

THE GENTLEMAN DIGGER

CHAPTER I

A TAP ON THE WINDOW

NEARLY six thousand feet above the level of the sea lies the vast veld of the Witwatersrand—a bare wind-swept plateau unbroken by mountains—bound by gently-rising hills or kopjes. No verdure save the karroo bush relieves these grey mounds of gigantic boulders outlined in rugged grandeur on the confines of the great plain.

Over all dips the edge of the horizon like a vast inverted basin of gorgeous blue and silver.

Very deep is the red hue of the sandy soil, the vital colour of the virgin gold sleeping beneath in the far depths of the wild barren land.

It was the magnet of this gold that drew to the bleak and trackless region the mighty band of diggers who have since blazoned to the world the glittering fame of the South African Gold Fields. Whereupon, as though conjured by the wand of a magician, appeared the wonderful city of Johannesburg. A city set like a dust-covered gem in the bosom of the great plateau.

Truly a city of Dust, Dogs, and Men. A city of startling incongruities. Dubbed by the pioneer diggers 'The Camp.' There amber 'Old Highland' whisky flowed, the staple drink. As plentiful—I was going to say as water—but purer and better than the limpid element could be found at that time in the Golden City.

The shadows of night were gathering adown the west. They threw into brilliant relief the silver disc of the new moon and her attendant star fast sinking in the wake of the setting sun.

A narrow band of pale golden light flickered for a brief spell in the shimmering after-glow. Suddenly it swept below the purple horizon, leaving behind a veil of darkness faintly tinged by the yellow light of the moon. The warm October evening grew chill and damp. A thousand crickets tuned their even-song. Lights gleamed like twinkling beacons, here

and there, from Kafir hut and digger's cottage on the mines along the reef.

A man rode leisurely over the road skirting the outer edge of the reef. He was enjoying the beauty of the sunset and the easy canter of his horse across the springing veld. The abrupt disappearance of the after-glow roused him from his reverie and to the fact that the evening was advancing. He had still a mile of veld to cross before he entered 'The Camp' to meet an engagement to dine at six.

A light touch of the whip sent the horse speeding along. Soon the bridge separating the young suburb of Jeppes - Town from Johannesburg was passed. There was still an open space of veld to cross. Through this he rode quickly, taking no heed of the many transport waggons obstructing the way. He took no note of the picturesque grouping of the bullocks outspanned on either side, their dark forms weirdly outlined against the light of the family fire. He saw not the fat Boer women and their Kafir servants preparing the sundown meal.

The lights behind the red-curtained windows of a canteen proclaimed that he had gained the entrance of Commissioner Street. A short distance ahead, on the opposite side of the

road, suddenly flared the lights of the Theatre Royal. The sight of these caused him to urge the horse anew. He realised that the hour of six was merging into seven.

The street before him was long and wide. The roadway extended from one side to the other. It was guiltless of side-walk or paving stones. A slow-going municipality had not yet provided this marvellous city with street lamps, drainage, or water.

Deep holes in the mud road caused the horse to stumble frequently. The lights of the New Rand Club pierced the darkness, and just saved horse and rider from many a dangerous rut. Some distance away the darkness was again relieved by the brilliant rays from some hotel lamp. Anon a friendly glow from a bar-room averted a collision with a Cape cart, whose cabby had neglected to light up.

The man reined in his horse at the end of the street before the stoop of a long, one-storied hotel. It occupied the upper left-hand corner, and commanded a view of the entire length of Commissioner Street.

A spacious verandah, commodiously fitted with cosy little tables, wicker chairs, and settees, surrounded the two sides of the building facing

the street. It was illumined by hanging lamps. The usual motley crowd of men who occupied the verandah had disappeared in the direction of the dining-hall. Even the bar, which communicated with the verandah by a broad door at one end, was deserted.

The man looked in every direction for a Kafir boy to take charge of the horse. He could see, through the open French windows of the dining-room, the dinner in full swing. Waiters, black and white, were scurrying to and fro. Corks were flying. Trays borne aloft, laden with steaming dishes. The long tables were packed with diners, laughing, talking, and gorging.

No chance of getting a waiter, stable-boy, or servant of any kind being evident, the man turned the horse towards the opposite side of the street. A covered passage, four or five feet wide, gave access to the more private buildings of the hotel.

These were called Percy Buildings. They were curiously constructed. Built in one story of corrugated iron, lined with planks of polished timber, the buildings formed a square. In the centre stood two rows of similar bungalows. The space between these formed an unpaved alley-way, eight feet wide. A narrow gutter

ran through the middle, and served to carry off the rain-water in the wet season.

The only entrance from the street to this labyrinthine alley-way being the passage already described, it was often a matter of perplexity to a new lodger how to find his way out. It was not an unusual thing for a belated visitor to lose himself at night, and wander round the bungalows a score of times, until chance or an obliging tenant showed him the passage to the street.

Another source of confusion was the similarity of the doors and windows. This, through the absence of lamps at night in the alley-way, occasioned ludicrous mistakes and strange encounters. It was a common occurrence for some festive young Johnnie, to use a colloquial term, returning from a drinking-bout, otherwise called smoking concert, to try every door until one was found to open beneath the key in his unsteady fingers. The *contretemps* arising from a mistake can be more easily imagined than described.

Curious and inconvenient these chambers. The sanitary arrangements on the most primitive scale. An utter lack of privacy prevailed, owing to the resounding properties of the wood-panelled walls. The occupant of one room

could hear his neighbour in the other cough, sneeze or snore, and dream! Here one was chilled in winter or baked in summer. Still people were content to pay a fabulous price for such accommodation.

The man rode boldly into the passage. It was customary for the occupants of the chambers, likewise visitors, to tether their horses in the alley-way. Consequently, the man rode straight in, trusting to the clatter of the animal's hoofs to warn foot passengers of his approach.

He turned to the right of the passage, and then to the left, cautiously guiding his horse to the end. From the window of the last bungalow shone a soft rosy glow. Reining up, he gave a tap on the window with his riding-whip.

The door was thrown open. A flood of light streamed across the footway. The horse started. The movement brought him before the door. It revealed the rider to the tall, white-robed woman standing on the threshold.

The man doffed his broad-brimmed digger's hat. The light fell on his smiling face and drooping golden moustache. He was handsome and manly enough to be the pride of any woman. So thought the woman standing in the doorway.

“Ah, Hector dear, at last you have come!”

Her tone was low and caressing. Her eyes shone with greeting. She stepped out and gently stroked the glossy neck of the horse.

"Yes, Ariadne, here I am. Sorry to have kept you waiting. There was not a sign of a Kafir over the way. So I rode in."

He gave the animal a pat. He caught in his the soft hand rubbing the horse. Drawing near, she drooped her head. Her cheek brushed the man's knee.

"Oh," she murmured, "I am so glad you are here. I have been so lonely."

The man laughed softly.

"Get down, dear, and come in. Jacobs will be here presently. He'll off-saddle the horse for you. He has been here twice with the *menu* for dinner."

A short man, with a good-natured face, appeared at the further end of the alley. Observing the horse before the door, he hurried forward, shuffling his big, clumsy velschoen in the sandy gravel.

Hector dismounted, and threw the rein to the servant.

"Take the horse to the stable. I want him put up for the night. Then come for the dinner order. Be quick about it."

The man led the horse away. The pair

entered the bungalow and closed the door. The alley was once more given over to darkness.

Within the room these two stood silent but happy. They gazed into each other's eyes. Her hands were folded on his breast. "One whole week! It has seemed an eternity. My love!" she said, slowly.

"Nay, Ariadne, it has not seemed so long as that. And if it did, is it not worth the waiting, these few hours when we shall be together, eh?"

He spoke in a half-teasing, tender tone. He kissed the fair head resting on his shoulder.

"I have often thought and dreamed," looking around the softly-lighted room, "of this little nest many a time through the week—I say, how charming it appears to-night—and also you, my bonnie bird!"

"I'm glad you are pleased with the room, dear," she said, ignoring her lover's pretty compliment. "I had a windfall this week in the unexpected sale of a story. I used every penny of the cheque in finishing the decorations of these rooms. Kathleen says I am awfully, *awfully* extravagant! Am I, dear?"

"Not a bit. But I am afraid I shall get into a row," he said, looking towards a door leading to the inner room, "if your sister hears me."

"Kathleen is not there. She has gone to St Mary's to assist at some school function—distribution of prizes, I believe. We are to have a *tête-à-tête* dinner for once. Now was it not good of her?"

"Oh yes! good old Kathleen."

"Hector, Hector!" She placed her hand over his mouth. "I will not permit frivolous slang—be warned."

"No? Beg pardon." He pressed the dear fingers to his lips. "May I be allowed to call you a barbarian?"

"Barbarian?" queried Ariadne, in surprise.

"Yes, a very fascinating barbarian," answered Hector, with a quizzical smile. "A charming barbarian, who turns her pretty room into a wigwam worthy of a Sioux princess."

"You big tease," said Ariadne, giving the golden moustache a gentle tug, "I'll forgive you for comparing my room to an ugly wigwam, if you will say that you admire the covering of those unsightly planked walls and ceiling."

"I like it immensely. You have made it

very artistic. The leopards adorning the four corners of the ceiling are stunning enough to shoot. What an original you are! I don't think one woman in a thousand would have the pluck to be such an original, eh?"

"Don't talk nonsense, Hector. Sit in this cosy chair—I bought that lion's skin for your use alone—while I get you a cigarette."

"Of what are you thinking?" said Ariadne. He was puffing away and staring abstractedly at the yellow eyes and black muzzle of a leopard!

"I was trying to 'kalculate,' as the Yankees say," said Hector, with a twinkle in his eye, "how many thousand words it took to buy all those karosses, rugs, and shields. You tell me that it's a guinea for——"

"Hector! you are really as unreasonable as Kathleen. I bought the whole lot, shields and all, from an old Swazie for a few pounds—I shall be vexed in a minute."

"There, there, little one," answered Hector, soothingly, "I am only teasing again. It's the prettiest room in the Rand. Those skins will come in very useful when we buy a waggon and bullocks, and go to Swazieland or Matabeleland on our wedding tour."

Ariadne hid her face on his breast. She did

not see how grave his face had grown. His voice was low and tender as he touched the coils of her shining hair.

One of the charms of this young Englishman was his voice. Every tone of it thrilled Ariadne, till she often wondered which she loved, the man or his voice. The indescribable tenderness of that voice now speaking of their marriage, swept her heart with a thrill almost painful in its joy.

After a time Ariadne talked softly of the projected wedding trip. He listened and gazed through the rings of smoke from his cigarette. The candles burned with mellow light in their sconces against the skins on the wall. They shone on the manuscript-strewn table. A bull-pup, hideous in the perfection of breed, lay beneath the table on a bed of tiger skins. The brute catching his eye, lazily arose to lick Hector's hand, and then returned as lazily to its dozing.

Hector's eyes roamed over the luxurious appointments of the room. It was resplendent with as many costly articles of furniture and draperies as the small space would admit. The air was redolent with the sweetness of a score of Indian bowls laden with violets of Pretoria. Ariadne had evidently neglected none of the

shops in her search for rare and beautiful things to embellish this pretty boudoir. Hector's gaze fell on the little round table opposite. Damask, sparkling silver, and tinted glasses, all looked exquisitely inviting in the glow of the silk-shaded candelabra.

His lips tightened as he contrasted that dainty table with the rough-and-ready service of his *ménage* at the mine. There metal cutlery took the place of silver, iron ware that of china. The unpainted deal board that of the shining damask. The only ornament thereon being the indispensable whisky bottle, and its attendant syphon of soda. There the yellow light of a smoky lamp spluttered and shone in lieu of the æsthetic glow of wax candles.

For the first time a pang of doubt smote Hector's heart. He realised how little he had to offer Ariadne in exchange for those pretty luxuries. It might be long before he could offer her that—little as it was. The week of absence had been one of difficulties and perplexities. And the future—it looked very dark.

“Bah!” he thought, “away with forebodings; I'll put the state of things to her squarely. I love her too much to be capable of deciding. She has grown into the very marrow of my heart. She shall decide. But if it should be—

God! it could not be. One way or another—
she shall decide.”

“ Kiss me, Ariadne,” he cried aloud.

She did not know the bitterness underlying
that kiss.

CHAPTER II

HOW THE SHAREHOLDERS' MONEY WENT

A KNOCK at the door announced the return of Jacobs, who entered the room bearing a silver dish laden with fruit. He placed it on the table. Then with an air of deference presented the *menu* to Hector.

Jacobs was a waif drifted to the gold-fields, how and when no man could tell. He could not have told himself had he been asked. Once there he found that a white man could not possibly work with the Kafir diggers. Too illiterate to obtain employment as a clerk, and too weak to work as farm labourer or driver, the poor wretch soon found himself on the verge of starvation. One day he tried to earn a shilling by holding the horse as Ariadne alighted at the Bank. On coming out to remount, she found the poor fellow in a faint. The exertion had been too much for him. With a woman's ready sympathy, Ariadne sent the unfortunate man to the Nurses' Home. After a week's illness he came to thank her for the kindness which had

saved his life. Touched by the gratitude he expressed, she engaged him as her special servant. She paid him well, and raised him from the slough of despair to the heaven of content.

"There you are," said Hector, handing the servant the *menu*, on which he had marked with a pencil the dishes desired.

"Thank you, sir," said Jacobs. He scurried away on his mission to the kitchens in the main building across the street.

Ariadne resumed her place on a low seat beside her lover. She rolled another cigarette, and slipped her hand in his. Meanwhile he smoked in silence.

Their hearts were full of that sweet sense of confidence and companionship which constitutes the truest and firmest bond between man and woman—the bond of intellectual sympathy. It elevates human impulse and mere passionate desire to the plane of spiritual enjoyment. The soul dominates the senses. Silence becomes more eloquent than words.

It is the invisible chain whereby a woman holds in perpetual thrall her lover or her husband. Without it the most alluring beauty sooner or later palls.

These reflections passed through Hector's

mind as he puffed silently. He knew the woman sitting contentedly at his feet, so assiduous of his comfort, even to the rolling of his cigarette, possessed an intellect that eclipsed the charm of her personality. She was one of those women who would convert a desert into a paradise for the man she loved.

"And now," he thought with something like a curse, "poverty, damnable, ghastly poverty, is the spectre that has arisen to drive her from my side. It is bad enough to suffer the pangs of being stoney broke. But the man who could expect the woman he loved to share poverty with him, is only fit to be——"

"Dearest, dearest, you are crushing my hand. Are you dreaming?"

"Have I been asleep, little one? did I hurt this poor hand? Let me kiss it."

"Ha! Here's the dinner at last!" he cried, opening the door for the servant, with a great show of alacrity, to effectually hide his emotion.

"Jacobs, you don't need to wire to announce your approach; your big velschoen shuffle loud enough to be heard at the 'Jumpers'."

"Yes, Master Hector," answered Jacobs, with a chuckle, as he placed the soup on the table, and proceeded to uncork the wine, "I know they do, but I had to hurry up, as I can't

get a blooming Kafir to help bring the dinner."

"That is unfortunate," observed Hector, as he served the soup.

"It will finish the velschoen, but don't let that trouble you. You shall have a new pair."

"Thank you, Master Hector. I hope you and madame will excuse my shortcomings."

"Certainly, Jacobs," said Hector, as the servant moved the empty soup plates. "But you should have said longcomings, my man. You have been a devilish long time serving the dinner."

"What has happened?" queried Ariadne. There was an unusual expression on the servant's face.

"Oh! everything, madame," answered Jacobs, glad to get a chance to talk of his grievance. "There is an awful row on in the kitchen. Jim, the head cook's two missis—the young one, and the old one——"

"Jacobs, what are you saying?" exclaimed Ariadne with an air of severity, although she tried to suppress a smile.

"I beg your pardon, madame, and Master Hector, but Jim is a Kafir, you know," Jacobs explained as he served the fish. "Kafirs have more wives—I mean as many wives as they

please. His two missis got jealous. One's a Fingoe, the young missus—and came to have it out with Jim, and themselves, and the whole blooming lot of Kafirs working in the kitchen. The young Kafirs liked the fun, and kept it up between Jim and his missus until Mr Bryant, the manager, brought in the constables and gave the old missus in charge—they couldn't find the young one—because——”

The usually staid and impassive Jacobs burst into fits of laughter.

“Because the old missus—ha ha!—chucked—the young missus—ha ha!—into—a big bin of pickled pork—ha ha! The constables carried the old woman off. Jim looked everywhere for the young one—couldn't find her—but—ha ha!”

Here Jacobs went into paroxysms of laughter.

“When I was crossing the road just now, I nearly dropped tray and all, for what should I see right before me but a bin—ha ha!—on two black legs—ha ha!—running up Commissioner Street like mad—ha ha!”

Jacobs shuffled away to fetch the remainder of the courses. He took good care, however, to turn into the alley on the opposite side of the bungalows to have his laughter out.

“How very ridiculous!” said Ariadne, when

she had recovered from the effect of the servant's inimitable description. "Jacobs is really too comical. I have heard nothing so funny for a long time."

"He would make a capital clown. You had better recommend him to Frank Fillis."

"A good suggestion, dear; I shall bear it in mind. On second thoughts, I might recommend Jacobs to our popular actress. She prides herself on having only 'gentlemen actors' in her company."

"Nonsense; she would not refuse Jacobs, provided he proved to be a genius. You know, the man that built the theatre in which she performs is not ashamed to own that he was once a stevedore."

"Not now; that was when he was poor. When one is rich it makes all the difference in the world."

"You are right; it makes all the difference in the world."

"Why do you repeat my words so sadly? What troubles you?" said Ariadne tenderly, as she arose from her chair and put her arms round his neck.

"Nothing. Sit down, little one. I hear those velschoen of Jacob's flapping along the alley."

"Won't you tell me?"

"Not now, dear—not now."

Ariadne resumed her seat. The rest of the meal passed quickly. Jacobs removed the dishes, and arranged the salver of fruit in the centre of the table. With the instinct of an observing, faithful servant, he saw that his mistress was impatient to have him go. He hurriedly opened the champagne and filled the glasses.

"Place the wine on the table—also the coffee. I will serve it."

The servant obeyed. He fidgeted about the room, anxious for an opportunity to apologise to his mistress. He imagined he had offended her.

"You may go, Jacobs," said Ariadne, apparently ignoring his uneasiness. "You will not be needed again."

"Thank you, madame." Then he left the room, closing the door very softly. Outside he paused a moment.

"It's them beastly velschoen as has made all the trouble," he muttered. "I'll never wear the damned things again."

Taking off the obnoxious shoes, and tucking them under his arm, he sped down the dark alley in his naked feet.

"Poor Jacobs, he thinks I am angry with him."

"I believe," said Hector, listening, "that he has taken off those velschoen."

"Very likely," answered Ariadne, with a smile. "He would take off his head if he thought it annoyed me to see it on his shoulders—poor grateful soul."

"Ha!" said Hector, with a sigh of satisfaction, after drinking his wine, "that's capital fiz! I say, this is not like famine, is it, little one? Let me fill your glass! Now drink to me, dearest and sweetest of women, drink to me!"

Lifting the glass of pale sparkling wine to her lips, Ariadne pressed a kiss on the rim, and held it to her lover.

"You drink first," she said gaily, "and then I'll know your thoughts."

"God pity me, little one," answered the man, with a sudden gravity. "I fear they would not make you happy."

Ariadne replaced the glass on the table. She looked steadily at him. Her face blanched as she saw his eyes cast down as though to avoid her gaze.

"Hector!" Her voice shook in spite of her efforts to steady it. "What do you mean—what has happened?"

"Everything has happened that should not."

He tried to speak lightly. He still avoided those violet eyes.

"Everything has gone wrong, the mine is in a fearful muddle, and——"

"Hector, look at me. Is it only the mine? Speak."

"My love! My precious little one!" cried Hector, excitedly. "You don't think *that* of me. You surely don't think I could be untrue to you—let my heart stray to another woman for one instant?"

"Oh, I am so glad!" sobbed Ariadne. "I am so glad it's only the mine—I thought——"

"You must not think about it any more, my darling, but drink your champagne like a sensible little woman, while I tell you how things stand."

"Thank God the ice is broken," thought Hector. He refilled the glass Ariadne in her agitation had spilled over the table. "It will be easier to tell her all now."

"As I was saying a few minutes ago—this does not look like famine," began Hector, helping Ariadne to some fruit. "You have no idea how difficult a matter it is to obtain food for our men at the mine. If the drought continues, we shall be obliged to half starve them. Work will be stopped. It will be necessary to aban-

don the batteries, unless water becomes plentiful very soon."

"Then the situation is indeed becoming serious?"

"It is indeed. I very much fear there is a bad look-out for Johannesburg. If the drought continues, there is a possibility of rioting among the natives employed in the various mines. Should they make a raid on the 'Camp' in search of food, a rough time would ensue."

Here Hector paused and frowned thoughtfully. Ariadne gave a little shiver; an icy wind seemed to chill the perfumed air of the cosy room.

"Don't let me alarm you, dearest," Hector exclaimed, affecting an easy, smiling manner he did not feel. "Fortune has beamed too long on the Rand to fear any real danger to its prosperity. An outbreak among the Kafirs could be easily subdued. For, after all, the poor devils are as easily managed as children, when not frenzied by drink. I am a duffer to frighten you in this manner.—Come, don't think of it. Eat your grapes; I'll not speak of it again."

"I am not frightened, Hector. Not one bit as far as a Kafir outbreak is concerned. But I

feel an indefinable foreboding of sorrow. I wish you would tell me the truth, at once. Don't spare me. I have stood face to face with trouble many a time since—since he died. I always make up my mind to expect the worst. Now tell me truthfully how things stand. What is your trouble?"

"Well," began Hector rather awkwardly, as it went against the grain—so to speak—to discuss his business with a woman, and this woman above all,—“Well—the fact of the matter is things connected with the mine are—unfortunately—not exactly as they should be. Money is needed to go on with. The pressure is getting too much for the pockets of the Syndicate. Shares are not selling as expected. Men are becoming chary of parting with funds just now. The confidence of speculators in Reef property has been terribly shaken. The revelations of the scandalous manner in which the shareholders' money has been squandered at the 'White Rose,' is doing all the harm.”

“The 'White Rose'! Is that not a neighbour of yours?"

“Yes, it is near our property.”

“And what is this scandal?"

“The story is not any too short for its own credit. It has been well ventilated by the

Planet this afternoon. I have a copy with me, and a nice tale it tells, I assure you. Mismanagement and trickery seem to have been running wild. Possessing the richest bit of ground on the Reef, the company has drifted into a virtual state of bankruptcy."

"Impossible!"

"Yes, it is true. The only way out of the difficulty was to secure additional capital at once. Those who furnished the money, very wisely stipulated that the direction of affairs should be placed in responsible hands. One of the most reliable and experienced men in the business was selected as director. The first steps he took to set things straight resulted in the discovery of a most deplorable state of affairs. To use strong language, the previous management turned out to be a damnable swindle."

"How very dreadful!"

"Let me read the account in the *Planet* to you, if it will not bore you?"

"Not at all; by all means let me hear it."

"It explains the whole nasty business better than I could tell it. By Jove! they don't spare them either," said Hector, taking a newspaper from his coat pocket. "I won't trouble you by reading the beginning, as I have already ex-

plained that. I'll go right to the account of the exposure. 'At the time when the company thus received its resuscitation,' he began, "'only a few weeks ago, the battery was shut down, and the mine was in a parlous plight : the stamps, ten head of Hornsby's, had in fact been condemned as useless. The engine, a sixteen-horse power compound, by the same reputable makers, had been likewise thrown aside. The plates had been cleaned up by the Amalgamator, said to be the son of a distinguished professor of mineralogy in England—and presumably the battery was worth little or nothing beyond the shed that covered it. Mr ———, the new manager, a practical, not an ornamental man, quickly perceived, however, that the final clean-up must have been a very perfunctory sort of business, for he succeeded in getting 180 ozs. off the plates ; that was not a bad haul to start with. It then occurred to the new management that it might be worth while to test the tailings in a Berdan pan ; thirty tons were accordingly put through, with the astounding result that two hundred pounds of quick-silver amalgam, containing nearly 100 ozs. of gold, was taken from the bulk.'"

"It reads like a fairy tale," said Ariadne.

"It does. But the worst is to follow.—

Listen. 'The next thing which occurred to the mind of the new man was, that the battery ought to be near the mine instead of a mile or two away, and as it would be some time before the complete delivery of a new thirty head Sandy Croft, which had been ordered by the former management, it might be worth while to overhaul that with a view of ascertaining whether it was not in a serviceable condition. The firm of engineers appealed to—the same that were getting out the thirty stamps—ridiculed the suggestion, vowed that the repairs and removal would take a couple of months and cost fifteen hundred pounds, and that the battery would be worth nothing even when the work was done.'

"Mark *that*, Ariadne. The company of engineers repudiated the battery in toto. 'This,' continued Hector, 'was not the kind of situation to please such a man as the new director, for he saw plainly enough that if something was not done quickly, the new capital would be fooled and frittered away like the old, and by the time the thirty stamps were up—with an undeveloped mine—the company would be once again aground. So he rejected the advice of the mechanical engineers, and set to work with his own men, and in his own way,

with the result that the removal has been effected in less than five weeks' time, that a dam has been constructed, and the ten stamps are now pounding away right merrily, worked by one of the smartest and prettiest engines in the Rand—and all for the expense of less than five hundred pounds.' Now, what do you think of *that*, for a set of swindling engineers!" exclaimed Hector.

"Oh!" answered Ariadne, with a little laugh. "But they were caught nicely. I wonder how they liked losing the chance of making a cool thousand!"

"They were quite willing to let it slip, no doubt, sure as they were of a bigger profit on the thirty stamps and new machinery. They feathered their nests well between them, director and all. But I must have another glass of champagne. It makes my throat dry. You know I am not much of a reader."

"Indeed, you read very well.—Not any more, thank you, dear," said Ariadne, as Hector was about to refill her glass.

"And now for the last chapter of this extraordinary story," said Hector, as he resumed reading. "'Lying about the mine were a number of machinery cases, which the new director took to be the empty packages in

which probably the original ten stamps had come out. Examination, however, proved the fact that they were full, and that their contents were a fifteen stamp battery and a twenty-five horse-power tandem, both made by Hornsby. These, after being indented and paid for by the shareholders' money, had been rejected as worthless, without the packages being so much as opened; and, as already stated, a thirty-head mill and a fifty-horse power Marshall's compound engine had been ordered from Sandy Crofts. So far as any one knows to the contrary, these, the fifteen stamps and their engines, were as good as ever left makers' hands.'"

"Simply disgraceful!" ejaculated Ariadne.

"Worse, dear," said Hector, pausing for breath, "it was simply criminal. Now hear the summing-up of the editor on the whole vile fraud—he writes to the point. 'Anyway,'” he continued, “‘the ten stamps are working to the entire satisfaction of the new directorate, and it is a sin and a shame, crying out for denunciation if not for practical vengeance upon those concerned, that not only the interests of shareholders, but the names and reputations of such houses as Hornsby's, should be at the mercy of managers and directors, who can only escape

the devil of hopeless incompetence by falling into the deep sea of infinitely worse. The sins of omission and commission that have been perpetrated at the 'White Rose' and its immediate vicinity are enough to make the angels weep.'

"How is that?" said Hector, looking over the edge of the page at Ariadne.

"Strong, very," she answered.

"Now for the gist of the matter," he exclaimed, as he resumed. "'It is clear that there is one cure, and one only, for the evils which are threatening to weigh the gold-mining industry down. *Companies must be so consolidated as to admit of economical working*, and of its being possible to employ really competent and qualified men. Exit the amateur engineer and the director who *directs* in order that he may draw the fees and have a better chance of gambling in stock—and the Witwatersrand will breathe again.'

"And that is the way," cried Hector, starting up as he flung the paper aside, "that the hundreds of unsuspecting shareholders' money goes! And we, *we*," he went on excitedly, as he strode the little room with springing step, "we suffer for it—*we*, the earnest, conscientious, hard-working diggers, we who have earned the

right to the name by years of experience, *we* must go under, we incur the opprobrium of distrust and suspicion, because a few mushroom directors and mine managers are foisted on the market by the unscrupulous so-called companies in London!

“It is such work as that recorded in this sheet of the printer’s devil, that, sooner or later, will stop half the batteries, and shut down the mines. In the face of such exposures and dirty business, who could blame the shareholders for a withdrawal of their confidence? They are right. I would not put one damned shilling in a mine share myself if I heard such things. *Johannesburg is going to the dogs, as sure as the sun rises to-morrow.* This is the work that will do it. *We* don’t want the moneyed speculator and his partner.

“If the honest men are left in peace to work for the ultimate good of all concerned, there is gold enough in the Transvaal for the whole of Britain!”

CHAPTER III

POVERTY TRIES THE DOOR—BUT LOVE LOCKS
HIM OUT.

“DON'T despair!” exclaimed Ariadne, as Hector sank into a chair. “Things cannot be as bad as you imagine. I am sure everything will turn out for the best.”

“For the best—no, no, it's all up with me, the worst has come.”

“The worst!” echoed Ariadne.

“Yes, I'm a ruined man, Ariadne—a ruined man. I've lost every penny I possessed in this world.”

“Oh, Hector!”

“I don't regret the money. I am young enough and strong enough to make it all back again. But you—you,” he faltered out hoarsely, “it will cost me you, my darling. It will be like tearing out my heart to do it—but I shall have to let you go!”

Ariadne made no reply. Surprise held her dumb. The news of Hector's ruin was trivial compared to the blow he dealt by acknow-

ledging his willingness to give her up. The shock aroused all Ariadne's pride. Her heart turned against the poor fellow blurting out his misery awkwardly, incoherently into her ear.

He was too much absorbed in his wretched anxiety to tell her all, and have it over with, to notice her coldness and silence. He had but a humble opinion of himself—this splendid, sturdy fellow, who could hold his own with any man. He trembled before this woman's frown, like an oak whose leaves rustle tumultuously beneath a passing summer storm.

He did not think that such a woman could or would make any sacrifice for him; the thought she loved him for his manliness, his generous, noble nature, never entered his head. There was no subtlety in his composition. He comprehended only the straightforwardness of action. He could risk his life in the depths of a mine—fight a refractory Zulu, or kill a lion; but he could no more analyse a woman's feelings than a baby. He did not comprehend the fierce pain in his heart. He took for regret what was in reality the struggle for mastery between his love and himself.

“Yes, little one, I must give you up. You will marry a better man than I am—and—” here he almost broke down—“one that is not

such a duffer as I have been, to squander his money away—and—lose his chance of marrying the sweetest woman on God's blessed earth. But I love you, Ariadne, as long as there is a breath of life in my body! And it will make me happy when I know that you—you belong rightfully to a man that can give you such pretty luxuries as these, that you are the wife of a good man who will cherish and protect you—my bright beautiful darling!”

Ariadne sat motionless at his feet. She gave no word or sign of what was passing in her mind. He looked sadly at the bowed head, and thought, with a sigh, how much more quietly she was taking things than he had expected. After all it was better so. Had he ever been worthy of her?—No!

“I have led a wild rough life since I came to South Africa,” began Hector, looking at the drooping head, not daring to touch it. “Twelve years ago—I want to tell you about it, Ariadne, in order that you may be able to judge for yourself how unworthy I am. May I?”

She answered by a nod of assent.

“Thank you, little one. It is just twelve years; since then I have squandered two fortunes. I deserve to suffer for it now. One fortune I brought with me when I left England

a headstrong, reckless boy of twenty-one. I threw it away in two years of riotous living in the Cape. The other I made in ostrich-farming. In a few years I sent that the way of the first. I drank, I gambled, I plunged into every dissipation known to the wild set with which I associated. Every manner and kind of dissipation but one—woman—that is the only sin I escaped. I have never wronged a woman, not even a poor black one—that I solemnly swear to you.”

For the first time since he had begun speaking, Ariadne moved and silently placed her hand in his.

“I don’t want to make you think any better of me, dear,” he said, pressing the cold little hand between his own. His voice trembled as he continued his story.

“It was through no virtue of mine. I simply couldn’t, that is all. As for love! Well, years passed amid the rough scenes, the reckless life of an ostrich-farmer and gold-digger obliterated all trace of refinement. I abandoned the hope or desire for a woman’s love. I felt too debased—living a life of debauchery, surrounded by half-savage Kafirs, with boon companions as bad if not worse than myself—to think of love.

“When I came to the camp three years ago, there were no women. But as time went on, things prospered, the booms began, the tent shanties disappeared, houses arose, like mushrooms almost in a night. With the gold that poured in, came women. Wives, sisters, and sweethearts of the newcomers. They made the camp gay with their afternoon teas, picnic junketings, and dances. But I held aloof. I was happier when boozing with the cricketers, or working among my Kafirs at the mine, until—until you came.

“I loved you the moment I saw your sweet smile—the moment I heard your voice. I did not care to know your past. I did not think of who or what you were. I only thought of the present. I was mad with the intoxication of loving you. At first marriage never occurred to me; or if it did, it was only to be thrust aside as a remote contingency. A humdrum method of securing you, when the fascinating edge of intimacy had dulled sufficiently to fit us for the sober routine of married life.

“I wronged you, dear. I humbly confess it. I might have wronged you more. Forgive me for acknowledging it—but I want you to know how really bad I am. I would have wronged you grievously had you been another woman,

for I misjudged you deeply. But, when I found that you were not the woman you seemed. A woman of the world as alluring as a siren. As heartless as you were fascinating, but that you had a heart of gold. A mind as fair as a pearl, and a life as clear as crystal, I resolved to marry you. If you would have me. I grew wild to make the money to buy the cage for my bonny bird, a cage where the glamour of luxury would hide the bars that fettered her.

“I grew wild, mad, and lost my head. I staked my last thousand pounds, and, God help me! lost it all, little one, all. With it I have lost you.”

“Yes, Hector,” faltered Ariadne, her voice broken by sobs; “but now,” creeping into his arms, “you have found me anew.”

“No, no,” he muttered hoarsely, as he gently put her away from him, “I could never subject you to the privations of a digger’s life. You to whom luxury and refinement is as essential as the air you breathe. This is the fitting nest for you,” looking round the room. “Not the brown earthen walls and ant-heap floor of a mine-manager’s hut!”

Ariadne’s sobs had ceased. She realised he was in earnest. His very self-abnegation proved how strong and deep was the love he

bore her. She knew that mere sobs, tears, caresses would not shake his generous determination. The only way to break down his resolution was by the power of eloquence and persuasive reasoning.

“You forget that,” she said in a low voice, pointing to the manuscript on the table. “With that I can help you!”

“Ah! God pity me! it’s that which adds a pain to my regret. That gift which you possess needs fostering. My hopes of your future are too great to ruin them by binding you to a poor devil like me. There!” he cried, placing his hand over her lips as she was about to interrupt his words passionately, “I know what you would say. You are noble enough to make any sacrifice for me. But I shall not be the one to let you throw away your future, as I have done my fortune: never would I permit it!”

“There was a time when you spoke very differently.”

“Yes, Ariadne, but that was, as I have just told you, before I understood you, before I loved you in the true sense of the word. Of what avail is a man’s love to a woman, if it does not bring her good?”

“That which some men call love, is not love.

It is supreme selfishness! Love is unselfish. Love is sensitive of the honour of its object. Love seeks to elevate, not drag down the woman. But you know all this as well, if not better than I do."

"Yes, I know all that you say is true," said Ariadne, looking at him sadly. "A man's love should bless the object of it with every good it is in his power to bestow. But, Hector, there are some things that money cannot buy. One is hope. Another is the content which begets happiness. Still another is the divine gift of inspiration. You speak of my talent. You say it needs fostering. You declare that you have hopes of a future for that talent. That you would rather die than destroy it. Oh, my love! do you not see that you are taking the most effectual means of crushing those very gifts—by—by depriving me of you?"

"God!" he cried brokenly, "help me to do right. Ariadne, don't say those things! Don't look at me with those reproachful eyes. Have pity, little one, for I am as weak as water in my love for you."

"Listen, Hector. The gifted women are the women who need the support of man's love far more than their less gifted sisters. You look surprised. You do not believe me! Then I

will try to explain. The women who possess brilliant talent, in fact, what is called genius of any kind, are naturally exposed to criticism, to admiration, to censure. Why? Because her exceptional talent isolates such a woman. Other women rarely understand her. The few who do, are not just to her. The poison of jealousy blinds them to all good in her. They tremble for the peace of brother, lover, or husband."

"Still," said Ariadne, after a pause, "there are women who trust. These are so few and far between, they are like the white milestones that mark a long and weary road. On the other hand, men are lavish in their admiration and goodwill. Of what benefit is their appreciation and good-fellowship, if it be the sort a pure woman spurns, or a shrewd one rejects as spurious? Men love to be amused and interested. A clever woman is a source of infinite diversion to them, be she singer, dancer, actress, painter, or writer. Men are honest in their praise, in the literal sense; of that there can be no doubt. Nevertheless, the majority would not care to see Maude the petted sister, Ethel the sweetheart, or the Missis suddenly developing into a genius. They would not care to hear them discourse learnedly on politics and art. Do anything above the average. Would they, dear?"

"I am afraid you are right, little one."

"You acknowledge it! Then you can understand the position of a clever woman thrown, without ballast or guide, like a captainless ship, upon the rough sea of Life, where every man is a pirate, and every woman's evil tongue a rock on which to wreck her. Hector, the only hope of the clever woman is the anchor of a husband's love. Her safest port a husband's fireside."

A mist gathered in Hector's eyes. His voice was husky with emotion as he said, "Dearest, do not weep. Every tear cuts me to the heart. Be merciful; teach me to be strong. You were not made to be the wife of a poor man. A beggarly digger."

"Hector! my life, my love is yours. I might have lived, content in my ambition, without love. Since I have known you I feel that is impossible. Come what may, I cannot live apart from you. My inspiration would be gone. My dreams of success over. My work. Oh! it is too late—too late to surrender love, and you."

All this and more Ariadne passionately pleaded. Hector felt his resolution vanquished by her words.

"Was the love of such a woman to be cast

aside?" he thought. "What if another should win the right to console her, to enjoy the sweetness of her companionship, the mad joy of loving her!"

The very thought set Hector's blood afire with jealousy. He yielded to the intoxicating thought of what the full possession of her love must be. Raising Ariadne's face he gazed into her eyes. The love shining therein thrilled and subdued him.

He kissed her hair, her brow, her lips, the proud curve of her soft warm throat as he whispered—

"It shall be as you wish, little one. You shall be a poor Digger's wife. God pity my weakness. It is too late to be strong now."

CHAPTER IV

ARIADNE'S VISION

THE little silver clock, in its nook above the book-shelves, had long since chimed the hour of midnight. The candles in their sconces were burned out. A heavy stillness hung over the room, oppressive with the strong odour of violets. The profound quiet was broken by the hurried scratching of the pen. Ariadne wrote rapidly, casting page after page into a satin-lined basket on the table beside her. The soft rays of the shaded lamp made a golden circle of light on the sheets. It faintly reflected her face, with its lines of deep thought.

The indefinable charm of expression that softened her face while her lover was beside her had disappeared. A mask had fallen over her beauty. A mask with compressed lip and meditative eye. It revealed the woman of vigorous mind. One on whom Fate had wantonly bestowed the form of a woman with the intellect and resolute will of the man. This combination is not usually attractive in woman.

It rendered Ariadne more fascinating, as she knew how to veil the masculine tenor of her mind under an assumption of feminine meekness. Men admire women of genius, but treasure them more as an *Edition de luxe*. They rarely regard them as convenient pocket editions of wife for the humdrum enjoyment of every-day life.

Wise women conceal wit and imagination beneath a cover of simplicity. They assume a desire for the flatteries which men find pleasure in bestowing, and ordinary women in receiving. It makes life more comfortable. Ariadne thought all this as she laid down her pen and neatly arranged the sheets of manuscript in the basket. Then she arose with a sigh of relief.

She gazed in tender reverie on the vacant chair by the table. A half-consumed cigarette lay beside it. She took up the weed and kissed it.

"Good-night, dear empty chair," she whispered, "you have held him in your arms—but I am not jealous; good-night!"

Taking up the lamp, she passed out, leaving the room to solitude and darkness.

The chamber she entered was curiously arranged,—the tent-like style of the adjoining

room being carried out in this. Skins covered the floor, likewise the walls and ceiling. Doors and windows were hung with draperies of amber-silk. The elegant modern dressing-table, the cheval-glass, the handsome furniture, was in strange contrast to the barbaric display of skins.

Some women individualise their surroundings. Ariadne was one of that class. She left on the most trivial of her belongings the stamp of her originality. If there is any truth in the mysterious doctrine of reincarnation, Ariadne had been a Savage, an Oriental, as she was now a Christian. To the first she owed the instinct of the savage developed in her extraordinary love of wild animals. The contact of the skin of the lion or leopard thrilled her sense of touch with an enjoyment as keen as that of a savage.

From the Oriental she derived her worship of light. Her love of vivid colouring. A forgotten sense of sensuality awoke in her enjoyment of sweet odours. The perfume of the hookah, the pungent vapour of incense burning constantly in its silver censer, made her think and dream better, so she would tell Kathleen, when her sister protested against the stifling fragrance of the tiny rooms,

"I have no doubt, dear, but what I was once on a time a sinful old Turk," she would say when Kathleen found her buried in silken cushions, with the amber mouthpiece of the hookah between her lips, scarcely visible through the smoke.

"Don't be shocked, sister mine, I am *drawing inspiration*," waving a bit of manuscript gaily. "Behold the result."

The Christian reincarnation saved her from sinking to the plane of a voluptuary. An early religious training held in check those strange inclinations—half savage, half sybarite—seeking a subtle mastery over her.

Religion was to her an ideal. There she worshipped the Beautiful. The ivory image of the crucified God hung by her bed. Before it she murmured the poetical prayers of the Rosary—she worshipped the beauty of kind words, good deeds, and heroism.

Ariadne stretched herself out wearily on the couch beside her sister. The rays of the night lamp on the table near by shone soft and clear over the pages of the little volume of sonnets with which it was her custom to beguile sleep.

Presently the drooping lids closed over her eyes. The book fell from her hand, and she slumbered.

The Spirit of dreams stole into the room and stood beside Ariadne's pillow. He touched her eyelids with his shadowy wand. Lo! they slowly opened. She saw not the dimly illuminated room, the lion skin across her feet, nor her own sleeping face reflected in the cheval-glass opposite the bed.

No; a wider, more mystical vision arose beneath the magic wand of the Spirit of dreams.

Her eyes opened on a strange wild scene. She found herself standing alone on a slight elevation above Johannesburg.

Its streets and squares, dotted with spires and villas, and lined with shops, lay at her feet.

In the centre a great mass of people surged around the Exchange Buildings, now transformed to a glittering temple of gold.

She heard the ribald songs.

She heard the boisterous laughter of men and women, as they thronged to and fro in wild frenzy.

They were of every nation, clime, and colour.

Some were strangers.

Others there were whose faces she knew.

The millionaire-broker cheek by jowl with the smooth-faced priest.

The bloated gin-purveyor hand in hand with
the smug-faced jockey.

The staid municipal official elbowing the
illicit canteen-keeper.

Diggers and athletes.

Actors and barmaids.

Wives and mothers, and young maidens.

Doctors, policemen, tradesmen, clerks, and
labourers.

All mad with the thirst of greed.

Drunk with the wine of gold.

The very dust of the street glittered in the
hot blaze of the noontide sun, so laden was
it with gold.

Gold was everywhere.

The people fought for it, some gleefully,
some sullenly.

The women dug it from the road with their
slender fingers, and thrust it into their bosoms.

The men tore it madly from the women.
Their breasts were crushed and bleeding
thereby.

Others snatched up the gleaming filth—
swallowed it, choked to death in voracious haste.

Anon, one more powerful than the rest
would build a mound of the magic soil.

He danced frantically on its top, till another
stronger still dethroned him.