

sort of thing—for our host, he's beastly uncivil the moment you ask questions. It's a regular case of scratch the Russian and you find the Tartar.'

'Yes ; you're right. Although it seems a bit ungrateful to say so, I'm dashed if I'd care to have much to do with him. Did you see him shut up when I remarked about his living a queer life ? Gad ! his lips closed up until they fitted like the valves of an oyster. He's as suspicious as the devil !'

'I say, look here—a photo ! Just look, man ! “Harrison Nairn ” on the back of it ! Quite a decent-looking chap. Heron, I wonder who *she* is ?'

'God knows ! I don't !'

'Someone else's, you can bet, or he wouldn't lie so low, eh ?'

'H'm ! looks devilish like it.'

'I say, Heron.'

'What ?'

'I wonder what he'd say if he heard us, eh ?'

'Shut up, man ; go to sleep !'

'I say ! The ideal white man—“ a possible enemy and a certain nuisance.”'

'For Heaven's sake, man, shut up ! They'll hear you sniggering. Good-night !'

II.

It was a dark night and still—the stillness that often precedes a thunderstorm. The clouds were banked up thick, and only here and there on the outer fringes, where cuts in the hills gave a glimpse nearer the horizon, was there a faint lighting of the gloomy canopy.

Low's Creek runs through one of Nature's perfect amphitheatres and finds its outlet at the Poort. If that were blocked, there would be a lake many hundred feet deep; but as it is not blocked, there is only a very clear, sparkling stream rippling over stony bottoms, or swirling under the overhanging thorns and fig-trees—the one constant babbler on such nights as this. The road through this valley is not over-good at the best of times, and it is something worse than bad on a really dark night—which was exactly what the driver of the spider-and-four thought as he pulled up with his near fore-wheel foul of a dead tree-stump. There was no damage done, for the horses were pleased to take the sudden check as an excuse, if not indeed a hint, to stop; and when by the light of matches the size of the obstacle was determined, and means were found to free the wheel, the driver said, 'Come!' and the horses toiled on again up the hill towards the Neck. Every now and then, as they climbed

slowly up, the ladies—there were two ladies in the spider—would point out the camp-fires of the prospectors at various heights and distances on the tops or slopes of the surrounding hills, and their companion would tell them which was French Bob's, and which the Cascade, and point out, high and far, the famous Kimberley Imperial; and the Hottentot driver would peer out in front, silently intent upon the road.

Toiling, swaying, and straining, they at last reached the Neck, and gave the horses a blow. Behind them, or rather below them, black as the bottomless pit, lay the valley out of which they had risen. In front lay the broader, shallower, furrowed basin, through which the road winds, cross-cut by Honeybird and Fig-tree Creeks; and beyond Avoca, where the waters meet, they could see, through the gap of the Queen's River Poort, the lightning playing in the distance—silent, clear, and not too vivid.

Down the easy slope the horses trotted out freely, swinging their heads and snorting as the faint, cool breeze, the sure precursor of the storm, fanned and freshened them. On they went gaily for a couple of miles till the deep, dry donga was reached, where the road dips down suddenly into a black, murky, impenetrable darkness. Above, the trees on either side of the high banks intertwine their branches; beneath, the soft dead leaves lie upon a sandy bottom,

and the road is flanked by jungle, pure and simple. It is like a tunnel. It is not possible to leave it except at the ends.

The driver gave the leaders their heads, and trusted to their knowing that he couldn't see, whilst they might. The heavy grating of the brake, hard pressed, sounded loud on the night air as the leaders disappeared into the dark trough. Down went the trap and horses with a diver's plunge at first, and then more steadily and slowly they neared the bottom; but before it was reached, the leaders shied violently to the off, the spider swung down the slope, slid a little, poised for a moment on two wheels, and turned slowly over on its side on the bed of leaves and sand. The horses, with their heads jammed in the bush, were effectually stopped.

The ladies did not scream!

It seems wrong—unnatural; but they did not. Urgent need and sudden danger, as they overwhelm and stupefy some, so do they brace and brighten others; and when one of the horses whinnied in a friendly way, it seemed odd that it should be a girl's voice that exclaimed quickly:

'Listen! they're not frightened. It must be another horse!'

'Are you hurt?' 'Where are you?' and, 'Are you all right?' were exchanged in the darkness; and then someone struck a match, and, making a dark

lantern of his hat, threw the light on the late occupants of the spider.

The girls were dusty, pale, and frightened, and the men looked anxious. The Hottentot driver was swearing to himself in a discontented undertone, and endeavouring concurrently to loosen the wheelers' harness.

'I am the culprit,' said the man with the light. 'I can only say I am very delighted that no one is hurt, and awfully sorry that I gave you such a fright. I'm sure I never meant it. I did not know there was a soul within miles until the sound of your brake frightened my horse into backing into the bush here. The brute wouldn't budge, so I sat still, hoping that you would pass without seeing me.'

'Oh, it really doesn't matter in the least!' came from one of the girls, as the match died out. 'You don't know how relieved, how grateful we are to you for not being a lion or a highwayman.'

The driver Piet had rummaged out a stump of candle, and lighted it. It flickered uncertainly on the capsized spider, on the scattered cushions and shawls, on the faces of the two young girls and their companion, and faintly lighted up the lank form and the dark bearded face of the enemy.

'I thought I knew your voice, Heron!' said the latter quietly.

‘Nairn! By all that’s great and wonderful! What on earth were you——’

‘Well, I wasn’t waylaying you with evil intent, and I do hope that the ladies——’

‘Oh, I forgot. My sisters,’ said Heron, with an explanatory wave. ‘Girls, this is Mr. Nairn, a friend of mine. Very much in disguise, you must admit, Nairn!’

‘Indeed I do. I confess, I repent, and I beg for mercy; and, to give practical proof of my sincerity, let me help you. Come on, Heron; let’s right the trap first.’

No damage had been done to the trap, and the three men soon succeeded in getting it on its wheels again. The boy drove through the donga and up the other bank without further difficulty, the others preferring to walk; but out there, when he had room to move round his team, the driver found that the off-leader had gashed his shoulder badly in the bush, and would have to be turned out.

Heron’s heart sank, for it would be a serious matter to attempt the four drifts of the Queen’s River in a heavy spider with only a pair. He looked at the overcast sky, and turned in despair to Nairn, who had remained with the ladies, and knew nothing of the injury to the horse.

‘Nairn, you know the road best. Is there *any* place where we can stay the night? We can’t

tackle the rivers. One of the leaders has cut his shoulder badly and won't face the harness. We must put up somewhere for the night!

'There's Clothier's,' the other answered; 'but I'm afraid that won't do—a grass hut, and sardines, gin, and rough customers. Charlie Brandt's—ditto! There's the Queen of Sheba's at Eureka City; but, then, you'd never reach there alive—at night. Let's see! No; there's no fit place between this and Barberton.'

'There!' said Heron, 'we'll spend a pleasant night in the veld, rain and all. I wish we'd come on a bit further with the waggons. It will be rough on you girls.'

But they did not seem dismayed at the prospect; in fact, they considered it a romantic sort of picnic adventure. Heron, who had had malarial fever, took no count of the romance.

While the matter was being discussed, Nairn went forward and carefully examined the injured horse. Heron had decided to outspan where they were, under a big Dingaana apricot-tree, and the ladies were busy making plans for the disposal of cushions, wraps, and rugs to fend off the coming rain.

'That horse will be worse to-morrow than he is to-night. He won't be well for weeks,' said Nairn coolly. 'How do you propose getting on at all,

even if you do stay here to-night? What do you gain by the delay?’

Heron was somewhat taken aback.

‘Well,’ he answered, ‘we gain the daylight, anyway; that’s something.’

‘Something—yes; but daylight won’t take you through the rivers with one pair of horses. They’ll be pretty full, too, after to-night’s rain.’

‘That’s true,’ said Heron gloomily; ‘and it’s raining like old Harry now up at the headwaters. Look at the lightning over the Kaap Valley!’

They looked, and the quick play of the distant flashes left no room for doubt. Then Nairn spoke again—without impulse, without enthusiasm, but deliberately, as though he had considered the matter and reluctantly but finally made his decision.

‘You will have to put my horse in place of the injured one, and go on to-night. I can walk.’

He did not affect that the idea was the happy thought of the moment, or that it was from all points of view a good one. He seemed from his tone to be making the best of a bad job, and Heron saw that so distinctly that he could only stammer out weakly:

‘Oh, really, it’s awfully good of you, but we couldn’t allow you to walk.’

But the taller of the two girls came to her brother’s assistance.

‘I think it’s a *capital* idea! Don’t you see, Jack, Mr. Nairn wants “to give a practical proof of his sincerity”?’

The lazy, mischievous imitation of Nairn’s tone and manner in quoting his own words brought a hearty laugh from the others against Nairn, for he had ‘given himself away’; and once or twice as they were changing horses and preparing to start, Nairn found himself looking curiously at the girl who had ‘let him down.’

They were nearly ready to start when she came over to him, and said :

‘You are not going to walk. You will come with us, won’t you?’

He shook his head.

‘My way is not your way, Miss Heron.’

‘No, no ; you express it wrongly. *My way is your way.* We have room for you and you must come.’

‘But I have just come from Barberton, and I live in—in the Swazie country.’ And his voice dropped to nothing on the last words.

‘Now, Mr. Nairn, I know you are afraid of overcrowding us. You *have* to come for your horse, so that excuse won’t do ; and since you compel me to tell the whole truth, Jack says you know the road best, and we want you to come because we are just a tiny little bit afraid of those horrid rivers. Now I’ve told you.’

Nairn submitted ; but as they drove along in the dark more than once the thought occurred that even the best of women will stoop to the most unfair means to gain their points.

After many years it was all fresh to him again.

They spun along the smooth soft road, slowing up in places for the dongas—those deeply-worn furrows in Nature's face, the result of many a heavy storm. They passed the huge old fig-tree standing sentinel where the waters meet, and crossed the Fig-tree Creek, which, to the experienced ear of the men, had a fuller and angrier tone than was its wont. They passed 'Clothier's' in silence. To the girls the grass shanty leaking candle-light at every pore in its misshapen sides, the shouts of laughter, the half-heard songs, the glimpse of the interior as they passed the door, showing the rough gin-case counter, backed by shelves laden with 'square face,' and the bare-armed, bearded man craning over to dodge the glare of guttering candles and see who or what was passing by—all made a picture unique and indelible.

They wound slowly round the bend and over the big smooth rocks down to the Fourth Drift.

The water ran silently over the sandy bottom, and when the horses were in breast-high and their movements no longer caused a splash, the absolute stillness begat a feeling of awe and fear of the

black-looking water that is so silent, so strong, and so treacherous.

To everyone there comes a sense of strain relieved and spirits reviving on coming through a bad river, and to the young girls, whose first experience it was, the splashing of the leaders' feet in shallow water, and the rising up the sandy bank, brought an ecstasy of relief.

Driving up the valley of the Lampogwana, Nairn and Heron cheered them with tales of the gold-fields and of the country, and ignored the river and the coming storm ; but the steep rush into the Third Drift, and the tossing and jolting over the boulders, and the angry racing of the water and the more distinct roll of the thunder, were features in a first experience which were not to be talked away, and if Nairn felt his conversational powers disparaged by very evident non-attention, perhaps this was compensated for by occasional graspings of his arm—mute appeals for protection which men take as compliments.

Going slowly down the cutting to the Second Drift, the course of the river was shown up by the lightning, and one bluish gleam in particular lit up the scene with such unsurpassable vividness that long after all was black again the eye retained a view of dark water in swirls and curves of wonderful grace, of foam-crested breakers and jets

of spray, of swaying shrubs and bent, quivering reeds.

Nairn recalled another such night when his horse, which had paused to sniff before facing the flood, jerked his head up with a snort as a blinding flash had shown him a white face for an instant above the water. The fixed stare that the dead eyes gave him lingered long after succeeding flashes had shown an unbroken surface of river again. But he did not speak of this.

They drove slowly over the little flat through which the river ran, and as that was barely covered by the flood they knew that the river was just passable for the spider, but it meant getting a wetting as it was dangerously near flood mark.

Piet pulled up. The ladies and the baases, he said, could take the footpath along the mountains over the krantzes and avoid the two drifts. It was only four miles to the next hotel. He would like to outspan and stay where he was—the river was too full, and the next drift would be worse still. The river was coming down.

But Heron was obstinate, and Nairn, who knew the footpath past the Golden Valley, knew it to be an impossible alternative for ladies, at night; so Heron called out: 'Kate, you grip the rail, and Nairn will look after you! You hang on to me, Nell!' They went in, and the water washed on to

the seats, and the spider swayed to the stream ; but the horses headed up bravely, and buoying on the waters, or sousing underneath, half swimming and half wading, they pulled through.

‘ Hold up, Nell! hold up, little woman! Don’t cry now, we’re as safe as houses ! ’ was what Nairn heard from the opposite seat.

What happened beside him was that his companion’s grasp loosened on the rail, and as the spider rose up the soft, sandy bank, she slid back against him with her weight on the arm he had passed behind her as protection, and her cheek against his shoulder.

When they pulled up on the level road again, while her sister was laughing off her tears, Kate pulled herself together with an effort, and said, with a half-sobbing laugh :

‘ I was very fri—frightened that time. I—I think I should have fallen out but for you.’

Then the storm broke over them, and the rain came down in blinding torrents, and the horses, ducking and swaying before it, moved slowly on. Flash after flash lit up the hills above and the river below as they toiled along where the road was cut out of the precipitous hillside. Every furrow was a stream, every gutter a watercourse ; the water seemed to gush from the very earth ; the river itself was a seething mud-red torrent.

The First Drift, which, as they were coming up stream, was their last, is broader, and not as deep as the others ; but in those days it was full of boulders, and the water raced down in three separate channels, although the surface showed but one broad stream. The drift is now higher up, where the bed is even, and the current is not so strong. They have also a wire rope across, and a ferry-boat ; but it was not so in '87. They have done a good deal to improve things, but still the river is king, and asserts itself upon occasion ; as when it took a thousand tons of solid masonry from the Cerro de Pasco dam a hundred yards below this drift, and carried samples of dressed stone and Portland cement to the barbel and crocodiles of Ingwenye Umkulu, thirty miles away ; or when, later still, it rose in protest against the impudence of man, and swept battery houses off like corks, and flung the huge girders of the railway-bridge from its path, and tossed fifty-ton boulders like pebbles into the Oriental water-race, seventy feet above the river's bed.

They crossed the first channel safely ; and they even got through the second and worst. The little Hottentot Piet sat tight, and handled his team with the most perfect skill. At times it seemed impossible that horses or trap could with-

stand the surging mass of water that piled up against them ; but they did. A cheering word or a timely touch of the whip seemed once or twice to avert catastrophe.

Nairn's horse had made a perfect leader, and faced the water like a steamboat ; but the other seemed to be losing heart, and but for Piet's whip would have headed down stream in the second channel.

They were into the third channel, and were going slowly and steadily through, when one front wheel came block up against a boulder, and the near leader again headed down. Whip, voice and rein failed, and as Piet made one more determined effort, something gave, and he dropped back in his seat, calling out :

'Baas, baas, the rein's broken!'

Nairn jumped up instantly, but the frightened girl clung to him, crying out :

'Oh, don't leave me! Mr. Nairn, for the love of God, don't leave us!'

Her one hand grasped the collar of his coat, the other held his right hand. He loosened her grasp, and holding both her hands tightly, forced her back into the seat.

'Hold *that!*' he said, placing her one hand on the rail, and stooping until his face almost touched hers. 'Sit still, and wait for me. I won't desert you!'

Vaulting over into the driver's seat, he seized the sjambok and jumped into the river. The near leader, free of the check of the rein, was giving before the stream, and had turned fairly down the river. Nairn was swept off his feet in an instant, but, anticipating this, he had grasped the wheeler's near trace, and was able to work his way forward until he was abreast of the swerving leader. Keeping with his right hand a firm grasp of the lower trace, he shouted to the quaking animal, and struck it sharply on the neck and jaw with the sjambok. The suddenness of the attack startled the horse, and he plunged up stream again. At the same moment Piet's whip whistled overhead, and his voice rang out; the other three horses strained together, and the spider rose over the stone, and, lurching and bumping, came through the third channel.

The excited animals rushed the last narrow strip of water, and Nairn, stumbling over rocks as best he could, was dragged with them, until, losing his hold and his footing with the last plunge of the horses, he was hurled forward on his head as they reached the bank. One of the horses trampled him, and two of the wheels went over his chest. The little Hottentot saw it all, and before the others knew anything, he had jumped off, leaving the horses to pull up as they were accustomed to on

the bank, and grabbed Nairn by the arm just as he began to swing into the current and float down stream.

* * * * *

The Bungalow was perched on the hillside, and overlooked the camp. The thatched roof and wide veranda made it cool and pleasant, and the view across the great valley of De Kaap was grand.

Nairn's head was still bandaged, and he was propped up on a cushioned lounge, unable to stir.

The French window of the room opened out upon the stoep, and from the couch itself Nairn could overlook the camp and see the bold parapets of the Devil's Kantoor five-and-twenty miles across the valley.

Nairn moved his head slowly and painfully as he heard a light footstep upon the stoep. Miss Heron walked in with a cup of something in one hand, and with the other grasping the folds of her riding-habit.

'Well, how is the head?' she asked, putting down the cup and busying herself at once, fixing the cushions more comfortably, and moistening the lint and bandage over his temples. 'Better, aren't you? See, I've brought you something cool and nice to drink. It will freshen you up again. Try some!'

Nairn closed his eyes, and half turned his head away, ignoring the offer.

'You are going out again, riding?' he queried, in an uncivil tone.

'Yes; as far as the river, to see how it looks in daylight, and in its better mood. They say it is beginning to fall; but it is banks over still. They say that the morning after we crossed, Welsh, whose house is on the rise above the drift, got out of bed into two feet of water. He says he felt it in bed, but thought it was only the roof leaking again. I wish you could come with us—but you will soon, won't you?'

'No; I've stayed too long already,' was the surly answer, and Nairn turned his face further towards the wall.

'To-morrow we shall be able to move you out on to the stoep, and perhaps you will let me read to you there? It won't seem so lonely and dismal then,' said Miss Kate, gently ignoring Nairn's tone.

'Thank you!' he answered tartly; 'I don't mind being alone. I like it!'

She had got to know his humours, and so, standing back a little where he could not watch her face, and keeping the laughter out of her voice, she said: 'Oh!'

'Perhaps the others are ready,' he remarked after a pause. 'I am keeping you from your ride.'

‘I don’t think so. They promised to call for me here.’

‘Don’t wait on my account, please. I don’t mind being alone.’

‘So you said before. If you *object* to my sitting here, of course I can wait on the stoep. I thought perhaps you liked me to be here.’

Miss Kate switched gently at her foot, but did not move from her seat, and Nairn played a tattoo upon the woodwork of the lounge. He broke the silence with an impatient sigh and, after another pause, his companion remarked airily to the opposite wall:

‘I wonder why sick people are called *patients*?’

Nairn twitched visibly, but offered no explanation, and there was another silence. Presently the girl observed genially:

‘You remember, Mr. Nairn, while we were driving along that night, you were telling us about the training of horses? You remember, don’t you?’

‘Yes,’ said Nairn grumpily.

‘You remember,’ resumed the girl, smiling sweetly—‘you remember telling us that you considered the various types of animals higher or lower according to their susceptibility to kindness and gentle treatment—that the horse, for instance, stands higher than the mule or the donkey. Now,’ said she, turning to him with laughing eyes but

earnest mien, 'I wanted to ask you which of those two is the one upon which patience and kindness and good temper are most wasted.'

'You mean, whether I am a mule or an ass?'

Nairn looked round, vainly endeavouring not to smile.

'Oh dear, oh dear!' said Miss Kate, laughing and moving to the door; 'I'm afraid the poor old head is very bad to-day! Here are the others. I must go. Good-bye.'

'*Did* you mean that *I*——'

'Say good-bye at once, or I'll sit down again and refuse to leave.'

'I won't! Tell me, did——'

'Good-bye, Ursa Major with the sore head, and don't ask questions.'

The girl curtsied to him in the doorway as she left, and Nairn turned his face to the wall again with a groan.

A girl knows when a man's eyes follow her about the room, and she knows why—long before the man does. But the man finds it out soon enough.

Nairn pushed away the books and papers. They had no charm for him, and, as he could not sleep, he fell presently to tracing the design of the wall-paper and counting how many varieties or bunches of flowers went to make up the general pattern.

He detected small irregularities in the joinings, and they annoyed him. So he turned round and stared at the ceiling; but he had studied that before, and he knew which board contained the most knots, and how many boards had apparently been cut from the same log. There were two boards which were twins; so exactly did they match, they must have been parted by but one saw-cut; and he speculated if there could be any sort of intelligence in them that could be roused to wonder or gratitude that they, cut in Norway from one stately old pine, should pass through many hands and yet find a resting-place side by side ten thousand miles away in the gold-fields of the Transvaal.

Nairn's eyelids drooped heavily. One sleepy chuckle escaped him at his own quaint conceit, as he wondered whether the ceiling boards considered the flooring boards beneath them, and if they ever put on side on that account; and the smile of lazy content remained long after he was fast asleep.

It was the scent of flowers that roused him. Violets! And he had not smelt them for twelve years!

Miss Kate was sitting there looking at him, and, but for the scent of the flowers and the slanting sunbeams, he might have thought she had never left.

'Does the big bear like flowers?'

He was too contented to do more than smile.

‘And he won’t eat me now?’

‘When Beauty picked the flowers, what did the Beast do?’

Kate looked up with a shade of alarm. She was not quite sure where analogies might lead them—they get to mean so much.

‘Well, well,’ she laughed, ‘who would have suspected you of a leaning towards fairy tales? Why don’t you ask if I enjoyed my ride?’

‘Well, did you?’

‘Listen to him! Well, *did* I? Oh,’ said Miss Kate, pushing back her chair with a sigh of mock despair, ‘you’ll *never* learn! It is not in you to be ordinarily civil. Now listen, and I’ll teach you; and now repeat after me: “I hope——”’

‘I hope——’

‘No, no! You must hope with greater warmth. Say, “I *hope* you have enjoyed——”’

‘I *hope* you have enjoyed——’

‘“Your ride *immensely!*”’

‘Your ride *immensely!*’

‘That’s better. “And I’m very glad indeed——”’

‘And I’m very glad indeed——’

‘“That you went out.”’

‘No, I’m hanged if I’ll say that!’

‘Mister Nairn!’

‘No ; I don’t care what you say ! I won’t say that ! I’m not going to perjure myself.’

‘You must say it!’

‘Not if I die for it !’

‘You won’t say it to oblige me ?’

‘N—no.’

There was a curious pause. Kate looked down, saying softly :

‘Well, if you won’t do the first thing I have ever asked you, I suppose I’d better go.’

Women, not excepting the very best, are often most unfair, and sometimes even mean. Why change in a breath from chaff to deadly earnest, and wring a man’s heart out with half a look and a catch in the voice ? Nairn succumbed.

‘No, don’t go. I’ll say it.’

‘Well?’

‘But I’ve forgotten the words.’

‘No ; you can’t have forgotten so quickly. Say, “I’m very glad indeed that you went out.”’

‘I’m very glad indeed that——’

‘Go on !’

‘That—that you’ve come back.’

‘I can see that you want to drive me away.’

‘No, don’t—don’t go ! “That you went out.” Heaven forgive me ! There, are you satisfied ?’

‘Yes, I’m satisfied now. I hate to give in—especially to a man.’

‘And to a woman?’

‘Oh, I never give in to a woman. Women are so obstinate, and they’re always wrong! What are you laughing at? Oh, well, I’m not like a woman now. I’m—you know what I mean—I’m stating the case. Besides, I meant *other* women.’

‘Now, if I tell you something, you won’t laugh at me and point the finger of scorn and press the heel of triumph?’

‘No, I won’t.’

‘Promise.’

‘I promise.’

‘Well, then, I *am* glad that you went out, and I *was* a bear to grudge it to you. And you—you have been far too good to me—far too good.’

‘No, no—indeed no! You are my charge, and I am your nurse. And, remember, had it not been for us you would not have been hurt. Had it not been for you we should not have been here. We brought you to death’s door, and you saved us. I—I was only teasing you. I never meant—’

‘Kate, child, Kate!’

‘Hush! No, no—not now. Here is George. Good-night.’

* * * * *

Yes, truly! The—man—finds—it—out—soon—enough!

* * * * *

In the morning Nairn and his horse were gone, and there was not a vestige of a trace to show how, why, or where! It was several days later that Geddy, who had been away for some weeks, dined at Heron's, and, as they were sitting on the stoep smoking and chatting, remarked :

'By the way, fancy whom I met on the way in! Our old friend Induna Nairn, looking ghastly, poor devil! Said he'd had a spill crossing a river or something. Surlier than ever. Glared at me with positive hatred when I asked him where he was going to to escape civilization, and said, "Zambesi, or hell." I could make nothing of him. Can't stand chaff, you know; never could. But I heard all about him from old Tom Callan—"Hot Tom," you know.'

Heron looked up curiously, but did not interrupt.

'It seems he's quite a great gun among the niggers—a real Induna. Did you know that? I thought it was only a nickname, but it isn't. He's a sort of relation of the king's, etc.'

'What the devil are you talking about?'

'Eh? what? A—a relation of the king's, I said.'

'A *relation!* Nairn?'

'Well, a connection. You know what I mean. He married the king's favourite daughter.'

'Great God!'

‘ Yes. You see, we were quite on the wrong tack. By George ! I did laugh when I heard it.’

Heron walked out on to the gravel path for a breath of air—out to ease the choking feeling in his throat ; and he saw his sister rise from her chair, draw a shawl over her head, and move away to her own room.

That night there had come to the house a little Swazie boy. He had one very miserable fowl for sale, and he squatted on his haunches near the gate, heedless of the fact that his offer had been twice refused. Through the night he stayed, and into the morning, and as the hot sun swung overhead he sat and waited still, never taking his eyes off the front stoep. And when at last Kate came out he tried his luck again.

She turned her armchair so as to get a good light on her book, and began to read, but in a few moments the child’s voice close by startled her. She looked up and saw a little black face, lighted by bright eyes and a flash of white teeth ; in front of that, a wretched fowl lying on the cement stoep ; and in front of that again, a folded note bearing her name. She picked up the note and read it.

‘ I had forgotten what a good woman was. Heaven bless you, Kate ! It is not that I am ungrateful, but I wish to God Piet had left me to the river.’

Kate leaned back quietly in the Madeira arm-chair, and closed her eyes. When she looked again the little *umfaan* was gone ; but he had forgotten his fowl upon the stoep, which was an unusual thing for any *umfaan* to do.

CASSIDY.

‘And the greatest of these is charity.’

I MET Cassidy under trying circumstances. But it worked out all right eventually, principally because, so far as I knew him—and that got to be pretty well—Cassidy was not amenable to circumstances. He beat them mostly, and some of them were pretty tough.

The circumstances surrounding our meeting were trying, because Cassidy was in bed after a hard day's work, and I aroused him at 3 a.m. by firing a revolver at his bulldog. His huts were on the railway works, and near the footpath to Jim Mackay's canteen—a pretty hot show. He used to be roused this way every Saturday and Sunday, and occasionally throughout the week, by visitors, black and white, warlike and friendly, thieving and sociable, but all drunk. At first he got a bulldog, but they got to know him, and after awhile the tip went round that half a pound

of beafsteak was a good buy and better than a blunderbuss for Cassidy's Cutting. Then he loaded fifty No. 12's with coarse salt, mixed with pebbles and things, and, as he said to me afterwards :

'Ye were the fourth that night, and ye 'noyed me wid yer swearin' an' shootin' an' that, so I just passed the salt an' wint for the dust shot as bein' more convincing like ; but the divil an' all of it was, I couldn't get the cartridge in by reason of drawin' the charge that was there already. Too bad ! too bad ! for dust shot it was, av I'd only known it, an' me thinkin' it was nothin' but salt. Lord, Lord ! we're a discontented lot ! Av it wasn't for bein' greedy, I'd 've had ye wid the dust shot safe as death. Faith, ye niver know yer luck !'

That was all right from his point of view, but as I had left my horse dying of Dikkop sickness just this side of Kilo 26, and had walked along the formation carrying saddle and bridle up to Kilo 43—about ten miles—without a drink, and twice lost my way between unconnected sections, and twice walked over the ends of the formation where culverts should have been and rolled down twenty feet of embankment, and once got bogged in a bottoming pit in a vlei, and many times hacked my shins against wheelbarrows and piles

of picks stacked on the track, I think it was reasonable to let out at a bulldog that came at me like a hurricane out of the darkness and silence of 3 a.m. in the Bush veld, to say nothing of a half-finished railway cutting. And I think it only human to have cursed the owner with all my resources until the dog was called off.

I don't exactly know how it came about, but I slept in Cassidy's hut that night. He pushed me in before him, guiding me to the bed with a hand on each elbow. He said that there were no matches in the show and that it wasn't worth while looking for the candle, which, as he had no means of lighting it, I suppose it wasn't.

He had a rare brogue and a governing nasal drone, but it was the brogue that emboldened me to ask for whisky.

'Spirits!' said he; 'not a drop, an' niver have; but jist sit ye where ye are, an' I'll fetch ye out some beer—Bass's, no less, av ye'll thry that; and can dhrink from the bottle.'

He talked in jerks, and had a quaint knack of chucking remarks after an apparently completed sentence, evidently intending them to catch up to it and be tacked on. He dived under the bed somewhere, and a minute later I heard the squeaking of a corkscrew and the popping of a cork.

'Here y' are,' said he, as he pressed the bottle into my two hands; 'drink hearty, me lad, and praise yer God Dan O'Connell there's got too fat an' lazy to pull ye down.'

I dare say he knew what he was talking about, but, for my part, I confess that nothing in the whole business had impressed me less than any lack of earnestness on Dan O'Connell's part. I sat awhile munching biscuits from a tin which he had placed on the table and gurgling down beer from the bottle. Cassidy was asleep. Ten minutes passed, and I was finishing the beer, when he sat up again, as I judged from the sound, and remarked in a brisk, clear tone:

'Ye called me a mud-dollopin', dyke-diggin', Amsterdam'd Dutchman! Ye'll take back the Dutchman, I believe?'

'I will indeed,' I said, laughing.

'An' the mud?'

'Yes, and the mud.'

He settled himself in the bunk again with a grunt, and murmured in a tone of indignant contempt:

'Mud, sez he, mud! An' me shiftin' granite boulders for soft rock, an shtruck solid formation a fut from surface, an' getting two an' six a cubic for the lot! Mud, faith! An' not enough water this three miles to the Crocodile to make spit for

an ant, barrin' what I can tap from the Figaro Battery pipe! An' mud, sez he? Holy Fly! Mud, be Gawd !'

It died away in a sleepy grunt, and Cassidy was off. I groped about for a blanket, and, rolling back into the meal-sack stretcher, forgot all about mad Irishmen, sick horses, and earnest bulldogs.

* * * * *

One always experiences a curious sensation on seeing by daylight that which one has only known in the dark. Persons do for years a certain journey or voyage, always starting and always arriving at regular hours. One day something happens which necessitates their passing in daylight the places formerly passed at night. On such occasions even the most matter-of-fact must marvel at the wanton freaks of their imaginations. The real thing seems so inconceivably wrong after what the mind had pictured. The appearance of a room, the outside of a house, are ludicrously, hopelessly at variance with what one had thought they should be. But it is, if possible, worse when the subject is a person. I have many times travelled with men at night by coach, on horseback, on foot, and in a waggon; have chatted sociably and exchanged all manner of friendly turns; have slept at the same wayside

hotel, and in the morning found myself unable, until he spoke, to pick out of any two the one with whom I had spent hours the night before.

In the case of Cassidy the difference was appalling.

I awoke in such light as might leak through the grass hut ; which was very little for light, but not bad for leakage.

The boy brought breakfast—coffee, bread, and cold venison, which suited me well—and I was turning my thoughts to the matter of a fresh horse for my homeward journey when I met the eye of one of my friends of the previous night. I say the eye, because I don't count the one in the black patch—I couldn't see it. But when Dan O'Connell stood in the doorway and allowed his one bloodshot, pink-rimmed eye to rest thoughtfully on me, it fairly fixed me. I used to recall his bandy legs and undershot jaw long afterwards whenever I thought of Cassidy's Cutting ; but it was only when the luminous eye uprose before me that I used unconsciously to twitch about and draw my legs up as I did the morning I saw him in the flesh. Cassidy *was* a surprise ; O'Connell wasn't. His appearance was only the cold chill of proof following a horrible conviction. I was much relieved when the boy cleared Dan out of the doorway with a bare-toed kick in the

ribs and a vigorous 'Ow! Ffoosack!' I admired the boy for that, and even envied him.

Through the open doorway I saw a white man walking briskly towards the hut, and I stepped out to meet him. He was a man of medium height, but there was something in his walk and figure that arrested attention. I am sure I have never seen in any man such lithe, active movement and perfect symmetry. A close-fitting vest and a pair of white flannel trousers were what he wore. I remember that because, somehow, I always recall that first view in the morning light—the springy walk, the bare muscular arms, the curve of the chest, and the poise of the head, as the face was turned from me.

If I could tell this story without saying another word about his appearance, I would stop right here. I would greatly prefer to do so, but it is not possible. I hope no one will feel exactly as I felt when this man turned his face to me. It serves no good purpose to give revolting details, so I will only say that the man was disfigured—most horribly so.

I cannot recall what was said or done during the few minutes that passed after we met, but there are some impressions seared into my brain as with red-hot irons; there are some recollections which even now make me feel faint and dazed,

and some which make me burn with shame. I take shame—bitter, burning shame—that I failed to grasp his outstretched hand, and that I let him read in my face the horror that seized me. It is one of those pitiful things that the longest lifetime is not long enough to let a man forget. Surging across this comes the vivid recollection of my conviction that this man was Cassidy. The first instant my glance lighted on him I felt what I can only call a sort of joyous conviction that it was he. I felt, in fact, that I recognised him. No doubt it seems odd, illogical, contradictory, even impossible, that, strong as the gratifying conviction was, the other, when he turned his face to me, was a thousand times stronger. It ought to have been a reversal of the first conviction. It wasn't. It was a smashing, terrible corroboration. It crushed me with a sense of personal affliction. It never germinated a doubt.

I had to stay all that day with him, and he was most gentle and courteous; most kindly and considerate. Every act heaped coals of fire on my ill-conditioned head. God knows I tried my best, but I could hardly look in his face, and I could not control my physical repugnance. I schooled myself to speak, and even to look, without betraying my thoughts, but I could not eat

with him. I could not sit opposite a face half of which was gone; I could not use the plate, the cup, the fork, that he had used. I pleaded illness, and feigned it; but by night-time I was ill enough to need no feigning.

It was common enough for anyone benighted on those unhealthy flats to pay the penalty with a dose of fever. I got fever, and no one seemed surprised; but for the life of me I cannot even now help attaching some significance to the fact that I was certainly not ill before the scene at the hut door.

I lay in that grass hut for a week or more, some of the time delirious—all the time panting with fever and shivering with ague; tossing wakefully and gasping for air; complaining of everything, unutterably miserable and despondent; hating the sight of food, shrinking from each act of kindness, scowling at the sound of a voice. My case was not worse than hundreds of others. I mention these things only to make clear what I mean when I say that never at any moment during that time did I awake or want anything but Cassidy was there to tend me. His was the care, the watchfulness, the gentleness, of a good woman. Can one say more?

It is odd that during that time I only saw him as he ought to have been—as I am sure at one

time he had been—a man whose countenance matched his character. It is not so odd, perhaps, that as I recovered and became rational the feeling of repulsion did not return, only an infinite pity for a hardly-stricken fellow-creature whose physical endowments and whose prospects must have been far above the average, and whose affliction was proportionately great.

When I left there was one feeling that was stronger than simple gratitude to him. It was thankfulness that something had occurred to prevent me from leaving with only horror and repulsion. I was thankful for the sickness that left me richer by a heart full of pity and—I think the right word is—reverence !

* * * * *

My lines were laid in other places than Cassidy's, and as months passed by without my either seeing or hearing of him, I might, for aught I know, have forgotten him, or come to recall him only as one recalls, after lapse of years, some curious experience. This *might* have happened, I say ; but it didn't. Mainly because of a conversation which revived my keenest interest in him.

Several of us had walked out to dine and spend the evening at the Chaunceys', and as we sat on the stoep smoking and chatting, the ladies being

with us, the conversation turned on a concert or entertainment of some kind which was being got up for the relief of some distressed families in the place. Somebody hazarded the opinion that the 'distressed family' business was being somewhat overdone, and that there was no evidence of it as far as he had been able to see.

The remark was unfortunate, for Mrs. Chauncey happened to be one of the promoters of the charity. She—good little woman!—had her young matron's soul full of sympathy still; her store had not been plundered by impostors, and she vehemently defended her project. She did more; she carried war and rout into the enemy's quarters and surmised that men, young men, whose lives are divided between money-making and pleasure-seeking, are not the best judges of what those who keep their troubles to themselves may have to endure.

'When you' (the young men) 'are settling differences on shares or cards, or having your occasional splits—or whatever else you do all day long—there are women and children aching for one good meal, shrinking back for want of ordinary clothing, languishing and dropping for want of a man's arm to fend and support them.'

Jack Chauncey — good chap! — must have thought this from his wife just a wee bit spirited,

for, after a pause, he gently drew a herring across the trail.

‘By - the - by, dear,’ he asked thoughtfully, ‘what became of that good-looking young widow who came here with her kid and looked so jolly miserable? By Gad! her face has been haunting me ever since. Did you manage anything for her?’

‘You mean Mrs. Mallandane. She would not take anything. She wanted to work; to earn, not to beg, she said. I have managed to get her some needlework, but, oh, so little, poor thing! And the pay is too dreadful! Now, there is a case in point. A widow, absolutely penniless, with a child of four or five to support. A woman of education and breeding, without a friend in the world, apparently; shunned by everyone—by some on account of her poverty, by others for her good looks and reserve. She certainly is difficult to approach. I have been to her now four times, and it was only on the last occasion that she thawed enough to tell me anything of herself. She has lived for years on what she believed to be the proceeds of her husband’s estate. Until within the last few months she was under this impression. But something happened which made her suspicious, and she found out that the income left by her husband was pure fiction, and that what

she had been living on was an allowance from the only real friend she or her husband ever had—the man who was her husband's partner when he died.'

'Does she say that her husband is dead?' asked Carter, the unfortunate 'young man' who had before provoked Mrs. Chauncey's ire.

Carter was very young, and I could see that he had no *arrière pensée* in asking that question. He did not mean to be impertinent. But I could also see that Mrs. Chauncey did not take that view. Her little iced reply finished poor Carter.

'I said that she was a widow, Mr. Carter, and I do not care to make another's misfortunes the subject of an argument.'

I felt sorry for Carter, he was such an ass; and I believe the other two fellows pitied him also; so we did not refer to the subject as we walked home together in the moonlight. That, however, did not suit Carter. After awhile he gave an uncomfortable laugh, and said:

'The little woman was rather down on me to-night about the charity show. I rather put my foot in it, I think.'

'Think!' said Lawton (one of our party), with heavy contempt. 'Think! I wonder you claim to be able to think! I never in my life saw anyone make such a blighted idiot of himself!'

‘Dash it all, man! give me a chance. The “distressed family” allusion was unlucky, I admit; but I hadn’t the faintest intention of returning to the subject when I asked about the husband. Man alive! Why, the nerve of the Mallandane woman fairly knocked the breath out of me. The cheek of her cramming poor Mrs. Chauncey with yarns of her husband’s death and estate, when everyone knows that he isn’t dead at all; that she gave him the slip, and went off with the “only friend”—his partner! A man with half his face eaten away by disease. I’ve seen the fellow at the house myself. Old Larkin, of the Bank, knew them in Kimberley. They were claim-holders and contractors there and used to bank with him. The firm was Cassidy and Mallandane. I only wonder she continues to call herself Mallandane. It’s a formality she might as well have dispensed with.’

I knew Carter to be a gossip young devil, so I held my peace about Cassidy; but it was with an effort. My impulse was to give Carter the lie direct, but I remembered Mrs. Chauncey’s last words and refrained.

We walked along in silence, and after a while Carter stopped in the road opposite a small house, the door of which stood partly open. There were voices outside, and as Carter said,

‘Hush! listen!’ we stopped instinctively, and my heart sank as I recognised a voice that said ‘Good-night.’ I moved on hastily, disgusted at being trapped into eavesdropping, and Carter laughed.

‘That’s the only friend! There’s no mistaking *that*. But I wonder why he’s coming away,’ said the youth, with unmistakable and insinuating emphasis on the last words.

No one answered his self-satisfied cackling. I was listening to the brisk walk behind us. I would have known it in a million. Closer and closer it came; his sleeve brushed mine as he stepped lightly past. I let him go, and I don’t know why. But I felt like a whipped cur for doing it.

It seemed to me that I must heretofore have been living in extraordinary ignorance of what was going on round about me in a small place; for, as though it only needed the start, from the first mention of this story by Carter I was always hearing it, or a similar one, or one half corroborating it.

I made an effort to see Cassidy the first thing next morning, but he had left his hotel—presumably having gone out to the works again. After a day or two had passed I felt glad that I had not met him—glad because I felt sure that he would have noticed that there was something

wrong. He would instinctively have detected the cordiality and confidence which were controlled by an effort of will, and were not—as they should have been, and as they did again become—spontaneous and real.

This worried me exceedingly and I turned it over and over again to get at the truth, and eventually it came to this. I knew that they were right as to the cause of his disfigurement; it was impossible to look at him and not accept it. I had no high moral prejudices about this. I only pitied him the more. But I did not believe a word of the rest of the story. All presumption and a heap of circumstances were against me, but I am glad to say that, but for the first hesitation, I never, never doubted him.

It may have been a week or two after this that I met Mrs. Chauncey in camp one afternoon. I had not seen her since the evening already referred to, and, as it was an off afternoon, I asked leave to join her in her walk home.

We wandered on slowly through the outskirts of the camp, along the most direct road to the Chaunceys' house. Since I had heard and seen what I had that evening my interest in Mrs. Malandane had increased. I never passed the house without looking. I claim—even to myself—that it was real interest and not curiosity that prompted

me. Once or twice I had seen the figure in simple black, but not sufficiently clearly to have known the face again. Her figure I don't think I should have mistaken; it was rather striking. There was also a little girl who used to sit under a mimosa-tree studying her lessons or doing sums on a slate. She and I became friends. I was drawn to the youngster because, when passing one day, I took the unwarrantable liberty of looking over her shoulder to see what the sum was. After a decent pause, during which I might have taken the hint, she turned up at me a very serious little face lighted by large blue eyes, and lisped slowly :

'I don't like people to thtand behind, becauth I fordet my thums.'

I laughingly patted the little head, and went on; but after this I always stopped to chaff my little friend about her 'thums,' and I generally brought an offering of some sort—sweets, cake, or fruit.

Thinking of the house and its people as we walked along, I was not sorry when Mrs. Chauncey asked if I would mind waiting for a minute or two while she went in to see her *protégée* about some work secured or promised.

I sat down in my little friend's seat and waited. I had not long to wait. Presently I heard behind

me the awkward tiptoeing of a child trying to walk very silently. Like Brer Rabbit, I lay low. Then came the climbing on to the seat, and finally a pair of childish hands were clapped over my eyes to an accompaniment of half-suppressed squeals of laughter, broken by panting efforts to maintain the blind-folding hug. I was busily keeping up the illusion by extravagantly bad guesses as to who it was, when I heard the rustle of a dress, and someone ran out, calling :

‘Molly, Molly! how can you be so naughty, darling? Oh, do excuse her!’

I was released. My hat was in the dust and my hair rumped. I saw Mrs. Chauncey in the background in peals of laughter; Mrs. Mallandane before me, looking most concerned, and holding the bewildered Molly by the hand; and Molly vindicating herself by saying with much dignity :

‘Mother, it’s only the gentimell that dooth my thumth an’ kitheth me.’

As a defence this was, of course, adequate—not to say excellent; but it was rather embarrassing for me. It was so effective, however, that I was spared the necessity of saying anything myself. Mrs. Chauncey introduced me to her *protégée* as she would have done to any of her lady friends, and the *protégée* bowed, as it seemed to me, with a great deal more grace and quite as much easy

composure as the best of them. That was my first thought. The next was to take myself indignantly to task for instituting a comparison.

As we resumed our walk I was wondering what could be the tie between this woman and Cassidy. There was no mistaking her class. She was a gentlewoman to her finger-tips. I was roused from my rather discourteous distraction by Mrs. Chauncey saying :

‘You are not so surprised now, perhaps, that I lost my temper with Mr. Carter the other evening. I am sorry I spoke as I did, but I felt it deeply—indeed I did.’

‘I can well understand it,’ I answered.

‘How do you like her?’ she asked abruptly.

‘What! after an interview of two minutes—and such an interview?’

Mrs. Chauncey smiled, and said :

‘Well, I only wanted to know your impression. And, after all, you have had time to form one, for you have been thinking of her all the time since we left the house!’

‘Perfectly true—I have. And to speak candidly, I think I have seldom—indeed, I think, never—seen a face that interested me more; partly, I suppose, because of what you told us. And I don’t think I have ever seen anyone look so infinitely sad. It is a pitiful, haunting face.’

'I feel that also. I have never been able to forget her look since she came to me a month ago for work—needlework or any work. I will never believe that she could be an impostor. No, no! Truth is stamped in her face—truth and sorrow.'

I had always liked Mrs. Chauncey. Just at that moment I was mentally patting her on the back and calling her 'a little brick,' for it was clear that she too had heard something—heard it and passed it by. Good woman!

I was a bachelor, and not too old to feel; and, over and above my interest in Cassidy, this whole affair fascinated me considerably. From this time forward I never passed the house without greeting mother or child with sincere warmth, or missing them with an equally genuine sense of disappointment. I never met Mrs. Chauncey without inquiring with interest the latest news of her friend and all details of her affairs.

There was never much to tell. Now it was some commission for a dress, now the mending of children's clothes—another time the trimming of hats or working a tennis-net, that helped to make ends meet without hurt to her pride. These were petty details which might pass in woman's chat, but should fail to interest a man, you would think. Nevertheless, they interested me. They

did more. In the evenings, as I sat alone and smoked out in the starlight they helped me to conjure up pictures and to see her as she would at those very moments, perhaps, be employed.

I would have done anything to help her had I been able, but there was nothing I could do. I had even learned that I might not as much as evince sympathy or interest, except at the cost of insult to her. On one occasion when I happened to meet and walk with her in one of the main streets of the camp, I was frigidly cut by two ladies with whom I thought I was on quite friendly terms. This disturbed me considerably, not on my own account, but because of the insult and injustice to one who was powerless to resent it. It hurt me even more to realize that it would be wise to bow before this and prove greater friendship by showing less.

I was still smarting under this next morning when I was accosted by one of those puddle-headed, blundering idiots of whom there seem to be one or more in any community, no matter how small.

'I say, old chap,' he began, 'look here, ye know! You're not playin' the game, ye know, old chap! The missis has been complainin' to me about you. You know what I mean.'

I detest this 'dонтcherknow,' 'g'-dropping

kind of animal at any time—the thing that fondles you with ‘old chap’ and ‘dear boy’ and refers to its wife as ‘the missis.’ But apart from this, I was to-day especially unprepared to submit to further outrage. I was still smarting, as I said before.

‘My good man,’ I said, ‘may I ask you to be more explicit?’

‘Why, dash it all, old chap! you know what I mean—er. It’s no affair of mine, of course, if you only keep it quiet, don’t you know. But you don’t give one a chance, don’t you know; and, after all, you can’t run with the hare and hunt with the hounds, and all that sort of thing, don’t you know!’

I was trying to keep my temper, but with no very marked success, I fear; but I said as calmly as I could:

‘That’s a very original remark, my friend, and no doubt equally intelligent, but I shall be pleased if you will be good enough to apply it so that *I* can understand it.’

‘Look here, old chap. If you will go and walk in broad daylight with a woman like that, you know—well, you can’t expect——’

‘Stop now!’ I said. I had hardly breath enough to speak, and there must have been something unpleasant in my face, for he stepped back

a pace or two. 'So far you are only a babbling fool. If you go on now you will be an infernal cad and must take the consequences. You understand what I mean. And further, as you have been good enough to hint that I should choose my line, I may tell you—to adopt your happy illustration—that I elect to "run with the hare." You see! Perhaps *you* understand what I mean!'

Now, before two minutes had passed, I did not need anyone to tell me that I had done the worst and most unwise thing possible under the circumstances. Of course I knew well enough that when a woman is concerned two things are very essential—that the man shall keep his temper, and that he shall be judicious, even circumspect, in defending. Having failed in the former, I necessarily failed in the latter, and I felt sick with impotent rage when I realized it.

I knew how the story would circulate, and I knew exactly how it would be touched up, amplified, and illustrated with graphic gesticulations when it reached the club and Exchange and passed through the hands of certain expert *raconteurs*; and to avoid the lamentable result of chaff and further provocation I got away for a couple of days to give myself—and the story—a chance.

Several weeks passed after this incident, during