

which I saw but little of Mrs. Mallandane, and heard not much more. Occasionally I heard of Cassidy from men coming up the line. In spite of his grumbling and seeming discontent with the nature of the country in his section nobody believed that Cassidy's Cutting was such a very unprofitable job as he gave out. Cassidy was too old a hand to be drawn into any admission which could be used against him for the purpose of cutting down prices in future contracts. Those best able to judge put him down to make close on £10,000 out of that job. His section lay some sixty miles from Barberton, and, as far as I knew, he had been into camp only twice during the five months that had passed since I had first met him. One occasion was the night on which I had seen him; the other when he called at the office to see me. I was out of camp that day and missed him. I do not know how often he may have been in besides those two occasions.

Mrs. Chauncey and I were real friends. Jack was one of my oldest chums, and when he married I found—what does not necessarily follow—that his wife was just one to strengthen the friendship and not weaken it. With regard to her, I felt that if an occasion should arise requiring that I should make a confidante of any woman Mrs. Chauncey would be the one. I

don't know that I ever realized this sufficiently forcibly to express it even to myself until after a remark which she made to me about this time.

She had been telling me some little thing about Mrs. Mallandane, and I may have shown by my attention—perhaps even by questions—more interest than she expected or thought called for. There was quite a long silence, during which I felt that she was thinking of something concerning me. When she turned towards me her expression was one of almost tender consideration, and in the gentlest possible voice she said :

‘It is good to be kind and generous, and to help those who need it; but when a man means to help a woman it should be clear to him from day to day, from hour to hour, not only how far *he* means to go, but also what she will understand.’

The words went home to me, and I suppose I showed it, for she added a little nervously :

‘You must not mind that from me. “Faithful are the wounds of a friend.”’

‘Taken as meant, Mrs. Chauncey; and—thank you!’ I meant it.

I made a careful and impartial examination of conscience that night when I had the silence and darkness to favour me; and although I honestly acquitted myself, there was just the faintest suggestion of the finding of the Irish jury: ‘We find

the prisoner not guilty; but he's not to do it again.' I told myself again that Mrs. Chauncey was a 'little brick' for her timely and well-judged warning; for I thought it was quite possible that I might have drifted on and 'gone soft' before knowing it. I am satisfied that there was no cause for alarm, as the resolution to 'ease up' cost me neither effort nor pang.

I abided fairly by the spirit of my unspoken pact. I changed my daily route to one that did not lead past Mrs. Mallandane's house. I ceased to talk of her; I even tried not to think of her. But just there I failed—for the effort to forget makes occasion to remember.

* * * * *

It was the tail end of summer. The heat was terrible, and in all the outlying parts—even in the lower portions of the camp—malarial fever was prevalent. The accounts from the line were particularly bad, nearly all the engineers, contractors, and sub-contractors being more or less laid up by attacks of the summer fiend. One of the engineers suffering from a mild attack was brought in, and, being at the hotel when he arrived, I heard accounts of what was going on. He told me that Cassidy had had attack after attack, but that he would neither lie up there nor come into hospital. It was work, work, work,

with him, all day and night, except when he was looking after others—and, in truth, his camp was a kind of improvised hospital. Cassidy, he said, with his superb strength and physique would not give in. He would not believe that fever could beat a man who was game, and he fought it.

There was no suitable conveyance to be got before night, so I arranged to start after dark, for I was determined to do something to repay the kindness I had had at Cassidy's hands. I took a serious view of his case, for I knew how these things usually ended, and he was not going to die without an effort on my part to save him.

I walked home that night worrying considerably about poor Cassidy and wishing to Heaven that the trap was ready to start at once. I had reached the crossing-stones in the little stream, where my old and new paths forked out. It was dusk, and I was not thinking of whom I might meet, so I started at the sight of Mrs. Mallandane a few paces off coming towards me, evidently to meet me.

'Oh, I have waited for hours to meet you!' she began without any ceremony, and talking nervously and fast. 'I thought you had gone already, and yet I feared to annoy you by going to your office. Look here—look! Tell me, is this true? Oh, you can't see—I forgot; it's too dark. Here in

the paper they say you are going down the line to-night to bring in someone who is ill, very ill with fever. Tell me, is it true ?

‘It is quite true. I leave to-night after nine,’ I answered—I hope without betraying surprise; but I could not help noticing that she did not mention Cassidy’s name, and that she was painfully excited. I drew no conclusions—I had no time for thought; but these things left a weight on my heart for all that, and it was not lightened as she went on.

‘I have come to ask you something. You will please bring him to my house. I must nurse him! He must come to me!’ This was not a favour sought, it was rather a direction given, and there was only the slightest note of interrogation in her voice. I could only repeat in surprise :

‘To your house, Mrs. Mallandane ?’

‘Yes—yes! You will do that for me, please?’

‘I am sorry, but I do not think that would be right. His place is clearly in the hospital, and I have no right to take him elsewhere.’

‘You refuse? Oh, you cannot refuse me!’

‘Mrs. Mallandane, you put it very harshly. You must see that I cannot do otherwise. I know of nothing to justify me in not sending him to hospital. It will be better for him, and far better for you.’

She drew a sharp breath and faced me drawn up to her full height, looking me straight in the eyes.

‘I half expected this,’ she said. ‘I only asked you because I feared to worry him. Your refusal is nothing. He will come to me all the same. You will not refuse to take a letter to him, will you, if I detain you a few minutes longer?’

We were quite close to her little cottage, and as we walked towards it I tried to soften my refusal as best I could. She, however, did not seem to hear me.

She left me seated in the little parlour. There was no light in the room, but she carried in a lamp from an adjoining one; and I have never been so struck by a face as I was by hers when the glow of the lamp lighted it up. The charm of her beauty was not one whit abated—for beautiful she was; and yet there was only one thing to be read in her face, and that was resolution. It lay in her lips, the curve of the nostrils, a peculiar look in the eye, and a certain poise of the head. In very truth, she looked superb.

I sat waiting while the minutes passed, and not a sound broke the perfect silence in the house. Everything was so still that it seemed as if there could be no one within miles of me.

There was a book on the table before me, and I took it up unthinkingly. It opened where a cabinet-sized photograph had been left in it—as a marker I suppose. The photograph showed the head and shoulders of a man, and the face shown in full was one of the gayest and most resolute that I ever remember to have seen. There was something very attractive about it, and there was, as I thought, a faint suggestion of somebody I had known or seen. It was a *good* face, splendidly strong and honest, and, from a man's point of view, a right handsome face too.

To look at a photograph uninvited may be an impertinence ; to read the inscription on the back certainly is. And yet these are things which one is apt to do unthinkingly and even instinctively. I turned the photograph round and read :

' O death, where is thy sting ? O grave, where is thy victory ?' and under that a date. I put it back in the book, feeling that I had been prying into the secrets of a woman's grief.

Presently I heard a chair pushed back in the next room and Mrs. Mallandane's step approaching. She handed me a closed note.

' You will give that to him, please,' she said politely, but very firmly. ' He will come here if he receives it ; but it is possible that he may still be delirious, and if so, I only ask you again

if you will be good enough to bring him to me.'

With the knowledge which after-events have given me it is difficult to say whether I was concerned only for Cassidy's health and Mrs. Mallandane's good name, or whether I was not pricked to anxiety by some other feeling. My heart did sink at her suggestion, I don't know whether through selfishness or something better. I felt that I was beginning to yield before her evident purpose, but my answer was evasive. I said I did not see how I could promise anything.

She waved that impatiently aside. I recall the motion of her hand, as though she could literally brush such things away. She came a step nearer to me, the light shone full in her face, on the waves of her hair, on her slightly-parted lips, and glinted and flashed back from her eyes. For half a minute she stood so looking at me, and I was conscious of the grip of her hand on the back of a chair, and of the rise and fall of her breast as she breathed.

'You know him! You have seen him?' she queried in a low, deliberate voice.

'Yes,' I answered.

'You know he is disfigured?'

I could barely answer again, 'Yes.'

'When I tell you, then, that *I am the cause of*

that, will you deny me the privilege of any reparation I can make?

The words met me like a blow in the face. I was crushed! God knows what I would have done but that I saw the flame of colour that leapt into her face, and the trembling and quivering of her lips. I gasped out:

‘No, no! I will do it.’

She seemed so upset, so unsteady, that I made a half-step towards her, but she motioned me back, saying:

‘Go now—go! Please go, and leave me.’

A hundred thoughts were surging and churning in my head as I drove down the long, long valley of the Lampogwana River that night. I felt as miserable as man need feel. Everything seemed wrong—most of it horribly so—but turn as I might from one phase to another, the one thing always recurred, pervading, dominating everything: ‘I am the cause of that.’ The words rang in my ears again and again, and the horrible significance shamed me afresh each time, always to be answered by something which said, ‘No, I will believe! I will trust!’

Poor Cassidy was very, very bad when I reached him, and his lucid intervals were far between. His appearance was terrible, the ghastly pallor adding, as I had thought nothing could add, to

the face from which one eye, the nose, half the upper lip, and portion of one cheek, were gone. It was terrible—truly terrible !

There is no need to dwell on it all. I got him in and he lived for five days. Fever didn't kill him ; it couldn't have ; he was too strong and too stout-hearted. It was hæmorrhage resulting from some old injury received in an accident years before. The doctor told me that when the artery had gone Cassidy knew he would be dead in a few minutes. He begged the doctor to leave him, and turning to Mrs. Mallandane, asked her to cover his face with a handkerchief, and to hold his hand. He said to her, ' God bless you, Molly ! Good-bye ! ' and died like the man he was.

Mrs. Chauncey was the real friend in that time of need. It was she who had supplied everything that an invalid could want ; it was she who stayed all that long night through with Mrs. Mallandane, who went with her to the funeral and stood by her, and stayed with her when all was over.

The day after the funeral I sat in my office dazed and stupefied with worrying and puzzling over many things in connection with these people whose affairs and whose lives seemed to have become suddenly entangled with mine. Not the least of my worries was the document before me, which was Cassidy's will : ' I give everything

absolutely to Mary Mallandane,' and nominating me as his executor.

I dreaded the first interview—so much so, in fact, that I got Mrs. Chauncey to go with me. The tall black figure and the excessive pallor of her face smote very hard on my heart, but I was relieved by the presence of little Molly, who stuck to me from the time I entered the room until Mrs. Mallandane sent her away. I had already stated my object in calling when she sent Molly out, and I was about to resume, when she asked me abruptly :

'Do you know anything of his past life?'

'Nothing whatever,' I said.

'Nor of mine?'

'No, Mrs. Mallandane.'

She laid a hand on one of Mrs. Chauncey's, who was sitting near, and said gravely :

'You, who have been my friend, know nothing either. It is right that you should—that you both should.'

We were sitting at a table in the parlour ; the writing materials were lying on it ready for my use. The two ladies sat close together opposite me.

I cannot give Mrs. Mallandane's own words, nor can I convey her manner when telling us the story of her life. Sometimes she would talk in a subdued monotone, telling, with an absence of

feeling that was infinitely pathetic, of their troubles. Sometimes she would be roused to a pitch of feeling that left her voice but a husky whisper. Once—just once—I fancied there was the faintest trace of contempt in her tone when referring to—well, not to Cassidy. If it was so, it was at any rate instantly lost in a flow of pity.

This is substantially what she told us. Mallandane and Cassidy had owned claims in the Kimberley or one of the neighbouring mines, and were in fact partners doing business together. They were both young Irishmen, and had come out on the same boat some years before—which were considered sufficient reasons for their entering into partnership. Cassidy was the one with the brains, money, and work; and, from what I gathered, there seems to have been no reason, except Cassidy's good-nature, for the alliance with Mallandane at all. However, they prospered, and Mallandane went home for a trip, and married and brought his wife back to Kimberley.

For a couple of years all went well—in fact, until the firm began to lose money. Reverses only stimulated Cassidy to harder work and more cheery, indomitable effort. You couldn't beat him. But it was different with Mallandane. All his wife said was that he lost heart; used to go away day after day and night after night to

where he could forget his worries—drinking and gambling. When Cassidy first recognised that his partner was falling, he gave up his own house, suggesting that it would be doing him (Cassidy) a good turn if they would let him board with them. He gave himself up to a splendid effort to save his partner from ruin.

For a time it answered, but Mallandane, besides being naturally unstable, must have been bitten by drink, for he broke out again, and nothing either wife or friend could do could save him. There came scenes—brutality and insult to the wife, ingratitude and insult to the friend. She told us nothing except in pity and forgiveness of her dead husband—nothing, that is, that justice to Cassidy did not require; but it is not difficult to imagine what happened, and, indeed, I know now that it was only the pitiful helplessness of the wife and child, and the knowledge that his presence was food, and even life, to them, that held Cassidy to his partner; for in his fits of drunkenness Mallandane would have murdered both wife and child.

Cassidy worked from four in the morning until eight at night, and at times through the day he would run up from the claims to the house, to see that all was well. All he made went to keep the house going, and it was given as a matter of

course. No complaint was made, although Mallandane now ceased even the pretence of work and spent the whole day in the canteens.

But the end came when least expected. Mallandane, when he did come home at all, did not get up until hours after Cassidy was at work. He used to awake drunk and dazed, and wander off at once, unshaven, dirty and half dressed, to the nearest canteen.

One morning, however, there was a change. He was gray-faced, puffy and sodden, it is true, but he fussed about the house briskly, talking to himself. He got out a clean moleskin suit, and told the servant that he could not wait for breakfast, as he had to fire the eight o'clock shots, and the holes were all charged and waiting for him.

Within a quarter of an hour Cassidy had come up for breakfast. Mrs. Mallandane met him on the way and told him what the servant had in the meantime told her; and Cassidy raced back to stop his delirious partner. With a madman's cunning and instinct he had slipped down the mine from ledge to ledge and along dangerous slopes until he reached the lowest workings, and when Cassidy, after some delay in getting a bucket on the hauling-gear to go down in, reached the spot, the boys told him that Mallandane 'umtagati' (bewitched) had gone into the

drive to fire the charges, and would let no one go near him.

Cassidy looked at the black mouth of the drive. He did not think of the worthless sodden wretch who had gone in there. He recalled the partner of years, the mate of good times and bad, and he recalled, too, the horror-stricken look on the face of the woman he had just left. He dashed in to the sound of a warning yell from every man in the mine.

When occasion calls there is still no lack of brave men. Heroes spring into recognition from every grade of life, from every class of material; and while the half-dozen explosions still echoed and reverberated in the circle of the mine, there were men dashing in to the rescue at the imminent risk of their lives, heedless of the deadly fumes and of possible unexploded charges.

'The firm' lay in one heap—Cassidy on his back, Mallandane athwart him. To the only person to whom he ever spoke of the affair, Cassidy said: 'He was stooping to light another fuse when I reached him. I gripped both arms round him as he turned on me and tried to carry him out. It was a wrestling match, for he showed fight. My face was over his one shoulder, as his was over mine; but mine was turned towards the shots.'

A piece of the rock that shattered poor Cassidy's face entered the back of his partner's head, and *he* never stirred again.

Cassidy lay for months in hospital, bandaged, blindfolded, barely alive; and the woman he had stood by, stood by him. When he was able to walk about, it was on her arm he leaned. When he was fit to leave, it was to her house he went to be tended for months longer. He never complained nor lost heart, although he knew that one eye was gone and thought he would lose the other.

Some seven or eight months had passed, and he was getting well and strong—he was healing. She had always dreaded the effect of the first sight of himself, and for this reason had removed the mirrors from the rooms he frequented; but one day, when she had been out for a while, she found him lying on the sofa, the bandage off his eyes, and a hand-glass dropped on the carpet close by. It was the only time he had fainted or in any way given in.

Later in the evening he said :

'I don't really mind so much now that I know. It was the suspense that worried me.' And, after a pause, he added in a voice that seemed to let you *hear* his heart lifting : 'I'll be able to tackle work again soon, and will be all right again.'

‘That was the only allusion,’ Mrs. Mallandane said, ‘that he ever made to his disfigurement. I believe it was out of delicacy and consideration for my feelings that he never spoke about it. You could not even see that he ever thought of it, for he had that splendid manliness that doesn’t know what self-consciousness means.

‘Only one thing showed unmistakably that he did feel it, and that he felt he was dead to all the promise of his past. You must have remarked his manner of speech?’ she observed, turning to me. ‘He spoke like a working man. *That* was his only shield. He deliberately sank himself to that level to be spared the prominence and pity that would be given him as a gentleman. It was his hope to pass through life unnoticed. With me, and with me only, he had no disguise, no concealment, no reserve!’

He used always to talk of their affairs as one and the same, in order to keep up the illusion he had encouraged in her from the beginning when he had told her very seriously that ‘it would never do to liquidate the firm’s business now. It would mean sacrificing *everything*.’ She agreed to do whatever he thought right; and at the end of every month he used to hand to her, scrupulously accounted for, a sum greater or less, according to ‘the firm’s profits for the month.’

From his own 'profits' he always managed to have something—no matter how little—to spend on Molly, who was his pet and companion always. The proceeds of the sale of house and furniture—when they had to be given up—were handed over to Mrs. Mallandane 'for a stand-by,' and she went into lodgings because she 'would feel more comfortable and have more time to give to Molly there'—not because he was watchful over her good name and would not stay in the house once he was well enough to walk alone.

When Cassidy extended the firm's 'business'—that is to say, went to the Cape Colony, Natal, and Transvaal, in search of contracts on the various railway lines—he continued to remit the 'profits' with the most elaborate statements, which Mrs. Mallandane, as a partner, felt bound to study, and, as a woman, often wept over in despair.

This had gone on for several years, and it was not until after she had gone to Barberton, 'to be near the business,' that something had made her suspicious that the joint capital locked up in the business was all a generous imposition.

'It only needed the suggestion,' said Mrs. Mallandane, 'to show me an appalling chain of evidence—evidence of his generosity and patient tactful help—evidence of my blind content and

foolishness. I spoke to him when next he came in. He could see that I knew, and he simply said that "Ralph would have done the same for him." God forgive me! He gave up his life to me! He suffered living death for me! He lived when it would have been a million mercies to have died. He bore all that man could bear and never grudged it. And I—I cut his heart in two when I refused his help! I know it! I wished I had died before I got the look he gave me when I told him that I could not take his help. Month after month went by and he did not come to me—he, who used to be here on the first day of every month. But I knew he was near. Twice I saw him passing slowly by at night when he had come to watch over us. The first time I was too surprised to call. The second time I called him and he came to me. He stayed until late that evening; and he went away happy again because we registered our second compact: that if we (Molly and I) were ever in real need I would send for him; that if he were sick or in need of friends the privilege of friends should be ours.'

She stopped for quite a while, and when she spoke again her voice trembled and it was all she could do to control it so that she could speak at all. I could not bear to look in her face.

'You two have seen him,' she said, and, turning to me, added, 'You have known him. I have liked to tell you all about him; and I like to tell you now that I know he loved me—that I think it is the greatest honour a woman can have to be loved by such a man: for not any woman that I have ever known, or heard of, or read of, was good enough for him!'

She left the room for a moment, and re-turning laid something on the table before us, saying:

'You remember him as you saw him. Try—try to think of him as I do—like *this!* It is all you can do for the memory of a good and honourable man.'

It was the photograph I had seen in her book the day I left to bring him in.

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All those things happened some years ago.

Out on the grass there, in front of my window, there is a little girl trying to dissuade a very small boy from pulling the black ear off an old white bulldog; but the fat little fists keep their grip, and as he staggers under the effort the little chap says:

'Molly mus' pull Dan'l Conn'l olla ear! *Make him det up!*

Watching them with the brightest, merriest smile in the world, and looking years younger than when I first saw her, Mrs.—

But if I mentioned her name this would not be an anonymous story.

THE POOL.

EVERYONE remembers the rush to De Kaap some years ago. How everyone said that everyone else would make fortunes in half no time, and the country would be saved! Well, my brother Jim and I thought we would like to make fortunes too; so we packed our boxes, donned flannel shirts, felt hats and moleskin trousers, with a revolver each carelessly slung at our sides, and started. We intended to dig for about a year or so, and then sell out and live on the interest of our money—£30,000 each would do. It was all cut and dried. I often almost wished it wasn't so certain, as now one hadn't a chance of coming back suddenly and *surprising* the loved ones at home with the news of a grand fortune.

Full of excitement (certainties notwithstanding) we went down to Kent's Forwarding Store, and there met Mr. Harding, whose waggons were loaded

for the gold-fields. This was our chance, and we took it.

On November 10, 1883, we crossed Little Sunday's River and outspanned at the foot of Knight's Cutting. The day was close and sultry, and Harding thought it best to lie by until the cool of the evening before attempting the hill. It wasn't much of a cool evening we got after all; except that we had not the scorching rays of the sun beating down upon us, it was no cooler at 10 p.m. than at mid-day. We were outspanned above the cutting, and the oppressive heat of the day and the sultriness of the evening seemed to have told on our party, and we were all squatted about on the long soft grass, smoking or thinking. Besides my brother and myself there were two young Scotchmen (just out from home) and a little Frenchman. He was a general favourite on account of his inexhaustible good-nature and unflagging high spirits.

We were, as I have said, stretched out on the grass smoking in silence, watching the puffs and rings of smoke melt quietly away, so still was the air. How long we had lain thus I don't know, but I was the first to break the silence by exclaiming:

'What a grand night for a bathe!'

There was no reply to this for some seconds, and then Jim gave an apathetic grunt in courteous

recognition of the fact that I had spoken. I subsided again, and there was another long silence—evidently no one wanted to talk; but I had become restless and fidgety under the heat and stillness, and presently I returned to the charge.

‘Who’s for a bathe?’ I asked.

Someone grunted out something about ‘no place.’

‘Oh yes, there is,’ said I, glad of even so much encouragement; and then, turning to Harding, I said:

‘I hear the water in the kloof. There is a place, isn’t there?’

‘Yes,’ he answered slowly, ‘there is *one* place, but you wouldn’t care to dip there. . . . It’s the Murderer’s Pool.’

‘The what?’ we asked in a breath.

‘The Murderer’s Pool,’ he repeated with such slow seriousness that we at once became interested—the name sent an odd tingle through one. I was already all attention, and during the pause that followed the others closed around and settled themselves to hear the yarn. When he had tantalized us enough with his provoking slowness, Harding began:

‘About this time last year—— By-the-by, what is the date?’ he asked, breaking off.

‘The tenth!’ exclaimed two or three together.

'By Jove! it's the very day. Yes, that's queer. This very day last year I was outspanned on this spot, as we are now. I had a lady and gentleman with me as passengers that trip. They were pleasant, accommodating people, and gave us no trouble at all; they used to spend all their time botanizing and sketching. On this afternoon Mrs. Allan went down to the ravine below to sketch some peculiar bit of rock scenery. I think all ladies sketch when they travel, some more and some less. But Mrs. Allan could sketch and paint really well, and often went off alone short distances while her husband stayed to chat with me. She had been gone about twenty minutes when we were startled by a most awful piercing shriek—another, another, and another—and then all was still again. Before the first had died away Allan and I were running at full speed towards where we judged the shrieks to have come from. Fortunately we were right. Down there, a bit to the right, we came upon a fair-sized pool, on the surface of which Mrs. Allan was still floating. In a few seconds we had her out and were trying restoratives; and on detecting signs of returning life we carried her up to the waggon. When she became conscious she started up with oh! such a look of horror and fright. I'll never forget it! Seeing her husband, however, and

holding his hand, she became calm again, and told us all about it.

'It seems she had been sitting by the side of the stream sketching the pool and the great perpendicular cliff rising out of it. The sunlight was playing on the water, silvering every ripple, and bringing out every detail of the rocks and foliage above. Feathery mosses festooned from cliff to cliff; maidenhair ferns clustered in every nook and crevice; the drops on every leaf and tendril glistened in the setting sun like a thousand diamonds. That's what she told us.'

'She sat a few minutes before beginning, watching the varying shades and hues, when, glancing idly into the water, she saw deep, deep down, a sight that horrified her.

'On the rocks at the bottom of the pool lay the body of a gigantic Kaffir, his throat cut from ear to ear, and the white teeth gleaming and grinning at her.'

'Instinctively she screamed and ran, and in trying to pass along the narrow ledge she slipped and fell into the water. Had her clothes not buoyed her up she would have been drowned, as when the cold water closed round her it seemed like the clasp of death, and she lost consciousness.'

'Well, what about the nigger?' I asked, for

Harding had stopped with the air of one whose tale was told.

‘Oh, he was dead right enough—throat cut and assegai through the heart. A fight, I expect.’

‘What did you do?’ I asked.

‘Raked him out and planted him up here somewhere. Let’s see—yes, that’s the place’—indicating the pile of stones my brother was sitting on.

Jim got up hurriedly; perhaps, as he said, he wanted to look at the place. Yet there was a general laugh at him.

‘Did you think he had you, Jim?’ I asked innocently.

‘Don’t you gas, old chap! How about that bathe you were so bent on?’

Merciful heavens! The words fell like a bucket of ice-water on me. I made a ghastly attempt at a laugh, but it was a failure—an utter failure—and of course brought all the others down on me at once.

‘The nigger seems to have taken all the bathe out of you, old man,’ said one.

‘Not at all!’ I answered loftily. ‘It would take more than that to frighten *me*.’

Now, why on earth didn’t I hold my tongue and let the remark pass? I must needs make an ass of myself by bravado, and now I was in for it. There

was a perfect chorus of, 'Go it, old man!' 'Now, isn't that *real* pluck?' 'Six to four on the nigger!' 'I pet fife pound you not swim agross and dife two times.' This last came from the little French demon, and, being applauded by the company, I took up the bet. The fact is I was nettled by the chaff, and in the heat of the moment did what I regretted a minute later.

As I rose to get my towel I said with cutting sarcasm :

'I don't care about the bet, but I'll just show you that *everyone* isn't afraid of his own shadow; though,' I added forgetfully, 'it's rather an unreasonable time to bathe.'

Here Frenchy struck a stage attitude, and said innocently :

'Ah ! vat a night foor ze bade !'

The shout of laughter that greeted this sally was more than enough to decide me, and I went off in search of a towel.

Harding, I could see, did not like the idea, and tried to persuade me to give it up; but that was out of the question.

'Mind,' said he, 'I'm no believer in ghosts; yet,' he added, with rather a forced laugh, 'this is the anniversary, and you know it's uncanny.'

I quite agreed with him, but dared not say so, and I pretended to laugh it off. I was ready in a

few moments, and then a rather happy idea, as I thought, struck me, and I called out :

‘Who’s coming to see that I win my bet?’

‘Oh, we know we can trust you, old chap!’ said Jim with exaggerated politeness. ‘It’d be a pity, you know, to outnumber the ghost.’

‘Very well; it’s all the same to me. Good-bye! Two dives and a swim across—is that it?’

‘Yes, and look out for the nigger!’

‘Mind you fish him up!’

‘Watch his teeth, Jack!’

‘Feel for his throat, you know!’

This latter exclamation came from Jim; it was yelled out as I disappeared down the slope. Jim had not forgotten the incident of the grave, evidently.

I had a half-moon to go by, and a ghostly sort of light it shed. Everything seemed more shadowy and fantastic than usual. Besides this, I had not gone a hundred yards from the waggons before every sound was stilled; not the faintest whisper stirred the air. The crunching of my heavy boots on the gravel was echoed across the creek, and every step grated on my nerves and went like a sword-stab through me.

However, I walked along briskly until the descent became more steep and I was obliged to go more carefully. Down I went, step by step, lower and lower, till I felt the light grow dimmer

and dimmer, and then quite suddenly I stepped into gloom and darkness.

This startled me. The suddenness of the change made me shiver a bit and fancy it was cold ; but it couldn't have been that, for a moment later the chill had gone and the air was close and sultry. It must have been something else. Still I went down, down, down, along the winding path, and the further I went the more intense seemed the stillness and the deeper the gloom.

Once I stood still to listen ; there was not a stir or sound save the trickling of the water below. My heart began to beat rather fast, and my breath seemed heavy. What was it ? Surely, I thought, it is not fright ? I tried to whistle now as I strode along, but the death-like silence mocked me and choked the breath in my throat.

At last I reached the stream. The path ran along the side of the water among the rocks and ferns. I looked for the pool, but could not see a sign of it. Still I followed the path until it wound along a very narrow ledge of rock.

I was so engrossed picking my steps along there that, when I had got round and saw the pool lying black and silent at my feet, I fairly staggered back with the shock. There was no mistaking the place. The pool was surrounded by high rocks ; on the opposite side they ran up quite perpendicularly to

a good height. Nowhere, except the ledge at my feet, would a man have been able to get out of the water alone. The black surface of the water was as smooth as glass ; not a ripple or bubble or straw broke its awful monotony.

It fascinated me ; but it was a ghostly spot. I don't know how long I stood there watching it. It seemed hours. A sickening feeling had crept over me, and I *knew I was afraid*.

I looked all round, but there was nothing to break the horrid spell. Behind me there was a face of rock twenty feet high with ferns and creepers falling from every crevice. But it looked black, too. I turned silently again towards the water, almost hoping to see something there ; but there was still the same unbroken surface, the same oppressive deadly silence as before. What was the use of delaying ? It had to be done ; so I might as well face it at once. I own I was frightened. I would have lost the bet with pleasure, but to stand the laughter, chaff, and jeers of the others ! No ! that I could never do. My mind was made up to it, so I threw off my clothes quickly and came up to the water's edge. I walked out on the one low ledge and looked down. I was trembling then, I know.

I tried to think it was cold, but I *knew* it was not that. I stooped low down to search the very

depths of the pool, but I could see nothing; all was uniformly dark. And yet—good God! what was that? Right down at the bottom lay a long black object. With starting eyes I looked again. It was only a rock. I drew back a pace and sat down. The perspiration was in beads on my forehead. I shook in every limb; sick and faint, my breath went and came in the merest whispers. So I sat for a minute or two with my head resting on my hands, and then the thought struck me, ‘What if the others are watching me above?’

I jumped up to make a running plunge of it, but, somehow, the run slackened into a walk, and the walk ended in a pause near the ledge, and there I stood to have another look into the dark, still pool.

Suddenly there was a rustling behind me. I jumped round, tingling, quivering all over, and a pebble rolled at my feet from the rocks above. I called out in a shaky voice, ‘Now then, you chaps! none of that; I can see you.’ But really I could see nothing, and the echo of my voice had such a weird, awful sound that I began to lose my head altogether. There was no use now pretending that I was not frightened, for I was. My nerves were completely unstrung, my head was splitting, and my legs could hardly bear me. I preferred to face any ridicule rather than endure this for another

minute, and I commenced dressing. Then I pictured to myself Jim's grinning face, Frenchy's pantomime of the whole affair, Harding's quiet smile, and the chaff and laughter of them all, and I paused. A sudden rush, a plunge and souse, and I was in. Breathless and gasping I struck out, only twenty yards across; madly I swam. The cold water made my flesh creep. On and on, faster and faster; would I never reach it? At last I touched the rocks and turned to come back. Then all their chaff recurred to me. Every stroke seemed to hiss the words at me, 'Feel for his throat! Feel for his throat!' I fancied the dead nigger was on me, and every moment expected to feel his hand on my shoulder. On I sped, faster and faster, mad with the dread of being entangled by the legs and pulled down—I swam for life. When I scrambled on the ledge I felt I was *saved!* Then all at once I began to feel my body tingling with a most exhilarating sense of relief after an absurd fright, a sense of power restored, of self-respect and triumph and an insane desire to laugh. I did laugh, but the sepulchral echoes of my hilarious cackle rather chilled me, and I began to dress.

Then for the first time occurred to me the conditions of the bet: 'Two dives and a swim across.' Now, this would have been quite natural in ordinary

pools—a plunge, a scramble on the opposite bank, another plunge, and back. But here, with the precipitous face of rock opposite, it meant *two* swims across and *two dives* from the same spot. But I did not mind; in fact, I was enjoying it now, and I thought with a glow of pride how I would rub it into Jim about fishing up his darned old nigger with the cut throat.

I walked to the edge smiling.

‘Yes, my boy,’ I murmured, ‘I’ll fish you up if you’re there, or a fistfull of gravel for Jim and Frenchy—little devil! It’ll be change for his fiver;’ and I chuckled at my joke.

I drew a long breath and dropped quietly into the water, head first; down, down, down—gently, softly. A couple of easy strokes and I glided along the bottom. Then something touched me. God in heaven! how it all burst on me at once! I felt four rigid fingers laid on my shoulder and drawn down my chest, the finger-nails scratching me. Instantly I made a grasp with both hands; my left fastened on the neck of a human body, and my right, just above, closed, and the *fingers met* through the ragged flesh of a gashed throat.

I tried to scream—the water choked me. I let go and swam on, and then up. I shot out of the water waist high, gasping and glaring wildly, and then soused under again. As I again came up I

dashed the water from my eyes. I saw the surface of the pool break, and a head rose slowly. Kind Heaven! *there were two!* Slowly the two bodies rose across the black margin where the shadow ceased, full in the moonlit portion of the pool—cold, clear and horrible in their ghastly nakedness. And as they rose the murderous wounds appeared. The dank hair hung over their foreheads; the glazed and sightless eyeballs were fixed with the vacant stare of death on *me*. One bore a terrible gash from temple to eye, and lower down the bluish red slit of an assegai on the left breast.

On the other was one wound only; but how awful! The throat was cut from ear to ear; the bluish lips of the great gash hung wide apart where my hand had torn them. I could even see the severed windpipe. The head was thrown slightly back, but the eyes glared down at me with an awful stony glare, while through the parted lips the teeth gleamed and grinned cold and bright as they caught the light of the moon. One glance—half an instant—showed me all this, and then, as the figures rose waist-high, I saw one arm rigid at right angles to the body from the elbow, and the stiff hand that had clawed me. For one instant they poised, balancing; then, bowing slowly over, they came down on the top of me.

Then indeed my brain seemed to go. I struggled

under them. I fought and shrieked; but I suppose the bubbles came up in silence. The dead stiff hand was laid on my head and pressed me down—down, down! Then the hand of death slipped, and I was free. Once I kicked them as I struggled to the surface, and gasping, frantic, mad, made for the bank. On, on, on! O God! would I never reach it? One more effort, a wrench, and I was out. Never a pause now. One bound, and I had passed the ledge; then up and up, past the cliffs, over the rocks, cut and bleeding, on I dashed as fast as mortal man ever raced. Up, up the stony path, till, with torn feet and shaking in every limb, I reached the waggon. There was an exclamation, a pause, and then a perfect yell of laughter. The laugh saved me; the heartless cruelty of it did what nothing else could have done—it roused my temper; but for that, I believe I should have gone mad.

Harding alone came forward anxiously towards me.

‘What’s the matter?’ he asked. ‘For God’s sake, what is it?’

The laugh had sobered me, and I answered quietly that it was nothing much—just a thing I would like him to see down at the pool. There were a score of questions in anxious and half-apologetic tones, for they soon realized that some-

thing was wrong ; but I answered nothing, and so they followed me in silence, and there, on the oily, unbroken surface of the silent pool, floated in grim relief the two bodies. We pulled them out and found the corpses lashed together. At the end of the rope was an empty loop, the stone out of which I must in my struggle have dislodged. Close to the nigger we laid them, with another pile of stones to mark the spot ; but who they were and where they came from none of us ever knew for certain.

The week before this two lucky diggers had passed through Newcastle from the fields, going home. Four years have now passed, letters have come, friends have inquired, but there is no news of them, and I think, poor chaps ! they must have ' gone home ' by another route.

TWO CHRISTMAS DAYS.

It was Christmas Day at New Rush—the Christmas of '73. No merry peals rang out to celebrate the occasion—there were no bells. The streets were not decorated with festoons or bunting—there were no streets to decorate. The usual lot of church-goers: men in broadcloth, women in gay colours, children neat and spotless, Prayer-book in hand—these were not the features of the day. There was no broadcloth, there were no women, there was no church—only long straggling rows of white tents, only a lot of holes of various depths and a lot of heaps of débris, only a lot of men in flannel-shirts and moleskins, broad brimmed hats and thick boots, the bronzed, bearded, hardy pioneers of the Diamond Fields. They had no church, but they could celebrate Christmas as well as those who had. There was a function which appealed to their feelings as Britishers—a popular, time-honoured function, whose necessary auxiliaries

were at hand. They could not go to church, but they *could* get drunk ; and they did.

All through the day the songs and cries and curses of the celebrants bore ample testimony to their devotion. The canvas canteens were crowded, and the bare spaces around them were strewn with empty bottles and victims of injudicious zeal. Within and without the one never-ending topic was diamonds ; diggers backed their finds for weight or colour, shape, or number. Fortunes were held in clumsy, grog-shaken hands, and shown round as 'last week's finds' ; all was clamour, festivity, and drink.

And this was Christmas Day ! And the same sun that blazed down so fiercely on the drinking, and scorched the unconscious upturned faces of the drunk, shone softly on the dark hedges and snow-clad meadows of old England. It saw the fighting and drinking of a turbulent New World and the peace and quietness of a respectable Old one. It saw the adventurers seeking fortune and the homes for which they worked. And across six thousand miles of land and ocean it looked down alike on the men who waste or struggle and the women who wait and pray.

In a fly-tent, away from the noisy portion of the camp, sat John Hardy—sober. Out of sorts, out of heart, and dead out of luck, he had neither the

means nor the inclination to get drunk. Ten months on the fields had about done for him. Other men came with nothing; they had made fortunes and left. He came with a few hundreds, the proceeds of the sale of his farm and stock. He had sacrificed everything to come to this El Dorado—and now! Now the farm was gone and the money too. Bit by bit it had slipped away. The last thing to go was the cart and mule; he had managed to keep those till yesterday, but the grub score had to be met—one must live, you know—and the old mule and cart went the way of the rest. Last night he had changed his last fiver and paid his boys. Now all he had in the world was a bit of ground (thirty by thirty), a few old picks and shovels, two blankets, and a revolver.

All through the day he had heard the noise of shouting and singing, but it awoke no responsive chord. Every burst of merriment jarred on him. The first man he had met had smilingly wished him a merry Christmas. Great Heaven! was the man a fool, or was it a devil jeering at him? Merry! Ay, with black ruin on him, his hopes blasted and his chances gone. And this was Christmas, when human beings were gasping and blistering between the parched plain and the blue sky, where a fierce relentless sun blazed down

upon them. Everything mocked him. Truly, when a man is down, trample on him! When it comes to this, that his own feelings are a hell to him, the more material things matter little. There is a limit to mental as well as physical pain; the mind becomes numb and the feelings spent. But Hardy had not yet come to this, and he felt acutely the sarcasm on his own fate that this Christmas Day presented.

At sunset he went out to take a last look at the hole that had swallowed up his all. Indeed, it was a poor exchange for the grand old farm and the cattle and sheep and horses, and, above all, the home that his dead wife had made a heaven of for the five years of their married life. For himself he cared little, but his little girl—her child!—whom he had left behind with friends! In his mad speculation he had robbed her—his darling, the one loving memento of his dead wife! Well, to-morrow at sunrise he would take the £15 for the claim, and hire himself out as a miner to the new owner.

The setting sun glinted over the workings and shed its golden light on the mine, ribbed out by roads and divisions, all in little squares like the specimen-cases in museums. There were hundreds of those squares, and his was *one*, and a worthless one at that. Yes, he would take the £15, and

lucky to get it, for every man in camp knew he had not found a stone worth mentioning.

For over two hours he sat in the little low tent ; a dusty lantern dangled from the ridge-pole and shed its weak, uncertain light around. His supper he had forgotten, and he sat at the rough packing-case table, his forehead resting on his arms, inwardly and silently cursing his luck and himself and the place with the bitterest curses his mind could frame. A revolver lay on the table before him—a grim sort of companion for a ruined man.

Presently a step came along the path—the step of one walking cautiously to avoid the scores of tent-lines and pegs that were stretched and stuck in every direction. As the step came closer Hardy looked up, and a head was thrust through the flap of the tent.

‘I was taking Jack Evans home and he asked me to give you this. It came yesterday, but he’s been spreeing and forgot it.’

The man stepped in and tendered a square envelope, and stood silent.

‘Won’t you sit?’ asked Hardy, scarcely glancing at him as he pushed an empty gin-case forward.

‘Well, just a minute, thanks.’

The young fellow sat down and watched Hardy in silence. The latter took the letter mechanically, but brightened up instantly as he saw the writing.

Gently and carefully he opened it, and from the envelope came a cheap Christmas card of flowers done in flaming colours—common and garish. That was all! No letter, nothing else. On the back was written, 'For dear Father, from his little girl, Gracie.'

For a moment Hardy looked at it steadily, and then the hard sunburnt face softened, the mouth twitched once or twice, and two tears trickled slowly down and dropped on the card. The man's head was lowered slowly until it rested on his arms again, and for a couple of minutes there was silence in the tent. The bitterness, the loneliness, the desolation were gone from his heart. What no reverses could bring about, and what no philosophy could resist, was done by a cheap, tawdry Christmas card sent by a child.

Presently he looked up and reached a small framed photograph from above his bed.

'It is from my little girl,' he said, and handed the card and photograph to the youngster.

The boy looked at them. The photograph was that of a child of about eight, with a rather pleasant expression and large, wondering, honest-looking eyes. He looked at it closely for a minute or so, and nodding kindly once or twice, handed it back without a word. As Hardy turned to replace the photograph the youngster leant forward

quickly, took up the revolver, and slipped it into his pocket.

He had been gone ten minutes or so, when again a step came along; the flap was lifted, and without a word the youngster re-entered, drew the gin-case up opposite Hardy, and took a long steady look at him. To Hardy's 'Hallo! what's up?' he returned no direct answer, but his eyes, which before had borne a calm, uninterested look, now shone with an eager brilliancy that could not fail to attract attention. His olive-brown face was pale, almost white now, and when he did speak it was, though slowly, with evident excitement, and he coughed once or twice as if feeling a dryness in the throat.

'The chaps say you are broke,' he said.

'Dead broke!' Hardy replied wonderingly.

'Have you anything left?'

'Nothing—absolutely nothing!'

'Where's your claim?'

'Going to-morrow!'

The youngster shook his head and smiled faintly. He was so evidently in earnest that Hardy submitted in simple wonder to the cross-examination.

'Have you found any stones?'

'Not five pounds' worth in ten months!'

'Where are your boys?'

'Gone. I paid them off yesterday.'

‘No, they’re *not* gone. Look here,’ he added more quickly, ‘when I was here before I took your revolver. You see, it looked to me as if you meant using it. Here it is. You can use it now on someone else.’ The youngster leant forward and spoke lower and faster. ‘When I left you I walked along the old path a bit, but my sight was spoilt by the candle here and I got off the track. I stood for a minute, and then heard some Kaffirs talking, and I went towards the sound. I called to them, but they didn’t hear me; and I was walking up closer when I caught something that made me listen all I knew. I heard more and crept closer. I got quite close up and looked through the grass. There were five boys sitting round a stump of lighted candle; there was a bit of black cloth before them, and they *were counting diamonds!* There was a mustard-tin full. I crept back about twenty yards and called out. The light was blown out at once, and when I called again one boy came out. I asked him who was his baas, and he brought me to your hut.’

Hardy sat dazed for a moment. Mechanically his hand closed on the revolver that was placed in it, and then, rising, he followed the lantern which the youngster had taken.

They entered the hut and caught the boys in the act of dividing the spoil. They found the mustard-

tin full, and on each of the Kaffirs a private supply hidden there from his mates.

John Hardy slept that night as those sleep who have borne their burden and have reached the place of rest. And he saw a picture in his dreams. The canvas tent was a palace of white marble, and as he lay there things of beauty were strewn around him ; but, surpassing all these, there hung in mid-air before him a wreath of bright and many-coloured flowers, more lovely than any he had ever seen ; and within its circle was the face of a child, and above it all there was a line of little crooked writing, and the letters, which stood out in shining gold, were, ' For dear Father, from his loving little girl, Gracie.' That was John Hardy's Christmas dream.

* * * * *

In 1885 New Rush and Colesburg Kopje were names well-nigh forgotten, and there reigned in their stead Kimberley and its neighbouring camps. In proportion as the tented camp had grown into a great city, in proportion as the puny diggings had become a mighty mine, in like proportion had men and things altered ; and even so had John Hardy thriven and prospered. One stroke of luck had placed his foot on the first rung of Fortune's ladder, and a cool shrewd head had done the rest. Hardy the digger, in his little canvas tent, was no

more, and in his place stood John Hardy, Esq., capitalist, speculator, director of companies, etc. But the change, after all, was no change at all: the man was the same, and the very traits which, with his fellow-diggers, had stamped him as a white man, now won him the respect of a different class. Calm and self-contained, straightforward and incorruptible, he was as popular as such men can be. In one particular especially was he unchanged. His 'little girl' was still his 'little girl,' in spite of the fact that she was now over twenty. During ten years he had not lost sight of her for a week, and in all the world he had not one thought, one wish, one desire, that had not for its aim her happiness and pleasure. On the banks of the Vaal River he had made his home. It was an old farm, with great, big old trees and shady walks and green hedges, and there was an orange-grove that ran down to the river-side, and a boat on the water, where one could glide about breathing the breath of the orange-blossoms. Here Hardy spent nearly all his time, perfectly happy and contented in the society of his 'little girl.'

But even so there were crumpled rose-leaves in John Hardy's bed. The first was the thought that some day she, his child, would love someone else, and he who had idolized her all his life would be

superseded by a stranger of whose existence even she was not yet aware. The other was a now half-forgotten ungratified wish—the wish to find the youngster who had done him such service twelve years before. Every effort had failed, every expedient proved fruitless. Not knowing his name, having hardly noticed his appearance, what chance was there of finding him? He had but one guide. Leaning across the rough table in the weak uncertain light of the lantern that night, he had looked full and fair in the youngster's eyes, and he thought he would know them. If ever he got the chance of looking into them again, he would make no mistake. He remembered their colour, he remembered them dark and dormant when he brought in Grace's letter ; he recalled them again, lustrous and expressive, when he returned to the little hut, and could see them now, warming, quickening, brightening, till they flashed with excitement as he said, 'They were counting diamonds.' Every little incident of that night was burned into his memory, but of the general appearance of the boy he knew nothing. He had not seen his figure, standing or walking, except for an instant, and that when he was paying little heed. He had not seen his face, except in one position—full—and that so close as to miss the general impression. So many years had passed

without a sign or clue that Hardy had long given up all hope of discovering his friend, and, indeed, he seldom thought about him now. When the thought did recur to him it came more as a regret that he had not found him than as a hope that he would.

It was Christmas Eve, and John Hardy was going into camp to arrange matters so that he would be free from all business during the holidays and could spend his Christmas and New Year at home undisturbed. The cart and grays had already disappeared over the rise. Grace had waved her good-bye and wandered off into the garden. There were the cheerful sounds of life about which seem peculiar to a bright summer morning. The finks on the river, the canaries in the field, the robbers in the orchard, vied with each other in pouring out volumes of song, lavishly squandering the wealth of their repertoire, and, as a sort of accompaniment to them, came the distant and pleasantly monotonous cackling of hens. Every variety of time, key, and voice was there, and all in rivalry, yet forming together a drowsy harmonious symphony of peace. Miss Grace wandered on, pruning here, plucking there, now stooping to see where the violets hid their heads, now running her hand lightly through the clusters of roses. She made her way slowly towards the

house, looking fresh and bright in her white dress. The brown-holland apron was caught up and filled with bright azalea blossoms. The broad-brimmed garden-hat had slipped back, showing waves of golden hair; her lips and fingers, too, were stained with mulberries; at her breast was a bunch of violets to match the eyes above them. Altogether, she was not the least attractive part of the picture that summer morning, and probably she knew it. From the broad-flagged stoep of the house to the gravel sweep in front there were a dozen or so steps, and on the top step of all Miss Grace turned and stood. The gravel walks and big trees, the flower-garden wildly luxuriant, the orange-grove, and beyond them the reach of river, looking placid and blue in the morning sunlight, all made up a delightful picture; and she, with her snow-white dress and bright-coloured flowers, looked and enjoyed it. The gentle morning breeze, laden with the scent of flowers, played on her cheeks and just stirred the feathery golden hair on her temples as she stood there.

Presently someone, a stranger, rode up and, dismounting, led his horse to the foot of the steps, and, raising his hat slightly, asked for Mr. Hardy.

'He has just gone into Kimberley. He is not half an hour gone,' Miss Grace replied.

The man looked disappointed.