

"I'm afraid, Mrs Robertson, I am too utterly lost to be saved now."

"Oh, I don't think of you as one lost," said this pretty missionary, taken aback at finding her innocent scheme detected. "But I thought you might feel lonely, and—and——"

"Let me put you in the cart, love," exclaimed the manager, seeing her embarrassment; while the grey-haired director looked in undisguised admiration at her very becoming blushes.

"There now, little wifey, are you comfortable?" he inquired, as he tucked the dust wraps round her. "The back of the cart is apt to be draughty; you will feel it at the side there. Jim, hurry up. Fasten this flap. All right; now, go ahead," he called, as the Kafir took the reins, and he settled himself at the side of his wife.

"Easy there over those planks. Don't jolt the cart too much."

The sluit safely crossed, the cart was soon spinning along at a good pace towards Johannesburg. As it neared the canteen previously described, the keeper came on the stoop. His red face was cleanly shaven, a well-brushed coat and trousers replaced the flannel shirt and knickerbockers. The bar was decorously closed. Not a trace remained of the disorder of the

previous night. As the cart approached he respectfully raised his hat, and did not replace it until the cart had passed.

“Who is that man?”

“The keeper of the canteen, love,” said the manager.

“Such an evil face,” said his wife, with a little shudder. “What is a canteen?”

“A bar, my darling.”

“A bar! Then that dreadful man sells whisky. That is the reason he looks such a wicked one.”

“Not necessarily, my darling,” said the manager, placidly. “Some one must sell it; and he is a good sort.”

“Oh! I am sure he is not. Does he sell whisky to the Kafirs?”

“Of course, my little wife. What a question!”

“Then it is very, very wrong, Harry.”

The manager laughed, and drew her close to him.

“What an earnest little Puritan it is!” he said, kissing the tempting cheek near his.

“But it is wrong, Harry, oh! so dreadfully wrong, to leave all those poor blacks at the mercy of that man. He looks as though he would sell them poison if he could.”

“There, my little wife must not make herself unhappy.”

“Oh, I won’t, Harry, if you will promise me to send that dreadful man away.”

“I’ll do anything to please you, my darling,” exclaimed the manager, with all the fervour of a young husband.

His wife smiled contentedly, and put her soft little hand in his, for, now that the camp was in sight, the billing and cooing behind the unconscious Kafir driver was at an end.

Commissioner Street was quite deserted ; but round the neighbourhood of St Mary’s were to be seen throngs of church-goers.

He was very proud of the graceful, self-possessed young wife beside him. He felt surprised, almost uncomfortable, at the keen womanly instinct which had set her up in arms against the keeper of the canteen. That her fears were true he knew perfectly well ; but the habit of custom he also knew would take more than a woman’s word to overcome. Nevertheless he was deeply touched by her sympathy for the blacks ; and for the first time he was sensible of the fact that they were much wronged. He resolved to do something towards removing the canteen, keeper and all, of whose doings he knew more than he would have cared to

acknowledge. Then he fell to devising ways and means to accomplish his design; when the rector's voice beginning the sermon aroused him from his reverie by these significant words, "Where is thy brother Abel?"

His wife turned her limpid eyes to his. There was a world of meaning in that innocent look. He laid it to heart more than the teaching of a hundred sermons.

In the hut in the mine the old Zulu and his companions slept the exhausted sleep of drunkenness. Now and then one would stretch himself and grope blindly round in search of the bottle to quench his consuming thirst, and suddenly roll over again unconscious. The air of the hut was stifling with the sickening fumes of liquor.

A little army of ants industriously besieged the shining calves of the snoring Lohia. A small colony of blue-bottle flies made a nest on the grimy chin and went on tours of inspection in and out the orifice of the old Zulu's wide open mouth. A great black spider noiselessly spun his silken web across an opening in the tent wall, and adroitly caught the half-dazed flies as they sought an escape, surfeited and dizzy with the fumes of the old man's breath.

Now and then a Kafir dog would run his nozzle into a rent in the canvas and give a series of sniffs, then sneak away with an air of disgusted disappointment. Once or twice a gust of wind shook the tent, raising a mist of dust, and disturbing the flies in their nest, the ants at their pastime, and almost demolishing the patient labour of the watchful spider.

Finally a fiercer gust than usual beat so violently on the hut, that the old Zulu was at last awakened. He sat up with a start, spluttering and choking, having swallowed a few of the unlucky flies that had ventured on too daring an exploration down his throat.

He crept outside the hut, and drew himself together in a heap on the veld. Throbbing head and burning throat made him long wildly for a mouthful of brandy ; until tormented with thirst and unable to resist the cravings within him, he called one of the young Zulus and despatched him for another bottle.

It was high noon before the little party left the tent and set out to trek it to a mine on the opposite side of the camp. Their steps were comparatively steady after their rest, and their nerves braced up a bit owing to the brandy, of which they had cautiously taken but a mouthful, consequently they managed to pass along the

road and through the camp without attracting attention. Once well out of the precincts of the camp and fairly on the main reef, a halt was made. Selecting a spot, at some distance from the road, screened by debris of quartz from observation, the Kafirs proceeded to rest and recuperate after the long walk from Langlaagte, a distance of five or six miles. The bottle was handed round, while a sharp look-out was kept for any mounted police that might be in the vicinity, a precaution quite unnecessary. The dust which arose in whirling clouds every few minutes kept those vigilant guardians of the Sunday's peace, who might have been near, too busily occupied in guiding their horses to find time to watch the movements of any prowling niggers.

The mine to which the Kafirs were going lay on the other side of the road, a distance of a quarter of a mile to the left. A good view of it could be obtained from their resting-place. In fact, the old Zulu had selected the spot for the purpose of reconnoitring, as the Baas of that particular compound objected to the visits of strange natives, owing to the frequent rows among the boys. From this vantage-point they could watch for their friends, and signal them to come to the road. The reef declined

gently from the main road, parallel with which lay the foundation of a steam-train line in process of construction, between Boksburg, a new mining village, and Johannesburg. The mine on which the Kafirs kept watch was quite near the road. On a slightly elevated spot stood the three-roomed single-story zinc shanty of the manager and engineer; around were scattered numerous outhouses and stables. A cart and 'spider' out-spanned near by, warned the Kafirs that the Baas was 'at home.' From this point the ground sloped to a hollow some distance off, wherein was planted the shaft, engine-house, and a cluster of canvas huts.

An hour or so passed before there was signs of any one moving about in the compound. The boys were evidently in their huts, or on some part of the mine not in view.

The old Zulu and his companions were beginning to grow impatient, when a sudden stir in the compound attracted their attention.

What appeared to be a great commotion was going on; the boys could be seen rushing out of the huts and running in every direction.

Several made for the manager's shanty, running as if for their lives.

"There goes the Baas," said the old Zulu,

as a man in his shirt sleeves joined the natives and hurried towards the scene of excitement. Three or four men, also in their shirt sleeves, followed quickly on the heels of the Baas, who carried in one hand a heavy sjambok.

“A fight!” cried the young Zulu, as men and natives seemed to mingle in a struggling mass.

The sight was too much for the prudence of the Zulus. Fortifying themselves with another dose of brandy all round, they made for the compound as fast as their legs would carry them. It was indeed a fight, and a pretty serious one, to judge by the bruises and many bleeding heads to be seen. One of the Kafirs was stretched out insensible on the veld, a terrible gash in his head, looking as though his skull had been fractured.

“Boys! who did this?” cried the Baas, speaking in Kafir.

The sound of his voice put a stop to the fighting.

“Dick from the Jumpers did it, Baas!” cried several.

An ugly blood-smeared native took to his heels and turned to run; but he was too drunk to run far, and was soon seized and brought back, struggling and fighting.

“Throw him down!” cried the manager sternly.

In an instant the Kafir was sprawling on the ground; but he began to kick so violently that the manager could not approach him.

“Sit on him!”

The next moment the fellow lay face downwards. Two of the boys sat on his legs, a couple on his shoulders, while the manager administered a vigorous thrashing with his sjambok.

The sound of their comrade’s howls provoked the natives who had assisted him in the fight, and they began an indiscriminate onslaught on the nine Kafirs, which was promptly checked by the manager’s friends; one of whom, the stalwart captain of the cricketers, struck out so vigorously that the offenders fled completely routed.

Meanwhile the Zulus watched with breathless admiration the prowess of the Baas, as he sent well-directed blows on the prostrate Kafir. Strength and courage was in their eyes the highest type of manliness; and the splendid young Englishman seemed to them a perfect Hercules. They felt the utmost respect for a Baas who could do his own flogging. And this Baas had never failed in that yet.

"Now be off!" said the manager, as he ceased the blows; "the next time I catch you on this compound I'll give you worse than that."

The boys would have liked to give the fellow something on their own account as they released him; but a look from the manager controlled them; and the wretch, thoroughly sobered, limped away, howling lustily.

Order being restored, and the wounded natives attended to, the manager and his friends returned to the shanty, where, over their pipes and whisky, they discussed the fight.

"I say, Archie, there, got in a few good rounds."

"It is disagreeable, to be sure," observed the manager, between the puffs; "but if I called on the mounted police to help me, I should lose all control over the boys. They have a great contempt for the police, and would have more for me if I did not settle things myself; so I am obliged to beat the rascals occasionally."

"And run the chance of a fine?"

"Yes; I would rather pay the 'fiver' than lose control of the boys. It's all owing to those illicit canteens there; they sell the Kafirs bad whisky and worse brandy. Something must be done to stop it, and that very soon."

## CHAPTER XVI

### A SUNDAY NIGHT'S CRIME

THE old Zulu and his companions listened eagerly to the details of the fight.

Dick, it seemed, was a very demon when under the influence of drink, and made it his business to get drunk regularly, from Saturday night to Sunday night. It was his custom to roam about from mine to mine, seeking a fight. He, in company with three of his comrades, had come to the compound, and attacked the first Kafir they met, whose yells aroused the others. Hence the fight.

The old Zulu's eyes burned with strange lustre as he talked. He drank freely of the hospitable bottle passed round, while his entertainers discussed the plans for the morrow; when it was agreed that they should all meet at the office in Market Square, to secure their passes.

The Zulus prepared to depart. Their friends stumbled out with them in the gathering dark-

ness, as the sundown hour had passed during their talk.

It was seven o'clock ; and as the party left the hut the night grew suddenly black as an abyss. Not a single star was to be seen. Guided by the instinct of habit, they reached the road in safety. A walk of half an hour brought them within sight of the lights of the camp. Here they parted, with promises of meeting on the morrow. The Zulus tramped forward, while their companions returned to the main reef.

And now a wonderful and magnificent phenomena frequently seen in Africa, and particularly on the high plateau of the Transvaal, was approaching.

Miles and miles away on the edge of the vast plain, appeared the harbinger of an electric storm. Suddenly the blackness was rent by a myriad slender spears of pale amber light shooting in zigzag lines across the heavens, and as suddenly lost again in the intense darkness. Then a single sword-like flame of opalescent ruby flashed straight up to the very zenith of the heavens, like the blade of a warrior-god, and was gone.

Soon a thin trail of pale rosy vapour, like the first delicate flush of the dawn, quivered afar, a

moment, and sank out of sight. In the instant the whole heaven was covered with a sweep of lurid light, as though the very gates of hell had burst apart, reflecting the infernal glow. This was flecked with inky clouds, like smoke from the bottomless pit. The whole land blazed for one brief interval. Shafts, hut, cottage, spire and street, the faces of the Zulus, the sleeping bullocks out-spanned on the veld, waggon and tent, shone with an appalling beauty, like a picture in a huge golden kaleidoscope, then all disappeared again in darkness.

And thus, ever and anon, the wondrous pictures on the shifting camera of the storm came and vanished; until the air tingled with the overflow of electricity from the surcharged heavens:

The old Zulu seemed to have gone mad with the storm. The brandy burned into his brain like the smelting of red-hot iron. He talked wildly as he staggered along. The colour of the blood he had seen flowing in the fight seemed ever before his eyes. The very darkness was red—red above and red below.

The combined influence of the debauch of the last twelve hours and the electrified atmosphere, together with the lack of food, unbalanced the old man's brain, and drove him completely mad.

His companions were silent, already stupefied with drink and hunger. Lohia was like the old man, completely unbalanced, and ready for any act of crazed excitement.

"Another drink, boys," muttered the old Zulu, when in sight of the canteen where they had begun the debauch of the previous night.

The others followed him blindly, stupidly, as he stumbled into the bar.

The canteen-keeper welcomed them with contemptuous familiarity. The invitation to dice-throwing was this time eagerly accepted. The old Zulu, becoming excited over his winnings, drank incessantly. His companions were not so fortunate, and grew sullen, with the exception of Lohia, who noisily disputed the old man's gains. A quarrel seemed imminent; when the canteen-keeper interfered, and roughly jostled the party away from the bar; whereupon the Zulus raised a clamour of indignation, threatening the burly canteen-keeper, who promptly cleared them out by kicks, cuffs and blows.

"I'll have no disorderly niggers fighting here!" he cried with an oath, as he sent the old Zulu spinning into the road. "Be off now; and don't show any of your black faces here again till you're sober!"

With these parting words, the door was shut

with a bang, and the Zulus were left to pull themselves together as best they could.

The blow of the canteen-keeper's heavy boot half-sobered the old Zulu for a time, but roused in him a terrible frenzy of rage.

"I'll kill him for that," he cried, as he picked himself up. "He make me drink. He make us all drink. He take our money—then kick us out. I kill him sure for this." He gnashed his teeth, and struck out blindly in all directions with the knob-kerrie in his clenched hand.

"Let us go to the compound," said one.

"No!" roared the old man. "I stay here all night. I kill him!"

By dint of coaxing and reasoning, the Zulus prevailed on him to go with them, Lohia supporting the old man, the two swaying and staggering in the darkness.

It was now nine o'clock. Gigantic patches of murky clouds veiled, here and there, the electric storm raging in the heavens. Flash after flash of pale, steely light lit up the scene, revealing the Zulus groping their way towards a broad ditch in an opposite direction to the mine. Blinded by the utter darkness one moment, dazzled by the brilliant flashes of lightning the next, dazed and dizzy from drinking, they wandered to the

edge of the sluit ; the next moment the five men lay sprawling at the bottom.

The fall frightened the Zulus back to their senses. Lohia yelled and clutched the old man in his terror. The others, however, realising that they had only fallen into a sluit, called to him reassuringly ; and lay quiet, until they finally drifted into a doze.

Meanwhile a man was slowly advancing along the bank of the ditch a short distance off. During the moments of darkness he stood still, availing himself of the flashes of light to take a few steps forward. So intent was he in picking his way, that he knew nothing of the presence of the Kafirs, until he heard the yells of Lohia.

Perceiving that the cries came from the direction of the sluit, he quickened his steps, and by the aid of a half dozen flashes, found his way to its edge.

The next flash disclosed the figure of the man to the wide-open eyes of the old Zulu.

And then an awful thing occurred. The sight of the white face looking down on him enraged the old man anew. Springing up, he clambered with the strength of madness on to the bank, the unsuspecting man offering to assist him.

In a moment the Zulu dealt him a heavy blow with his knob-kerrie. The man, completely surprised, staggered; then rallied and endeavoured to defend himself with a light cane he held in his hand. The next glare of light revealed the Zulu ready for a second attack; whereupon the man struck out with his cane, inflicting a sharp stinging blow on the upraised hand. The Zulu never winced, but stood awaiting the next flash, by the light of which he dealt a second heavy blow on the head of the defenceless man, who fell forward stunned and bleeding.

“I kill you!” he muttered, raining blows on the prostrate figure. “You not kick Zulu again. I kill you.”

By this time Lohia, followed by the others, had scrambled out of the sluit.

“Don’t kill him!” cried one, snatching the knob-kerrie from the old man and throwing it away. “Let us take his clothes and watch.”

This was agreed upon; and the unconscious man was soon stripped of all clothing.

But the old Zulu was not content with robbing his victim. Leaving the others to do that work, he groped, staggering and stumbling, searching for the knob-kerrie. But he could not find it. Cursing and raging, he sought in every direc-

tion, getting down on his hands and knees, tearing up the dusty veld grass in his disappointment.

Just as he was about to give up the search, his knee came in contact with a substance that did not feel like a stone. Picking it up, he saw by a gleam of the lightning that he had found a broad heavy clasp-knife, which had evidently fallen from the trouser-pocket of the man during the struggle.

Uttering no sound, the Zulu opened the knife and examined it closely; then he returned to the spot where his companions were busy over their spoil.

At that moment a groan escaped the man, who had regained consciousness.

"Don't kill me!" he moaned, as the old Zulu sprang upon him. "For God's sake—spare my life."

One of the Zulus struggled with the old man, striving to keep him back.

"I will kill him. He kicked me out!"

"It is not the canteen-keeper," cried the other, still holding him back.

But the old Zulu's frenzied strength was too great; wrenching himself away, he sprang for the second time on him.

A great flash of light revealed the broad

white breast of the prostrate man. With one stroke he drove the knife to the hilt in the heart of his victim.

An awful panic fell upon the others when they beheld the old Zulu's bloody work. For a time they were paralysed with fear, and unable to stay the murderer's hand, as he mutilated the dead man in a horrible manner, while Lohia assisted the fiendish work.

They had not the power to steal away, so benumbed were they with fright.

Then at last the old Zulu dragged the body to the slit, and cast it in, their senses returned, and picking up their booty, they made for the compound, dragging the murderer away with them in the darkness.

Hours after, when the electric storm had vanished, wrapped in the folds of the black and heavy clouds, and the stars came out, they shone with soft and peaceful light on the dead face, upturned in its cold bed at the bottom of the slit.

Each gaping, oozing, bloody wound cried out in the silent night to the quiet heavens above for vengeance.

Vengeance, not on the outcast being, besotted, deranged with drink, whose unwitting hand had done the deed ; but for vengeance

on those who live upon the debauchery of the black man ; the men who sell him the curse of drink ; who barter for his hard-toiled savings a few mouthfuls of liquid madness.

For vengeance on the purveyors of rotten whisky, the illicit canteen-keeper and all the many men sleeping that night, with a peaceful conscience for bed-fellows, the men who fatten on the degradation of their black brothers.

For vengeance on such as these, cried out that poor mutilated body, soaking in its own blood, in that lonely sluit!

## CHAPTER XVII

### A MORNING RIDE TO WILLOW GROVE

ONE morning at six o'clock, Jacobs brought the horses to the door of the chambers in Percy Buildings, according to instructions received the night before. A Kafir boy followed, carrying a tray bearing a cup of steaming fragrant coffee. The door of the sitting-room was open, while Ariadne stood waiting, whip in hand, equipped for her morning ride.

"I am glad, Jacobs, to see you so punctual," she said with a smile, taking the coffee from the Kafir, who stood by grinning while she drank it. "I judge from the way you are showing all those ivories that you want a reward. Does he deserve it, Jacobs?"

"Yes, madame!" answered Jacobs. "He got the coffee very quick."

"Well, there's a sixpence for you, little blackie."

The boy did not understand the words, but he understood the sixpence, which he seized

with a chuckle, then darted out of the door, tray and all, stopping when half way down the alley to drain the cup ; after which he carefully scooped out the remains of the sugar with his small black fingers, licking them vigorously as he disappeared round the corner of the passage.

After caressing the horse, who showed his delight in seeing his mistress by a succession of low whinnys ; admiring his glossy black coat, shining like satin ; petting and patting him until the sensitive animal felt thoroughly confident and happy : a process Ariadne never omitted, believing it a wise plan to make the best possible friends with one's horse before mounting him—she sprang into the saddle.

“ Do not get breakfast ready,” she said, as Jacobs adjusted her riding skirt ; “ I shall breakfast at the ‘ Grove.’ ”

Some men in flannels, bathing towels hung over their shoulders, on their way to the baths in the buildings, met her at the entrance of the street passage. She bowed coldly to their effusive greetings, in Johannesburg style, as they stood aside to let the horse pass.

The quiet and peace of early morning hung over the street as the horse leisurely picked his way along. The bars, adorning every corner, were still closed ; while here and there a mid-

night lamp smoked and spluttered away in the niche over a shop door, or in the recess behind a bar-window. The street was empty ; and the horse, whose hoofs made no sound on the soft soil, startled the dogs lying curled up asleep, some of them right in the middle of the roadway.

“ Steady, Prince,” said Ariadne, as the horse shied when turning the corner, as he came suddenly on a bullock-waggon outspanned in the roadway.

She guided him carefully over the small space available round the crouching bullocks ; startling the big Boer driver from his slumbers beside his wife and little ones snugly ensconced in their canvas bed-chamber ; rousing the little naked Kafir vourpouper, sleeping between the two great oxen, his black head pillowed on one, his grimy legs rolled under the other, the beasts warming as well as sheltering him.

For a moment the boy gazed with half-open eyes at the vision before him ; and then dropped off to sleep again, with a thought only for the beautiful black horse that had awakened him from his dreams. The Boer turned on his side with a grunt, and likewise dropped asleep, as Ariadne, clearing the tangled mass of bullocks, rode on.

The next turn led straight through a short street, lined on either side by shanties huddled together in indescribable fashion, occupied mostly by Hindoo shopkeepers, coolies, workmen, and their families. An occasional shanty, whose door and single-latticed window was painted red, and red curtained, likewise proclaimed the abode of the Chinese. If the scene was unsightly, the various odours mingling in the morning air were worse, rendering the spot a perfect fever-bed and sink of contagion. Moslem and Celestial were invisible, the dirty stoop of hut and shanty empty, save for the few dumb members of the domestic household, the lean hungry-looking fowls roosting here and there, with mangy dogs and drowsy disreputable-looking cats for companions.

To the end of this fetid lane, crossed by a narrow sluit, now dry and dusty, the broad flat stones at the bottom caked with the hardened yellow slime, Ariadne cantered the horse at a brisk pace. Once over the sluit, another five minutes' canter brought her to the brow of the low hill overlooking the camp. Here again was passed a collection of straggling shanties, of which a canteen on one side and a chemist's shop on the other were the most pretentious. Passing quickly through this little hamlet, she

guided the horse across the veld. To the right sloped gently upward the low hill. To the left in the distance lay the valleyed reef, dotted with clusters of shanties, shafts, batteries, and all the signs of mining industry. No tree or shrub broke the monotony of the view. All was red soil, red dust and deep-coloured quartz. The land rolled over the vast plateau in swelling kopjes and low-lying valley, until lost to sight in the blue distance of the horizon.

The morning air blew fresh and crisp in her face, while the genial rays of the sun beat on her back and shoulders with gentle warmth. Prince tossed his handsome black head in evident pleasure when the wind flicked his silken mane; he set his slender hoofs in the springing veld with intense satisfaction. Horse and rider were in a delightful glow when the 'Willows' came in sight. There Ariadne drew rein, and, leaning forward, lightly stroked the glossy neck of the horse, as she gazed on the charming scene before her.

Below, in the lap of the gently declining hill, lay Willow Grove, a mass of rich, deep-toned green, set like an emerald gem in the waste of barren, veld-covered plain. Wind, dust, and drought seemed to have lost their power to work havoc with the verdant beauty of that

embowered spot. It might have been a bit of lovely Devonshire wafted across the seas at the beck of a magician's wand, and dropped in the sandy bosom of the desert plateau.

Many long years ago a hardy Boer settler had planted those lines of poplar and willow by the side of rippling stream and shallow pool. He taught the golden honeysuckle to twine its loving tendrils round clump and gnarled trunk, pouring thereon a sweet store of honeyed fragrance from a thousand tiny cups. He reared the blushing purple-hearted fuchsia, the sweet wild rose, the white-browed daisy, the blue-lipped violet. He built for the good vrouw and little toddlers those ruined adobe walls, thatched roof, drooping eaves and quaint-windowed nooks, now carefully preserved, and bearing pathetic witness to that home in the wilderness.\* There the cope trekers found rest at last and peace from the wars and troublous times of the colony.

Absorbed in her contemplations, Ariadne knew nothing of the approach of another rider, until the sound of his voice startled her from the reverie into which she had fallen.

\* This interesting relic has, since writing, been destroyed by fire. It was the homestead of the original owner of the property now known as the Langlaagte Mine.

“Good morning,” he was saying. “This is quite an unexpected pleasure.”

“What is an unexpected pleasure?” answered Ariadne, coldly.

“Why, meeting you, to be sure.”

“Oh!” she said, with an air of studied indifference, “I thought you meant the view of the Willows.”

“Not at all,” he answered, “although the sight of the Grove is a pleasant surprise when seen from this point for the first time. But I must confess that you are the last person I would have thought of meeting on such an early ride.”

“And why, pray?”

“Well, intellectual pursuits, late hours devoted to literary toil, poetical visions, and all that, you know. The brain must rest after such drains upon its strength!”

“You are quite right,” she answered, calmly, ignoring his attempts at chaffing. “Late hours devoted to literary toil call for repose, and this is my way of taking it.”

“And a capital way it is. That horse of yours is a beauty. Where did you get him?”

Ariadne’s voice softened as she answered, for she was very proud of the horse.

“He belonged to a poor fellow that was ruined in the first of the smash. I bought him

for a mere song. Dear old Prince," caressing the horse with one hand, while arranging the reins in the other. "And now," riding on, "I must bid you good-morning, Captain Achilles."

"I think I am going in your direction," he said, "if you have no objection to letting me ride beside you."

"None whatever," she answered. "I haven't a monopoly of the road, I'm sure."

"I say, it is too bad to snub a fellow this way. I have been trying to get a chance of seeing you alone for an age. Do you always ride alone?"

"Yes, always," answered Ariadne, with an emphasis on the last word.

"And your sister, does she not ride?"

"No. She is more useful in keeping away intruders and answering my letters."

"By Jove! I should think she was," said the young man. "I have reason to know what a dragon she is. Why do you not see me when I call?"

"Because," began Ariadne, impetuously, a gleam of anger in her eyes. Then suddenly checking herself, she answered quietly, "I did not wish to hear what you have to say!"

"But you must hear it sooner or later."

"Then let it be later," she said, reining the

horse before the threshold of the old Dutch homestead. It now served as a hotel which offered accommodation respectively to man and beast, after the fashion of an English roadside inn.

“Good morning, Mr Spears,” said Ariadne, as the gentleman landlord, a fine-looking Englishman of middle age and sportsman-like bearing, appeared in the door.

“Good morning, madam. I am glad to see you have taken advantage of the beautiful weather,” he said, as he hastened to assist her in dismounting. “Did you enjoy your ride?”

“Yes, thank you. How fresh everything looks.”

“The rains are beginning to do the shrubs and trees good, as well as laying the dust. How are you, captain?”

“Right as a fiddle. Have you anything good for breakfast?”

“I was sure madam would avail herself of the fine morning for a ride, and”—looking dubiously at the other—“I ordered her favourite breakfast, a grilled fowl, kidneys on toast, and salad.”

“There is not enough for two?”

“No; however, if you don't mind waiting——”

“I have no objection to sharing the fowl and other good things with Captain Achilles,” said Ariadne, on seeing the landlord’s dilemma. “No thanks, if you please,” she said in an undertone, as the captain began a pretty speech ; “I do it to oblige Mr Spears.”

Leaving the horse with many instructions to the care of a Kafir stable-boy, Ariadne followed the landlord into the long, low chamber, once the Boer farmer’s living-room, now converted into a dining-room, the original character of which had been carefully preserved by the landlord.

The thatched roof visible above the broad rafters toned a rich brown with age, formed the ceiling. The walls likewise bore marks of age in the primitive plastering of ant-heap, rudely applied by the thrifty hands of the long ago dead and buried master. Two small deep windows, the heavy sills notched, dented and worn, no doubt by generations of hardy little Boers, lighted the room. The floors, also of ant-heap, were firm and hard, though worn smooth as polished oak by the hundreds of feet, some of which were mouldering away in the little Dutch graveyard near by, that had passed in and out over the homely threshold. A low, narrow door, opposite the honeysuckled embowered windows, opened on another chamber

of similar character, whose wide fireplace served admirably for the grilling, frying, and toasting necessary to Mr Spears' hospitable cuisine.

Near one of the windows stood a table cosily laid out for the breakfast, on which the landlord had bestowed much thoughtful care.

If walls and ceilings and floor were grimy with age, all else was as neat and shining as busy fingers could make them. The tiny panes of glass in the old windows were as clean and bright as crystal, the linen spotless as snow, while the silver and china breakfast service would have done honour to the most fastidious housewife.

"This is delicious coffee," said Ariadne, when they were seated at breakfast, "and the kidneys are broiled to perfection. I can get nothing fit to eat in camp. You should prize your cook, Mr Spears; there is not another like him in the Rand."

"I thank you," answered the landlord, with a smile; "I am glad he pleases you. These native cooks are very good if properly trained. I must say Hans seems to give general satisfaction."

"Your cook is a Kafir, then?" observed Ariadne, in some surprise.

"Yes, and extremely intelligent. Have you

never seen him? No? then I'll call him. He will be quite delighted. Nothing pleases the poor devil more than a good word now and then."

"Hans!" he called out in a loud voice.

"All right, Baas!" came from the kitchen, the door of which was quickly opened, and an enormous Kafir made his appearance.

"The breakfast is very good, Hans, and madam wishes to tell you how she enjoyed it. She says you are the best cook in the Transvaal!"

"Hi! hi!" roared the great fellow. "I'm much obliged to the missis."

Ariadne looked pleasantly at the black, good-natured face, the shining eyes, and glittering white teeth, now exposed to the utmost in a broad grin. A battered old felt hat, much too small, was stuck on his woolly head. A pair of tattered trousers, barely covering his huge limbs, were held on by a bright blue cotton handkerchief tied round his hips. A sleeveless shirt, of a glaring pattern in red and white check, completed this costume of incongruous odds and ends.

"Come here, Hans," said Ariadne. "There's something for you," dropping some silver in the big, white-lined hand.

“ Thank you, thank you, missis ! ” he cried, as he looked at the coin, and, at a nod from the landlord, shuffled back to the kitchen.

“ What a big fellow he is, ” she said. “ What is he ? ”

“ Oh ! he’s a Swazie. You don’t find many in work out of the mines ; but I have had him for some time. ”

“ Does he drink ? ” said the captain.

“ That’s his only fault, ” answered the landlord. “ He never drinks here, I’ll not allow it ; but when he gets into the clutches of some of his friends from Langlaagte or the Crown Reef, and they drag him off for a spree at one of the canteens, he comes back like a madman, and it is many days before I can get him straight again. ”

“ By the way, ” said Captain Achilles, “ was it not at some place near here that the natives murdered that poor fellow one Sunday night ? ”

“ Not quite near here, ” answered the landlord ; “ the sluit in which the body was found is about a mile back of us, between the Langlaagte and Crown Reef property. ”

“ What are they going to do to the wretches ? ”

“ Hang the lot of them, I believe. They are in gaol now. ”

“ Please don’t speak any more about the awful affair,” interposed Ariadne, with a shudder.

“ Certainly not,” said the landlord, changing the conversation. “ I have some splendid fruit from Pretoria,” he hastened to say, as she rose from the table. “ Will you have it now, or shall I send it out to the garden ?”

“ I believe I should like some later, if you will send it to me. I shall be in my usual seat by the big round table under the willows. I have a lot of reading to do.”

This was said with an emphasis intended for Achilles, to whom she had not addressed a word during the meal.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### CAPTAIN ACHILLES PLAYS THE RÔLE OF IAGO.

IT was one of the most secluded spots, at the end of a broad pathway, ornamented on either side by carefully-trimmed grass, and bordered with rows of scarlet geraniums intermingled with beds of daisies and violets. A spot out of sight of the smooth lawn-tennis ground, the tables and benches scattered round under the shadow of the spreading trees, near the rows of quaint, thick-walled, single-chambered old dwellings for the accommodation of Mr Spears' permanent guests. To this spot Ariadne directed her steps when she left the breakfast table so unceremoniously.

Under the last of a row of willows, whose feathery branches swaying and drooping partially concealed the rudely-constructed rustic bench erected against the gnarled and massive trunk, Ariadne seated herself with a little sigh of content.

Drawing the rickety, moss-stained table

nearer, she opened the pocket edition of Keats, her constant companion, and resting her elbows on the table, began to read.

There was no sound to disturb her in that quiet spot, save the soft whirl of waters dammed up in a deep sluit near by, the low twitter of the young birds overhead receiving their morning lessons in nest-making, the dull echoes, like distant thunder, of the great battery in the Langlaagte mine, whose huge shafts were just visible through the interlacing branches of the orchard of pear trees before her.

She was sitting so quiet, absorbed in the magical verses of Endymion, that she took no heed of the many voiceless, velvet-footed visitors who had come, emboldened by her silence, to pay her a morning call.

The rustling, as she turned the pages of her book, disturbed them not ; it fell soft as the whisper of the willow leaves on their delicate senses. There was something in her warm, human presence that drew them to her, one and all, and made them cling to the edge of her riding skirt, creep into its folds, and curl cosily up on the brim of the soft felt hat shading her golden hair. They had no fear of the dainty riding boots, but slyly inspected heel, toe, and arching instep. An indefinable instinct taught

them to feel secure, and assured those beautiful insignificant atoms of creation, that, in this, to them, mountain of humanity, dwelt no will to destroy or injure them.

And while they busily crept in and out of every fold and crease, rubbing their silken bodies in pleasant friction against the fuzzy nap of her gown, Ariadne sat motionless, unconscious of the little world swarming around her, until one bold, big fellow glided from her sleeve, and stretched his sinuous, shining, transparent body against her ungloved hand.

There he lay quite still, evidently enjoying the contact with the cool, soft flesh, while Ariadne noted the deep, rich crimson of his coat, flecked out beneath by black and yellow stripes. A ray of sunshine, struggling through the dense foliage above, alighting on his back, transformed him for the instant into a fiery carbuncle, in which she could trace the blood pulsing through a network of fringed veins. Then the ray vanished, and with it disappeared that beautiful vision of the surging tide of life within the otherwise repulsive grub upon her hand.

Very slowly and carefully she closed her book, putting it down with her disengaged hand, and, folding the other over it, prepared to watch the

vagaries of her queer guest, who had curled himself up with every apparent intention of enjoying a sound nap on his new-found couch.

Soon another, of deep indigo-hued coat, crept over the edge of the book ; then another, clad in yellow mail, followed by a score of many-coloured brothers, surrounded the citadel of her motionless white fingers.

“ Poor little grub, there is much that is beautiful in your short existence,” mused Ariadne. “ You are happy in your own lonely way. The dew refreshes you. The sweet root of shrub and tree strengthens you. The sun warms your delicate body. The rain and storm have no terrors for you, who can in a moment burrow for shelter in the soft sandy soil. Where,” said Ariadne, lightly pressing one beneath her finger, “ did you get that glittering coat? Have you found it sleeping in a bed of golden quartz in the great mine over the way ?

“ Soon the glorious summer-time will be here, and with it your feast of roses, when you will gorge yourself with the luscious strawberry, and kiss the white bloom from peach and apricot. Yea, happy is your lot, watched over by the same God who guides the fate of kings and empires. But you are happier than kings,

for you know not the pain of mortal striving and straining. The great God has not given you a soul, but He has given you a life, brief, 'tis true, yet full of the richness of mother earth, on whose breast you tranquilly subsist, and as tranquilly die.

“And you,” as a truly magnificent specimen, fully four inches long, crept over the rim of the table, and slowly glided near with stately undulations of his gorgeous body, “surely you are the very prince of caterpillars, with your cuirass of vivid green, that wonderful gleaming web of black and silvery white woven into your sinuous back. Those shiny golden antennæ waving above your tiny eyes set like black jewels in your glossy head. How resplendent you will be when that woven coat has blossomed into a shimmering pair of gossamer wings. But now you are content to creep as lowly as the ugliest grub among them all. You preach the old, old sermon of patience and humility, the lesson of humble contentment through the season of grovelling in probation, ere the wings are grown that lead to a higher life for me as well as for you, my pretty caterpillar!”

“I say,” exclaimed the voice of Captain Achilles, “you will be eaten up by those beastly grubs if you don’t get out of this.”

"I'm not afraid of them," answered Ariadne, scarcely raising her eyes to the man standing at the opposite side of the table, "any more than I am afraid of another and more loathsome kind of grub who eats up a woman's reputation."

"I don't understand you," he answered, with a wicked laugh, seating himself on the edge of the table, and flourishing his riding whip with nervous jerks.

"You have been indulging in whisky and soda, Captain Achilles; and I would thank you to take yourself away."

"Captain Achilles," he echoed mockingly, mimicking her tone; "it used to be Archie; now it is Captain Achilles!"

"Yes, and it will be Captain Achilles to the end of the chapter."

"Oh! indeed, h'm——" he ejaculated, as he twirled his whip and brought it down vigorously on the gorgeous caterpillar, cutting the unfortunate grub literally in two, while inflicting a stinging blow on Ariadne's folded hands.

For a moment she sat quite still, holding her breath to keep back the cry of pain that sprang to her lips, and closing her eyes to quench the tears that gushed forth at the shock of the blow. Then she arose, and, folding her hands behind

her to hide the vivid marks thereon, confronted the man seated on the table still nonchalantly twirling his whip, with white face and blazing eyes.

“Cruel brute! Worse than brute, for brutes are cruel only to defend! Why have you killed that harmless worm? Ah! I was right in saying there were grubs among men who would eat a woman’s reputation with as little compunction as you have cut the life out of that helpless insect.”

“Oh, don’t bother about that old caterpillar,” he went on, apparently unconscious of the blow he had given her. “If I knew that you were so fond of the grubs I’d get you a bushel of them. But I want to have an understanding on this subject of a woman’s reputation, which you fling at my head every time we speak.”

“It is a subject on which you have no scruples whatever; in fact, it is a subject you don’t believe in at all.”

“Oh! damn reputation! What does a woman want with reputation in the Rand? If she has any she had better stay away, and look after it. By Jove, she can’t do that here. This is no place for women with reputations. What did you come here for, if you had any?”

“I came here because a merciless destiny

meted out to me the fate to suffer bitterly at the hands of such as you."

"I quite fail to catch your drift. I wish you would explain what you mean."

"You don't understand me?"

"No."

"Then you are one of the most contemptible prevaricators on the face of the earth. You deceive yourself when you imagine that I know nothing of your insinuations, your calumnies, your efforts to separate Hector and myself. I know them all. And while I am at a loss to comprehend your motive—unless it be," she said with a quick disdainful laugh, "that you are in love with me yourself."

"And if I acknowledge that I am?" he burst out, as he sprang from the table. "What then? Answer me straight. No fencing, if you please."

"I would say," answered Ariadne, turning steadily away her pallid face from his gaze, "that I would sooner die than exchange the love Hector has given me for such as you have to offer."

Her answer seemed to stagger him, for he turned abruptly away and strolled along the garden path; while Ariadne picked up her book, and, shaking the folds of her habit, prepared to leave the garden.

Suddenly he turned back ; and, coming close to her, said in a voice which he strove to render indifferent, " Thank you for giving me a straight answer ; but it's thrown away, I am sorry to say—as—I don't happen to tell the truth."

" I am glad to know that, and quite willing to forgive you, as I would not wish to make my worst enemy unhappy if I could help it."

" No? I quite believe you," he said with a sneer, " when I see you doing all in your power to make one who *is* your worst enemy happy."

" One who is my worst enemy happy! What do you mean?"

" I propose to let you find that out yourself, my charming Ariadne."

" I gave you a straight answer a moment ago. Now give me one. What do you mean?"

" I would rather be excused," he said, taking his old position on the table, and resuming his twirling of the whip, " if you don't mind."

" I do mind. And I insist on an answer."

" Oh! I really could not tell you. It would be a breach of confidence."

" Captain Achilles," said Ariadne, emphatically, " again I insist on an answer!"

" What is the use of nagging a fellow like this?" he cried, with assumed anger. " I tell

you I will not be guilty of a breach of confidence."

"You have been guilty of worse than a breach of confidence in casting the slur of insinuations on Hector, for you can mean but him, as you well know he is the only man I wish to make happy. But your odious hints and sneers are lost on me, let me assure you. I would not believe one word from you against him, not if you swore on a stack of Bibles as high as the highest willow in the grove."

"Ah! indeed," he answered, while leisurely preparing a cigarette, dropping the tobacco slowly on the paper in his hand as he spoke, "you love Hector. There is no doubt about that?"

"None whatever," exclaimed Ariadne, with a strange foreboding straining at her heart.

"And you would marry him; give up all ambition; be content to live the rest of your life buried in Africa?"

"I would do all that—and more."

"Well, I am glad to hear you say so, glad to find you a woman of more pluck than I gave you credit for, and you will need it all, for——"

He paused to re-light the cigarette; it seemed to Ariadne that he prolonged the answer more

from a spirit of tantalisation than through reluctance to tell any unpleasant truth.

"Confound that cigarette, will it never light?"

"Let me hold your cap while you strike the match inside."

"Thank you, how thoughtful you are!" he said, puffing away in the shelter afforded by the cap.

"I say," he cried, suddenly catching the cap and her hand in his, "don't treat me as you do. Spare just a little of that love you lavish on Hector for me. There," kissing the livid mark on her hand, "let us be friends."

"Never!" exclaimed Ariadne, snatching her hand away. "Never—do you understand?—Never. You would have to be born over again to be capable of inspiring such love as I bear for Hector."

"And most worthy he is of it," sneered Achilles, his eyes flashing with jealous rage.

Ariadne made no reply.

"Yes, Hector intends to marry you," he resumed, slowly puffing away between each sentence, "when the mine is floated"—puff—"and there is lots of tin"—puff—"and he can set up a nice little shanty-villa"—puff—"piano"—puff—"horses and cart"—puff—"and all that,

you know"—puff—"he will marry you"—puff—"and"—puff—"commit bigamy!"

"Bigamy?" gasped Ariadne.

"Yes, bigamy; that is the sort of man you love; that is the sort of a man I should be if I were born over again, as you just said, in order to inspire you with love. Yes, my charming Ariadne, your darling Hector has a wife in England: not an aristocrat, as you are, to be sure, but his wife all the same. But he will marry you. The law of England need never reach here. You will both be very happy, I am sure—as you deserve. You said a moment ago you would give up everything for him, and more. Well, now you have the chance to prove it. Marry him, and my blessing go with you!"

With the last words ringing in her ears he left her.

For a moment Ariadne stood helplessly staring after his form, as he strode rapidly over the pathway between the beds of budding flowers—stared till path, trees, sky and flowers seemed to revolve in one mighty whirl round his face with its cruel smile. Then all grew black as night. Her heart gave a great throb. She swayed forward and sank insensible at the foot of the great willow.

"Baas, Baas!" cried a Kafir boy, a few

minutes later, as he rushed breathlessly to the landlord, "the missis fall down by the tree in the garden."

Mr Spears found her lying face downwards. As he gently raised the poor stricken head a little line of crimson oozed from the pallid lips. "Bring some brandy and water. Run, you black devil, as fast as your legs can carry you!" he roared to the gaping Kafir.

After much chafing of hands, bathing of temples, and forcing of brandy through the clenched teeth, Ariadne revived a few moments, just long enough to moan—

"My sister—bring her to me," and relapsed into unconsciousness once more.

Hours afterwards Ariadne returned to consciousness, but stared in a dazed fashion at the white walls and low ceiling of the room in which she was lying.

The sun had gone down long ago, and the silvery rays of the moon tipped with pearly light the nodding willows, lawn, and vine-covered hedge visible through the deep-curtained window by her bed. In the soft glow shining across the little chamber, she saw the anxious face of her sister close to her.

“Oh, my sister!” she cried, sobbing faintly, and twining her arms round her, “take me home.”

“Yes, dearest,” answered Kathleen, while her tears fell fast on the golden head pillowed on her breast; “we shall go back to our dear home, far over the seas, where no echo of the sin and wretchedness of this spot shall ever trouble you again.”

## CHAPTER XIX

### A BIG LITTLE MANAGER

A SHORT little man, with a big, bullet-shaped head, round protruding eyes, heavy brows, and thick, sensual-looking lips, between which was perched a briarwood pipe, was sitting at an upright piano, in the middle of a narrow space enclosed by a wooden railing covered with cotton plush, and devoted to the half-dozen musicians dignified by the name, if not the quality, of an orchestra.

The little man vigorously pounded on the yellow keys, and when not absorbed in attending to the intricacies of the score before him, found time to give the beat with one hand, while rattling away with the bass with the other.

The little man was ugly, coarse, and uncouth to the last degree, but he made up for lack of beauty in plenty of brain and indomitable pluck. With the one he ruled, with the other he fought, until he conquered every obstacle in his way.

and stood up before gods and men a successful man with no thanks to either.

That he possessed the power of getting good out of the most incongruous elements, no one would gainsay who saw him at his post, shouting, swearing, sweating, smoking, and singing all in the same breath, in the herculean labour of rehearsing the opera of 'Faust.' The Marguerite had no voice, but tried to sing. The Seibel had a voice but could not sing. The Faust brayed like a donkey, or bleated like a forsaken goat. The Mephistopheles had a voice as big as his elephantine body; he could emit a bass note equal to the roar of an enraged lion. A chorus of limp young women, with limper voices, whose feeble efforts were completely drowned—unless the sprightly little leader held her own with a succession of shrill notes—by the score of dirty, unkempt, but willing and earnest chorus men. These did their work with a reckless disregard of rhyme, tone, or harmony, that was as marvellous as it was inharmonious.

The little man knew all this, and more; for he was, singular to relate, an accomplished musician without a tith of training.

Training! what had he to do with training. It was a loss of time. His principle was to go straight to work with a bang, to do or die!