

“Hi!” exclaimed a broker, catching sight of him, “there’s Karl Hennig. I must get a word with him.”

The broker pushed his way through the throng, anxious to get the first advice before the other brokers surrounded him.

“I say, Hennig, how’s the market?”

“Look here,” he answered impressively, as he laid down his glass on the counter. “I have had some good advices from London. You just buy and wait.”

An advice which the early bird of a broker hastened to act upon; whether he caught the worm is a matter of mystery.

When the market looked weak it was a favourite strategy of Hennig to beg to sustain it by making offers to buy, which were sometimes accepted to his affected dismay. The man who invariably took advantage of this position was his intimate pal, one Stein, a sleepy-looking shareholder, but who saw more with his eyes closed than many men with both wide open. He was a bit of a sentimentalist, and was probably attracted to the handsome Hennig by his good looks, as well as his character, which displayed now and then romantic tendencies, a quality Stein possessed in no little degree; as he had proved by making

a decidedly romantic marriage, wherein he led to the altar a beautiful young nurse, who had brought him safely through the dangers of a serious crisis of fever. The gallant Stein proved himself as shrewd as he was romantic, in securing for life the service of his skilful nurse.

The great Crœsus was not a regular attendant on 'Change. He seldom operated himself, but issued instructions to his brokers, of whom he had many. The majority mistrusted him, and his brokers got little brokerage from the people. Crœsus did not easily commit himself to any marked opinion, but pretended on the whole to believe in better times.

As an operator he was not courageous ; and with the prejudice existing against everything connected with him, found it difficult to boom his stock.

When he had finished his champagne he beckoned to one of the brokers, a young fellow, looking as if he was fresh from college, or ought to have been still there.

“Can you get me any Consolidateds ?”

“What would you give?” answered the young broker.

“What do you buy at ?” queried Crœsus.

“There are buyers at thirty-nine shillings.”

“Have you any others at that price?”

“No.”

“Well, see what you can get them at,” said Cræsus, turning again to the bar.

As soon as the young broker had gone on his mission through the room, Cræsus faced about again and made a sign to another broker to come to him; this one was old and grizzled.

“Go,” said Cræsus, nodding in the direction of the former broker, “and sell that fellow some Consolidateds. Try to get thirty-nine shillings. But if you can’t, sell at thirty-eight.”

Cræsus was apparently engrossed in an argument with Stein and Hennig when the young broker returned.

“I think I can get you some Consolidateds,” he said, “at thirty-nine.”

“Take them,” answered Cræsus, “but ask me first.”

In a few minutes the young broker returned saying—

“Yes, I have five hundred at thirty-nine shillings.”

“Sorry,” answered Cræsus; “have just bought of another broker and am full now.”

Without a shade of disappointment in his face, the young broker turned and pushed again

through the crowd, where he was soon in the midst of a new transaction.

"I say," cried a seedy-looking broker to one of the best dressed men on 'Change, "will you sell me some Buffelsdorn on time, Mr Tyler?"

"Couldn't sell them," replied Tyler. "I'm buying myself. Who wants them?"

"Oh, Smith wants some very badly. You ought to let the poor fellow have some; he has been losing lately."

"Well, you see, I have none left; but I know of a man in the Colony who would sell that way, and just to oblige Smith would let him have three thousand at fifty-six shillings one month, but don't press it."

The seedy broker departed well satisfied, knowing as he did that there was not a kinder-hearted man on 'Change than the dandy Tyler, the dispenser of the most gorgeous balls and hospitality in all the Rand.

Another character of the Exchange was Daly; he dealt chiefly in Rietvliers.

"I'll buy Rietvliers." He was selling at fourteen shillings.

"I'll sell to arrive at fourteen shillings," cried Graham, one of the most persistent sellers in the room.

No answer.

“I’ll sell to arrive at thirteen shillings and ninepence,” persisted Graham.

“How many?” cried Daly.

“Five hundred.”

“I’ll take them,” cried Daly.

“I’ll still sell to arrive at thirteen and ninepence,” continued Graham, “I’ll sell at thirteen and sixpence—at thirteen and threepence.”

“Give it up,” said Daly to his broker. “We must wait for some time when Graham is not on ‘Change to do anything.”

As Daly turned away, his youthful countenance showing signs of disgusted annoyance, and prepared to leave the Exchange, an intention which was easier to conceive than to carry out, for his last words were drowned in a prolonged dismal howl mingled with shouts and laughter interspersed by cries of—

“A fight! a fight! I bet on the bull-terrier.”

He joined the crowd near the door, all of whom were eagerly watching the sight which, to all intents and purposes, was evidently of greater importance to them than the record of business promulgated in the momentous accounts of the secretary.

Daly speedily forgot the source of his annoyance, and his face lit up pleasantly as he espied

the scene of excitement ; which consisted in the determined if somewhat unequal combat of two dogs, the stronger of which, a powerful bull-terrier of good breed, had fastened his fangs in the neck of his antagonist, a much smaller animal, whose pluck availed him little against the superior powers of the terrier. The poor brute had given up all attempts at dislodging his formidable adversary, and was giving vent to a series of piteous howls, while from his poor little body, torn and mangled by the cruel teeth of the other, hung strips of skin. Bleeding horribly, he still struggled ; while the crowd of brokers and shareholders urged on the terrier to finish his half-dead victim.

“Cowardly brute,” insisted his unnatural master, a tall, bony Scotchman. “Fight him, Nero ! don’t give in !”

“For shame !” exclaimed a quiet looker-on. “Dog-fights are under no circumstances better than sheer brutality ; but to match an animal like yours against that powerful beast is nothing short of cowardly and disgraceful.”

But the sentiment was evidently not in harmony with the majority, who cheered and laughed themselves hoarse ; until at length the Scotchman, probably afraid of the pecuniary loss that the death of his dog might incur, began

to belabour the terrier with his heavy boot, and succeeded in rescuing his dog more dead than alive, in order, no doubt, that he might live to fight another day.

The gratified audience heaved a sigh of regret as they turned away, some to refresh their excited nerves at the bar, others to again busy themselves in the share market, while the secretary resumed his labours, his voice quite fresh and ringing as he called—

“Monte Christoes—any buyers?”

CHAPTER IX

A TYPICAL LADY OF THE BAR

“ I SAY there, Mrs Koker ! Mrs Koker ! where the devil are you ? ”

The speaker emphasised each exclamation by a vigorous whack with his riding-whip on the counter of the bar, in which demonstration he was seconded by his companion, a tall, extremely thin man, who lazily tapped on an empty tumbler near his elbow.

“ M-e-ses Ko-ker ! ” he drawled.

“ Y-e-s, ” answered a voice from the far interior of somewhere behind the bar-room. “ I ’ m coming. Wait a mo-ment. ”

“ Wait nothing ! Hurry up, I say. ”

This impatiently from the first speaker, a handsome saturnine type of the Boer.

A moment or two passed, while the young men sauntered to the door for the fifth or sixth time to look at their horses, standing in the early morning sunshine, pawing the red dust, munching their silver bits and flicking a fly now and then from their sides with their long glossy tails.

The men regarded with evident satisfaction their property held well in hand by two dirty, ragged Kafir boys.

“Don't pull the bridle so hard,” drawled the tall German.

“All right, Baas,” answered one of the Kafirs.

“Well, what is it to be?” said the lady of the bar, as she appeared behind the counter.

“A whisky split, if you please.”

“My stars, but you boys are early customers this morning. I don't believe you have been to bed at all.”

“Oh, yes we have, Mrs Koker,” replied the saturnine man, laughing at her chaff. “Steady, not too much soda.”

“There you are,” pushing the glasses towards them.

“Oh, that's good!” drawled the German, draining his glass.

“Have another?” said his companion.

“I don't mind.”

“Well, help yourselves,” said Mrs Koker, amiably pushing the bottle forward, “while I open the soda.”

When the glasses were filled Mrs Koker folded her arms on the counter and looked smilingly at the men. She was waiting for

confidences. It was the usual thing with men after their second whisky.

She felt curious to know what they were up to so early on this bright morning. A rendezvous, she thought, as her eyes caught sight of the horses now being led up and down the roadway by the attendant Kafirs.

Still she made no remark. It was her business to appear discreet. No questions asked was her invariable rule; a wise one indeed, whereby she learnt more than any cross-questioning could have revealed to her.

Now this was no ordinary bar-lady.

She was the mother of a small family, with a good-looking little husband, considerably her junior, more fit to be her son and the brother of her pretty daughter by a former husband, so people said.

She was also a very ladylike, pretty woman for her years. Bar-tending had not always been her occupation; and she made her customers feel her superiority over the frivolous beauty who presided at the Heights Hotel bar, within calling distance of her own domicile.

They had pretty much the same class of men who, when tired of the Hotel bar, would invariably take another glass at Mrs Koker's, if only to chat with her jolly little daughter.

That Mrs Koker knew how to keep undesirable admirers at a distance, was well known. This brought her a certain amount of respect. She doled out her amiability judiciously, always with a keen eye to the mercenary advantages to be gained thereby.

The two men on the other side of her counter might be turned to profitable account sooner or later, thought this practical little woman. Especially the handsome Boer, into whose debt her young husband had foolishly slipped one day at the races, when under the fly-blown enthusiasm of champagne. He borrowed a few hundred pounds of him; the Boer, equally elated by copious draughts of brandy and soda, and success in betting, forgot his usual caution in the matter of parting with the 'ready,' and let him have the money.

Now, this debt had been a thorn in Mrs Koker's bosom. She felt very sore about it. Times had begun to grow bad, and bad had grown worse; consequently Mrs Koker felt it would be a waste of money to pay the debt, provided the handsome Boer could be conciliated by a few harmless blandishments.

And the German? Well, he might be good for a jewelled bangle or diamond ring for her daughter Letty. Then, he bore a respectable

title, modestly worn, to be sure. There was just the possibility—thought Mrs Koker, as she gazed pensively at the glass of sparkling soda and whisky in his hand—that something more lasting than a ring or bangle might be secured for her Letty. Baroness would be a pretty handle to her name.

So she set to work this bright Sunday morning, perhaps for lack of something better to do, perhaps for the mere love of weaving a spell, for she was too fond of her young husband to resort to intrigue herself—of conquest for her pretty daughter.

Some women can hypnotise a man's thoughts right out of his head, as easily as a corkscrew pulls out a cork, and with infinitely less trouble. It is the blue-eyed, blonde, guileless-looking women that can perform these magnetic feats to perfection.

Mrs Koker was blonde, or had been in her youth, and was so still by the use of *l'eau d'or*; and she had innocent blue eyes that stared through their long, light lashes. They were small, deep-set, sleepy-looking eyes, full of hypnotic power, of which the little woman was unconscious. She vaguely knew that therein lay some power or other by which she could do pretty much as she liked with people.

The two men sipped at their whisky quite leisurely. They seemed to have forgotten their hurry. Mrs Koker's eyes began to take effect. The German felt quite sympathetically drawn to the little woman.

"I would like very much, my dear Mrs Koker, to take you out for a canter this lovely morning."

This was drawled out with just a suspicion of an accent. Mrs Koker elevated her eyebrows and shook her head discreetly.

"I say," laughed the other, "it would do you good."

"Not this morning, thank you, gentlemen!" and Mrs Koker beamed. "Besides," she added, "I am sure you are provided with company."

"Right you are," cried he of the saturnine face.

"Then there was no chance for Letty after all," thought the lady of the bar.

"I'll tell you, Mrs Koker," drawled the German, "I'll tell you all about it; we are going to have a little picnic, with two ladies," winking knowingly. "But before we go, another split, please."

"So early," said Mrs Koker demurely, as she served the whisky and soda.

"We are going to Half-Way House; the

ladies meet us at the cricket grounds ; and we'll all ride out together."

"Oh," purred Mrs Koker, "but you should be more gallant. Why not call for them?"

"They are two of Laville's girls, you know."

"Oh, I see," murmured Mrs Koker, sympathisingly. "It is unreasonable to be so strict with the chorus ladies."

"So you see," continued the German, "we can't go near the chambers."

"No," said the other. "The little duffer has sworn to punch the head of every fellow he catches calling on the girls."

"Well, you can't blame him," said Mrs Koker, as her mind reverted to a refractory barmaid assistant, who was at that moment sleeping off the effects of a night's debauch. "Laville must have a chorus, you know ; he can't give an opera properly without one."

"Very true," answered the German. "But our girls have stuck bravely to their contract, and I don't see why they should suffer for the others who have left him."

"Or he has sold," laughingly added his companion.

"What do you mean?" queried Mrs Koker.

"Is it possible you have never heard that queer story from Kimberley?"

“No!”

“Well, here it is, then. Laville, you know, wanted a bang-up chorus; so he went to London with a view to importing one, and secured a round dozen, I believe. However, he only succeeded in bringing half that number to the Rand. The girls were too good-looking, you know. Two or three made matches on board the *Roslin*, and gave Laville the slip. At Kimberley another slipped off. Laville was as mad as a hatter. So you see, when Dave Cross set his cap at one of the prettiest little women amongst those left, Laville raised the very devil. Couldn't blame him, now, could you?” and the German smiled persuasively.

“I should think not,” said Mrs Koker, with a sniff and an indignant toss of her head.

“Dave wanted the girl badly, so he offered to refund her passage money. Laville refused; he was not going to lose one of his best chorus girls for a trifle. However, after a lot of haggling on both sides, Dave planked down two hundred pounds, and got the girl.”

Mrs Koker laughed heartily; her eyes sparkled with greed at the thought of Laville's clever transaction.

“Of course,” she said, with a prudish pucker of the mouth, “they got married?”

"Of course," echoed the Boer, mimicking her tone, "as much as they ever do here."

At which the three laughed long and loudly.

"What's all this about?" queried a sweet voice.

The two men doffed their caps as their eyes rested admiringly on as pretty a vision as one would wish to see, standing in the doorway behind the bar.

She looked barely older than sixteen. There was refinement and intellect in the lovely face framed in its aureole of golden hair. The slight elegant little figure was robed in a babyish-looking gown of white, fastened at the waist by a broad sash of blue silk. The wide flowing sleeves revealed a glimpse to the elbows of a pair of plump and dimpled arms.

"What's all this about? Tell me; I want to laugh too." This with a delicious pout.

"No, child," answered Mrs Koker. "It is not for little girls to hear."

"Good morning, Miss Letty," said the German.

"Good morning," she answered a little stiffly. She rewarded the handsome Boer's salutation with a coquettish nod of her pretty head.

"You're looking positively charming this morning, Miss Letty," he said, insinuatingly.

"Your trip to Pretoria has done you good."

A sudden rush of crimson dyed the face and neck of the young girl; but she returned the man's mocking glance unflinchingly as she answered steadily—

"It has, thank you."

Mrs Koker looked at the Boer, and hastened to say in as careless a tone as her temper would permit—

"I don't need you, daughter!"

"All right, mamma, dear," and she disappeared in the room behind the bar.

"I say, Mrs Koker, don't drive Miss Letty away."

"No, do call her back," said the Boer, possessing himself of one of Mrs Koker's hands.

"I don't like my Letty to hear naughty gossip," said Mrs Koker, permitting him to hold her hand. "She is so young, and I want to keep her innocent of the world's sinfulness as long as I can."

"Quite right, Mrs Koker," said the Boer.

A mysterious fit of coughing seized upon his companion, who rushed to the door, glass in hand, to get air. The Boer promptly availed himself of the opportunity to whisper a few words to Mrs Koker.

“What a nice white little wrist, you have!” he whispered, insinuatingly. “A diamond bracelet would become it wonderfully, eh?”

“Of course,” answered Mrs Koker, with a pleased smile.

“Then you shall have the handsomest in the Camp.”

“What is he up to?” thought Mrs Koker, but she gave no sign of what was passing in her mind. She was thoroughly accustomed to humouring the vagaries of her patrons, and knew that many brilliant promises made over the bar were born of the generosity begotten in the sparkling exhilaration of champagne and soda—and as effervescing.

A series of nods from each side of the counter seemed to silently settle the matter of the bracelet.

“You know, Mrs Koker,” resumed the Boer in a whisper, “Teddy has not settled that racing debt with me yet?”

“Oh, I know,” purred Mrs Koker, gently pressing his hand. “That will be all right; he is awfully worried over it. Do give poor Teddy a little more time!”

“Of course I will. But—” whispering still lower, and leaning half way across the bar in his eagerness—“I’ll do better than that. I’ll

call it square if you say a good word for me with Miss Letty."

"Certainly I will," answered Mrs Koker, with an innocent look.

"Oh! but you don't understand," he persisted. "I don't mean in the ordinary way."

Mrs Koker's heart gave a great bound.

Was this a proposal for the hand of her daughter Letty?

But the words which followed disabused her mind of any such hope.

"I'm fond of that pretty girl of yours, and I'd give anything I possess to make her——"

"The missus?" insinuated Mrs Koker.

"Oh! Go on! I'm not a marrying man, Mrs Koker, but I'd give anything to—to—well, to make Letty a lady, and the envy of the Camp."

Mrs Koker made no reply. The shock of the brutal proposal was too much even for her feelings, hardened as they were by the experience of years of mining-camp life. She did not raise her eyes from the counter, although the colour had faded beneath the rouge on her cheeks, as the Boer continued, emboldened by her silence,—

"I'll wipe out that five hundred, as clean as

an aasvogel finishes a bullock, if you'll give me Letty!"

"Five hundred," answered Mrs Koker, in a strained whisper, as she abruptly withdrew her hand, and flashed a blazing glance through her half-closed eyes at the leering, handsome face close to hers, which if a look could have burned would have shrivelled up the Boer.

"Five hundred pounds!" she repeated. "No, not five thousand pounds!" bringing the tumbler nearest her, as she clutched it, down with a force that shivered it to pieces on the counter. "Not fifty times five hundred pounds would I take to sell my girl to you or any other man!"

"Ho, ho! Mrs Koker, don't get excited," said the Boer, placidly brushing the broken glass aside with his whip. "She might do worse. I can't marry just yet, for family reasons, but I'll do the right thing by her. I'll do it handsome. Letty won't object, I'm sure; she always has a smile for me—little beauty!"

"If you think, Jan Vanderbosch," gasped Mrs Koker, "that my girl would do wrong, you mistake her. Don't you suppose that because I stand behind a bar, and sometimes let my daughter serve you, that I am not a mother, and a woman to be respected. I like money, and work hard enough to get it—but I don't

want it at such a price as that. No. I'd sooner sell every stick we possess, and pay you your beastly five hundred, than you should dare to put a hand on my girl!"

"Ho, ho!" a soft laugh rippling his face. "We'll see, Mrs Koker, we'll see. Leave that to me; I'll manage it."

Further talk was prevented by the entrance of the German, purple in the face from a paroxysm of coughing.

"There, Fritz," cried the Boer, advancing towards him, "that will relieve you," giving him a few smart pats on the back. "I say," looking at his watch, "it is time to meet the ladies; let's be off."

"Another whisky split, Mrs Koker; I'm nearly choked with this cough."

"Won't you join us?"

"No, thanks all the same though," she said, softening her refusal with a smile. "I never drink when serving my customers; it is a bad plan, and has ruined my assistant, Molly. If it wasn't for that failing, she would be the best barmaid in the Rand. Now don't run away with the girls."

"Don't you be afraid, Mrs Koker. We'll not give Laville another chase to Heidelberg. One such is enough for him."

“ Poor little man, what trouble he has with that chorus, to be sure! Has he got her back?”

“ Yes, she’s back safe enough; but Davidson’s dreadfully cut up about it; he vows he’ll get her away again—if—he has to marry her.”

“ Well, chin-chin, Mrs Koker!”

The lady of the bar followed the two young men to the door, and stood on the stoop while they mounted their horses, now in a state of almost unruly restlessness. In a moment they were tearing through the roadway in the direction of the cricket-ground, leaving a whirlwind of red dust behind them.

Mrs Koker watched them out of sight. A curious smile played round her thin lips as she turned and re-entered the bar. Her face bore the look of one who had made up her mind to do an unpleasant thing.

Her ladyship of the bar was in anything but a holy temper this lovely Sabbath morn. “That beast of a Molly,” was her first grievance. As she thought of the wretched girl, she gave a vixenish grip to the bottle she was replacing among its fellows on the shelf, as though she would twist its neck in lieu of the unfortunate Molly’s.

Her second grievance was that she, the fas-

tidious Mrs Koker, was obliged to serve the few loiterers who were likely to drop in ; her usual proud post being the little parlour behind the bar, where she dispensed champagne and such like expensive drinks to a few, a very few favoured ones.

Grievance number three was that dear hubby of hers ; had he not promised faithfully to be back from Potchefstroom by Sunday evening ? “ The Lord alone knows what capers he’s up to,” she thought, as she viciously flicked the flies off the counter.

And fourth, and last, and worst grievance of all, was the scene she had just gone through with Jan Vanderbosch. That Letty had been guilty of some secret indiscretion with the handsome Boer, she did not doubt for a moment. His words, “ She has always a smile for me,” convinced her of the fact.

Now, Mrs Koker was thoroughly imbued with the idea, and stood in awe of the African custom, that any indiscretion on the part of a young maiden considerably lessened, and in flagrant cases utterly destroyed, her marriageable value. Mrs Koker’s grand dream was a profitable alliance for her pretty daughter. She knew the young Boer would be a desirable match ; and the bare thought that Letty had

damaged her chances with him, by some of those new-fangled tricks introduced to the Rand by the young ladies imported from the Cape or the old country, called flirtations, made her furious against the poor child.

“Yes—Letty had done something foolish. Letty had been corrupted by the example of those fly-away chorus-girls. Letty must be punished, must be read a lecture she would not soon forget; and that before Teddy returned, for was not Teddy—like the rest of these silly Englishmen—a perfect fool where a pretty face was concerned?”

“Letty!” she screamed shrilly; “Letty, I want you!”

CHAPTER X

A CRY IN THE NIGHT—THE VANQUISHER VANQUISHED

“YES, mother.”

Children, very young people, and dogs share in common a keen discrimination of tone. They instinctively judge the character, temperament, and mood of those around them by the voice. We who are older, seared and hardened by daily contact with the outer world, little know the subtle changes that betray the different phases of the mind. We may have known it when we were little toddlers, or on the verge of emancipation from the schoolroom. That inner sense, that subtle delicate chord thrilling like an Æolian harp, sweet or harsh beneath the breath of a gentle or discordant breeze, vanishes with the many happy delusions of childhood.

And Letty, poor little soul, was not too old to have lost that childish keenness of instinct. She knew as she heard her mother's voice what it meant, another something. What if a shudder passed through her body? She went

bravely to meet her mother's commands. Instinctively she coupled the tone of voice with the mocking smile of the handsome Boer.

How loudly beat the poor little heart. That would never betray her. But her voice! oh, that voice! it would lose its childish tone; it would betray that it knew what was coming, and that filial duty prompted the formal—

“Yes, mother.”

“Don't ‘Yes, mother,’ me!”

Now Mrs Koker invariably worked herself into a perfect frenzy of passion when she had to do anything that did not exactly please her.

“I want you to tell me the truth—have you been carrying on with Jan Vanderbosch?”

“No, mother,” cried the girl in tremulous tones, “I only rode out with him once towards Pretoria——”

“What?” screamed Mrs Koker; “so you have been taking rides with him. There,” dealing a series of stinging cuffs on the round soft cheeks, “I'll teach you better!”

The girl shrank back into a ledge between the bar and the corner of the room, her blue eyes staring through their tears as she watched in an agony of terror the angry face of her mother.

“Now listen to what I have to tell you,”

panted Mrs Koker. "Jan Vanderbosch is a bad, wicked man. He means no good by you."

Letty drew her breath quickly and raised her head with a little gesture of pride. Mrs Koker noted the effect of her words, and went on, secretly pleased with the girl's attitude of indignation.

"You are too good to suffer insults at his hands. I have brought you up better than that. He only wants to amuse himself with you. He don't want to marry you. So just you take care of yourself."

Letty turned crimson with shame at the thought of what her mother's outspoken, almost brutal words implied.

"Yes, I mean what I say. I have good cause to know his intentions; and if I catch you or hear of you having anything to say to him after this—I'll——" snatching a light whip from its place on the wall, and shaking it over Letty's head, "I'll give you a lashing, and then send you to Om Peit, where you'll not see a white man for months, and wear nothing but old frocks. There, now look after the bar," said Mrs Koker, as she replaced the whip, feeling better since the trying scene with her daughter was over, "while I go and see if I

can't get Molly on her feet. If anyone comes, call me."

When her mother had gone, Letty dropped her head on the bar, and gave way to a tempest of tears. Although her cheeks were smarting, her eyes burning, and a terrible feeling of home-sickness overcame her at the prospect of being sent away to the lonely, dreary life on the farm of Om Peit, her dead father's brother, where only Kafir herdsmen and native women shared the solitude of the big, coarse, Boer farmer, and the still coarser Tante Suije; all that was nothing to the pain of mortified pride and injured modesty which wrung her innocent heart on hearing her mother's revelation of the wickedness of Jan Vanderbosch.

A feeling of loathing took the place of the admiration she had secretly cherished for the handsome Boer. Her cheeks burned with a keener twinge than ever her mother's hand could have inflicted, as her mind reverted to that stolen ride to Pretoria.

With a sudden gesture of infinite passion, she smote her little right hand.

"He dared to kiss me there," she cried half aloud. "Oh, I wish I could burn out the flesh that his wicked lips have touched!"

Then she dropped her head once more on the counter and sobbed anew.

There is no sorrow so pitiful, no realisation so terrible, as that of an innocent heart when first brought face to face with the depravity of the world. True, Letty had lived the major part of her short life behind her mother's bar, yet she had passed unscathed amid the dissipation and sinful scenes around her. Fast and reckless as the men were who patronised her mother's bar, they had, to a man, treated the beautiful child with tender consideration and half-quixotic respect: and thus she grew up, amid those hostile surroundings, as some fair, fragrant flower flourishes in a garden of noxious weeds.

If vague hints reached her of sin, or an instinctive dread arose within her at times of unseen dangers to her innocence, they left her unharmed, as the poisonous breath of the weeds upon the fair flower. She, like the flower, bore within her the strengthening breath of purity which sweetened the very air around her.

But now, alas! all that was changed, for the hand of her mother, her dear mother, whom, with all her faults, she passionately loved—that hand had rudely torn aside the veil divid-

ing childhood and womanhood ; plunged the first spear of doubt and distrust in the quivering heart, when she revealed the baseness, the loathsomeness of the man whom that loving little heart had singled out as the ideal of its innocent dreams.

Thus the pure eyes were opened, and a child went forth a woman, with no armour, save the frail shield of modesty, to fight the long, hard battle.

As Letty's sobs grew fainter she heard a horse dash up to the door. Looking up, she saw a blurred vision of a man dismounting, but her swollen eyes could not for the moment distinguish him until he stood beside her, saying—

“What's the matter, Letty?”

“Oh! Dad Teddy! why didn't you come home last night?” was Letty's answer, as she wound her arms about his neck, and burst into a fresh shower of tears.

Meanwhile Mrs Koker was going through a stormy scene with the refractory Molly.

She lay on a low bed in a tiny room. It opened on a stone-paved courtyard, which formed a sort of open-air lumber-room, with its mound of empty bottles heaped up in one corner, as well as a fowl-yard, with its chicken-

coop in another corner ; a shelter the feathered inmates evidently discarded during the day, to judge by the manner in which they availed themselves of the freedom of the court, the house, and even the bar.

This accommodating courtyard likewise served as a kitchen, where the half-breed maid prepared the family meals on a rusty stove propped up in a third corner. A steaming coffee-pot sent forth a fragrant odour as the yellow maid poured its contents into the bowl in her hand.

Mrs Koker had already exhausted breath and muscle in her efforts to rouse the stupefied Molly from her sleep.

“Leave me alone,” at last grunted the girl ;
“I ain’t slept enough.”

“Oh, you drunken wretch !” groaned Mrs Koker, “shall I never break you of that terrible habit ?”

This lament was lost, as Molly sank back on the bed apparently in a deeper stupor than ever.

“Put down the coffee,” cried Mrs Koker to the maid, “and pull her feet while I lift her so that we may get her on the floor.”

But their combined efforts only landed Molly on the side of the bed, where she sat supported by Mrs Koker’s arms.

“Now put the bowl of coffee to her mouth.”

The maid obeyed with alacrity, for the coffee was very hot, and she felt a secret delight in the prospect of scalding the unfortunate Molly's palate.

But, to the maid's amazement, Molly, on feeling the bowl touch her lips, took a long draught with evident relish, and then opened her eyes.

“Ah!” she sighed, “now I feel better.”

“It's time, you horrid beast!” exclaimed Mrs Koker.

“Don't ‘horrid beast’ me,” she cried, struggling to her feet. “If I am overcome now and then, it's all your fault; you're never satisfied. You want me to sell a lot, and if I sell a lot of drink, I must drink too!” and Molly's voice ended in a sound between a shriek and a howl.

“Oh, listen to that!” cried Mrs Koker, appealing to the yellow maid, who stood by, grinning, and the bare walls around her.

“Yes,” blurted Molly, “you row me when I sell eighteen-penny drinks. I must make them open champagne; and if they do, I must drink with them, to make them drink more. And if I get boozed—whose fault is it?—yours, *yours*. The profits go into *your* pocket—so don't you

call me names, if you please—if—*you please*—Mrs Koker.”

This was altogether too much for Mrs Koker’s patience, already worn out by the exciting events of the morning ; and a terrible war of words ensued.

The yellow maid hid behind the chicken-coop, where she gave vent to a paroxysm of silent laughter which shook her fat sides and sent tears to her beady eyes. This babel of screams, words, and imprecations was suddenly interrupted by a voice exclaiming—

“What, in heaven’s name, is the matter, Fanny?”

It was Mr Koker.

The sound of his voice stilled the tumult and brought the women to their senses.

Molly hurried away to look after the bar ; she was sober now, and rather ashamed of herself, and sought by bustling about and clearing up the bar to make up for her lapse of duty.

“It’s all your fault, Teddy,” blubbered Mrs Koker, as she sat in the little parlour, looking the picture of woe.

“It’s all your fault ; I’ve been in a rage all the morning because you did not come back from Potchefstroom last night. There’s Molly, dead drunk since last night. And then I had

such a scene with my poor little girl, all on account of Jan Vanderbosch. I had to beat her—it went to my heart to do it—but it's the only way to cure her of flirting with him——”

“There, there,” said Teddy, soothingly, “I'll look after him. Letty has told me all. I'll look after *him*.”

“You must never stay away over night again. I—I was so uneasy about you,” whimpered Mrs Koker, cautiously omitting to speak of her jealous doubts. “And it was so mortifying to be obliged to serve whisky to those fast boys, Teddy.”

“It was, indeed, love,” said Teddy.

And so ended the morning's troubles.

It was long past midnight, when Letty was awakened by a sound at the door of her room. As the room opened directly on the street, she thought nothing of it. Probably some one belonging to the adjoining building had mistaken the door. She settled her little head more cosily on the pillow and dozed off again.

Presently she was again awakened. This time the sound of her name called in muffled tones floated through the door, and aroused her.

It was the voice of Jan Vanderbosch.

For a moment the blood seemed to surge

away from her heart, leaving her faint and trembling. Then her courage returned as a wave of doubt swept over her.

“Perhaps I was dreaming,” she murmured.

But the next instant her doubt vanished, as she beheld, distinctly outlined by the full bright rays of the moon, the figure of a man on the thin muslin curtains draping the window.

A childish fear of the dark had induced her before retiring to pull up the window blind to its highest, in order that the light of the moon might keep her company while she slept.

Her innocent device had laid a trap for her. It was that which had attracted Jan Vanderbosch as he rode slowly past on his way home after a drinking-bout.

He could not resist the temptation of peeping into that little chamber. He had no intention of harming or alarming the sleeping inmate when he dismounted from his horse. Something in the wine he had drunk, or that mysterious influence which spurs men on to sudden deeds of evil, roused in him a desire to enter the room.

So he first cautiously tried the door, then whispered softly Letty's name, and was trying the window when she awoke.

Letty's blood ran cold as she suddenly remembered that the window was unlatched.

What should she do ?

But she had no time to consider that important question, or devise means of escape. She beheld from her pillow, the sash slowly and noiselessly raised, and a pair of hands rest on the sill of the window. Jan was evidently listening, or it may have been hesitating, before he raised the sash further ; but whatever it was, it saved Letty.

Now, Letty was, despite her barely sixteen years and slender little physique, as sinewy and strong as a young springbok. In her veins ran sturdy Boer blood commingled with English blood, that gave her both strength and pluck. As she beheld the hesitation of the intruder, and the hands resting on the window-sill within the room, she saw her opportunity. Quick as thought, with a light bound she gained the window, sprang on the sill, and threw the weight of her body on the sash, thereby effectually pinning the hands to the window, and making a prisoner of the audacious Jan.

Then she uttered a loud piercing cry.

“Was not that Letty's voice ?” cried Teddy, starting up from his sleep.

“Fanny, wake up!” shaking his wife; “I’m sure I heard Letty scream!”

Mrs Koker stared sleepily at her husband.

“It’s Letty!” he cried, springing out of bed and hastily donning some clothes. “Something is wrong!”

Again the cry rang out louder and more piercing than before.

“Oh! my girl, my Letty!” screamed Mrs Koker, “she is being murdered!”

To hurriedly unlock the doors, scamper through the narrow alley leading to the street, in which was the door of Letty’s room, was, to the excited pair, the work of a few moments.

The sight that met their eyes almost paralysed them with astonishment.

For there, against the window, kicking, struggling, and swearing, was the form of Jan Vanderbosch.

Teddy went to him and discovered that the young Boer, caught by the hands, was securely imprisoned beneath the window. Then he peered through the glass, and beheld the brave Letty holding on to the sash for dear life.

In an instant he took in the whole situation, and gave vent to a roar of laughter that roused the neighbourhood.

“Look, Fanny!” he gasped between the

fits of merriment, "Letty's pinned him tight. Serve him right. Ha ha! Jan, you won't try to climb a lady's window in a hurry again."

"Oh, you wretch!" screamed Mrs Koker, as she hit viciously at the Boer's legs, "you thought you'd get the best of my girl. Oh, you nasty Boer!"

"For God's sake, Teddy," cried Jan, "tell Letty to get off the sash; she is cutting my hands off."

"Get down, Letty dear," called Teddy, "I'll take care of you now."

At his words the poor, brave girl fell in a heap on the floor beside the window; and the young Boer drew away his hands with a curse of relief.

Teddy climbed through the window, lifted the fainting girl to the bed, and then unlocked the door, admitting Mrs Koker.

Meanwhile Jan Vanderbosch lingered outside, although the sound of the screams and loud voices had attracted a small crowd of neighbours, while a head thrust here and there from an open window demanded the cause of the disturbance.

"I've been a duffer and a blackguard, Teddy," said Jan, humbly enough, as he caught his arm.

“Don’t, for God’s sake, give me away. I’ll send you that I.O.U. to-morrow, and the bracelet for the missus.”

“All right, Jan,” answered Teddy, “I might make an example of you, but I won’t do that, although I’ll let you pay for your fun!”

True to his word, Jan Vanderbosch returned the note, and Mrs Koker proudly shows to this day the splendid bracelet gracing her wrist. When people ask Jan to drop into Mrs Koker’s for a drink he is always in a hurry, or suddenly espies a friend in the distance whom it is absolutely necessary for him to see.

And so ended that night’s troubles.

CHAPTER XI

ONE MORE UNFORTUNATE

THE drought had held the land for many weeks ; but that Monday morning there was a general spirit of jubilation throughout the Camp. The shower, which had passed over the town during the night, had raised hopes of many such visiting the drought-cursed country. The shopkeepers brightened up wonderfully at the prospect of a rainy season, which would freshen the roads and give new life to the veld.

Terrible stories had reached Johannesburg, told with brutal vividness by the half-starved drivers of the few transport waggons that managed to survive the hardships of the road from Kimberley, the Free State, and Natal.

“Not a drop of rain,” they said, “had fallen for over a month. The veld was as dry and hard as a chip. The poor bullocks died by scores for lack of water and nutriment. Nothing fattened, nothing thrived, save the

huge, hideous aasvogels, who came in flocks to feast on the poor beasts as they lay dying, in the helpless agonies of starvation on the veld, or dropped on the dusty roads."

"Them domed assvogels got so fat they couldn't fly," said a brawny, scrubby Boer, as he stolidly puffed at his pipe.

"Yah!" answered another; "how I wished to the Almighty that I could have inspanned the devils to my waggon!"

Which grim humour elicited a grunt from his companions, and leers of delight from the half-naked Kafir boys crouched on their haunches in front of the vorelouper of the span of bullocks that had survived to drag their weary load into camp.

The boys rolled their great eyes in silent mirth, while they playfully whacked the flabby sides and dribbling jaws of their charges with the knotted ends of the rope with which they guided the steps of the sick and tired animals.

A handful of mealies a day sufficed to keep life and soul in their poor little black bodies; right merrily they lived at that, basking in the sunshine or gaily trudging ahead of their charges; the secret of contentment seemed to be born in them.

It was as much a part of their savage nature

as the dark colour of their dusky hides or the kink of their woolly scalps. And so they kicked their shining heels together as they lay on their bellies in the dry red dust of the great market square, silently nodding their little heads in approval of the coarse wit of the Baas.

There were many anxious, troubled faces among the knots of men gathered here and there around the outspanned bullocks in the market square that morning; supplies of food seemed to grow less and less.

"Why don't the Volksraad do something for us?" was the general query. Even the itinerant Mahometan merchants looked hungry and drooping as they sat behind their piles of gay-coloured Kafir blankets and other attractive commodities.

But no buyers came. The Kafirs bid no more; they felt grateful for something with which to fill their stomachs in lieu of the silver which should have filled their grimy hands.

"It is going to be worse than ever," croaked an old Boer as he shook the ashes from his pipe, and gazed into the deep blue of the cloudless sky with his bleared, bloodshot eyes.

"Yah!" responded a gaunt carrier; "that spurt of rain last night was no good. It'll

be another domed month before rain falls."

He jingled the gold coins in his great pocket with a grim smile, as he thought of the enormous profits his bag of mealies had brought him.

Presently a wan, unkempt woman, accompanied by a little half-breed boy, drew near the waggon of the big Boer.

She approached the man timorously.

"I want——" she began.

"What you can't buy," said the Boer with a rude laugh.

"Take yourself off," croaked the blear-eyed old man.

"I've got money to buy," she said, with an effort at dignity.

"How much?" growled the Boer.

The woman disclosed a handful of silver coin.

"Yah, yah!" he roared, "is that all? I don't sell anything for silver; I want gold, old vrouw, gold—be off."

"For pity's sake——"

"Be off," he roared again, giving the unfortunate woman a push.

"Go, drink yourself to death; it's the best thing you can do. You'll get all you want over

there," pointing to a bar in the corner of the square, "you ugly, wrinkled old vrouw. If you were nice and young and fat, I'd give you some for nothing."

The poor creature slunk away, dragging her half-starved child after her.

There was no refuge for such as she, ugly and thin, her face seared with the marks of a horrid disease; clutching the tiny fingers of her boy, she turned her steps towards the bar.

The words of the Boer rang in her ears.

"Drink yourself to death!"

She could do that, she thought, and closed her fingers convulsively over the few silver coins in her hand; they would buy forgetfulness, and make her nice and warm.

"Baby," she whispered softly to the child as she stopped in front of the bar in the corner, "here, take this," putting some silver bits in his little hand. "Go in there, and say to the lady you want a small bottle of gin. Mind you speak nice now!" The child obeyed with an alacrity which told plainly of many such errands.

Presently he toddled back, his pinched little face aglow with smiles as he held a big, stale sandwich in one hand and a bottle in the other.

“Did the lady give you that? Bless her!” exclaimed his mother, as she uncorked the bottle and put it to her lips.

The little fellow nodded, and gleefully crammed the food into his mouth.

The woman drank again and again. Presently she thrust the empty bottle in the child’s hand, together with the remainder of the coin.

“Go, that’s a lovey,” she said huskily, “and buy mummy some more gin.”

The child toddled away, and again returned with another sandwich and the replenished bottle.

The unfortunate creature felt the fiery poison of the liquor stealing through her veins and mounting to her brain. A last impulse of decency prompted her to hide herself. Dragging the child with her, she staggered into a recess between two projecting stoops, and sank helplessly on the ground. In a few moments she was unconscious.

Meanwhile the child devoured the sandwich, notwithstanding the heavy dose of mustard with which it was seasoned. But the mustard made his little throat burn; and, taking the bottle from the unresisting hand of his mother, he grasped it between his tiny fingers, and raised it to his mouth.

He was about to drain the few drops of fiery liquor remaining, tip-tilting the bottle on his lips in imitation of the gesture he had often seen his mother perform, when a hand gently drew the bottle away. The cry of disappointment died on the child's lips as he looked up at the tall figure before him.

A woman, with kind, gracious face, looked down upon him with pitying eyes.

"Poor child," she said softly to the servant beside her; "how did they get here? Take the little fellow to your rooms, Jacobs; give him some hot milk, and send someone to look after this unfortunate creature; I fear she is ill."

Jacobs lifted the boy in his arms and carried him away.

For some time Ariadne stood there looking up and down the roadway. No one was in sight, Rissik Street being a sort of narrow lane, not yet built up, save for the two little shanties between whose stoops the drunken creature had crept.

A neat Cape cart, with well-groomed horses, stood motionless in the middle of the road. The Kafir driver waited patiently. Presently Ariadne looked at the watch on the silver chatelaine at her side.

"It is dreadful to leave the poor wretch

lying here," she said, partly to her driver, partly to herself, "but I must be going soon."

The driver respectfully nodded his head, but said nothing.

At that moment Jacobs came round the corner; a policeman accompanied him, followed by some Kafirs carrying a rude litter. The policeman saluted the fair woman with great deference.

"You can drive on now, missis," he said. "Thank you for sending for me."

"Don't mention it," she said. "Tell me, is the poor creature ill or drunk?"

The Kafirs raised the heap of rags, and placed it on the litter. One of them gave a grunt of surprise as the unfortunate's face was revealed.

"What is it?" said the policeman.

"This is old Polly, Canary Dick's vrouw," answered the Kafir. "He works at the Jumpers. This morning old Polly came in to buy mealies."

The policeman drew near, and examined the bundle of rags.

Ariadne turned her head aside, her heart beat quickly, while a lump seemed to rise in her throat.

Presently the policeman said in a low voice—

"You had better go away, missis; no one can do the old creature any good now."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean she was starving, and that dose of Cape-smoke has killed her."

"She is dead?"

"Yes," answered the policeman, motioning to the Kafirs to take away the litter and its burden.

"Was she a European?"

"Yes," said the policeman; "there's many of them brought to that out here through Cape-smoke."

Ariadne opened her purse and gave the man a couple of gold coins.

"Be sure and see that the poor wretch is decently buried. I cannot bear to think of a white woman wrapped only in an old Kafir blanket, and thrust into a ditch to rot!"

"I promise you I'll see that she is properly buried," said the policeman, deeply touched. "Bless your kind heart, missis."

Doffing his helmet, he stood bareheaded, while Ariadne mounted the cart and drove off.

"Oh, the horror of it, the horror of it!" she thought, as the cart sped over the road in a whirl of dust.

“To what terrible end is this strange city tending? one half starving while the other half feasts.

“No water to drink, nothing but champagne for the rich and Cape-smoke for the poor. How will it end? Shall it be, as Hector said last night, the drought will ruin every one if it continues another few months? The mines will be utterly useless—not a stamp or drill at work for lack of water.

“How dreadful is the outlook, God alone knows.

“If the rain, the sweet, soft, blessed rain, would only come, and wash away all these horrors.

“Oh, England! England! if you but knew how dearly bought is the gold you send your sons to seek in this far-away land! Through what scenes of misery, crime, and debauchery it finds its way into your proud coffers!

“If you but knew! If you but knew!”

Ariadne clasped her gloved hands nervously together, while big tears ran down her cheeks.

“What can I do?” she murmured. “My poor pen is too feeble to work the good it is in my heart to do.

“I’m only a woman, a weak, weak woman.

Were I a man, I would raise a cry that would reach from one end of the Transvaal to the other. I would send that cry of appeal to England. I would fight the good cause night and day, until I had laid the first rail of the road that would lift the poor golden city for ever out of this helpless state. She would be no longer Boer-ridden,—the prey of drought, famine, and fever. Oh, to be a man! a man! to work, write, talk, until I had prevailed on that slow-going Volksraad and old Oom Paul to give Johannesburg a railway to the Cape.”

“Drive to the hotel first, for a moment,” she said, as the cart turned into Loveday Street.