of the party strenuously to their task, and already a little heap of yellow grains reposed within an iron-bound chest. The men had, however, experienced some trouble with their colored assistants, who had been unusually dejected and apathetic of late.

While Dane ran his eyes along his trenches it struck him that the raw heaps of sand and the rude wooden flumes appeared strangely out of place in that gap in the primeval forest. It towered about them, vast, shadowy, and impressive, rotting as it grew, but throbbing with the pulse of an untrammelled life that would tear down the conduits, and bury the workings with verdure, almost as soon as their constructors relinquished them. The voices of the negroes, rising hollowly through

the motionless atmosphere, sounded weak and feeble against its silence.

"If all goes well, and the yield increases as it has done of late, we should have enough to leave us a creditable profit before the year is done," Dane said. "We have been long enough in this country, Carsluith, and I mean to return to England before it wastes all the life out of me."

Perhaps it was the weather, for Maxwell appeared in an unusually somber mood.

"Your proviso covers a good deal," he replied. "This is a land of surprises, where it is more than usually useless to predict what any man will do. Neither are the signs auspicious at present."

"No," Dane agreed reflectively; "I can't say that I consider them so. This dead stillness worries me. Does it presage a premature change in the seasons, or has it any other unpleasant meaning?"

"Who can tell? Anything abnormal carries a hint of death with it in this country. Still, there are other tokens. The few tribesmen who brought us in provisions have vanished completely. The last we saw looked like badly frightened men and were moving south with, for natives, surprising celerity. As you know, the interpreter failed to understand them, but I have an uneasy feeling that there was a sufficient cause for their hurry. The negro is not a foreseeing person, and does not run away unless the danger which threatens him is tangible and near."

Dane twice turned to move back toward the workings, but did not do so. His physical nature revolted from toil that day, and his brain felt sick and useless under the stress of temperature. So the two lingered until a negro near them, dropping his shovel, rolled over, clawing at the sand, as suddenly as a rabbit stricken by the gun. His fall was so swift and unexpected that Dane stared at the twitching black limbs motionless until Maxwell's voice roused him.

"Shake yourself together, Hilton. There is work before us! That fellow must be carried into the bush before the rest discover what he is suffering from."

The man proved a heavy lift, and his greasy limbs writhed within their grasp; but they laid him among the creepers without attracting attention, and Dane, running to the tent, returned with a phial.

"Where do you feel them pain lib?" he asked.

The sufferer laid a black hand on his waist-cloth.

"Somebody done put hot iron in heah, sah, and turn him round and round."

Dane managed to drench him from the phial before his teeth met in an agony, and Maxwell closed one hand as he looked at his partner.

"It is very hard that this should happen—now—but you and I must see the poor devils through," he said. "Our help may not be worth much, but it is all that stands between them and destruction. It is one of the scourges of this afflicted country—swifter than cholera, and more deadly. This camp will resemble the pit presently."

Maxwell next glanced down at the negro pitifully, his forehead contracted and his lips firmly set, but he nodded abruptly when Dane spoke again.

"I have seen something like it in South America. Is it invariably contagious?"

"To negroes, yes; to white men, less so. In any case you have run the worst risk of infection already."

"Confound you! Do you suppose—?"

Maxwell interrupted, laying a hand on his shoulder.

"I think you and I are going to fight a very tough battle together, Hilton."

He had hardly spoken when Rideau appeared from behind them, and glanced at the groaning man. Then he shuffled backward well away from him; answered Maxwell's look of interrogation with a nod; and, while his face grew distinctly less like that of a European, he fumbled inside his jacket. The barrel of a pistol was visible the next moment. "It is," he said suggestively, "if the cases are few, the best way for preserve the others. In their own country they use the paddle. One good blow where the skull she is thinnest, and—voilà, the safe remedy!"

Dane stretched a big hand out, and Rideau winced with a stifled expletive as he dropped the weapon; while the Briton was sensible of a distinct disappointment when he saw that the man's wrist remained unbroken. The suggestion had apparently revolted Maxwell also; he stared at the speaker with unconcealed loathing, while the latter opened his lips for a moment in a wolfish snarl as he glanced sideways at Dane. Just then, Victor Rideau looked very much less like a French gentleman than a low-caste negro. Nevertheless, he was the first to recover his serenity.

"You have the mistaken squeamish; but me, I know the most advisable, and have great fear of the sick which catches," said he. "She is distressful for me. Sacre! Here is more other. To-morrow I consult you. Alors, I go."

A shrill scream of human agony rang through the lifeless air, and Rideau, who did not stand upon the order of his going, departed with all possible celerity.

Neither of his partners was much inclined for mirth, but there is often a ludicrous side to a tragedy; and Maxwell positively laughed when

Dane savagely hurled the pistol after its vanishing owner.

"Missed! I would have given a good deal of the gold to strike him squarely between the shoulders. I meant it to hurt," he said.

Then an uproar began. Black figures, swarming out of the workings, gathered about the fallen man, clamoring excitedly, and Maxwell resumed command.

"They're panic-stricken; and fear will spread the sickness fastest. This must be stopped at once! We have not a moment to lose, or there will be murder done."

Dane felt very helpless as they ran forward to disperse the mob of terror-stricken black men. He still carried the shovel, though Maxwell went empty-handed, because, either from pride or policy, he never displayed a weapon once camp had been pitched. He appeared quietly resolute, though Dane afterward admitted feeling desperately anxious and more than a little afraid, for the mass of dusky faces with unreasoning fear and its accompanying ferocity stamped upon them was not an encouraging spectacle. Any one of those negroes was physically a match for two white men, and there were a good many of them.

The mob came to a standstill at the sight of them. Maxwell, removing his hat, straightened out the dints in it before he spoke a few words, and then, thrusting his way through the groups which opened up before him, halted beside the fallen man.

Some of the negroes began to chatter; some shrank farther back; but there was presently an ominous growling, and again the mob surged forward, one man with a matchet launching himself straight at his white master. Hitherto he had shown himself both cheerful and docile, but now he seemed possessed of a devil, the devil of fear transmuted into maniacal savagery. Maxwell did not at first see him,

and when he did it would have been too late, but that Dane whirled aloft the shovel, and when it came down the negro fell like a pole-axed ox at his comrade's feet. Even then Dane felt sick and sorry as he saw the red drops run from the steel, for he had often encouragingly patted his victim's brawny shoulder; but the negro is above all things unstable, and that blow was the saving of many lives. The crowd stood silent, cowed for a few moments by the swift retribution.

"Thanks," said Maxwell; "I think you have nipped it in the bud, Hilton."

Before he began to speak again his lieutenant, Amadu, and Dane's special follower, Monday, sprang to their side. Both carried rifles; and that turned the scale. Before half an hour had elapsed the two had not only restored a degree of confidence and order, but had picked out a number of men who might be trusted to act as sanitary police. By this time, however, the plague had claimed other victims, and Maxwell started forthwith to choose an isolated site for a hospital camp; while Dane, moving to and fro among the laborers, set apart any with suspicious symptoms.

It was midnight before either found leisure for food or rest, and then Dane knelt, with a biscuit in one hand, beside the little medicine chest in the tent, while Maxwell bent over a medical treatise as he ate. Several sick men lay moaning just outside the illuminated canvas, and one, apparently in delirium, had during the last hour never ceased crooning the hammock-bearers' song.

"That chanty grows wearisome," said Maxwell at length; and, because Dane was overwrought, his companion's composure jarred upon him.

"Put down that tin and hold the glass for me. You have eaten three biscuits already, and this is no time for feasting! I'm going to start with chlorodyne. We found it good in South America when we could give it

to them quick enough; but these fellows have an irritating trick of crawling away into some lair to die quietly. There. Give this to the first two poor devils, half each by measure."

Maxwell went swiftly, and returned very grim in face.

"Too late," he reported. "One is cold already; the other testified that there is but one Allah as I bent over him, and ended in a gurgle. Hallo! What is this?"

Preceded by a negro carrying a torch, Rideau, smoking sedulously, approached the tent, and halted well clear of it. The man was not, as his partners had cause to know, unduly timid, but now fear was plainly stamped on his face, which the red glare of the torch forced up against the gloom.

"I have great fear of this sick, and make proposition," he said. "I go take all the boy of me back a league into the forest, and make other camp. If any he is fall ill, I with all possible expedition send him you."

Both of the listeners found heart to smile at the latter sentence before Dane's resentment mastered him.

"It is particularly considerate of him, but his proposition has some sense in it," said Maxwell aside. "You are acting surgeon-major, Hilton. What do you suggest?"

"You can go straight to perdition, or anywhere else that pleases you, so long as you don't waste our time!" thundered Dane; and with a salute which expressed no resentment, but only relief, Rideau withdrew.

"How long does this thing generally last?" asked Dane.

"Sometimes it clears a village out in a fortnight, more often it hangs round a month, or even longer, picking out odd victims; and before

that time has gone we shall have the rains."

"Which will prevent any further mining, probably cut off our road to the coast, and render life here almost impossible," Dane said hoarsely.

"Exactly. There can be no more mining now."

As the two men's eyes met, each knew just what his comrade was thinking.

"We must see them through," said Dane, and Maxwell answered, as though this decision had never been in doubt: "Of course!"

With that they fell to work again, for there was much to do, which was fortunate, because, otherwise, the thought of what both would certainly lose and what one was risking for the sake of naked heathen, many of whom were little higher in intelligence than dumb cattle, might have maddened them. Still, even the most stupid had trusted the white men, and, in their own fashion, served them well.

CHAPTER XIV

AN EVENTFUL DECISION

The weeks that followed left only a hazy impression of hurry, effort, fatigue that was almost overwhelming, and anxiety which spurred wornout mind and body to further action, with the two white men who lived through them. Some of the sick they cured, and though it is possible their lack of knowledge hastened the end of others, their intentions at least were benevolent, and while they often went hungry the convalescent were always fed. They put heart into the hopeless and buried the dead, stormed, exhorted, and jested by turn all day long, and sat watching the worst cases when the hot night fell. Dane was never afterward able to recollect the exact mixtures he dispensed, which Maxwell said was probably fortunate; but as a result of their labors, while all would otherwise have perished, part at least of their followers escaped. They had also capable assistants. Amadu, Maxwell's man, had fought under a great Emir who had made his name a terror in the Soudan; and Monday, so Dane gathered, had carried the standard of a successful robber chieftain somewhere far up in the land of the brown men who swear by the Prophet; but both had the full courage of their fatalist convictions, and what their masters bade them that they did. The rank and file of the orderlies were thick-headed heathen who grinned each time their leader stormed at them.

One day when the sick were recovering, and a little hope was springing up again, Dane, staggering half asleep behind his bearer detachment, halted when Maxwell beckoned him.

"Get on, you dusky angels, and try to carry that poor devil right-side-up," Dane said. "Monday, tell them hopeless idiots if they handle the other fellow that way they'll pull his head off. You would tempt the most patient man to murder some of you."

The bearers beamed upon him with mouths extended, and Maxwell laughed.

"They take your abuse as a compliment, Hilton; and your capabilities become apparent by degrees. Still, after the success which has attended your daring pharmaceutical experiments, one could hardly be astonished at your licking even yonder most unpromising raw material into shape."

"The credit is to necessity," replied Dane, surveying his assistants with a certain air of pride. "Those are the most wooden-headed niggers in Africa, and the more I swear at them the wider they grin; but if I wanted sulphur from the pit, and told them, the beggars would go—and get it."

"I wish we were both fresher," Maxwell said; "because there is another worry to grapple with. The man I sent over to Rideau found the camp empty, and this pinned to the tree his tent had been pitched beneath."

"If Mr. Rideau desires to repeat his opinion that we should set them all to work it is as well he does it in writing. I could hardly keep my hands off the brute the last time he made the suggestion in person," answered Dane.

"Read, and see," said Maxwell, holding out the note; and because Dane's head was swimming he translated the indifferent French with difficulty. The message might have appeared ambiguous to a more accomplished linguist. Nevertheless, he gathered from it that their partner, who professed a total ignorance of physics and a fear of

contagion, regretted his inability to render them any assistance, and had decided to visit a headman he had dealings with who dwelt at a considerable distance. He stated that none of his boys could be induced to carry a message to the stricken camp.

"He might have expressed himself more plainly, but it is plausible. Do you attach a different meaning?" Dane asked.

Maxwell, instead of answering, asked another question.

"You feel tolerably certain that we have seen the worst of this epidemic?"

"Yes," was the answer. "I did not, however, tell our estimable partner so. It seemed a pity to relieve him prematurely of what he called his fear of the sick. Perhaps I was wrong in this."

"Pshaw!" exclaimed Maxwell. "It is not the plague he fears the most. In fact, considering that he must have lived through one or two outbreaks already, part, at least, of his fear must have been simulated. If you expect to see Rideau here again on the old terms, Hilton, you are mistaken."

"His absence would not leave me disconsolate," said Dane. "In that case, one wonders what he is afraid of, and why he came? Isn't it also surprising that he should abandon his share of the gold?"

"In reply to the first query, I don't know—but we shall doubtless discover in good time. There is no difficulty in answering the rest. He came to see if the river was worth exploitation, and to pick up a practical knowledge of the necessary operations. His share of what we have obtained is, after all, but trifling for an avaricious man who cherishes a grudge against you, and desires the whole. Two men alone at present prevent him from obtaining it, and the life of any white man is very uncertain in this country."

"A grudge against me?" Dane queried.

Maxwell nodded.

"Have you forgotten Miss Castro? Your powers of attraction may prove a dangerous gift, Hilton."

Dane flushed with sudden anger, for this appeared to him ill-timed levity; but Maxwell continued unheeding:

"The whole complication resembles a mosaic puzzle, and I have fitted most of it together. One or two pieces, however, are missing, and we must wait until accident supplies them. Meanwhile, every effort to expedite our sick men's recovery would be advisable."

Maxwell left his comrade startled and uneasy. Dane could see that he was anxious, and they already had sufficient to try their endurance without the addition of a haunting fear. There was, however, no remedy, and they continued to tend the sick, setting those who had recovered to work as the pestilence slackened its grip. So, while groups of naked tribesmen whose tongue nobody therein could understand traveled southward past the camp, the days went by until Maxwell was supplied with one missing portion of his mosaic. One morning a seaboard negro, whose leg had been rendered useless by the horrible Guinea worm which had burrowed from knee to ankle, crawled into camp, and told a story which roused both listeners to suppressed fury. Rideau had left him behind crippled, to starve, but with many sufferings he had managed to drag himself to their camp.

"I be missionary boy, sah, and savvy them JuJu palaver be all dam fraud," he stated in the coast English. "When them low white nigger Rideau lib for them first river by the Leopards' country he send one man two day into the bush."

"What was the man like? How that boy he look?" asked Maxwell.

"Yellow man with mark on front of him head, sah. He be fit to make fetich palaver."

"Oh," commented Maxwell. "This is going to be very interesting, Hilton."

"Two night go," continued the negro. "Then I look them white man he wait for somebody sitting with a pistol outside him tent. I lib for behind a cottonwood, where he not done see me. Bimeby, two leopard come soffly, soffly, and stand up when he see them. The white man light a lamp before him say: 'Why you done play them fool trick with me?'"

"You were too frightened to crawl away?" Maxwell asked; and though the negro evidently trembled at the mere recollection, he answered boldly:

"I be missionary boy, and savvy all them JuJu palaver humbug, sah. One leopard done throw off him skin and sit down by the tent. I know him for the man with the mark on him. 'How much you want for let me lib for your country and come back again,' the white man say, and they all talk plenty. Then the white man say: 'I leave them cloth and bead and gun in the bush, and when I lib for come back safe you get two time as much, but you see them other white men done get lost or sick too much in your country.' Rideau talk more plenty, and them leopard go away. I not know how. I see him one lil' minute, then there be no more leopard, sah. I lib for say nothing. Suppose Rideau guess I look him he shoot me, sah. The Lord he give me sense too much."

"Rideau is a capable rascal and this explains a good deal," said Maxwell, when he had handed the cripple over to the Krooboy cook. "The man with the scarred forehead is clearly an influence among the Leopards. Otherwise Rideau might never have overtaken us. His prudence in promising to double the toll demanded on his safe return strikes me as highly commendable; and one can only presume that,

seeing us successful in spite of his efforts, he determined to cast his lot in with us for a time."

Dane's answer was fierce and emphatic; and Maxwell smiled.

"Over-confidence is a weakness of yours, Hilton. Now it is no doubt flattering to one's pride to disdain petty suspicions and precautions; but having done so, isn't it illogical to grow feverishly indignant when you are victimized?"

"You need not waste time in moralizing. It is much more necessary to discover why Rideau cleared out in a hurry, and what he is doing now."

"I don't know, but it will be high time to move when we do. Meanwhile, we can only wait. It will become apparent presently."

Dane left him, and went back to his task, stolidly determined that he would have a reckoning with M. Victor Rideau before he sailed from Africa. Hilton Dane, though by no means a fool, possessed neither his comrade's power of deduction nor his insight into the weakness of human nature; but he was, nevertheless, likely to prove an even more dangerous enemy when his natural generosity, being abused, had changed into vindictiveness. It is generally well to avoid the righteous indignation of the good-humored man when his patience is exhausted; and Dane's patience was not of the longest.

The time dragged slowly by until, when those the plague had spared were well on the way to recovery, chance supplied the partners with the final clue. A man swathed in ragged cotton and of comparatively light color halted one morning to beg a little food at their camp, and Maxwell grew eager when he found that Amadu could understand him. Headman Shaillu's villages had been stricken by the plague, he said, and that ruler, either to avoid contagion or to prevent the spread of disaffection among his people, had marched them out on a

campaign against his northern neighbors. He had been badly beaten, and the tribesmen had summoned every petty chieftain who had suffered by his depredations to join them in retaliating. They would probably wait until the rains were over, the stranger said, though this was not certain; but once they started, they would spare nothing on their march; and as their priests had a special animus against white men, he considered they would certainly storm the camp.

It was dark when Dane and Maxwell held their final conference, and they sat moodily silent a while before either spoke. The sufferings and hardships undergone had left their mark on them; it is possible that Maxwell's British acquaintances might scarcely have recognized him, as he sat huddled, as it were, together under the smoky lamp. Even his ironical humor had deserted him along with every personal characteristic save the courage and certain racial instincts that were ineradicable. Dane was reminded of an ancient portrait in Culmeny as he watched him. The old moss-trooper had looked much the same—lean and dour and grim; and the observer could recognize the same baleful light in his wolfish eyes. It was not an unnatural reversion, for the customs of modern Africa are not greatly different from those of Britain in bygone days.

It was hotter than ever, and a darkness that could be felt hung over the tent.

"We have had several of these talks, Hilton, but never one half so important as that before us now," said Maxwell at length. "Rideau's whole intentions are clear at last. He learned what was threatening long before we did, and profited by the sickness as an excuse for escaping and leaving us to our fate. The gold? Please wait until I have concluded. These tribesmen are mere predatory nomads, with no knowledge of mining, and after burning every village they come across they will vanish into the bush again. Therefore, our partner clearly expects that if the pestilence fails to remove us the spearmen

will; and he no doubt hopes to return when there is peace again, and clean out this river without our assistance."

Dane smote the camp table hard with his fist, and was sullenly pleased to see that he had not lost all his strength, for one of the thin boards split.

"Then I solemnly pledge myself to carry out the second portion of our compact. The vile, treacherous scoundrel shall not escape if I live," he declared.

Maxwell raised his hand, but there was an ominous light in his eyes as they met those of his companion.

"That may come later; but in the first place the severely practical aspect of this affair requires to be dealt with. To begin, less than half our men are, even yet, capable of steady marching, and our numbers would be quite insufficient to convoy those too weak to walk safely through a hostile country. Therefore we have to choose between two evils. The first possible course would be to leave all the sick and weakly, and striking due south, not by the way we came, endeavor to reach the coast with what gold we have won. We could return when it appeared safe to do so. I put it before you, without expressing my own opinion, dispassionately."

Dane did not falter, but he remembered that in all probability there was gold enough in the river to enable him to market his patent with at least a hope of success, and this implied a prospect of winning Lilian. Of late his hopes that he would eventually do so had grown steadily stronger; and during many a lonely watch, when he recalled her delicate beauty, the longing for her had almost mastered him. As Maxwell had pointed out, one way to realize his ambitions was still open; but Dane knew that he could not go home with the blood of the men who had trusted him upon his hands.

"That course is impossible!" he said hoarsely.

"Yes," agreed Maxwell with impressive quietness. "We have, it is said, outgrown superstition, but I can't help thinking misfortune would follow the money we made that way. They have done their best for us, poor devils. Therefore, we come to the second alternative. This camp could be further stockaded into a very strong position, and you or I must hold it against all comers. While one of us does so, the other, with a couple of picked men, will strike straight for the coast, catch the first mailboat, and, if he can't persuade an agent to believe and finance him by the sight of a few ounces of gold, cable home for a credit to be opened by telegraph on some big trading firm. My bankers should manage that. Then he will return with a strong expedition. Speed affords the one chance for success, for if Rideau heard of the attempt, he and the Leopards would frustrate it; and both are doubtless watchful; but two or three men traveling night and day might escape observation. They must start unburdened, with just sufficient food, abandoning all idea of carrying treasure. The one question is, who is to go?"

Dane was conscious of a grim satisfaction. Everything pointed to him as the one to stay, and he had no desire to return home with nothing more than expectations; while, harassed as he had been by many enemies, deserted, and betrayed, the prospect of trying conclusions with an open foe came as a relief to him.

"You have the money, and brains, Carsluith, and you must go," he said. "I have the brute strength, and, I think, to-night some of its ferocity. I can promise that all the savages in Africa shall not turn me out of this camp. Neither would I be sorry if they attempted it."

As Maxwell turned toward him the smoldering fire was plainer in his eye.

"Are you not forgetting that other men are born with the same

passions? Break that twig into unequal lengths, shut your eyes, and draw. The man who picks the longest stays."

They were equal at the second draw, and Dane grew feverishly anxious as he thrust in his hand again. Then he threw the twig on the table triumphantly.

"It points to me," he said.

"So be it," Maxwell answered quietly. "Then we will get ready two loads of provisions. I start at sunrise to-morrow, taking Amadu and one other man with me."

The night was far spent before the preparations were finished and they lay down to sleep; and Maxwell was dressed and equipped when his comrade awakened.

"I could not bring myself to disturb you earlier," he said, when Dane glanced at him reproachfully. "We will eat a morsel of breakfast, and then I will start."

Dane could swallow nothing, but Maxwell ate a little, though he seemed to force his appetite. Then they walked silently together as far as the stockade gate, where Maxwell turned and held out his hand.

"God knows whether I will reach the coast. This gold, with whatever you can add to it, is yours if I fail," he said. "If I live I will come back and join you should I come alone!"

"Whether you come late or early you will find me or my bones here," Dane answered huskily, for there was a painful contraction in his throat.

Their hands met in a strenuous grasp, and with a hoarse "Good luck!" following him, Maxwell strode out through the gate. Dane

watched him descend the slope to the river, while all the camp boys capable of motion clustered about the one who stayed, and Monday squatted at his feet. They were all very silent until a murmur went up as the white man, halting on the edge of the forest, turned toward them. He raised his shapeless sun-hat high above his head, answering Dane's salute; and long afterward the latter sighed each time that lonely figure rose out of the blurred memories.

A horrible sense of loneliness oppressed the man left behind, and there came upon him an irrepressible desire for speech.

"He has gone, Monday," he said, patting the naked shoulder of the big dark-skinned alien, who looked up at him sympathetically; "but if he lives he will certainly come back; and you and I in the meantime are going to keep his place warm for him. You don't understand? Well, you probably will when several hundred yelling devils come round this way at midnight wanting to get in. Still, I don't think we'll make a bad show between us, even then."

The dusky man caught a glimpse of his meaning, for he grinned and nodded when Dane continued:

"You don't feel quite sure what I'm saying yet. I don't care, so long as you sit up and listen patiently. I'm feeling very low and lonely this morning, Monday."

The listener appeared to consider, and then rose upright, saying solemnly:

"Cappy Maxwell, say we lib for this place, then we dam well lib. Cappy Maxwell fine white man too much. Suppose them low bushmen come we dam well go chop him."

CHAPTER XV

THE BOARDING OF THE KABUNDA

It was a hot and steamy night when trader Redmond sat with his comrade Gilby in an upper room of their factory perched above a beach swept by smoking surf, which was even heavier than usual that night. The factory was not a desirable residence, even for West Africa, where there are not many places where a fastidious white man would care to live; but neither Redmond nor his comrade was particular, and so long as they could make a good percentage on the factory's turnover, they disregarded the dirt, smells, and insect legions. Redmond was pale and round-shouldered; Gilby lank and tall; and their speech was usually vivid and their tempers quick.

Redmond strolled toward the window and swore at the surf. He had some justification, for the whole heave of the southern ocean hurled itself thundering upon the hammered beach. The factory windows rattled as each breaker dissolved into long sheets of foam which surged far up the trembling sand, while the steamy haze of spray veiled almost to its summit the lofty bluff behind the edifice.

"No use lighting the signal fire. There's not a surf-boat on the coast could run a load of produce through. The *Kabunda* can either blow her whistle off or go on again," he said. "It's even too bad to venture off light, and screw an odd bottle of liquor out of her purser."

"It always is when the markets are rising and we have cargo waiting," grumbled Gilby. "As to the liquor, you can go yourself if you want it. I'm not over-keen on playing that game with the *Kabunda's* new

factotum again. It takes a good deal to stir me, but that man has no sense of humor, and was positively insulting. 'No cargo in your confounded boat?' growls he. 'Well, the next time you stop this mailboat just because you're thirsty, we'll heave you over the rail!'"

Redmond chuckled dryly. The steamboat officials who ply along that coast have a good deal to ruffle them; and it is exasperating for the master of a steamer, attracted by flag or fire signal, to anchor off a dangerous beach expecting several boat-loads of cargo at least, and then discover that the shipper desires only a piece of ice or gratis liquor.

"Better wait for the old *Luala*. She's the canteen ship. Still, we'll sit up until we hear the *Kabunda's* whistle. It sounds homelike," he said.

Gilby nodded approval, for the coast-hunting steamers were the only link connecting the two lonely men with civilization, and there were times when they acquired a childish fear of losing all touch with it.

Redmond sat smoking in silence, while Gilby listlessly turned over an old English newspaper, and huge brown cockroaches crawled up and down the mildewed walls.

"Hallo!" Redmond exclaimed suddenly. "There's a man with boots on crossing the compound. Who, by all that's wonderful, can it be?"

"The Frenchman from Swamp Creek, looking for drinks," suggested Gilby.

"Guyot's dying of fever this time, sure, his nigger said. There's no other white man within marching distance; but whoever it is is coming up the stairs!"

Projected against the darkness outside, a strange, bedraggled figure stood in the door. The man's hair was wet and long, the half-closed eyes beneath it glittered feverishly, and the bones of the haggard

face showed through the pallid skin. Thorn-rent rags barely decently covered the bony limbs beneath them, and the mire of many a league of swamp clung about him to the knees. Behind loomed the figure of a negro leaning on a rifle.

Moving unevenly, the stranger advanced into the room, and Redmond positively recoiled before him.

"Who in the name of perdition are you, and where do you come from?" he gasped.

The newcomer, instead of answering the question, caught at the table as he asked another:

"What day of the month is this, and have they changed the homeward mailboat's time bill?"

"The tenth, and the *Kabunda* should pass to-night," said Gilby, staring blankly at him.

"Thank heaven!" was the response. "I am just in time! You ought to know me. I am Maxwell, and have been prospecting for Niven's gold beyond the Leopards' country."

"Good Lord!" broke from Redmond. "Stir round, Gilby, instead of gaping there! Fetch out some whisky, and kick up the steward boy! Can't you see there's a white man starving? Sit down before you fall over, Mr. Maxwell."

Maxwell gulped down a draught of the spirit forced upon him, and sank into the chair his host dragged forward, while there was a crash and a howl on the veranda where Gilby fell over the sleeping steward boy.

"He means well, but can't help having been born clumsy," said the trader apologetically. "Lie right back there, and don't talk until you've

eaten. Oh, I see—brought a nigger with you. Tell the cook to stuff the black man, Gilby."

When food was set before him, Maxwell ate ravenously; then leaning forward in his chair, he looked at his hosts.

"I must thank you for your kindness, and ask another favor," he said. "It is of vital consequence that I should catch the *Kabunda* to-night. I will pay up to twenty pounds for a passage off to her."

The pair stared at him, and there was a sceptical smile on Gilby's lips. It was clear that he doubted the ragged adventurer's ability to redeem his promise.

"It can't be done," declared Redmond. "Our surf-boat has a plank badly split; and if she hadn't there's not a man on all this coast could run you off to-night."

"Nevertheless, if you will listen a few minutes, and treat what I tell you in strict confidence, I think one of you will," said Maxwell, determining to trust them in part.

As he told the story, the incredulous smile faded from the faces of his listeners.

"You can understand the necessity for my desperate hurry now," he concluded. "My partner is left alone, save for a handful of sickly niggers, with the bushmen coming down, and his life may depend upon my catching that steamer. I will leave this packet of gold dust, which I had intended to use for traveling expenses, as the price of my passage."

Redmond opened the leather bag tendered him, and Gilby dropped acid upon part of its contents. Then there was silence, until Redmond spoke with a naive directness which called up the faintest flicker of amusement into Maxwell's eyes.

"It is quite genuine, and we believe you. Rideau's a hard case, and we'd stake a good deal to get even with him after a certain game he played us; but our folks at home are so confoundedly particular, and you wouldn't find an agent on the coast willing to speculate in mines beyond Shaillu's country. You see, if you let us in, the auditors would set off the sum against our salary. Steady; I haven't quite finished yet. We're not fastidious, either of us, but we haven't come down to screwing money out of a countryman's necessity; so we're open to do the best we can for you. Now take back your gold, and be hanged to you!"

"My sentiments, too!" nodded Gilby. "Redmond can talk sensibly when he likes. It looks uncommonly like suicide, but as my place down under can't be much worse than this one, I'm open to chance drowning with you. I'll go out, and fill my boat boys up with trade gin now. They're tolerably daring beggars, but they'd never face it sober."

An hour later Maxwell and the two traders stood upon the roaring beach amidst a crowd of black men. Steamy spray whirled about them, and veiled half the palm-crowned bluff from whose summit a crimson flame leaped up; and each time the white haze thinned, two lights reeled wildly through the blackness out at sea. Between these and the beach a succession of great rollers reared their crests of phosphorescent flame, and the hoot of the steamer's whistle was but faintly audible through the roar they made. A picked crew of brawny negroes chattered about the big surf-boat they held upright on rollers just clear of the surges which raced up the sand.

"It does not look nice. In fact, I've seldom seen it worse, but we'll take our chances when those big ones have run in," said Gilby. "Get into the boat Maxwell, and take care when the rest of us follow in a hurry that we don't fall over you. Hyah you Krooboy, all be fit and ready!"

Huge breakers usually run in series, and when the last of the larger

ones had crumbled with a thunderous roar, burying the half-mile sweep of sand in foam from end to end, there was a heaving of muscular shoulders, and clamorous black men floundered waist-deep through the backwash dragging at the boat. She was large and heavy, but thirty pairs of strong hands made light work, and when a dozen amphibious Kroos had swung themselves on board the rest toiled almost shoulder-deep in hissing froth while the sand streamed seaward under them. The craft's stern alone stuck fast, and Redmond shouted himself breathless as he braced his shoulders beneath her quarter, knowing that unless they could drive her clear boat and crew would be rolled over together when the next sea came in.

"Shove, you black imps, shove before them sharks go chop you!" he cried.

They made a last effort, the boat slid clear. Twelve three-tongued paddles smote the water together, and Redmond watched the craft rise almost upright with bows buried in froth and seafire as another majestic breaker came rolling in. Then he turned and raced shoreward for his life, with an acre of foam close behind him. When he halted again the surf-boat had vanished into the hollow of the sea, but the howling of those who paddled her, and the helmsman's sulphurous encouragement, rising above the roar of waters, betokened her safety.

"Gilby's no fool in a surf-boat, anyway," he mused, as he went back dripping to the factory.

Another hour had passed when the boat was flung upon the beach with a crash which rent her damaged plank from end to end; and the soaked white man who sprang out of her hurried to the factory with his proud display of two bottles of claret, and one, partly-empty, of liqueur, besides a piece of ice in flannel, and a cigar box.

"The time was too short, or I might have done better," he explained.

"Had only a few minutes to tax the skipper and mates in, while the old man wasn't over-pleased about stopping for one passenger. Boat was half-full when we got alongside, and Maxwell too weak to climb the ladder. They hove him on board with the crane, wrong side uppermost, and half-dazed apparently. The boat was plunging wildly, and Sorrowful Tom too drunk to fix the sling. Taking things all around, it's a mercy we didn't drown him."

"You're a good man in a boat," Redmond conceded. "Still, you have very little sense. Fancy making a run of that kind and coming ashore with—claret!"

While Dane and Maxwell fought the plague in Africa, Lilian Chatterton and the young clergyman in charge of that parish walked side by side down the street of a village in North Britain one afternoon. The village was neither picturesque nor prosperous just then, for there was a scarcity of work at the quarries, and for weeks together hard frost had rendered all stone-cutting impossible. A bitter wind sighed about the low stone houses which rose dripping in unlovely simplicity from the muddy street, while an air of stolid, uncomplaining poverty was stamped upon the faces of the men who lounged idly where they could find a shelter in the lee of a building. Miss Chatterton had not enjoyed good health that winter, and the surroundings depressed her. Neither did she find the vista of bleak hillside, snow-streaked moor, and lowering sky much more cheerful, and she was glad when her companion broke the silence.

"It is not exhilarating weather, and this has been a hard winter for the poor," he said. "Unfortunately, we have had rather more of them than usual with us of late, and the sick would have suffered considerably if it had not been for your kindness."

"I have done little," Lilian replied; "but they are somewhat hard to

help."

The Reverend Andrew Rae laughed.

"That is the simple truth. We are not an effusive race, and it sometimes hurts us to receive a favor. Still, though they would rather perish than express it, I fancy most of them would on opportunity prove their gratitude. I have been wondering if the worthy Robert Johnstone's opinions have been too much for you, having noticed that his house, or rather, his son's house, is the only one in the village you have not entered. It surprised me, since his daughter used to sew for you, and has been ailing lately."

"It is some time since Mary Johnstone did any work for me," said Lilian, and the clergyman wondered at the coldness of her tone.

"She is a very hard-working girl, and as she has been lying helpless for several weeks, would it not appear unkind if you made her the one exception? I want you to come in with me now."

Drawing the girl's arm lightly through his own, he marched her up to the doorway before she quite grasped his intentions, and halted in front of the man who lounged there regarding them with undisguised hostility. He was not an attractive person, and did not look like an abstainer from alcoholic liquor, but just then he was evidently in the more aggressive humor because, for the time being, he was wholly sober.

"We are coming in for a few minutes to see your daughter," announced Rae.

The man did not move an inch, and his person barred the entrance.

"Will ye no wait until ye are invitit?" he inquired sardonically. "Still, if there is anything good in yon basket ye can leave it with me."

A grimy hand descended into the basket Rae carried and reappeared clutching the neck of a bottle, while a derisive grin suffused the speaker's unwashed countenance.

"I'm thinking I'll just keep it with thanks. It's whiles more comforting than tracts."

The Reverend Andrew Rae had perhaps studied more than theology at a certain university, for there was a twinkle in his eyes as he laid one hand on Johnstone's wrist.

"Not so fast!" he said. "That is Miss Chatterton's property, and I did not hear you ask her permission."

He used no apparent violence, but his fingers tightened steadily, and Johnstone gasped with astonishment as he relinquished his hold upon the bottle.

"Am I to be insulted in my own house?" he cried. "Away with ye! A free man's dwelling is his castle."

"Havers!" exclaimed a voice behind them; and a neatly dressed young man joined the group. "If it's anybody's castle it's the man's who pays the rent, and that's more than Rab Johnstone has done for long, I'm thinking. If ye an' Miss Chatterton are for stepping in to see Mary we'd take it kindly, sir."

Johnstone senior slouched away down the street, frowning scornfully.

"I am glad to see you have prospered since you took to honest ways, Jim," Rae said.

"It's small thanks to any one but Mr. Dane. He was no too particular to help a poor man, ye see."

"Was that it?" asked Rae, a trifle awkwardly. "You are surely not turning back, Miss Chatterton!"

Lilian was certainly about to retreat; but being a young woman of spirit, she determined to make the best of it when the man, opening another door, announced:

"Miss Chatterton an' the minister to see ye, Mary."

She entered the poorly furnished room the next moment, but saw nothing of its interior, for her eyes were fixed upon the sick girl, who lay on a dilapidated sofa. Rae noticed the contrast between his companion and the seamstress. Miss Chatterton was a very dainty figure in costly furs, and the slight trace of haughtiness became her. The seamstress was pale, and hollow in face, with the sign of poverty stamped upon her, for the faded shawl about her shoulders and the little ragged garment told the same story.

Rae soon became conscious that there was a latent hostility between the women, and he felt it incumbent on him to break the silence.

"I am glad to see you better," he said; "but you should not work too soon. You must lie still and recover completely, because there are a number of customers waiting for you. Mrs. Gordon told me she was keeping quite a large order back until you were fit to undertake it."

Lilian had been present when, by dint of dogged persistence, the reverend gentleman had secured a reluctant promise to employ his protégée, and she wondered whether all his sex, without exception, could be deluded by a pretty face. She was forced to admit that men of uncultivated taste might consider Miss Johnstone pretty.

"Poor folk cannot afford to be idle long, an' my wee sisters cannot go ragged," replied the sick girl. "Still, I'm no complaining. Jim has helped me bravely, and we're winning through a hard winter well, thanks to the gentleman who befriended him."

Rae observed that the speaker flashed a glance at Miss Chatterton,

whose face remained icily indifferent. Feeling that the situation was becoming strained, he turned toward the boy.

"Being away at the time, I never quite got to the bottom of what preceded your acquittal. Do you mind telling me, Jim?"

"It's no great secret, an' all to the credit of the man who helped me. Weel, I was locked up, charged with poaching and wounding."

"Innocently, I hope," said Rae; and there was a trace of Caledonian dryness in Johnstone's reply.

"Ye will mind the saying about speiring no questions and being telt less lies. Meanwhile two or three others consultit with Lawyer Davidson, and he said conviction would be certain if Mr. Dane could swear to me. Otherwise, he suspectit I would go free. Then Mary would see Mr. Dane for the sake of the bairns. I was sore against it, but they had me jailed, an' what could I do? Well, she wrote asking him to meet her by the Hallows Brig, and Mr. Dane e'en promised to do his best for me, an' tell nobody. May be he could no be quite certain. Ye will mind there was no moon just then, and the night was thick, Mr. Rae."

"I have heard that no man is expected to testify against himself," said the reverend gentleman dryly.

"That's what Davidson telt the fiscal," continued Johnstone, with a laugh. "Says he, 'It's the business o' your witnesses to convict him'; an' I'm no denying that they did their best, all but Mr. Dane. He just stuck to his story—it was dark, an' while the man he grappled with was like to me, he could swear to nobody who had just kicked him hard upon the knee."

Johnstone added further details, and then looked hard at the clergyman, as though expecting him to take up the challenge when he concluded, "May be there are folks who lightly Mr. Dane for what he

done, but it was him an' no other who made an honest man of me, forby a promotit foreman home on a holiday."

"I am not a lawyer," said Rae. "It is therefore not my business to judge him; and you need not stare at me. I already believed Mr. Dane to be a kindly gentleman. I am also open to admit that he did more than either I or my predecessor could accomplish. We are not, however, all friends of big contractors, you see."

Johnstone grinned in answer to the last thrust, while Lilian felt thankful that she sat in a shadowy corner, for the simple story which bore the truth stamped upon the face of it, had stirred her strangely. The action narrated was characteristic of the man who was risking his life in Africa. She knew that he was very generous, and could be loyal to a pledge, even to his disadvantage. It was equally evident that the young workman with his unconcealed dislike to his benefactor's class would be very unlikely to shut his eyes to any intrigue between Dane and his sister. Yet, though Lilian was angry with herself for the thought, it was possible that the brother might have been deceived, and she felt that she must learn the truth. The seamstress said nothing, and it dawned upon Rae that his presence was superfluous; so, making the first excuse available, he took his departure, and Johnstone with him.

CHAPTER XVI

ILLUMINATION

When the two men went out Miss Chatterton discovered that she had undertaken a very difficult task. The seamstress lay still looking at her, evidently expectant, but saying nothing. She, it appeared, felt herself mistress of the position. Lilian felt that the silence was growing painful, and determined to attack the subject boldly.

"Mr. Dane has clearly been a good friend to your brother, but may I ask whether that evening at the Hallows Bridge was the only time you spoke to him?"

A flush crept into the sick girl's cheeks, and a hardness into her eyes.

"I was expecting ye would ask me. What would ye say if I did not answer?"

"Probably nothing," returned Lilian, quietly. "Mr. Dane is, as we know, somewhat impulsive, as well as generous. Why do you tell me that you expected such a question?"

Mary Johnstone painfully raised herself on one elbow.

"Ye are a grand lady, but hard, I think, as some folk would call ye bonny. I am a poor sewing woman with the need to strive hard, an' always, to keep hunger from the door—but in the hearts of us there is no that difference between you an' me. No—bide ye and listen."

Lilian had risen, but she sat down again. Something in the girl's voice and manner compelled her attention, for the seamstress spoke as

equal to equal on the basis of their common humanity.

"I owe ye little, Miss Chatterton. What ye paid, I earned, an' some of it hardly, but when ye bade me come no more to The Larches, with no other word, there was many an ill tongue to cast dirt at me, forby lying tales that ye found things of value missing."

"I never suspected that would happen," said Lilian, a little uneasily.

"How should ye?" continued the seamstress. "But ye could not blame the slanderers, being quick yourself to think evil. May be ye did not know, either, that my good name means work and bread to more than me? So, if there was no other person interested, I would ask—how dare ye, thinking what ye think, come here and ask me that question?"

Lilian was contrite, realizing the harm she had unwittingly done, and recognizing the genuine ring of injured innocence in the speaker's voice. She was also slightly angry, as well as astonished, but she was sufficiently just to see that it would not become her to manifest displeasure.

"I did wrong, but how do you know what I thought, or if I thought anything at all?" she asked. "You have also avoided the question instead of answering me."

"What did I tell ye at the beginning?" said the sick girl with a curious smile. "Being poor, am I less a woman? Well, and not for your sake only, ye shall have the answer that should pleasure ye. That night at Hallows Brig was the one time only Mr. Dane had word with me. Are ye believing me?"

Lilian failed to understand why she should feel so relieved by the information, but she certainly did. She also felt humbled; and as it was not her way to do anything by half, she made reparation with a queenly simplicity. Stooping over the sick girl, she kissed her on the

cheek.

"After that you cannot refuse to forgive me, and must come back and help me as soon as you are fit," she said. "But I do not understand yet what you meant when you said it was not for my sake only."

The sick girl at first only regarded her with a smile, but it sufficed to show Lilian that peace was made.

"If ye cannot guess, I fear I cannot tell ye," she said. "I have eyes and the sense to see, but it would be presumption for me to tell ye all they showed me. Still, ye and Mr. Maxwell were not the only persons I saw that night at the Hallows Brig."

Lilian asked no further questions, but when she left there was a brightness in her eyes which had not been there before.

"Mary Johnstone has clearly bewitched you," the clergyman remarked. "Your very step is lighter than it was an hour ago, and you are looking better than you have done all winter. Would it be indiscreet to ask what spell she cast upon you?"

"I am afraid it would," Lilian answered, while a softness crept into her face. She laughed, and henceforward chatted so brightly that when she left him her companion looked after her longingly, and then sighed as he turned back to his bachelor quarters. They struck him as very cheerless and lonely.

A week had passed when Miss Chatterton, sitting alone, listlessly took up a newspaper a maid brought in. The listlessness vanished, however, when a heading, "Further Fighting in the Dark Continent," caught her eye, and she eagerly hurried through an account of the reverses suffered by a British punitive expedition in West Africa. Then, while her heart beat fast, she sat very still, staring at the concluding paragraph:

A French trader brought news to the coast of another unfortunate affair in the hinterland. It appears that two Englishmen, Dane and Maxwell, who left the coast months earlier, on a prospecting expedition, lost their carriers by sickness, and have since been hemmed in by hostile natives in a perilous position. Our correspondent states that the French authorities, who warned them against the expedition, consider their extrication impossible, and believe they must have perished already.

Lilian let the paper fall from her nerveless hands, and lay motionless, shivering in her chair. The shock of a supposed discovery, and a jealousy she would not own, had played their part in forcing on her attention a question she had resolutely striven to ignore, while now, when it was perhaps too late forever, the answer was clear. She could deceive herself no longer; and she guessed why the man had risked his life to win a little gold in Africa. Risked it—at the thought her eyes grew hazy. It might well be that he had flung his life away! Yet, even then, it was with a passing thrill of pride that she remembered the stubbornness beneath his patience, and knew that it would go very hard with his enemies before he went down.

Hilton Dane had changed swiftly in her estimation from a man with a weakness to a hero, generous, loyal, swift to do her pleasure, and yet fitted to command. It seemed to her overstrained fancy that she could almost hear his voice ringing through the blast of the rifles in the last struggle; and that it would be a very grim and terrible struggle she knew. Then she shuddered once more, recollecting what she had read of the scenes within an African stockade when the rifles lay cold in the undergrowth, and the smoke of the flintlocks had melted away.

The sense of constraint inside grew unbearable, and the girl went forth into the night, and stood bareheaded, staring into the darkness, hoping, though almost afraid to hope, that the man she had sent away

had not passed forever beyond her power to recall him.

Chatterton and his wife, returning presently, found her waiting in the hall; and the iron-master's action was characteristic when he had glanced at the paper she handed him. Wrenching out his notebook he wrote on the first blank leaf the address of a firm dealing in palm oil in Liverpool, and then a message beneath it:

"See newspaper report of disaster to West Coast explorers, Dane and Maxwell. Wire your agents to find out how much is true, and all possible details. Spare no expense whatever."

He flung the paper to the groom outside.

"Get that telegram sent off before the post-office closes, if you kill the horse!" he said.

There was a rattle of wheels, and Chatterton laughed a grim laugh as he turned toward the women.

"No great cause for anxiety as yet. I know Hilton Dane better than either of you, and I think I know Maxwell too. It would take several legions of niggers to hem them in—and I should be sorry for many of the black men."

A few days later, Thomas Chatterton sat beside his hearth one evening in an unpleasant frame of mind. The weather might have caused a more even tempered person some discontent, because the windows rattled under the impact of the sleet-laden blast, and the snugly curtained room was swept by chilling draughts. But Chatterton was not considering the weather; he glanced at the clock before he turned toward the owner of Culmeny.

"That lazy rascal is stopping somewhere to gossip on the way," he said.

"The telegraph office is closed now, and he must be here shortly," replied Maxwell. "I was sorry to hear that Miss Chatterton was no better. Have you any more favorable news to give me?"

"No. She is rather worse than better, and we are distinctly uneasy about her to-night," he said. "Dr. Gilmour was here an hour ago, looking rather more owl-like than usual, but I could get no opinion out of him. In fact, the man puzzled me. He appeared dazed, and either would not listen to my questions or was incapable of understanding plain English."

"Dazed? You do not as a rule speak ambiguously. If Miss Chatterton is seriously ill I think it is my duty to tell you what you evidently do not know, though it is no secret. Gilmour is not free from a weakness for alcohol."

Chatterton was a man of action; making no comment, he wrenched upon the rope of the bell before he pulled out his watch.

"Send Robertson here at once!" he ordered; and when his groom appeared, he asked:

"Is it possible to ride a horse to Swiftsbridge across the Langside moss and through the ford in time to bring out the doctor by the last train?"

"No, sir," was the answer. "The moor track's under water, the ford just roaring full, and I'm thinking that to swim the Swift to-night is impossible."

"I think he is right," Maxwell said; "though I fancy I could have done it twenty years ago."

"Then you can drive!" Chatterton said harshly to the groom. "It's a little over forty miles there and back by road. Get a fresh horse at the bridge; but if you value your place don't come back without the

doctor!"

Chatterton walked to the window and flung the curtains behind him; then he returned with brows contracted farther.

"The moor is white all over, and the air thick with sleet," he said. "It will take that fellow all his time to bring the doctor here by to-morrow."

A maid, appearing, laid a telegraphic envelope on the table, and Chatterton tore it open.

"At last! I always thought the man was incapable. Listen to this!

"Difficult to communicate by ocean cable except at heavy cost, but surmise from message received that our coast agent credits published account. His cable just received reads, as deciphered by our code: Yes. Consider prospects discouraging. Do not look for improvement. Think we could confirm."

Chatterton whipped out a pencil and, scribbling across the foot of the message, handed it to Maxwell.

"Can you send somebody down to the office with that?" he said. "It can't go until to-morrow. I want to keep my other man ready."

"Yes," agreed Maxwell. "There are regulations, Chatterton, which will bar out your opening sentence, *Damn your private code*. The rest is, I think, plain enough. *Get news whatever it costs. Wire your agent in English if he has sense enough to understand it. Believe I am quite able to meet the bill.*"

"That man," explained Chatterton, "is, I blush to say, a relative of my own, and given to complaining that times are bad. It surprises me that he does not find them ruinous, if this is a sample of his enterprise. I'm almost as much cut up as you are about this affair; and I'm sorry for you, Maxwell."

"Thanks," returned the master of Culmeny, quietly. "He was the only son left me, and I have a presentiment of what the end will be. It is, however, in the hands of the Almighty; but, if the worst comes, I know that neither of them will forget what is due to the land that bred him."

Chatterton coughed huskily.

"You are morbid, Culmeny. If they can only steer clear of treachery, by the Lord, those two lads will cut their way out in spite of all the savages in Africa. I know the one whose father was my partner, and I know your son. If my own brother told me he had seen them beaten, I would not believe him."

Maxwell left, and in a few minutes Mrs. Chatterton came in to say that Lilian was growing delirious. As they spoke together the iron-master heard a voice in the hall.

"It is that confounded Rae," he observed. "It was he who encouraged Lily to go poking into the houses of poor folks who didn't want her, all winter. I consider him responsible for her illness, and feel quite capable of telling him so."

The clergyman was ushered in, and he had barely stated the purport of his visit when the elder man cut him short.

"No. Miss Chatterton will neither sing at your concert, nor distribute any more coal tickets to encourage professional loafers!" he said. "In fact she is seriously ill. If you had not been enjoying yourself in Edinburgh you would have known it. You are sorry! Well, I really cannot help saying that I think you ought to be. Miss Chatterton has not been strong all winter, and was warned against damp and exposure; but you managed to convince her it was her duty to wander up and down the village, pestering the sick folk, in spite of the rain and snow. Women have not the sense to discriminate between what is necessary and sentimental foolishness, you know."

Rae, who was not readily browbeaten, interrupted the speaker, and though he expressed no contrition, he showed such genuine anxiety concerning Miss Chatterton's health that her uncle was surprised, as well as mollified. It is possible that the clergyman showed his fears too plainly.

"Perhaps you could not help it, being possibly afflicted with the crazy notion that to destroy one's bodily health is good for the soul," he said. "It is one of the few things which always excites my indignation."

Rae, who knew that the things which roused the speaker's ire were numerous, smiled a little. "I certainly have never preached that doctrine."

"You must forgive me if I appear abrupt," Chatterton apologized. "The fact is that when I'm anxious my temper is not so good as it generally is, and I am very anxious about my niece to-night. When Gilmour came round, the infernal—yes, that's the adjective I meant—old scoundrel wasn't even sober. And you remember Dane? Well, he is hemmed in by hostile savages somewhere in Africa, and we can learn no news of him. My niece and he were very good friends, and when she grows light-headed she begs us to tell her what has happened to him. It is distressing because, of course, we cannot do so."

Rae winced visibly at the last few sentences, and found a corroboration of them in the recollection of the change in Miss Chatterton after hearing Johnstone's story. Still, he pulled out his watch.

"There is a clever doctor at Swiftsbridge."

"I believe so," said Chatterton, impatiently. "There are also a number in London and a few in New York, I've heard. I sent over for the

Swiftsbridge man some time ago; but considering the snow and bad roads, I don't expect him before to-morrow—and to-morrow may be too late."

"It is scarcely twelve miles across the moor and moss," said Rae. "There's a train this way in two hours' time. If you could lend me a horse——"

"My man, who ought to know, declares that nobody could get through the ford to-night. I'm obliged to you, Rae, but what you suggest is out of the question. The one horse now in my stable has the fiend's own temper, and I cannot allow you, who cannot have had much experience in the saddle, to run risks that were too heavy for a very capable horseman."

"I used to ride a little, and haven't quite forgotten. If, as you suggest, I am responsible for Miss Chatterton's illness, I must make the only reparation possible. In fact, I intend to do so; and unless you will mount me I will borrow a horse at Culmeny. I will not, however promise to spare the beast."

"You can drown him if you bring the doctor through by the last train!" said Chatterton, ringing the bell. "The horse will be ready inside ten minutes; and I'm greatly obliged to you."

The time had not elapsed when Rae walked quietly toward the mettlesome beast, which, resenting the change from its warm stable into the stinging sleet, laid its ears back, and when Chatterton approached it bared its teeth.

"Stand clear of his head!" cautioned Rae, swinging himself to the saddle; and the horse, rearing half upright, sent the gravel flying. "No. Leave the gate shut! I'm going the nearest way."

"I shall not forget this kindness," called Chatterton. "Feel I ought to stop you, but dare not do it. Take care of yourself—and God bless

you!"

"I hope He will prosper my journey," the younger man answered gravely.

There was a further scattering of gravel, a pounding of hoofs across a strip of lawn, and a crash of brittle branches as horse and rider smashed through a tall hedge into the sleet which whirled across the meadow beyond it.

Chatterton, shaking the white flakes from him, returned to his wife.

"I suppose you saw what has happened," he said. "There's another of them in the running now, and this one has mettle in him if he is a clergyman. He's going through Langside moss to-night, though I gave him the plainest hint I could that in respect to Lilian his chance is of the smallest. Maxwell, it seems, took his dismissal gracefully; but what Rae has done to-night will count heavily on his side. Why must that idiot Hilton go out and get himself cut off by niggers in Africa?"

Thanks to Rae's daring ride, a skilful doctor arrived at the junction by the last train, and remained at The Larches all the next day. He also made a number of other visits before he stated that his patient was making rapid progress on the way to recovery.

"You had, however, better take her south, say Egypt or the Canaries, to escape our genial spring," he said. "Not necessary, but distinctly advisable. Miss Chatterton might sail almost at any time."

"We will choose Teneriffe, and start at once," Chatterton informed his wife. "It is well on the mail route to West Africa, and I'm growing anxious about Hilton."

CHAPTER XVII

IN NEED OF HELP

Mrs. Chatterton had no objections to Teneriffe, and so it came about that one evening she and her niece, who had almost recovered her usual health, sat upon a hotel balcony in Santa Cruz, looking down upon the quaint Spanish city. It had lain basking under fierce sunlight all day, but now the cool shadow of the giant Cañadas rested upon it, and its olive-faced inhabitants came forth to breathe the freshness from the Atlantic. Garrison officers and somberly clad merchants with their wives and daughters, strolled up and down the plaza beneath the balcony, while laughter and merry voices throbbed through the strains of an artillery band. Near by, the Atlantic swell pulsed whitely on the lava reefs, and high above the great black cordillera heaved aloft its jagged pinnacles against the sunset fires.

Lilian Chatterton, however, saw little of all this. She was looking out across the shimmering Atlantic toward the blue peaks of Grand Canary, beyond which stretched the coast of Africa. A little black-funneled steamer was creeping across the sea-plain between.

"That must be the African boat. The flag is going up above the agent's offices," she said. "She may bring us news. It is a pity that my uncle is away. He seems distressed about the uncertainty concerning Hilton."

Perhaps Lilian's tone was less indifferent than she wished, for Mrs. Chatterton watched her keenly before she answered.

"It is hardly surprising. Your uncle is a just man, and never forgets a

benefit. As you must have heard, it was an invention of Hilton's father which first started them, when both were struggling men, on the way to success; but Dane died, and the widow, who was never cordial toward my husband, drew her share out of the business against his advice. She died comparatively poor when Hilton was young, while your uncle, who still considers he owes his dead partner a moral debt, tried several means of discharging it by benefiting his son. Hilton, of whom I am very fond, is not, however, a person one can readily confer favors upon."

"No," said Lilian, with a trace of coldness in her tone. "You never told me quite so much before. My uncle is not always quite judicious in the way he sets about accomplishing his benevolent intentions. But the boat will soon be in."

Mrs. Chatterton smiled a little.

"He will certainly blame us if we allow any opportunity for obtaining news to escape, and I must find somebody to take a note off to the purser. You are tired, Lily, and had better remain here while I go across to the agent's offices."

Lilian sat leaning back in a basket chair, shrouded from observation by two tall aloe plants, with her face still turned toward the coast of Africa. The silver shimmer faded from off the sea, the fires of sunset died out behind the cordillera, but Mrs. Chatterton did not return, and her niece waited with hands crossed idly in her lap. It was now some time since the steamer's anchor had rattled down. Presently, because the long windows behind her were open, she started at a voice in the adjoining room. It seemed the voice of one risen from the dead.

"It is impossible!" she thought.

"I have no baggage," the voice rose again. "Going on with the

Southampton boat, due to-morrow. Send across to the offices and book a berth for me."

Lilian, rising, stood in the open window, and the speaker stared at her in astonishment.

"I could hardly believe my eyes, Mr. Maxwell," she exclaimed.

Maxwell strode out into the balcony, but his surprise, which vanished quickly, was surpassed by the girl's. His face was worn and hollow, and in the failing light he looked strangely frail. A great sense of pity came upon her.

"You are ill, and I must not keep you standing! Please sit down, because there is so much I—we all—wish to know," she said, striving to suppress her eagerness.

"I have been in the African forest," Maxwell replied simply, as though that were sufficient explanation. "Thank you, but I would rather lean against the railing here."

As he spoke, he drew out the basket chair, and bent his head with a gesture of invitation, while the girl, noticing the languidness of his movements, showed her compassion in her eyes. Maxwell saw the pity, and smiled wistfully; then as Lilian's gaze met his own, she glanced aside a moment with a sudden trace of color. She remembered their last meeting, and there was an awkward silence which Maxwell broke.

"We can at least return to our former status as good friends, can we not?" he said. "I see you are anxious for my news, and it may be a painful story; but first I must ask you a question. What fortunate accident brought you here?"

"I was unwell and ordered south to escape the spring." Seeing the anxiety in the man's face, Lilian added quickly, "I have recovered

now. My aunt will be here in a few minutes, but Mr. Chatterton has gone across the island. An Englishman he met invested some money in a sugar-mill the Spaniards are reconstructing, and he could not resist the temptation of joining him. My uncle has a weakness for showing other people how to manage machinery. It is your turn now, but first, where is your partner?"

In spite of Lilian's intention the last question was put with a sharpness which surprised the listener.

"He is alive and well, I hope," he answered gravely. "My story will be longer, but I will try to tell it to you clearly."

The waltz the band played in the plaza below formed a curious accompaniment to such a tale. After the first few sentences neither of them, however, heard the music, and Lilian leaned forward with the color changing in her intent face as she listened. Maxwell suppressed the most gruesome details, but the narrative would have been startling to any one of the girl's upbringing. The thunder of the sunset gun brought it to an abrupt conclusion, and as the long reverberations rolled among the hills, Lilian rose suddenly and turned upon the speaker. There was scorn, as well as horror, in her eyes.

"And you left him in that pestilence-stricken camp to be murdered by the tribesmen—you coward!"

They were equally off their guard, and, for there are occasions when human nature mocks at all conventional restraint, both had dropped the mask. When once before they spoke openly it was Maxwell who had laid bare his heart, and now, though he made a valiant effort, he could not conceal his astonishment.

"And I never guessed," he said under his breath.

So for a few seconds they stood, with inmost thoughts laid open, face to face. Maxwell, having revealed the less, first recovered himself.

"I am afraid I have told my story badly, Miss Chatterton," he said. "You see there was gold enough to excite most men's cupidity lying within our sight, and that was why we drew lots to determine which should go out and seek help to secure it. Dane was, for a reason he did not mention, not only willing, but anxious, to stake his life on the chance of turning that gold into currency, and the lot fell to me. Being unable to raise the necessary funds by cable, I am now on my way to England, to sell my last possessions and pledge whatever in the future may be mine. Then, if I have to go alone, I am going back into the Leopards' country to bring my comrade help."

It is possible that few men under the circumstances would have framed their answer as Maxwell did; but he was in all things loyal, as his listener recognized. She was once more mistress of herself, but she did not look at the man as she answered him.

"You must forgive me. What you had to tell must have dissipated my poor senses. It is even more startling than anything I had imagined," she said.

"I can hardly forgive myself for telling it so badly," Maxwell answered gravely. "You had already, I gather, received some news that we were not exactly prospering. How did it reach you?"

Lilian mentioned the newspaper paragraph, and Maxwell's face grew dark.

"It was evidently the work of our enemy, and done to divert suspicion from himself in case the tribesmen overwhelmed us, as he hoped. It is another reason for haste, and if you will excuse me I will go on to the steamship office to make sure of my berth."

An inspiration dawned upon Lilian.

"I want you to promise that you will not sail without seeing me again,"

she said quickly.

"It is a conditional promise. While I would do anything to please you, Miss Chatterton, so much depends on my speed that whatever happens I must catch the steamer. She will land me in England three days before the West Coast boat, and is expected early to-morrow."

He moved away, and Lilian was left alone, plunged in a whirl of thoughts, with her eyes still turned toward Africa. But as she sat there one purpose grew into definite shape, and at last she rose sharply, and set out in search of Mrs. Chatterton, with determination stamped upon her face. Lilian was shrewd; she saw that Maxwell might well arrive too late unless she could hasten the starting of the relief expedition. She found Mrs. Chatterton presently in the bustling plaza, and the elder lady turned aside from her English companions after a glance at her niece. The girl came straight toward her with swift, resolute steps.

"Mr. Maxwell was on board the steamer," she said, with a calmness that puzzled her aunt. "He has told me all about the expedition, and left Hilton in deadly peril. Money is needed to extricate him, and Maxwell is going home to-morrow to obtain it; but I think my uncle would find it hard to forgive us if we did not let him know immediately. No—we have no time to waste with these people now. Turn back with me."

The girl passed the friends who advanced to greet her as though she did not see them, and by the time they reached the door of the hotel Mrs. Chatterton realized the need for haste.

"My husband must certainly know at once, but it is twenty odd miles to Oratava alone, and several more from there to the sugar-mill," she said. "The telegraph office is closed, and you say the mailboat should sail early to-morrow. It is very unfortunate, but what can we do?"

There is only one thing possible," declared Lilian. "No one could trust a Canario with so urgent a message. We must start at once ourselves. We need not go all the way round by Oratava. There is a bridle-path across the hills."

"But you are hardly strong enough for such a journey, and we might not get a carriage to take us there to-night."

"The carriage is entering the plaza now," said Lilian. "Can you not see that if Mr. Maxwell goes to England he may be too late."

Mrs. Chatterton looked hard at her niece. Lilian's face was very resolute, but she bore the scrutiny calmly, and the elder lady was not wholly astonished.

"I will be ready in five minutes," she said, and Lilian, moved by some impulse, kissed her swiftly.

The five minutes had hardly expired when, with the Canario driver shouting in warning, a two-horse carriage rolled out of the plaza, and went rattling up the narrow street. Accustomed as they were to the eccentricities of British visitors, the sleepy citizens stared at its occupants, when, with unusual agility, they had leaped out of its way, for the driver stood upright, lashing his horses until they broke into a headlong gallop, and the crazy vehicle lurched and bounced over the uneven stones.

Night had closed in now, and a vault of velvety indigo spangled with many stars, hung over the long rows of sun-baked walls, which rolled away behind. A full moon rose slowly over the Atlantic. In front wastes of scorïæ, maize fields, vineyards, rolled upward, ridge beyond ridge, toward the Titanic wall of lava, nine thousand feet above; but the climbing road was broad and good, and, if the string-patched harness held, they might bring Thomas Chatterton news in time.

Lilian retained but a blurred impression of that part of the journey.

They swept past climbing mule teams, and, sometimes on two wheels only, swung round many curves. Blinding clouds of dust rolled up, and, driven forward by the breeze from the Atlantic, whirled about them. There were odd gleams of light, and a howling of dogs, as white-walled dwellings swept by, then only the clang of iron on lava, and creaking of the vehicle to break the silence of the desolate hillside, until the driver howled again as they clattered into old-world Laguna, just sinking into early sleep. The carriage lurched over the cobbles, sparks blazed up, white walls and glimmering lattices raced by, and Lilian glanced at her watch as, while the lathered team swung into swifter stride upon the level, Laguna receded into the night. Branches of eucalyptus met above, the road was checkered with shadow, but it was straight and good, and the driver evidently meant to win the guerdon promised him.

It was cool on the higher levels. The fresh night wind stirred the passengers' blood, and while the stinging whip-cuts roused the horses to further effort, the eucalyptus gave place to sugar-cane, vineyards, cork-trees, and, looming black in the moonlight on the bare hill shoulders, gnarled pines.

"We have lost no time so far," said Lilian, bending her head over the moonlit dial of her tiny watch, and almost resenting the attention when her aunt drew the wrappings closer about her. "Still, it is passing fast."

The driver was certainly doing his utmost. He stood upright, for the most part, shouting as he lashed his horses, for the Castilian is not as a rule merciful to his beasts, and as the road had been lately mended in places with broken lava the carriage jolted painfully. Lilian, making no comment, only held fast the tighter, but once her aunt screamed, and it was fortunate that, startled by her cry, the man checked his horses. There was a steep grade before them, and when the beasts broke into a walk he stopped them altogether, and

leaped down from his perch. He glanced at one of the wheels, then cast his hat into the road and kicked it several times, shook his fist at the surrounding country, and for nearly a minute poured forth a torrent of sonorous Castilian. It was well that neither of the listeners wholly understood him.

"What is the matter, and what can he be saying?" asked Mrs. Chatterton, almost appalled by the man's vehemence; and Lilian answered with a shudder.

"I am not quite certain, but I fancy that a wheel is coming off."

"*Lo creo*," interjected the Canario. "*Mal rayo!* I spik good Ynglez. This jimcraky wheel, which is made of a lost carpenter, she is come right off."

Putting his shoulder against the vehicle he hurled the wheel down crashing upon the lava, and then flung one arm aloft, with a tragic gesture.

"Stop him at once, Lily!" begged Mrs. Chatterton. "The wretched man is beginning again, and his language positively frightens me!"

"You mustn't!" said Lilian severely, as the Canario's tongue, which had apparently been dipped in brimstone unloosed itself again.

"Stop immediately! Instead of all that nonsense, try to think of what you can do!"

"I do nothing. No man do nothing. On three wheel this coche she is not can go." The driver's gesture expressed despair. "We stop here for all night, *puede ser* all to-morrow. We stop a here forever."

"That is absurd," said Lilian sharply. "Is there no blacksmith at Laguna? Blacksmiths—*hombre de hierro, entiende?* Take one of those horses out and go for him immediately!"

"*No possible, senorita.* The black-a-smeet he sleep at night," explained the Canario, hopelessly.

Lilian stamped one little foot.

"It is *no possible* to waken him? *Escucha Vd*, and please try to comprehend. If I reach the sugar-mill too late you will be paid exactly what the Alcalde at Oratava says is your due. If I get there in time, and not otherwise, you will receive what I promised you. Now take out one of those horses, and I will help you."

The driver rubbed his forehead, and kicked his hat again. Then he declaimed a little further; and finally, while Mrs. Chatterton protested against Lilian's helping him, he proceeded to act upon her suggestion. The girl struggled with rusty buckle and raw-hide patched with string, and at last tethered one horse to a branch, while the Canario clattered off toward Laguna on the other. He had neither saddle nor stirrups, but that did not matter much to a man of his race.

The two women were left standing in the middle of the lonely road.

"I wish we had never come," wailed Mrs. Chatterton. "Mind that horse does not bite you, Lily."

"Poor beast," said the girl, stroking the creature's scraggy neck. "He did his best, and a great deal still depends on him. If that wretched man does not return soon the waiting will drive me mad."

Mrs. Chatterton found a seat by the wayside. Lilian paced to and fro, halting only to listen and gaze down the long dusty road. An hour passed slowly. Still only the rustle of the sugar-cane and the sighing of dark branches broke the stillness. There was no light visible; and save for the horse, the two anxious Englishwomen seemed the only living things upon the mountain-side.

"Can you hear nothing, auntie?" the girl asked; but the elder lady

heard only the drowsy gurgle of water in a distant barranco, and the moan of the breeze.

"No. There is no sign of any one coming yet; and I am afraid we should be almost too late if we started now," she said.

Twice again the girl paced up and down in a fever of impatience, then stood rigidly still, leaning forward a little, for a faint thudding sound came out of the shadows.

"He is coming at last!"

The man came up at a gallop, with a hammer and a bag of tools, and, talking volubly, remounted the wheel. Then he lashed his horses viciously, and they were off, pressing on at a gallop almost to the divide, where, partly bathed in silver light by the moon, and partly wrapped in black shadow by the mighty peak, the great horseshoe vale of Oratava sloped to the Atlantic. Here the driver turned.

"The brake of this coche is also broke. I have ten children, señoras, and all very small, and if we must go down at the full speed it will be one more ten shillings for the risk."

Mrs. Chatterton, glancing down toward the lights that twinkled apparently vertically beneath her, and the glimmering plain of the Atlantic very far below, somewhat naturally hesitated, and was about to speak, when Lilian thrust a gold coin into the man's brown palm.

"You shall have more when I come back from Tampena. Only lose no time!" she urged.

The driver, who had been deluded on various occasions by British emigrants bound for the Cape, first prudently bit the coin, then piously crossed himself, after which he lashed the horses, and the carriage began the long descent like a run-away locomotive or a thunderbolt, as Mrs. Chatterton afterward said. The road was good, but it dipped

in zig-zags down the steep hillside, and they went round the bends madly with two wheels in the air; while twice the elder lady held her breath as a straggling mule team rushed past. She prayed spasmodically that the ancient harness might not break.

The walnuts gave place to fig-trees, the figs in turn to vines, and still the straining gear held fast, and the bouncing vehicle hung together behind the lathered beasts. Then the terraced vines were replaced by maize, and when the broad leaves of bananas raced up, as it were, to meet them under the moon, the driver, shouting his loudest, reined his team in outside a little hill posada.

"Horses and a trusty guide for the sugar-mill!" he roared, beating on the door. "Here are two mad English señoras with a purse of gold!"

CHAPTER XVIII

MAXWELL'S CONFIDENCE

Though the English are not greatly loved in any possessions of Spain, their gold has the power of rousing even the contemplative Canario out of his usual lethargy, and when the driver shouted, drowsy men hurried about the posada. The host had two good mules, and a vine-grower would be glad to act as guide, but there was, he said, a difficulty. He had only one saddle fit for a lady and with the deepest respect for the señora, he feared she was too old to venture over the perilous bridle paths at that time of night; with which opinion Mrs. Chatterton quite concurred. Lilian glanced at her aunt, and then toward the bare-legged peasant, who, with a great blanket rolled about his shoulders, stood, hat in hand, before her. There was a rude dignity about this vine-dresser which pleased her, and moving forward she kissed her aunt.

"You must go on alone to the hotel at Oratava," she said.

Mrs. Chatterton had long grown accustomed to being ruled by her niece, and though she protested, she did so feebly. Even while she spoke the girl put her foot in the hand of the vine-dresser, who lifted her to the saddle, and then sprang into his own. He swept his battered hat to his knee with the grace of a courtier as he passed Mrs. Chatterton, and almost before the elder lady realized what had happened, the two mounted figures had vanished among the maize. With a sigh and an inarticulate prayer, she bade the driver proceed to Oratava, as slowly as he liked.

Lilian never counted the risks she ran during that ride. The two strangely-assorted companions soon left the maize behind and rode over broken lava and scorix; dipped, sliding and stumbling, into a barranco filled with impenetrable shadow, out of which the guide had hard work to drag the horses on the opposite side; and then skirted the dizzy brink of another vast volcanic fissure in the black hillside. Lilian, looking down into the depths that yawned beneath her, guessed aright that a slip would mean destruction, while for once her heart failed her when the peasant pulled the mules up where the pathway seemed to break off at the brink. He pointed toward the lights far down in the hollow, saying in Castilian:

"That is the mill. The señorita rides well. If she will let the mule find its own way she may, with the blessing of heaven, come down safely."

Lilian, partly comprehending, shuddered for a moment as she glanced into the great volcanic pit, then, slacking the bridle, laid one hand on the high peak of the saddle, as with the cinders rattling away beneath them, they commenced the descent. No beast but a Canary pack-mule trained to carry wine kegs over the wild hill trails could have come down alive, and it seemed to be sliding with legs braced stiffly most of the time, and then picking its way foot by foot down the face of an almost precipitous descent. Fortunately the darkness hid the worst terrors; they came down safely, and swept through tall cane on the level toward a group of dusky buildings, which grew plainer ahead.

Then the guide shouted, there was a howling of dogs, and Lilian, dropping stiffly from the saddle, walked into the presence of her uncle in the Spanish sugar-grower's dwelling. Chatterton, who had been poring late over some machine drawings, rose abruptly at the sight of her.

"Good heavens, Lily! Have you flown here?" he cried. "What has

happened girl? Is your aunt ill?"

"Don't ask questions! Sit still a minute, and listen! My aunt is well and should be safe in Oratava by now. Mr. Maxwell is in Santa Cruz, and brings serious news of Hilton."

Chatterton stiffened to attention as he listened. Then, because he was above all things a man of action and could let side issues wait, he asked no questions but patted his niece's shoulder.

"Well done, my girl. Well done!" he said. "God forbid that my dead partner's son should perish while I have the power to help him. If it's money Maxwell needs, he shall have it if there's sufficient in the Bank of Spain. It is lucky I opened credit to show these blunderers how to run their mill. You will stay here with the Señora Martin, and rejoin your aunt to-morrow. I shall start, but not by your road, as soon as these loafers can get horses ready."

"I am going with you," Lilian said, quietly. She was very tired; but with Dane's life at stake, she dare not take any chances. That her uncle would do his best to reach Maxwell in time, she knew; and yet, if something should happen on the way! If his horse should slip on those treacherous lava trails!

Chatterton saw the pale lips close tightly with a determination that he never attempted to resist.

"Very well, Lily," he acquiesced; "but it will be a hard ride."

In an incredibly short time the horses were ready, and Chatterton and his niece followed their guide throughout the remaining hours of the long night. Few words were spoken by either of them as they urged their horses forward. At dawn they were still riding, Lilian feverishly anxious, Chatterton grimly determined.

A big gray-painted steamer lay rolling in the harbor of Santa Cruz, and Maxwell stood on the hotel steps impatiently glancing at his watch. He had given Miss Chatterton his conditional promise that he would await her return, but he dare not miss the steamer. A feathery column of vapor roaring aloft from her steam-pipe indicated that all was ready. He had less than ten minutes to spare, and there was still no sign of Miss Chatterton.

"Five more minutes. There's the first bell now!"

Three of the minutes passed, and Maxwell was hurrying toward the boat, when somebody shouted his name, and turning, he saw two white-flecked horses race into the plaza. One kept on to the hotel; almost before the other stopped, Thomas Chatterton leaped to the ground.

"You're not going in that boat!" he gasped. "Can't you understand me? You are going back to the Coast instead!"

"I'm afraid I can't, sir," Maxwell replied with a puzzled air. "I don't want to be uncivil, but I dare not waste a moment. I must catch the steamer."

"You shan't!" persisted Chatterton, his red face growing purple when Maxwell shook his hand off his arm. "Confound you! Stop and listen! I owe Hilton's father more than I can ever repay his son, and Lilian told me what has befallen him. Well, if it's money you are short of, I'm not a poor man, and you can have as much as they hold in the bank here if you want it to rescue your partner. Now, don't let any foolish pride lead you into manslaughter. I'm doing you no favor, but making a commercial investment. Call me sleeping partner or anything you like, but don't throw your comrade's life away."

Maxwell looked his relief.

"I am not quite a fool, sir, and dare not refuse. It only remains for me to express my gratitude."

"Gratitude be consumed!" said Chatterton, cheerily. "Call it business. Now we'll order the best breakfast they can serve us in this place, and you can tell me the whole thing again."

Two days later when Maxwell boarded a steamer bound for the West Coast, Chatterton and his niece went on board with him. Lilian was both relieved and sorry when the iron-master hurried away in search of the purser to make sure that several bags of silver currency were put in safe keeping. She had something to say to Maxwell, but the task was difficult.

"I shall always take shame upon myself for what I said on the balcony," she began. "You are a very loyal partner, and I wish you Godspeed."

The words were simple, but because, during the fateful moments when the two stood on the balcony, the veil which covered their inmost thoughts had been drawn aside, they cost Lilian an effort, and meant a good deal. They sent a curious thrill to the heart of Maxwell.

"I meant all that I said one other night, and I am ready to prove it," he said. "Whether I shall ever return or not, I say it solemnly, only God knows; but if I live to reach our camp, I think Hilton Dane will."

For a moment Lilian's eyes grew hazy, and she looked away from him. Then, though there was moisture on her lashes, she turned fully toward her companion, holding out her hand.

"Heaven send you both back safe! You are a good man, and very generous. I knew it the evening we passed the Hallows Brig—but _____"

"Destiny arranges these things for us," Maxwell interrupted quietly. "I

am glad that your good wishes follow me to Africa."

Thomas Chatterton came up panting as he spoke, the warning of the last bell broke through the rattle of the windlass, and Maxwell bent bareheaded over Lilian's hand. Then she and Chatterton went down the side together, a deep-toned whistle vibrated above the waters as the steamer slowly forged ahead, and Maxwell saw a white-gowned figure in the boat beneath her side turn with a farewell smile and wave a hand to him. Once more he raised his hat, and when the boat slid astern Lilian's eyes grew hazy as she gazed after the departing vessel.

"That man will go far," said Chatterton. "Once he makes up his mind the devil himself would hardly turn him. He is one of the steely, quiet kind who are never more in earnest than when they are silent, but I am anxious. He is bound for a very deadly country."

Cool breezes followed the steamer to the African coast, and Maxwell had recovered part of his vigor before the first palm-crowned bluff rose out of the sea. He had sufficient funds at his disposal, but arduous work to do, and he held himself apart from the few passengers, thinking earnestly. Among other things he decided to fit out the relief expedition at Redmond's factory at Little Mahu, because, though more difficult, the road from there was shorter and less likely to be watched; and he surmised that Rideau, who must hear of his presence on the coast sooner or later, would expect him to start from Castro's factory. Maxwell knew he had not seen the last of their treacherous partner.

At the last moment, he so far modified his plans as to call upon Dom Pedro.

It was a fine afternoon when the cliff with the tall palms on the crest of it, and low whitewashed buildings nestling between them and the smoking beach, rose to view, and the purser, strolling past, halted

near Maxwell.

"We have several boat-loads of cottons for this place, and as the surf is high it will take us until sunset to land them safely," he said. "Then, as there are nasty reefs to thread through, the skipper will probably wait for moonlight before he heaves the anchor; so if you don't mind a spray bath you might have a few hours ashore."

Maxwell, knowing that he would see quite sufficient of Africa before he sailed west again, felt no great desire to go ashore; but as he gazed at the dazzling buildings through his glasses a figure came out upon the veranda, and an unaccountable impulse urged him to seek speech with Miss Castro. Why he should do so, and what he should say to her, he did not know, but he remembered that several times during his career some unconsidered action made on the spur of the moment proved as fruitful as his best laid plans. So, donning the mate's oil-skins, he dropped into a surf-boat and was whirled shoreward on a big breaker's crest, landing without misadventure amidst a cloud of spray.

Dom Pedro, it appeared, was absent, but his daughter started at the sight of the stranger, and the warm olive coloring of her face was suffused with a deeper tinge. She was herself again the next moment, and came to meet him with only a slightly heightened luster in her black eyes; but for a man Maxwell was observant, and deduced a good deal from what he had seen. Nevertheless, he was mistaken when he attributed it to the loss of his map.

Miss Castro received him affably, and presented him to her aunt, who combined a lethargic disposition with the usual portliness of an Iberian lady who has exceeded the age of forty, and after a few drowsy compliments she betrayed no further interest in the visitor. Nevertheless, the señora was not so sleepy as she appeared. Maxwell seated himself beside Bonita near the opposite end of the

veranda, and was not wholly sorry he had come ashore. The girl made a charming picture as she reclined in a deep chair near at hand, smiling at him with a trace of shyness that was not assumed, though an occasional nervous movement betokened a suppressed eagerness. Maxwell had pledged himself soul and body to the service of another woman with a chivalrous self-abnegation that only those who knew him well would have suspected him capable of; but he possessed artistic perceptions, and Bonita's dark beauty appealed to him.

"You have very much to tell me. How is it you come from the westward, and where is your compañero?" she asked; and once more Maxwell was wholly misled.

He noticed the swift gleam in the dark eyes that fell beneath his own; and, knowing what he knew, he was troubled. There was a hidden gentleness under the man's sardonic exterior, but he never learned how blind he had been that afternoon.

"My comrade was well when I left him," he said gravely; and Bonita, flashing a swift glance at him, evinced less satisfaction than he had expected.

"We were the good friends, señor. You will tell me why you leave him and now come from the west. Also if you met Rideau, and what you did with him. You are a strong man, señor, but it may be a woman can help you?"

Maxwell was in his own way a chivalrous person, but he owed a duty to the comrade who remained in the forest, and he meant to discharge it. So he answered with incisive frankness.

"Can you not see why it might be better for both of us that I should not tell you, señorita?"

The girl laughed softly, then laid a little hand upon his own. It felt

strangely hot, and again her eyes were luminous in a manner that puzzled him.

"It is the map, you mean? It is true I find it after the Señor Dane leave, and I sell it to *el perro* Rideau. Señor, we women must use what weapons we can, and the price he pay me—I have no secrets from you—was my father's safety."

"I do not venture to blame you," said Maxwell. "I had partly guessed it, and your confidence is safe with me, but suppose *el perro* had proved too strong for me? After this, can I believe that you would prove a good friend to me?"

Miss Castro positively blushed as she drew her hand away, but her laughter indicated a mingling of pride with scorn.

"You are modest, señor. It is not possible that the cur dog should prove too strong for—you. To Dom Pedro I say these Englishmen will kill this Rideau. So señor, because I hate him, you will tell me."

Maxwell did not speak for a while. Again an impulse which appeared wholly illogical in face of the girl's confession prompted him to tell her all; but very much lay at stake, and he did not usually act on impulse. Meanwhile his companion watched him from under the dark lashes which half covered her eyes; while, unobserved, the sleepy aunt watched them both. Bonita Castro looked bewitchingly pretty in her filmy draperies, perhaps the more so because of her curiously heightened color; but though Maxwell knew that she was a woman who would do much when prompted by passion, she did not look like a traitress.

"So you fear to trust me, señor?"

"On the contrary," Maxwell answered, "I have decided to trust you fully. In doing so, I know that I place my life and my comrade's equally

in your hands."

"It is well; I would hold them safe if I risked salvation," said the girl.
"So tell me everything. I shall be able to help you."

Maxwell did so, and Miss Castro asked him many questions which betokened a keenness of judgment that surprised the man. He spent some time in answering them, and Bonita appeared to find pleasure in listening to him. So while the palm-tufts tossed behind the factory and the spray whirled above the beach, the minutes slipped by, until, when the sun dipped, the señora woke up and ordered the black major-domo to hurry forward *comida*.

Bonita, reappearing attired in filmy robes of black, was more fascinating than ever during the drawn-out meal.

"That woman would turn any man's head," murmured Maxwell, inaudibly he thought, and added, with a smile, to the sleepy aunt, who glanced at him, "I was wondering, señora, if your distinguished family had a monopoly of all the wit and beauty in the Peninsula."

Maxwell was a little confused to notice that Bonita had overheard; for a second the long lashes dropped across her eyes, and again there was a flicker of damask in her cheek.

The moon hung over the ocean which stretched away before them, a broad sheet of silver, when the two stood once more on the veranda; and Miss Castro shivered slightly for no apparent cause when Maxwell announced that it was time for him to take his departure. The surf had gone down, and the roar of the breakers diminished to dull pulsations that fell drowsily on the ear, while the warm breeze brought down the fragrance of spices and lilies from the forest. Two of the pure white blossoms nestled among the laces beneath Miss Castro's neck, and their fragrance filled Maxwell's nostrils as he stood close beside her under the effulgent moonlight of the tropics. There was a

thrill in the girl's voice which, but for one fact, might have awakened an answering vibration within him.

"So you have trusted me, señor, and I am glad. It is also good that you start from Little Mahu, for so *el perro* hear the less of you. There are many black people who fear him, and tell him things, but he come first to this factory—and I deal with him. You will leave Mahu, two, three, perhaps four weeks before him. It is true you have no longer any doubt of me?"

"I have no doubt at all. I have trusted you to the utmost."

Bonita's eyes dropped swiftly beneath his gaze, but there was in her attitude no sign of coquetry. She had, the man thought, changed with the night, and put on a quiet simplicity which became her wonderfully. Something impelled him to add:

"I feel that I have done wisely."

Once more the girl's voice thrilled him.

"It is a dangerous country, and who can tell what may happen; but, whatever it costs me, I will help you."

Maxwell felt strangely softened toward her, for it seemed that some influence born of the glamour of the night was at work upon his will. It hardly seemed to emanate from his companion, for Miss Castro was graver than he had ever seen her; but the strange mingling of tenderness and admiration grew stronger in him, and he was glad when the boom of the steamer's whistle rang through the monotone of the surf.

"I must go, señorita."

Bonita's eyes shone in the moonlight as, with the faintest of smiles, she held out her hand to him.

"It is a perilous journey, but I will pray always for your safety," she said softly.

Maxwell lifted the hat from his head as, stooping, he touched the olive-tinted fingers with his lips. They trembled a little in his grasp.

"I thank you, señorita. We are allies now."

Again the roar of the whistle throbbed across the surf, and Maxwell went swiftly down the stairway and across the sand. As the boat plunged out through the breakers he shook himself with an air of irritation which attracted the notice of the steamer's mate.

"Got bewildered trying to understand those folks?" he asked sympathetically.

"No," laughed Maxwell. "The fact is rather that I don't understand myself."

"I dare say that don't greatly matter," commented the mate. "Take a good stiff cocktail and give the puzzle up."

The steamer heaved her anchor, and rolled slowly eastward down the coast, while Miss Castro stood on the veranda following the tier of diminishing lights until they faded and finally dipped into the moonlit sea. Then she turned and walked very slowly into the factory without a word, leaving the sleepy aunt lost in speculation when the door of her room closed noisily.

CHAPTER XIX

THE DANGEROUS SEÑORITA

Some days after Maxwell's departure Monsieur Victor Rideau, traveling in hot haste, arrived at Castro's factory. Dom Pedro was absent in the bush, but his daughter frowned when she saw the visitor coming. She was standing on the veranda where she had bidden Maxwell farewell; and this fact recalled the contrast between them, which was distinctly striking, and to Monsieur Rideau's disadvantage. Maxwell wore an indefinite air of refinement, which is the birthright of some favored Britons, and there was a good deal of finely-tempered steel in his composition; Rideau was by no means ill-favored, and as usual with gentlemen of his extraction, dressed himself almost too well; but his face was sensual, his black hair over-crisp, and, in spite of his very cunning eyes, there were other signs that his animal appetites might on occasion prove stronger than his judgment.

When he descended from his hammock, attired in spotless duck and American brown shoes, he was evidently well contented with himself.

"I compassionate you on your misfortune," said Miss Castro. "My father may not return until midnight, and you will have only myself and my aunt, who is always sleepy, for company."

"What better could any man desire?" There was a look of the African in Rideau's over-bold eyes, and the girl regarded him frigidly. "I go east by the steamer which will call to-night," he continued, "and hurried for the pleasure of a few hours of your company. The English adventurer has called here, is it not so?"

That was sufficient warning, and Bonita Castro prepared for the fray. The weapons she chose in the first place were merely demure glances and opportune smiles; and though many of his speeches stung her pride to the quick, she fooled Monsieur Rideau cleverly, and extracted from him more information than he meant to impart. Still, when the black major-domo set out the *comida* and Miss Castro withdrew, the visitor might have lounged less complacently on the veranda had he seen her kneeling, with a face that was stamped with hatred, beside the factory medicine chest. She lifted a ribbed glass phial, and glanced at it earnestly, then let it fall back, took out another, and clutched at the chest, when she saw that the door had opened a little. Then, as the rustle of the palm-fronds suggested that the breeze was accountable for this, she slipped the bottle behind a vase on the window-sill, and went out softly. Hardly had she done so than the Señora Diaz entered silently, lifted the bottle, and read its label, and then, with a gesture which expressed both relief and perplexity, replaced it. The señora was much more observant than she seemed to be, and was by no means a friend of Victor Rideau.

It might have been better for Rideau had he reached the factory after dinner. He did not eat prettily, and Miss Castro had lived long enough in the Iberian peninsula to grow particular about small matters. Also, he drank freely, and while his voice grew louder his consonants lost their crispness. Rideau spoke several civilized languages, but that night he emphasized the vowels after the fashion of the negro. Though not excessively indulgent, Dom Pedro's old Madeira had awakened a side of his nature he usually kept in subjection, and perhaps it had slightly clouded his judgment. In any case, the Señora Diaz frowned at some of the compliments he paid her niece, and her ancient laces rustled as she stirred with indignation, for while compliments were common in her country, they were characterized by either a becoming deference or scintillating wit. Once or twice she glanced sharply at the girl, who was generally quite capable of

representing a liberty; but Bonita did not heed her. She was working for an end, and working skilfully. Perhaps she suffered during the process, but that was only part of the price of victory.

The *comida* was cleared away at length, and when Bonita accompanied her guest to the moonlit veranda, she made it manifest that she did not desire her aunt's company. Nevertheless the Señora Diaz, who respected the customs of the Peninsula, seated herself beside an open window and saw all that passed. Rideau lounged in a cane chair with a cigar in his hand, while Bonita stood upright, dropping morsels of ice presented by a steamboat purser into the bowl which rested on the little table at his side. A Frenchman would not have shown such lack of manners. Rideau's very leer, which grew more pronounced, conveyed a hint that he knew he held the whip hand, and meant to use it; with any one of Miss Castro's disposition, that was very bad policy.

"It is charming, señorita. I have done much for you; you do a little now for me."

Miss Castro dropped the next lump of ice somewhat hastily, so that the liquid splashed over the table; but she smiled with apparent good humor, and the man grew more bold.

"You will sit here while I tell you something, is it not so? This scene is so charming that after I make one more journey I have resolved to cultivate the domestic virtue."

"That is commendable," said the girl, smiling. "Might one compliment you on such a piece of self-denial?"

She did not forget that the African's greatest weakness is vanity, as Rideau answered her with a deprecatory smile:

"It is not my fault if many women love me. Perhaps they are foolish

and trust to the eye. But, me, I aspire, and am only content with the great mind and virtue."

Miss Castro, instead of meeting his glance, appeared to be looking out to sea, and Rideau continued, still far too complacently:

"Now I see all that I desire—the peace, the tranquillity, the night that speaks of love, and the company of the peerless Bonita."

The girl laughed as she turned upon him; but her sleepy aunt, who sat by the window, knew that the passion which called the color to her forehead and set a sparkle in her eyes was by no means love.

"Is that another empty compliment, monsieur?" she asked lightly.

"It is the ambition of my life," he declared in a deeper tone; "and a long time I dream of it. Now when I make one more journey I ask you to gratify it."

"You must be more explicit. And is it the custom of France—or Africa—to make such speeches—so?"

Rideau frowned, and for a moment it appeared that he would have preferred the African custom of choosing his bride; but remembering what he claimed to be, he stood upright, a full-fleshed, crisp-haired figure, with his sensual lips showing too prominently.

"I have the honor to offer you my name and devotion, señorita."

"That is very much better," laughed Miss Castro. "But are you quite sure you would not find domestic happiness grow monotonous? I, at least, have been my own mistress so long that it might not content me. What else have you to offer?"

"An affection that will not weary," was the answer, and the man dramatically laid his hand where he supposed his heart to be.

"And if even that were not enough?"

"All the good things that money can buy, and women love. I shall be a rich man presently."

"You have not won those riches yet; and white men have lost their lives already in the Leopards' country. You should understand me."

Rideau blundered when he resolved to use the strong hand at last.

"There is still something—the safety of your father. It is, as I have once said, forbidden with the heaviest penalty to sell the black man the modern rifle, and Dom Pedro has sold more than this."

It is possible that Miss Castro had expected a similar answer, but the speaker's tone and the glitter of his eyes would have inspired most women with misgivings under the circumstances.

"You are forgetful," she said slowly. "I have bought that from you already."

Rideau laughed.

"You are mistaken. You sold me the English madman's map for the Emir's agreement, but you did not buy my lieutenant or the black headman who hired your father his people, and is a good friend of me. Señorita, you quite fail to comprehend me. To those who love me I give everything, but with those who bargain it is different. You are too young and pretty to drive a hard one with me."

The girl turned from him, and walked slowly across the veranda with her back toward her suitor and her face toward the sea, so that he could not see how one hand slipped without a rustle beneath a fold of her dress. He had left her but one way out of the difficulty, and it was dangerous; but gauging the quality of her antagonist she was content to take the risks. The sleepy aunt saw, however, and smiled grimly to

herself.

Then Miss Castro turned, and smiled.

"It is a long journey to the Leopards' country, and many things may happen on the way. You would be wise to wait for my answer, monsieur. What you offer appears insufficient now, but few women are sure of their own minds, so some wise men say; and, who knows, when you come back I may think differently. I have duties to attend to, and may not see you before you sail, but I want your promise to keep silence in the meantime. Pledge it in Vermont."

Before the man could answer, she had passed into the house and returned with a small flask and two fresh glasses. One was brimming, and she filled the other before she held it out to him.

"A swift journey to the land of the Leopard!" she said.

Miss Castro's voice was steady, though she waited almost breathlessly while the man stood undecided, holding up the cup. It was evident that he was averse to delay, and yet afraid to lose by undue precipitancy.

"So, I give the promise. To your bright eyes, señorita. It is a journey I make for you."

Rideau laid the glass down empty, and with a swift salutation that was half-ironical, and a swish of light draperies, Miss Castro had vanished before he quite realized that she had left him. When he did, he gnawed the end off a cigar, and lay thoughtfully back in his chair. It struck him that perhaps he might find Bonita Castro much less amenable to his wishes and more difficult to live with than a deeper-tinted helpmate.

In the meantime, a group of chattering Krooboys were lighting a fire on the crest of the bluff, their figures outlined against the increasing

glare. It was a signal to the east-bound steamer due to pass shortly that cargo or passengers were awaiting her. Rideau watched the blaze until it flared high aloft in token that the fire had good hold, then he walked slowly to the rail of the veranda and leaned over it, as though expecting an answering light from the moonlit sea. There was none, and presently he walked back, still more slowly, and sank into his chair with a sigh. Then his shoulders sank lower until his head drooped forward and there was silence in the veranda except for the sound of his uneven breathing. This had scarcely continued five minutes when a slender black-robed figure flitted out of a shadowy door, and the profile of a woman's face was silhouetted against the moonlight as it bent over the sleeper.

"Sleep soundly, and awake too late!" a voice said, and the figure vanished again.

Presently, perhaps because there was nobody to watch them, or they had been regaled too freely with factory gin, the Krooboyes left to tend the fire curled themselves up beside it, and when an hour had passed, only a thin column of vapor rose up from the bluff. The stokers slumbered peacefully, as did the comrades they should have awakened, when the twinkle of a masthead light crept nearer from out at sea. It rose until the black patch beneath it lengthened into a line of wallowing hull; but the fresh land breeze and the clamor of the surf between them rendered the hoot of the steamer's whistle but faintly audible at the factory. Still, the Señora Diaz awakened, and sitting upright on her couch near an open window, looked out on to the veranda. Her niece stood in a doorway, with the moonlight on her face, which showed white and anxious as she watched the sleeping figure.

The girl set her lips tight when again the whistle's summons, ringing louder this time, was flung back by the bluff behind the factory; but Rideau lay motionless in his chair; and Bonita quivered all through

when, finding his signal unanswered, the steamboat skipper burned a crimson flare. She could see the wall of hull and slanting spars sharp and clear in the blood-red glare, with the figure of a man leaning out from the slanted bridge projected against it, but there was still no answer from either bluff or factory, and with a last blast of the whistle the steamer moved on. No other boat would call for a fortnight, and this one would have saved Rideau a protracted and risky surf-boat voyage, or a weary march through the jungles overland.

It was past midnight when Dom Pedro's hammock came lurching into the compound, and, alighting stiffly, the trader climbed the veranda steps. He started on reaching the veranda, for there was nobody to meet him, only a man whose visits he had learned to dread, asleep in a chair. The trader bent over him; and by the way his eyes glistened and his fingers twitched as he saw that the duck jacket had fallen open, leaving the dusky throat bare, an observer might have concluded that he would not have been sorry had some accident prevented the sleeper from ever awakening. Still, Dom Pedro was only a man of lax principles; he shrugged his shoulders as he quoted a Castilian proverb, and then he shook his guest by the arm. Rideau sat upright, grasping the arms of his chair. He stared at the table, possibly seeking the glass he had drunk from, but it was not there, and rising shakily, he staggered toward the balustrade.

"What hour is it?" he asked.

"Past twelve. It is not good to sleep in the moonlight, my friend."

Rideau's face was a study of evil passions, but his reason resumed the mastery. The fact that the glasses were missing was significant, and perhaps he recognized that the woman might prove no contemptible adversary; for he answered Dom Pedro calmly.

"Your wine is too good, and I have slept so well that it seems I have missed the steamer. Well, there are other means of transit, and, if it

is not too late, you and I have business to talk about."

A light shone in a window of the factory for an hour after this, and when Victor Rideau walked somewhat unevenly toward his quarters, Dom Pedro cursed him under his breath.

The next morning he demanded a surf-boat and Krooboy crew, and when his host had provided them, he sought speech with his daughter before embarking. Rideau did not look his best that morning. His eyes were heavy, the color of his face was mottled in patches; and he was in a dangerous humor. Miss Castro, however, did not avoid him.

"It is to be hoped that you passed a good night," she said.

Rideau could not have failed to notice the boldness of the challenge. He looked at her steadily, and his glance expressed desire rather than resentment. The girl grew hot beneath his gaze as he surveyed her critically, after the manner of one appraising a costly bargain.

"I slept well—so well that I missed the steamer—and awakened with a heaviness I can guess the cause of. You have a bold spirit—and that pleases me; but you are dangerous, señorita—so dangerous that even if you were not otherwise very desirable, I dare not let you go."

Miss Castro returned no answer, and the man added threateningly:

"If you have not a promise to make me when I return from this journey, it will be very bad for Dom Pedro."

The girl clenched one hand tightly, but her voice was clear as she answered him.

"You shall have your promise now. If you come back from the Leopards' country, I will marry you."

Rideau appeared both gratified and perplexed. Possibly he felt that he should seal the bargain; but the girl's attitude did not encourage him, and he had learned that it was not judicious to press her too hardy. So he answered with a bow which had in it little Latin grace.

"Then one must defer his happiness. The señorita will not forget."

"I have given my word," said Miss Castro calmly. "You may claim the fulfilment of my promise if we are both alive when two months have passed."

Rideau shivered slightly as he turned away. He had inherited more than a trace of superstition from one side of his ancestry, and there was an unusual significance in the speaker's tone, and he had heard stories respecting her powers of prediction. A few minutes later he departed eastward in a surf-boat, and it was not a blessing which Dom Pedro, standing on the beach, sent after him.

CHAPTER XX

MAXWELL'S LAST MARCH

Maxwell was never addicted to losing time, and, thanks to Miss Castro's efforts, he had a clear start of Rideau, when he left Little Mahu. Redmond, being warned by a message posted on from the cable station farther along the coast, had a number of picked men ready; and Amadu declared that they were sturdy cattle. Both traders had done their utmost, and by dint of working night and day, Maxwell was able to leave their factory two days after he reached it.

They followed him to the compound gate, where Gilby gazed longingly at the forest and then sighed as he surveyed the line of brawny men, each of whom stood waiting beside his burden. Their clothing was simple. Broad folds of white cotton hung over one shoulder, and, drooping to the knee, were belted at the waist by a band from which a matchet hung. A number of the men also carried long flintlock guns.

"They're warranted free from civilization, and fit for almost anything, if you drive them with a tight rein," Gilby said.

"The niggers are fit enough," agreed Redmond. "If I were you, Maxwell, I wouldn't spare them. Nobody has heard anything of Rideau since he reported you as hopelessly hemmed in, but there's not much happens in this region he does not get news of, and it's my humble opinion he'll turn up somewhere along your trail just when you least desire to see him. As you probably know, news travels very fast in this country. That fellow must have some influence with the nigger

headmen or the chiefs of the Leopards, or somebody would have cut his throat long ago. You'll have to push on your fastest to keep ahead of him."

"I quite appreciate the necessity," Maxwell replied quietly. "But if it were not for my comrade's sake I think I'd wait for him. It strikes me that I am wasting precious time now, and I'll leave you with my best thanks for your assistance."

One trader thumped him on the back, the other grasped his hand.

"Good luck!" cried Redmond. "We'll put a spoke in Rideau's wheel if we can."

"You're the sort of man I take to!" Gilby added. "We'll use up a whole quarter's allowance, and turn this place inside out when you come back again."

Maxwell beckoned to Amadu, and waved his hand to the traders, as his carriers picked up their loads; and the two stood gazing after him until the steamy forest swallowed the long line of plodding men. They never saw him again, and it was some time before any news of his movements reached them, but meanwhile Gilby nearly brought about the death of Rideau's principal assistant, and ever afterward regretted he did not wholly do so.

That evening Gilby was returning with a gun in his hand from a prowl beside a lagoon soon after darkness fell, when his boot became unlaced near the factory boys' quarters, which stood at some distance from the white men's dwelling. Gilby seated himself on a fallen log, and remained a few minutes glancing meditatively, but unseen himself, toward a group of dusky figures crouching around a cooking-fire just outside the edifice. They sat with their backs toward the long, low shed, and, because the fire had sunk, the light was dim and fitful. Accordingly, Gilby saw, though the negroes did not, a

shadowy form crawl without a sound down the slope of thatch. With suspicions aroused, Gilby reached out for his gun. It was a heavy big-bore, and there was a large-shot cartridge in either chamber.

Still, he was distinctly puzzled until the crawling object resolved itself into a man, who dropped noiselessly from the overhanging eaves, and the next moment appeared before the astonished negroes, as though he had fallen from the clouds. It was cleverly done, and Gilby could see by the negroes' attitude that they were impressed. The stranger was evidently one of the wandering magicians who are a power in that country, and wanted something from the Krooboyes. Gilby, having suffered by the visits of similar gentlemen, determined to demonstrate to his servants the hollowness of such trickery, and furnish the intruder with cause to regret having frightened them. He could see the dusky figures shrink backward until the stranger checked them with an imperious gesture, and asked questions in some native tongue. As Gilby crept carefully nearer, the man's appearance seemed to be familiar. He wore a broad palm-leaf hat low down on his forehead, but as the firelight leaped up the trader felt almost certain that he had before him Rideau's headman.

"If you lib for move a foot, I'll shoot you!" he shouted, pitching up the gun.

There was a murmur, apparently of relief, from the Kroos, and, though Gilby afterward said he did not run, the stranger's figure grew less distinct. It had almost vanished when he called again, and, receiving no answer, pressed the trigger. A wisp of smoke blew into his eyes, he heard the lead smash through the frail boarding of the shed; but though he was a tolerable shot there was no other sound beyond the concussion flung back from the palms above. Gilby, dashing forward, searched all the surrounding bush before he returned to the Krooboyes, having found nothing.

"What did them Ju-ju man lib for want?" he asked.

"He done ask us how many boy them white man take, and when he lib for bush, sah," answered a trembling negro.

"I'll stop half your rations if the next time he comes one of you doesn't lib for get out sofly, sofly, and tell me," said the trader. "I'll also flog any boy who tells him what he wants to know!"

"Were you trying to shoot yourself, Gilby?" asked Redmond, meeting him at the foot of the stairway. "I'd try to hang out here on top as long as possible, if I were you."

"I was trying to shoot one of those confounded Ju-ju men, more fool me. The beggar got away, and, though of course it was trickery, he did it cleverly. I believe it was that brute of Rideau's."

"Then it would have saved somebody a lot of trouble if you had held straighter. Rideau doesn't usually make his movements plain, but it will be unlucky for Maxwell if those two rascals are on his trail."

Maxwell in the meantime was pushing north with feverish haste. He did not know what had happened at the factory, but he feared many things, and guessed that his rival would miss no opportunity to prevent his joining hands with his comrade. Still, he could not forecast what his plan would be, and could only redouble his precautions and make Amadu solemnly promise to carry relief to the threatened camp if disaster overtook him personally. Also he traveled very fast, for Maxwell possessed the gift of getting the utmost out of his men, and because news flies swiftly through the African bush, that perhaps accounted for his being able to cover the distance he did before misfortune overtook him.

The rains had set in, when, with Amadu some paces behind him, he plodded one day through thick jungle before his men. The deluge had ceased during the last hour, but the narrow path ran water, while the

cane, which grew higher than a tall man's head on either side, shook down drenching showers alike on soaked white man and naked negro. Belts of thick steam drifted across it in places. There was no sound but the splash of moisture and the fall of weary feet, but Maxwell, with his pistol loose in its waterproof holster, marched the more cautiously. He had faced numerous perils in his time, and had learned never to run an unnecessary risk; and the jungle he traversed was particularly suitable for an ambush.

Amadu, who recognized this, also was vigilant, and swept the cane on either side with searching eyes. He endeavored to persuade his master to travel in his hammock; but unavailingly. Therefore he carried the long Snider rifle with its breech well covered by his arm, and felt at times with wet fingers for the hilt of the short, straight blade, which hung at his side. He was a tolerable shot, but like most of the Moslem tribesmen deadly with the steel.

"These men march well," said Maxwell. "We should reach the camp within a week if nothing hinders us. Tell them to spread out a little and keep their matchets ready. The cane is getting thicker."

Amadu moved backward along the plodding line, and when he turned to rejoin his master, Maxwell was some distance in front of him. The path twisted sharply round a thicker clump of cane, and suddenly Amadu caught a glimpse of a tiny black patch among the dripping stems. Nevertheless, he evinced no sign of notice until he was certain that the black strip formed part of a human arm; and then he was called upon to make an eventful decision. The dusky soldier of fortune knew that if an ambush had been planted among the cane the lurking foe would, should both pass apparently unobservant, hold their fire until, by a volley poured into the main body, they could spread panic and cut the column in two. That might mean the loss of many black men; but Amadu counted these as beasts of burden in comparison with his master. He guessed that almost before he could

pitch up his rifle a poisoned arrow or a charge of ragged potleg would strike down the white man. So he held on stolidly, with dusky lips set tight, hoping that Maxwell might not see what he had until the corner was passed. Then there might still be time to crawl in upon the enemy from behind.

Maxwell walked straight on until he turned and glanced over his shoulder; then he shook the moisture from his jacket, and in doing so, let his hand slip from its lower corner to his revolver holster. He turned again, with death, as it were, suspended above his head; and Amadu gasped as he approached the thicker clump of cane. There was now no sign of an enemy's presence in all the jungle; only the splashing and panting of the carriers behind.

Suddenly the white man's hand swept out level with his shoulder, and almost at the same instant a bright flash blazed from the cane. Then the quick ringing of a rifle broke through the dull thud of the flintlock and the pistol's second crack, and Maxwell, reeling a little, hurled himself into the thicket.

With a roar to those who followed, Amadu plunged in too, a score of clamorous black men with naked blades hard behind, and was just in time to spring upon a naked man who strove to clear an entangled foot from the creeper withes. The short blade twice passed through him; and wrenching it free with an exultant laugh, Amadu floundered on. For a space he and his followers smashed through that strip of jungle, but found only a smoking rifle and one flintlock gun; then calling off the rest, he led them back to the path. Maxwell was sitting there in a pool of water.

"Send those boys back," he said thickly. "One of those brutes missed me, the other did not. One can't always guess aright, Amadu, and I thought there were at least a score of them."

Amadu groaned. He could see that his master was hard stricken, for

he looked faint and cold, and did not usually converse with his subordinates in that kind of English. Still, he understood the first sentence, and drove the curious black men back beyond the corner before he stooped over the speaker. Maxwell's face was distorted and clammy. There was a stain on the side of his jacket, and it plainly cost him an effort to speak.

"Did you lib for chop them bush boy, Amadu?"

"One of him, sah," was the grim answer. "He done leave them rifle."

"Let me see," said Maxwell. "That is an old chassepot. Rideau had a number of them. You don't quite follow? Well, you got the wrong man, Amadu. Don't stand there, but slit up this jacket. Chop them doff piece up the side of him."

Amadu did it with the still wet blade, and groaned again when Maxwell, turning his head a little, looked down at the slow, red trickle from his right side, then passed his hand across his lips and nodded when he saw what there was upon it.

"Take them lil' silver bottle out of my pocket and pull the top off him," he said very slowly; and when Amadu had done so he gulped down a draught of lukewarm brandy before he spoke again.

"I don't suppose it's much use, but you may as well take the knife that's in the pocket, and feel if there's any potleg near the top. Well, why don't you do it? You need not be frightened. It won't bleed much—that way."

Amadu shivered as he probed the wound. Maxwell's face grew grayer, and after a downward glance out of half-closed eyes he shook his head and stretched out one hand for more of the brandy. Then there was a heavy silence for several minutes.

"If I could lie still with ice to suck until somebody brought a surgeon

there might be a chance; but that's out of the question here," he said in a rambling fashion, and then roused himself. "You don't understand. Well, I'll try in the little I know of your own idiom. We have made two great journeys together, but now it is written that I shall shortly set out on a longer one alone, Amadu."

Maxwell spoke thickly, but there was a wry smile on his lips as he watched the big dark-skinned alien, who, rending his cotton robe, bound a pad of wet leaves upon the injured side.

"It is useless, Amadu." Maxwell coughed once or twice. "Listen. Because of something you may remember you dare not fail me, and this is my word to you. I made a promise which must be kept, and you will carry me to the white man's camp before six days are over, alive or dead."

Amadu looked eastward across the jungle, spread his palms outward, and then bent his head.

"By fire and salt, and the beard of the Prophet it shall be so," he said in his own tongue. "And I would it may also be written that I shall still follow my master should these dogs of bushmen meddle again."

"Your master is one of the infidel," replied Maxwell. "Now see that none of these others know what has overtaken me, and call up the hammock men."

Maxwell was leaning on Amadu's shoulder when the hammock appeared round the bend, and none of the black men who lifted him into it guessed how hard he had been hit; and the monotonous carrying chanty drowned the groans he could not quite suppress. The heavens were opened as the march began again, and the rain rushed down. It lashed the negroes' oily skins until they tingled, the trail became a streamlet, and the mire in places fouled them to the knee; but Amadu, having given his promise, saw to the keeping of it

with a terrible persistence, and they trudged on doggedly, the dripping hammock always before them. As one worn-out bearer stumbled another replaced him, and the march progressed until long after darkness fell, and after a few hours' halt in drifting mist it began again.

So the long days and black nights passed. There were odd flashes of sunlight, and once or twice the moon looked down; but between these times the air was filled with the steam of the saturated earth or with a rush of lukewarm water.

Late one night, when the weary carriers lay camped for a brief rest in thick forest, Maxwell beckoned Amadu. He lay in the slung hammock, a lantern burning behind his head.

"You will start in two hours. I must reach the camp before another night comes. My time is short," he said.

Amadu, looking down at him gravely, saw that the words were true; but he strove to deny them in his own tongue.

Maxwell smiled wearily, answering him in English beyond his complete comprehension.

"I have known many men of lighter tint I could part from more easily, Amadu. If we reach the camp before another night comes you shall have my big elephant gun."

The dusky man stood upright.

"I carried an Emir's standard. Will you bribe me with a gun to keep the oath I swore?"

Maxwell must have been in a state of torment about that time, but he was in his own way a man of extravagant pride, and it was perhaps to avoid his weakness that he spoke again.

"Yet it is a good gun," he said, with a trace of his old dryness. "Once you will remember at over a hundred paces it drove a smooth ball through a rash bushman's head. You could keep it in remembrance—couldn't you?"

The alien stooped and laid one of the thin hands on his own bent head, then dropped it suddenly, for from somewhere far off a faint sound scarcely more than audible trembled across the forest. Maxwell strove to raise himself to listen, but before he could speak his lieutenant sprang bolt upright, and his voice rang out. It was the sound of firing, and even at that distance something warned the listeners that the quick beat of it betokened modern rifles.

The hammock-bearers, who feared their new master rather more than the old, came up at the double; bundles were thrown hurriedly on to woolly crowns; the tired men swung into line; and the little camp grew empty.

Amadu, limping behind the hammock, laughed.

"If it be the will of Allah, I shall see that big gun make even a bigger hole in more than one heathen's head!"

CHAPTER XXI

RELIEF

Hilton Dane sat with a fouled rifle across his knees in an angle of the stockade protecting what had been the hospital camp. It was, however, a hospital no longer, for some of the sick had recovered, and the rest had died. Dane considered that he might have saved more of them had he been more skilled in medicine, but he had done his best according to his abilities; and none of the poor wretches seemed to blame him. Still, there were times when he felt like a murderer as some unfortunate sufferer's eyes turned in his direction, beseeching help, and he could do nothing but watch him die. They died, for the most part, as apathetically as they had lived, the heathen with the uncomplaining stolidity which had carried them through much hardship and cruelty, and those who followed the prophet testifying that it was Allah's will.

Dane remembered it all that morning as he looked round upon the remnant left him, for it seemed hardly possible that any would see another day. When the pestilence relaxed its grip he had resumed the mining, until the tribesmen hemmed them in. Once the foe tried to storm the camp, and failed so signally that beyond creeping up and firing into it, they had not repeated the attempt until the preceding night, when a few succeeded in passing the defenses. These, however, did not survive very long. On the other hand, the garrison could not get out, and though they had no lack of water, one cannot subsist upon fluid alone, and there was very little else.

The men lay about the stockade with their rusty guns beside them,

the negro, Bad Dollar, filing his matchet, as he did continually. The man Dane called Monday, however, crouched close beside him. A curious friendship had sprung up between the two, and they would talk long together with mutual satisfaction, though neither of them fully understood his companion.

A ravine cut the camp off from the forest in the rear, and beyond the front stockade the ground fell steeply to the river. There was forest across it, but only the tops of the higher trees rose out of the mist which shrouded all the plain below.

"You tink Cappy Maxwell perhallups come to-day, sah?" asked Monday.

"He will certainly come some day," Dane answered with a cheerfulness he found it hard to assume. "It would be opportune if he came just now, especially as he might be too late to-morrow. A miss is rather better than a mile in the present case, but you let too many of your black friends get in last night, Monday."

The dusky man, for he was not a negro, looked up at the speaker doubtfully and shook his head.

"I no savvy all them palaver, sah, but Cappy Maxwell too much fine white man. All them black boy tink each morning they go look him. Cappy Maxwell say he lib for heah, and them boy believe him."

Dane glanced at the dejected objects, even then staring down expectantly into the drifting mist, then at the tally of days that would never be wholly forgotten which he had scored on a post of the stockade. A deeper notch marked each seventh, and after many calculations he had gashed a few across to indicate the probable date of Maxwell's departure from Little Mahu. The black men did not understand the meaning of those scores and regarded the making of them as a religious ceremony, but Dane fancied that Maxwell might

understand if he reached the camp too late. Then, perhaps because he was overwrought, he became conscious of an extravagant pride in his friend. Those half-naked Africans had waited, trusting in Maxwell's promise patiently and long, and trusting it implicitly still. This, it seemed to him, was no small testimony.

"I tink we look Cappy Maxwell one time, sah," Monday began again.

"If he is alive, you will," Dane answered as sturdily. "Stop those boys' chattering. Something is going on down yonder now."

Monday stood up staring at the mist.

"Them parrot scream, sah, and them monkey talk. I tink them dam bushmen lib for come back again."

"Then don't let your boys start shooting until they crawl close in," Dane answered, with an indifference assumed to reassure the rest. "Some of those fellows can't hit anything with a gun, and you had better keep a few as a standby in case they come in with a run. Let them wait until the bushmen lib for climb the stockade, and then split their heads with the matchets. You understand me?"

Monday apparently did so, for he moved off with a grin which betokened nothing pleasant for the bushmen; and Dane sat still with his eyes fixed on the forest. Something was evidently happening, but the mist was thick, and he could not see into its dim recesses. His few men were worn down by hunger and continuous watching, and he feared that if the foe pushed the attack with vigor they would certainly get in. There was no doubt that the garrison would make a grim last stand if they did, but that appeared at the best a poor consolation, and Dane became sensible of a coldly murderous indignation against the bushmen.

There was a crackle of undergrowth far below, then a sound as of men splashing through the river which ran high and swollen; but Dane

was short of ammunition, and did not consider it advisable to fire blindly into the mist. He felt himself quivering with suspense. Staring down the steep face of the bluff, he waited, ready to drive a bullet through the head of the first assailant who rose out of the vapor. Then the noise ceased altogether, and the ensuing silence became maddening. How long this lasted Dane could never tell, but he grew cold and hot by turns as he waited, until a sound that was wholly unexpected became faintly audible. It was not the rustle made by the passage of a stealthy foe, but more resembled the approach of men marching in some order. While the blood pulsed within him he saw that the camp boys glanced from him to the vapor under the influence of an overwhelming excitement. But though the sound came nearer, the mist, which was thicker than ever, still hid all below, until a negro's head rose out of it, and Dane saw that he carried a hammock pole. Then a wild shout went up, and Monday's yell rang through all the rest:

"Cappy Maxwell lib!"

There was an end of all discipline. Weapons went down clattering, and famishing men, who during many weary days had vainly scanned the forest, poured out through the stockade gate and raced madly down the slope to welcome those who had brought them the long expected help. For a moment Dane stood stupidly still, almost too dazed to realize what had come about, vacantly wondering how Maxwell had forced a passage without firing a shot. Then the contagion seized him and, leaping down from the stockade, he followed the rest. His perceptions were yet clouded by a bewildering sense of relief, but it struck him that the hammock-bearers came on in an ominous silence. When he reached them, Amadu looked at him curiously, as though he would have spoken, but, brushing past, Dane tore the wet matting aside.

Then he stepped suddenly backward, breathless and aghast. Maxwell lay huddled in a limp heap upon the drenched canvas,

almost unrecognizable. His face was distorted and shrunk, his jacket reddened in patches, and his lips were cracked and black. His eyes had grown dim and glassy, and when he spoke his very voice seemed changed.

"Have I altered so much that you don't know me, comrade?"

"You have brought us our lives, Carsluith, but God knows I would rather have stayed on here forever than to see you come like this," said Dane.

Maxwell moved a little, and there was the ghost of a smile in his half-dosed eyes.

"I really couldn't help it. I hardly think I shall trouble you long. A bushman back in the forest shot me."

"Don't!" Dane answered hoarsely. "It can't be so bad as that. I won't believe it!"

Maxwell let his hand fall into his comrade's palm as though to convince him.

"I am afraid it is. I have been holding on to my life desperately—because I wanted to see you before I went," he said brokenly.

The touch of his clammy hand struck a cold chill through Dane, who, turning abruptly, bade the hammock boys carry their burden with all speed to the tent. What he saw there convinced him that Carsluith Maxwell had made his last adventurous march, and that the best to be hoped for him was a painless passing to his rest. Maxwell also knew it, and though Dane could say nothing because of the choking sensation in his throat, he looked up at him and nodded.

"Hopeless, isn't it? This case is beyond your skill," he said faintly.

"We have been good comrades, but even the best partnership can't

last forever. Still, you might do what little you can, for there are things I want to tell you."

Dane went out to seek for his case of drugs, and just then, as if in mockery, a blaze of sunshine beat down on clustering negroes and rain-beaten camp. Swayed by a sudden gust of grief and passion, the man shook his fist at the river and cursed what lay beneath it. It seemed to his overwrought fancy that the stain of blood was on the gold, the blood of the staunchest comrade any man ever starved or fought beside. Though their friendship had been neither lengthy nor demonstrative, the hardships and perils undergone had woven a bond between them that knit them as close as brothers. Nevertheless, Dane had yet to learn all that his comrade had done for him.

Maxwell slept or lapsed into unconsciousness all afternoon, but he revived a little by nightfall, and beckoned his comrade near him. The night was black and hot. Because Dane had given stringent orders, no negro's voice reached them, and they seemed utterly alone, hemmed in by the darkness of Africa. Dane could hear only the river moan below, and he found it necessary to cough huskily, for again, as he remembered one other night when they sat there together filled with bright hopes for the future, an obstruction gathered in his throat. Maxwell told him of his journey, in a low, strained voice, halting for breath at frequent intervals, and every word burned itself into the listener's memory. Maxwell always put things vividly and tersely.

"It was a wonderful march; but I have let you talk too much," said Dane, when he concluded. "So it was by Lilian's help you fitted out the expedition, and she rode all night across the mountains to warn Chatterton. It was what one might have expected. God bless her!"

"Amen," said Maxwell, with full solemnity. "The talking can't make much difference now—I shall have a long rest to-morrow. There is still

something I must say, and even if I am blundering it seems best to speak. We are very blind when we think we see most clearly, Hilton."

Dane looked at the speaker with some bewilderment as he let his head fall back on the matting, and lay still gasping. Five long minutes passed before he spoke again.

"Will you raise me a little, Hilton? My breath comes short."

Dane slipped one arm beneath his shoulder before Maxwell continued.

"It is strange that neither of us guessed; but all was for the best, maybe. The knowledge might have severed our friendship—I hardly think much more than that would part us now. Though twice I came near doing so, I never told you that I asked Miss Chatterton to marry me."

It was only by an effort that Dane held his arm motionless so that it still supported the dying man. It seemed the strangest of all the strange happenings that they two should have braved so much together for the love of the same woman.

Maxwell saw his blank surprise, and smiled feebly.

"You asked Lilian Chatterton to marry you?" Dane repeated dazedly.

"Very foolish of me, was it not? But there is no reason for such surprise that I should desire it; and I promptly discovered my folly. I also gathered there was somebody who might please her better. Now you have the simple fact, but as there is an inference you must listen still. How could I have guessed the truth—after what I saw at the Hallows Brig? It appeared impossible to me that any man who had won Miss Chatterton's approval could find pleasure in——"

"Stop!" cried Dane, striving to hold his excitement in check. "You

were mistaken, Carsluith. It was only out of pity, and because the imprisonment of her brother would bring destitution upon her, that I met that girl."

"I can take your word," Maxwell said quietly. "That was the one point which troubled me. Strange, isn't it, that on my last night I should talk in this fashion; but when one's grasp on material things grows feeble the others assume their due value. Yes, I loved Lilian Chatterton—as I love her still—though it was madness to think that she, fresh and bright with innocent light-heartedness, could stoop to mate with a somber man like me. But raise me a little. I can't see you clearly, Hilton."

Dane did as he was bidden, and Maxwell continued:

"I want you to remember that it was my fault, Hilton. Miss Chatterton never suspected until I spoke that night we passed you at Hallows Brig. I had a suspicion you admired her before that time, but it vanished completely then. You see how each trivial incident fitted in. She was very gentle, but I knew her decision was final—and still I did not see the truth."

As Maxwell looked into his comrade's eyes a quiver ran through Dane.

"I am bewildered, and it seems brutal to ask you questions now," he said huskily. "But you have more to tell."

Maxwell's eyes signified assent, but he paused to gather breath.

"It is only because I am dying. Otherwise, you would never have heard this from me, but it seems best for both that you should know. It was naturally not for—my—sake Miss Chatterton made that midnight journey."

Maxwell smiled wistfully as he let his head sink back again; and

Dane, drawing his arm away, said nothing for a few minutes. It was wonderful news he had heard, but the price which had been paid for his safety was unbearably heavy.

"You are a very staunch friend—and this makes it the harder for me to lose you. If only there was anything a man could do to prevent it! Carsluith, rouse yourself! I can't lose you!"

"It makes it the easier for me to go," said Maxwell. "If what I hope for happens, you will always be kind to her, Hilton. Just moisten my lips with the brandy."

There was silence afterward, for Maxwell lay breathing unevenly with his eyes closed, and Dane was swayed in turn by satisfaction and a crushing sense of loss. He suffered from remorse as well. Maxwell dying had revealed a side of his nature his comrade now knew he should have seen manifested in his actions if not in his words.

It was the sufferer who first spoke again.

"It was Rideau who brought misfortune upon us from the beginning, and to judge by the rifle the bushman left, he was the instigator of the last attack."

"May worse befall me if I do not repay him fully before I leave Africa!" Dane said, solemnly.

Maxwell appeared to smile as he had always done when his partner was unusually emphatic.

"He had excuses, Hilton, and I am past all desire for vengeance now. For one thing he recognized the señorita's gift to you. Still, for the sake of Miss Castro—and she promised to help me—I would advise you not to let him go free to continue his persecution of Dom Pedro. We both owe her a good deal, and I would like you, if possible, to tell her so. You might add my respectful remembrance, too. There is yet

another point. Whatever my share of this gold may be, I bequeath it to you, with my blessing, on condition that you send the boys back happy, with as much cloth as they can carry, to wherever they came from. The poor devils served us faithfully. When I have rested, I would like to see Amadu. Then I think my work will be finished, and I can only await the summons to answer for what I have failed in. It will come before sunrise, Hilton."

An hour passed slowly while Dane listened to the ticking of his watch; then Maxwell opened his eyes again, and Dane beckoned to Amadu, who stood waiting without. He came in, still wearing the straight blade which had struck the murderer down, and stood like a bronze statue beside his master.

"I want to thank you for faithful service, Amadu," Maxwell said weakly. "You shall have the gun—you have won it—and whatever else you wish besides. We made two great journeys together, but I cannot take you with me now."

The big man bent until Maxwell's thin hand rested on his head. What they said Dane failed to comprehend, but Amadu seemed to do him homage, and when he rose, he moved slowly, with raised palms and head bent, backward out of the tent. Then as Maxwell's eyes closed he crouched in the entrance, with the steel, which caught the lamplight, lying naked across his knee.

"Often I lib for watch them white man so," he said softly. "No djinn or devil go near him now."

Maxwell said little further. He slept or lay unconscious for some time, and then just smiled for a moment as his eyes rested on the grim sentinel with the bronze limbs and raw blue draperies, guarding the entrance. When he next roused himself he laid his chilly hand on one of Dane's, and showed a faint sign of pleasure when his comrade's fingers closed upon it. Once again he murmured, but it was rather by

the movements of his lips than by audible sound that Dane gathered the message:

"You will tell her I kept my promise."

That was his last effort, for when the night was almost gone the fingers which lay limp in Dane's grew rigid. Then Dane stood up stiffly, desolate, knowing that the spirit of Carsluith Maxwell had passed to find such rest as may be reserved for the souls of loyal gentlemen. But the dust claims that which sprang from it quickly in that land, and the comrade he left to mourn over him found his own endurance heavily taxed before the aliens who had helped him at his task took up their stations with weapons girt about them, a barbaric guard of honor, at the dead man's head and feet. It was Amadu who strapped the big revolver by its lanyard to his master's wrist, when, scattering a few of the heavy-scented lily blossoms, Dane folded the tired hands. Then they kept their vigil together, and it did not seem incongruous that dusky cattle thief and soldier of fortune should watch beside the English adventurer. Humanity is greater than color and creed, and it was as those who had suffered together they did their dead due honor.

The rain had ceased and a dazzling sunrise flamed across the forest when Dane stooped for a last glance at Carsluith Maxwell. The pain had faded from his face, and he lay in impressive serenity as one who rested with his work well done. Then the lonely survivor went out into the brightness of the morning with a grief that found no expression mingled in his heart with the lust of vengeance.

CHAPTER XXII

ON TO THE COAST

Nature, untrammelled by human inventions, takes her own way swiftly in the fever land, and the sun had hardly cleared the cottonwoods when Dane found himself mechanically following a tattered hammock borne high on the heads of dusky men. Though there was somber cloud above, dazzling brightness beat into their set faces, and flashed on glistening blade and long gun-barrel borne by those who marched behind. There was no word spoken. Only the patter of naked feet and the jingle of steel broke through the impressive hush, for that morning every leaf hung limp and still. It was with all solemnity that Carsluith Maxwell set out on his last journey.

Dane halted by the eastern gate of the stockade, watching the black men swing past him file by file; they were as strange a company as ever followed a British gentleman to his grave—Moslem bandit, woolly haired bush thief, stalwart, heathen Kroo, brown desperadoes who had fought the French under the banner of the great Sultan, and two-legged beasts of burden from the steaming swamps. Still, unstable and unreasoning, with the light-heartedness of a child and the cruelty of a devil, as many were, it gave the watcher a mournful pleasure to see that one and all had come to pay respect to their dead leader; and he showed his wonder when Amadu cried aloud, and the glinting flintlocks swung together, with muzzles to the rear. Dane guessed that the dusky adventurer had not learned to reverse arms in the service of any hinterland Emir.

He followed, seeing as one walking in a dream, the sinuous line of

drapable limbs and white and blue draperies wind on through deepening shadow. When Amadu cried again, the moving figures fell apart on either hand, and Dane was left with their leader and the bearers beside a shallow trench, on which one shaft of sunlight fell. He cast his ragged hat down on the sand, and in a voice which seemed to belong to some other person recited such fragmentary portions of the last office as he could remember. No one moved among all the silent company, but there was an inarticulate murmur when at last the solemn words broke off.

Dane remembered nothing further beyond the dull thud of shovels; his eyesight seemed to fail him, until presently he found himself moving dejectedly back to camp behind the straggling company. He must have slept when he reached his tent, for the sun was low when Monday and Amadu stood outside the entrance, calling him. When he rose wearily, Amadu pointed to the groups of men waiting without.

"Them boy lib for savvy what you do now, sah," he said in the coast palaver.

"I can't tell them just yet," Dane answered. "What do they wish themselves?"

It was a few moments before his meaning dawned upon Amadu, for the white man felt too dazed to frame his thoughts in other than everyday English.

"Them carrier bushmen lib for beach and go back to his own country one time," said Amadu. "Say this country belong to the Ju-ju."

No man could have blamed the carriers. They had in their own fashion done their utmost, and Dane almost shared their opinion about the locality; but he pointed to other men of lighter color and soldierly aspect.

"Do these want to lib for their own country one time, too?" he asked.

Amadu laughed mirthlessly, and fingering the hilt of the straight blade glanced at Monday, whose face was very grim, and the little negro, Bad Dollar, crouching close by with a polished matchet in his hand.

"They say they follow you if you be fit to hunt them Leopard or go chop them dam Rideau."

"They shall have an answer to-morrow," said Dane. "Monday, see there is order in the camp. Tell them no man is fit to reach the coast himself, and must wait until I go with him. There is something I want to ask you, Amadu. What you did was well done, but who taught you how, when a white soldier is buried, men carry the gun. Your master has gone, and I am Cappy now."

As it were mechanically, the big dusky alien closed his heels together, while his hand went up to his ragged turban and fell again with a rigid precision.

"I had suspected it already," said Dane, half-aloud. "Sit down and tell me about it. Monday, see no boy leaves the camp."

The others disappeared, and Dane was glad when the man obeyed him. He was respectful and intelligent, and Dane felt the need of company. It seemed that the same feeling troubled Amadu.

"The white man has guessed," he said, in a strangely mixed idiom. "I carried an Emir's standard in the North, in the dry country where men fear Allah, and there is corn and tobacco. My master mocked at the Sultan, refusing his tribute, and the Sultan's horsemen came upon us while we slept. They wore fine iron chain and carried the guns which come south through the desert from where no man knows, but for an hour a handful of us held the gate with the sword. Then when other gates went down and the huts burned behind us, some one brought my master's horse, and he rode out upon them. There were less than

a score of us living then, but we carried the standard almost through their midst, and when my master went down, I and three others stood over him. The Sultan had fewer men and horses when at last a gun-butt struck me down."

Amadu flung his head up as he halted, and his eyes glittered when they fastened on the listener's face.

"The Sultan was served by men, and not by such as the heathen who follow the little white man," he said.

Dane could draw the intended inference, and when he nodded Amadu appeared satisfied.

"When I lay in the grass next morning only the wall remained of the town," continued the dusky soldier of fortune. "There were sufficient heads hung about it already, so I fled south to serve the White Queen, as others of my people had done. We would follow the strongest, and knew how the great Emir of the West had mocked the white men who do not speak your tongue. So I came south and learned the drill, and wondered if the English were mad when they sent a lad with the face of a woman to lead us. There were twenty of us, all broken men who had lived by the sword, and some laughed when for the first time our officer spoke to us. Others answered him openly, and, perhaps not understanding all, he said no word to them; but when one night four men returned carrying plunder they had stolen from the heathen, and, mocking at his orders, threatened him, he shot their leader. He stood alone before us, very slight and slender, with the smoke of the pistol curling about him, and any one of those who stood by could have crushed him with their hand; but we went back to our huts when he told us, and henceforward obeyed him.

"It happened that when time had passed, and we knew our officer, as he knew us, we went up with him to chastise certain thieves, and came upon a stockade across the path, with many men who carried

guns behind it. The sun hung low over the forest, and we feared treachery when one held out a palm branch; but refusing to heed us, our officer went forward alone to speak with the heathen. He stood as he used to stand, with one hand on his side, so, holding in the other only a little cane, the stockade ten paces from him, and we waiting, as he had bidden us, it may be a hundred, behind him. A wise man would not have done so, but the one who led us feared nothing. He spoke, and his voice came clear through the shadow as he stood twisting his cane a little, one lonely white man demanding submission from the heathen. Then a gun flashed, and he fell forward on his face, and with a cry for vengeance we swept the stockade. The heathen did not wait for the steel, and most of them escaped, for darkness fell suddenly upon the forest.

"We knew they would fly to the stronghold of a thief in the country of the white men who speak a different tongue, where, when certain thieves had done so, our leader might not follow; but when we had buried him we made a plan, and swore to send many of the bushmen after him. The night was far spent when we crept softly about the stockade of that heathen village, but men drunk with palm wine made merry within, doubtless boasting how they had slain our leader. It was one who had served the Sultan, climbing the stockade, drove his bayonet through the watcher at the gate, and no man saw us slip from hut to hut until we gathered softly about the headman's house, where in honor of the strangers who had killed a white man there was feasting.

"Three we could count on held the door, the rest went in, and there remained no one living when they came out again. Then we burned the village, and I went back to the outpost of the next white Captain and told him what we had done. He had eyes like the Captain Maxwell, and listened very quietly, tapping with his fingers on the table—so—but another white man whom I did not know, smote it, calling upon Allah in the speech of the English.

"Then the Captain looked hard at me, asking, 'You had no order?'

"'No. He was our master, and those bush thieves killed him treacherously,' I said boldly, and one white man nodded to the other.

"'You were wise to speak the truth in this,' said the Captain. 'Your master would never have given that order; but there are men who will not believe the rest of your tale.'

"'By salt and by fire,' I was answering, when he lifted his hand.

"'I said there are men who will doubt you, and say you shot your leader. Even if that is not so, you have killed many of our good friends' people.' When he said this the listening white man laughed a little. 'Their nation will demand restitution, and it is possible the Commissioner will hang you for what you did—which would not please me, for you are a good soldier, Amadu. Now you must wait in prison until we hear from him.'

"Again the white man smiled, and I could not read all that was in the Captain's face as he looked at me, but his friend spoke, in the speech of the English, saying that if he did something he would be condemned. So I was laid in prison, and stayed there several days, fearing greatly that I, who had carried the Emir's standard, should hang like a common bushman, until one night the comrade who brought me rations set down a treble quantity.

"'Am I to hang, a fat man, to please the white men who speak differently?' I asked him, but he answered nothing.

"It was near midnight when I heard the silver whistle, and a sound of running feet, after some one called the guard. Now I did not wish to hang, and Allah gave me understanding. The roof was of whitened iron, but the door was not strong, and they had left me my rifle, which was not usual. The door went down at the second blow, and no man

saw me as I fled for the bush, taking the rifle and three days' food with me. Still, I knew it would not be well for me to remain in the country of the English, and when no man would hire me, I took service with my last master. Two I had were killed before him, but neither was his equal, and I shall not find such another in all Africa—though my service is not completed yet."

Again there was a mutual understanding between the pair, and when Dane nodded Amadu went out softly. The story had interested and also encouraged him, for he knew he would not be left without a helper in what he had still to do. Now that the numbness which followed the blow had begun to pass, there was sufficient to occupy his attention, and Dane never closed his eyes that night. The gold won would suffice to cover the cost of the two expeditions, and leave a balance which would enable him to launch his invention. Dane feared that, situated where the mine was, no company could be induced to handle it. It appeared certain that the climate, the sicknesses, and the hostility of the natives would between them prevent any private adventurers from working it successfully. Nothing could be done for some months at least, until the rains had ceased; and before morning the one white man who knew the river's secret had decided to keep it and send no more of his countrymen to their deaths in the Leopards' country. At the best, the mine lay in no-man's-land, and he had not even a black ruler's doubtful concession for reckless speculators to operate upon.

What Dane had seen and suffered had humbled his pride. Maxwell's last news still thrilled him, and he determined he would do what might better have been done earlier—ask the woman for whose sake he had pressed on into that forest to wait until he had made further progress in his legitimate profession. So far, the way was clear, but even before his comrade left him a desire for vengeance had been growing stronger within the survivor, and now a sullen fury filled the lonely man, who had pledged himself to demand a full account for any

breach of trust, and had not hitherto failed his promise.

At sunrise, leaving his tent unrefreshed, he called the men together and addressed them first collectively.

"I will take you all back to the coast, and you will receive more than you bargained for when you get there," he said, rendering it, however, into the seaboard tongue. "Still, as the bushmen may try to stop us on the way, you will not start until you are rested, and I think you ready. We may not go quite the shortest way, but no boy shall suffer for it who serves me well."

There was an approving shout when the listeners grasped his meaning, but Dane called Amadu and Monday aside.

"Before or after I take these boys to the coast, I have an account to settle with Rideau. You will help me?" he said; and when he had made his purpose plainer, a dozen of his special bodyguard came forward, protesting their willingness to follow.

They set to work at once, and there was much to be done. Arms required to be stripped and oiled, loads packed for transport, and Dane drilled his men an hour or two each day. A number of days passed before all was ready, and then the combined forces looked fit for whatever they might have to do; their leader recognized that the work might be arduous.

It was early in the morning, and all waited for the word to march, when Dane stood bareheaded beside a little cross on the bluff beyond the camp. For a few moments his eyes grew misty as he glanced down at the date and name he had painfully hacked upon it. He felt that he would never meet the equal of the man who slept beneath.

"Good-by, comrade. You will be long remembered," he murmured thickly; then he solemnly recorded a vow that while Rideau went free and unpunished his own affairs would wait. Dane owed the dead man

a duty, and he had taken upon himself a pledge which he meant to discharge thoroughly.

It was with as little parade of weapons as possible that the expedition headed for the coast, for the men had their orders and Amadu saw they were carried out. Those who carried matchets wore them hidden under their cotton robes, while at times the rank and file were allowed to straggle unchecked, with small semblance of discipline, in a drawn-out line. The discipline, however, was there, and disaster would have overtaken any bushmen who attempted to profit by the apparent lack of it. Dane did not order defenses of any kind to be raised at night, and generally had his tent pitched apart from the main camp; so that when they had made wide detours through dense forest and reeking swamp, some of the black men commenced to murmur as well as wonder at his recklessness. Amadu, Monday, and the negro, Bad Dollar, with whom he held long conferences, realized, however, that their leader was by no means inconsistent, even if they did not know that he was to all intents and purposes the victim of a monomania.

When it was too late forever to tell him so, he realized what his fallen comrade had been to him; and remembering how Maxwell reached the river camp, it was with difficulty that he refrained from breaking out into fits of berserk rage at the thought of their third partner's treachery. The knowledge that it was necessary to pit an intelligence unhampered by senseless fury against the enemy's cunning alone restrained him; for he felt that Rideau, who had probably heard by this time of his relief, even if he did not know it earlier, would strike again to ensure his own personal safety. He had no lack of opportunity, but, either by accident or by judgment, for long refused to fall into the trap, however temptingly Dane baited it.

CHAPTER XXIII

AN EYE FOR AN EYE

The expedition wandered southward leisurely, and Dane grew more savagely sullen as they passed dripping forest and foul morass in safety, until at last he ordered his tent to be pitched one sunset, fully a hundred yards from the camp. The light was failing when he stood outside it looking about him with a curious suggestion of anticipation in his face. They had reached the southern fringe of the Leopards' country, and another week's march should place them in touch with French officials. The forest was comparatively open, the cottonwoods growing well apart; and gazing between the long rows of towering trunks streaked by blue wood smoke, Dane could catch the shimmer of a sluggish creek. It was deep and miry, and haunted, as he had seen, by huge saurians, but a little produce evidently came down that way, for the bush path on either side was connected by a native ferry.

As he made a last survey the light died out; and his lamp was lighted when Amadu, Monday, and Bad Dollar came softly into the tent. Dane stood upright, but the rest crouched low among the cases, that they might not reveal their presence on the illuminated canvas. Monday growled a protest as he noticed how his master's figure was projected against it by the light; but his comments fell unheeded, for there was a definite purpose behind the white man's imprudence.

"Again I found the footsteps," Amadu reported, using a mixture of several tongues, as well as broken English. "The men who made them were tired, and have doubtless followed us far. They will surely be satisfied when they see us resting to-night."

Monday grinned wickedly; Bad Dollar flung back his woolly head and broke into a silent laugh; and Dane felt a thrill of satisfaction as he glanced at the speaker. The four formed a curiously assorted company; but one purpose dominated each of them equally, and the leader was contented with his assistants.

"One wore boots and trod in the soft places as no black man would," said Amadu, reading the unspoken question in the white man's eyes. "Another wore sandals, and went cunningly, as did the rest, walking as we do upon our naked feet. Still, they left this behind them among the thorns."

He held out what Dane was not surprised to see, a small tuft of leopard's fur, and laughed harshly.

"Ho, ho! We shall try whether they are devils with lead and steel!"

"The ferry canoe?" asked Dane briefly; and Amadu nodded.

"I go to see to it, and afterward it will need good witchcraft to find it. If any one would go south in a hurry he must swim to-night."

"There are crocodiles in that stream," smiled Dane. "You will take men you can trust and hide them where the path winds down to the water, Amadu. Monday, you will see that until I call, no boy leaves the camp, but let them lie down with their matchets beside them. Bad Dollar will wait with me; and I will borrow Cappy Maxwell's gun to-night, Amadu."

Sitting low among the cases now, Dane made careful preparations for his own share in the approaching tragedy. That it would prove one he felt certain. He cleaned Maxwell's gun with a loving care, polishing the inside of the barrel until it glistened, and touching each part of the action with oil. The weapon was a heavy, single eight-bore, with a rubber pad on the heel; part of this Dane cut away, leaving the steel

bare, because he knew that at close quarters the butt of a heavy gun may prove as deadly as the muzzle. It was with a curious stirring of recollections that he saw the dead man's initials cut into the elevated rib, and because of them his face was the sterner as he laid down the weapon. At short range in the darkness it was likely to prove more formidable than any rifle, and—for Dane was wholly under the influence of the monomania—his own safety counted for little if he could use it with due effect.

Presently he reloaded half a dozen cartridges with heavy B pellets, crimping the wads down almost affectionately, and thrust one into the chamber and the rest into his pocket. Never were cartridges filled with greater care. Then he laid two of the colored lights Maxwell had brought beside the tent door, made sure he could find them by feeling alone, and placed a tin match-box in one pocket where it could be most quickly grasped.

At last all was ready, and Dane sat perched high on a deal case between the lamp and the canvas for a while. Any one in the forest could, of course, see him clearly; but though Dane expected his foes would strike that night he did not fear a long-range shot. Rideau, he knew, must have recognized that his late associate could lay a formidable complaint before the authorities, who, regarding his inland journeys with suspicion, would be glad to fasten any charge upon him, and perhaps equally glad of an excuse to send an expedition up into the Leopards' country.

After lying for a time on the matting at one end of the tent, he rose and turned the lamp out; the watching then was not cheerful, and it was comforting to feel the weight of the big gun upon his knee. The last hum of voices had died away in camp, the fires burned low, and except for an occasional floundering beside the creek, the bush was strangely silent. The darkness was now intense. The wild animals would await moonrise to begin their hunting; what Dane expected

would happen before then. He could not see Bad Dollar, who crouched somewhere near the entrance of the tent, though he heard his file grate softly upon a matchet, and could picture him running a black thumb along the keen-edged blade at every cessation.

Confused memories crowded upon Dane, with Maxwell stalking through them all. He saw him again, alert, indomitable, resourceful, quelling the mutinous, cheering the dejected, and tending the sick. He saw him gasping his life away in that very tent, with, regardless of his own agony, words which would brighten all his partner's future upon his lips; and again a gust of passion stirred the lonely man in every fiber. It passed, and—for Dane was not for the time being wholly sane—left behind it a coldly murderous resolution.

Suddenly there was a touch upon his leg. Without a sound Bad Dollar had wriggled toward him. Turning as silently as he could, Dane crawled to the entrance, where he crouched with his right heel beneath him, behind the drawn-back sheeting which hung slackly. It was so dark that he could scarcely distinguish the nearest cottonwood; but though his ears failed to localize any definite sound he became conscious of some danger approaching. Under different circumstances Dane would have felt distinctly uneasy, knowing, as he did, that the thick gloom sheltered those who sought his life. Then, however, he feared only that he had not accurately loaded the cartridge, or that the damp had spoiled the fulminating mixture inside its cap; and his fingers were woodenly steady as they tightened on the gun.

He felt with one hand for the socket of the signal light and found it, stretched out a foot and pressed it against Bad Dollar when he touched him again warningly; and then the vague sensation of impending danger grew into shape at a recognizable sound. Noiselessly almost, but not quite, somebody or something was crawling toward the tent.

Dane suspended his very respiration as he strained his eyes, and listened. He could see nothing, and his ears seemed filled with a dull throbbing, but in spite of this he could hear the faintest of rustlings on two sides of the tent at once, and knew that, because no white man could move in such a manner, his dusky enemies were coming. One seemed to be making for the end of the tent, where his bed was spread; the other was creeping toward the entrance to prevent the escape of the victim in case his comrade failed at the first attempt. It was done with so little noise that Dane found it hard to realize he had creatures of flesh and blood to deal with, and not the malevolent devils the bushmen believed in. Bad Dollar made no further movement, and Dane crouched woodenly still, only sliding his forefinger inside the guard of the trigger when at last a spray of leaves swished softly a few yards away.

Then he heard somebody breathing close beside him, and knew that sudden death stood hidden behind the slacker sheeting which began to roll back very slowly; and yet, while the throbbing in his ears grew louder, he remained impassive another few seconds. He had awaited that moment patiently; and he meant to strike decisively, for his dead comrade's sake. There was no light. The night was black and thick; but some sense beside that of the optic nerve made it evident that part of the moving sheeting was more rigid than the rest because it rested against human flesh. Knowing that at the next move the assassin would fall over him, Dane felt for that portion of the sheeting with the muzzle of the gun while his forefinger contracted on the trigger.

The barrel found something that yielded as he added the last ounce of pressure; there was a detonation; the white man fell backward with his eyes filled with smoke and two fingers gashed by the trigger guard; and something that struggled convulsively fell upon the canvas and bore it down.

The tent collapsed behind Dane as he slipped from under it; but knowing how the heavy B-shot would at that distance smash through bone and muscle, he paid no more attention to this assailant. First he snapped out the spent cartridge and crammed another home, then, striking a match, touched the signal light. It smoldered for a moment, then a column of blue fire swept aloft, and its radiance which beat athwart the towering trunks showed a striking spectacle.

Close behind the white man a shapeless heap of fur and black flesh lay quivering upon the over-turned tent. Half-seen for a second a dim figure, whose garments were not those of a native, vanished among the remoter trunks. Men with weapons came flitting out of the shadows which shrouded the camp; and about thirty yards away a monstrous object with the head of a beast and the legs of a man was slinking toward a creeper festoon. Dane flung the gun to his shoulder and fired as it ran, but the glare of the light beat transversely along the barrel, blinding him. Springing clear of the filmy smoke, he saw the second assailant was still running, and he sprang forward without waiting to reload. The light would last but a few more seconds. Still, the object moved at twice his speed, and might have escaped but that as he blundered on, choking in his haste, a diminutive figure ran forth to meet it, and the beast flung an upper limb aloft. Dane saw the spear which had been meant for his destruction draw back to stab; but the negro, Bad Dollar, sprang sideways, and his broad matchet, long filed to a razor-edge, flared under the last flicker of the light as he swung it round his head. Then there was sudden darkness, a thud and a crash.

Dane, guessing that Bad Dollar's matchet had bitten deep, and that his carrier comrades would see his victim did not escape, turned at top-most speed in the direction of the creek. Men came running behind him; but a heavier sound was audible through the patter of their feet, and he knew that one who was not barefooted fled for his life near ahead. He was running fast, but Dane, flinging the gun down,

knew that he was gaining, and remembered that the man he sought would find his passage barred across the creek. So they ran, straining every sinew in a desperate race. Now and then one smashed through a thorn brake, or staggered, catching his foot in a creeper vine, but neither went down, and the gurgle of the creek grew nearer all the time. Dane raised his voice, and though his cry was barely articulate it proved sufficient, and as Amadu's hail came back in answer the footsteps before him grew slower, and a tongue of flame shot up.

So far there had been no miscarriage, and to furnish light for the climax a torch had been kept ready by one of Amadu's men. It showed first the group of grim black figures which guarded the narrow path to the water through tall cane, and then a man in European dress who stood still, gasping with fear and rage.

It was Victor Rideau.

"See that no boy fires on him unless he moves!" Dane made shift to cry; and Rideau, turning, met him face to face.

"I have expected you a long time," Dane said brokenly, for the race had taxed his strength, and once more he was shaken by a fit of futile rage. "Now I can't tell you how I regret we did not meet just five minutes earlier."

This was an adequate expression of the pursuer's feelings, for as his enemy stood gazing about him in abject terror, Dane felt he could not strike him down in cold blood, and he longed fiercely that he might be provoked to some fresh violence.

"Can you understand, you thief and midnight assassin, that there is not enough room in this country for both of us?"

"I comprehend nothing, camarade," Rideau answered calmly. "What would you of me?"

"Satisfaction!" Dane tried to choke down his fury. "There is a long account between us, and we could have settled it with less difficulty if you had had the courage of your confederates a few minutes ago. As it is, you can choose between a dash for the forest and a volley as you go, or a journey down to the coast in my custody. There you will be turned over to the authorities. I reserve myself the privilege, if they do not render you incapable of further mischief."

Rideau laughed.

"There I should denounce you for the plunder and killing of the Indigene. The Administration has no charge against me. I am good friend of the sous official, me. My friend, you are excite, and talk foolishly."

"If the chief of the Administration is a friend of yours, his own words don't bear it out. I can substantiate quite sufficient against you; and unless I'm greatly mistaken, the man with the cross on his forehead lies riddled with big shot beside my tent. A number of my boys will swear to his identity. In the meantime I have no further words to waste with you. I intend to give the Administration the first opportunity for rewarding you. It will be time for me to take further steps if they do not profit by it as I think they will."

Dane felt that he was weak; but even in his passion there were things he could not do, and his enemy's helplessness was his protection. Also, he knew that justice is tempered with discretion throughout much of that country, and he hoped that if the Authorities suspected Rideau of different offenses, but could not convict him, they would see that this charge did not miscarry.

The assumption of indifference faded from Rideau's face, and with a swift glance over his shoulder he drew out his hand from under his jacket. Dane afterward decided that he saw, what all the rest were

too intent to notice, that the torch was burning out; for with an evident effort and a shrug of his shoulders he answered quietly.

"La bas they laugh at you, and I make you pay. Alors, when I am impotent I surrender to the force majeure."

Dane, calling to Amadu, strode forward with the failing light upon him. Unarmed as he was, this was distinctly foolish, and he might have paid for his folly, for just before the negro dropped the torch Rideau flung one hand up, and simultaneously with a thin flash something hummed past the Briton's head. There was bewildering darkness, and Dane ran straight in upon his enemy, or where he supposed him to be, determined in spite of the pistol to end the feud there and then. Rideau, however, had beaten him again, for the growth about the water-side began crackling, and when some of Amadu's men fired into it, the sound did not cease, and they only came near destroying their master, who plunged savagely through the bending stems.

He fell into a pit of slime, sinking to the waist, and lost precious time floundering in its oozy grip before he dragged himself out. Then there was further ooze with matted roots which fouled his feet, while a sound behind him showed that the negroes were following. It was Amadu who, when he had waded up to the shoulders and sought for room to swim, dragged him backward by main force; and though Dane struggled, he was held fast in a grasp against which he was powerless.

"If the white man is alive he makes no sound," he said. "No man could find him in this darkness, but perhaps they who crawl along the bottom will. Still, when one brings the canoe up we will look for him."

As his reason returned to him Dane realized that the search would be useless. A hundred men might fail to find a fugitive who cowered motionless amid the luxuriant aquatic growth, though, as Amadu had suggested, the scaled inhabitants of the river would be less likely to miss him. Still, when somebody brought up a canoe he encouraged them by extravagant offers of cloth, and then turned back hurriedly toward the camp. It would, while the confusion lasted, lie open to attack; and Dane hoped that his enemy, if he succeeded in crossing

the river, would leave a trail behind him which could be followed on the morrow.

Reaching his overturned tent he found a group of curious negroes clustered about it, and because a fire had been lighted, there was light to show that the huddled mass of fur and dusky skin lay where it had fallen. The canvas was foul with half-coagulated stains whose color made it unnecessary to inquire if the wound had been fatal. Dane had no compunction. The man who had been slain when seeking his life with devilish cunning was one of the league which had struck down his comrade. Stooping with a shudder of disgust, he stripped the leopard's fur from the face beneath, and was not surprised to see that a cross-shaped scar on the forehead showed vividly.

"Where is the other? There were two?" he asked; and it was with relief that he saw Bad Dollar, whom he had forgotten, shamble toward him and then turn beckoning. Dane followed the negro, who held high a blazing brand, toward where another monstrous object lay full length among the trampled undergrowth. The fur had fallen partly clear of the flesh beneath, and he saw that Bad Dollar's matchet had done its work.

"Come here, all of you," called Dane. "Tell them to look at this man's neck, Monday, and say if they know the meaning of what there is about it."

Monday talked with some of the negroes, who, chattering excitedly, bent with fear and hesitation, to examine the tattooed device.

"Them boy say this yellow nigger and them other be big cappy among them Leopard, sah," Monday interpreted. "That be the Ju-Ju mark, and no common nigger done wear him, sah."

"Cappy Maxwell was right again," said Dane. "Make me a bed in the

camp and burn that tent to-morrow, Monday. I could not sleep in it—and I think until I leave this ghastly country I shall not sleep again. See to the sentries and let the rest lie down while they can. We lib for go on again with the sun."

CHAPTER XXIV

THE ESCAPE

Dane was mistaken when he said he could not sleep, for hardly had Amadu returned to report his failure to find any trace of the fugitive than he sank into deep slumber. This was not strange. He had lived for some time under a constant strain, sleeping very little; and now that part at least of his task was accomplished nature had her way. It was true that Rideau had escaped him, but Dane believed that if he was alive they might still overtake him. He decided that Rideau's life would no longer be worth a day's purchase in the Leopards' country, and he would head at once for the coast.

Events proved him right, for when he opened his eyes the next morning Amadu stood beside his couch to say that Rideau had left a trail it was easy to follow across the creek, and that the boys were ready to march. They started forthwith, and that was the beginning of a memorable chase. Every indispensable pound of weight, including the weapons, was ruthlessly flung away once they entered a settled country. The time for food and sleep was cut down, and the camp boys, seeing that the road led south toward the sea, vied with each other in their efforts to shorten the journey. The forest rolled behind them, as did miles of dusty grass; but the chase never slackened, and, for this region was populous, they had news of the fugitive. One morning Dane reached a village he had passed the previous night. At another they missed him by a few hours, and found two lame men he had hired and left behind.

Dane's own men had flung themselves down panting in the shade,

but most of them rose cheerfully in answer to his summons, while Monday used forcible arguments to encourage the rest, and in ten minutes all were on their way again. They lost the path in a morass, and at the next village they found that Rideau had increased his lead; but Dane knew that they were near the coast, and that he held his enemy between him and the sea. So the chase went on, until they reached a native market on the banks of a broad stream. A white man, so its ruler stated, had seized a canoe there a few hours earlier.

"Say dam low t'ief man done go chop one canoe and lib for get out like the debbil down them river," explained a negro who seemed proud of his linguistic abilities.

"Tell your headman I'll pay twice its value for the best craft he has," said Dane; and then consulted with his subordinates, for it was evident that they must divide forces here. It was not more than three days' journey to the coast, the headman said; and taking Amadu, Bad Dollar, and six picked Krooboys with him in the big canoe, he left Monday to follow with the rest to Little Mahu. Dane felt sorely tempted to leave the gold with the headman, under guard, but thought better of it.

The Kroos were skilled with the paddle, the canoe was long and fast, and Dane's spirits rose as he felt the thin shell surge forward at every sturdy stroke. All that day the dusky bodies, stripped to the costume of Eden, swayed athwart his vision over the flashing blades, as he stared forward with aching eyes down the long vista of dazzling water that unrolled itself before him. Palms, cottonwoods, creeper festoons, mud banks, fled astern. The temperature grew suffocating under the glare of afternoon, but still the thudding paddles rose and fell, while froth licked the bows and the paddling song rose in spasmodic gasps. At sunset they met a big trade canoe toiling upstream; and, excited by promises of rich reward, the crew roused themselves to fresh effort when its helmsman told them that another craft with three

men in it, one of whom was dressed as a white man, had passed him an hour earlier.

A full moon rose over the forest presently, and they pushed on across stretches of glistening silver and breadths of inky gloom. The Kroos had done gallantly, but they were only beings of flesh and blood, and their strength was ebbing fast. One who had dropped his paddle lay idle in the bows, another appeared to be choking, and fouled his comrade's blade, while the paddles of the rest dipped at steadily increasing intervals; so seeing that neither bribes nor threats could stir them, Dane desisted, almost too hoarse to make his voice audible. His hands were raw and bleeding where the haft of his paddle had eaten into them. The stream, however, ran with them, and they still made headway, while he strained his heavy eyes, expecting each moment to see a canoe ahead.

Dane, however, even yet had not gaged his enemy's ingenuity.

They ran the craft alongside the landing of a native village in another hour or two, crawled out of her very stiffly, and were told by the headman that two negroes had come ashore from a passing craft to purchase food a little earlier, while a white man lay still in her bottom. Dane concluded from this that the fugitive had slightly increased his lead, and he was wondering whether he could by main force get his boys on board again, or could engage a fresh crew, when a negro who spoke English plucked his sleeve.

"I go look them white men in canoe soffly, soffly. What you lib for dash me if I tell you something, suh?"

Dane had nothing left to offer as a present, and seizing the man by the shoulder, shook him violently.

"Tell me at once, and you shall have whatever you want if you will go to Mahu for it," he said.

The headman protested, but the negro only grinned when Dane slackened his grip.

"I not fool man, sah. The Lord he give me sense too much. You done dash me them jackus you have on now."

Dane's duck jacket was badly rent, but it was garnished with ornamental metal buttons such as the black man loves. Tearing it off, he flung it at the speaker. The heathen, finding himself successful, desired the white man's trousers too; but this time Dane, disregarding the headman, shook him savagely.

"I go look them white man, sah. He was a black man in white man's clothes."

Dane stared at the man stupidly; and then clustering huts, red fires, and wondering negroes, grew hazy before him, as choking with fury he saw what had happened. Rideau had changed clothes with one of his followers, and sending him on for the pursuers to follow, had landed and vanished into the forest. It was of the first importance to decide where he would make for. Mastering himself with an effort, Dane managed to obtain some useful information from the headman. Mahu, being partially sheltered, was the only port in that vicinity where any one would be likely to find surf-boats, or canoes suitable for a coast trip, he said; for the bar of the river they had descended was generally impassable. It seemed hardly probable that Rideau would turn north again without equipment or escort; and deciding that he would endeavor to escape from the colony before the authorities heard his pursuer's story, Dane determined to push on at once for Redmond's factory. His men, however, were utterly worn out, and finally declined to drag themselves a yard farther. Bad Dollar lay down, and was either unwilling or unable to get up again; only Amadu remained unbeaten. Finally the headman was prevailed upon to provide carriers, and Dane and Amadu were borne out of the village

in lurching hammocks.

At first the motion of a hammock is soothing, but though very weary Dane could not sleep. The boys marched well; but consumed with impatience, he lay wide awake peering into the darkness, and striving to encourage them to more determined effort. They ceased the carrying song from sheer lack of breath, and the white man could hear them panting beneath him. The sun rose, but there was no halt for rest; and the men were stumbling when one shouted excitedly, and not far ahead low whitewashed buildings rose dazzlingly against the sea.

When the carriers halted in front of them, two traders whom Dane recognized from Maxwell's description met him at the compound gate, and stared wonderingly when, watching them with bloodshot eyes, the newcomer told his name.

"Where are the rest of you, and Maxwell?" asked Redmond. "You can't have lost the whole of them; though there's no need to tell me something has gone wrong. Few men come home from the back country looking as though they had enjoyed the experience, but you're almost as bad as the last one."

"I have not enjoyed mine," Dane answered huskily; for he remembered with what hopes and in whose company he had first marched from the sea, and the contrast was bitter. "Maxwell has made his last journey."

"Dead?"

Dane nodded; and Gilby laid a hand on his shoulder with a gesture of sympathy which touched him.

"He was a wonderful man—but all the rest of them are not dead, too?"

"We lost too many. The rest are following. I will try to tell you all in good time. Has Rideau arrived here lately?"

Gilby smiled dryly.

"He has; and the way he did it coupled with your own appearance would stir up any man's curiosity. Rideau came in dressed like a nigger this morning, in the hottest hurry, saying he'd important business down the coast, and offered me my own price for the loan of our big surf-boat to go there in."

"You didn't let him have it!" Dane gasped.

"We don't often let business pass us; but I told him to go to perdition, if he could find his way swimming." Gilby chuckled. "I also told him several things that needn't be repeated."

"Gilby never had any sense to spare," interjected his comrade. "He was so proud of the speech he made that instead of warning the niggers not to help him, he did nothing except tell me how he said it; and Rideau got some fishermen to take him east in their canoe. They'll be well away to leeward now. What did the brute do?"

"Instigated my partner's murder, and twice attempted my own life," Dane answered in breathless haste. "But I'm in no mood to waste time. Will you hire me that surf-boat?"

"If you want her to follow Rideau you shall have the boat for nothing, and we'll both come along," said Redmond. "Gilby, get down to the beach and see to the gear and crew. Meantime, you are coming straight into the factory to get some food. Where is Rideau making for? That I don't know, but he'll probably try to get on board the *Minella* if he's afraid of you. She's billed on a stopping trip for Lagos, but she'll edge close round Twin Point Bluff, and he'll no doubt try to board her there. There's a nice southwester blowing now, and under

the big lugsail we ought to overhaul the canoe before he does so. She can't have got far until the breeze sprang up."

Dane had eaten little of late, but the food forced upon him almost choked him now; and leaving most of it untasted, he drank feverishly; then finding himself almost too exhausted to pace the veranda, he flung himself impatiently into a chair.

"Will that boat never be ready?" he asked.

"I'm hurrying her," replied Gilby, who also seemed impatient. "One boy's sewing a new cloth in the sail, and as she's too big to paddle far, we can't start until it's finished. She wants some pitch run into her bilge seams, too, and won't be ready for an hour or longer. Still, I'm hoping to overhaul Rideau early to-morrow—and he won't enjoy the meeting, by the look of you."

After some discussion Redmond reluctantly agreed to remain behind in charge of the gold Dane brought down; and it was nearly dark when, without shipping overmuch water, the surf-boat cleared the beach, and with tall lugsail straining, lurched away eastward over the moonlit swell. It was then that, lying in the stern to rest and gather strength for what might yet be required of him, Dane told Gilby his detailed story. He could afterward recall the intent face fixed upon him, the crash of breakers throbbing through the haze that hid the shore, and the listing craft's swift rise and fall. At the time, however, he was conscious of nothing except that they were speeding east, and that the trader assured him the slender native canoe dare carry very little sail in such a strength of breeze. Gilby held the tiller, a big Krooboy sat on the weather gunwale slacking off the lugsail sheet each time the boat dipped her side to a stronger puff of breeze, and Amadu lay on the weather floorings, deadly sick and groaning horribly, to the amusement of the amphibious heathen.

"It will be remembered that I have suffered these torments for my

master's sake," he said in a mixture of several tongues. "Still, once we land I will beat the life out of some of these dogs."

The craft traveled fast, for the off-shore breeze blew fresh abeam; and though at times it lashed the waters into foam, the helmsman daringly held on to the whole lugsail; and so at last, when the moon hung low in the west, and pearly streaks brightened over her starboard bow, a tall bluff loomed blackly through the haze ahead.

"Twin Point," said Gilby, shaking the spray from his jacket. "I have kept her well inshore for a purpose, but now we'll ease the sheet off. We should see the canoe once we round the head. The *Minella* can't be far off by this time, either."

Dane rose stiffly, but he could see little except the belts of thinning haze which dimmed the waters ahead. He could hear the thunder of breakers on the invisible foot of the cliff. The light was growing each moment, the breeze dying fast, and presently the damp lugsail slatted against the mast.

"Get out your paddles!" ordered Gilby.

The lugsail rustled down, the mast was lowered. Muscular black men perched themselves on the gunwales, and the paddles beat the water, while, when they had brought the head abeam, the mist rolled back, and the red track of the sunrise streaked the heaving sea. A low, black blur and a smear of smoke crawled athwart it; while nearer the shore, and seen only when the surf-boat climbed the long undulations, a dusky strip, with moving figures silhouetted against the radiant sea, lurched toward the approaching steamer.

"There he is!" Dane shouted. "Gilby, promise those boys anything if we overtake him! Pull up your tiller and swing her farther off-shore! If we pass out of hailing distance I shall miss the steamer."

"You are right; and that's the *Minella*," was the answer. "Still, if you wish to meet Mr. Rideau you had better let me arrange things for you. We can see him out there, but he won't see us under the high bluff as yet, and his boys don't seem to be killing themselves yonder. He'll expect us coming up from the southwest, and that is why I edged in along the shore. Besides, there's a nasty piece of stone lying off the False Point which, as the stream sets strong over it, it's wiser to keep well clear of."

Straining his eyes, Dane could see the surf on the Twin promontory some distance away; and while he watched it a long undulation outshore of it was rent asunder and a column of foam rushed aloft. It dissipated into filmy spray, and a dull roar reached the listeners faintly. The steep swell of the southern ocean breaks heavily along the coast.

"That's Sunk Reed," said Gilby. "A steam-boat went ashore there three years ago and smashed most of her bottom out in less than five minutes. Since then careful skippers coming round False Point haul out from shore. By the way the *Minella's* steering, it's not certain that either Rideau or ourselves will catch her. Paddle, you black devils, paddle!"

Dane fancied the boys were doing their utmost, but the progress they made appeared distressfully slow. The steamer was rising higher all the time, but thin haze still clung about the rocks, and the surf-boat probably remained unseen against the towering background. The canoe also was growing larger, and Dane could plainly see the sunken reef hurling clouds of spray aloft ahead of her, for the flood-tide joining the usual eastward current was setting strong across it. Presently a figure waving a white cotton cloth rose upright in the craft and the paddles whirled faster, but there was no answering hoot from the steamer's whistle.

"The *Minella*'s deep, and her skipper wouldn't stop long for a Colonial Governor when he has a full cargo on board," explained Gilby. "It will be a tight fit to catch her; but we could head off Rideau, who doesn't see us yet. I don't think his boys, being strangers, know how far that reef runs out. Only the steeper seas break on the outer end of it."

"Head him off. Never mind the steamer," Dane said hoarsely.

The boys made further efforts. Foam lapped about the bows, the splash of paddles swelled into a resonant thudding, and Gilby pulled hard upon his helm.

"They see us at last!"

Dane stood upright, cheering on the paddlers, who broke into a gasping song, and both craft went flying across the swell; but as they edged outshore it became evident that Rideau must pass the reef closely to reach the steamer. Rolling heavily, she still came on, perhaps a mile away, with unslackened speed. The spouting on the reef drew nearer, and Dane's voice seemed to break up in his throat, for unless Rideau could clear it during the next few minutes the pursuers felt sure of him. Dane had no paddle, and there being nothing he could do, he stared forward, moistening his parched lips with his tongue. Quickening a trifle, the paddles flashed and fell, while the lurching hull leaped forward at every impetus; but it seemed to the anxious man that she was merely crawling over the flaming sea.

"We have him!" gasped Gilby, with exultation in his tone. "If he holds clear of the reef we have him safe! Hallo! Where is he going now? It's a very odd chance he shoots through between the seas."

Dane already had noticed that the outer end of the reef was marked only by a swirl of water when the smaller seas passed. As Gilby spoke, the canoe was turned straight toward it.

"What that man can do we can. Follow him!" Dane cried; but Gilby signaled to his crew, and they slackened their paddling. They were far from timid, but they had not lost their reason.

Twice the sea was rent apart ahead, and sheets of foam rushed up, while the sound of its impact on the reef rang in a deafening crash. Then the pursuit ended suddenly.

"Are they mad, or turning on him?" gasped Gilby.

A man flung in his paddle on board the craft ahead. The flash of a pistol followed, but no sound was audible through the thunder of the reef. Then a black form rose upright with paddle swung high, and a long sea rose between the pursuers and the canoe. When it passed, the frail craft floated bottom uppermost, and the reef hurled up a smother of foam close ahead. Already several black heads were spread out across the swell as the native crew swam for dear life to evade the danger.

Gilby's boys stopped paddling altogether.

"Go on! Rideau's clinging to the canoe!" shouted Dane.

Gilby looked at the whirling spray, and then at his comrade.

"It won't be in this world he'll answer for his offenses. She's drifting straight across the reef, and nothing at that distance could cheat it."

Dane struck the nearest negro.

"Go on! Why don't you paddle? Gilby, where that man goes I follow!"

The trader gripped him savagely by the arm.

"He has escaped you. Keep still or I'll fell you with the tiller. Are you mad? There, look yonder. That is the last of him."

Staring out of eyes that but imperfectly recorded their impressions, Dane saw the black hull of the canoe swing aloft on the crest of a sea which rolled majestically toward the hidden barrier. The wall of water broke up suddenly with a deafening roar, and a tremendous rush of foam hurled itself aloft. When it fell, there was no sign of the canoe.

"He has gone," said Gilby, in a curiously strained voice. "The niggers will get ashore all right. You couldn't drown a beach man. Rideau will be smashed out of recognition. Still, we'll paddle round to leeward and make certain. Appolyon, you try to signal them 'teamer."

When they slid round the other side of the barrier a shattered canoe rocked bottom-uppermost on the confused welter, but there was no sign of a human head; and when the blast of a whistle reached the searchers, the surf-boat's bow was toward the steamer.

"You had better go on with her and make an affidavit before the Commandant, if they'll land you," advised Gilby. "I'll send in a written statement and swear to it if they send a Commissioner. Meantime, we'll keep your boys at the factory; and, in case we might want their testimony, I'll take off Rideau's niggers too. Of course, we had no intention of drowning him, but the way he shot that poor black paddle-boy lessens one's regrets. Rideau was dangerous to his friends to the last."

Dane was ready to act upon any suggestion. Worn out, mentally and physically alike, he could not think connectedly; and when, climbing the lowered ladder, he was surrounded by a wondering group on the steamer's deck, he turned from them savagely.

"We are all curious," said the skipper. "What took place aboard the canoe—mutiny, murder, or an outbreak of insanity?"

"I can't tell you anything now; but if you will come ashore with me at the next French station, where I must make a declaration, you shall

hear how the canoe was wrecked when I am able to tell it."

"That will do," acquiesced the skipper. "You certainly don't look fit for unnecessary talking now. Better turn in, and I'll send our doctor along to you."

Dane was glad to do so; but he had hardly flung himself down in his room before the doctor came in.

"I have been living under a constant strain during the last few months, and have had very little sleep for weeks," he said. "Give me something that will keep me from waking or thinking for twelve hours, if you have it."

The surgeon touched his wrist and laid a hand on his forehead.

"So one would suppose," he replied; "but if the scene we just witnessed was the climax of your adventures, I hardly think you will need a sleeping draught. Nature is addicted to providing her own remedy. If you'll take the dose I'll send you, you will probably wake up considerably better. It will not contain narcotics."

He went out, and Dane soon sank into deep, refreshing sleep.

CHAPTER XXV

THE HEART OF BONITA CASTRO

A puff of cool air streaming in through an open port roused the sleeper, and he became conscious of a restful lift and swing. The hammock boys, it seemed, had a good path beneath them and were traveling well. But the swing was longer than that of any hammock, and a steady vibration, which resembled no sound in the forest, recalled him to remembrance. He recognized that it was made by pounding engines. The air that fanned him was also fresh and invigorating, and Dane lay still again with a sense of vast relief. The time of strain was over, and now for a space at least he could rest. Dressing languidly, he went up on deck.

The ocean gleamed, a great sheet of rippling silver, under the moon. Clear stars burned above the mastheads, which swayed to and fro athwart them, while the splash of tumbling waters and the sting of flung-up spray seemed charged with healing. Lights shone in the smoking-room windows, through which laughter and a murmur of voices came out, but just then merriment would have jarred on Dane, and he leaned over the rails, baring his head to the breeze, and trying to realize what had happened to him. He felt that the shadow which had hung over him had melted while he slept, and escaping from its baleful darkness, which had obscured his mental vision, he had awakened sane. Then, though for the sake of one who slept on a lonely bluff beyond the Leopards' country, Dane did not regret what had been done, he shuddered, remembering the one grim purpose which had dominated him.

"We did not expect to see you yet," said the skipper, halting beside him with the doctor. "Of course, we have had only one topic of conversation."

"What is the general opinion?" Dane asked indifferently.

"My glass is an old one, but the mate has one of the latest inventions," the skipper answered. "He declares it was the white man who upset the canoe, and did it deliberately."

"I should like to see the mate," exclaimed Dane. "If he is right it would to some extent be a relief to me."

"I haven't quite relinquished my authority yet," the doctor interposed. "One might conclude it would be wise for you to give your mind a rest from that particular subject. A good many things happen in this country which it is well to forget; and there are signs that your load has been as heavy as you are fit to carry."

"It is good advice, if somewhat hard to profit by," said Dane; and the two men turned away. The skipper's words, however, had removed his last compunction. He had determined to deliver Rideau to justice, and not planned to drown him, but if his enemy had preferred to take his own life rather than stand a trial, the responsibility did not rest upon his pursuer.

Dane strolled forward out on to the reeling forecastle, and found the swift passage of the ship through the moonlit water soothing. Ahead there was neither reef nor shoal. She forged on, hurling aside each sea which barred her way, straight toward a safe haven through open water. It seemed a happy augury, and presently Dane retired tranquilly to sleep again.

Early the next morning the mate and the skipper went ashore with him at a cluster of white-washed buildings, over the largest of which the tricolor floated, and were courteously received by a little elderly

officer. His secretary took down the statements made by the captain and mate, and when these had been sworn to, he quoted from a book before him as he turned to Dane.

"It sounds like a romance, but we have proof that Monsieur speaks the truth," he said. "He will return to Petit Mahu with an official who will examine the traders and the Indigene. Until his report is considered, Monsieur will not leave this colony. In touching the gold, the signature of this contract is undoubtedly that of Victor Rideau, and under the terms of it his share is forfeit. Thus, subject to certain fees, Monsieur retains possession. In regard to the position of the river he decides to say nothing? It is not convenient that more white men lose their lives in that country of the devil, or cause the bad understanding with the Indigene. We have not yet open it for exploitation. Our information describes it as barren, and without value, which Monsieur will, I think, not contradict."

Dane had little trouble with the authorities. A commendable absence of useless formalities characterized all their dealings with him, and in a very brief space he was free to leave the colony. His men had been paid much more than they bargained for, and it was with genuine regret that he took leave of the last of them; it was with difficulty that he dissuaded Monday from accompanying him to England. The few Kroos remaining at Mahu when he left paddled him off to his steamer; and looking back from her deck, he could see Amadu's tall figure on the beach. Redmond and Gilby came on board, and, dining there, celebrated the parting so thoroughly that several seamen were needed to assist them into their boat, while how any of the party ran the gauntlet of the surf was more than Dane knew. They were not men of much refinement and had their weaknesses, black and white alike; but he owed a good deal to the sturdy heathen, while the two of paler color, instead of turning aside from a distressed compatriot, had shown themselves ready to assist him with a warm-hearted recklessness not always to be found among those possessing a

higher degree of culture.

Dane had one task still before him; and it was a hot afternoon when he called for the last time at Dom Pedro's factory. It seemed almost strange that everything should remain as he had last seen it—the little olive-faced gentleman lounging, cigarette in hand, against the veranda balustrade, and Bonita and her sleepy aunt lying in deep chairs in the shadow. In spite of the heat and sickness in that land, life goes smoothly at an African factory run by men of Latin race.

Dane was puzzled by something in Bonita's manner as she rose to meet him. She showed little pleasure, but rather suppressed anxiety, and looked past him toward the beach as though expecting somebody. Even Dom Pedro seemed shaken out of his usual serenity, the señora's eyes were open wide, and there was a silence after the opening courtesies.

"It is with the great satisfaction we see you safe," said Dom Pedro, though satisfaction was not what his voice most clearly expressed. "But you bring us news? Two of you go up yonder, and there is a third who follow. One only he comes back."

Dane guessed that the speaker's anxiety chiefly concerned the third who followed, and the implied question was the least difficult to answer.

"I have news," he said. "The man who followed us was no friend of yours, señorita?"

Bonita Castro's lips curled scornfully.

"No. I have little cause to be a friend of him."

"He will harass you no longer. He is dead," said Dane.

There was no pity, but rather pride and a still strained anxiety in the

girl's eyes.

"It is as I told you, padre. The dog has failed in his treachery and the Señor Maxwell has kill him."

"No. He was drowned at sea."

"It was not the Señor Maxwell who kill him? And the man with the cross on his forehead?"

"No," said Dane. "Rideau was drowned while trying to avoid me. The man with the cross on his forehead is also dead. He twice attempted my comrade's life, and I shot him one night when he was crawling toward my tent."

Bonita bent her head in a curious formal salutation.

"Our felicitations, Don Ilton. And the Señor Maxwell?"

Her voice grew a little deeper with the last question, and there was a note in it which puzzled Dane, while she cast a swift glance toward the second surf-boat lurching in shore from the anchored steamer. The man hesitated before he answered.

"He also is dead, señorita. He was treacherously murdered in the forest beyond the Leopards' country."

Amid all the memories Dane carried with him from Africa there were only two which equaled in vividness that of the few following moments. The girl stifled a half-articulate cry, and a heavy silence succeeded. Dom Pedro grasped the rails hard with genuine consternation in his face; and there was horror in the señora's expression. Bonita stood stiffly upright, with lips turned suddenly bloodless and a look that astonished Dane in her dilated eyes. Beyond that space of shadow there was dazzling sunlight, and to emphasize the stillness on the veranda the hot air vibrated with the

roar of the sea. The girl appeared to choke for breath. Understanding suddenly, Dane turned his eyes away. It was the señora who spoke first.

"All dead. *Reina de los angeles—ave!*" she murmured.

Dane, looking round again, saw that Bonita was mistress of herself. It was all clear now, and he admired as well as pitied her. Passionate, vindictive, wayward as she was, the blow had stirred within her the pride of her race, and it was with a queenly air she turned toward him.

"The señor will pardon us if we give him pain, but he will tell us all. Of Rideau's treachery, and—how his comrade fell."

Dane fancied that he was the only one in the party who had guessed the girl's secret; and he might not have done so but that sympathy quickened his perceptions, for he also had loved Carsluith Maxwell. He felt that it might be well for Bonita Castro if she heard everything, and he roused himself to do his fallen comrade justice. Thus the dead man moved an heroic figure through all the kaleidoscopic happenings. The rest, black and brown, were lay figures, himself a puppet obeying the leader's will; and, when the narrative concluded, Dane felt that if others now knew his comrade as he had known him he was satisfied. Remembering what he had seen he could, he fancied, read by the light of it what was passing in Bonita Castro's mind. At times she listened with quivering lips, then a moisture gathered in her eyes, which nevertheless glittered with a curious pride, and he thought her superb when at last, with a glance only, she thanked the bringer of the news.

"He was all *caballero*, as you say, a very gallant gentleman. I will pray for the sound rest of him," she said.

Dom Pedro moved uneasily.

"He was a man without principle this Rideau. With excuses to the señor, I would my books examine, and try to figure of how much he rob me," he said, and hurried away.

Bonita followed, and Dane was left with her sleepy aunt who presently astonished him. The señora, it appeared, was a lady of much keener perceptions than he had imagined; and he understood why she told him what had happened during Rideau's last visit to the factory. It was evident that Dane owed his life in a measure to her niece. When she concluded, the lady lapsed into a somnolent silence, which, if assumed, was tactful, leaving the man, who was glad of a respite from conversational effort, to digest the information.

Dom Pedro had cargo for the steamer, and it was late when Dane said good-by to Bonita on the moonlit veranda. It may have been due to the silvery light, but she seemed to have changed, and Dane shrank a little from meeting her. Bonita, however, spoke very quietly.

"I have a confession to make," she said. "You have done much for my father, and it is right that I tell you."

"Please don't, señorita," Dane interposed; but the girl checked him.

"You lost the Señor Maxwell's map here, and I, who found it, sold it Rideau. It was the infamy, but the price was tempting—and I knew one of you would kill him. You will try to forget the injury?"

"I think I know why you did it, and I do not blame you," said Dane. "I shall most clearly remember that, when I was sick, you saved my life for me, as I think you did again when you helped my comrade to forestall Rideau."

Bonita smiled a little.

"You are generous, but I would have it so. Then we are, as you say, the equal. I have been able to help you. You give me my liberty. You

sail now for England, Don Ilton?"

"Yes," said Dane; and again Bonita Castro astonished him.

"She loves you?" she asked simply.

The question was startling, and the man answered stupidly.

"I hope so. I—I do not know."

For a moment the swift laughter rose to the girl's eyes, but died in its birth, and the movement of her hands that followed it stirred the man's pity.

"You do not know? I saw the picture, and it was for her you went up into the Leopards' country. You are a strange people, Don Ilton—and the Señor Maxwell, he was like you?"

Dane afterward remained uncertain why he spoke as he did, but the words framed themselves, as it were, without his volition.

"No," he said; "nobody could compare me with Maxwell. Nor do I think I have met many such as he; but when he was dying, he spoke much of you. He told me you had promised to help us, and that he could trust you. It was almost his last charge that I should tell you so."

Dane knew by her swift grateful glance that Bonita Castro blessed him for the speech. In impulsive southern fashion, she held out both hands to him.

"*Vaya con Dios*, and the good saints send you happiness! I think we neither of us forget what has happened here, Don Ilton."

The last words ended in something like a sob, and Dane, who could think of no fitting words to say, only crushed the little hot hands in his own and swung his hat low as he turned away. Dom Pedro walked to the surf-boat with him, but Dane scarcely heard what he said, for his

thoughts were centered on the girl, who stood, a pathetic figure, gazing after him from the moonlit veranda.

The Krooboy was slow to reach the steamer, but Dane was the better pleased, for he hardly felt equal to facing the questions or the badinage of her passengers just then.

CHAPTER XXVI

REWARDED

It was a sunny afternoon when the little West Coast mailboat's engines ceased their throbbing off the mole of Santa Cruz, Teneriffe. Clear skies had hung over her as she rolled northward in no great hurry, and the fresh breezes which curl the sparkling sea between Morocco and the fever coast had brought new life to her sickly passengers. Dane felt his heart grow lighter as each league of deep blue water rolled astern, and the shadow of the dark land had almost fallen from him when the Canaries rose out of the sea. He had youth on his side, besides a comparatively clean conscience and a sound constitution; and a little chest consigned by him to a British bank was locked in the steamer's specie room. Though he would gladly have flung its contents into the sea to undo the past, regrets were futile. So, with a courage which sprang rather from humility than pride, he had determined to ask Lilian Chatterton to either share his struggles or await his prosperity.

The long black mole slid past, the bows forged more slowly through the crystal brine, and the harbor opened up. Even before the yellow flag fluttered aloft, boats by the dozen shot out from the lava steps, and Dane eagerly scanned the faces of their occupants. They were fruit peddlers, shipping and coaling clerks, and he sighed with disappointment as he next swept his eyes along the mole. Nobody among the loungers there raised a hat or a handkerchief.

"Expecting friends?" asked the purser, halting beside him.

"I was," Dane answered dejectedly. "Although I cabled from the Coast, I don't see them."

"I wouldn't count too much on that," smiled the purser. "Nobody is very particular in Spanish possessions, and it's quite possible they lost your message or couldn't decipher the English name. We shall fill up here with tourists, and if you are going home with us you must let me know."

"I can't tell you now," Dane said. "It depends on what I hear ashore."

"Well, I won't keep a berth for you."

He left Dane troubled when he turned away, for he had certainly expected Chatterton to welcome him and he had counted the days until he could ask Lilian an eventful question. He had hoped also that the cable message would have prepared them for his tidings; he shrank from again appearing unexpectedly as the bearer of tragic news. There was no time to be lost, however, and he went ashore in the first boat. Strange faces looked down at him from the mole, and no friendly voice was raised in greeting; and further annoyance awaited him when he hurried into the hotel.

Mr. Chatterton and family had stayed there for a time, but had left, the major-domo said. He thought they had gone to Madeira, but they might have sailed for England, or anywhere. It was not his business to ask where any Englishman wandered to, but the clerk might know. The clerk, it appeared, was out, and might not be back for an hour or so, but the major-domo suggested that in the meantime something might be gathered by an examination of the visitors' letters in his office. He showed Dane where the office was, and then shrugged his shoulders.

"What pity! Ramon he have lock the door," he said.

"That's a very small obstacle," answered Dane. "Nobody else has a

key, I suppose, so I'm going to get in through the window, and I will most certainly break it if he has fastened that up, too."

There were murmurs of protest, and Dane fancied that half the staff gathered in the hall and watched him endeavor to wrench the sash out by main force. When he had almost accomplished it, somebody suggested that when Ramon locked the front door he usually left one at the side open. It was a characteristic example of how things are managed in Latin countries; and the next minute Dane was busy turning over a bundle of letters in the office. There were several for Thomas and Mrs. Chatterton, and the sight of them filled him with satisfaction. Then his eye was caught by his own name on the top of two envelopes reforwarded to Chatterton, and after a swift glance at the embossed name on the back, he tore the first open.

It was from a celebrated engineering firm, and his blood pulsed faster as he read it:

"Although when you last called upon us we could not quite see our way to do so on the terms you mentioned, we are now prepared to undertake the manufacture and sale of your invention on the following conditions."

Dane saw that the conditions were as favorable as any non-capitalist inventor could expect, but he felt that the gold he had sent home would help him to improve them; and it was with a thrill of satisfaction that he opened the second letter. This was from his last employers, offering him reasonable remuneration if he would undertake the supervision of the machines and bridge work they were sending out to execute an important railroad-building contract abroad.

Here was one difficulty removed, at least. Dane hastened to the cable offices, and felt a great contentment when his messages were on the wires. His prospects were improving, and it was encouraging to know he would not pose as a wholly indigent suitor. When he

reached the hotel once more, the clerk had returned, and informed him that Mr. Chatterton and family had retired for the sake of coolness to Laguna, five or six miles away.

Dane procured a horse, and within the next few minutes he was urging it at its best pace up the steep hillside. The horse, as it happened, was a good one, and its rider's spirits rose higher as each mile went by. It was a fine evening, and to one fresh from the enervating heat of Africa, there was a wonderful buoyancy in the cool air that came down from the cordillera. It was a refreshing change to see the merry brown faces of the peasants who saluted him as he passed, and hear the laughter of the mule drivers as their climbing teams dropped behind. Dane had almost forgotten the dark land when the white walls of drowsy Laguna rose to view. The loungers in the plaza knew the Englishman Dane inquired for, and one of them preceded him down a narrow street with a dignified leisureliness which even the sight of a dollar failed to dissipate, and finally halted outside a high-walled garden doubtless laid out by some Castilian conquistador four centuries ago.

Dane swung himself from the saddle before a door ornamented by a beautiful bronze bell handle, and spent two minutes pulling the bell vigorously. There was no answer nor any sound within, and remembering that it did not necessarily follow that the handle had a wire attached, he stepped back into the roadway and flung himself against the barrier. A hasp of some kind yielded, and he staggered forward into the garden. The sun was dipping behind the cordillera, but its red light beat into his eyes, and at first he could see only a row of crimson oleanders stretching away before him. Their fragrance and the scent of heliotrope was heavy within his nostrils. Passing through the shadow of an orange-tree he made out a white wall garlanded by blue bougainvillea, and halted at the sound of a startled voice as his eyes fell upon the group on the terrace beneath it.

Thomas Chatterton had flung his chair back, and stood up with a flushed face, speaking excitedly. His niece also had risen, and her gaze was fixed upon the man who came hurriedly out of the shadow of the tree. She was silent, but Dane read in her eyes that which set his heart beating, and for a second or two he saw only the dainty figure and the smiling face turned toward his own.

The elation suddenly died out within him, and it was by an effort that he moved forward, for there was a third in the party. A man with iron-gray hair stood a little apart from the rest, and while each of his companions showed that they rejoiced to see the new arrival, he was gazing fixedly at the open door behind him. Dane saw that it was Brandram Maxwell of Culmeny, and knew why he watched the door.

"This is even more than we hoped for, Hilton, though we have all been anxiously waiting for news of you," said Chatterton. "Thank Heaven you are safe anyway. Worth a good many dead men, isn't he, Lilian? She knew Maxwell would bring you out; and when I grew anxious her confidence reassured me. But why didn't you cable—and where is Maxwell?"

Dane disregarded the last question, for Lilian laid her hand in his. He was not certain what she said, but her eyes were shining under the half-closed lashes in a fashion that was eloquent enough. Still Dane could not linger to wonder what, if they were fully opened, he might see within them, for Chatterton repeated his question.

"Where have you left Carsluith. Did he not come up with you from Santa Cruz?"

"No," Dane answered, and his voice shook a little. "Did you receive my cable?"

"We did not," said Chatterton. "What has gone wrong, Hilton. Speak out, man!"

Lilian, guided by some womanly instinct, laid her hand warningly on the speaker's arm, and Dane nerved himself for the hardest task of all, as the owner of Culmeny, moving forward, stood close beside him. He was very much like what Dane's dead comrade had been—wiry, spare, and grim. The drooping gray moustache matched the pallor of his face; but his eyes were steady and keen, and only a deepening of the lines about them betrayed his anxiety.

"I fear you bring bad news," he said.

"I do," Dane answered as steadily as he could, though the older man's composure rendered his task even harder than a sign of weakness would have done. "I had hoped the cable I sent might have prepared you—and now I hardly know how to tell you."

It was just possible to see that a tremor ran through Maxwell and his lean hand closed a little more firmly than was needful on the back of a chair.

"Brevity is best. Disaster has overtaken him?"

"Yes."

The owner of Culmeny looked him full in the eyes, and it was some time before Dane could shake off the memory of that gaze.

"It is the worst—he is dead?" he said; and Dane mutely bent his head.

Brandram Maxwell's fingers trembled, and for a moment he looked at the ground; then he spoke very quietly:

"I feared this when I saw he was not with you. Tell me how it happened. It is not the first shrewd blow fate has dealt me."

Chatterton and Lilian would have turned away, but Maxwell beckoned

them to remain.

"No. We have grown to be good friends, and I should like you to hear it, too," he said, looking toward Lilian. "There will be no cause for any one who knew my son to blush at this story. It will be a kindness if you hide nothing, Hilton."

Dane afterward wondered how he got through that recital. At the beginning speech seemed to fail him, but one listener's spirit infected him as he proceeded, and pride was mingled with the man's grief, for what he had seen in Bonita Castro's face he read in that of the owner of Culmeny. It was dark when he concluded:

"I can tell you nothing more, sir, and, though God knows it is the truth, it is useless to say that I would willingly have staked my own life on the chance of saving him."

Lilian appeared to be crying softly, and Chatterton troubled with something in his throat, for he coughed several times vigorously, but Maxwell held out his hand to Dane.

"I believe you would. You were his friend," he said, still with a startling quietness. "You did your best for my dead son, and no man dare blame you. It is a brave story, and I am not ashamed of his end. It was in accordance with the traditions of an unfortunate family. But you will excuse me. I am getting an old man and weaker in the fiber than I used to be."

He turned away, holding himself stiffly erect, and Chatterton laid a heavy grasp on Dane's shoulder.

"Well done, Hilton. If you had not chased that damned rascal to his death I'd have sent you back with another expedition to take up the hunt again. I am sorry for Culmeny. He was fonder of Carsluith than anything else under heaven, and you saw how he took the blow. Well, I won my own place, and went through the fire for it, but the brand

Culmeny wears is what I could never attain to. They were alike, both of them, and it will be a long time before we find their equal. Perhaps I had better follow and try to comfort him."

It struck Dane that Thomas Chatterton, though not lacking in sympathy, would hardly make a tactful comforter, but he did not say so, and Lilian seemed content to let him go.

"You are not sorry to see me, Lilian?" asked Dane, taking one of the girl's hands into his own, for her cheeks were damp yet, and bending, he caught her answer.

"No, but I was shocked. Hilton, I felt that when he went out to save you he knew he was going to his death, and I—I let him go."

"Even you could not have turned him aside," said Dane.

"I—right or wrong—I did not try."

"He was a better man than I am," declared Dane. "But it is fortunate that there are women who can be content with less than the best, and make up the deficiencies themselves. Will you listen to a little tale, one which is rather amusing than somber?"

"Is it about the poacher? If so, you need not tell me. You must also take the confession I ought to make for granted. You were always a blunderer, Hilton."

"I dare say I was," Dane answered, laying his hand on the girl's shoulder in a masterful fashion. "And my last adventure was perhaps the maddest freak of all; but that is beside the question. I once made a very vague arrangement with you, though you kindly said we understood each other. Now, I must ask you, do you wish that understanding to continue. If so, the only way for me to keep it would be to go back to Africa. A steamer sails to-morrow."

"No," the girl said shyly, then lifted her head and glanced at her companion. "I dare not send you back to that hateful country, Hilton."

There was no need for further speech. Dane knew that he had won at last.

THE END

Transcriber's Note: The following typographical errors present in the original text have been corrected.

In Chapter IV, "You need not be. unless you are fond of poverty" was changed to "You need not be, unless you are fond of poverty", and a comma was added after "That same, sir".

In Chapter VI, a period was added after "the power of lucid speech deserted him".

In Chapter IX, "Your sister, persumably" was changed to "Your sister, presumably".

In Chapter XI, "at sunrise tomorrow" was changed to "at sunrise tomorrow", and a comma was changed to a period after "until I was certain".

In Chapter XII, a comma was removed from "the footsore, and spiritless carriers".

In Chapter XV, "prospecting for Niven'st gold" was changed to "prospecting for Niven's gold", and a comma was added after "I think one of you will".

In Chapter XVI, "unpleasnt frame of mind" was changed to "unpleasant frame of mind", and "snuggly curtained room" was changed to "snugly curtained room".

In Chapter XVII, "which suprisd the listener" was changed to "which surprised the listener", and a period was added after "said Lilian sharply".

In Chapter XXII, a period was added after "the white men who do not speak your tongue".

In Chapter XXIII, "Dane ran straight in upon his emeny" was changed

to "Dane ran straight in upon his enemy".

In Chapter XXIV, "out in less then five minutes" was changed to "out in less than five minutes", and "the scene we just witnessed" was changed to "the scene we just witnessed".

In Chapter XXV, "Reina de los anegles" was changed to "Reina de los angeles".

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