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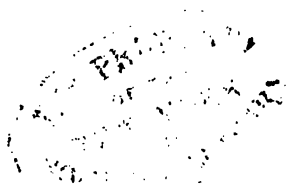
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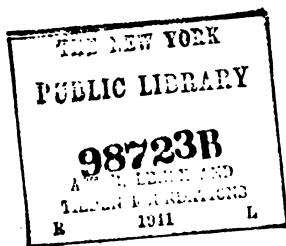
BY

STANLEY PORTAL HYATT
AUTHOR OF "THE LITTLE BROWN BROTHER"



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1909
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TO
WILLIAM RICHARD PORTAL
THIS BOOK IS
DEDICATED BY HIS NEPHEW
THE AUTHOR



And he shall desire loneliness and his desire shall bring
Hard on his heels a thousand wheels, a people, and a king.
And he shall go back on his own track, and by his scarce cool camp,
There he shall meet the roaring street, the derrick and the stamp,
For he must blaze a nation's ways with hatchet and with brand,
Till on his last won wilderness an Empire's bulwarks stand.

—KIPLING.

THE END OF THE ROAD

CHAPTER I

A HEAVY thud, as though from the falling of some giant hammer away beyond the line of granite kopjes, broke the noontide stillness; then came a score, in quick, irregular succession, then a veritable roar which rose and fell as the light gusts of wind carried the sound up the narrow valley.

John Allingham, the transport rider, put down his book, and looked out of the wagon tent.

"It's the stamp mill on the Marvel mine starting to crush, Swartboy," he said.

The head driver, a pockmarked old Basutu, nodded, and went on with the brake block he was cutting.

"Ja, Baas, it's the big machine on the mine; nothing else could make such an accursed noise. Do you remember the first time we came through here, when you shot a young koodoo bull where the store is to-day? Now, that machine will scare away all the game; then the railway will come, and they won't need the road any more, just as it was in Johannesburg. There was no Johannes' when I was a young man, only good veld, with quagga and swart wilderbeeste, and,

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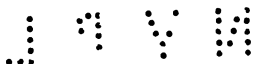
here and there, a Boer farm. Now—" He broke off with a mournful shake of his head.

The transport rider laughed. "There will always be the road, Swartboy, ahead of the railway. It stretches out northward all the time."

"Everything stops at the Zambesi, Baas," the old man spoke with conviction. "I have seen the great river, and I know. All the wagons must stay there because of the water. . . . Ho! you little naked Matabele child," he jumped up suddenly, and bellowed at the herd boy, "why do you let the oxen come this way, when they ought to be feeding in the old mealie lands? Turn them back quickly, before I get after you with my sjambok."

Allingham picked up his book again, and lay back on his pile of blankets. The Marvel mine did not interest him much, except in so far as its secretary would have to pay him a considerable check on the morrow. He had loaded his four wagons at the dusty, thirsty little collection of tin shanties, nearly three hundred miles to the south, which, for the time being, represented Railhead. The road had been bad, heavy sand alternating with seemingly bottomless swamps and the drifts had been heartbreaking; but, as ever transport rider knew that the Marvel people were determined to make theirs the first gold-producing mine in Rhodesia, the rates for carriage had been proportion; and now, after six weeks' trekking, had just over five hundred pounds to draw.

Allingham thought of the fact with satisfaction but with no special elation. He had long since g



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accustomed to his own luck. It was now eight years since he had left England to take up the post of assistant engineer on one of the outlying mines in the Transvaal. He was five-and-twenty then, and moderately keen on his profession; but, somehow, from the very outset the Road had called to him. Whenever he could get away from work, he would climb one of the little kopjes behind the line of galvanized iron shanties which the company called "the staff quarters" and stare at the narrow, dusty track winding northward across the great plain, until it was finally lost in the poort among the distant hills. Still, he was under contract, and for twenty-four weary months he stood the life, hating it all the time—the deadly monotony of seeing the same handful of men day after day, the eternal bickering and slandering, the galling sense of being always on the company's premises, at the company's beck and call; but, the day his agreement ended, he had quitted the mine.

"I think I shall buy some cattle, and go in for transport work," he had told the manager as he said good-by.

The manager, an Afrikaner born, had laughed a little scornfully. "You Englishmen think you can do everything. Why, man, you want to be brought up in the country to handle bullocks. You'll only lose your money."

Like most mine employees, Allingham had saved nothing out of his actual salary—on a mine, the canteen always accounts for any surplus—but, unlike most, he had kept his eyes open for opportunities, and

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two or three shrewd speculations on the Johannesburg Stock Exchange had left him with enough to buy a couple of good spans and wagons.

At first, while he was raw to the work, he had endless trouble with his drivers, as well as a good deal of opposition from the other transport riders, who were scandalized at the fact that he ran his wagons on common-sense principles, instead of bowing to that direful South African fetich, the custom of the country; while they were also inclined to resent the intrusion of an Englishman on what is, for some inscrutable reason, considered their particular domain. But Allingham had made up his mind to go through with the thing, and, in the end, he came out on top. He discharged driver after driver until he got the right boys; while in a very few months the brotherhood of the road proved, as always, infinitely more potent than any mere racial antagonism between Home-born and Colonial, Briton and Boer.

Allingham's venture had turned out successful; so much so that his luck had become proverbial right up the great road, from Palapye, with its thousands of beehive huts among the offal-littered white sand, to Salisbury, which then consisted of a few score tin shanties disfiguring a muddy vlei. The man himself took things quietly. As he never boasted, so he never complained. When the Rinderpest caught him, going south in the Dry Stretch, by Elephant Pits, and he lost two thirds of his oxen, he merely shrugged his shoulders, and remarked it was fortunate that his wagons were not loaded; when he found that m

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men had lost nine tenths of their cattle, and that his remaining bullocks were now worth more than the whole lot had formerly been, he muttered that his luck evidently held good. Having by this time plenty of capital, he filled up his spans again with "salted" oxen, and, thanks to the high rates which resulted from the disease, made money faster than ever. Outwardly, he was now a rich man, judged by the standards of the road; although, as a matter of fact, he was far richer than the road suspected, his earlier mine experience having stood him in good stead, and enabled him to speculate boldly and successfully in the shares of some of the mushroom companies which were springing up round the new settlements.

The Marvel mill ran on uninterruptedly, to the obvious annoyance of old Swartboy, who kept growling out curses on it as he hacked at his brake block. Then, suddenly, he dropped his work, and, shading his eyes with his hand, looked down the road.

"There's a wagon coming, Baas," he said. "I can hear them shouting in that sandy drift, where our red span stuck this morning. What fools can they be who are trekking now, while the sun is hot, instead of letting their oxen feed?"

A quarter of an hour later, Swartboy's question was answered, as a light traveling wagon with ten bullocks came in sight round the bend. The old driver gave a snort of disgust. "Bah, it's not transport; only foolishness, with springs on the wheels, and a few little calves pulling it." Then he relighted his

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big pipe, and went back to his brake block, deliberately turning his shoulder on the newcomers.

Allingham, however, scrambled out of the tent on to the ground. The novel he had been trying to read, the alleged masterpiece of an alleged authority on the African native, bored him unutterably—the assegai-waving heroes depicted therein were so painfully untrue to life. Moreover, he had not spoken to one of his own color since leaving Tuli, a fortnight previously, so he went forward almost eagerly to meet the white man whom he saw walking in front of the on-coming span. As he drew near, he gave a little whistle of surprise.

“Halloo, Ingram,” he called out, “I didn’t expect to meet you up here. I thought you were still in the Transvaal. What are you now? A mining expert, I presume, judging by the gorgeous outfit.”

The new arrival laughed a little uneasily. “I haven’t quite reached that height yet. No, as a matter of fact, the wagon belongs to the Marvel people; but they lent it to me to bring my wife down. I’ve been just appointed manager of the mine.”

Allingham glanced at him sharply. “I didn’t know you were married.” Then he changed the subject rather abruptly. “Are you going to outspan here? There’s no water between this and the mine, five miles of bad road.”

“Well, I wanted to get right on; but we’ve come from the police camp already, so I suppose the bullocks want a feed.”

The transport rider looked at the sunken sides and

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weary eyes of the beasts in question. "I should suppose they did," he said curtly. "Sixteen miles in one trek! I wonder they even got you through that last drift."

As they reached his wagons, Allingham stopped. "I dare say Mrs. Ingram will be ready for some tea after your seven-hour trek. I will send some over in a minute."

"Thanks, I'm sure she would. But bring it over yourself. Oh, never mind that," as the transport rider glanced down at his faded flannel shirt and discolored khaki breeches. "Come just as you are."

Allingham laughed awkwardly, then walked over to the fire, where Swartboy, whose curiosity had overcome his disdain, was holding forth on the demerits of a spring wagon. "See, it's a toy for children, jumping first this way, then that. And what oxen! Why, my two hind bullocks alone could do more than those ten. The black and white one is inspanned on the wrong side of the trek chain, and the red front bullock hangs back; but then the driver is that Zulu schelm Willum whom we sacked at Macloutsie. Moreover——"

Allingham's voice broke in suddenly: "Swartboy, tell that cook piccanin to make some tea, quick, and take it over to that other wagon, where the missus is." Then he climbed into the wagon tent, brushed his close-cropped, rather sandy hair without troubling to consult the scrap of glass wedged in the tent frame, and, after that, felt in one after another of the canvas wall pockets. He found matches, cartridges, some

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dynamite fuse, and a number of old waybills; was not until he came to the last pocket that he produced a rather faded silk tie. For a moment, he held the thing up, and looked at it doubtfully; then, with a sudden resolution, he thrust it back whence it came, and jumped down, with his shirt still open at the throat, showing a triangle of red-brown skin with sleeves rolled up from forearms which were darker than his neck. "If she doesn't like the look of the Road, I can't help it," he muttered.

A couple of minutes later, he was conscious of a pair of big gray eyes and a dainty little white figure, a strange contrast to Ingram's heavy, avuncular person and bearded face; and he troubled himself about the lack of a tie or the stains of anti-rust grease on his trousers. He saw she would stand.

There was a little folding table already set with a white cloth, on which his own battered enamel teapot looked strangely out of place, and there were china cups, and folding chairs with green canvas seats. He saw them all—Mrs. Ingram and the table and cups and chairs—more or less indistinctly; but his teapot, was horribly clear, and he saw for the first time, that there was a huge, rusty stain on the side, and that the lid had a jagged little hole where the knob should have been.

"It was most awfully good of you to throw away my tea, Mr. Allingham," Mrs. Ingram said, as she sat down. "I've been longing for it; and yet I was afraid that when we did outspan, the wretched c

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would take at least half an hour to make it. He either has no wood or no water, or, if he does happen to have both, he upsets the kettle just as it boils."

Allingham laughed. "I know their ways, and I expect you find it pretty rough and tiring; but, by this time to-morrow, you will be settled in your quarters, and trying to forget all about camping out."

"No, no," she took him up eagerly, "you mustn't think that. I love the Road. It's always like a holiday to me after the mining camps with their petty squabbles—and the other things. You feel the Road goes on and on; and there's no one to worry you, no one to give you orders. I often tell Walter I wish he would go in for transport work."

Ingram laughed a little harshly. "It's easy enough to say that, Leslie, when you've only seen the soft side of the Road; but ask Allingham what it's like in the wet season, when your front wheels are out of sight in the mud, and you've got to work all night in the drenching rain digging the wagon out, and then, when you want to inspan, find your cattle have strayed away. Oh, it's a lovely life, and, as for your road, I prefer the railway."

"Well, there's your prosaic mine calling you, Ingram," Allingham answered, as a sudden gust of wind bore down the full roar of the mill. "That wretched machine started up about midday, and I've been trying ever since to make out what it's saying." He turned to Mrs. Ingram: "I'm an old mine engineer, you know, and we always used to believe that when the mill began to crush, the stamps got a kind of rhythm,

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which told you how the mine was going to turn out. Can you distinguish this one?"

Mrs. Ingram held up her hand. "Listen!" she said; then, after a pause: "I have it—they say 'eight-pennyweights-to-the-ton and not-a-pennyweight-more!' Isn't that so, Walter?" and she turned to her husband with a mischievous gleam in her eyes

But Ingram snorted and got up abruptly. "Nonsense. The mine's marvelously rich. It'll run out over an ounce to the ton."

CHAPTER II

IT was quite dark when the wagons came to a standstill on the uncleanly, dusty clearing which served as the Marvel outspan. Halfway up the side of the little kopje, the stamp mill was bellowing out its wearisome roar, while every few minutes the sharper rattle of the hauling engine on the hill crest told of another truck load of quartz being tipped into the ore bins. A big arc lamp on the pit-head gear, and another outside the mill house, shed a curious light on the scene, a strange contrast to the virgin bush, which still extended to within a couple of hundred yards of the main engine house. Close to the outspan was the canteen—the hotel, as the company preferred to call it—a long, low galvanized-iron building, with a broad stoep half filled with grain bags and cases of whisky; while at the back of it were some wattle and dab huts, which represented the hotel accommodation.

Allingham drew his wagons up in line, ready to trek to the mine and discharge their loads in the morning; but the driver of the spring wagon outspanned on the other side of the road, nearer the store. A few minutes later, Ingram crossed over to the transport rider.

“Are you going up to the store?” he said. “I want to see if there’s any news.”

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There was a confused babel of sound coming from the bar, a score of men talking loudly and excitedly, while every now and then snatches of a revivalist hymn rose above the clamor.

"They're celebrating the starting of the mill," Ingram growled. "Which means, I suppose, that they're short-handed underground, and that to-morrow the mill will be hung up for want of quartz. Halloo, what's this?" as three or four struggling figures appeared at the open window. A moment later, it was obvious what was being done—a little, dungaree-clad man was heaved up from the floor and thrust bodily through the window, whence he fell heavily on to the stoep, then rolled over a couple of times and dropped to the ground, where he lay in the loose red dust, blaspheming incoherently.

Allingham hurried forward and picked him up. "I thought so," he said. "It's old Bill Sedley. He always gets abusive to the Home-born men, and they always put him out that way. Wake up, Bill. Are you hurt?"

The old man looked at him solemnly, then "Who said I was hurt?" he grunted. "I'm all right, John Allingham, and curse you for a rooinek," and he shamled off toward the mine.

The transport rider shrugged his shoulders. "Cheerful old beast. He hasn't got a drop of Dutch blood in him, yet he is more Boer than the Boers themselves. I think we've struck a tough crowd to-night, Ingram."

The scuffle with Sedley had brought the hymn to

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an abrupt close; but, as the newcomers entered the bar, the singer, a long-nosed little Cornishman, standing on a barrel with his face to the wall, began again, "Hold the fort, for I am coming." Nobody took any notice of him, except one of his fellow-countrymen, who was squatting on a milk case in the farther corner, beating time with an empty glass, and weeping copiously. Most of the other occupants of the bar were young men with the unmistakable marks of decent birth and education on them. You could see that they had been engaged at home by the company as a picked staff for this wonderful mine, and yet, at the same time, you could see also, if you had any eyes at all, that there was something wrong with them, something far more serious than the fact that, without exception, they had been drinking too much bad whisky. Their faces were yellow, as most men's are in the malaria belt, and their eyes weary, as though they had been looking for something they never found. They stood for the mine, with its clanging mill, its hideous smokestacks and headgears, its huge, blatant, galvanized-iron buildings, as John Allingham, well-knit, clear-eyed, and bronzed, stood for the Road, where things were clean and natural and wholesome.

"You're back quickly, Jack," Tom Earle, the storekeeper, said as he shook hands. "I heard you were loading for here again. Got anything for me on board?"

Allingham shook his head. "No, I've only mine stuff, machinery spares, and so on." Then he in-

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roduced Ingram. "This is Mr. Ingram, the new manager, Tom."

The storekeeper started slightly, then held out his hand. "Glad to meet you, Mr. Ingram. You've come just in the nick of time. The boss sent his driver down this afternoon to know if there was any news of your wagon."

Ingram gulped his whisky down quickly. "The boss? You mean Cuthbert Lestrangle, the consulting engineer? I had better go and see him. Where is he to be found?"

Earle jerked his thumb toward the mill house. "There's a big green tent under a mahogany tree, just below the battery. You can't miss it." When Ingram had gone, "Where have I seen that man before, Jack?" he said to Allingham. "His face is very familiar to me."

"He used to be an amalgamator on the next mine to ours in the Transvaal, seven years ago. That's where I knew him, and I don't think he's been north of the Crocodile River before this time."

"It wasn't in the Transvaal," Earle spoke with conviction. "I've seen him somewhere else. . . . What, are you going already?" as the other prepared to leave.

The transport rider nodded. "I think I'll go down and see how Mrs. Ingram is getting on. Ingram has gone straight up, and she may be worrying, especially if some of your customers stray in that direction."

"Mrs. Ingram?" Earle raised his eyebrows. "So we've got a white woman here now. He might have

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told me, and I could have got a room fixed up for her. Well, so long, Jack. See you in the morning, I suppose?"

Allingham nodded and turned to go. "I expect so. Oh, by the way," he faced round again, "how's the boss? Same as ever?"

"Worse, if possible," the storekeeper spoke feelingly. "He sacked an engine driver on Wednesday, a fitter on Thursday, and yesterday came down and cursed me, said it was my fault his men got drunk. By Jove, I don't wonder they hate him."

Mrs. Ingram was sitting in the back of the wagon, trying to read by the light of a rather dim lantern, when Allingham came up.

"So he's gone up to see Mr. Lestrangle? That means he will be very late," was the only remark she made when the transport rider told her the cause of her husband's absence; but a shade crossed her face, though whether it was due to vexation or disappointment, Allingham could not determine. She changed the subject abruptly. "Sit down and talk to me, Mr. Allingham, if you're not going back to the store."

They were near enough to the bar for the noise to be unmistakable, and he thought he detected a reproof in her words. "Don't judge them, don't judge us too harshly, Mrs. Ingram. They've been working terribly hard to get this mill going, and this—this burst is the reaction."

"I know," she answered softly. "I'm not new to mines. Poor fellows—the dullness and monotony. There's nothing to keep them up. But for you men

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who live in the open, who are your own masters, it's different. I wouldn't excuse it in you."

Allingham nodded thoughtfully. "The Road does you good, I think." He paused, and stared at the mine lights for a full minute, then he turned to her again: "Do you know, I never thought a woman would understand the Road as you do; but then, it's five years since I spoke to a white woman, at least, an educated Englishwoman."

"How do you know I understand?" she asked smilingly.

"I can see you do," he answered. "Somehow, you seem to have caught its spirit; you—" He broke off awkwardly. "I'm a bit of a fanatic on the subject, I think; perhaps because I always travel alone, and have so much time for dreaming."

Mrs. Ingram did not answer, and, for a while, they sat in silence; then "Does the mill still say the same to you?" he asked.

She nodded quickly. "Yes, 'eight-pennyweights-to-the-ton and not-a-pennyweight-more.' I hope it's giving us a false prophecy, though. The last two mines we were on in Barberton both turned out badly. That was why Walter wanted to come up here."

"I suppose you know you'll be the only white woman in the camp?" he said.

"Yes. Mr. Lestrangle told me that. He gave me full warning."

The transport rider looked up sharply from the pipe he was filling. "So you know the boss already?"

"I know him," she answered, with a touch of de-

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fiance in her tone, "and I like him very, very much. Don't you?"

He evaded the question. "You will hear a lot about him on the mine," he said; but she would not be put off.

"Why don't you like him, Mr. Allingham?"

The man laughed, a little uneasily. "We had a row last time I came up. He swore at me because he said I had been three months on the way from Rail-head."

"And had you been so long?"

He nodded. "Yes, but the Shashi River had held me up for six weeks. He didn't give me time to say that, though; just stormed for a couple of minutes and went on. I made up my mind I wouldn't ride for his rotten mine again; but the rates were too tempting. I'm glad I came now."

She looked down at him with a laugh in her eyes. "Why?" Then, before he had time to answer: "Where are you going to next?"

"Up north, to Fort Alexandra, to ride grain in from the trading stations. I'm tired of this road; and, besides, the railway will be up to Buluwayo soon. You get a better crowd of fellows ahead of the line, a tougher lot than these," and he glanced toward the bar, where the hymns had now been replaced by a ribald chorus.

"You mean you're going to fly from civilization as represented by the mill? Now, admit it, Mr. Allingham. You want to get on to your beloved Road, where you can travel day after day with a kind of monarch-

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of-all-you-survey feeling; and you won't realize that the inevitable result of your pioneering are these—these outrages on the picturesque," nodding toward the mine buildings. "The gold is the end of it all. You're part of the machinery, and your road ends in the mine."

"No, no." There was an eager remonstrance in his voice. "You belong to the mining crowd, and see things accordingly; but there's another class, men who came up here in the early days, and took the risks, and——"

"And broke down the way for the mining crowd, as you call it," she put in quietly. "Well, that husband of mine does not seem inclined to come back, so I shall wait up no longer. No, I'm not nervous. I suppose I shall see you to-morrow before you start north to join your own kind?"

"Oh, I shall give my oxen a couple of days' rest before I make a move," he answered.

"Then you shall come over and help me to get my quarters straight. Is that a bargain? Good night, Mr. Allingham. It's so nice to meet some one who hates mines and stamp mills—as much as I do."

Allingham walked over slowly to his own wagon, and sat down on a little three-legged stool beside the camp fire, from whence he could keep an eye on the spring wagon. He was burning with indignation against Ingram.

"Rotter," he muttered, "to leave her alone here with all those howling idiots full as eggs in the bar, and Heaven knows how many Kaffirs knocking about.

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It isn't as if he didn't know better. I wonder who she was, how long they've been married, and how much she knows about him? She's ten thousand times too good—what a waste." He knocked the ashes out of his pipe, and stared gloomily at the empty bowl.

The sound of some one stumbling over the bullock yokes made him look up suddenly.

"Halloo, Carden," he said. "Is that you? Little boys ought to be in bed now, instead of trying to break my yoke skeys and disturbing my oxen."

The newcomer, a pale, slightly built youngster, shook hands, then sat down on the little water barrel.

"I heard you were here, Jack, so I thought I'd come over and have a yarn. It's quite refreshing to speak to some one with whom you have not had a row, or who has not been rowing you."

Allingham began to refill his pipe carefully. "What's the latest?" he asked.

"Oh, the boss went for me this morning. He was raising Cain all round, and I got a little more than my share. I was doing a job in the mill, and he said something pretty nasty about leaving it all to the Kaffirs. Then up at the quarters, we're all at loggerheads as usual—Cousin Jacks against everyone else, Home-born against Colonials, and so on. I would clear out to-morrow if I wasn't under agreement. Now, they've put me to work in the mill as an assistant amalgamator, eight hours at a stretch in the horrible noise, working like a Kaffir all the time."

For a while he went on, full of bitterness against

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the mine and all concerned in it; then "Where are you going to now, Jack?" he asked.

Allingham, who had been listening in silence, yawned, "Fort Alexandra."

Young Carden raised his eyebrows. "By Jove, I wish I were going with you. My governor and my sister will be up there next month. The old man's an archæologist, you know, grubs up stone and old bones and that sort of thing; and now he's been commissioned to go and examine those big ancient ruins by Alexandra and decide who built them, if he can. I wish you'd make a point of seeing them. You might be able to get the old man to write to the boss, and ask him to cancel my contract. He knows the boss well, the decent side of him, if he has one."

"Why not write to your father yourself?" the transport rider suggested.

The youngster shook his head. "No. He's much more likely to listen to you. Halloo, who's this?"

Allingham looked up. Ingram was just coming over from the store. "That's your new chief. Good night," he called out, in answer to Ingram.

Then he got up suddenly. "Come over to the bar, Phil, and have a drink. I want to wash the taste of something nasty out of my mouth."

CHAPTER III

THE following morning, Allingham strolled over to the store while his boys were inspanning. Tom Earle, a short, stiffly built man with a pleasant, if rather weak, face, was just mixing himself a whisky and milk.

"Have one, Jack?" he said. "It's the first fresh milk I've seen on the Marvel. A Kaffir brought it in this morning."

Allingham hoisted himself on to a pile of whisky cases, and drank the mixture with evident relish. "The first eye-opener is the best drink of the day," he remarked. "What has been happening on the mine, Tom? They all seem to be at loggerheads."

Earle refilled the glasses slowly. "Well, for one thing, the boss doesn't set much of an example in loving-kindness; and they work them all devilish hard. But the chief trouble is that it's a rotten hole for fever. Why, we've buried seven this wet season—seven, and we've never had more than fifty, all told, on the property! Of course funk did more than fever, and they drank to keep themselves from worrying about it—the usual thing. You may think it's funny for a canteen keeper to say it, but it's not so much what they drink here, as what they get up from Railhead by the case—German potato spirits, which those high-souled

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patriots in Port Elizabeth bottle and send up as 'Scotch.' Of course the fever season's over, but the effects are not. You know that queer irritability which makes you kick a nigger and throw an ax at another man's dog. You fellows on the road get a chance to work the fit off harmlessly, but these poor devils don't. Have you seen the quarters?"

Allingham shook his head. "No, I offloaded and went straight out again last time I was here. What are they like?"

Earle made a grimace. "Galvanized-iron cubicles, all littered round with the muck the Cousin Jacks throw out. The company can't spare a boy to clear it up."

"Have they built the hospital yet?" the transport rider asked.

The other laughed harshly. "There's a grass hut which leaks like a sieve when it rains, and they won't build anything better; though when Woodford, the chairman of the London Board, paid his state visit last month, he gave a hundred pounds of the company's money to the Buluwayo Hospital, as a kind of thank offering for the future prosperity of the mine, much to the edification of the press. Oh, the Marvel's a nice place."

Allingham took his wagons up the steep incline, past the hauling engine, to the mine store shed; then, after sending away all but his hind bullocks, sat down on a drum of cable, while the head storekeeper checked the stuff as the boys offloaded it. One wagon had been emptied and sent back to the outspan, when he

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caught sight of a tall, thin man with grayish hair coming out of the main shaft. Allingham recognized him at once for Cuthbert Lestrangle, and though he, himself, was absolutely independent of the mine, he shifted a little uneasily on his seat; and, looking at the strong, lean face, realized why everyone called this man "the boss."

Lestrangle walked straight past the transport rider, without vouchsafing even a nod, and went in to the store shed. Allingham flushed slightly. "Surly brute," he remarked to the store's clerk. "He knows me well enough."

The clerk shrugged his shoulders. "We're used to it; and you're a keg of nails short on this wagon, John. Oh, no, there it is. Here, you spindle-shanked cross-eyed Mashona, why the dickens did you take that off? Send you to the compound manager, get plenty sjambok, see?"

A minute later, the boss came out again, and seemed to become aware of the transport rider's presence for the first time.

"How do you do, Allingham?" he said, holding out his hand. "Had a good trip? Do we owe you a lot of money again?"

He stood chatting about transport conditions generally for a few minutes, then he asked: "Are you going to get another load for us?"

Allingham shook his head. "No, I'm going farther north now."

The boss frowned slightly. "You're making a mistake. For the present, all the money is down in

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this part, and we're ready to pay, because we want to keep the wagons south. Look here, Allingham, you can have the contract for riding in our firewood here, if you like. We won't haggle over terms, and it'll pay you better than the road."

Allingham hesitated a moment, and, unconsciously, glanced down toward the outspan. "It sounds good enough," he began; then he caught a glimpse of a white dress and Ingram's tall figure coming from behind the spring wagon. "No, I won't, after all, Mr. Lestrangle," he said rather hurriedly. "Though thanks very much for the offer."

The boss held out his hand. "Well, good-by; I'm sorry. Good luck to you. Come and see me if you happen to be back to Buluwayo when I'm there." He walked on, and, a moment later, he was raging at a ganger whose ignorance of that beautiful language, "mine-Kaffir," had resulted in a truck of rock being overturned in the roadway.

As soon as the wagons were offloaded and the waybills signed, Allingham strolled over to the office to get his check. Greener, the secretary, a large, flabby man with a white and puffy face, glanced at him out of the corners of his eyes, then went on with the letter he was writing. Allingham filled his pipe and lighted it, then put his waybills down on the counter. "I want a check from you, Mr. Greener; thirty-one thousand five hundred pounds weight at thirty shillings a hundred pounds."

The secretary looked up. "You're always in a great hurry to get your money, I notice. You make

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us wait for our stuff, so you can wait for your check. Come again to-morrow, and I'll see if I've time to give it you then."

Allingham went white with wrath under his tan, and his fingers gripped the sjambok which was always hanging on his wrist by a thong. "I don't take any cheek from you, you great hippo calf," he growled. "But if your company likes to pay me two pounds a wagon a day for waiting——"

"What's that, Allingham?" Neither of them had heard the boss come in, and his voice, dangerously soft, made the secretary jump.

The transport rider explained the situation. Lestrangle's eyes flashed. "Give him his check at once, Greener. Don't you know by this time that a transport rider must be paid on the nail?" When Allingham had gone, "Don't make a confounded fool of yourself again," the boss went on roughly. "I've told you before about quarreling with transport riders. They're the most independent lot of beggars in the world, and we must keep in with them. Besides, this one is what you'll never be—a gentleman," and he went out.

There were big beads of perspiration on the secretary's flabby face, and his hand was shaking horribly, but a vindictive look came into his eyes as he watched the other go. "Some day, Mr. Lestrangle, you'll be sorry for the way you see fit to treat me," he muttered.

It was not until the following afternoon that Allingham heard anything more of Mrs. Ingram; then

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he received a note explaining that she had got tolerably straight without having to ask his help, but inviting him to tea instead. He found the manager's quarters to consist of three neatly thatched round huts situated in a small clearing by themselves, one hut being used as sitting room, one as bedroom, and one as kitchen. Mrs. Ingram had already draped some muslin round the little openings which served as windows, spread some rugs on the earthen floor, and decorated the red-mud walls with Japanese fans and pictures. Allingham had been six years on the road, living in his wagon the whole time, and, by contrast, the little hut seemed inexpressibly dainty. For some inexplicable reason, too, he was painfully shy. When he had met Mrs. Ingram first, it had been different; then he had been on the road, his own ground; but now he felt at a horrible disadvantage. She was dressed in something fluffy and cool, and he realized, for the first time, that, though her features were hopelessly irregular, she was a very pretty woman, a fact which made him even more nervous. She saw his trouble at once, and tried to help him.

"I haven't done badly, have I, Mr. Allingham? Walter sent down one of the carpenters to help me, and the rest I was able to do myself. I only hope the roofs don't leak too dreadfully, and that I can get some decent boys. I hear you and the boss have been making friends, and that you got Mr. Greener into hot water. You see how quickly gossip gets about, even to this remote corner."

Allingham laughed rather grimly. "I was on a

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mine myself for two years. Do you know the plethoric Mr. Greener?"

She nodded. "Oh, yes. He was on the 'Golden Hope' with us; in fact, it was through his introduction Walter got this new berth."

"Oh, then I had better leave what I was going to say unsaid."

Mrs. Ingram smiled. "I know exactly what you would say if I were a man, so I will assume it. Well, as I can see Walter coming, I had better make the tea."

Ingram greeted his guest heartily. "I'm glad you came to see us before you went. The boss tells me he offered you the wood contract. You should have taken it, and got in with him. He's the most powerful man in the country to-day. Half the mines are under his control, and he'll get the railways, too. By the way, do you still speculate? If so, I might tell you, in confidence, that this is going to be an even better thing than they think. I should buy Marvels, if I were you."

"Despite what the mill says about eight penny-weights?" Allingham asked with a smile.

Ingram made a gesture of annoyance. "Haven't you forgotten that rubbish of Leslie's? No, I'm giving you a tip which would cost me my job if the boss knew; but I remember you did much the same for me once."

The transport rider muttered his thanks; then two or three more men came in, all scrupulously clad and painfully nervous, and the conversation drifted on to

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different topics. After a while, Allingham, who had been sitting in a corner, listening and watching his hostess, rose to go. Mrs. Ingram, however, insisted that he should first see her proposed site for a garden, and give his opinion on it. She led the way, laughing, but as soon as they were out of hearing of the others, she said hurriedly: "What the mill says is true, 'eight-pennyweights and not-a-pennyweight-more.'"

The man gave her a quick glance of comprehension. "I think I like the road better than the mine," he answered.

CHAPTER IV

THERE is something almost human about the great transport roads of South Africa, some quality which is lacking in the highways of other countries. On the veld, the road stands for civilization. It is the outward, visible sign of the white man's rule, for hundreds of miles often the only sign. On either side of you there may be barbarism, rank and unadulterated, but you know that somewhere ahead there is a settlement, an outpost of the new order—perhaps only a dozen tin shanties or a mud-walled fort, utterly insignificant in point of size, but, none the less, vastly important facts, because they make a definite advance, an actual spot on the map, which, but a few short years before, was one vast blank.

The road has many phases and many moods, and yet, somehow, it is always the same. Whether on the barren dreariness of the high veld, where in winter the savage cold of the nights seems to bite into your marrow, and in summer your wheels sink out of sight in the mud; or in the kopje country, where countless baboons gibber at you from among the vast granite boulders, and guinea fowl in hundreds scurry away through the mealie fields in front of your oxen; or amidst the gray monotony of the bush veld, where the

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red impala buck dodge in and out among the mopani scrub, and you tie up your cattle with double reins because of the lion you heard at nightfall—at all times, anywhere and everywhere, for those who have eyes to see, it tells the same tale, of advancing civilization, of a nation in the making, of the eternal northward trek.

The Road began when the first Dutchman trekked out to the back of Table Mountain, and it has gone on ever since, slowly, very slowly, at first, creeping stage by stage up the mountains, on to the great plateau, then across the Karoo, gradually gathering speed for the great final rush, which carried it in twenty years as far as it had gone in the preceding two centuries. It was a pioneers' road always, the work of men fighting for their own hand, unaided by the state. Against them were the natives and the wild beasts, all the terrors of the unknown land; and yet it was the very fascination of the unknown, rather than any concrete idea of gain, which spurred the makers on. The railway is crudely commercial, authorized by the state, built by the public in the hope of dividends, prosaic from its very inception, an eyesore in all its details; but the road has always stood for romance, at least to those who have been able to understand it. The mere passenger who goes up by wagon to some settlement, who has a fixed end to his journey, probably reviles the road ever after. To him it is a miserable track across the veld, where the wagons crawl along at a bare ten miles a day, and so waste weeks of his valuable time; where no one ever hurries, where the

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methods are still those of the dark ages, before the shriek of the locomotive had startled this old world out of its apathy.

You must live on the road to know it, you must make the journey-which-always-goes-on, in which mines and townships, loadings and offloadings, are merely so many incidents by the way. You are your own master; the road makes you an absolutely free man, and, for that reason, you learn to love it, and, loving it, you understand it.

“Ach, Hartman, ach Bosman, yeck, yeck.” Allingham heaved a big sigh of relief as Swartboy called to his front oxen, and the big tent wagon jolted off the tin-strewn mine outspan on to the highway. He was always glad to leave the mine; but this time he was hardly conscious of the hideous smokestacks, the clanging mill, the dusty, sack-clad Kaffirs shoveling on the dumps, the whole outrage on the face of Nature. He was thinking of a little woman in a fluffy white dress, who, somehow, had turned a mud-walled hut into a paradise, and then, despite himself, he could see another woman, a full-breasted German, who seven years before had lived in a similar hut which was not a paradise, down in the Transvaal; and the contrast made him so unreasonably angry that he was burning to get away on the road, where women play no part, and forget them both.

Moreover, it was his holiday. He was going north with empty wagons, which meant some fifteen days of easy trekking, with no anxiety about drifts or mud

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holes, no double or treble spans to pull out of heavy places, no thin or footsore cattle.

"Ach, mein Kleinjes! Ach, mein klingerhut! Bosman, Rooiland, Biffel, Biffel." Swartboy's big whip whistled harmlessly through the air. "Blomveld, my beautiful hind bullock! Ah, Baas," to Allingham, "the cattle know we are going to better veld, away from these stores and tin houses and machines that-never-stop-making-a-noise. Bullocks are like Basutu, they understand things, while donkeys or mules are full of foolishness, like Mashona and baboons."

The transport rider laughed. "I think you've told me that before, Swartboy. Well, I'm just going into the store for a few minutes. I'll catch you up soon."

Tom Earle was leaning on the bar, listening languidly to young Carden, who was growling out his seemingly endless grievances. The storekeeper heaved a grateful sigh as Allingham came in.

"Here, Jack," he said, "can't you take this cheerful youth away with you? His high spirits make me tired. He's grouching now about being put to work in the mill; and I tell him it's the chance of a lifetime, to handle all that gold, and so be able to guess beforehand what the output will be. Why, there's a fortune in it, if you know how to speculate."

Carden sneered. "It's not much we shall know. They scrape the plates, collect the gold amalgam, once a shift; and at the end of every month they'll stop the mill to clean up the rest. But only Ingram and the boss will know the true total. Somebody else can have my brilliant chances. All I want is to get away.

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You won't forget to look out for my governor, will you, Jack? He'll get to Alexandra about the same time you do."

As Allingham finished his last farewell drink, Earle came round the end of the bar.

"I'll walk as far as the spruit with you," he said. "Here, Carden, in case anyone comes in, act as bar man till I come back."

For a few minutes they strolled along in silence, then, suddenly, the storekeeper turned to his companion. "Look here, Jack. It wouldn't be safe for me to be speculating in my own name; but, if I wire you any information about Marvels, will you act on it, and go shares?"

"On young Phil Carden's report? No, I'm dead in that act, Tom." The transport rider's tone was decisive. "And, if you take my advice, you'll leave the shares alone altogether. I've an idea the boss is too strong a man to buck up against."

Earle said nothing more till they reached the spruit, where he stopped. "Well, good-by, Jack. Pleasant trip. Remember me to the old crowd up there. By the way, did you ever know a woman called Bertha Ludwig?"

Allingham looked up sharply. "Yes, once. Why do you want to know?" he demanded.

Earle laughed uneasily. "Oh, Piet Vander Byl was speaking of her last night; said she was in Buluwayo, and I thought you might know her. Well, good-by again."

Allingham could hear the wagons jolting a little

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way ahead, yet he made no effort to overtake them. Instead, he walked along slowly, deep in thought.

"Now, why the deuce did Tom Earle ask me that?" he muttered. "He's not a very deep person as a rule. Perhaps I might have told him, but, after all, it's not my affair. Still, it's rotten." He lashed savagely with his sjambok at an overhanging branch, then hurried on after the wagons.

Allingham outspanned at the Five Mile spruit between the kopjes, where he had first met Mrs. Ingram; and, perhaps because of some memory of that meeting, he was unusually restless all the outspan. Usually, he passed the time reading or sleeping, and, from long habit, the enforced wait of at least six hours had ceased to be wearisome. But this time it was different. He could not sit still, and at last, in sheer desperation, he took his rifle from the sling in the tent, and prepared to go out shooting.

Swartboy, who had been scornfully watching the voerloupers pounding snuff in a broken earthen pot, hurried after his employer.

"Are you going to try and shoot klipspringer in the kopjes, Baas? Most of them will be asleep now, because the sun is hot; but some foolish ones may be awake. I want a klipspringer skin to sew my whip lashes with. The best kopje is the one with the single stone on the crest. I saw five buck there when I was looking for Jonkman and Rooiland, the time that naked little Matabele child let them stray. There is a village there, too, a place of six dirty huts, more fit for baboons than men."

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Allingham had intended to go alone, to walk off his fit of restlessness; but he knew that the old man would be bitterly hurt if he sent him back, so he accepted his company.

The first kopje proved a blank, as did also the hill with the single stone; but as they walked round the foot of the third one, Swartboy pointed suddenly to three little grayish antelope running among the aloes and fever trees, halfway up the boulder-strewn hillside. Allingham saw them, too, and raised his rifle, then lowered it again.

"They'll stand in a moment," he said.

A few seconds later, his words proved true, as one of the little fellows jumped on to a huge rock, from whence he calmly inspected the strangers.

It was a long shot, and Allingham's bullet merely chipped a flake off the boulder. The buck leaped quickly to the ground, and was lost to sight behind a clump of long grass, but, at the same moment, one of his companions took his place. This time Allingham corrected his aim, and, almost before the report had died away, the body was rolling down the hillside, where it finally lodged against the twisted stem of a hateful yellow fever tree.

Swartboy hurried forward to pick up the game; but a strange native, whom neither he nor the transport rider had noticed before, was ahead of him, yelling, and brandishing his knob-korrie.

The newcomer, a tall, lean savage, clad only in a couple of skins, deposited the buck at Allingham's feet, and clapped his hands two or three times.

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"Chief, great chief, mighty hunter. Give me the intestines," he said.

Swartboy laughed. "Ow, what people these hill-folk are! They smell meat like vultures. I have shot a wilde beeste ten miles from a kraal; yet before I could cut its throat there were two hungry Mashona squatting by it. Where do you come from, oh man without clothes?"

The stranger squatted down, and calmly began to tie the klipspringer's legs together. "I come from the village there, just behind the mahobbahobba trees. You can see the smoke from our fires, if you, Basutu, have eyes." Then he turned to Allingham. "If the chief will come, I can sell him eggs and fresh milk."

Allingham assented, and five minutes later they entered a small clearing, where half a dozen dilapidated grass huts, with smoke-grimed roofs and ragged, overhanging eaves, were grouped in an irregular circle. The ground in which they stood was littered with broken pots, mealie cobs, ashes—all the miscellaneous dirt of a native kraal. A little to one side was the cattle scherm, a rough erection of twisted poles, in which the unfortunate beasts had to stand knee deep in mire; while scattered about the neighboring rocks were queer little cylindrical grain bins, plastered with bright-red mud. A couple of women were laboriously grinding grain in the shade of a mahogany tree, and four or five yellow curs appeared from nowhere, and dashed, yelping, toward the white man; but, with the exception of these, the place was deserted.

The guide deposited the buck under the mahogany

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tree, curtly told the women to clear off, then squatted down and took snuff with great deliberation.

"Whose village is this?" Allingham asked.

"Malongesa's," answered the native, then tapped himself on the chest. "I am Malongesa. The chief wants milk and eggs? I will fetch them." He jumped up, dived into one hut, and returned with a calabash of milk; then he entered another hut, obviously disturbing a couple of fowls, which dashed out, cackling violently. A couple of minutes later, Malongesa himself reappeared with a dozen eggs in a basket-work tray.

Swartboy picked up one of the eggs and examined it critically; then he calmly cracked it against the rock on which he was sitting, and exposed a half-formed chick. "The eggs are bad," he remarked severely, and began to toss them one by one to the waiting dogs.

Malongesa laughed and took snuff again, then turned to Allingham. "The big machine at the mine is no good," he said.

"Why?" demanded the transport rider.

The native scratched his wool. "It will frighten away all the game. Then, too, our young men will go there and learn evil things, and our village will break up. Now, we are happy; but two of the boys are working in the compound already, and our young women want to go to the mine to see things. There are many white men there, as you know, and women are foolish." He paused and stared at the opposite kopje. "Are they making another mine near here?" he asked suddenly.

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Allingham shook his head. "There is no gold in this granite. Why do you ask?"

"There were white men looking at the country just beyond here this afternoon. One was on a horse, the great chief from the mine. Ah, here he comes, even now."

Allingham looked round quickly, to see the boss leading his big gray horse up the narrow footpath.

Cuthbert Lestrangle glanced at the dead klip-springer, then nodded to the transport rider. "Been shooting, Allingham? You fellows don't seem to trouble much about the close season. I think you've had the country to yourselves too long." His tone was rather irritable. "By the way, you ought to know this veld pretty well. Is there any pass through those hills about ten miles to the northwest?"

Allingham's face flushed at the note of command in the other's voice. "Why do you want to know?" he asked.

"Because I want to take the railway through there." The answer came curtly.

The transport rider laughed, a little angrily. "Your railway! You'll never get one down through the hills; and, anyway, it's hardly likely any of us are going to assist you to destroy our business."

The boss shrugged his shoulders. "We can do without you." He walked away a few steps, then turned back. "It's no good, Allingham," he said. "We mean to have the railways all through the country. We can't go on paying bullock wagon rates. You transport riders have got a monopoly now; but

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it can't last. We shall get up a lot of those poor Dutch from the Transvaal and the colony, if we can't get the railroad built in time."

Allingham's eyes flashed. "You mean that your companies, and the government behind you, will try and break the men who have opened up the country for you? It's about what I expected of your crowd. But you haven't done it yet."

Cuthbert Lestrangle climbed rather wearily into his saddle. "We shall do it," he said quietly. "We're going to make this a payable country." He glanced round the kraal. "This fellow here is living on one of our farms. He'll have to pay us ten shillings a hut a year; not so much because we want the money, but because we need him and his sons as laborers on the mine."

"Then it's a cursed shame," Allingham burst out. "This country was made for something better than your confounded mines. You mining people are a gang of pirates and robbers, right through. You took no risks in the first case. We did all the rough work; and now you want all the profits."

It was the boss's turn to flush. "Very well, Allingham," he said. "If you dislike the mines so much, I'll see you get no more loads from any of them," and he rode off.

"Why is your white man scolding the great chief of the mine?" Malongesa asked Swartboy, looking up from his task of skinning the klipspringer.

The driver snorted. "My white man is the bigger chief of the two, oh dirty-bodied one," he answered

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scornfully. "He was telling the mine man that his big machine is no good, and that the hill savages in the neighborhood are uncleanly baboons."

As they walked back toward the wagons, they met two tall, finely built native girls carrying pots of water on their heads. Allingham glanced at them with an unusual sense of interest.

"My daughters," Malongesa said. "They will marry this year. The cattle for them are promised already."

Allingham had long since got used to seeing practically nude Kaffir women, and, as a rule, he never gave them a second look, but this time he did turn his head.

"Marry them off soon, Malongesa," he said impulsively.

It was late in the evening trek when the wagons reached the top of a long rise some twelve miles from the Marvel. On the crest, Allingham stood a moment, gazing at the arc lamps, which he could make out perfectly through the clear atmosphere. Suddenly, a gust of wind bore up the roar of the mill, faint, yet perfectly distinct.

"Eight-pennyweights-to-the-ton and not-a-penny-weight-more."

Allingham repeated the words. "I hope it's true. By Jove, I hope it is. The mine couldn't go on six months at that rate."

Then he crossed the ridge, out of sight and sound of the mine, on to the road.

CHAPTER V

ON the official plan, a copy of which you could see hanging in the civil commissioner's room, Fort Alexandra consisted of six streets, crossed at right angles by no less than ten avenues. There was a market square, and a stand for a market hall, in addition to those for the church, the school, and the museum. All the plots were sold, even including those originally set apart for the government; and if you had come across that plan anywhere else, you would infallibly have been impressed with a sense of the size, wealth, and dignity of Fort Alexandra. But when you saw the place in actual being, that impression faded, or, rather, it was obliterated by a sense of utter astonishment. True, you could trace Main Street, for there was the fort itself next door to the courthouse, and the Thatched House hotel opposite, with the coach agents' office across the next avenue. Higher up, you came on two tin shanties, owned by coolies, and beyond these again were Leary and Co.'s red-brick store, tin-roofed, too, and, almost opposite it, the R.T.A., the Rhodesia Trading Association's large, barnlike structure. These formed the buildings of Main Street; and, to those who possessed the eye of faith, and saw the track after one or two wagons had cut up the spoor anew, it was most certainly a genuine road. For

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the rest, there was the hospital on the rise; a grass hut, square and neatly thatched, on Third Avenue; and six brick-and-tin buildings in what the older inhabitants insisted on calling Pioneer Street. The remainder of the houses and stores, some twenty in number, half of which were of wattle and dab, were vague—that is to say, their position was indeterminate, and you approached them, not by any definite road, but by stepping over the bottles and rusted tins which littered the intervening spaces. There was no church as yet; but there was a cemetery across the Drift, containing over a hundred and fifty graves, although the town was but seven years old, and the population, including some twelve police and a Dutchman's family of fifteen, had never exceeded seventy-two whites.

Alexandra rather prided itself on that cemetery. It said, with perfect truth, that no town in Africa, save Macequece, that sultry little Portuguese Gehenna, had a higher death rate. But there was nothing aggressive or self-assertive in its pride; for the fort never forgot that it was the oldest town in Rhodesia, and, consequently, it had none of the conceit of the newer, mushroom settlements, such as Salisbury and Buluwayo. These latter might have a water supply and electric light and periodical typhoid epidemics; but Alexandra was venerable by comparison with them, and every true Alexandran knew that, in the long run, his town must resume the premier position. Sooner or later, the boom must come.

Miss Salter, the matron of the hospital, took another view. The boom concerned her not, but she had

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held the hands of too many of those hundred and fifty while they were slipping into the unknown to cherish any illusions. It was the whisky, she said with gentle persistence, or, at any rate, the deadly potato spirit which passes for whisky among the Teutonic gentlemen in Port Elizabeth, who hold the health of the interior in their damp and fleshly paws. The matron never preached, being infinitely learned in the ways of men, so she shut her eyes to anything that might happen at the Thatched House, and allowed the whole town to come to the hospital for tea and tennis.

Beyond the matron and her two nurses, there were only three other white women in the town, unless you included, as no one did, a couple of stout and slatternly Afrikaner vrouwen, who lived in wagon tents among a litter of old tires and rotting wheels behind the abandoned smith's shop. The three consisted of the wives of the magistrate and the doctor, and a gallant little Colonial-born girl, the daughter of old Henry Rainer, the trader. The two former did not count much. They visited each other to exchange grievances and criticise the matron; but Mollie Rainer was almost as much an institution as the Thatched House, or even Father Martin himself, which was saying a great deal, for the Father was, by common consent, the chief man in Fort Alexandra.

Strangers, who had never been in the town before, and knew nothing of its ways, were apt to imagine that Father Martin must be a priest; when they were told that the title was used in the wider sense, as fitting

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the oldest inhabitant, they looked to see a venerable, or, at least, an elderly personage, grave of mien and speech; consequently, they were usually moved to wonder or profane speech, according to their temperaments, on learning that the red-bearded man of about forty, clad in blue dungarees and an old khaki shirt, who was now having a drink with the coach driver, was none other than the famous Father.

Robert Martin had seen the actual birth of the township, and he had been there ever since. There were others in the place—old Henry Rainer, Molly's father, Daddy Hurst, the commission agent, and Sandy Graham, of the Thatched House, who had come up soon after; but of the original founders only the Father now remained. The rest were scattered far and wide; some had been lured away by the meretricious display of the newer settlements; others had fallen at the hands of the natives or been swallowed up by the veld, as was so often the case in those early days; while many lay in that quiet little inclosure across the drift, waiting, not for the boom, but for the Day of Judgment.

The Father was coach agent, auctioneer, cattle dealer, and general financier to the town, as well as chairman of the Sanitary Board, which latter was the only form of municipal government permitted by an unsympathetic administration. He owned half the stands, five or six farms, and was reputed to have a share in every mining venture in the district. True, none of these brought him in the slightest revenue; but in Alexandra men did not look for immediate re-

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turns—they believed in buying cheaply in order to reap a huge profit when the boom came.

Few strangers ever wandered to Alexandra. Practically speaking, the town was two hundred miles from anywhere, and the only visitors were the transport riders who came up with trading goods and whisky, and took away the grain which had been bartered from the natives in the outlying stations. As a matter of fact, this same grain trade was the only paying thing in the district, and everyone took a hand in it. Of course, when the boom came and there was capital to develop the innumerable gold reefs and work the farms and introduce good breeding cattle, the grain would be relegated to the background, left to coolies and men like Stephenson, who persistently scoffed at the optimists; but for the present it was a useful stand-by. Even Father Martin was not above financing five or six traders, though his methods were very different from those of Leary & Co., Stephenson's firm, who got the poor wretches heavily into their debt, took over the grain in settlement at a starvation rate, and insisted on paying any balance, not in cash, but in trading goods or Port Elizabeth whisky.

The meeting of the Sanitary Board was just over, and the members had adjourned, as usual, to the Thatched House. There had been nothing of special note discussed that day; in fact, when the secretary, who was also magistrates' clerk, prepared to write up the minutes, he could not remember anything that had been said, except a remark of old Daddy Hurst's regarding the moral character of Stephenson's dog—

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which, though amusing, would hardly look well on paper—so he tossed the minute book into the corner, and, telling the native messenger to lock up the building, hurried after the Board.

He found the members grouped round John Allingham, who, seated on the bar itself, with his big sjambok dangling as usual from his wrist, was trying to keep pace with their questions.

"I got in about an hour ago," he was saying. "The wagons are at the drift. . . . Oh, yes, I had a very decent trip up—sixteen days. I cut across from the Marvel on to the old road, as I meant to come up light. Met no one the whole time, except old Andy Maddison the prospector, traveling with a couple of pack donkeys. I shot a rietbuck at the Mahaulihauli kopjes and a young roan bull at the Insiza, as well as a couple of duikers. . . . No, I never heard a lion the whole way, though an old Matabele I came across told me that one had just killed some cattle at Voudsa's kraal, a mile off the road."

"How's the Marvel going to turn out, Jack?" Father Martin asked.

Allingham shrugged his shoulders. "The mill only started the day I got there. They won't declare any output till they've had a clear month's running. I don't believe there's much gold there, really."

Daddy Hurst nodded his grizzled head. "I never had much faith in any of those southern mines. The best reefs are round here, only those cursed fools of mining experts won't even come and look at 'em. Still, they'll find out their mistake by and by. They

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talk about that Marvel being a kind of test of the country. Lot of rot, though I hope the Marvel will turn out well, as it'll give 'em confidence at home."

"Are they doing any farming down that way?" Sandy Graham asked.

"Some of the big companies are trying a bit, importing cattle and so on, but it's all close to Buluwayo, where traveling directors can go and look at them without too much trouble and risk of fever."

Daddy Hurst made a gesture of disgust. "If only we had that capital up here! Oh, well, it's bound to come before long."

"What's that, daddy, the boom?" It was Stephenson, a big, florid man, with a red beard, who spoke. He had come in, unobserved by anyone except Allingham, who had only vouchsafed him a curt nod. Stephenson had once sold the transport rider some alleged flour, which, when opened a week later on the road, had turned out to be half mealie meal, and Allingham had a good memory for such things.

"Is it the boom?" the red-faced man repeated. "I thought so. Give me fair warning when it's coming. I've been here three years now, and during that time the town has increased to the extent of two coolie shanties. There's not ten solvent men in it to-day."

Daddy Hurst put down his glass so suddenly that he spilled half the contents. "You confounded, underselling, money-grubbing, trader-cheating white Kaffir," he sputtered; but Sandy Graham laid a restraining hand on his arm. "Steady on, daddy,"

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he grunted; then, "If you're one of the solvent ones, Stephenson, you can afford to pay me. It's a good bit overdue. Mac," to the bar man, "sing out the total of Stephenson's bar account. Thirty-seven pounds eleven, isn't it?"

The Sanitary Board of Fort Alexandra laughed; but the manager of Leary & Co. muttered an oath and left hurriedly, without waiting for the round of drinks which Father Martin had already ordered.

"He's the only man I've ever asked for money, and, by George! I believe he's the only man in the place who would do me down, except some of the police, and they don't get any credit," growled the proprietor of the Thatched as he pushed over the tray of glasses. "Are these yours, father? . . . How's the railway gettin' on, Jack?" to Allingham.

The transport rider refilled his pipe carefully before answering. "Well, they say it'll be in Buluwayo in about three months, and last time I saw Cuthbert Lestrangle he was talking about a line down to the Marvel. He says they're sick of paying the rates we ask for transport."

"He belongs to the new crowd." It was Father Martin who spoke. "They think they've come up to Rhodesia when all the rough work was done, and that, because they have the capital, they can oust the old hands and collar the lot for themselves. But they won't do that in this district, whatever they do elsewhere. . . . Well, it's about time the coach was in. I think I'll have a look if she's coming."

The arrival of the mail was the one event in the life

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of Fort Alexandra; consequently, when the Father announced that the coach was in sight over the farther rise, the whole of the occupants of the bar turned out to the stoep, where they were quickly joined by the doctor and Captain Martell, the police officer.

The latter, a huge, tired-looking man, clad in pyjamas and an old khaki jacket, shook hands cordially with Allingham. "Halloo, John. Been poaching royal game lately? You promised to bring me some meat. I'm tired of Father Martin's gall-sick bullocks." He glanced again at the transport rider and grinned. "Got any rats on your wagon?"

The other looked puzzled. "No, why?"

The captain pointed to the transport rider's hair, which was short and very irregularly clipped. "I thought the rats had been gnawing off your flowing locks."

Allingham rubbed the back of his head rather ruefully. "I let one of the drivers have a try. Still——"

"Still, he's abominably rude, Jack. And I've told him not to come out in pyjamas," a clear voice broke in.

Captain Martell faced round quickly. A young girl, brown-faced and rather awkward, had just strolled up, the bridle of her pony looped over her arm. "Halloo, Molly. Little girls should keep away from the bar; then they wouldn't see the pyjamas."

Molly Rainer made a little gesture of disgust. "I came to see if there were any passengers. If I wanted a drink I should have it at home, decently." She emphasized the last word with a rather vicious nod,

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then turned to the coach agent. "Any passengers, Father?"

Martin shrugged his shoulders. "Can't say yet, my dear. It's about time we had some; six weeks since the last came. You remember him, Molly?" He turned to Allingham. "He was a superior youth from the Agricultural Department. He wore a stiff collar and a tie, and he told us he was a teetotaler. So, naturally, they closed the stores and came up to have a look at him. By ten o'clock he was assuring us he had both foot and mouth disease and rinderpest. It took three men to put him to bed," he added simply.

Allingham, whose eyes were on the coach, which was really only a large and shabby mule cart, laughed. "I know the gentleman, one of the Royal Family's cousins." He glanced at the coach again. "I think you've got some passengers, after all, Father."

The coach agent shaded his eyes and stared at the approaching vehicle. "Yes," he said slowly, "there're two. Halloo, Mac," to the bar man, "you had better get that trek gear cleared out of the bedrooms. You'll have some guests to-night."

Mac, who, among other things, was the brother of an Irish peer, came forward wearily. "We'll see if they look worth it, first," he drawled, but five minutes later, when the mules reappeared on the near bank of the drift, he gave a whistle of surprise. "A white woman, by Jove, and an old chap with whiskers. Who the dickens can they be?"

Molly Rainer, who had been watching eagerly,

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turned to Captain Martell. "Don't you think you had better get?" she said severely. "We don't want them to think they've struck a Kaffir location."

The captain laughed, and lounged across the road to the fort.

The six weary mules drew up of their own accord outside the Thatched House. The driver exchanged a greeting with the company on the stoep, handed his long whip to the leader—on a mule cart the driver is the man with the whip, the leader the native with the reins—climbed down stiffly, and went to help his passengers alight. The lady, who descended first, was tall, slight, and presumably young, though the thick veil she wore completely hid her features; the man was of medium height, stout, with an iron-gray beard. Both were thickly covered with the abominable whitish dust of the high veld, and showed obvious signs of that ghastly fatigue which only those who have traveled on a mule cart can understand.

Sandy Graham waddled up, exchanged a few words with the man, then led the way to the hotel.

As soon as they were gone, half a dozen voices assailed the driver. "Who are they, Piet?"

The long, thin Dutchman scratched his head. "He's some sort of a schoolmaster, who's come from England to have a look at the ancient ruins down by the mission station."

Allingham nodded. "Is his name Carden? I thought so."

"Carden." Father Martin looked up from his mail bag waybill. "There's a lot of gear coming for

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him on Johnny Geldenhius's wagon. Did you pass Johnny on the road, Piet?"

The coach driver grunted assent. "Ja, he's at Leary's store, twenty miles out. He'll be in day after to-morrow. How about that drink of mine, Father?"

Molly Rainer, who had been listening with deep interest, vaulted on to her horse. "She's got nice clothes, and they're quite spoiled with the dust," she remarked to the company in general. Then she singled out Allingham. "Your cattle look jolly fit. I saw them to-day by the Location. Only, there's a rooi-witpans rather lame. Well, good-by. I'm going to tell matron the news."

Three hours later, Mr. Carden rejoined his daughter in the dining room, where a special dinner of tinned soup, curried tinned cod, Mashona fowl, pumpkin, and sweet potatoes had been prepared for them.

"I have seen this Father Martin," he said, as he adjusted his gold-rimmed glasses and surveyed the meal. "He turns out to be merely the coach agent and, ahem, general transport man, as well as butcher and grain dealer. He tells me that Geldenhius, who is bringing our stores, will not go farther than this benighted spot, and he suggests that we ask a certain John Allingham to take us down, as a favor."

Hilary Carden looked up languidly. "Well, did you see him?"

Her father shook his head. "No. He is that big, rather rough-looking person, who was leaning over the rail with a sjambok dangling on his wrist when we

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drove up. I saw him just now in the bar—the whole lot of them were there still—and he did not appear in a fit state to discuss business. I quite understand why they gave this town a bad name in Buluwayo. You remember what we heard on all sides.”

Miss Carden gave a rather impatient little sigh. “He was the nicest looking of the lot,” she said.

CHAPTER VI

JOHN ALLINGHAM breakfasted in his usual fashion, sitting on a three-legged stool beside the tent wagon, with his plate and cup on an upturned case. If anyone had suggested that he might walk the four or five hundred yards to the Thatched House, and have a much more comfortable meal at a table, he would have received the proposition with surprise. Why should he do so? He belonged to the Road; the wagon had been his home for six years now; and his cook boy knew exactly what he wanted. Moreover, he liked Sandy Graham himself much better than Sandy Graham's food, which, to his mind, always tasted of a coolie's hands. And yet, in some subtle way, things had not seemed quite right since that day when he had had tea with the Ingrams at the Five Mile Water. On that occasion, his teapot had first struck him as being painfully old and battered; now, there were other things which appeared equally in need of renewal, and he began to wonder, half unconsciously, whether he, himself, had not got into coarse, uncivilized ways. He remembered the sense of shyness he had felt in Mrs. Ingram's hut, and the thought of it made him vaguely uneasy. He did not like the idea that men whom he knew to be his inferiors in every way could outshine him so

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easily. Then, too, he had an unwonted feeling of loneliness, coupled with an envy of Ingram's luck. For the first time since the road had called him, he began to wonder whether, after all, there was not much to be said in favor of a fixed abode.

He finished his meal, gave Swartboy a few instructions concerning the cattle, then started out toward the Thatched House, with the intentions of seeing Father Martin about a grain contract. As he was passing Leary & Co.'s store, Stephenson, who was standing on the stoep, haggling with a coolie hawker for some miserable-looking fowls, hailed him. "Do you want any loads, Allingham?"

The transport rider did not even trouble to stop. "Not from your people," he said curtly; "I won't do the coolies and Kaffirs out of a job."

Stephenson flushed. "There'll be a day when you fellows won't be so beastly independent. The mining people have got the government behind them, and they mean to freeze you out. You old crowd, as you call yourselves, are simply a drag on the country. One would think the whole veld belonged to you."

Allingham stopped and refilled his pipe very carefully. "I dare say," he said slowly, looking the other square in the eyes. "I dare say they will freeze us out; but I expect, too, there will also be a day when we have food inspectors. Then they'll have to build larger trunks, Stephenson," he added with cheerful insult, and passed on, leaving the other spluttering with rage.

Father Martin was still down at his butcher's shed,

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superintending the dissection of some aged goats; so, after a drink with Daddy Hurst, who had come in for his final breakfast appetizer, Allingham went out on to the stoep, when he was presently joined by the bar man. They had been chatting there a few minutes when, from round the corner by the courthouse, a couple of pack donkeys appeared, followed by a short, stiffly built white man, with a stubbly iron-gray beard. The packs were suspiciously small, one containing nothing but a big prospecting pan; while the absence of any natives confirmed the impression of a man down on his luck. As the animals and their driver came opposite the stoep, Mac hailed the stranger.

"Halloo," he said, "where are you three going to?"

The little man stopped and looked at him for a moment, then, as the real meaning of the question struck him, he shook his head reproachfully. "Young fellow," he answered, "even your face is not so weak as your wit," and he went on after his donkeys, who had turned off to browse on the dusty patch of grass which, according to the official plan, was the market square.

Allingham, struck by something in his gait, called after him: "Aren't you going to have a drink?"

The stranger paused again, and looked at him with a queer wistfulness, then his face hardened suddenly. "No, thanks," he said.

"Why not?" demanded the transport rider.

The little man drew himself up as he blurted out

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the answer: "Because I'm dead broke, and I can't ask you to have one."

"What's that, Kerridge?" It was Sandy Graham who spoke. He had been standing well back in the doorway, listening.

The stranger repeated his words, adding, "I owe you an old account already, Sandy."

The hotel keeper's face grew blank. "There's nothing against you on my books, is there, Mac? And, anyway, what the deuce do you mean by hinting that I'd ever refuse tick to one of the pioneers? It's the mining experts and the government servants I have to be hot after. Come in now, Sam. Here, Sixpence," to one of the boys, "take those donkeys' packs off, and tell the piccannins to drive them down to feed with Baas Martin's mules. Come in, Jack," to Allingham, "I'm going to open a big bottle to celebrate Sam Kerridge's return to his old haunts."

As Allingham turned to follow the others into the bar, he caught sight of Miss Carden sitting by the dining-room window. He divined, somehow, that she had witnessed the whole scene, and he flushed awkwardly, then, half unconsciously, he raised his big sombrero. The girl—she was only about twenty—looked surprised, and vouchsafed him a stiff bow.

"She's not much like her hopeful young brother," he muttered.

In the bar, the champagne, out of a tumbler, soon restored the old prospector's good humor, though his voice grew bitter again when Sandy Graham asked him of his doings during the last three years.

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"I went south," he said; "I knew there was plenty of good ground there, and I found it, an ounce to the ton at the surface in some places. I pegged out hundreds of claims, all around the Marvel district, put all the cash I had into licenses. Then, when these experts came, I tried to sell. Do you think I could?" He laughed grimly. "They came down, Cuthbert Lestrangle's lot, had a look at my reefs, sampled them, ate my skoff and drank my whisky, and that was the last I heard of them. They knew I had no money left to pay those huge government inspection fees, so they waited till I had to let my titles lapse, and then repegged immediately, in the companies' name. The gold law's devised for that purpose, to oust the prospectors. All these companies are hand in hand." He paused to take another drink.

Sandy Graham nodded wisely. "Hawks don't pick out hawks' eyes. And so you lost the lot?"

"Aye, the whole lot." The old man growled out a curse. "Then, you know, all those wayside stores are on what they call the companies' farms, and the storekeepers have got to do what they're told—Lestrangle sees to that. Freeze the old crowd out, get rid of the men who did the hard work, who broke down the way, who took the risks from the niggers, the fever and the rest of it. . . . I tried for a job in the mines, but you're barred there, too. They've a lot of stiff-collared youngsters from home, at about half wages, and ruddy Cousin Jacks from the Rand. By Jove, if the niggers rise again, they'll just run through that lot like water through an expert's dam.

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There's not one of them could do a day's walk or hit a bullock at twenty yards."

"So you've returned to the old place now, Sam," remarked Sandy.

The defiant look came back into the prospector's eyes. "Aye, I thought I might get something here," he muttered. "Some developing work on a reef, or that sort of thing."

The hotel keeper clapped him on the shoulder. "We'll fix you up, some way. There's no hurry. Your room's No. 4; and I think the boy's got your breakfast ready," and he went out hurriedly.

The old man got up from his seat rather unsteadily, while Allingham and the bar man looked away studiously. "I think I'll go and have a wash," he muttered; "I'm a bit tired, and it'll—it'll buck me up," and he stumbled toward the door, holding his hand out in front, as though he found a difficulty in seeing.

Mac watched him go with contrite eyes. "Sorry I said that to him. By George! those companies are playing it low down. My brother's chairman of about six, though he doesn't know quartz from blue metal. He offered me a job last mail, but I think I prefer this. One thing, they're gentleman here."

A few minutes later, Allingham went in search of Sandy Graham, whom he found in his den. "Look here, Sandy," he said abruptly, "I've been making pretty good money lately. I'll put up the old chap's expenses till he gets round again."

Sandy looked at him solemnly, then thrust out a big hand. "You're a good fellow, Jack, a deuced good

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fellow; but you don't belong to the town, and this is our affair. Why, Sam was here before I was! They'll be enough and to spare for all the old hands before long! The boom's bound to come."

Allingham smiled. He knew the creed of the township, knew, too, the futility of argument, so he strolled out again, to intercept Father Martin, whose voice he heard outside. The father was discussing the advisability of buying more mealies with a trader—in Alexandra all business was done in the Thatched House, offices being regarded merely as convenient places for stowing saddles, old reims, and unlabeled specimens of quartz—but he came over to Allingham as soon as he saw him.

"Will you go down to the mission station for some grain, Jack— Oh, I know you loathe the crowd there as much as I do—but they owe me a good deal of money, and I want to get their grain in. Then, too, those people who came yesterday want to go down, and I thought you'd give them a lift. Their stuff ought to be in to-night, or to-morrow morning. I know you won't mind waiting. The rest will do your oxen good. They look leg-weary."

The transport rider, knowing that the other had had no chance of seeing the cattle in question, laughed at the transparent ruse. "What's the rate for the grain, father?"

"Six shillings a bag—that's three bob a hundred for twenty-five miles."

"Yes, twenty-five miles of the worst road in the country," retorted the other. "Still, if you can give

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me four loads, I'll take it. Will your passengers be ready to trek to-morrow afternoon?"

Father Martin shrugged his shoulders. "They'll have to be ready. Well, we had better go and see old Whiskers and tell him."

Mr. Carden was alone in the bare dining room, writing, when the father strolled in, followed by Allingham. The archæologist received them with a dignity which, somehow, seemed rather incongruous in the Thatched House. It was as though he were conscious of his own importance and superiority, and correspondingly annoyed with the community for not recognizing these facts. His speech was slow and marked by a rather irritating precision.

"Mr. Allingham says he'll take you down to the ruins," Father Martin said. "It's lucky he was here; otherwise, you would have had to wait till some other wagons came in."

"But I understood all arrangements would have been made." There was a decided note of indignation in Mr. Carden's voice. "His Honor, the Deputy Administrator in Buluwayo, assured me it would be so."

"Oh, they talk a lot of tommy-rot there," the father answered cheerfully. "It's their way of shifting you on. They may have written to Weldon, the magistrate and civil commissioner, but I expect he forgot it, and now he's away shooting, while the native commissioner is out on patrol, which means he's shooting, too. Anyway, Weldon would have left it to me. . . . Mr. Allingham wants to get out

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to-morrow afternoon. I suppose you'll be ready then?"

The archæologist got up. It was evident he did not relish the rather offhand disposal of the matter, but he had the sense to accept the inevitable. "I'll call my daughter," he said.

When Miss Carden came in, he explained the situation, without, however, going through the formality of introducing Allingham. "This—this gentleman," the father grinned at Allingham as he noticed the hesitation, "is going to take us down to the great ruins in his wagon. He wants us to be ready to-morrow afternoon."

Miss Carden turned to the transport rider with a smile. "I hope it won't jolt us too dreadfully. The coach was awful. I'd sooner walk back to Buluwayo than make that journey again."

"Yes, a most unpleasant experience," Mr. Carden added, "most trying. Still, we knew we should have a great deal to put up with in a new land," and he glanced through the window down the main street, as if to cite an instance of discomfort.

Father Martin was quick to notice the implied slur of his town. "When I came here," he said pointedly, "there was no town at all, only a laager of wagons, and a couple of thousand armed niggers under those kopjes, discussing whether they should wipe us out. You've come up too late to see the rough side of things, Mr. Carden."

Meanwhile, the girl was questioning Allingham about the wagon trip—how long would it take, was it

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a tent wagon, would the dust be bad? Allingham's sense of awkwardness had returned—he felt even less at ease than he had done in Mrs. Ingram's hut. It would be four treks, two days, he explained. Yes, there was a good Natal wagon tent she could use. Her father? The transport rider smiled. Well, Mr. Carden would have to sleep under the wagon, or beside the fire.

Miss Carden gave a little gasp, and looked at her father with a spice of malice in her glance. "Oh, how funny. Just like one of his beloved prehistoric men. I'm sure he won't fancy it, though. Is there no other plan?"

Allingham shook his head. "The transport road is not like camping on the river at home, where you have tents and so on. We never worry about that sort of thing."

"Do you know the river?" she asked.

The man smiled. "Yes, why not?"

Miss Carden colored. "Oh, I thought transport riders were all Boers or Colonials. So they told us in Buluwayo."

"As a matter of fact, I come from quite close to you," he answered.

She looked at him in surprise. "How do you know where we come from?"

"Your brother told me the other day. By the way, I've got a letter to your father from him."

The girl frowned slightly. "So you know Phil? Father's very annoyed with him. We saw Mr. Les-trange in Buluwayo, and he said Phil wasn't doing

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well. . . . Why do you shrug your shoulders, Mr. Allingham?"

For the first time he looked her full in the face. "I don't like Lestrangle, and I wouldn't put the slightest faith in what he said."

"Well, I should," she answered rather hotly. "He seemed to me the one man who understood what this country wanted to make it fit to live in. Ugh, the mule carts and these awful little stores and hotels."

Allingham fidgeted with his sjambok, then, hearing footsteps on the stoep, he looked up to see Molly Rainer outside, making signals to him.

"Excuse me," he said, and went out.

"Matron sent me," Molly explained rather breathlessly. "She wants her," with a nod toward Miss Carden, "her and Whiskers, as Mac calls him, to go up to tea. She was too busy to come down herself. They've just carried in old Ryan, the trader from Mabouka's—blackwater, I think."

"Well, come in and ask her," Allingham said. Molly hung back. "No, you do it, there's a good chap." But Allingham insisted, so she hitched her pony to the rail and went in, vainly trying to straighten a rebellious curl on her forehead.

She was horridly shy, but she struggled bravely against the feeling. "Please, Miss Carden, matron wants you and Whis—Mr. Carden, I mean, to go up to tea this afternoon. She can't come down herself, as the boys have just brought in old Dan Ryan and she thinks he's going to die at once."

Hilary Carden gasped for the second time that

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morning. "But I don't know 'matron.' Who is she? What——"

Allingham intervened. "It's Miss Salter, the matron of the hospital. Her word is law here. And this is Miss Rainer."

"I see now." The elder girl unbent, and smiled down at the earnest, sunburned little face under the old felt hat. "Well, we'll go to the hospital. Will you come and fetch us, Miss Rainer?"

Molly nodded. "All right. I'll come. Good-by," and she went out.

Miss Carden watched her canter off. "What a queer little girl, Mr. Allingham. And who is Dan Ryan, and why is he dying?"

The transport rider shrugged his shoulders. "He's one of the old traders, and he's got blackwater fever."

She looked at him reproachfully. "Do you always take a man's death so calmly?"

"We've seen so many die," he answered simply.

CHAPTER VII

MAC, the bar man of the Thatched House, was expounding his views on the subject of archæologists with considerable emphasis to Father Martin, Allingham, and old Kerridge. They had buried Dan Ryan that morning—as Molly had anticipated, he had died before noon—and after the funeral, in accordance with a rigidly observed custom, the whole of the mourners had adjourned to the hotel, but, with the exception of the three in the bar, the rest had now drifted back to their stores or quarters. Allingham was sitting, as usual, on the bar itself, while the old prospector was leaning forward with his elbows on the one battered marble-topped table, listening eagerly. Thanks to the father's influence, he had been engaged by Mr. Carden to superintend the actual excavations at the ruins and act as general camp master; so, naturally, he was anxious to learn as much as possible of the nature of his new employer's profession.

"I've seen something of the fraternity," Mac said. "My brother has a queer old farmhouse in Hampshire, where there was once a Premonstratensian monastery."

Father Martin held up his hand, gulped his whisky down quickly, and pushed the glass forward. "Let's

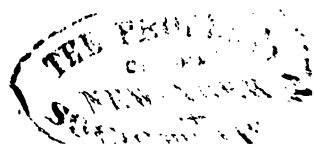
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have some more drinks on the strength of it, Mac, and please say that word again, very slowly."

The bar man grinned, and complied with the request, then spelled the word out, while the father produced a blue pencil and solemnly inscribed it in large characters on the wall. "We'll make Weldon, the magistrate, say it when he comes over here and declares everyone else is drunk. Go on with the story, Mac."

"Well, there's nothing much except that some society asked permission to prospect the ruins while we were away. Jim said they could, of course. When he got back, two months later, there were whacking great trenches across the lawn, where they had 'dug up the foundations'; and the garden had been looted by their navvies. But the worst part was they had had the cheek to cadge for subscriptions for a digging fund—to excavate Jim's property! Someone did well over it. I know what they raised, and I know what they paid in wages. And then, to crown it all, their beastly little rag of a magazine denounced us as 'soulless vandals' because the trenches were filled in again and Jim wouldn't let them raise another fund to dig some more. I dare say old Whiskers here was one of the crowd."

The Father shook his head. "He's come out for the government, so he must be a big gun, almost as big as he thinks he is. He's got to decide whether the Queen of Sheba built the ruins, or whether Solomon kept his surplus wives in them. It'll all help to draw attention to this district, so good luck to him."



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"Are they going to stay there long?" Mac added.

"Whiskers says about a month," Martin answered. "They're going to put up at the Dutch mission station. I hope they enjoy it. I can't imagine why he brought the daughter out, unless his mind's too full of moldy bones and broken chunks of stone for it to be safe to trust him alone."

Allingham yawned and got off his seat on the bar. "Well, it's about time I inspanned, if I want to reach the poort to-night. I'll be up in about half an hour, Mac."

Hilary Carden looked rather doubtfully at the great eighteen-foot wagon with the tent at the rear end. "How do I get up and where do I sit?" she asked.

Allingham produced a little set of steps, which he had unearthed from among the rubbish in Father Martin's store bed. "Climb up by these. Then, if you unroll your rugs on that mattress, I think you can manage. Are you going up, too, Mr. Carden? All right, Swartboy. So long, Sandy. So long, father. See you in a few days."

Sandy Graham watched the wagons till they entered the dip beyond the old smith's shop; then he went back to Father Martin.

"He never had a drink, except with meals, all the time," he said solemnly.

The Father nodded.

"He never asked anyone to have a drink, not even John Allingham, who's taking him down for nothing."

Father Martin nodded again.

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The hotel keeper wiped his forehead. "He asked me for his bill, and when I said he might as well leave it over till he came back and pay the whole lot at once, he got suspicious. Mac gave him the bill, and he said a quid a day was preposterous, and that he had neither breakfast nor lunch here the day he came."

"What did Mac say?" asked the other.

"That, sooner than have any dispute, we wouldn't charge him anything that day, and he actually accepted that. I think for a man so full of learning, he's got a good idea of the dollar. But he gave Mac a couple of shillings," he added with a chuckle.

Father Martin lay back in his chair and roared with laughter. "What did Mac do?" he asked at last.

Sandy grinned. "Asked him to have a drink with it, and when he wouldn't, chucked the coin over to the house boy."

Allingham rode on the front wagon with old Kerridge, and did not see anything more of his passengers till the end of the trek. The first two or three miles of the road lay across a stretch of open veld; but, gradually, the country grew more broken, until the track finally entered the Poort, the narrow defile which led down to the granite district. The sun was just setting when the first wagon jolted over the rocks at the head of the pass, but the short tropical twilight was almost over when it reached the outspan, a little stretch of level ground at the foot of a giant kopje.

"Wu-uk, ah-h-now." The signal to stop ran down

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the line, then, one by one, the wagons drew off the road; the brakes were screwed hard on, the long whips stowed under the buck rails, and the outspanning of the oxen begun.

"Tie up the cattle right away, Swartboy," Allingham called out, then went to help Miss Carden descend.

"Did you travel more comfortably than on the coach?" he asked.

She made a little grimace. "Yes, but it's horribly slow work, crawling along these dreary roads."

"Dreary!" He echoed the word in surprise. "Why, I always reckon this as one of the most interesting, at least after you leave the open veld. Still, I suppose it does seem slow to a stranger."

Mr. Carden, who was walking up and down to get the cramp out of his legs, caught the word "slow." He said petulantly: "I had no idea when I agreed to come that my time would be wasted in this way. It's preposterous. The authorities should have made other arrangements."

Hilary Carden flushed. "Father can't bear delays in his work, Mr. Allingham," she said hurriedly, with a note of apology in her voice. "He's so tremendously interested in it, and he has always more than he can do. They simply begged him to come out here, and now they don't seem to realize how much he has given up for them."

Allingham nodded. He was not greatly troubled by the archæologist's woes, his mind being full of the question of the daughter's comfort. Much to Swart-

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boy's astonishment, he had borrowed a table and some chairs from the Thatched House, and these were now being set out between two of the wagons; but it suddenly struck him that he had forgotten to get either a tablecloth or a lamp, and, though the camp fire remedied the latter defect in part, there was no hope of disguising the hideousness of the former with its blistered paint and top burned by innumerable cigarette ends. Moreover, there was a question as to whether the cook boy would not lose his head completely when called upon to provide for these additional white people.

Hilary Carden glanced round at the scene, the huge kopje standing black and forbidding against the sky, the group of naked piccannins crowded round their own fire, watching the great three-legged pot, the long lines of bullocks tied to the trek chains, some lying down, others standing with lowered heads, breathing heavily, the flickering light playing on the white canvas of the tent and vast, clumsy frames of the wagons. Inside the circle of firelight was life, outside was the unspeakable silence of the veld. A distant hyena raised his hateful voice, seemingly cursing the whole of creation; a belated rock rabbit high up on the kopje side gave out a queer, strangled cry as he scuttled under a boulder; an owl hooted mournfully from the old mealie lands at the lower end of the Poort; and still, to the girl, the silence remained unbroken; these were all a part of it. Then, too, old Kerridge leaning against the buck rail of the tent wagon, smoking a huge Boer pipe, the cook boy, in a tattered flannel shirt

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peering into a spluttering frying pan, the drivers in their parodies on European raiment sharpening their knives on yoke skeys, preparatory to tackling some biltong—these had no part in her scheme of things, they belonged to the same world as those frankly naked piccannins or those ominous-looking oxen.

She had been brought up in an atmosphere of culture, among people who died decently from pthisis or typhoid or rheumatic fever, who prided themselves on reading every dull book that appeared, or seeing every problem play—to whom mind was everything, matter nothing; and, consequently, the savagery, the utter crudity of the present surroundings were wholly abominable.

A month before, she could hardly have conceived conditions under which her father, the foremost authority in England on the Domesday Book, could be actually inferior to a battered old prospector, who, very possibly, had never heard of the Norman Conquest. Yet, as a matter of fact, she and her father represented one end of the scale, their companions the other.

And John Allingham? She was young enough, despite her university degree, to regard him with impatience, simply because she could not understand him. The men of her own circle at home, the stodgy antiquarians of the old school, the self-satisfied younger ones who still had the marks of the 'varsity on them, the dramatic poets and the essayists, all that Literary World which spells its name in capitals and abhors Fleet Street, would have sneered at this loose-limbed

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man with the raggedly clipped hair as a barbarian, who sat on bars with a sjambok dangling from his wrist, and did not know a low-side window from a piscina. And yet, this same barbarian could handle Biffel, the huge black bull who pulled as a wheeler in Swartboy's span, as easily as other men of her acquaintance could use a pair of scissors. Everything in this new world was wrong, and, as she joined her father in his tramping to and fro, she was conscious of a distinct sense of annoyance against Allingham for being the representative of it all.

The transport rider, on his part, read her attitude, and tried to make excuses for it; although, despite himself, he could not help thinking how Mrs. Ingram would have acted under the circumstances—how, without seeming to do so, she would have taken all the worry of the meal out of his hands and insured its success. This girl, of course, did not know; she was new to it all; and yet, though he had seen so little of women, he divined that she never would know, because the road made no appeal to her.

The meal passed off in awkward silence. Old Ker-ridge was hungry, Mr. Carden had not recovered from his fit of annoyance, which his daughter seemed now to share, while Allingham himself was fuming inwardly at the cook boy, who had burned the chops and served the tinned soup practically cold.

The transport rider was truly grateful when the ordeal was over, and Miss Carden got up. "Do you always have your meals like this, in the open, with those savages looking on?" she asked.

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Allingham nodded. "Yes, except when it's raining."

"And then?"

"Then I have them under the wagon."

She made a little gesture of horror. "How awful! I hope it won't rain this journey. Well, I think I shall try whether it's possible to sleep in that tiny tent. Good night, Mr. Allingham; good night, father. What would they say at home to the idea of going to bed at this hour? What time do we start in the morning, Mr. Allingham?"

"As soon as it's light enough to see the road—about half past five. But that needn't worry you; in fact, I shouldn't advise you to get up, as the early mornings are very cold."

"Then why start at such an unearthly hour?" she protested.

"So as to give the oxen longer time to feed and rest during the heat of the day," he answered. "If we were on one of the big roads, instead of this traders' track, I should travel entirely by night."

"Then the comfort of the oxen comes before everything else?"

Allingham smiled at the question. "Naturally," he answered. "His oxen always come first with a transport rider."

The girl tossed her head a little impatiently and climbed into the tent. Allingham lighted his pipe, and strolled back to the fire, where Mr. Carden, who did not smoke, was trying to read by the flickering light. As the transport rider came up, the archæolo-

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gist laid his book down, and closed his gold-rimmed glasses.

"I hear you know my son, Mr. Allingham," he began.

Allingham nodded. "Yes, he gave me a line to you. It's somewhere in the tent, but it's unnecessary now. The point is he wanted me to persuade you to get him away from the Marvel."

"I see; and does he want to go in for—er—this sort of thing?" He waved his hand toward the wagons and smiled, a little scornfully.

The transport rider laughed, not too pleasantly. "He's hardly the man for the road. No, he'd do for one of those Buluwayo offices, and, candidly," his voice grew earnest, "candidly, Mr. Carden, that Marvel is a horrible hole for a youngster like that."

"I have heard very differently," the archæologist answered coldly. "All the men I met in Buluwayo spoke most hopefully of it, just as, ahem, they spoke otherwise of Fort Alexandra and its inhabitants, and as I find them right in that case, there is no reason why I should assume them to be wrong in the other."

Allingham flushed hotly. "The men in Alexandra are my friends," he said pointedly. "I suppose your informants were officials and mining men, who have been in the country five minutes, and think they ought to have all the plums?"

Mr. Carden smiled pityingly. "They were, as you suppose, officials and mining men, who seem to me to represent the intellect and the culture of the country, as well as its financial side, though of the latter I know

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nothing. Still, with all your evident prejudices, you must admit that the present condition is one of utter savagery, and that these men with their mines and railroads are the only ones who can alter it."

The transport rider shrugged his shoulders. "It suits me as it is. Well, by the time you get back to Alexandra we shall know how the first crushing on the Marvel has turned out. A lot hangs on that, as the Marvel is a kind of test mine."

Mr. Carden got up. "I've no money to invest, and I never have speculated, knowing nothing of finance; but from what I learned in Buluwayo, I wish I were one of the lucky shareholders."

Allingham stared out into the night. It almost seemed as though he could hear the roar of the Marvel mill grinding out its unvarying warning—"Eight-pennyweights-to-the-ton and not-a-pennyweight-more."

And long after Mr. Carden had gone to rest in the stretcher bedstead which Sandy Graham had lent him, John Allingham was sitting on the düsselboom of the red wagon, thinking, partly of the girl asleep in the tent, but more of another woman, who was married to a man he loathed, a woman who understood the road.

CHAPTER VIII

N'SHLELENE! Ach Jonkman! ach Rooiland!" Hilary Carden awoke with a start, as, in obedience to Swartboy's yells, the oxen bent to the yokes and the wagon jolted off the outspan on to the road.

For a moment, she could not remember where she was; then, as she recollected, she sat up and peered through the slit in the laced front flap. Just below her was her father, huddled up in a big overcoat and looking supremely uncomfortable and out of place. A bundle of blankets on the next wagon represented old Kerridge, still apparently asleep, while on the front wagon of all was Allingham, smoking as usual, and wearing an old greenish-gray shooting jacket. It was the first time she had ever seen him otherwise than in a canvas shirt with the sleeves rolled up to his elbows, and she wished now that he were nearer, so that she could decide how a more conventional garb would suit him.

The Poort looked very different in the first flush of the morning light. The gloom and the heaviness were gone, and though the huge boulder-strewn kopjes were impressive, magnificent, there was something friendly about them, while the bright-green vleis and the yellow stems in the old mealie lands formed a welcome relief after the monotonous desolation of the high veld.

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You could see that in the granite country things would grow if man took the trouble to plant them.

The first turn of the road brought in view a little native village, perched high up on the hillside, a score of huts with smoke-grimed roofs, and, wedged in between two vast boulders, a tiny cattle kraal, the inmates of which lowed in friendly fashion to the approaching oxen. Half a dozen yellow curs dashed down the footpath as they caught sight of the wagons, followed a moment later by three or four naked youngsters eager to sell milk and sweet potatoes to the white man. Hilary watched the scene with interest. It was by far the most picturesque piece of country she had passed through, and, hitherto, the only native dwellings she had seen had been some unspeakably filthy hovels outside Buluwayo, which the town described as "the Location."

Allingham spoke to the kraal piccannins for a moment, then, suddenly, Hilary saw him pick up a shotgun from the buck rail beside him, jump to the ground, and hurry off to the right of the road, followed by two of the youngsters. A big crowd of guinea fowl was scurrying across an adjoining rapoko field, giving vent to their queer, rasping cry as they ran. They were already out of sight in a little patch of scrub before Allingham came within range; but, a moment later, they reappeared in another field. Then the shotgun boomed out twice in rapid succession, the piccannins dashed forward to where three birds lay on the ground fluttering violently, twisted the heads nearly off the necks, and fell in behind the white man,

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who had already ejected his cartridges and was making back toward the track. Meanwhile, the wagons had gone on, and as a result, Allingham reached the road again square with the last of them, that in which the girl was traveling. He could not see her, or did not try to see her, but she could note every detail, the strong, upright figure set off by the well-cut, tattered jacket, the breeches wet up to the thighs from the tramp through the dew-sodden grass, the indefinable swing of a man who was at home in his surroundings, and absolutely his own master. For the first time, she realized that he was infinitely more interesting than the latest dramatic poet, or even the discoverer of a new theory of low side windows.

Allingham caught up the leading wagon, handed his gun to Klaas, the driver, jumped on himself, and settled down against the buck rail. He was feeling contented again. He had fresh milk for breakfast—no small thing on the road—and guinea fowl enough for a couple of meals. Moreover, he always felt a kind of exhilaration during these morning treks among the kopjes, where Nature had made the world very beautiful, and civilization had, as yet, left the beauties undefiled. It was worth being alive on those mornings, worth all the discomforts and the hardships, the long nights digging the wagons out of mud holes, the unutterably wearisome treks across the high veld, where the grass was brown and parched, the maddening waits on the banks of flooded rivers which would not subside. You learned then what the road meant, you got back almost to what Nature intended man to

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be; you were away from, aloof from, all the petty jealousies and the dishonesty and the besmirchings of the towns; you had neither part nor lot with the money grubbers; you fought for your own hand fairly and squarely; and what you gained you could take with a clear conscience—you had earned it.

Miss Carden enjoyed her breakfast that morning, despite the lack of a tablecloth and the presence of half a dozen natives, who were squatting twenty yards away, watching with dull interest. The keen air had given her a color, and, as he glanced at her from time to time, Allingham could not help thinking how fresh and charming she looked. The other woman, down on the Marvel mine, had seemed charming, too; but there had always been a hint of weariness in her eyes, and, moreover, she belonged to another man.

"I saw you shoot those guinea fowl, Mr. Allingham," Hilary said as they sat down. "How awfully wet you got in those few minutes. I suppose you changed?"

He laughed. "No, I'm dry again now, though. That sort of thing doesn't hurt you on the veld. Why, in the wet season, we are often soaked for days at a time."

The girl opened her eyes in surprise. In her own circle men used umbrellas and shuddered at the bare idea of wet feet. Yet this man was not boasting—instinctively she felt he never would boast—it was all part of the day's work with him.

"Do you shoot much?" Mr. Carden asked.

"I'm not much good with the shotgun," Alling-

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ham answered, "I prefer the rifle; most of us do. You won't find many fancy shotgun men except Mac at the Thatched."

Mr. Carden looked puzzled. "Mac?" he repeated, "Mac? That kind of bar-man person? Where did he learn to shoot?"

Allingham smiled—he had seen the incident of the tip—"Mac learned to shoot before he came out. It's quite on the cards, you know, that one day he will be one of our legislators."

The archæologist sniffed. "Oh, indeed. Does he aspire to become a Labor Member? He did not strike me as being especially gifted."

Old Kerridge hid his face in his mug of coffee, while Allingham explained. "Mac's brother is an Irish representative peer and unmarried, and Mac is his heir, at present. . . . Oh, no, he's not a waster, far from it. He wouldn't have his job if he was. Why, only four years ago the magistrate, Weldon, was assistant bar-man. It's quite an honorable job."

Mr. Carden drew his hand across his forehead. He did not like to think that he had offered a tip to a potential peer. Even in Buluwayo he had met no one more important than a German count and the claimant to a Nova Scotian baronetcy. "It is a most amazing country," he said; "most amazing. Is there any one else of note in that curious community?"

The transport rider shrugged his shoulders. "I don't know what your standard is. Still, I will say this—they are the best crowd I know. Why, the night

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you came up, out of eleven men in the bar, only one was not an old public-school boy. You wouldn't find that in Buluwayo. . . . Well, Mr. Carden, I shan't inspan till half past three—it's only ten now—would you care to go and look at a small ruin under that bald kopje? Kerridge says he knows one there, and will show you the way."

The archæologist's eyes lighted up; it was obvious that he was genuinely interested in his work. "Of course, of course," he said. "We will start at once. Will you come, Hilary, dear?"

The girl glanced toward Allingham, as though asking his advice. He was quick to read her question. "I shouldn't go if I were you, Miss Carden," he said. "It looks simple enough, but it's really a rough bit of country. I followed a wounded duiker through it once, so I know."

Mr. Carden started off with the prospector, the latter carrying his old cut-down Martini rifle, while a piccannin with a camera brought up the rear. Allingham saw them off, then strolled over to where old Swartboy was cutting yoke skeys.

"Do you think we can get to the mission station in two treks, Swartboy?" he asked.

The driver pushed his big hat back and scratched his head. "Let me see, Baas. We sleep to-night by the old store, where the trader died and was eaten by the hyenas; then one trek—oh, ja, Baas. The cattle are fat as jackals after the Rinderpest, and it will not tire them. Do we leave the foolish old man and the missus at the mission, Baas?"

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Allingham nodded. "Yes, and Baas Kerridge as well."

Swartboy hacked viciously at his skey. "Are they going to join the Dutch preachers there and help teach these Mashona baboons to read and write? Ow! as if they were not evil enough already, these hill savages. Last time we were here, the mission boys stole Klaas's knife and my yellow shirt, while as for the women—" He snorted and used a word which is current from the Cape to the Equator.

Allingham hastened to reassure him. "No, they don't want to teach the Mashona. The old Baas is going to look at the big ruins, and say who built them."

Swartboy snorted again. "Everyone knows they were built by the men of old, who practiced deviltries there, long before the baboons lost their tails and became Mashona. What foolishness! . . . Baas, the Dutchman at the mission has a big red bull you should buy. Ow! a bull, indeed! He would make a mate for Jonkman. The white man got him from a boy he taught to read and write—you know, Bungu, who is in tronk now for forging Baas Martin's name."

"I'll see if I can get the bull," Allingham answered, "only I expect he will be too dear. Inspan at half past three, Swartboy; I want to get to the old trading station before it's dark," and he walked away.

Swartboy looked after him and shook his head. "First the white woman the day the big machine started; now this one. It wasn't so before. The Baas

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belonged to the Road; but the railway is coming, and the Road ends at the Zambesi. I always said so. The Baas used to think of the oxen, only the oxen; now he brings tables and chairs and suchlike foolishness. The Road ends at the Zambesi; aye, at the Zambesi." He mumbled the words several times, then relit his big pipe and went on with his skeys.

Hilary Carden was sitting in the shade of the wagon, reading, when Allingham came up; but she gave him a little nod of welcome and put down her book.

"What do you usually do during these long mid-day waits, Mr. Allingham?" she asked.

The man sat down on the next chair, and pushed his big sombrero on to the back of his head. "I really don't know. I see to the wagons, or read, or go out on the chance of getting a buck. The time goes somehow."

"What do you read?" she asked.

"Oh, paper-covered novels and magazines, anything I can get hold of."

The girl frowned. "Don't you ever read books of a better type, something worth the trouble?"

"Where should I get them?" he asked. "I generally exchange with men I meet in the townships or on the mines, and have to take what I can get. Besides, when one has been up here some years, and had a few dozen doses of fever, one loses the ability to read anything but light stuff. When I was a youngster, putting in my time in engineering works, I used to take a kind of ghastly delight in Spencer

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and Schopenhauer and people of that sort. And, do you know, I believe I really did understand them; but now—you might as well give me Browning.”

“I love Browning,” there was a distinct reproach in her voice; then she looked at him suddenly. “I cannot understand why an educated man like yourself is content to be a kind of carman, when you might live among men of your own class in Buluwayo.”

Allingham tried to repress a smile. “We call ourselves transport riders,” he said; “and, as for working in Buluwayo, you see I could get at the outside twenty-five pounds a month there, whereas I can average fully four times as much as that on the Road.”

The girl looked at him in astonishment. She had been brought up in the knowledge that her father had a restricted income, derived, as she was told, from investments—archæologists working for the love of the work and not for money—and a sovereign to her represented a considerable amount. Consequently, Allingham’s casual reference to the financial side of his occupation gave her a distinct shock. Hitherto, she had regarded him as a poor man, toiling for a starvation wage; yet now it was obvious that she must readjust her ideas.

Allingham, however, did not seem to notice anything, for he went on: “Apart from that side of it I love the Road, the freedom, and so on. I could never work for a boss now, after being my own boss so long.”

“Don’t you feel lonely sometimes?” she asked.

A month before he would have scouted the bare

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idea; now he hesitated a moment before replying. "Perhaps, at times, when I've got a touch of the fever, or get hung up for a long time on a river bank, I think I should like to go back to civilization, to England, I mean, not to one of these African towns. I could afford to do so now if I wanted to."

"Then you should go home and settle down, and make some use of your life. Leave this sort of thing to those who can do nothing better." There was a kind of elder-sister note in her voice.

"What should I do at home?" he asked; "I am not a drawing-room man. Shooting dicky birds, pheasants, I mean, would seem horribly tame; and I don't think I should make a farmer. No, Miss Carden, I shall stick to the Road, unless they succeed in driving us out with their railways, a thing I'm not much afraid of; and even then, one can always shift on farther north."

She rested her chin on her hand and stared at nothing in particular. "You're quite wrong," she said. "No educated man should prefer this savagery. And look at a place like Fort Alexandra, the tone of it, men doing nothing but drink all day long. When you've no comfort of any sort, no civilization, you must deteriorate."

Allingham smiled. It was a very long time since anyone had lectured him, and there was something distinctly quaint in the way this girl laid down the law. Obviously, she herself was perfectly convinced that her own ideas, the ideas in which she had been brought up, were absolutely correct. On the other hand, some

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subtle change in her attitude toward himself flattered him, put him at his ease, and for that reason he rated her advice higher than he would have done on the previous evening.

He refilled his pipe slowly, carefully, then forgot to light it, and sat for some time in silence, thinking over her words. Yes, he was lonely at times, and, perhaps, a trifle weary and homesick. One did lose grip of things on the Road, the little details which, after all, count for so much. He was not a drawing-room man, and, before he met Mrs. Ingram, he would rather have prided himself on the fact; but now it was different, and he was conscious of an uneasy feeling that, in course of time, he would get down to the social level of Johnny Geldenhius, Moodie, or any other of the Afrikander transport riders he met on the road. It was eight years since he had left home, since he had known any of the refinements of life. He thought of London, with its well-dressed women, its brilliantly lighted shops, its restaurants where goat flesh and trek ox beef were unknown, its bars where the whisky was not made from potatoes; he thought of these and a host of other things he had lost during those eight years—but, above all, of the women. As he said, he could afford to go home. He had done amazingly well, thanks largely to his very distrust of the mines. All his speculations had turned out well, and now he could reckon on a certain five hundred a year from his capital. Enough to marry on— He looked round at Hilary Carden, who had taken up her book again and was pretending to read. Yes, she was

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right. The Road had served its purpose, as far as he was concerned. He would——

“Baas, the piccannin has seen a leopard on the kopje. His wind scared the cattle. He’s still in sight, crouching on a big boulder.” Swartboy’s voice broke in on his thoughts with startling suddenness. In an instant, his dreams were forgotten, and, almost before the girl had gathered the cause of the alarm, he was hurrying away, rifle in hand, as keen as ever to destroy this enemy of those who lived on the Road.

Hilary stood up, vaguely alarmed. To her mind a leopard was something to be avoided, not to be sought after eagerly. Yet, though Swartboy had gone off, she noted that the other drivers were still calmly trimming new whip lashes, so she sat down again, anxious now, not for her own safety, but for Allingham’s. She had read of wounded leopards turning on a man, and once, at a Burlington House gathering, she had been introduced to a noted explorer who had a withered left arm as a result of one of these attacks. Why would men run such risks, why——

The sharp crack of the rifle brought her to her feet again. She could see nothing, of course, but a savage snarl from halfway up one of the kopjes sent a shiver down her back. Then the rifle spoke again, but this time there was no more snarling, only a yell of unmistakable triumph from some native, which sent all the boys in camp scurrying in the direction whence it came.

Hilary watched them go with a sense of misgiving, tempered with indignation. It was not pleasant to be

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left utterly alone. Allingham ought to have known better than to have raced off in that unceremonious fashion. The men she knew at home, who came to her father's house, or whom she met at learned gatherings, would have been more polite. But would they have gone after a leopard at all? Her wrath against Allingham was struggling with an unwilling recognition of his promptness, when she caught sight of her father and Kerridge coming down the track.

"Mr. Allingham raced off to shoot a leopard, and now all the natives have gone," she said in explanation, as the old prospector glanced round the empty camp. Her father, however, hardly noticed her words; he was too full of the ruin he had seen.

"A most interesting thing, Hilary," he began; "quite small, but built of the most carefully worked granite blocks, with no mortar at all. A very puzzling problem. There is no detail of any sort to furnish a clue to the builders, and it is impossible to say if it was ever roofed. We measured it and made a plan. Look at this," and he unrolled a sheet of paper which he spread on the tailboard of the wagon.

The girl bent over it and endeavored to follow out his explanations. As a rule, she was genuinely interested in such things, but this time she could hardly keep her attention on the plan, and when, at last, she heard Allingham's voice behind her, she faced round quickly to see him striding in, followed by the boys, who were carrying a big leopard slung on a pole.

Allingham's eyes were bright with excitement. He looked masterful, alert, self-confident, very different

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from the man who had been listening humbly to her lecture half an hour before. "He was still there, where the boy spotted him first. I think he must have been asleep." He bent down and examined the body. "A full-grown male in fine condition. Would you like the skin, Miss Carden?" He looked up rather eagerly.

Hilary glanced at the animal with a mixture of timidity and aversion. There was something very ominous in the catlike face, which seemed to be snarling, even in death; while there was more than a suggestion of brutality in the large, jagged hole just behind the shoulder, where the bullet had come out. "Thank you very much," she said rather primly, "I really don't know what I could do with it. You see——"

"It will make a beautiful rug for the drawing-room, my dear," Mr. Carden broke in. "I'm sure your mother will be delighted to have it. Thank you very much, Mr. Allingham."

The transport rider turned away with a shade of disappointment in his eyes. He had meant the skin for the daughter.

Old Kerridge, who had been regarding the leopard solemnly, took his pipe out of his mouth. "I've been trying to make out whom he was like," he remarked to the company in general. "I see now—he has just the same look as Cuthbert Lestrangle when he's mad over anything, as if he'd like to get you in his teeth and worry you."

Allingham looked round with a laugh, but Mr.

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Carden laid down his plan and frowned. "Mr. Les-trange is a particular friend of mine," he said severely. "It is due to his good offices that I was intrusted with my present mission."

Kerridge rubbed his grizzled beard rather sheep-ishly, then walked away slowly. "So the boss is trying to get his grip on this part, too, curse him. Still, perhaps I may get even with him yet," he muttered.

CHAPTER IX

OLD Kerridge, who had a choice taste in horrors, was retailing to Mr. Carden and Hilary the story of the trader who had died in the ruined camp just above the outspan. It was nearly dark when the wagons had reached the end of the long trek, but there had still been sufficient light to show the three dilapidated huts on the big flat rock.

"The two small ones are where he stowed his grain," the prospector explained. "And the big one, with the roof fallen in, is where he lived. He was one of Leary & Co.'s victims, never had more than a few pounds' worth of Kaffir truck, and fed on mealie meal and sugar. He was afraid to use a yard of limbo to buy a Mashona fowl for himself. At the end of the season, there was a balance of a few pounds, and Stephenson made him take it out in goods and whisky. I've lived hard, but that poor devil—" He shook his head mournfully. "Yet I suppose Leary's made three or four hundred profit on his grain." He paused to refill his pipe.

"What happened to him?" Hilary asked.

"He died," answered Kerridge. "A white man can't go on the second year on mealie pap, with baking-powder bread as a luxury. If he had had a shot-gun he could have got tons of guinea fowl, but Ste-

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phenson collared his for a debt right at the start. He got fever, one day a week first; then two; then had it all the time. At last he was too bad even to write, so his store boy went in to tell Leary's. "Think they'd do anything?" He laughed harshly. "They're like the mining crowd, reckon men are cheap. Stephenson chased the boy out, and the trader died. When a transport rider came down a week later, a hyena ran out of the hut. . . . That's how the companies treat their men," he added grimly. "I remember another case——"

Allingham, who had been seeing to a lame ox, strolled up just in time to cut short another grewsome story. "Well, it's only one good trek from here to the mission station," he said. "And the ruins are only half a mile from the predikant's house."

"Do you know these Dutch Reformed Church missionaries?" Mr. Carden asked.

The transport rider nodded. "Yes, most of us know them too well. I don't want to prejudice you, but I should advise you to be very careful."

From her very first meeting with him, Hilary had been conscious of a kind of antagonism, which made her burn to combat all his ideas. "Why should we be careful?" she asked.

"Because, for one thing, they're all bitterly anti-British, as disloyal as they make them; and, for another thing, every nigger round the place is a thief. It's always the same when you teach a Kaffir to read and write."

"I should have thought you would have been

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above that prejudice, Mr. Allingham," the girl said, a little scornfully. "Education must do good."

Allingham looked surprised. "I don't think it is a prejudice, Miss Carden. What do you say, Kerridge? Did you ever know one of these mission boys use his education for anything else but to forge a white man's name to get liquor?"

Kerridge rubbed his head. "Yes, I did once, down in the south. He was a clever nigger, one of Khama's boys, and he forged a check."

Hilary laughed despite herself. "I can see you're not in earnest, after all."

Allingham flushed. "I am in earnest," he answered. "It's a pretty serious thing when the niggers in a big district like this get corrupted. As it is, they learn quite enough that's dangerous from the mining camps. If they don't go there themselves, it drifts up from Johannesburg in some way or other."

While Kerridge was away in quest of his tobacco bag, and Allingham was busy reviling the cook boy, Mr. Carden turned to his daughter. "It's curious how all these men seem to have the same narrow ideas," he said. "I can understand what Mr. Les-trange meant when he said the country needed new methods. These are people of quite a different type from those we saw elsewhere."

The girl nodded. "Yes," she answered, "quite a different type." But her voice was distinctly non-committal.

After supper, Kerridge, who had now conquered his awe of Miss Carden, reverted to the subject of the

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dead trader, and, from that, drifted on to his own experiences. It was the story of ninety-nine prospectors out of a hundred—continual disappointments, which however, seemed merely to spur him on to fresh efforts. Things would pan out right some day.

“And have you never found a good mine yet, Mr. Kerridge?” the girl asked, with a note of sympathy in her voice which Allingham had never heard there before.

The old man smiled at the question. “Yes, there was the ‘Quagga’ and the ‘New Year’ and the ‘Poodle Dog.’ Oh, a host of them.”

“Why the ‘Poodle Dog’?” she asked.

“The name of a brand of whisky I had at the time; or rather I had had it; the bottle was empty then. But I lost most of the claims; I couldn’t go on paying the fees. Still, I’ll strike it rich yet; oh, I’ll strike it all right. There’s no one else knows the gold belts as I do. There’re one or two things round this district I shall peg when the boom comes. I’m not afraid of anyone finding ’em.”

“Do you always go about alone?” Mr. Carden asked.

“Ja, ’cept for the niggers and the donkeys, and I don’t count them. Lonely? Well, I don’t think it ever struck me that way. In the evenings I see to my skoff, food, you know, and read my books.”

Hilary smiled. “What books do you take with you?”

For answer, the old man got up and fetched his pack-saddle bag, from which he produced three rather

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seedy-looking volumes, one being a Bible, the others forming a cheap and closely printed edition of Gibbon's "Decline and Fall."

"These are the ones," he said. "I've had them now—let me see—it must be three years. I found them in the kit of a man the niggers murdered. They suit me fine. By the time I get to the end of them I'm just ready to start again."

"Which do you read most?" Hilary asked.

For a moment the prospector puffed reflectively at his pipe, then, "About equal, turn and turn about. I've never read any other books you could do that with, of which you never got tired. I don't hold with the Afrikandu idea of the Bible, that it gives you an excuse for making a brute of yourself, but still it's right on niggers—'hewers of wood and drawers of water.'" He repeated the words twice, with obvious approbation.

"There's a horse coming." Allingham got up suddenly and peered through the darkness. Kerridge rose, too, while the drivers stopped chattering and listened attentively. Hilary watched in surprise. She had not yet realized that anything moving on the road after nightfall is, of necessity, a matter of interest.

A couple of minutes later the animal and its rider came in view. Allingham uttered an exclamation of astonishment and hurried forward. It was Molly Rainer and her Basutu pony, both looking rather weary.

"How fast you trek," the girl said as he helped her dismount. "I thought I should have caught you up

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before you inspanned this afternoon, then I could have got home before dark. There were some Kaffirs at your last outspan eating a leopard, and they told me you had left there early. Isn't it cold? I'm glad you've got some hot coffee." Then she greeted Miss Carden shyly, shook hands with Kerridge, and nodded to the archæologist.

As she sat down, Allingham noticed that she was shivering violently. He glanced across at Hilary, who read his meaning instantly, jumped up, and returned with a warm cloak of her own. "Let me put this round you, dear," she said.

Molly smiled up gratefully, then thrust her hand into a pocket of her skirt and produced a bundle of letters. "These are what brought me down," she explained. "There was a special cart came in this morning with the man who does the police accounts on board, and the driver actually remembered to get the mails. There are three for you, Miss Carden, one for you, Jack, and a lot for him," nodding at Mr. Carden, for whom she did not seem to entertain a very friendly feeling. "You see, I wanted to know how you were getting on." She turned to Miss Carden again: "And I never thought he would have made such long treks. I reckoned to be back by nightfall, but now I shall have to stay here. You must be in a hurry, Jack."

Allingham colored, and muttered something about empty wagons, then seeing Hilary and her father were doing the same, opened his letter, which proved to be from young Phil Carden.

"I hope you have met my people," the boy wrote,

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"though, from the governor's last letter, there is not much chance of my getting away. Still, things are more comfortable. The mill work is rotten, of course, but the camp is more decent than it used to be, perhaps because the boss is hardly ever here. Mrs. Ingram tells me the boss has asked the governor and Hilary to have a look at the mine on their way down country. . . . Mrs. Ingram sends you her kind regards, and says 'the tune is still the same.' I don't know what she means. Ingram, himself, has been in a very vile temper about something lately. He had half a dozen niggers sjamboked for nothing at all yesterday, and I hear one is dead."

Allingham thrust the letter into his pocket and stared into the fire. He suspected why Ingram was bad-tempered, and pitied Mrs. Ingram accordingly, but, somehow, these two seemed far more remote than they had a few days previously. After all, it was their concern, not his.

"Yes, matron sent for the Father and gave him a most awful dressing down." It was Molly giving old Kerridge the latest Alexandra gossip. "Matron said it was perfectly scandalous to keep the bar open all night, and then expect her to nurse those who got ill from it. They were rather bad that night," she admitted, "but it was because just after you trekked out, old Cunningham's wagons came in with some beer in barrels. They're not used to that, you know; and I think matron saw the Father's excuses were right, because they parted good friends."

Allingham glanced at Hilary, hoping she had not

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heard. For the first time for years it struck him that there was something very low and sordid in these orgies. Of course it was slow work waiting for the boom; and there was no meeting place other than the Thatched House; but still, when the boom did come, would they do anything different, save, perhaps, drink more, because they had more to spend? In a flash he saw all their weak points, almost as Hilary must have seen them, and he remembered, with a hot, uncomfortable feeling, that she had met him first as one of that crowd. No wonder she had treated him coldly then, and, even now, kept up a kind of guarded aloofness. She looked on him as a bar-room loafer. Mr. Carden's voice suddenly broke in on his reflections.

"Mr. Allingham, can you tell me how one would proceed from Fort Alexandra to the Marvel mine? Hilary, dear," he turned to his daughter, "Mr. Lestrangé very kindly invites us to be his guests when my labors here are complete. As he rightly says, I could come straight from these ruins of a vanished civilization to the most modern development possible; and the contrast would make a most striking final chapter to my book. Moreover, it would give us an opportunity of seeing your brother, Philip."

"You want to get to the 'Marvel'?" the transport rider said. "Well, you can go back to Buluwayo by coach, and then another coach a hundred and twenty miles, or——"

Hilary interrupted him. "No coach, Mr. Allingham," she said decisively. "When I got to Alexandra, I made up my mind I would sooner walk than

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suffer that agony again. Ugh, the dust and the awful weariness! And now you talk of two coach journeys! What is the alternative?"

Allingham looked away. "You can go direct by wagon," he answered. "Now and then, you find a transport rider going down with grain. Of course it takes much longer, but if you don't want the coach——"

"I don't." There was no mistaking Hilary's intentions on that point. "I would sooner have a month by wagon. Father can say what he likes about it, but he knows it's no good arguing, don't you, father, dear?"

Mr. Carden signified a rather grudging assent. "Do you suppose we shall find any wagons going in about a month or six weeks' time, Mr. Allingham?" he asked.

Hilary glanced at the transport rider, but he would not meet her eyes. "I think so—very likely—I can let you know," he muttered.

When they were safely in the wagon tent, rolled up in their blankets, Molly Rainer tackled the subject bluntly. "Why don't you ask Jack Allingham to take you down to the 'Marvel'? He could get loads for there, and he would just jump at the chance."

It was dark, so she could not see the color rise to Hilary's face as the latter asked: "Why do you think he would jump at it?"

Molly laughed softly. "I don't think—I know."

CHAPTER X

THE Baas is ill," Swartboy remarked as he watched Allingham walking down from the outspan to the drift, which, if you only knew it, really formed the end of Fifth Avenue, Fort Alexandra.

It was a month since they had left the Cardens at the mission station, and during that time the wagons had made five trips to various outlying trading stations. Now they had come in fully loaded, forty bags to a wagon, and the drivers were speculating as to their next destination. Not that they troubled much where they went. It was all one long journey, with occasional breaks when they met their wives and families in Buluwayo, or managed to get gorgeously and dangerously drunk after a visit to one of the illicit liquid seller's shops in Salisbury. The Road always went on. If you came to a place where it appeared to stop, well, you yourself could make a new track into the Beyond. Only Swartboy had been to the Zambesi, where there is no drift.

"The Baas is ill." Swartboy repeated his remark.

Joseph, a lanky young Zulu, sniffed. "Bah! Does he walk like a sick man? Could a sick man have pulled that front ox of mine, Hartman, out of the mud hole in the way the Baas did yesterday?"

The old Basutu stared at him scornfully. "Zulus

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always talk foolishness, especially when they are very young and don't know how to drive. The Baas is ill, because he doesn't eat his food, and doesn't drink whisky like he used to do. Moreover, when we out-span in the morning, instead of sitting down and reading his book or going to sleep, he is restless and walks about, like those ill-trained cattle in your span, Blesbok and Jackalass, who upset all the other bullocks when they ought to be chewing their cud."

The Zulu took the insults calmly; he was more or less used to them, and, like all his race, he had an instinctive feeling that it was ill work quarreling with a Basutu. Still he would not drop the subject. "The Baas wants to marry the missus we took down to the mission. White men are always like that. I have seen them in a hotel in Durban where I worked."

Swartboy got up in great wrath. "Durban white men are not like my Baas, and I expect you only went into the hotel to steal meat. If my Baas wanted the missus, he would take her. The foolish old graybeard, her father, would be only too glad to see her marry a man with many wagons and oxen. Besides, what would the Baas do with a wife on the road?"

"Dutchmen take them." It was one of the piccanins who spoke.

Swartboy turned on him. "Dutchmen! Bah, what has my Baas to do with them?" Then his voice changed suddenly from scorn to anger. "What are you doing here? Why aren't you herding the cattle, you dirty little boy with a naked body? Hurry back to them before I hit you very hard with the sjambok,"

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and, disregarding the youngster's protest that he had returned for the porridge pot, he chased him out of the camp.

Meanwhile, Allingham had reached the Thatched House, where he found old Daddy Hurst sitting on the stoep with a bottle of Bass on the chair beside him. The transport rider opened his eyes in surprise. Bass cost six shillings a bottle, and was only indulged in on very special occasions. Daddy waved his hand in welcome. "Have one?" he said cordially.

Allingham hoisted himself on to the rail of the stoep. "What's the reason for this, daddy?" he asked.

For reply, old Hurst called the bar boy. "Sixpence, you black schelm, go and ask Baas Mac for another bottle, and be quick. If you shake it, I'll send you to the native commissioner to be sjamboked."

Sixpence gave a grin which showed the value he placed on the threat, and disappeared, then daddy turned to the transport rider.

"The boom is coming at last," he said solemnly.

Allingham tried to repress a smile. "What makes you think so, daddy?"

The old man laughed indulgently. "Father Martin got a letter by runner to-day asking what we would take for the 'White Label Reef.' Of course we won't sell outright." He shook his head knowingly. "We shall retain a controlling interest, and those people, the Matabele Development Co., can work it. Then, once they find out how rich the district is, everything will be taken up, mining claims and land and all. We went

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shares with Sandy Graham over his last two dozen of beer to celebrate it. The Father will be here soon, and Weldon the magistrate, and Martell, and all the other fellows”

“Is there any other news?” Allingham asked.

Daddy shook his head. “Nothing much. One of the police has blackwater, but matron can’t blame that on to us, as Sandy gives them no tick here. Kurlitz, the German, got his head punched by Weldon the other night for talking of what Kruger and the Kaiser were going to do. Hang the Squareheads, why can’t they go to their own colonies, or stay in the Fatherland and make sausages? I think that’s all. Oh, yes, there’s one thing more—Old Whiskers and his daughter are coming up to-day in Tom Blackwell’s wagons.”

Allingham examined the bowl of his pipe very carefully. “Which way is Tom going, then?” he asked.

“Out to Tchakata’s,” daddy answered. “He’s got to bring in three hundred bags for me.”

The transport rider looked up with an unusual light in his eyes. “Has anyone got loads to the ‘Marvel’? Halloo, Father,” as Martin came up. “I’m glad to hear about the boom. I was asking daddy if there was any grain here for the ‘Marvel.’”

Father Martin gave him a quick look. “You’re in a great hurry to get to business, Jack. I suppose you think it’s time you made money, too? Sixpence, bring me a bottle, and one for Baas Weldon, who’s just coming over. . . . Ja, Jack, I can let you have a hundred and forty bags at the old rate, if that will do you.”

Ordinarily, Allingham would have demurred at the

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light loads, twenty bags short, but this time he took the offer readily, eagerly even.

"I want to get down and see how they're getting on at the 'Marvel,'" he said, almost apologetically.

Father Martin shrugged his shoulders. "Queer taste," he answered. "You would do better to stay in this district, now things are going to buck up. Still——"

"There's a wire coming in for you, Father." It was Captain Martell who had just lounged up, clad as usual in pyjamas and an old uniform jacket. "Jordan, the postmaster, was taking it down, but there was some break, and he was calling Buluwayo up again."

Father Martin glanced across the road toward the post office. "The boy's not coming yet. Sixpence," to the bar boy, "take a whisky over to Baas Jordan, and see if he has any writing for me. Be quick. . . . No, no, a big whisky, not that little one."

A few minutes later, Jordan himself arrived with the telegram. "It's the 'Marvel' returns, Father," he remarked. "I think it's worth one of your bottles of beer."

Father Martin glanced at the slip. "Sixteen hundred ounces fourteen and a half pennyweights to the ton." His face grew jubilant. "That's good; that'll buck up the country. If they can turn out that much down there, what can we do here? . . . Mac, let's have some more beer. I say, Weldon," to the magistrate, who had come in on the heels of the postmaster, "what do you think of that? The country's going ahead now."

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Weldon, a tall, thin man with rather wild eyes, poured out his beer carefully before answering. "It's all right Father. But then we knew it would be," and he winked across to Allingham.

"Do you think it's a fake then?" the Father asked sharply.

The magistrate shrugged his shoulders. "Mr. Martin, you sometimes forget I'm an official, whose first duty is optimism, so I'll leave your rude question for Jack Allingham to answer."

The transport rider laughed. "Thanks, Weldon. I'm not a mining expert, so I can't say. Only I wouldn't trust Cuthbert Lestrangle's figures too implicitly. Let's see, what's the date? The third. They must have wired in the return yesterday to Buluwayo. Well, they started the mill about seven weeks ago, and sixteen hundred isn't much for that."

"But these are the month's figures," Father Martin protested. "You can tell that by the tonnage."

Allingham shook his head. "What's happened to the other three weeks' gold?"

"Are you going to join the croakers, Jack?" Martin's voice was almost impatient. "I tell you this means a lot to all of us. We've got this offer for the 'White Label,' and now, of course, they'll be keener than ever. This district will go ahead like wild-fire."

The magistrate grinned. "Then we shall expect you to stand us Baas every day, Father. Good luck to the boom. Even Martell here will be able to pay his debts and buy a new uniform."

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"And what will you do, Weldon?" the police officer asked.

"Oh, I shall grant myself a liquor license and start in opposition to the Thatched; then I shall get all the money the Father and Daddy Hurst make."

Allingham finished his beer and walked away to the end of the stoep. He saw clearly how the day would end. No one would do another stroke of work, and midnight would find them still there, talking fatuously. He was disgusted with the whole atmosphere of the place, sick of the eternal subject of liquor. The town was an uncleanly little collection of tin shanties, its inhabitants a gang of soakers, obsessed with the ridiculous notion that they could get rich without doing any work. Weldon was a clown, Martell would not even have got his corporal's stripes in any decent corps. He could hardly imagine now how he, John Allingham, had ever been content with their society, how they could have— A bullock driver's shout caught his ears, and he looked up quickly to see a span of oxen coming out of the drift on the Mission Station road. He recognized the cattle instantly, before the wagon itself came in sight. He knew it was the one with Miss Carden on board. For a moment he hesitated, then vaulted over the rail, and strode down the road toward the approaching team, deliberately turning his back on his old associates in the bar.

Hilary Carden welcomed him with a smile. She had passed a very long, dull month. Her father had been fully occupied with the ruins, and, beyond him, the only society consisted of old Kerridge and the two

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sour-faced Boer predikants and their heavy, uninteresting wives. She had often thought of Allingham, and wondered whether chance would bring them together again. She hoped it would, merely for his sake, as she told herself primly, because, after all, he was too good for the gang in whose company she had seen him. Moreover, Mr. Carden himself seemed interested in Allingham, especially since he had learned that the transport rider was far from being a poor man. In fact, once he had even remarked to his daughter that it was a pity that Allingham could not be induced to adopt a more civilized way of life. "I am almost inclined to speak to him on the matter," he had added pompously.

Hilary and Kerridge had grown fast friends. The old man followed her about with a doglike devotion, and obviously regarded her comfort as of infinitely more importance than her father's plans for clearing out the ruins and exposing the remains of the inner walls. Not that he neglected that part of his duties. Far from it; he was being paid comparatively well, and he made his gang of boys do a good day's work; but, as he had confided to Hilary, he himself was not interested in the task.

"What does your father expect to find, miss?" he had asked. "These ancients, whoever they were, will have watched leaving any gold behind them, and as for those bits of broken pot he sets such store in, they're nigger stuff. I've seen tons of 'em down in the Portuguese. Now, if your father would bring this gang along about ten miles, on to the gold belt, I know

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a reef there where we could do something. I'd go half shares with him. I've never been able to afford to develop it myself, but it's a two-ounce-to-the-ton proposition, sure. Would you put it on to him, miss?"

But Hilary had smiled a little sadly, for, somehow, the old man always seemed a pathetic figure. "I don't think it's any good, Mr. Kerridge. You see, father cares nothing about gold mines. He would sooner see these ruins than all the reefs in this country. Money doesn't attract him."

"Money's a mighty fine thing," the prospector had answered; then he had paused and stared toward a break in the granite kopjes through which one could catch a glimpse of the gold-formation hills. "A mighty fine thing. I thought I should have had plenty before now, when I was younger. I suppose it's better then. But still," his face had brightened again, "it'll be all right soon. Things must buck up, and I shall know better than to let Cuthbert Lestrangle and his crowd do me down another time."

"How long since you have been home, Mr. Kerridge?"

The old man had scratched his head. "Let me see—four years in Queensland, four in the Transvaal, and eight up here. That's sixteen years—a long time. Still, I expect I'll see the old place soon, when the boom comes. . . ."

Hilary gave Allingham a critical glance as he helped her down from the wagon outside the hotel. He seemed better-looking, she thought, possibly by contrast with the bearded and not too cleanly mission-

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aries; then she caught the sound of the crowd in the bar, and her face hardened suddenly.

Allingham was quick to note the change. "I myself only came in about an hour ago," he said.

The girl saw his meaning and rewarded him with a smile, which made his implied repudiation of his old friends seem an act of positive virtue. Then Sandy Graham bustled out, and she and her father followed him to their rooms.

This time Allingham did not hesitate. He vaulted the rail, so as not to pass the bar-room door, and strode back to the outspan, where he wrote a note to Mr. Carden, offering to take his daughter and himself down to the Marvel on his wagons. The same piccannin who carried the letter brought back Mr. Carden's acceptance.

CHAPTER XI

MR. CARDEN accepted the prospect of the long trip down to the 'Marvel' very philosophically. He had an enormous mass of notes on the ruins which he wished to put into shape while his impressions were still fresh; consequently, his time during the midday outspans would be fully occupied. Moreover, in matters such as these he generally let his daughter have her own way; once she had declared her determination not to travel by coach again, he knew that any arguments of his would be powerless to move her.

Hilary, on her part, was quite content with the arrangement, partly because it was of her own making, more because it included Allingham. She was still satisfied in her own mind that her interest in the transport rider arose merely from a desire to save him from wasting his life in bars or amidst the solitude of the road—to bring him back into line with the ideals and practices of her own class, to which he, too, belonged by birth and education. Already, she had done much—that had been obvious during the two days they had spent in Alexandra before starting on the southward trip—and her success had fired her to further efforts.

"So long, Jack. We shall see you back soon," Father Martin said as he shook hands. "Won't you

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have just one more drink? You can catch up the wagons before they've gone a mile. Remember, you've got at least eighteen days, with only two bars the whole way; and I'll guarantee old Whiskers's conversation will make you wish there was one every trek. It's dry enough. Don't forget to tell the fellows how things are looking up here."

Allingham excused himself from the whisky. "No thanks, Father, really not, if you don't mind. Good-by. Good-by, Kerridge," and he started down the road after his teams; but before he had gone many yards, Captain Martell hailed him from the gate of the fort.

"I say, Jack, look out for those rats on your wagon. The lady wouldn't thank you if they gnawed her hair off, you know."

The transport rider flushed angrily and went on without answering. Down at the Drift he met Daddy Hurst, who held him up a moment.

"You're coming back, aren't you, Jack?" the old man asked earnestly. "We want your sort here now. . . . No, we haven't heard any more about the 'White Label,' but it'll be all right, it'll be all right. And if you meet Sutherland, or Barry, or any of the real old hands, advise them to come up. We want the men who did the hard work to get the profits, not the darned newcomers."

Meanwhile, Captain Martell had joined Father Martin on the stoep of the Thatched House. "Jack's in love," he remarked.

Father Martin nodded half unconsciously, and

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sighed heavily, as if at some recollection, then followed the police officer into the bar.

Allingham had almost caught up the wagons when he heard a shout behind him. Looking round, he saw Molly Rainer coming up on her pony.

"I'm just going to say good-by to her," she said as she passed him.

For some reason, he slackened his pace and kept well behind while Molly was riding alongside the tent wagon, evidently talking eagerly to the other girl; then she waved her hand in farewell to Hilary, and came back to him.

"Good-by, Jack," she said. "Good-by and good luck. Think of us sometimes. We shan't see you up here again."

Allingham flushed suddenly. "What do you mean, Molly?"

The girl gave a laugh which had very little of mirth in it. She'll take you away from the road, and I—I'm sorry for that part," and, without another word, she cantered off toward the township. . . .

The days passed pleasantly enough. Both Hilary and her father had got over the initial strangeness of the wagon life, while Allingham admitted to himself that the trip was the best he had ever made. Already the thought of having to travel alone again seemed horribly distasteful. Yet Hilary still understood nothing of the road, as was evident when she asked him, "Where are your headquarters, Mr. Allingham?"

"My headquarters?" He echoed the question in surprise. "I don't think I have any."

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"Have you no home of any sort, no place where you keep your things and so on?"

He laughed and pointed to the tent wagon. "That has been my home for the last eight years. Half the charm of the life is that you are free to go where you will—that you take your home with you."

They were outspanned under some big mimosa trees on the bank of a sand river, seven days' trek from Alexandra. Breakfast was over, and Mr. Carden had already retired with his bundles of papers, leaving the others alone, as usual. Hilary lay back in her steamer chair—one of the many additions which had aroused Swartboy's scorn—and tried to realize the idea of the journey—which-always-went-on. All her own travels so far had had a fixed end; there had been a going and a returning; but this nomadic existence, with its seeming lack of purpose, its virtual renunciation of anything in the nature of friendship, or even companionship, appeared almost incomprehensible. One of the articles of her creed was that everyone, at least everyone of her own class, must have something in the nature of a home.

"What happens if you get ill?" she asked after a long pause.

"I get well again as best I can," he answered with a smile. "One has fever, of course, lots of it in the wet season, but it's really nothing, provided you don't get scared. Five men die of fright for every one who dies of malaria."

She rested her chin on her hand and stared up the river to where a wild goose was perched on a big rock,

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calling anxiously to an absent mate. "It seems an awful idea," she said at last, "being ill perhaps a fortnight's journey from a doctor, with only black men round you. I remember you said in the hotel, the first day I met you, that you had seen so many men die that you had ceased to trouble about it."

His face grew grave suddenly. "No, no. Not ceased to trouble about it; far from that. Only, while death seems a remote contingency at home, here it is an ever-present possibility. The risk is the price you pay for being a free man."

She shook her head. "Too high a price. And is the freedom worth so much, after all?"

A few weeks before, he would have argued strongly that it was worth it, more than worth it; now, however, he had no answer, because in his own heart he was asking himself that very question.

Allingham inspanned earlier than usual that afternoon on account of an ugly piece of road ahead which he wished to get over while the daylight lasted. Hitherto, the country had been mainly open bush, comparatively level, with nothing more serious to negotiate than some heavy drifts. Moreover, the road had been dry throughout; consequently, Hilary had still seen only the soft side of life on the road. She knew nothing of those heartbreaking days in the mud, when, with three spans on each wagon, forty-four cattle, you plow along a few yards at a time, your front wheels out of sight in the clinging mire; she had never seen a wagon turn over bodily in a big washout, stood never on the side of a drift and held her breath as the cattle

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fought their way across through a rising flood, which threatened every moment to sweep them off their feet. There had always been firewood, always plenty of food; the acrid smoke of the cow-dung fire had never got into her nostrils, and Allingham had not told her how, on the high veld in summer, when everything is saturated by the rains, you may go for days without being able even to make tea. She was just a passenger, and, somehow, no passenger has ever learned anything of the road.

The afternoon trek led through a small range of slate-formation hills, rough under foot for the oxen, with a number of awkward turns and short, steep drifts. Allingham had insensibly got into the habit of traveling with the Cardens on the tent wagon, which usually brought up the rear; but this time he altered the order of going, and the tent wagon went first.

"Swartboy is much the best driver," he explained to Hilary, "and in a bit of country like this it's best for him to go first."

The passage through the hills proved less awkward than Allingham had anticipated. Once Joseph's wagon stuck in a sluit, and Swartboy had to take his span back and hook the other out; but, except for this, the oxen plodded along steadily, till they reached the top of the pass where the road descended sharply down to the level veld again.

Swartboy stopped his span on the crest, screwed on his brake, and looked toward Allingham, who read his meaning, and turned at once to Hilary. "Miss Carden, I think you and your father had better get

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down and walk. It's a very stony piece of road, and it'll jolt you horribly."

Hilary obeyed at once, and, with her father, stood to one side of the track; while the transport rider himself walked on to examine the road. As he passed the front oxen, he turned his head and called to the driver, "It's all right, Swartboy. Come on."

"Ach, Jonkman, ach, Hartman," Swartboy called to his front bullocks. The span started down the hill slowly, cautiously, as well-trained oxen do, then, just as the wagon itself topped the rise, the driver himself hurried back to screw the brake on yet harder. He had done the same thing thousands of times, and he trusted that brake absolutely, yet now, at the second turn of the handle, the thread of the screw stripped, and the brake flew off. With a cry of dismay he sprang forward; but it was too late to stop the span; the wagon had started down the slope, very slowly, to be sure, but it was gathering speed with every foot it went.

Biffel and Fransman, the great wheelers, already knew something was wrong, for they were hanging back with all their might in a vain attempt to stop the vehicle. A few seconds more and the wagon would have been over them, then have dashed on, into the body of the span. But, almost as soon as it happened, Allingham had seen the danger. With a hoarse shout, he thrust the voerlouper to one side, seized the leading reim, and by main force dragged the front oxen into a run. The rest of the span perforce followed suit, and galloped down the hillside, with the great eighteen-foot

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wagon and its three-and-a-half-ton load thundering over the stones behind them.

On the crest, Hilary stood very still, her face deadly white, her hands clinched. It was the first time she had really seen man's work. If Allingham should stumble, if he should slacken his pace in the least, those great beasts would be on top of him, and the wagon in turn would crash into them. A huge cloud of red dust rose from the road, obscuring everything for several seconds. Hilary cried out in the pain of her uncertainty. If she could only see, if— The noise suddenly grew less, a gust of wind swirled the dust to one side, and from the bottom of the hill came Allingham's voice, faint yet distinct, stopping the oxen.

"Wu-u-uk, ahnow, ahnow!"

The wagon had reached an almost level stretch of soft ground and slowed down. The incident was over.

"Very bravely done. I thought those oxen were going to be crushed under the wheels." Mr. Carden's voice came from behind her.

Hilary nodded mechanically, but did not turn round. She was anxious he should not read her secret in her face. She, herself, had never thought of the oxen at all. . . .

Hilary said little during the remainder of the trek, and she was greatly relieved when, about half an hour later, Swartboy pointed to a line of bright-green thorn scrub as being the outspan. She wanted to sit down quietly and think. She had not had any chance of speaking to Allingham again, on account of his having

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stayed behind to see all his spans down the dangerous hill, and then having followed along on the last wagon. She was not sorry he had done so, as she divined instinctively he would rather she did not mention his exploit.

As they reached the last bend before the outspan, eight mules followed by a piccannin suddenly emerged from the bush; and a couple of minutes later they came in sight of a mule cart which was standing under a big thorn tree. A smart-looking cook boy was busy at a fire, while a tall, thin white man was walking up and down with his hands behind his back, evidently deep in thought. Swartboy recognized him at once, and turned to Mr. Carden. "Baas Lestrangle," he said.

Cuthbert Lestrangle did not look up when he heard the oxen coming; in fact, he did not even seem to be aware of their presence till Swartboy turned his span off the road and brought the wagon to a standstill just opposite the mule cart. Then the boss glanced round and caught sight of Hilary and her father. His face lighted up instantly and he came forward to help them alight, just as Allingham hurried up with the same intention. The transport rider's face flushed quickly—he had not forgotten their last meeting—but Lestrangle was evidently in one of his pleasant moods, for he held out his hand as though the quarrel in Malongesa's kraal had never been.

"How do you do, Allingham? Bound for the 'Marvel' again? How do you do, Miss Carden? This is an unexpected pleasure. I came up here to have a

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look at some mining claims; but I never thought I should see you on this road."

"We were on our way to meet you at the Marvel mine," Mr. Carden said, rather stiffly. "If you remember, you asked us to meet you there in about ten days' time?"

The boss nodded. "I shall be there by then. I have to take a cross-country track from here to another district, but then I travel very much quicker than you do. You must come over and have dinner with me. My boy shot a reed buck yesterday, so there's ample fresh meat, which is not always the case, eh, Allingham?"

The transport rider, not having been explicitly included in the invitation, turned away to examine the disabled brake, while his passengers crossed the road to Lestrangle's camp. He was angry that this man should have been there at all, furiously jealous at the calm way in which he had carried off Hilary; but when the smart cook boy came to him a quarter of an hour later to say that dinner was ready, he could not refuse the hospitality.

At first, Mr. Carden, convinced that he had a sympathetic listener, was so eloquent on his discoveries at the ruins that none of the others felt called upon to speak; but at length Lestrangle turned to Hilary and asked her how she liked the country.

"Not at all," she answered promptly. "I'm afraid I am not of the stuff of which pioneers are made. I am too fond of the conveniences of civilization."

"If you come up in ten years' time, you won't know

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it," the boss replied. "You see, we haven't had so very long yet. The railways will make all the difference."

Hilary darted a glance at Allingham. There was something rather piquant in the meeting of these two men, each so typical of his own kind. There were power and determination in Lestrangle, who, moreover, seemed to carry the drawing-room into the veld. He was far the stronger man, just as he stood for the stronger side. She could admire him unreservedly, or she would have done so a little time before; and yet, now she found herself wondering whether he would be ready to risk his life for his bullocks, whether, in an emergency, he would know exactly what to do.

Lestrangle talked on, fluently, easily, about what the future would see, the plans for the development of the country, while Allingham listened in grim silence. Once or twice the girl looked at him almost impatiently. She did not sympathize with his point of view. Yet she hated to see him tamely leaving the victory to his adversary; but still he said nothing until, after a while, he got up, and with a muttered excuse about seeing to the tent wagon brake, left them. Then Mr. Carden harked back to the subject of the ruins, and for a couple of hours Hilary was vaguely conscious that her father and their host were discussing the question of the Ancient from every point of view; but her own thoughts were all of the future.

CHAPTER XII

BAAS, shall we go and look for another of those klipspringers? You remember we shot one in those kopjes last time we came along." Despite his veneer of civilization, Swartboy was as eager as a raw Mashona when there was a question of game.

Allingham glanced round. They were outspanned once more at the Five Mile Water, one trek from the Marvel mine. Hilary and her father were both busy writing letters for the mail, which would, with luck, leave on the morrow; but the transport rider himself had no correspondence; and, in any case, the idea that, in a few hours, Hilary Carden would cease to be his guest would have been enough to prevent him from settling down. For the first time since he had joined the brotherhood of the Road he was thoroughly miserable. Everything else was forgotten save the fact that he was going to be alone again—that, day after day, he would have to trek on without a soul to speak to, that Hilary would go clean out of his life, back to her old friends, and probably never think of him again. Last time he outspanned at that water the place had seemed almost sacred by reason of his memories of Mrs. Ingram; but now he thought of the mine manager's wife with something approaching im-

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patience. She had merely touched his life, never come into it, as had this tall, serious girl.

Swartboy fetched his Baas's gun, and in silence they tramped across to the kopjes; but even the Basutu's sharp eyes failed to detect a sign of klipspringer, and they finally reached Malongesa's squalid little kraal without having fired a shot.

The village was the same as ever. There was the same litter on the ground, the same dogs dashed out to yelp at them; but at first glance the place seemed deserted by its human inhabitants.

Swartboy nodded wisely. "All the baboons are down in the fields making beer. I thought I heard them singing their foolish songs. Bah, what a people! One might come and steal all their goods, if there were anything worth taking. Now, in Basutoland—" He paused abruptly, then saluted. "'Morning, Baas, 'morning, Baas."

Allingham, who had fallen behind a little, came forward just as two white men scrambled to their feet. They had been sitting on the ground between a couple of the huts, talking to some young native girls. Allingham recognized the latter instantly as Malongesa's daughters, whom he had seen on his last visit; then he turned to the men, and saw that one was Phil Carden and the other a youngster he had met in the Marvel office. Malongesa's words about the girls going to the mine came back to him, and he went white with anger. The girls, quicker to read the signs than their companions, turned and fled, without a word; but young Carden came forward jauntily.

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"Halloo, Jack," he said. "Back again? I heard from Hilary that you had been trotting them round the Alexandra district."

The transport rider ignored the proffered hand. "You dirty young hound," he growled. "You bring up her name—here! Have you turned white Kaffir altogether? You had better get out of this, quick. Your sister and Mr. Carden are down at my wagons now, a mile away, and it's just a chance they didn't walk across with me and catch you young blackguards."

Phil Carden's jaw dropped; but his companion stepped forward with clinched fists. "Who are you calling a blackguard?" he demanded truculently.

Allingham eyed him calmly. "You, for one," he answered, "and Carden for another."

The youngster muttered an oath, then turned away. He recognized the futility of hitting a man twice his own size, and he remembered vividly having seen Allingham inspanning a fractious young bull. Phil Carden walked after him a few yards, then came back to where the transport rider was standing.

"Jack," he said hurriedly, "Jack, don't tell them. And, really, I haven't done anything wrong."

"I'm glad to hear it—if it's true," Allingham answered grimly. "No, I won't tell your father." Instinctively he left Hilary out of the discussion. "I won't tell him, if you give me your word to leave these girls alone. Hang it all, boy," his voice shook with sudden passion, "can't you see how you're disgracing every white man, aye, and every white woman,

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in the country? You bring yourself down to the level of the niggers; and then, what about those girls afterwards? Bah, it makes me sick. And you're an Englishman born. Do you give me your word?"

Phil Carden nodded. "You've got me tied up," he said sulkily. "All right, I'll give my word, although I don't see why you should be so pious all of a sudden. I've heard yarns about you in Buluwayo."

Allingham laughed scornfully. "You never heard a yarn about me and a Kaffir woman. Oh, get off, Phil, and for God's sake try and get clean before you meet your father this evening."

The youngster shrugged his shoulders with a pitiful affectation of defiance, and slunk off after his companion.

"What is the chief saying?"

Allingham turned round quickly to see Malongesa speaking to Swartboy, who had been watching the scene with obvious approval.

The headman had only just come up, but the anxious look in his eyes showed that he was aware something was wrong. The transport rider answered him gently, more gently than Swartboy had ever heard him speak to a raw native before. "It's the matter we spoke of before, Malongesa, the matter of your daughters. I have sent these two white men off now; but there will be others. Take your daughters away, marry them off if you can; anything, so long as you don't leave them near the mine."

Malongesa made a hopeless gesture, and suddenly it struck Allingham that he was an older man than he

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had seemed before. "The mine, chief, the mine kills everything. The klipsspringer have gone because of the great machine; the white men come down on Sundays and destroy all the guinea fowl in my fields. Soon nothing will be left. And now they say my village is on their land, and we must pay them a pound a hut every year."

Allingham's face grew dark. "It's a cursed shame," he muttered; then, "Why don't you shift, Malongesa?"

Again the headman thrust out his hands hopelessly. "Where should I go to, chief? I only know this place. I was born here, and my father before me. We are all of one family here. Seven huts—two are mine, the others belong to my brothers, and my father's brother's sons. Already we pay ten shillings each hut as tax. Where can we find another pound each to give to the mine which ruins us all? They say we must work on the mine for it. Yet when we go there, they refuse us. 'You are too old,' they say; 'we want mine boys, not kraal Kaffirs.' What do they want, chief? You are one of them, although you are kind and speak the language of the black people. Tell me what they want."

Allingham walked to and fro for several minutes. His face was hard and set, and Swartboy, who knew him well, saw that he was wrought up into one of his rare fits of passion. Only once before had the Basutu seen him so moved, and that had been when he had caught a Free Stater, on whom an English public-school education had been wasted, flogging a native to

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death. Ten minutes later, it had been a question who was nearer death, the Africander or his victim.

"I will pay this tax for you, Malongesa." Allingham broke the silence suddenly, then he muttered to himself in English: "By George, Cuthbert Lestrangle shan't force the poor devils out this year! So this is the mining crowd's plan for getting cheap labor! Come back to the wagons, Malongesa."

The headman followed without a word. He belonged to a race which never voices its gratitude, possibly because it so seldom feels any. Swartboy shook his head as he fell in behind the other. "The Baas is too good to you hill people," he remarked. "Really, you should be beaten for keeping your kraals so dirty, instead of being given money, which would be much better spent on new gear for my wagon."

Allingham led the way straight through the bush, not, as before, round the foot of the kopjes; he had lost all desire to shoot. They had gone, perhaps, half a mile when the sound of some one chopping made him turn a little to one side. A minute later, they came into a perfectly straight clearing about fifty feet wide, leading from the direction of Buluwayo, and apparently being carried on to the Marvel mine. At the end of it, a dozen natives were cutting away the bush and trees, while an apathetic-looking white man was dozing a few yards away, though he sat up quickly when he heard Allingham's boots on some loose stones.

"Halloo," he said, "I'm glad it's only you, whoever you are. I was afraid it was the boss. Whew! I've got a thirst, a touch of fever, I suppose," and he helped

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himself to a drink of lukewarm water from the dusty canvas sack by his side.

When he had finished, Allingham glanced up the clearing. "What's all this for?"

The stranger shrugged his shoulders. "Something to do with a preliminary survey for the railway. It runs right to those hills, but then it stops dead. They haven't found a way up yet, though they say a fellow came down there with wagons once. I don't believe it myself."

"I do," Allingham answered grimly. "I do, because I am the fellow."

The other pushed his hat back, and regarded him solemnly. "I say, the boss would like to know that. We've looked for the old spoor and bullied all the niggers to tell us, yet we can't light on the pass."

Allingham laughed. "The boss does know I'm the man, and he knows, too, I won't tell him."

"Because he's such a swine, I suppose," the ganger said, almost heartily. "I'm with you there. By Jove, he's the limit! Still, if he were willing to pay—oh, well, so long. . . . Hi, you," to Malongesa, whom he evidently recognized, "got any Kaffir beer in your kraal? Ah, you always say the same, that you haven't any. You want plenty sjambok, you niggers. Hi, you schelms," to his own boys, "what are you loafing for?" And growling and cursing, he settled down again to his interrupted nap.

Hilary gave Allingham a friendly little nod as he came up, then went on with her writing, or, rather, pretended to go on with it, for she had seen from the

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expression of his face that he was angry and worried about something, and had instantly begun to speculate as to the cause.

The transport rider went straight to his box and took out a money bag; then he beckoned Malongesa to one side, and counted out seven pounds into the brown hand. He knew the native character too well to waste any words in telling the headman to reserve the money for the mining company's tax; the gold would be used for nothing else. Malongesa's eyes glistened as his hands closed over the coins, but he said nothing except "Chief, great chief, father of the people," and raised his hand in the chief's salute.

Allingham nodded and strolled back to the wagon. He felt more satisfied now, as he knew perfectly well that the Marvel Company wanted the natives' labor much more than their money.

Hilary closed her writing pad as he came up the second time. "Did you have any luck, Mr. Allingham? I heard no shots."

"I'm afraid there's not much left to shoot," he answered. "That wretched machine," jerking his head in the direction of the Marvel mill, "is bound to scare away most of the buck, and the fellows from the mine soon clear off the rest. It's not what they kill, but what they wound and leave to die."

The girl gave a little shiver. "What a horrible idea. . . . Who was that strange-looking old native you brought back with you?"

Allingham explained, and then, all his jealousy of Cuthbert Lestrangle welling up again, he went on to

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tell of the company's extra tax, and all the misery it would entail on the natives. As he spoke, his voice grew very bitter. "Why should they be made to pay? The land was theirs before we came up here, and though, like every decent white man, I believe we were perfectly right in collaring the country, I reckon it's sheer robbery for these companies to dispossess individual natives, who are tilling ground which nobody else would use."

Mr. Carden, who was listening attentively, shook his head. "I think you take the wrong view, quite the wrong view, Mr. Allingham. Our friend, Mr. Lestrangle, explained this very matter to me, most carefully. These natives, it appears, never have worked and never will work, unless under some such mild form of compulsion. And until they are taught the nobility of labor they can never be raised in the social scale."

Allingham made an impatient little gesture. "The old excuse. I've heard that so often. The nigger has his own work to do in his fields and so on, and, anyway, I don't see how mixing with a lot of strange Kaffirs in the compound and being bossed up by a rough class of white man is likely to improve him morally. Why, the sight of a mine canteen on a Saturday night is quite enough to destroy any respect he may have had for us. No, it's cheap labor, not philanthropy, these mining people worry about."

"I'm afraid you're a very bitter partisan," Mr. Carden said with a shake of his head. "Still, one always likes to hear both sides of a question."

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Allingham did not reply; he had no love for argument, and he did not wish to offend his passenger.

It was Hilary who spoke next. "Mr. Allingham, does that mill always make that dreadful noise, night and day?"

"Night and day, Sundays as well," he answered. "It only stops once a month, unless they have a breakdown. Can you make out any special rhythm in it?" and he told her of the mill men's superstition.

Hilary listened attentively for a minute. "No. It's simply a distant roar to me. What can you hear?"

"It was Mrs. Ingram, the wife of the manager, who pointed it out to me, the day the mill started. It says 'eight-pennyweights-to-the-ton and not-a-penny-weight-more.'"

The girl laughed. "Yes, I can hear that now. How strange!"

But her father shifted uneasily in his seat, and shut his glasses impatiently. "What rubbish! Excuse me, Mr. Allingham, but as Hilary knows, I have little patience with any of these superstitions. Moreover, we know the mine has yielded sixteen pennyweights." He got up rather abruptly and walked away.

Once, only a few weeks before, Hilary would have followed him; now she stayed with Allingham. "Father is silly," she said, a little impatiently. "He takes everything so seriously, even matters like this mine, which don't concern him in the least, and about which he knows nothing."

"Does he ever speculate?" the transport rider asked.

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Hilary shook her head. "I don't think he could afford it, and he cares so little about making money. I have sometimes wished he were more practical," she added with a sigh.

Allingham, who was leaning against the buck rail, glanced down at her quickly; but she was looking away, apparently at the oxen which were just being driven up, preparatory to inspanning. At last, "This is our final trek," he said hurriedly. "I suppose I shall see no more of you after to-night, Miss Carden?"

Hilary laughed rather nervously, but she did not look round as she answered: "I think that depends on yourself, Mr. Allingham. You know where we shall be."

CHAPTER XIII

THE Marvel mine seemed, if possible, more miserable than ever. Not that there had been much change. There was a little more timber lying about the kopje, a little more waste rock on the dumps, while the dam below the mill was already a foot or two deep with the milky-looking tailings' water. It was the small things which made the difference. The freshness was off the galvanized iron, the paint blistered from the smokestacks; all the trees which were fit to burn had been cut down, leaving the bush thin and ragged, while the little grass which had remained on the hillside had been trampled down and smothered by the dust from the trucks of ore.

Hilary looked at the scene with something akin to dismay; but her father surveyed it with distinct approval. "Wonderful," he said, "wonderful. To think all this has been done in the midst of a savage country, hundreds of miles from a railway. I am delighted we have taken the opportunity of seeing it. What do you say, Hilary, dear?"

But the girl did not answer his question; she was wondering why Allingham had made the trek on the front wagon, and whether he would speak to her again before they left him to go to whatever quarters Cuthbert Lestrangle had provided for them.

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A few minutes later, the wagons turned off at the outspan, where, to Hilary's surprise, the boss was already waiting for them, accompanied by a strange lady, whom he introduced as Mrs. Ingram. "I heard from a native that you were outspanned this morning at the Five Mile Water, and I expected you in about this time. Mrs. Ingram has very kindly offered to put you up, Miss Carden; while Mr. Carden will come to my own quarters," he said.

Hilary murmured her thanks, then answered more or less mechanically his questions about her experiences since they had parted, ten days before. She was watching Mrs. Ingram talking to Allingham, and wondering why the latter had never mentioned this gray-eyed little woman who appeared to be an old friend of his.

Mrs. Ingram, on her part, was uneasy. Allingham could see that at a glance, though she was trying to appear gay and unconcerned.

"So you've come south after all, Mr. Allingham," she said. "I thought you meant never to come in sound of the mill again. You will find us all much the same as when you went away. Still, if you will come up to dinner to-night, you shall hear what little gossip is going. My husband is away, but Miss Carden is going to stay with me, so it won't matter. I've asked her brother, too."

Allingham hesitated a moment, then "Thanks," he said; "I should like to come, very much."

Mrs. Ingram nodded, and turned to Hilary again, and the two women walked up the kopje together, fol-

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lowed by Mr. Carden and the boss. Allingham watched them till they disappeared behind the machine shop, then made his way over to the store.

The moment the transport rider set his foot on the stoep he saw that something unusual was astir. It was an ordinary working day, yet the bar was full of the rougher class of the mine employees, most of whom should have been at work at the time. Moreover, there were all the signs of a long-continued orgy; it had not begun that day, possibly not even the day before. Tom Earle, heavy-eyed and anxious-looking, was behind the bar, arguing with an engine driver, who had obviously had more than enough whisky; but when the storekeeper caught sight of Allingham, he cleared the bottles off hurriedly and came round to the front.

"I never expected you, Jack," he said, leading the other out on to the stoop again. "This is a deuce of a mess, isn't it? There are nearly half the underground men on the spree; some are sleeping it off in the rooms and the rest are the devil knows where. They're not at work."

"But what's the reason?" Allingham asked. "What sent them off?"

The storekeeper shrugged his shoulders. "It was coming, anyway. They're sick of the monotony. But the actual cause is that." He pointed to a traveling wagon outspanned a couple of hundred yards away, well off the road. "You remember I was wondering where I had seen Ingram before. It struck me afterwards—that Bertha Ludwig affair. Well, Madam Bertha has come down here. That's her wagon."

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Allingham started, and the thought of Mrs. Ingram's worried looks came back to him. "Do you think Ingram's wife knows anything about it?" he asked in a troubled voice.

"I couldn't say," Earle answered; "Ingram himself had convenient business on the 'Last Chance,' ten miles away, and is staying there. As for this woman, some of the fellows had known her when she was behind the bar in Johannesburg, others knew her at the hotel in Buluwayo. Anyway, her coming started them off."

Allingham scowled. "Why doesn't the boss shift her?"

"He can't," Earle answered. "For one thing, she has outspanned on another man's mining claims; and besides that, there's been nothing against her here. She's just a traveler, she says. If she came to my place, I couldn't refuse her. She'll stay as long as she likes."

"Will she?" answered Allingham grimly; "we'll see. Clear those fellows out of your bar, Tom, and come across with me."

Ten minutes later, the transport rider was face to face with the German woman, who was sitting in the back of her wagon, puffing at a cigarette.

"Well, Jack," she said, "I thought I recognized your walk."

John Allingham looked her square in the eyes. "You've got to get out of this, Bertha," he said. "I've told your driver to send for the oxen."

She blew a cloud of tobacco in his face. "How

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kind you are, Mr. Allingham! But I'm not going, you see," and she shrieked out to the driver, who had already started in search of the cattle, knowing John Allingham of old.

"You will go within an hour." The transport rider's face was white, but his voice was perfectly steady. "If you are not away within an hour, I shall wire to the police and tell them what you are after here."

The woman flung at him a term of abuse peculiar to the Fatherland. "You were always a fool, Jack, and you've not got wiser since I saw your ugly face last." Allingham came a little closer to her. "I saw Carl Tielnitz at the Poort store three days ago, I saw your brother Johann on the road yesterday. Do you want me to tell the police who tried to steal the gold at the 'Red Jacket' six years ago?"

Again she snarled at him, but Earle, who was watching closely, saw she was beaten. "If you do that, you give Ingram, your friend, away, too."

Allingham shrugged his shoulders scornfully, and the woman realized that the argument had failed, for his only answer was to call to the driver: "Klaas, trek right through to the Nine Mile Water to-night. If you outspan this side, the police shall take you." Then he swung abruptly on his heel, and left the woman cursing impotently. A quarter of an hour later, he saw Klaas and the voerloupper driving up the oxen, and, soon after, the traveling wagon itself jolted past the store.

The German woman gave him a venomous look.

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"Very well, Mr. Jack Allingham," she called out, "I'll be even with you."

The transport rider ignored her utterly, though he beckoned to her driver. "The Nine Mile Water to-night, Klaas, remember that. No nearer here."

The driver saluted with his whip, and hurried on after his oxen.

It was quite dark when Allingham started across the kopje to keep his appointment at Mrs. Ingram's. It was the first time for eight years he had dined out, save in an hotel, or in bachelor's quarters, and it had taken him some time to sort out the dark suit he was wearing. The stiff collar seemed to chafe his neck, the waistcoat was a veritable abomination to him, and yet he felt a sense of satisfaction, almost of elation, as though he had been away a long time, and was just coming back to his own people.

As he was passing the hauling engine house, in the black shadow thrown by the arc lamp on the headgear Cuthbert Lestrangle suddenly came round the corner and accosted him, evidently mistaking him for the mill manager, for he began furiously:

"Jackson, what the dickens do you mean by throwing away those shoes and dies I saw outside the mill to-day? There's another week's work in them yet. Hasn't it yet penetrated into your idiotic brain that they cost us fivepence a pound for carriage alone? If not, you'd better get out, and I'll find a man who can understand it."

Allingham stepped out of the shadow. "I think you've made a mistake," he said coldly.

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The boss was in no way perturbed, nor did he apologize. "I thought it was that fool of a mill manager," he remarked calmly, then his voice changed: "I must thank you for shifting that woman off. Earle sent me word that you had done so."

The transport rider shrugged his shoulders. "I didn't do it out of affection for your mine."

The boss laughed with perfect good humor. "You are an ungracious brute, Allingham. Well, good night," and he passed on.

Hilary Carden was alone in the little drawing-room hut when Allingham came up. She recognized his voice as he spoke to a dog which had dashed out of the kitchen to investigate him; but, none the less, she gave an involuntary start as he came in, stooping to avoid the low eaves. It was the first time she had seen him in what she called civilized clothes, and she felt a queer little thrill of satisfaction as she realized how well they suited him. She had feared that he would look awkward in conventional attire.

For a few minutes they talked on indifferent subjects, then Mrs. Ingram came in accompanied by Phil Carden. The latter greeted Allingham as though he had not met him earlier in the day, and joined in the conversation. Mrs. Ingram, standing a little apart, watched the transport rider keenly for a moment, then with a half-impatient little sigh turned toward the door where the house boy was waiting and ordered him to bring in dinner.

"We are to stay here four or five days, then Mr. Lestrangle is going to take us in himself. He says his

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mule cart is very comfortable, so I suppose we must go. After all, it's the last stage, as the railway is now up to Buluwayo." Hilary spoke apparently to the company in general.

Dinner was over, and they were sitting outside the huts, watching the moon climb into an absolutely cloudless sky.

At the girl's words, Allingham, who was sitting next to Mrs. Ingram, let his cigarette fall, though only the hostess noticed the fact. Hilary was looking away, while Phil Carden was engaged in filling a large Boer pipe which had already aroused his sister's scorn.

Mrs. Ingram broke the silence. "Where are you off to next, Mr. Allingham? Fort Alexandra again?"

The transport rider started. "No, I—I hadn't really thought of it. I think I shall go to Buluwayo and load there, perhaps for Salisbury."

"How long will it take you to Buluwayo?" Mrs. Ingram asked. Hilary was still looking away, but, somehow, the other woman knew she was anxiously waiting for the answer.

"Six days with empty wagons," Allingham replied. Then Hilary turned round and began to talk to her brother with unusual animation.

At last the transport rider got up reluctantly. He had said very little the whole evening, as little as when he had come down to the huts on the first occasion, and yet there was an unmistakable change in him; he was shy still, but no longer awkward.

Mrs. Ingram walked with him as far as the gate of her own little inclosure, where she stopped and held

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up her hand. "Listen," she said smilingly, "there are ten more stamps running in the mill than when you were here last. What does it say now?"

"'Eight pennyweights,' " he answered promptly.

She laughed and turned to go back. "It's treason to suggest such a thing now. I suppose you heard the first month's output? . . . Well, come and see us before you trek out to-morrow afternoon."

Allingham walked across the kopje toward the outspan with a light step. He had been so afraid of having to part generally from Hilary at the Marvel, that the idea of meeting her again in Buluwayo had sent his spirits up with a bound. Given decent luck, he would be into the town at least half a day ahead of Lestrangle's mule cart. True, then it would merely be a question of "good-by," after all. She belonged to the great city, he to the Road; but at least the evil day had been put off and he derived an unreasoning amount of satisfaction from that reflection.

The bar was apparently empty as he passed and Tom Earle hailed him from the stoep.

"Halloo, Jack. That you? Come and have a nightcap."

When they got into the light, the storekeeper surveyed him critically. "Humph! You look more like a mining expert or a government clerk than a transport rider; only anyone can see you are hard, while they are not. You've fallen into the fashion pretty quickly," he added with a laugh.

Allingham frowned. "What do you mean?"

"Everyone puts on their best clothes and goes up

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to Mrs. Ingram's," the storekeeper answered. "I do myself. Apart from this one outbreak she has reformed this camp, and yet I'll guarantee she's never mentioned the word whisky to anyone, except to offer it to them. A teetotal woman who preached would have made them worse than before, but this one is so decent they all want to keep in her good books."

"It's a bit rough on your trade," Allingham remarked.

Tom Earle shrugged his shoulders. "I'm not so sure. It's the store I depend on. I'd sooner they spent their money there than in the bar, where I get sixty per cent of bad debts. Besides, I'm old enough to hate the sight of a drunken man, especially a young one. . . . What did you think of our first output?"

Allingham hoisted himself into his favorite position in the bar and filled his pipe carefully. "What do you think?" he asked at last.

There was no one near, yet, instinctively, the storekeeper dropped his voice before answering. "They say—the coach driver brought the rumor down from Buluwayo—that Lestrangle took the six weeks' gold and the month's tonnage, and worked out his sixteen pennyweights to the ton in that way. At any rate, they are waiting pretty anxiously for the next returns. Meanwhile, the shares are booming in London."

"Where did Buluwayo get the idea from?"

Tom Earle shook his head. "That I don't know. Not from here, I fancy. Most of the men don't seem to care, one way or the other, and the rest dare not talk, even if they know."

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Allingham finished his drink, bade the storekeeper good night, and strolled back to his wagons. By the time he reached the outspan he had made up his mind to plunge, and before he turned in a letter was ready for the morning's coach, instructing a broker in Buluwayo to cable to London to sell five thousand "Marvel" shares. The same mail also brought the broker a letter from Mr. Carden, whom he had met at the deputy administrator's house. Contrasting the two notes, the broker laughed grimly. "One of them is obviously an ass." Then he went down to the post office and dispatched his cable.

CHAPTER XIV

THE morning whistle had hardly gone when Allingham's wagons drew up outside the mine store shed.

"You're in a hurry, John," the store clerk growled, after he had yelled to his boys to come and offload the bags of grain.

"I am," the transport rider answered. "You see, I'm not like you fellows, who just have to loaf through a month in order to get a fat check at the end of it."

The clerk pushed his glasses on to his forehead and stared at him with bulging eyes. "Loaf! oh, my aunt! Why, the boss spends half his time on the 'Marvel' now. And as for fat checks—" He shook his head mournfully and went into the office to sign the waybills.

Greener, the secretary, nodded quite amiably when Allingham came in, and made out the check without the least demur. "You transport riders ought to put your money into 'Marvels,'" he said genially as he took the receipt. "It's lucky the mine is turning out so well or we should have to cut down your rates."

"Then we shouldn't ride your stuff," the other answered promptly.

Greener gave a greasy little laugh. "I don't think

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it will ever be as bad as that. Well, come in and have a drink. I think I can find one in my room."

The transport rider hesitated a moment. He disliked this stout secretary intensely, but still it would be rude to refuse; moreover, there was always the chance of learning something useful.

Greener's room was in the office building itself, the secretary and the assayer being the only ones who had quarters there. The room was typical of the man himself, with its colored curtains, its brass bedstead, its host of useless little trifles which no one else would have dreamed of bringing out to the frontier. There was a silver-plated revolver, the weapon of the raw amateur, hanging on the bed rail; but, as Allingham's quick eyes noted, there was neither rifle nor shotgun.

Greener poured out two generous tots of whisky—he followed the custom of the country in that respect—and began to talk about the progress of the mines in general, then, from that, he skillfully brought the conversation on to the subject of the "Marvel" itself and its satisfactory first output. "I suppose you had a flutter in the shares?" he remarked.

Allingham shook his head. "It can't be done when one is out of touch of civilization for weeks on end."

"Of course. I hadn't thought of that," Greener answered. "Still, I suppose you hear things sometimes. Do men seem satisfied with this mine?"

He tried to speak carelessly, and yet the transport rider thought he caught a hint of eagerness in the question, so he shrugged his shoulders as he answered:

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"As far as I know; but they seem to expect something better at the end of this month."

Greener finished off his whisky and helped himself to some more. "I hope we shall be able to satisfy them. You didn't—er—hear anything said about the first fortnight's gold?" he added with a nervous little laugh.

Allingham shook his head stolidly and rose to go. "Not a word," he answered. "Anyway, it's the month's crushing people wanted. Well, good-by, Mr. Greener. I must get off. I expect I'll see you again soon," and before the secretary could say any more, he had opened the door. Outside, the boss's voice could be heard, calling up the pumping station on the telephone.

The secretary sighed as he watched the tall figure striding down the kopje toward the Ingrams' huts. "I wasted two whiskies on him. He's a fool, after all," he murmured, but John Allingham laughed to himself.

"I think I've got the hang of things. He was just going to get confidential, and I didn't want that."

"Eight-pennyweights-to-the-ton and not-a-penny-weight-more." Allingham let all the wagons pass him, and stood once more on the twelve-mile ridge, listening to the Marvel mill. He had made an afternoon trek to the Five Mile Water, then inspanned when the moon came up, and trekked on again. It was now well after midnight, and the whole veld should have been at rest; but still the great machine was grinding

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out its unceasing roar, and, though for the last four or five miles it had been inaudible, now the wind bore it up to him again.

“Eight-pennyweights-to-the-ton and not-a-penny-weight-more, and not a pennyweight more, and not a pennyweight more.”

The transport rider stood a full five minutes listening to it, as though he wished to be quite sure of its message. One moment, the sound died away to nothing; the next, it swelled again as if it were but at the foot of the long rise.

“‘Eight pennyweights to the ton.’ If it’s only true.” He had said the same thing before, in the same place, but then he spoke in bitterness, now his voice had an exultant note of hopefulness in it. He gave a last glance at the distant arc lamps, burning unblinkingly on the headgear and kopje, then, raising his hand in an unconscious salute, started to overtake the wagons.

The moon was well up, lighting the whole road; consequently, the perfectly trained oxen needed no leading, and the voerloupers were riding on the wagons, huddled up in their rags of blankets.

Ordinarily, Allingham reveled in these long night treks, especially when, as on this trip, the wagons were empty, and there was no fear of sticking in drifts or mud holes. You learned there the meaning of perfect peace. Somehow, all your cares, all your anxieties, all your sorrows, seemed to drop from you; the world where men strove and fought and wore themselves out in the insensate struggle for money was an immeasurable distance away from you; you were part of the

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great Road, which meant you were face to face with nature, who abhors everything that is petty or mean or selfish.

This time, however, Allingham was not thinking of the road, except in so far as he felt an unreasoning impatience at the slowness of the oxen. He was all on fire to get to Buluwayo, to be there when Hilary arrived, so as to run no risk possible of missing her before she could start down country on that hateful train. And yet he had no plans. He would simply see her and say good-by, then go back to the Road and what had now become its intolerable loneliness. The one chance of anything different lay in his speculation in "Marvels."

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Joseph, the Zulu driver of the red span, deftly picked a live coal out of the fire and dropped it into the bowl of his pipe; then, after one or two vigorous puffs, "The Baas is mad," he said. "We have done nearly five days' journey in three days only. By the time we reach Buluwayo all the cattle will be thin and footsore."

Old Swartboy sniffed contemptuously. "What foolishness Zulus talk," he remarked to the company in general, which consisted of the two other drivers and the cook boy. "This one, who cannot drive, thinks that, because we hurry and make him work instead of merely sleeping and eating, the Baas must be mad. I, however, know. We are hurrying because there are very valuable loads waiting for us in Buluwayo, loads which they will trust to no one but my Baas. Prob-

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ably, when we reach the town, Joseph will be sacked, and we shall get a Basutu, a proper driver, instead of him."

Joseph, whose temper had been sorely tried of late by the old man's criticisms, began a heated reply, which, however, was cut short with startling suddenness by a bellow of fear from one of the oxen. An instant later, all the cattle had scrambled to their feet, and while some were tumbling violently, others were tugging at their head reins, in an attempt to break loose from the trek gear.

The drivers sprang up instantly. "A lion," Swartboy said, peering into the blackness. "They've got the wind of a lion, Baas," to Allingham, who had leaped down out of the wagon tent, shotgun in hand.

One of the piccannins flung an armful of dry brushwood on to the fire, which flared up suddenly, just as the plunging oxen of the nearest span swung round, dragging the trek chain with them. Allingham, who was nearest to them, jumped to one side, to get out of their way, but his foot caught in a clump of grass and he fell heavily. Before he could recover his footing, before Swartboy could attempt to save him, the oxen were on top of him, trampling him with their great hoofs. The old Basutu gave a cry of wrath, and literally flung himself on the cattle, forcing his way between them, utterly regardless of his own safety.

"Baas, Baas," he cried. "Say you're not hurt, Baas."

But Allingham was lying very still, unconscious, with two broken ribs and a broken leg.

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Swartboy raised his head very tenderly. "Baas, Baas," he repeated; then, getting no answer, he shouted to the other drivers, who were frenziedly trying to drive the cattle back: "Ho, Joseph, Klaas, Dingaan, leave those mad oxen and come here and help me with the Baas."

"Witpans and Blesbok have broken away," Klaas shouted back.

The old Basutu cursed him. "Leave those oxen, I say, and come here. What does it matter about them when the Baas is killed? Come here, come here at once."

Joseph caught his words and hurried round; then, between them, they carried the transport rider to the fire, where Swartboy made a hurried examination of his injuries. Meanwhile, the oxen had calmed down again, the lion whose wind they had caught having apparently been scared off by the shouting and the fire. A few minutes later, the two runaway bullocks were rounded up, driven among the others, and caught again.

Swartboy got up from his examination of Allingham with a very grave face. "He is not dead, but nearly so," he said. "We must take him to the Police Fort at M'Bendese. From there they can send a wire message for the doctor."

"The oxen are very tired," Joseph objected.

The Basutu turned on him savagely. "Who said we wanted oxen? The jolting of the wagon would kill him. We shall carry him in a hammock, now, at once. Dingaan will stay with the wagons,

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and you and I and Klaas and the cook boy will carry."

Joseph's jaw dropped. The night was dark, the fort was six miles up the road, and there were undoubtedly lions about; moreover, four bearers, taking it in turn, two by two, were not much for a man of Allingham's size.

But the savage little Basutu would listen to no argument. He was going and the others were going with him. He raged and stormed while he was fixing up a hammock on a pole, and finally, by the time it was ready, the others had bowed to his will, despite all a native's horror of traveling in the dark, when not only the evil beasts, but, worse still, the evil spirits, are abroad.

"We shall be back by daylight, Dingaan," Swart-boy said as they started out. "If you hear a lion, fire the Baas's gun many times. We are taking the Baas's whisky so that you cannot get drunk. And you very little children," to the piccannins, "see that you keep good fires going. Otherwise, the lions will doubtless eat you, unless some evil spirit carries you off first." Then he trotted after the hammock, at which Klaas and the cook boy were taking first turn.

It was a heavy, weary task carrying the unconscious man six long miles through the darkness. True, there was a moon; but the sky was unusually overcast. Moreover, the pole galled their shoulders, and, before they had reached the halfway sluit, the unwonted load had made them all footsore. But Swart-boy kept them to it. He was the oldest of them all,

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yet he did his share manfully, and insisted on the others doing theirs. He would allow no rest, for gripping at his heart was the fear that the Baas, his own Baas, might die before he could receive any proper attention.

Once a hyena raised its hateful voice a few yards off the road, and the cook boy gave a little yelp of terror; once a reitbuck, bolting through the grass near by, brought the carriers to a sudden stop, for on the road every unseen thing moving at night is a possible danger. But Swartboy would brook no delays. The cook boy's feet were bleeding; both Joseph's shoulders were raw from the chafing of the pole, while Klaas was deadly weary; but still he kept them going. They could rest when they reached the police camp, when the Baas was among his own kind. And all the time Allingham remained unconscious, although from time to time he tried to turn over, and groaned heavily.

At last they staggered up to the fort, which consisted of an earthwork inclosure with wattle-and-dab huts inside it. The crazy main gate, made of rough planking off which the paint had long since blistered, was fastened with a stick thrust through the hasps where the bolts should have been. There was no sign of a sentry to challenge them, but, after repeated knockings with the butt of his sjambok, Swartboy managed to arouse a native police boy, who came to the entrance wrapped in a blanket and cursing volubly.

"Go away," he growled. "Go away before I arrest you all."

Swartboy's pent-up feelings suddenly overmastered

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him, and the police boy, a Matabele, fairly cowered before the storm of wrath; then, when he finally gathered that there was an injured white man outside, he hurried off to awaken the sergeant.

They carried Allingham into the shanty which was dignified by the name of hospital, and made him as comfortable as their resources and their knowledge—neither of which was great—permitted them to do. Then, while the corporal in charge of the telephone was trying to call up Buluwayo, fifty miles away, and ask for a surgeon to be sent out the first thing in the morning, the sergeant came out and interviewed Swartboy. He was a kindly man, if somewhat slow of thought and somewhat addicted to dop, and he appreciated what the drivers had done. "You had better sleep in that hut over there to-night," he said. "The boys will get you some skoff." Then their weariness struck him suddenly, and he told them to follow him into his own quarters, where, without another word, he poured each of them out a stiff tot of dop. "Now, go and turn in," he said.

Swartboy shook his head. "I must get back and see to my Baas's wagons, Baas," he said. "There are lions about, and they might eat the cattle. I shall bring the wagons up here to-morrow morning. Good-night, Baas," and he went out, followed in silence by his three companions.

The sergeant helped himself to another drink. "By Jove, that's a good nigger!" he muttered, then he went across to the telephone hut, where the corporal was still trying to get an answer from Buluwayo.

CHAPTER XV

IT was four days later when Swartboy, who had outspanned just below the Police Fort, caught sight of a cloud of dust rising half a mile down the road.

"It's a mule cart," he remarked to Klaas, the only other driver who was awake. "I expect the white missus is on it." Then he perched himself on a boulder beside the track and waited.

The mules picked their way carefully down the slope of the drift, stuck a moment in the stream itself, then came up the near side with a rush, which had degenerated to a slow walk by the time they reached the level again.

Swartboy, who had seen Hilary long before she had noticed him, signaled to the driver to stop, and came forward, hat in hand.

He ignored Cuthbert Lestrangle and Mr. Carden, and addressed himself solely to the girl. "My Baas is there," he said, jerking his thumb in the direction of the fort.

Hilary leaned forward. "What is that, Swartboy?" she asked with a shade of anxiety in her voice.

The Basutu repeated his words. "My Baas is there. He is very sick. The oxen trampled him."

The girl went very white, while the boss asked sharply: "Where is he? In the fort?" Then, as

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Swartboy nodded, he turned to his own driver. "Go into the fort, Willum."

Hilary lay back in her seat, staring at the mules with unseeing eyes; but when the cart drew up opposite the sergeant's quarters, she sprang down almost before the boss could come to her assistance.

"Where is Mr. Allingham? What is the matter with him?" she demanded, as the sergeant came out, hurriedly buttoning his tunic. He had been there four years, but it was the first time he had seen a white woman within the earthworks, and he was wondering what she could be doing there. Then he recognized Lestrangle, and, through sheer nervousness, turned to him.

"The boys brought Allingham in here four days ago—broken leg and two broken ribs. But the doctor says he'll pull through now," he hastened to add, as he saw the look on Hilary's face; then he gave them a brief outline of how the accident had occurred, gleaned partly from Swartboy and partly from Allingham, who had recovered consciousness the previous morning.

Ten minutes later, the boss came out of the hospital hut looking rather grave. Hilary, who was walking up and down with her father, stopped abruptly. "How is he?" she asked.

"Better than I expected," Lestrangle answered. "He wanted to know whether you would mind going in to see him?"

Hilary did not hesitate, as she certainly would have done two months before, nor did she consult her father;

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but followed Lestrangle into the mud-walled shanty where Allingham was lying.

They had made the transport rider as comfortable as possible on a canvas stretcher bed, though the girl gave a little shudder as she noted the bareness of it all, the earthen floor, the solitary chair with a pile of ragged magazines on it, the candlestick in an empty whisky bottle, and the tattered old horse rug which served to close the doorway at night.

The transport rider's face lighted up as she came in. "It's awfully good of you," he said. "I wanted to see you again before you left the country."

Lestrangle, who had followed Hilary in, turned round and stood looking out of the doorway, blocking out most of the light, so that the injured man did not see the color rising to the girl's face.

"I thought I should have been in Buluwayo first," he went on. "But the oxen settled that question, so I must say good-by to you here."

The color left her face again suddenly. "Are you going back to that hateful Road then, after this?" she asked in a low voice.

Allingham looked away. "I had been thinking of a trip home. It's such a long job getting over an accident in this country. If I do, shall I see you?" There was no mistaking the eagerness in his tone.

Hilary smiled. "That depends on you," she answered.

The man gave a big sigh of relief. "Then it's only *au revoir*, after all?"

"Only *au revoir*," she replied, and Allingham

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thought he felt her grip tighten as she took his hand. "Only au revoir, but be very careful not to try and move too soon."

He gave a laugh, and though it brought on a sharp twinge of pain, there was undeniable happiness in the sound. "I'm too keen on getting out of this country to do anything rash," he said.

As the mule cart drove out of the fort a few minutes later, a tall savage, armed with two or three formidable knobsticks and followed by a couple of mangy yellow curs, stalked up to the wagon-drivers' fire, where he squatted down and proceeded to take snuff copiously.

Swartboy, who had returned to his seat, regarded him severely. "What are you doing here, dirty-bodied one to whom my Baas gives unearned money?"

Malongesa, for it was the headman from the village at the Five Mile Water, ignored the insult and answered the question. "They told me yesterday morning that the chief was killed, and I came to ask."

Swartboy made a rapid mental calculation. The headman had come fifty miles in a day and a half, so the driver relaxed his severity. "The Baas is not dead, and will not die. He is too strong for even those mad, ill-trained oxen in Joseph's span to kill him. Soon he will be up again, and we shall trek far away to the north, to buy oxen from the Makalanga. This country is no good, with its big noise machines and savages who beg for money."

Malongesa made no answer and asked no more

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questions about Allingham. He had heard what he wanted to know; only "I am hungry," he remarked.

The Basutu snorted. "I never met a hill man who did not say the same," he grumbled. Then he got up, hacked a huge piece off a loaf of bread, took a couple of strips of biltong out of a sack, and handed the food to Malongesa.

The latter looked at the bread doubtfully. "Is this what the white men call bread?" he asked. Then he took a bite and smacked his lips. Five minutes later, both bread and biltong had vanished. The headman sighed, as though he regretted there was no more, gathered up his knobsticks, nodded to the Basutu, and without another word stalked back down the road, followed by his dogs.

Swartboy watched him till he left the main track at a footpath just beyond the Drift, then turned to Dingaan. "Hill folk are very like baboons," he remarked.

Dingaan grunted, and being unable to think of a suitable reply, went on with his job of splicing a broken whip stick.

It was dusk on Friday evening when Cuthbert Lestrangle set his passengers down at the entrance of their hotel in Buluwayo. The building was very different from the Thatched House in Fort Alexandra, at least in outward appearance. The Teutonic gentlemen who directed the fortunes of the company which had built it, invariably described it to their shareholders as the finest hotel in the African Tropics, apparently considering that the satisfaction at being part proprietor of such a magnificent edifice should more

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than compensate for the lack of dividends. Guests, however, were apt to find that the main difference between the hostelries in Buluwayo and Alexandra lay in their charges. If those of the latter were high, those of the former were outrageous. True, in Buluwayo, you had a German who looked like a baron as manager, and a Greek who looked like a galley slave as porter; while behind the bar, instead of Mac, you found sprightly deities with dyed curls, who were duly haughty with transport riders and their kind, reserving all their smiles for the real Buluwayo men, the civil servants and the clerks in the mines offices. They could always be known by their spotless hunting stocks and perfectly polished leggings, which they wore on all occasions, though most of them could not ride, and none could have gone three miles out of the town without getting lost. For the rest, in both Alexandra and Buluwayo, they gave you scraggy goat for mutton and aged trek bullock for beef, milk out of a tin, and a semiliquid yellow oil which some humorist in Denmark exports to our colonies as butter; bread made with hop beer; coffee which was such in name only; whisky which had its origin in a potato field in the Fatherland; and beer preserved with salicylic acid—in short, both hostelries were typical of South Africa, where the beginning of civilization, the germ from which society has sprung, is the three-legged stool beside a cow-dung fire.

Mr. Carden gave a sigh of relief as he found himself once more in the hotel. In England, he would rightly have waxed indignant over both its cooking

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and its charges; now, however, he was only too thankful for its comparative comforts and for the feeling that, only half a mile away, there was a real railway station, a veritable link with his own world, where men of learning were appreciated at their proper worth.

"There is no train till Monday now. One went out this afternoon." The manager spoke with the ill-concealed satisfaction which his kind always evinces under such circumstances.

Mr. Carden sighed and turned to his daughter. "Hilary, my dear, do you hear that? No train till Monday. How very annoying! Well, we must make the best of it." At which rather futile remark the girl merely nodded and continued her listless examination of a steamship advertisement, though at heart she felt a sudden gladness. There was just the possibility of further news of Allingham during the next four days.

At dinner, the Cardens were joined by a youngster whom they had met on their way up country, a garrulous youth, whose obvious admiration for Hilary was tempered only by a sense of his own importance as an official in the Mines Department.

Miss Carden herself listened to him languidly. He had never been out of South Africa and never been on the road or the veld; consequently, all his conversation was either of Capetown or Buluwayo, and she found herself longing for the time when she could leave the table, and wondering at the patience with which her father bore all the chatter about mines and mining companies. After a while the archæologist

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chanced to mention their recent visit to the "Marvel." The youngster pricked up his ears. "Everyone is talking of the mine here. You see, it's the end of the second month's crushing, and they'll declare the output to-morrow night or Saturday morning. I suppose you have no idea of what it will be?"

Mr. Carden shook his head and smiled. "I was Mr. Lestrangle's guest; but I could hardly ask him that. Only this I do know, because I have been through the workings myself—the mine is wonderfully rich. They have hardly touched the best ore yet."

Hilary frowned slightly. Somehow, she had come to share Allingham's antagonism to the mine; why, she hardly knew. But the boy leaned forward eagerly.

"I'm glad to hear you say that. It only confirms the belief in our department. Of course there are croakers, but—you know," and he dismissed them with a wave of his hand.

The girl flushed, then, seeing the others had finished, got up with a little sigh of relief. "Shall we sit out in the court for a little while, father? These rooms are so close. Don't you ever have punkas in your beloved South Africa, Mr. Cloete?" she added to their companion.

As they were passing through the hall, Hilary suddenly found herself face to face with a rather good-looking man in evening dress, who glanced at her with laughing eyes, as though expecting her to recognize him. She knew his face very well, and, half involuntarily, bowed; then, when he was out of hearing,

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turned to young Cloete. "Who is that man, Mr. Cloete? I know him so well, yet can't recall where I met him."

The youngster looked back. "That? Oh, that's Captain MacMurdo, the Honorable Charles MacMurdo, generally known as 'Mac.' He used to be in the mounted police, but resigned over something—he was most insulting to the administrator, whom he told to do his own dirty work—and lately I believe he's been in Alexandra."

Light fell on Hilary's mind, and she laughed for the first time since Swartboy had stopped the mule cart outside the fort. "Oh, I remember now; but I only knew him as 'Mac.' You recollect, father?"

Mr. Carden, who was fidgeting nervously with his watch chain, nodded. "Yes, I recollect him, my dear. A most extraordinary young man, quite an extraordinary young man."

Hilary laughed again, this time at the thought of her father's unlucky attempt to tip the former bar man of the Thatched House. She wished now she had spoken to Mac in the hall, as Allingham's name would inevitably have come up, and she was hungering to hear it spoken. A few minutes later, she did hear it, though not from Mac. Mr. Carden had gone off on some excuse, and, to make conversation, she asked Cloete whether he had ever been to the "Marvel." The youngster shook his head.

"No, I've sometimes thought of having a run down that road. My brother is in the police at Fort M'Bendese."

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She looked up with sudden interest. "How curious! I was in there the day before yesterday, to inquire after Mr. Allingham, who had met with an accident. Perhaps you heard about it?"

Cloete nodded indifferently. "The doctor was talking about it in the club, a bullock tossed him or something. Careless lot of beggars, those transport riders. It's they who keep the country back now with the high rates they charge; but we'll break them soon, when the branch railways are through."

"You know you wouldn't dare to speak like that if Mr. Allingham were here." The youngster started at the cold scorn in her voice. "You talk about them keeping the country back! It's men like he who have made it possible for you to be up here at all," and she got up from her chair, and swept indoors without another word.

Cloete gazed after her in amazement. "Well, I'm jiggered!" he muttered; then he hurried off to seek consolation from his favorite barmaid, who, at least, knew the relative social positions of an official and a transport rider.

The following morning, while Hilary was sitting in the court, trying to read, Mac strolled out, clad now in an old, though well-cut, suit of tweeds. The girl greeted him with a friendly little nod, and, taking heart from that, he came across and shook hands.

"I'm sure you didn't know who I was last night," he remarked, as he took the chair next to hers.

The girl smiled. "I must confess I didn't; and

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even when they said 'Captain MacMurdo,' I wasn't much wiser."

"Mr. MacMurdo, please," he corrected. She opened her eyes wide. "Why is that? Isn't the 'captain' right?"

Mac laughed. "Oh, it's all right, in a way. But, you see, everyone in Buluwayo calls himself colonel or major or captain; they appoint each other, I think, as the Americans do, so it's almost a distinction to be a plain civilian. I suppose, like myself, you're on your way home?"

Hilary nodded. "Have you finished with Fort Alexandra then?"

"Oh, no," he answered cheerfully. "I'm just taking a trip round the world. I came into some money recently."

"I hope it's a good sum, Mr. MacMurdo."

Mac shook his head. "That depends on how you look at it. Five hundred—enough to have a good time on, but too little for anything else. So I shall just spend it. It's the best way, isn't it?" Then, seeing the disapproval in her face, he hastened to change the subject. "What sort of trip did you have down, and where did you leave our young friend, Allingham?"

"Haven't you heard? Mr. Allingham has had a frightful accident. The cattle went mad over a lion or something of the sort, and trampled him. He's lying in Fort M'Bendese now, with a broken leg and some other injuries."

Mac's face had grown very serious. "I never

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heard a word of it. By Jove, I am sorry. Poor old Jack. M'Bendese, you say? I think I'll charter a mule cart and go down and see him. I'm in no hurry, after all. Do you think he would like to see me?"

Somehow, she did not seem to notice the assumption of her knowledge of Allingham's wishes, but she thanked him with her eyes for his offer. "I'm sure he would like it. It must be awful down there, in a little mud hut. When will you start?"

Mac smiled to himself. He saw that she was thinking only of Allingham; the trouble and expense which he, himself, proposed to incur had never struck her. She still understood nothing of the Road, despite the journeys she had made. He smiled, and then he gave a queer little sigh, envying Allingham. "I can start to-day," he said. "Then I shall be at the fort in good time to-morrow. When do you leave Bulu-wayo?"

"On Monday," she answered.

The ex-barman nodded. "All right. I'll let you know by wire how he is getting on. He'll want a change after this smash-up. I wonder if he would go with me round the world?"

He was looking away as he spoke, or he would have seen her hand grip the arm of her chair almost fiercely; but she strove to speak quietly as she answered. "It would be very wrong if he did. I should blame you very much indeed. He will want a long rest, not a sight-seeing trip."

Mac grinned at a bar boy who was just coming out with a tray of drinks, but his face was perfectly seri-

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ous when he turned to her again. "Then I won't suggest it, Miss Carden," he said slowly. "I'll advise him to go straight home instead."

All that day Hilary saw little of her father. He had several official visits to pay, and these occupied the whole afternoon; but when he came back in the evening, after having declined an invitation to dinner on the score of fatigue, it was palpable to her that he was worried and nervous, though when she hinted at such a thing he brushed the suggestion aside, almost impatiently. "Nonsense, my dear. I'm tired, that's all. I'm disappointed at not seeing our friend, Lestrangle—no one seems to have seen him to-day—but I've no doubt I shall see him in the morning. It'll be all right in the morning. I'm sure of that, quite sure."

She opened her lips to inquire what it was which would be all right, then changed her mind, for she very seldom questioned her father about any matter outside his work, and she supposed now he was thinking of some business transaction, probably an article he was writing for the boss.

The following morning she came down just as Mr. Carden was interviewing the manager.

"No, it's not out yet," she heard the latter say. "We expected it last night. Perhaps Lestrangle is holding it back for Stock Exchange reasons. You see it's Saturday, and he may not want the shares played with until Monday."

"What was that you wanted to know, father?" the girl asked as they walked into the dining room.

Mr. Carden hesitated a moment, then "The results

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of the second month's crushing at the Marvel mine. I feel quite interested in it, knowing the place and having Philip working there."

Hilary gave him a keen glance, and noticing that the worried look was still in his eyes, an uncomfortable suspicion crept into her mind; but before she could make any remark, her father had turned to greet one of his many new acquaintances, a rising solicitor, who at once asked permission to join them at table.

As they finished breakfast, the lawyer turned to Hilary. "Have you seen our market square on a Saturday, Miss Carden? No? Well, you really must go. You will see quite a different Buluwayo from this one," glancing round the room. "May I take you down there? Say about eleven o'clock?"

Hilary consented gladly—already the hotel seemed insufferably dull—and soon after eleven she and her father found themselves on the fringe of the crowd in the big, dusty square.

One glance showed her that their guide had been right when he spoke of a different Buluwayo. The men on the square did not wear immaculate puttee leggings or hunting stocks, being mostly of John Allingham's type, with independence and self-reliance written all over them. You could see they fought for their own hands, that no senior partner or managing director ever bullied them.

"Take them as they come in pairs, take two or more." The strident voice of the tireless, good-humored auctioneer selling a span of cattle could be heard half across the square. His stand was the center

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of interest. In five minutes, he did more business than any of his rivals would get through in a whole morning. He had a monopoly of the cattle and wagons, the only things which really interested the transport riders; while the others had to content themselves with coolie or Greek customers, who bid in shilling advances for old cooking utensils, blankets of more than doubtful cleanliness, and stretcher bedsteads which a white man would have promptly burned.

The scene appealed to Hilary, possibly because it recalled Allingham so vividly to her memory. He would have been quite at home there, the equal of any man in his keenness and special knowledge, though, as she told herself with a little thrill of pride, there was hardly another man there who was his equal socially. Most of them had been born and bred on the veld or the road, and knew no other life. They had grit and honor and determination, all the qualities which the road engenders or develops, and yet, none the less, they were not of her world. They belonged to the road and to the road only. Allingham belonged to civilization, and the road was merely an incident in his life—or at least she told herself it was so.

“Eighteen pounds I’m only offered for the pick of this span. Eighteen pounds. Any advance on eighteen pounds? For the first, for the second, for the third time. Eighteen pounds, and I’m going to sell. Are you all done? Are you all done? For the first, for the second, for the third and last time. Going, going, going—gone for eighteen pounds!”

The words were hardly out of the auctioneer’s

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mouth when a sudden shout at the farther corner of the square made men turn their heads sharply; then some message was passed rapidly from one group to the next and instantly all business seemed paralyzed.

Hilary, standing a little way outside the crowd, leaned forward unconsciously, trying to catch the words, then she turned to their guide. "What is it, Mr. Madden? Could you hear?"

The solicitor started at her words, then looked at her with a strange glint in his eyes. "Yes, Miss Carden. "It's the 'Marvel' output just announced. It has dropped to eleven pennyweights to the ton."

Mr. Carden, who was behind them, drew his hand across his forehead, and steadied himself by clutching the buck rail of a donkey wagon; but Hilary did not see him, for, at that same moment, a well-remembered mule cart swung round the corner and headed across the top of the square. The mules were going their best, urged by voice and whip, but through the dust she could see Cuthbert Lestrangle leaning back in his seat, a cigarette in his mouth. He raised his hat as he passed her, and by that time the crowd had realized who it was. The transport riders and the stock dealers, the outside men generally, stood still, watching, but the Buluwayo men, the sprinkling of the hunting-stock brigade, the storekeepers and the Hebrew dealers, rushed forward, yelling and hooting incoherently, for this was the man who had dashed their hopes to the ground, who had never warned them that the output was going down, who had betrayed them all. In a flash, almost before the words could be spoken,

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the old story of six weeks' gold and a month's tonnage was alive again, this time as a fact, not as a supposition.

Cuthbert Lestrangle did not look at them; he looked over them, and nodded to a man he knew who was standing on the edge of the crowd. Then he tossed away his cigarette end, and was calmly lighting another as the cart turned out of the square on to the Marvel road.

Hilary drew a deep breath, then slipped her arm into that of her father. "Shall we go back?" she said, very quietly.

Mr. Carden started. "Yes, my dear, of course. There must be some mistake. The mine is enormously rich. At the worst, it is only a temporary setback. Why, I've seen the ore myself; it's wonderful, wonderful."

The girl pressed his arm. "I'm sure it's so, father. You could see it in Mr. Lestrangle's face." But Madden, who was listening, did not think she believed her own words.

"If it wasn't that the old boy is so wrapped up in his musty profession, I should say he had been gambling in 'Marvels,'" he muttered to himself, as he went into the bar for a drink after leaving the Cardens in the hall.

That evening, Hilary received a wire from Mac; and two days later, when she came down to the Cape cart which was to take them to the station, there was another waiting for her in the hall rack. It read: "Allingham getting on splendidly."

CHAPTER XVI

MR. CARDEN'S Sunday afternoon "at homes" were quite an institution in their way. Often you would meet as many as twenty visitors, male and female, in the big drawing-room on the first floor; and though most of these belonged to that curious subsection of the literary world which professes to labor solely for the sake of its art, and, perhaps as a consequence, never produces anything of the slightest practical value, you would occasionally find a man who had really done something useful already, or who was destined to do something in the future.

It was difficult to say when these gatherings had been started, for they were a gradual growth, rather than the outcome of any definite plan. You saw men there who had gone to the dreary house in the dreary Pimlico Square with unbroken regularity ever since Hilary had been a baby in arms, and had seen Mrs. Carden change from a bright-faced girl to a thin, colorless woman, who seemed only too ready to retire into a corner and allow her elder daughter, Mrs. Fred Darton, to play the part of hostess, a position which that large and masterful young woman considered herself fully qualified to fill, by reason both of her social gifts and her educational attainments. She and her husband lived in a flat overlooking Battersea Park, but she

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was always ready to leave her children in the hands of their nurse and cross the river to assume control of her father's house, as in the days before her marriage. Darton, a tall, fair, unobtrusive man, as recognized, at least by his own circle, as the leading authority on ancient earthworks, and though there were many to cavil at his theories and heap scorn on his deductions, his views had a kind of official weight, owing to the fact that the majority of the committee of the Royal Antiquarian Institute consisted of intimates of the Cardens, and, as a result, all who disagreed with his views, or those of his father-in-law, stood but a very poor chance of writing the coveted letters of F.R.A.I. after their names.

"Hilary, dear, when is your Carter-Paterson person coming? I suppose he will really put in an appearance?" Mrs. Darton remarked as she handed her younger sister a cup of tea.

It was some three months since Mr. Carden and his daughter had returned from their African trip, and, though for the first three or four Sundays the big, classically furnished drawing-room had been crowded with friends anxious to hear of the discoveries made at the ruins, now a reaction had set in, and there were unusually few callers. Mrs. Carden had already effaced herself on the plea of a headache; her husband was sitting by the window, deep in conversation with two of the elders; while the daughters had been endeavoring to entertain a couple of rather shy youths whom Darton had introduced. They came from his old college and he had just secured them

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berths on a new "Archæological Survey of the Counties of England," to be complete in a hundred and five volumes, of which he was assistant editor, Mr. Carden being editor in chief.

Hilary did not answer at once, and Mrs. Darton repeated her remark, though with less assurance. Somehow, though all her life she had been used to bullying this younger sister, she had lately begun to realize that there was a limit to the other's patience. The Hilary who had come home from South Africa was very different from the girl student whom she had seen off at Southampton a few months previously. Mrs. Darton's chief studies had been of the works of latter-day poets and dramatists; consequently, her knowledge of human nature was neither extensive nor accurate; but, none the less, she was a little frightened at the look which came into her sister's face. However, the threatened storm did not burst, for a moment later the door opened and the servant ushered in John Allingham.

Hilary's first impression was that the transport rider looked wonderfully sunburned and fit; then, with a little gasp, she realized that he was distinctly lame. He was well groomed, without the slightest hint of the returned wanderer in his appearance—he was not of the kind which proclaims itself as a traveler by the simple expedient of wearing a sombrero in the streets of London; yet even Mrs. Darton could see he was different from the majority of the men she met; and she summoned up her sweetest smile as he was introduced to her.

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"I am glad you remembered us," Mr. Carden said, after shaking hands with unusual cordiality. "We were most pleased to get your letter and to hear you had arrived home safely. I trust you are no worse for your accident."

Allingham shrugged his shoulders. "I suppose I got through easily and ought to be thankful; but my leg is a little out of the straight. Still, it isn't much, at any rate, in England."

Hilary, who had said nothing so far beyond a merely formal greeting, caught the meaning of his words. So he was not going back to Africa. In her elation at the thought, she recovered from the shock of seeing him limping. As he said, it was not a great matter, after all.

It was some time before Allingham really got a chance to speak to Hilary; but, at last, Mr. Carden went back to his old friends by the window, and Mrs. Darton, finding that the new arrival was not interested in her conversation, turned rather impatiently to her husband's protégés. "A dull person," she remarked as Allingham settled himself down in a chair next to Hilary's. "My father and sister met him in the wilds of Africa, where he seems to run a kind of Carter-Paterson business with cows instead of horses."

The embryo archæologists snickered. Mrs. Darton was the wife of their assistant editor; consequently, all her wit was amusing.

Somehow, neither Hilary nor Allingham found much to say to each other. The transport rider was conscious of being off his own ground, in a strange

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atmosphere, where he was at a hopeless disadvantage compared to the other men present; while he could not help contrasting his present surroundings with those under which he had known Hilary before. The difference came home to him with especial force when she handed him a cup of tea, and he thought of his own clothless table and thick earthenware mugs.

Hilary, on her part, felt much as she had done at the outspan on the edge of the kopje country. During their subsequent companionship, a number of trifles had served to provide them with matter for conversation when other subjects failed; but now she had slipped back into most of her old ways of thought, and their common meeting ground seemed to have become very limited. Yet she had been looking forward with barely suppressed eagerness to Allingham's homecoming, and she no longer disguised from herself the place he held in her life.

"Have you seen Mrs. Ingram again?" she asked suddenly, after what had been a rather long pause.

Allingham shook his head. "No, I went straight into Buluwayo as soon as I could move, and neither saw nor heard of any of the 'Marvel' staff."

"And what have you done with your wagons?" It was a very ordinary question, yet she waited breathlessly for the answer.

The man looked her in the face and smiled. "I've sold them—the whole lot. I've done with the Road now." Then, seeing her expression, any regret he may have had vanished.

"I'm very glad," she murmured.

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A minute later Mr. Carden came across the room and sat down next to Allingham. His manner was far more pleasant than it had ever been in Africa.

"You must come and dine with us one night this week," he said. "Would Wednesday do? Very well. Remember that, Hilary, my dear. We shall find a great many recollections to talk over."

When the visitors had taken their leave and Hilary had gone upstairs to inquire after her mother's headache, Mrs. Darton turned to her father.

"So that is Hilary's young savage. He is presentable enough externally, but horribly dull. I noticed they did not seem to have much to say to one another. Perhaps they talked with their eyes."

Mr. Carden fidgeted with his glasses. He was genuinely afraid of his elder daughter; but he felt that this was an occasion to assert his own dignity. "Really, Jessie, your remarks are most flippant. Mr. Allingham was extremely kind and helpful to us in Africa, and I have ascertained since that he belongs to an excellent family. I object, too, to the phrase you used earlier in the afternoon, 'a Carter-Paterson person.' A transport rider is a pioneer of empire, and I understand Mr. Allingham has made a considerable amount of money by his work."

Mrs. Darton yawned behind her hand. "How nice to have a moneyed brother-in-law. I congratulate Hilary on her farsightedness, though I prefer a man with a mind. Well, I think I had better get home and see to my babies. . . . You might call me a cab, Clara," to the maid who had just come in.

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Her father sighed. "You are very extravagant in the matter of cabs, Jessie. You could get an omnibus from the corner."

"And be wedged in between a man reeking of bad tobacco and a woman equally redolent of gin," retorted his daughter. "I have noticed that you have become very fond of walking since you came back from Africa. I suppose we shall have Hilary starting a bullock cart soon."

Mr. Carden sighed again, but made no answer. He was very fond of cabs himself; but, unfortunately, they were not the only luxuries he had been forced to deny himself lately.

Allingham found, to his great relief, that the party at dinner was to consist only of Mr. and Mrs. Carden, Hilary and himself, and, as he saw at once, Mrs. Carden did not count. Looking back on her years afterwards, when she had long since been gathered to her fathers, he used to feel a kind of astonishment that a woman could be so unimportant. She never seemed to affect anybody's life, except in a purely negative way. She was futile—there was no other adjective one could apply to her. Possibly, at one time she had felt ambitions and hopes. But as her youth had slipped from her, so these had vanished; and in their place she had installed as fetiches a number of colorless conventions, which affected no one, because she had not the force of character to insist on their recognition; yet they seemed to fill the empty spaces in her life, and out of their very repudiation by the younger generations she extracted a kind of mournful satisfaction.

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The dinner was good—Hilary had seen to that—and Allingham sat down to it with a curious sense of restfulness. It was the first time for eight years he had been in a real English home, and there was something unspeakably soothing in the surroundings, the perfectly polished plate, the silent maidservants, the all-pervading air of solidity and permanence in the furniture. There was nothing nomadic about the Cardens; evidently they knew how to make the most of what life could bring them.

During the meal the conversation ran on indifferent subjects, but as soon as the ladies had left the room Mr. Carden plunged straight into a topic which was obviously uppermost in his mind. "Did you see anything more of Mr. Lestrangle?" he asked.

His guest shook his head. "No. He went straight down to the 'Marvel' after that second output was declared, and he had not been back in Buluwayo when I left. There were all sorts of rumors, especially when the third month's returns showed an improvement, but where mines are concerned you can never believe a word you hear. The only thing I am sure of is this—the 'Marvel' has got a bad name. The shares fell from four and seven eighths to less than three, and I don't think they'll ever go up to the former figure again. I don't see why they should."

Mr. Carden rested his chin on his hand and stared into the fire. "I'm afraid you're a confirmed pessimist," he said. "Still, in this case, the pessimists must have made money." He sighed, and it suddenly struck his guest that he looked old and careworn.

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Allingham nodded. "I backed my pessimism. You remember the day we arrived at the mine? Well, I sent orders to sell five thousand 'Marvel' shares by that mail. You can work out what profit I made."

The elder man drew his hand across his forehead. "You sold five thousand! Well, well." Then, with a sudden outburst of anger: "Lestrangle was a rogue. He deceived everybody grossly. I—the whole country—thought the mine was going on as well as it had begun."

Allingham picked up his wineglass and stared at it reflectively. "I think you're too hard on him," he said at last. "I don't like either the man or his ways, as you know. No one could have less in common than he and I. But I think he believed in the mine. Of course I am able to be charitable because I've scored out of its failure."

"Ah, yes, yes. That alters matters; yes, it alters matters," Mr. Carden mumbled. Then he looked up suddenly. "You are going to stay in England, I understand?"

"A lame man isn't much use on the veld," Allingham answered. "Besides, I think one can stay out there too long. I've done pretty well, on the whole. I've got a certain seven or eight hundred a year from safe investments on this side. This last deal in 'Marvels' has helped me out a bit."

It was the first time he had ever mentioned his own financial affairs to Mr. Carden, and the latter thought he detected a purpose in his doing so now; but he was

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wise enough to make no remark, and a few minutes later they joined the ladies in the drawing-room.

Mrs. Carden did not stay long. She had a way of fading out of the room with the minimum of fuss, and while Mr. Carden pored over a book in the corner, Hilary and Allingham found themselves virtually alone.

"How do you think father is looking?" Hilary asked suddenly. She was leaning her chin on her hand, staring into the fire, much as her father had done while he was asking his questions about Cuthbert Lestrangle.

The similarity struck Allingham at once and brought the "Marvel" back to his memory. "I don't think he looks very fit. Has he been working too hard? I suppose he hasn't—" He broke off suddenly, but the girl did not seem to notice it.

"It began when he was in Buluwayo. He's never been quite himself since." Then, before she could say anything more, the door opened quickly and Mrs. Darton came in, followed by her husband.

"We're going to this meeting at Burlington House—oh, good evening, Mr. Allingham—you had better come, too, Hilary, and bring Mr. Allingham. I'm sure he must be longing to meet crowds of people after all those years in the wilderness. Go and get ready, Hilary. We've got the Flowers's carriage, and it'll hold us all."

Mrs. Darton usually had her own way. She possessed a cheerful faculty of overriding everybody's objections and wishes, of course entirely for their own

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good; and this case proved no exception, with the result that, almost before he knew it, Allingham found himself meekly following the ladies downstairs, bound for a function of a type which would have aroused his scorn and wrath in the days when he belonged to the Road. Now, it was sufficient if Hilary were going, too.

CHAPTER XVII

IT'S good to be back again in a country where you can get a whisky for fourpence, and you know that the beef you are eating didn't come off a gall-sick bullock." Mac leaned back on the velvet-covered lounge in the hotel bar and surveyed the scene with great appreciation. He was very well dressed and was spending money with great freedom, despite the fact that his five hundred pound legacy had already been diminished by four fifths of its original amount; but then, as he had explained to John Allingham, the family would certainly subscribe for his passage out again, and Sandy Graham had promised to keep his job open for him.

Of course there was always the possibility of a company directorship — his brother was on three boards, and was now able to keep a flat in that neutral zone just west of Harley Street—but the idea did not appeal to Mac; and, anyway, a mere Honorable's price was far below that of a fully fledged peer.

"John Allingham, you're mooney and miserable. You drink your whisky as if you thought it came from Port Elizabeth, and you haven't made a single original remark since I hunted you up this afternoon. A Durban town councilor, who suspected that the minister and deacons of his chapel were shadowing him,

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would be cheerful company compared to you." Mac spoke feelingly.

Allingham laughed. "You haven't given me much chance to talk. . . . Well, what are you doing to-night? Would you come round after dinner and see some old acquaintances of yours, the Cardens? They asked me to bring you."

Mac turned away to hide a grin. He had been expecting something of the sort, and he accepted readily, partly because he had a sincere liking for Hilary, but more from curiosity to see how far matters had gone with John Allingham himself.

It was nearly half past nine when Allingham limped up the steps of the now familiar house. The parlor maid received him with a demure smile. Down in the basement, where the floors were of stone, and the light came slantwise from just above the grimy pavements, they had long since settled Miss Hilary's future, and there was not one of the servants who did not envy her. Allingham was open-handed, and that goes far with the wearers of cap and apron; but he also had what was much more important, that instinctive chivalry which comes only to the man who has lived so long away from the women of his own color that the sense of class distinctions has almost disappeared before the sense of sex. He always raised his hat when the girl opened the door, and, being very human and prone to sentiment, she thought more of that than of the half crowns he had slipped into her hand.

The drawing-room was very full when Allingham and Mac entered. Mrs. Darton had lately discovered

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that a newly risen dramatic poet was an old acquaintance of hers, and she had forthwith invited him to dinner at her father's house, her own flat being too small for the purpose. Incidentally, she had also bidden the pick of her associates to come in after dinner, and Mac raised his eyebrows as he summed them up mentally. He thought of what Father Martin and Daddy Hurst and all Allingham's other old friends would think of these new acquaintances.

Hilary, on her part, came forward quickly to meet them. There was no doubt about the warmth of her welcome to Mac, and yet, as the ex-barman saw at a glance, there was some subtle difference in the greeting she extended to Allingham. He was the one man, and she was only glad to see his friend because it had pleased Allingham to bring him. Mr. Carden was scarcely less cordial in his manner, while even Mrs. Darton had a smile to spare. Archæology would fare badly but for the subscriptions of the aristocracy; consequently, even the younger brother of an Irish peer was not a negligible factor.

The other guests regarded the newcomers rather doubtfully. Allingham, entirely wrapped up in Hilary, did not seem to notice the fact; but Mac saw it at once, and smiled to himself as he took a vacant chair next to Mrs. Darton's. Besides the dramatic poet, who was eyeing Hilary keenly and talking with rather unnecessary energy, there was a young architect whose forthcoming work on the moldings of Twelfth-Century church windows was confidently expected to become a veritable classic. True, so far no publisher had been

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found ready to bring it out at his own risk, but a fund had been started, and there was every reason to hope that, after the secretarial expenses, cost of printing appeals, and so on, had been met, there would be more than enough left to publish the work. Meanwhile, the talented young author had been provided with a billet on the "Archæological Survey of the Counties of England," where he was working in Mr. Carden's own editorial room.

Then there was a youngster newly up from Cambridge, who was acting as Mr. Darton's secretary, as well as two experts on manorial descents; and a reviewer who would certainly do great things when the crude materialists of Fleet Street would give him space in their papers—he did not worry about payment, being entirely out of sympathy with those mere journalists who looked upon a column as so much toward their quarter's rent, or the education of their children; his whole soul was in his art, and yet, somehow, editors were snappy with him, and gave the work to men who turned up for their checks on Friday with an unfailing regularity, which showed the respective values they placed on modern literature and the coin of the realm.

Mac was the person from Africa. He divined that at once, and delighted in the idea. He had been among crude realities so long that it was infinitely refreshing to meet people who lived in a wholly artificial world.

"Have you, too, come back for good, Mr. Mac-Murdo?" Mrs. Darton asked.

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Mac shook his head. "No such luck. My work is waiting for me out there."

The dramatic poet smiled indulgently. "The call of the veld, I suppose? You hear the swish of the stock whip and the rumbling of the ox carts, even in London?"

Mac looked a little doubtful. "We don't have stock whips in Africa. The only one I ever saw was in a circus when I was a kid, and even then it struck me as a pretty futile sort of affair. You want to see John Allingham using the real thing, a wagon whip with a fifteen foot stick and a thirty foot lash. But I was not on the Road, you know," and he turned to Mrs. Darton, as though expecting Hilary had told her.

But the lady only smiled again. She was not paying much attention, her mind being occupied with the problem of whether Mac's brother could be induced to subscribe, through her husband, to the "Archæological Survey." The commission was by no means a negligible factor. "You were not on the Road?" she repeated, more or less mechanically. "No? What was your part in the development of the country?"

"I was bar-man at the Thatched House," Mac answered promptly.

Mrs. Darton gasped and her face grew hard. "Bar-man, Mr. MacMurdo! What do you mean?"

The author of the classic work on moldings sniffed and turned away. He was not a teetotaler, rightly considering labels to be vulgar; but he abhorred what

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he vaguely termed alcoholism. The reviewer frowned; he thought the guest's pleasantries were being carried too far. But Mac was unabashed, and, seeing Mr. Carden passing, he beckoned to him. "Mr. Carden, I see I have shocked Mrs. Darton; you can tell her I was a good bar-man, can't you?"

The host tried to smile. "Really, Mr. MacMurdo, I can't say I had sufficient experience of your capacity in that direction. Over here, you know, we forget that sort of thing."

Mac understood instantly, and, apparently without the slightest effort, switched the conversation on to another topic, but when, at last, he found himself alone for a moment, he looked at Allingham with troubled eyes. "They're mid-Victorian, almost early Victorian, and they'll never understand him, not in the creation of cats. I only hope she's different from the others," he muttered.

It was nearly midnight when they left. Mac, himself, was hopelessly bored. Never before had he felt so utterly out of sympathy with the company in general. His only consolation was in trying to imagine what Molly Rainer and old Kerridge would have said or thought under the circumstances. He was a public-school man, and, in practical things, he knew as much, or more, than any of them, but during his sojourn in the wilderness he had got out of touch of contemporary literature, or what passes as such, and most of the allusions he heard conveyed but little to him. For an hour before they took their leave, he had lost sight of Allingham, but as soon as they were out-

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side something in the transport rider's manner told him what had occurred.

"Can I congratulate you, Jack?" he asked.

Allingham nodded. "Thanks. You can. We fixed it up to-night."

They were passing a bar at the time, and Mac turned toward the saloon entrance. "We must have a drink on the strength of it, even if I wasn't dry enough already from those beggars' conversation."

Allingham demurred a moment. "I don't know," he began.

The other man took his arm. "Take my advice, Jack. I'm as old as you, and I'm not in love, therefore I'm wiser. Don't try and strain things too far. You've left the Road, but the Road's still there, just as it was," and he led him inside.

As they came out again at closing time a hansom cab passed. There was a man inside in evening dress, and they recognized him simultaneously. It was Cuthbert Lestrangle.

CHAPTER XVIII

ALLINGHAM chafed at the idea of a long engagement. Both Hilary and he were perfectly sure of their feelings, and he could see no reason for delay. He had rather vague hopes of getting some sort of occupation, although this was by no means essential from a financial standpoint; they could be very comfortable on his income. Somewhat to his surprise, he found a supporter in Mr. Carden, who was obviously satisfied with his daughter's prospects, and disinclined to run counter to the wishes of his future son-in-law. Hilary, too, was willing, and the only opposition came from Mrs. Carden, who, for once, endeavored to assert herself, and talked of two years, or, at the very least, a year, as the limit prescribed by recognized conventions. For a little while, she held out with the tenacity of a weak woman, then suddenly her opposition collapsed, and she consented to Allingham's proposed six months.

Mac had arranged to stay over in order to be best man. His legacy was finished, but, as he put it, a maternal aunt had come down with a grant in aid, and he had been enabled to share some rooms in town with Allingham. He had written out to Sandy Graham, explaining the circumstances, and the town of Fort Alexandra had risen to the occasion and sent him a

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draft wherewith to buy a wedding present on its behalf. Naturally, it had fallen to Father Martin to write the letter of congratulation, which Allingham had gone through very carefully twice, then passed without a word to Mac, who read it, while the transport rider himself got up and stared out of the window at the cabs in the street below.

"We are very glad," the Father wrote, "and, as I need hardly say, we wish you every sort of happiness. We don't feel we are saying good-by to you, because we know we shall see both you and your wife here again. You'll find a different Fort Alexandra then, though. Things are beginning to buck up at last. There's a new building going up opposite Leary's store for Sebag & Co., of Buluwayo, and, as you know, those people would not come here unless they were certain of their cent. per cent. Then some one Daddy Hurst knows is thinking of putting up a five-stamp mill on the 'Johnny Walker,' Kerridge's property, or at least daddy thinks he will; and already there is a scheme to run a railway through to here as soon as the main line has reached Salisbury. So we are getting on. . . . When the boom comes, this is going to be the first town in the country. . . . The niggers' crops are good, and they say there are more guinea fowl than ever among the kopjes. Weldon saw a troop of sable antelope the other day, just by the old camp where you were quarantined when your oxen had lung sickness. He shot two, though it is the close season. Not bad for a magistrate, eh? . . . Transport rates are high, and the grass is very good still.

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. . . Your old driver, Swartboy, was in here last week. He has managed to get together a span of young native oxen, and is riding grain for me. . . .”

At the end there was a postscript. “Molly has just rushed in to ask me to send her love to Miss Carden, and to tell you that she was right, after all.”

Mac put the letter down, glanced at Allingham's back, then went on with his breakfast. He did not speak. He knew that Allingham's spirit was six thousand miles away, on the old Road, the great Road, the Road which always went on; that the whistle of the trains in the terminus near by had, somehow, become the hoarse shouts of the drivers; that the rattle of the cabs was now the creaking of the big buck wagons; that there were no houses and chimney pots opposite—only a vast stretch of yellow-brown grass with a blue line of kopjes in the distance, and a steinbuck bounding away in front of the oxen. A big lump rose in his throat, because he could go back to it and Allingham could not, and often during the last few weeks as he had watched Hilary's quiet, restrained manner, her seeming lack of enthusiasm, he had thought that he was luckier than his friend.

At last, Allingham turned round, picked up Father Martin's letter, and put it into his pocket. “What is our programme for this morning?” he asked very quietly. “After lunch, Hilary and I are going down to look at those houses in Essex.” Then he went on to talk of their plans, but he made no reference to Father Martin or the Road.

That afternoon, Hilary and Allingham made a tour

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of the parish of Cottington, under the personal guidance of Mr. Fisher, the local house and estate agent, whose note paper not only proclaimed his capabilities in the matters of drains, cesspools, and surveys, but also called attention to the fact that he was representative for a moderately solvent insurance company, and would, when occasion offered, be delighted to act as auctioneer and valuer, and collect rents.

Allingham was strongly averse to living in town. He detested the idea of having a house in a row, of being known by a number. He wanted a place of his own, where no one could look into his windows, and no one's children play on his doorstep. Both Mrs. Carden and Mrs. Darton had shaken their heads over the proposal. They were essentially town bred, and to them the country suggested stagnation and dullness; none of their old family friends would ever go out to see the newly married pair; but in this, as in most things, Hilary agreed with Allingham. She knew nothing of the country, but she was ready to go anywhere he wished in England. Possibly, too, she understood something of the other feeling, which, though he never expressed it, was always in the back of his mind, the desire not to be unduly near her own people.

They had set twenty-five miles as the limit of the distance they would go from town; but, even with that amount of latitude, house hunting had proved a very disappointing task. Mrs. Carden had insisted on their trying the Surrey side first—or rather Mrs. Darton had inspired her mother to insist, urging the un-

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doubted respectability of the southern districts—but they had seen nothing which appealed to them.

“The men all suggest the city, somehow,” Allingham had remarked as they sat in one of the draughty stations, waiting for the long over-due train which was to jolt them back to town. “I feel any of them could tell us the price of ‘Marvel’ shares, while the women look as if they never sat down in their own houses.”

Hilary had smiled faintly. Occasionally she found it a little difficult to follow the drift of her fiancé’s ideas, and, in this case, both the men and women had struck her as being well-dressed, normal people.

Mrs. Darton had protested vehemently at the idea of Essex. “Why, it’s dead, Hilary. Surely you won’t agree to living there? Fred has been in the county lately for the “Archæological Survey,” and came back horribly disappointed. No one seemed interested in the work, and the secretary tells him they have got practically no subscribers. You had better tell John he is mad to suggest it.”

But still, despite Mrs. Darton, Allingham had made an appointment with Mr. Fisher, and they had gone down to Cottington to inspect what that gentleman described as his elegant residential properties.

The agent was a tall, lean man, who usually wore, as a kind of symbol of his calling, a silk hat and a blue-serge suit. His own taste in building was distinctly florid, as was evident from his private residence, which abounded in the unexpected, in the way of pinnacles and turrets and wholly useless excrescences, while on

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the window frames, front door, and gable ends he had used all the colors of the rainbow.

"My own house. Not to let," he explained to his prospective clients, as he drove them past in his pony trap.

A few minutes later the pony stopped, apparently of its own accord, outside an inn, whose sign board announced it to be dedicated to "The Fortune of War."

"A free house," Mr. Fisher announced with a genial wave of his whip.

Hilary raised her eyebrows. "Do you mean they give beer and that sort of thing away?"

Mr. Fisher laughed. "No, madam. I'm afraid not. I mean it isn't tied to any firm of brewers, that the landlord can sell whose beer he likes. No small thing in a village like ours, madam." Then he turned to Allingham. "If you will get out first, sir, we will go inside; and, while we have a little liquid refreshment, I can show you some photographs of my residential properties which are on the wall there. It may save time."

Allingham got down, but Hilary shook her head. She had never been in a public house yet. "I'll wait for you here, Jack. I suppose the pony is not likely to run away, Mr. Fisher?"

The agent gave a little smile. "No, he is often here—on business, you know," he added hastily. "But can't I bring something out for you, Mrs. Allingham, a glass of port, or say, a small lemon?"

Hilary colored at the unexpected title, then shook

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her head. "No, thank you, really not. Don't be very long, Jack."

"These are some of my houses down on what we call the Homestead Estate. Six rooms, bath, hot and cold, every modern convenience, and water laid on from the company's main. Gas we expect shortly, very shortly."

Allingham looked at the photos rather doubtfully. Even to his lay mind it was obvious that these houses were the work of the same genius who had designed Mr. Fisher's own residence, and he felt a suspicion that the camera had been merciful.

"Are these on high ground?" he asked. "The Fortune of War" itself was halfway up the rise, on the top of which the village proper could be seen clustering round the little wooden steepled church.

Mr. Fisher rubbed his chin. "Well, I can't say they're exactly on high ground, no, not exactly, but the position is extremely beautiful. You can see them from this window," and he pointed to some roofs showing behind a rather ragged line of trees on the edge of that great bare plain which stretches along the northern bank of the Lower Thames.

"Those would never do." Allingham spoke decisively, with a touch of annoyance. Mr. Fisher's letter had led him to expect something very different.

The agent was unabashed. "Let me drive you down there before you decide. There is bath, hot and cold, and easy terms can be arranged, besides gas very shortly. No? . . . Any other houses, sir? Plenty, both in this parish and the adjoining one. No hot and

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cold, though. You want something on the hill? Well, let me think." He consulted a notebook. "Yes, there's 'Willans,' on the very top of the rise, at the farther end of the village, eight rooms, kitchen, wash house, and garden."

Hilary glanced at Allingham a little severely as he came out. It seemed to her that he had been an unnecessarily long time in the inn. Something about the place had brought back to her memory a glimpse she had once obtained through an open door at the Thatched House of a tall, sunburned man sitting on a bar with a sjambok dangling from his right wrist.

The village was apparently asleep when the pony broke into a trot at the top of the rise; but, somehow, it was awake before they had gone many yards down its little main street. Grimy curtains were pulled aside in the cottages; the owners of the little shops came to their doorways; while even the vicar, who was just entering a wooden hovel up one of the alleys, paused a moment to look.

"They all know my pony's bell," Mr. Fisher explained with a certain degree of pride. "I was born here, you see." He raised his hat to the vicar. "Our clergyman, an indefatigable worker." He stumbled a little over the adjective. "This is our other inn, not a free house, madam." He smiled at Hilary, then, as the pony showed an obvious inclination to stop outside the place, he gave it a touch with his whip.

The village proper ended rather abruptly in a red-brick schoolhouse, but a hundred yards farther on the ground sloped away very quickly, and right on the

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crest, a little back from the road, was a rather nice specimen of a small Georgian house.

"That is 'Willans,'" Mr. Fisher said.

Hilary and Allingham exchanged glances. It fulfilled, outwardly at least, the ideal which they had discussed a score of times lately—there was the perfectly smooth lawn, the old garden with its twisted fruit trees, the ivy half covering the front of the house, and, behind all, a clear view of some two miles with no house to mar it, save an old thatched farmstead well away to the right.

An aged caretaker hobbled up and opened the door in response to Mr. Fisher's knock. "I thought it wor you, Mister Edward, ah, I thought it wor you, when I heard them bells."

The interior of the house fully bore out the promise of the exterior, and as they entered the last of the upstairs rooms, Hilary laid her hand on Allingham's arm. "Take it, Jack, dear, do. It's just perfect, and we can furnish it so easily."

Allingham pressed her hand. "If you're satisfied, dear, I am. I suppose the kitchen and scullery and all that sort of thing is in order?" He did not know anything about the matter himself; and, as a matter of fact, Hilary's domestic experience had been confined to the ordering of dinner at home, but she answered cheerfully:

"Oh, I'm sure I can manage. Of course one hasn't the conveniences, but still— Isn't the view lovely, Jack, dear? And they call this a flat country! These rooms will be simply perfect for the sort of

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furniture I want. I always felt I never could be at home in one of those new jerry-built places."

Mr. Fisher was busy with the caretaker, and, perhaps, for that reason, he forgot to point out that the water had to be pumped from a well, there being no company's supply in the village; while the kitchen range belonged to a bygone age.

Hilary went back to have another look at the reception rooms and to make mental plans, while Allingham strolled down the garden. When the girl rejoined him ten minutes later, he was standing by the lower gate, staring at some oxen in a field beyond. They were red Devons, and therefore very different from those ungainly monstrosities the ordinary farmer rears. Allingham counted them. There were just sixteen, a full span. He never heard Hilary's footsteps behind him, never knew she was there until she touched his arm. He had been back on the Road.

"I was watching the cattle," he said apologetically.

But she did not even glance at them. "Jack, dear, you must take this house. It is exactly the thing, and the agent says there are very nice people round here."

Allingham gave one more look at the oxen, then he drew her arm into his very tenderly. "I will take it, provided the agreement is all right. I rather like the village, as a whole."

The vicar had finished his visit at the cottage, and was walking slowly homeward as Mr. Fisher's trap jingled past. He was an old bachelor, but he sighed enviously as he noticed the pair in the trap. "A good-looking couple," he muttered.

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"Then you will send all further particulars on, Mr. Fisher?" Allingham said as they parted at the station. "By the way, who was the last tenant?"

The agent stroked his chin. "A Mr. Forrester, a very nice gentleman; but he went in for Stock Exchange transactions and lost very heavily. Let me see, what was the name of the mine he came to grief over? Ah, I know, the 'Marvel.'"

Allingham turned away so that Hilary could not see the look in his eyes.

CHAPTER XIX

THE Carden family, as a whole, objected to the idea of the house at Cottington. No one they knew had ever lived in such a dull village, nearly a mile from the railway station and a full hour from London. But Hilary was quietly determined, and finally Allingham took it on a five years' agreement. As he read over the document prior to signing it, a wholly involuntary shiver ran through him. Five years certain, in one place! He sat for a full minute twisting the pen in his fingers and staring at the fire. Then, as he thought of Hilary, his face changed suddenly, and he dipped his nib in the ink and scrawled his name at the foot of the paper.

"Witness this, Mac," he said.

Mac, who was dozing on the sofa, jumped up and complied. "Now you're a householder, Jack," he said as he added an extra twist to his signature. "And you'll have to go to church, and be summoned for rates which go to keep fat guardians in luxury, and have to pay for the education of other people's children. Five years—what's the longest you've stayed in one place since you went on the Road?"

"Four weeks," Allingham answered. "That is, with the exception of the time I was laid up. I was stuck in Buluwayo four weeks once waiting for two

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wagons I had bought. Heavens, wasn't I bored!" He broke off suddenly and colored as the force of what he was saying came home to him.

But Mac merely smiled and yawned. "Let's go round to the club," he said. "You're off duty for another hour or two, aren't you?"

As they entered the club smoking room, Allingham gave a start of surprise, for the only other occupant was Cuthbert Lestrangle, who was standing by the fireplace, examining a time-table.

The boss put down the book and came forward at once. "Glad to meet you again, Allingham. How's the leg? Fairly well? You're better than I thought you could ever be when I saw you that time at Fort M'Bendese. How d'you do, MacMurdo? I met your brother last week, and he told me you were in town. But he's too busy in these days to talk much." He smiled as he said it, and Mac grinned responsively.

"His business ability must be a great help to you mining people," he said solemnly. "I know he has managed to raise two loans for me since I came home. I'm not staying long, though. I'm off back as soon as I have seen our friend here safely married."

The boss turned quickly to Allingham, who was leaning against the mantelpiece. "So you've fixed it, after all? I congratulate you." Then he gave a rather angry little sigh. "I hadn't heard, because, though I intended calling on the Cardens when I first came home, I found I was in Mr. Carden's bad books."

Allingham colored. No one had mentioned whom he was going to marry, yet Lestrangle's quick percep-

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tion had told him. Something of his old feeling toward the boss came back, that uneasy sense of antagonism tempered by something nearly akin to fear which he had experienced on the mine. "Mr. Carden was annoyed about the 'Marvel,' I think," he answered. "I don't fancy it was anything very serious."

Lestrangle laughed quietly. "A good many people have been annoyed, and most of them seem to take it very seriously. They blame me because they gambled and lost." One of his sudden flashes of temper swept across his face, but it was past in a moment, and he went on. "I'm sailing again this week, rather against my will. I had a good deal more to do; but I got a cable this morning to say Ingram was dead."

Allingham looked up from the cigar he was cutting. Somehow, the way the announcement was made jarred on him. A few months ago, he, himself, would have spoken in the same casual manner; but now it was different. People died with more solemnity in the Cardens' circle.

"I am sorry to hear that," he answered. "I suppose Mrs. Ingram will come home now?"

"Mrs. Ingram is home," the boss replied. "I have got to go down and tell her this afternoon; in fact, I was just looking up the trains when you came in." But he did not say where she was living, nor did Allingham ask; then he picked up the time-table again, found what he wanted, glanced at his watch, and bade them a hurried good-by. "I can just catch one. . . . Oh, by the way, Allingham, we've got the money for that railway; but I suppose you don't mind now," and

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he was gone, leaving the other vaguely angry and perturbed.

When he mentioned the matter to Hilary, she frowned slightly. "I never quite understood why father was angry. Mr. Lestrangle was always nice to us out there. . . . Did he say where Mrs. Ingram was?"

Allingham shook his head, and the girl dropped the subject. He wished she had said a few words of sympathy for the woman who had been her hostess; but already he had learned that such was not her way. Whatever she might feel, she seldom put her feelings into speech.

The furnishing of the house at Cottington proved a long business, and Allingham's lame leg often ached horribly before he got home in the evenings. Then, too, Hilary did not like him to smoke in the shops, and that was another trial, just as it was to spend a long evening in the Cardens' drawing-room, talking to dull and learned people who were not in the least interested in anyone except themselves; while all the time his mouth was watering for the taste of tobacco smoke. Long before half the household goods had been chosen, he hated the sight of suave shopmen turning over carpets, while the neatly stacked rolls of linoleum behind the carpets and the seemingly endless selection of jugs and basins in the china departments filled him with loathing.

Hilary wanted antique furniture, and he gladly agreed with her taste, which was really excellent. On the other hand, however, he found that, only at the

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risk of something very like a quarrel, could they purchase from the dealers they had visited. Mrs. Darton always knew of something better, which could be purchased through a friend of hers. When this means failed, one of the staff of the "Archæological Survey" had already been instructed to use his special knowledge to find the exact thing required, and, of course, it would be impossible to offend his dignity by declining his offices. He knew nothing about the price, being above sordid considerations of that kind, but he would, and, as a matter of fact, did, see that they were not put off with some faked antique. Allingham had not yet got accustomed to home standards of value—to him a shilling was still the smallest coin of the realm—and, consequently, he made no demur at the prices asked, but he did not like the principle, and hinted so much to Hilary. The girl, however, laughed rather coldly at his objections. They were getting the things they wanted, and it was very kind of Jessie and her friends to take the trouble. Perhaps in her own mind she was a little ashamed; but still, in some subtle way, Allingham was the stranger when her own circle was concerned. She did not realize the fact, nor did he, for they were really in love with one another; but Mac saw it, and sometimes, if the hum of the traffic kept him awake on those nights when Allingham insisted on going home before midnight, he would brood over it, and cast about for plans for saving his friend. As a rule, he had forgotten all about it by the morning, and the before-breakfast whisky and soda, which he and Allingham took together, dispelled any lingering mem-

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ories for the time being ; but, none the less, they would come back, especially after one of those interminable evenings at the Cardens'.

" They talk of bones, and the bally things on the top of church pillars—capitals, don't you call them? —and Browning, and all the gang which is supposed to be clever because no one, not even itself, had the least idea of what it was driving at," he wrote to Father Martin. " If we talked like that in Fort Alexandra, Sandy Graham would insist on our changing our brand of whisky ; but here it is culture, and poor old Jack has to take it at face value. He's pretty lame still, and I don't think he'll ever get across a horse again, or be fit to tramp through the grass after buck, so perhaps it's for the best ; but still it hurts me, because he wasn't meant for bones and capitals and Browning. He still takes his whisky before breakfast and smokes wholesomely, but I know she does not like the idea. We went out to see his new house the other day. The agent is quite a cheerful sort of rogue, who drank largely at our expense, while the local pub., ' The Fortune of War,' is above criticism ; but Allingham got on the subject of cattle with a farmer who was in there, and after we had trudged through a vast amount of mud to have a look at his red Devons, it was too late to see the house. . . . I have an idea that Carden père is broke, and that the marriage, which comes off next week, will be a relief to the family. . . ."

Two mails later he wrote again : " Well, it is all over, and Jack is safely married by two clerical rela-

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tives of the Cardens. I am sending Molly one of the ladies' papers, which contains an account of it; perhaps she will show it to you. . . . I know Jack did not want a fuss made—what decent man would?—but naturally they would not hear of that. The bride looked very happy and rather pretty, and her family was there in full force, together with all the bone and capital and Browning people, who seemed to enjoy the breakfast. . . . I saw their house, and it is certainly an improvement on Jack's old wagon tent with the red paint your boy spilled down the side. I hope they won't be bored there. It is a pity he has not got something to do, just to occupy his time. He has been too active a man to do nothing. I shall see you all again before long now. I am not sorry to be leaving; it is horribly dull since Jack has gone, and there are very few fellows I care about in town. I see the 'Marvel' returns are down to nine pennyweights now. The mine can't even cover expenses at that. . . . One more thing—if any of you write to Allingham again, don't mention the Transport Road."

CHAPTER XX

MRS. DARTON was perfectly right when she described Cottington village as dull and grubby. For once, she expressed things exactly, without a hint of exaggeration. The cottages were a perennial source of diphtheria to their luckless inhabitants, and of sorrow to the vicar, who had once gone so far as to draw the attention of one of the Radical papers to them, secretly, of course. The result had been a scathing denunciation a column in length, which led, in turn, to a stormy meeting of the local council; but, with that, the matter had ended. The landlord, a retired butcher belonging to the neighborhood, was also a councilor, and more than one of his colleagues possessed similar cottages. Consequently, it almost became a question of privilege; and so the children of the unfortunate laborers, who could not possibly afford to look for work elsewhere, continued to die at a wholly abnormal rate, while the councilor-butcher was able to endow an independent chapel, named after himself, having come to the conclusion that salvation was not to be found under the guidance of a vicar who declared bluntly that a healthy soul could not be expected in a diseased body.

Besides the cottages, there were three or four shops of the huckster variety, which picked up a bare living somewhere or other; though on many a night their

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owners went to bed hungry, after casting longing glances at the poor little stacks of provisions which they dared not broach for themselves. The main portion of the trade went, however, to Messrs. Job Hobbs and Sons, who were alike grocers, butchers, and drapers, having built up their business in little more than a generation by a combination of good luck and rapacity. Had the Food and Drugs Act been introduced a little earlier, the sea beach would have been richer in sand, and much dust which had been swept out of the holds of tea ships might have gone overboard, instead of into nice lead paper packages. Mr. Brankam, the present owner—the only surviving Hobbs was a local preacher, a second cousin of the late Job—denounced the act vigorously, as an infringement of the liberty of the subject, or rather of the grocer; but still, despite its hardship, he managed to make a considerable income, the majority of the cottagers being afraid to deal elsewhere, owing to the friendship known to exist between their landlord and the shopkeeper.

A nice Queen Anne house at the farther end of the village was occupied by a young and energetic doctor, whose rule of payment in advance was more honored in the breach than in the observance; while almost opposite "The Fortune of War" two prim old maiden ladies shared a prim old house.

The Allinghams had been settled in their new home a fortnight when Mrs. Darton paid her first visit. She had not seen the house before, and Hilary was awaiting her with a little trepidation. In spite of her new dignity as a married woman, some of the old feeling

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remained. She had deferred to this elder sister too long to recover her independence in a few weeks.

"I know Jessie will criticise everything; but you'll have to back me up, won't you, Jack?" she said at breakfast.

Allingham leaned forward and kissed her hair very lovingly. "Of course I will, dear. So long as I'm satisfied, it doesn't matter to her."

"Are you quite satisfied?" she asked with a smile. For answer he kissed her again, this time on the lips.

Mrs. Darton arrived in the station conveyance, which, for want of a really suitable word, was known locally as "Jones's Fly." She had left her train vague, otherwise Allingham would have met her with the more presentable vehicle belonging to "The Fortune of War." He, himself, was going to buy Hilary a pony and trap; but, so far, he had not found what he wanted.

"Send it away, John," Mrs. Darton commanded as she got out of the fly. "I would sooner walk back than suffer that again. I wonder does that driver know that there are at least ten moldy cigarette ends on the floor, and the remains of a hair net hanging on the catch at the top?" Then she went indoors, leaving her brother-in-law to settle with the abashed Jones. Allingham gave the man an extra shilling. He had been out of England too long not to have a scrupulous regard for the feelings of every fellow white man.

Hilary's fears proved correct. Mrs. Darton had come prepared to criticise, and judging everything by

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the standard of her own very modern flat, by lunch time she had found much which called for comment.

"I cannot understand how you can be content with that terrible little scullery, or how anyone can cook with such a range. My dear Hilary, it's so out of date that I shall tell Fred to send one of his staff down to photograph it for the 'Archæological Survey.' . . . And no water laid on, only that pump from a well, which is sure to be full of crawly things and microbes."

"We boil everything," Hilary murmured apologetically.

Mrs. Darton sniffed, and sipped her claret. "I shouldn't fancy it, even then. It's fortunate you can afford two servants; but you'll find them a great nuisance in a village; they'll be getting married, or something. Then, when, as I suppose——"

Allingham, who had been fidgeting impatiently with his bread, had an idea what was coming, and cut it short by a question as to her own servants. He did not relish the somewhat plain speech in which Mrs. Darton, despite her culture and respect for the proprieties, was apt to indulge.

Mrs. Darton took the hint. She was inclined to scoff at Allingham's intellectual attainments when in her own circle—he was still the "Carter-Paterson person" to the staff of the "Archæological Survey," some of whom had formerly cast longing glances at Hilary, while the others wisely applauded all the clever sayings of the assistant editor's wife—but, none the less, she was a little afraid of him face to face; while there might be circumstances under which a brother-in-law

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with capital would be a convenient family asset. So she dropped the subject of the house and those other possibilities on which she had been about to dwell, and began to talk of the latest books she had read.

Hilary recovered her good temper at once. She was genuinely fond of reading, and she lived in hopes of infecting her husband with the same spirit. Hitherto, she had not attempted the task; consequently, during this first month of married life she had been in an intellectual wilderness, except for glimpses of reviews and publishers' advertisements in the papers, neither of which she had really found time to study. Now, however, she listened with avidity to her sister, and before lunch was over she had jotted down the names of a dozen books, mostly of a heavy type, which she intended to get from the library in town.

Allingham said nothing. It was the first time since their marriage that he had been forced to take the second place, and he did not relish the situation. He was a well-educated, if not a well-read, man. When he had first gone to Africa he had been rather a keen student; but the Road had brought him face to face with the grimmer realities of life, and he had abandoned problems for practice. Now, as he listened to his wife and Mrs. Darton, he chafed inwardly at his own inability to join in the conversation. It was not only that he had got hopelessly behindhand as regarded the latest thought, that half the men whom they seemed to look upon as famous were wholly unknown to him, even by name; it was more than this, for he was bitterly aware that the fever and the restlessness of his

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life on the Road, but especially the fever, had deprived him, if not of his mental activity, at least of his powers of application. He could not wade through a book which needed careful reading—even a novel he skipped if it showed the slightest tendency toward prosiness; and yet, all the time, he knew in his own mind that he was the equal, if not the superior, of those he met at the Cardens', so far as the things which count were concerned. Their erudition had not taught them to understand the wants of humanity; their membership of learned societies had not given them the grit to go on with a losing fight. He was the better man, and yet in their company he felt shy and ill at ease; just as now he was awkward before his own wife and sister-in-law.

The vicar was the first of the neighborhood to call; then, on the strength of his report, the two Misses Tucker, from the prim house opposite "The Fortune of War," drove up in state. They were old enough to be resigned to their spinsterhood, yet still young enough at heart to feel a sentimental interest in newly married couples. They took to the Allinghams at once.

"He is a very good-looking man and a perfect gentleman," Miss Clara, the elder, said as their fat pony jogged them homeward.

Miss Beryl sighed. "And she is very pretty. I should say they were a most happy couple. The house is nicely furnished. Whose taste, I wonder?"

"Her's," answered her sister decisively. "I understand he has been in Africa many years," she added with unconscious irony.

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There were not many other callers; in fact, the number of what Mrs. Darton described as civilized people was extremely small. The local magnate, a rather pompous man of middle age, made Allingham's acquaintance at the vicar's, and invited him to come across to the Hall for a day's shooting. Jack accepted gladly. He was not bored, he told himself; but by that time they had been married three months, and, occasionally, the days dragged a little. Often he wished he could find some occupation; but there seemed little chance of that. He was totally unfitted for any sort of sedentary life; while, by taking the house at Cottington, he had tied himself down to one district. Several of the neighboring farmers would have welcomed him as a partner, but he had an instinctive distrust of agriculture, and, as for the local ideas of cattle-raising, these were a continual source of wonder to him. Even the custom of the country as understood in Africa was comparatively harmless in its effects by comparison with the corresponding fetich at home.

The day he went over to the squire's, Hilary decided to pay some visits in town. "I don't suppose I shall get down before that eight o'clock train, dear," she said. "So don't wait dinner for me. And, Jack, do be careful not to try too much and strain your leg. Promise, won't you?"

The head keeper sniffed a little doubtfully when he saw Allingham's old, well-tried shotgun; most of the gentlemen who came down had weapons very different from that, and he tried to resign himself to the pros-

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pect of a small tip. Allingham, on his part, was nervous. He had never fired a shot in England, and the whole conditions, the half-tame birds, the beaters, the proximity of the other guns, were strange to him, and he shot very badly. At the end of the day, the keeper was covertly insulting, and his host cold. They did not know that this man, whose marksmanship they despised, had been reckoned one of the finest big-game shots between the Crocodile River and the Line, and, even if they had been told, probably they would still have judged him by their own artificial standard.

Allingham understood their attitude and limped home, raging inwardly at himself. He had always despised a shotgun, except as a means of filling the pot; and now he loathed it as the cause of his humiliation. Out there, in Africa, they had known him. Johnny van der Merwe had seen him shoot two lions with two consecutive cartridges, and the story had gone the whole length of the road, because one of those same lions had been charging at Johnny, whose rifle action had jammed. But here, in England, because he was not quick enough at their footling little pheasants, they jeered at him.

He wished Hilary were at home. He wanted her sympathy, and yet he was half afraid she would not understand. He changed his mud-stained clothes, put his gun away in a corner of his dressing room, out of his own sight; then suddenly decided to go down to the station to meet his wife. There was a full hour and a half before the train would be in, but still he felt restless and miserable alone.

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On his way down from the village he had to pass "The Fortune of War." He had not been in there since that last visit with Mac; but now he paused a little irresolutely, then entered. He had ample time, too much in fact, and there would be some one to talk to in the inn, just as there had always been in the Thatched House.

"You're quite a stranger, sir," Mrs. Pike, the landlady, said, as she brought him a whisky. "I hoped we should have seen more of you. Several of the farmers who come here have said they would like to meet you and hear about those bullocks in foreign parts. You remember you were telling Mr. Barton, from the manor farm, about them."

Allingham laughed. "I've done with cattle now, Mrs. Pike, and am forgetting all about them." But five minutes later he was talking almost eagerly to two farmers who had dropped in on their way home from market.

They were much better educated, and far more intelligent than Johnny van der Merwe or any of his other old friends of the road had been, and they were keenly interested in what he had to tell them; consequently, when he looked at his watch he realized, with a touch of shame, that he would now be too late to meet Hilary at the station. All he could do would be to hurry back so as to arrive home before her.

Hilary had been disappointed at not seeing him on the platform. It was the first time he had failed to come down to meet her, but she said nothing about it, assuming he was tired; and he volunteered no expla-

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nation. Somehow, everything had been wrong that day.

His wife was very full of the people she had visited, and it was not till they sat down to their belated dinner that she asked him about his day's shooting.

"I'm afraid I did not shine," he answered with a rueful smile. "I don't expect another invitation."

Hilary frowned a little. The people at the Hall filled a large place in her social horizon, and she had been very pleased at this recognition of her husband. "What do you mean, Jack? Surely you can shoot?"

He shook his head. "I did very badly to-day. I'm not used to their English ways of shooting, although, if I could take them out with me on the veld, I dare say—" He left the sentence unfinished, and stared into his wineglass.

Mrs. Allingham sighed; it was disappointing he should fail on what ought to be his own ground. She wanted so much to be proud of him and to prove to others that her pride was legitimate.

He seemed to have no more to say, so she changed the subject. "I saw father for a minute. He wants to come down and see you to-morrow on some matter of business."

Allingham, who had been longing for some word of sympathy and understanding, looked up in surprise.

"I wonder what it is? You've no idea, I suppose? Well, we shall be in all day, shan't we?"

"I told him so, of course," Hilary answered. Then she got up and departed for the drawing-room, carrying a couple of new library books with her.

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Allingham helped himself to another glass of port, and lighted a cigarette, but threw it away a moment later and followed his wife.

"Come into the smoking room, dear. I hate this room when we're alone, and I know you don't like me to smoke in it. I expect you're really too tired to read to-night."

Hilary put her book down reluctantly, and did as he asked; but she had very little to say, and it was not long before she went up to bed. When Allingham followed her, he found she had been crying.

"I think you're overtired to-night, sweetheart," he said.

For answer she threw her arms round his neck and kissed him passionately, as though in her kisses she wanted to forget something.

Mr. Carden arrived in time for lunch on the following day. Allingham saw at a glance that he was nervous and ill at ease; consequently, he was not altogether surprised when, after Hilary had left the room, his father-in-law disclosed the nature of his business.

"As a matter of fact, John, I am embarrassed, temporarily embarrassed, financially. I am most reluctant to come to you, but until my book on the ruins is published, and one or two, ahem, other little things come in, I see no other course. I was led into a most unlucky speculation, decoyed into it, I might say, and it has seriously depleted my capital."

Allingham knocked the ashes out of his pipe a little viciously. Furnishing and similar expenses had come rather heavy, and the hundred pounds for which

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his guest asked probably meant touching his capital, or, at any rate, getting an overdraft; but he was the last man to refuse a loan.

“ Was it over the ‘ Marvel ’ ? ” he asked.

Mr. Carden nodded. “ I bought on the very same day that you sold. Mr. Lestrangle impressed me so with the richness of the mine that I very unwisely went into a business I did not understand. I consider he defrauded me.”

His son-in-law looked up quickly. “ Did he advise you to buy ? ” he asked with a bluntness which startled the visitor.

“ Well, no, not exactly. In fact, I never mentioned my intention to him. But he led me, distinctly led me on.”

It was snowing a little outside, the first snow Allingham had seen for many years, but though he was staring out of the window he did not see it. What he did see was a vastly ugly galvanized-iron shanty in which a mill was grinding out its warning: “ Eight-pennyweights-to-the-ton and not-a-penny-weight-more.”

Why had no one save Mrs. Ingram and himself been able to hear the message?

CHAPTER XXI

THE Allinghams had been married about a year when the Boer War broke out. Looking back on the twelve months, Hilary could count up very few definite events. They had been very happy, she told herself; and yet, somehow, she was not quite satisfied. She had hoped, more or less vaguely, that her husband would make his mark in some way; but now the prospect seemed more remote than ever. He still had no occupation, and, gradually, he seemed to be losing the desire for any. She sometimes wondered how he got through the days. She, herself, had her household duties, her calls, both locally and in town, and her books; but her husband seemed to do nothing except read the paper, smoke, and go for long walks. Sometimes he went to town with her, but she knew that there was very little in common between him and the majority of her friends, and already it had become an understood thing that he should go to his club, and meet her at the station when she was ready to go home. He received but few letters from Africa, for which she was thankful; yet she knew that he was constantly thinking of the land of heat and dust and drought, and in her own heart she was fiercely jealous. What was even worse, she unconsciously showed her jealousy, and gradually Allingham ceased to speak of

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the veld or the Road when she was present. The greater part of his past, the part which really counted, was never mentioned between them. In the same way, Hilary had ceased to mention her books; she believed he was not interested in them, and so kept that side of her life for her friends in town. Mrs. Darton had resumed much of her old ascendancy, and, even against her will, the younger sister was influenced by everything she said. A remark of Jessie's, no matter how superficial, had a way of remaining fixed in her memory; and Mrs. Darton did not like John Allingham. Quite unjustly, she suspected him of knowing that the last hundred Mr. Carden had borrowed, making three hundred in all, had gone to pay some of her bills.

One event, which had occurred some six months after their arrival in Cottington, Hilary did remember with shame and annoyance. It was the only occasion on which she had been really and definitely angry with her husband. Messrs. Job Hobbs & Sons, the local universal providers, had allowed their account to run up to what they considered a large figure, or rather they had made it up to a large figure, by the simple process of giving their imagination full rein; then they had suddenly presented it with a demand for immediate settlement. Allingham, accustomed to a country where you can trust the storekeeper's accounts and the storekeeper can trust his customers, was furious about the matter, and absolutely declined to pay, until he got an amended account. A few days later, to Hilary's intense annoyance, he was served with a county court

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summons. She had begged him to pay it when it first came in, and now his obstinacy had laid them open to this.

Allingham pitched the summons into the fire, and went to see his solicitor, determined to fight. But the lawyer smiled.

"It's not a great amount to you, Mr. Allingham, and by defending you will only run up the costs, and put more money into their pockets. You've no chance. They will produce books to prove it. I've no doubt they've got them ready by now. You must remember this—these tradesmen look on the oath merely as something which gives weight to their lies. To them, the county court is a place where they can perjure themselves publicly and profitably, and so win the applause of their kind."

In the end, Allingham had paid, but Hilary had not forgotten it, and she could never pass the shop without a sense of humiliation, and something akin to resentment against Allingham, whose African ways had allowed these people to insult him.

Allingham's attitude on the Boer question had also troubled Hilary. Her father and sister and all their friends were bitterly anti-Boer; but until war actually broke out, John Allingham had not shared their feeling.

"I know the Boers pretty well," he said. "I had a lot of good friends among them when I was on the Road. Of course, like niggers, the more you educate them, the more dangerous they get; but, like niggers again, they've lots of good points. Then see the crowd

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which is running this agitation—Houndsditch and the Fatherland combined, using the British Lion as a cat's-paw. I don't see why we should worry about the franchise for them. The vast majority of the Uitlanders are employees and would have to vote as they were told. Oh, I know the mining crowd of old."

"Is he a pro-Boer, Hilary?" Mrs. Darton asked sympathetically; then she passed the word round her circle, and from there, in some mysterious way, it went down to Cottington.

The retired butcher who owned the cottages and Mr. Brankam, of Messrs. Job Hobbs & Sons, heard the rumor, and, being on principle opposed to anything which savored of Imperialism, immediately changed their opinion of Allingham, and endeavored to get him into conversation, while the vicar shook his head sorrowfully, and the squire passed him with unseeing eyes.

"The lame little Englander," some one called him, and the name stuck until war was declared. Then, though men could not understand his attitude, they realized that they had been wrong. He had wanted to see the crisis averted; but, when it became inevitable, he was with his country, because it was his country. In a village meeting held to discuss the war, he carried the audience with him. He was no speaker, yet they saw he knew South Africa, and he lashed the butcher and Mr. Brankam with his tongue. Hilary listened in amazement, and glanced with a proud little smile at her vicar, who was sitting next to her.

The old clergyman shook his head. "My dear,

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it's too late for the men who really know to get up and tell us about things. It's the day of the men who don't know."

Hilary knit her brows; she had not the gift of prophecy. When the Cape rebels joined the Boers, Allingham grew fierce and moody, and each cable describing the gentle treatment these freebooters were receiving made him more savage, until those who had once called him pro-Boer shook their heads over his ideas. They failed to see the difference between a belligerent and a murderous insurgent, who had not a single grievance, except that British law enforced the sixth and eighth commandments. Like most of his kind, Allingham would have given no quarter to the rebels, a course which, he argued, would have brought the war to an end within the year.

The vicar, who watched him sympathetically, understood what was in his mind, and tried, without much success, to make Hilary understand. The man was chafing continually at the lameness which kept him from the front. Possibly, had he been sound physically, he would have placed his wife before his country, and have remained quietly at home; as it was, however, the very knowledge that he could not go seemed to make him fiercely anxious to be on the scene of action.

Mrs. Allingham realized that, in the mood he was in then, herself and her feelings hardly entered into his calculations, and the idea hurt her terribly. She had always been restrained, now she began to grow almost cold. She could not sympathize with him, because,

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according to her own point of view, he was absolutely wrong. His place was with her, in a civilized country. Mr. Darton and other married men of her acquaintance never even thought of volunteering; they were quite content to leave that to the men who had no home ties.

As the war dragged on its weary course, Allingham gradually got back into his normal state, or nearly back to it, yet, somehow, Hilary could not feel to him as she had once done. She had dreamed of a husband who would always be a lover, whose one ambition would be to go through life by her side, who would enter into all she did, share everything with her. She was so certain her own ideas and standards were right, that, as a natural consequence, she found much to grieve over in him. His impatient disregard for various social conventions seemed to her almost wicked; these things were sacred in her own family.

It pained her that he should have a whisky-and-soda before breakfast—an appetizer he called it—and that he should smoke in the bathroom. Other men did not do these things, and the servants were bound to talk. In fact, one or two remarks which the elder Miss Tucker let drop showed that the servants had talked, and that Allingham was the subject of comment in the village. At first, her husband had striven hard to get into line with her ideas, and he would have succeeded had they understood one another better; but, after a while, somehow he ceased to try any longer, and, as she said no more, he slipped back into his old ways. True, he did not have his appetizer in the

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house, but, on the excuse of taking the dogs for a stroll, he used to walk down as far as "The Fortune of War" for it, a fact which was duly reported to Hilary by the Misses Tucker. Mrs. Allingham received the information in silence. What could one argue in defense of a husband who frequented the village public house? She knew he always went for these early walks with his hateful old sjambok dangling from his wrist, and with a hot sense of shame, she pictured him sitting in the bar, laughing and joking with the farmers, or even with the laborers.

Allingham longed to talk of Africa. Every paper he picked up brought the old life vividly before him. He could not get away from it. The absurd mistakes the illustrated journals made, the grotesque parodies on oxen inspanned in the equally grotesque Australian fashion, the wagons which would have broken in twain at the first drift, the drivers who looked like Drury Lane supers, the very inaccuracies stirred all the old memories. He wanted to point them out to Hilary, to explain the faults, possibly to make her feel a pride in his own very real knowledge; yet after one or two attempts, he abandoned his efforts. Hilary was cold and unresponsive; all that belonged to the life she wished forgotten. A perfectly uneducated Boer could be as good a transport rider as this husband of hers, who sometimes muttered Dutch words in his sleep, and had more than once jumped up during the night and cried out to Swartboy that there was a lion in the vlei. The Road still formed the background of John

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Allingham's life, and on the Road Hilary Allingham had only been an episode.

On the other hand, the farmers who met in the sanded bar parlor of "The Fortune of War" were interested in trek cattle. Among themselves, they shook their heads gravely over Mr. Allingham's idea of what an ox should be like, a hardy beast which could live on the country and needed no artificial feeding; but, none the less, they realized that he could tell them things they did not know, and, though Hilary would never have believed it, they recognized him as a social superior. He did not lose caste by talking to them over those whiskies which he drank in apparently unlimited quantities without the least evil effect.

The Carden family, as a whole, frowned over John Allingham, and felt sorry for Hilary—that is, when it did not want to borrow money. On those occasions, it would feel a certain condescending liking for this stranger whom it had admitted to the circle; but, as soon as the checks had gone through safely, the transport rider became the Philistine once more, the man who would not, or could not, come into line with real culture. Once, when Allingham had flatly refused to guarantee the costs of the great work on Twelfth Century church-window moldings—the fund raised had gone in secretarial and printing expenses—there had been something approaching a breach between him and the Dartons, or rather between him and the whole tribe of archæologists belonging to the Carden circle; but Hilary had defended him fiercely, and, after all, a soap-and-candle manufacturer had come

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forward to save the situation so far as the book was concerned.

Mr. Carden's book on the ruins had come out and failed. The Boer War had distracted men's attention from the speculative side of the subcontinent, and centered it on the grim realities. No one wanted mining shares, and, consequently, no one cared whether it was King Solomon or the Phœnicians who had worked the gold reefs in bygone days. Just as the "Marvel" had slumped, so the book had slumped; and though Mr. Carden professed, and possibly felt, a perfect contempt for the commercial side of his work, none the less he had to borrow again from his son-in-law. He had cut down his own expenses, as John Allingham knew; but Mrs. Darton had not cut down hers. She was the wife of the assistant editor of the "Archæological Survey of the Counties of England"—she preferred to describe him as a director to her tradespeople—and she spent, or obtained credit, accordingly, with the result that, in the end, Allingham had to pay. The transport rider never made any remark, for fear Hilary should hear about the matter. Whatever the others might be, he knew his wife's standard of honor, and he would have given the Cardens twice as much, sooner than have her know of the loans he had made. In some curious way, he never associated her with her family. Things might not have turned out as well as he had hoped; but still, she was his wife, and therefore absolutely sacred to him.

The "Archæological Survey," now the mainstay of the Cardens and their friends, was not flourishing.

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There was something very nearly akin to hostility between the editorial staff and the directors. The latter, business men who had gone into the thing for the sake of a profit, could not understand the feelings of their employees, who worked only for glory, and yet asked continually for increases of salary. After two years' work, only one out of a hundred and five volumes had appeared. The rest were in preparation, active preparation, Mr. Carden, the editor in chief, explained. Vast amounts of matter were being collected in the Record Office and the British Museum. The forty members of the staff were busy, if not night and day, at any rate most days in the week, and the ultimate result of their work would be a series of incalculable value. The volumes were issued to subscribers only; but, owing perhaps to the war, subscribers were few and far between, and the directors were beginning to complain.

Allingham cared little about the "Survey," although it sometimes struck him that the six hundred a year Mr. Carden drew as editor in chief should suffice for that gentleman's needs; but one day, at his club, the matter was brought before him in an unpleasantly vivid manner, and from that time onward he watched the "Survey's" career with a kind of grim resentment.

A fellow-member brought in a guest, and, after introducing the latter to Allingham, the three sat down to lunch together. By a curious chance, the stranger proved to be the late secretary of the "Survey, Ltd.," and before long he began to talk of the great work, being sore and disappointed.

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"I resigned," he told his host. "I used to dream of a jury of shareholders at the Old Bailey, and a judge who always roared out 'Forty years' imprisonment, guilty, guilty, guilty.' Utter piffle, like most dreams are; but it got on my nerves. I knew the directors were straight enough; but they couldn't see how the staff was swindling them. Pepper, the editor of the Sussex volumes, published a book on the county with a rival firm, using the pick of the information we had spent thousands in collecting; the Essex editor did the same; and so it went on. I wanted to clear out the whole lot; but the directors wouldn't, or couldn't, understand that archæologists are pretty plentiful; in fact, they're a drug in the market. Unless they have a county history or an archæological survey to edit, they have to live by raising subscriptions to dig up somebody's back gardens."

Allingham, who had been rolling bread pellets impatiently, switched the conversation suddenly on to the war, rather to the surprise of the guest, who had a good deal more to say on what was evidently a sore subject; but the transport rider did not care about the stranger's feelings. Indirectly, the matter touched Hilary, his wife, and what touched her touched him. On the other hand, he did not forget what had been said, and, when a chance arose, he mentioned the matter to Hilary, hinting gently that perhaps her father was being put into a false position by the other members of the "Survey" staff. But, to his intense astonishment, she turned on him angrily.

"Of course they do outside work. The 'Survey'

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pays them miserable salaries, and doesn't appreciate them in the least. The directors are mere money grubbers. It's the duty of Fred Darton and the others to make the best use of their special knowledge."

"But the 'Survey' pays them to collect this knowledge, and if they sell it elsewhere—" Allingham began.

Hilary got up impatiently. "Sell it! You are horribly commercial at times, Jack. I suppose you never will understand that there are men to whom money is no consideration, men like my father and my brother-in-law," and she swept out of the room.

Allingham looked after her ruefully. There had been something unpleasantly akin to the commercial in Mr. Carden's requests for loans. Then he lighted a cigarette and limped down to meet a farmer who wanted his opinion on a new bull, and, for the time being, forgot even Hilary.

CHAPTER XXII

ALLINGHAM tore the letter open eagerly, and looked at the signature, just to make sure. "It's from Mac, dear," he said.

Hilary frowned slightly. She had taken to a rather severe style of dress, and it sometimes seemed to Allingham that she had changed in appearance a great deal during the three years of their married life. When they were alone she seldom smiled, and, somehow, he felt that every word he uttered, everything he did, was the subject of her mental criticism. "From Mr. MacMurdo? It is a very long time since you heard from him, John"—even the familiar "Jack" had been gradually dropped in favor of the more formal word invariably used by her own people. In that, as in so many other things, the Carden influence had triumphed. Mac, too, had been known to her by his nickname during the too-brief days of their engagement; now, by giving him his full title, she seemed to imply a kind of subtle reproach.

Allingham sighed, and put the letter into his pocket, to be read later in the smoking room. They had never quarreled; in fact, they had hardly even disagreed; and yet, at times, he found himself longing for a sudden, fierce outburst which would clear the air, and, perhaps, show him whether she still cared.

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Of his own feelings, he had no doubt. She was his wife, and the relationship was a very sacred thing to him; but, beyond that, he still loved her, perhaps more fiercely than before, only he found it increasingly difficult to show it. She went to town now more often than ever, while he stayed at home, and met her in the evening with a pony trap. Not that he had anything to do at home, far from it; but there was less to do in town, and he did not want to meet her friends, or rather Mrs. Darton's friends, for Hilary was entirely under her sister's influence. While she was away, he would spend most of the time down at "The Fortune of War," trying to kill the hours until she came back, a fact of which she was only too well aware, although she misinterpreted the motive. She thought that he was taking advantage of her absence to slip back into his African ways; he never told her, and she never suspected, that he was lost without her, and miserably jealous of those who were taking her away from him.

"I am going to call on Miss Tucker to-day. Will you come with me, John?"

Allingham, who had been wondering what Mac's letter might contain—he wished she had suggested he should read it out to her there and then—looked up and smiled.

"I don't think so, dear. I really am out of place there, and I know they don't quite approve of me."

Hilary sighed and got up from the table. He never went calling with her now. True, he was very kind and thoughtful in little things. Because she was his wife, he never omitted any of those small acts of

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courtesy he would do for another woman. In fact, he was always scrupulous, even when they were alone, which Mr. Darton and several others she knew were not; but those things did not fill the blank in her life. In town, she met men who understood her, especially one man—a man whom the world considered it an honor to know; who was already spoken of as the future laureate, despite the fact that he was barely her own age. If she had only met him before, in time—she looked up at her husband as he held the door open for her, and the expression in his eyes sent a hot wave of shame through her. Suddenly, she wanted to turn back and kiss him, to nestle down to him and cry her eyes out, and then to explain all things, and read that letter through with him. But the door had already closed; and so she went on, dry-eyed.

Allingham went through to his smoking room, dropped into a big easy chair, and took out Mac's letter. But he did not unfold it at once. Instead, he filled his pipe very slowly, lighted it, and then let it go out while he stared into the fire. Mac, and Father Martin, and the Thatched House, and the outspan across the drift, and the guinea fowls calling in the mealie fields, above all the guinea fowls, these and a host of other things, he saw them all—and Mac had been his best man, when he had renounced them all. He straightened himself up suddenly, and opened the letter.

"It's nearly two years since you can have heard from me," Mac wrote, "but, as you will have presumed, I have been down at the front. I won't bore

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you with any details; for, of course, it has been a rotten show all through, especially the kid-glove business with the rebels, although, I am glad to say, we hanged a few, unofficially. Now I am back in Alexandria. The place is much the same. The boom is still expected daily, or, at the very latest, when peace is declared, and Father Martin and Daddy Hurst have all their plans complete. Martell, the police officer, got the sack for embezzling the police pay, and Weldon has been a teetotaler for four months, or says he has. There are eighteen more graves across the spruit, police, traders, and transport riders, including your old friend Johnny van der Merwe, who got a chill after being pulled through blackwater. Poor old Johnny! His spans fetched big prices, especially the black one. The government appointed Father Martin executor, but no one seems to have the least idea who the heirs are. The Father wants to know if you can shed any light on the matter. . . . I met your brother-in-law, young Phil Carden, in Buluwayo. He tells me he has been there nearly two years, in the Surveyor-General's office. . . . You will be surprised to hear that Molly Rainer got married some time back to a fellow called Harford, who is now on the 'Marvel,' which has just been restarted, after being closed down pretty well since the war began. Molly is there with him. I don't know how the marriage has turned out, but we all miss her very much. I wish she had kept clear of the mining crowd, as she was a dear little girl. . . . I am just going down to the Lundi River to try and get some N'Yala bushbuck—a trader tells me there are

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plenty in some thick scrub about sixty miles down from the drift on the old Pioneers' Road, and there are Lichtenstein hartebeeste, too. I hope to buy some cattle from the niggers, and so cover expenses. . . . I came across Cuthbert Lestrangle a few weeks back. They hate him more than ever up here and he seems to trouble about it as little as ever. I wonder some one he had done down, like old Kerridge, does not put a bullet through him. There are several who would, if they got the chance. He was quite civil to me—I suppose it was one of his good days—and he asked after you. I think I have heard you mention a Mrs. Ingram. Well, Lestrangle says she is taking a house in your part, one of those homesteads our bibulous friend, the agent, was so eloquent about. Lestrangle asked me to tell you, as Mrs. Allingham might be able to introduce her to people. Are there any little Allinghams yet? If so, I presume you have made me godfather by proxy. I will endow them handsomely—when the boom comes. Why don't Mrs. Allingham and yourself come out for a trip when the war is over, which won't be long now."

John Allingham folded the letter up carefully, then, as he put it back into his pocket, he gave something curiously like a sob. If only he could write and tell Mac that he was a godfather by proxy. A little Allingham—his child and Hilary's! For a full hour he sat very still, his hand over his eyes, then, suddenly, he got up and went to look for his wife.

Hilary had finished her household duties for the morning, and was sitting in the cheerful little dining

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room, glancing through a new book which Mr. St. John, the future laureate, had sent down to her. She had not told her husband from whom it had come, nor had he asked. He cared about nothing which really concerned her life, or at least she had been thinking so, as she had sat by the window, turning over the leaves with unseeing eyes.

"Would you like to read Mac's letter, dear?" Allingham spoke with unusual gentleness, but, somehow, for once, Hilary failed to catch the note.

She glanced at the letter he held out, but made no attempt to take it. "What a length, and what horrible writing! Is there anything very special in it, John? Can't you tell me the news?"

"No, there's nothing special." All the life had gone out of John Allingham's voice. "The boom hasn't come yet; Molly Rainer is married; and Mrs. Ingram is taking, or has taken, one of the homesteads here. Isn't it curious? I think I will go down this afternoon and ask Fisher about it."

Mrs. Allingham bit her lip. He had refused to pay a call with her; yet he was quite ready, eager even, to go and look for this other woman, of whom she had always felt a vague jealousy.

Mr. Fisher was in his office, and received his tenant with his accustomed geniality. Men were apt to call the agent greedy and grasping, and to hint darkly at the iniquity of his business methods; yet, even when he had no more to get out of you, he was always ready to be affable and pay for what he termed "liquid refreshment." Possibly, affability was so much a part

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of his nature that even his profession had not sufficed to make him rude when politeness no longer had a cash value; at any rate, Allingham had managed to preserve a half-amused liking for him, and they usually had a long chat when they met.

"Mrs. Ingram," Mr. Fisher said, as he took off his silk hat, the house agent's sign of office, and deposited it carefully on the rather uncleanly desk. "Yes, Mrs. Ingram. She took Glen Carrig—seven rooms, bath, hot and cold—at the quarter day, but she has only just moved in. A most pleasant little lady, a widow, I understand. And so you knew her in Africa? How interesting. . . . Yes, Glen Carrig, the last house in Winston Avenue, called after the war correspondent—the avenue, not the house."

Allingham found the house without much trouble. As a matter of fact, there were only three houses in the avenue, which, being very new, still lacked anything in the nature of a pavement, though it possessed a superfluity of clinging Essex clay.

Mrs. Ingram was in, the servant said, then showed the visitor into exactly the type of room he had been expecting, daintily furnished in an essentially modern style, nondescript, almost bizarre, but still wholly charming, a striking contrast to the rather severe good taste of his own house.

Mrs. Ingram came in a minute later; and, as he took her hand, it struck him how little she had changed. Outwardly, at least, she was exactly the same woman he had first met at the Five Mile Water. She greeted him with all her old frank cordiality.

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"I was hoping I should come across you soon. In fact, I was thinking of writing to Mrs. Allingham and telling her I was here. I heard two mails ago from Mr. Lestrangle that you were in this neighborhood."

"So you didn't know before?" he asked.

She smiled at the question. "How could I? We seemed to drop completely out of each other's lives. I mislaid Miss Carden's—Mrs. Allingham's—address, and she, of course, knew I had left the 'Marvel.'"

At the reference to her loss, he muttered a few words of sympathy, but her quick ear told her they were only conventional, and she cut him short rather abruptly.

"Mr. Allingham, I was sorry—for him; but it's only fair to tell you that we had parted finally a couple of months before; and I had come home for good. I had means of my own, quite independent of him."

Allingham drew his gloves slowly through his hand. "So you found out?" he said suddenly. Somehow, he could always talk freely to this woman.

She understood his meaning at once. "I knew, long before I met you. But when that woman came down to the 'Marvel,' it was too much. I never thanked you at the time for sending her away, but I can now."

She told him no more, nor did he ask further questions. The old, ugly story of Ingram and Bertha Ludwig was one better not discussed, least of all with Ingram's widow. The transport rider had always suspected that the connection had never really been

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severed—the German woman had too strong a hold for that—and now Mrs. Ingram's reference to her own means supplied the motive for the marriage. He saw it all in a flash, then, a moment later, he found himself answering his hostess's inquiries about Hilary, whom both of them seemed to have forgotten till then; and, after that, the conversation drifted back to Africa, first to the subject of their many mutual friends, and then to the Road.

"You have nearly forgotten it now, I suppose?" she said. "It must seem hardly real when you look back on it—your fierce desire for loneliness, and your impatience of civilization as represented by the Marvel mill and the railway." She put her head on one side and surveyed him critically. "Yes, you look perfectly civilized, and—what shall I say?—prosaic. And yet, at one time, I never thought you would."

He looked down at his lame leg. "There was a pretty good reason," he said bitterly.

"Was that the only reason?" The words rose to her lips, but she did not speak them; only, she felt a great pity for this man who had unconsciously told her so much in a few words. Then she tried to talk again of his home life, of Hilary and her people, but, with an almost irritable perversity, he would go back to the things they had in common. She knew the Road; she had loved the Road, even as he had; she, alone of all women he had ever met, was able to understand the Road. Probably, Hilary would not even remember who Swartboy was; but Mrs. Ingram had an almost tender recollection of the old man, and, as she

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mentioned his battered hat, his puttees made from one of his Baas's discarded waterproofs, his huge pipe and wizened little face, Allingham could almost hear his voice, rising shrill above the creaking of the wagons, "Ach mein kleinjes, ach mein klingerhut! yeck, yeck!"

He sat there a full two hours, talking eagerly, raking up old memories of men and places they had both known, but somehow the Road was the background of it all. It was so long since he had talked about it to anyone sympathetic. He brushed the "Marvel" aside a little impatiently. He had always hated that mine, though his face lit up again when she mentioned the mill. "'Eight-pennyweights-to-the-ton and not-a-pennyweight-more.' Do you remember that, Mr. Allingham?"

"I do," he answered emphatically. "I took it seriously, and sold five thousand 'Marvels' at five. You know what profit that meant. It was a wonderfully good guess of yours, or was it instinct?"

She disregarded the question. "Yes, it was a good guess," she answered.

He was well aware he had stayed too long, but still he was reluctant to go. It was many, many months since he had enjoyed an afternoon so keenly, though, as he rose to leave, he was conscious of a thrill of satisfaction at the thought that Mrs. Ingram would always be there.

"When do you think Mrs. Allingham will come down and see me?" she asked him, as he opened the door.

He shook his head. "I don't know her arrange-

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ments, but I fancy Tuesday would do, if you will be in."

Mrs. Ingram nodded. "I am generally in. Give my love to Mrs. Allingham, won't you?"

John Allingham limped home slowly. Several people he knew passed him on the way; but, though he acknowledged their salutations mechanically, he never saw them. He had come back now from the memories of yesterday to the facts of to-day, and, try as he would—and he did try, being by nature an honorable man—he could not help comparing Hilary with Mrs. Ingram, and regretting many things.

As he reached "The Fortune of War," he turned in at the hotel entrance, not because he wanted a drink, but with a kind of vague idea of breaking his train of thought before he got home. At the same moment, Hilary came out of the prim house opposite. Miss Tucker had accompanied her to the door, and neither of them could help seeing Allingham.

Hilary turned round with a flush on her face and a deliberate lie on her lips. "I heard the landlady had some nice home-cured bacon, and I asked my husband to go in and see it." Then she shook hands again, and hurried homeward.

But Miss Tucker was not deceived. "The bacon was all sold three weeks ago; and I told her so at the time. I am afraid he is a great trial to her. It makes one glad one never risked marriage," she said to her sister, when she rejoined the latter in the drawing-room.

Miss Beryl sighed, but made no reply. She had a

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good deal of sympathy with Allingham, though she had never dared to express it, even to the vicar, whom she suspected of sharing her opinions.

Allingham reached home soon after Hilary. There had been no one he knew in the hotel, and so nothing to tempt him to remain. He did not know his wife had seen him enter, nor did she tell him. She had long ceased to remonstrate with him on his ways.

As a rule, he kissed her whenever he came in, but this time he omitted to, his mind being full of other things. Outwardly, she usually took his caresses passively, as a matter of course; but, none the less, she was quick to notice the omission, and all her old jealousy of Mrs. Ingram came back.

"We were talking over old times, and I am afraid I stayed too long," Allingham explained with a rather uneasy laugh. "Mrs. Ingram wanted to know which day you were likely to call, and I suggested Tuesday. Will that do?"

Hilary frowned. "No. I was going up to see Jessie that day, and shall probably stay the night at father's. I don't see that there's any hurry about the matter. She has forgotten us all these years," and she swept out of the room.

Allingham tossed his cigarette away impatiently, then went to the cupboard and helped himself to a strong whisky-and-soda.

CHAPTER XXIII

THERE was already prejudice on both sides when, after a delay of nearly a fortnight, Hilary called on Mrs. Ingram. They met without enthusiasm, and they parted on terms of cold politeness. Allingham, himself, was not there. He had a feeling that his wife would not appear to her best advantage, and he was loath to be present. He was fighting hard to remain loyal to her in thought; but each time he met Mrs. Ingram—and he had found several excuses for going down to the homestead—his loyalty was weakened. At Glen Carrig, he felt perfectly at home. He could talk of the things which interested him with the certainty of a sympathetic listener; just as, in town, his wife could talk to Mr. St. John, the future laureate, who, despite his profession, kept his hair short and wore the dress of ordinary men.

Mrs. Ingram was quick to see Hilary's jealousy, and determined to remove the cause by putting a stop to Allingham's visits; but, after one or two meetings, the wife's cold aloofness and obvious lack of understanding of the man's nature so irritated her that she let him continue his visits—out of sheer pity, she told herself. Moreover, ever since she had come home, she had been horribly lonely and bored with her own society, and John Allingham had come as a welcome

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relief. To her, he seemed, as ever, very young, boyish even, in many of his ways. Any stiffness there might have been at first wore off quickly, and as he sat and chatted to her, smoking all the time—she, too, smoked on occasions—she found it increasingly difficult to look on him as a married man, the husband of the cold, stiff girl who so obviously disapproved of his ways.

Once or twice, he let fall chance things which showed her how matters were going.

"I can't stand archæologists," he remarked one afternoon, when he had met her in the village, and was seeing her back to Winston Avenue. "They are always on the make. I have subscribed to a dozen epoch-making works, and have not got a single volume yet. Not that I myself want them; but I thought Hilary would like them. I hoped they would come as a surprise to her, as they were written, or are to be written, by friends of Mrs. Darton's."

Again, "They bore me, horribly, these people. They have a kind of subtle semi-literary jargon which leaves you out of the conversation, almost pointedly. I am the bullock person from Africa, and yet, in most things, I know as much as they do. Hilary likes them, of course. She was brought up among them, and, Heaven knows, it must be dull enough for her here. Still, I sometimes wish—" he broke off abruptly, and stared across the fields at some young oxen following a cart loaded with fodder for them.

Mrs. Ingram did not answer. She was afraid of thin ice, so, once more, she made a mental resolve to

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be out next time he called, and kept it, for a full fortnight. Then one day she met him coming out of "The Fortune of War," and he insisted on walking home with her.

Local gossip, reaching her through her maid, had already told her of the hours Allingham spent in the little hotel. Knowing Africa, she understood why he went there; but she was also too well versed in the ways of the English country not to realize what people must say of him. For the first time, she felt a wave of sympathy with Hilary, and a distinct sense of indignation against Allingham. She said nothing at the moment, but when they parted at her gate—she did not ask him in—she remarked pointedly: "When your friend Mr. MacMurdo comes home, I suppose you will get him a position as bar-man in that inn?"

Allingham colored. "Hardly. It's very different over here—" Then he saw the implied censure and bit his lip. Yet her words touched him more than any of his wife's had done for many months past, and thenceforth "The Fortune of War" saw him very rarely. Hilary noticed the change, and, by some strange intuition, guessed its cause; consequently, instead of feeling any gratification, his very reformation increased her jealousy and resentment.

The months dragged by slowly. The Allinghams were very far apart now, so far that Hilary sometimes found herself wondering whether the days of their engagement and honeymoon had been real, after all. She went to town more than ever, often spending

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two or three nights at her father's, and merely sending her husband a post card to say when she would be home. She was too proud to distrust him, just as he never dreamed of distrusting her; but he felt her absence keenly, even though in some ways it was a relief; while she was bitterly hurt at the seeming calmness with which he acquiesced in it.

When she was away he would sit all day long, with a bottle of whisky at his elbow, doing nothing, except thinking, and brooding regretfully over what could not be undone. The Road was in his mind always now—even in his sleep he could see it stretching away across the veld, a narrow ribbon of white, broken every few hundred yards by a dip or a donga, into which it disappeared for a space, but beyond that going on again, always going on, toward the heart of Africa. It was the Road he had known in the early days, before the first stamp dropped in the 'Marvel' mill, which came back to him so insistently. Somehow, his last few months with the wagons seemed almost a blur. During them he had merely been on the Road, not of the Road. Mrs. Ingram first, then Hilary, had filled his vision to the exclusion of all else.

Now, however, it came back to him, as it had been before that accursed mine sent all their lives awry. Hilary had made a mistake, and Mrs. Ingram had made a mistake, he himself had made a mistake, and the "Marvel" was to blame for it all, for the "Marvel" had brought them together, to act and react on one another's lives. The "Marvel"—that was Cuthbert Lestrangle; and, in some inexplicable way, he felt

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that the boss was still in the background, influencing their lives.

This thought of Lestrangle preyed on him. He was drinking a full bottle of whisky a day now, unknown to Hilary, who saw little of him, even when she was at home; and, though it never affected his head, his nerves were beginning to feel the strain. He generally slept in his dressing room, on the grounds that he was suffering from insomnia, and might keep his wife awake, too. Hilary accepted the arrangement without protest, though many a night, while he was slumbering in the next room, she lay awake hour after hour, dry-eyed, longing for the tears which would not come. It was the virtual end of their married life, she told herself, the deathblow to all their hopes.

Once only did Allingham manage to bring up the subject of Lestrangle with Mrs. Ingram, and then he learned little, except that she still heard occasionally from the consulting engineer, who had not been home again since her husband's death.

Allingham, who was gradually growing irritable, almost uncouth at times, muttered that Lestrangle's absence was no loss.

Mrs. Ingram flushed quickly, then laughed. "I know you never liked him. In fact, you were afraid of him—oh, yes, you were. He is essentially a strong man."

"And I am not?" he asked bitterly.

She laughed again. "I don't say that; but he was the stronger. Do you remember I warned you once not to run counter to him?"

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"I made money by 'bearing' his shares," he answered.

"Was that the only time you ran counter to him? Wasn't there something even more important, Mr. Allingham? You beat him, and now wish you had lost, just because you don't know the value of what you won."

It was Allingham's turn to flush. He knew she referred to Hilary; but, hitherto, he had thought that her sympathy was entirely with him. That evening he went home more restless and miserable than ever, and, though he knew what train Hilary would return by, he did not trouble to meet it. Instead, he drank nearly half a bottle of whisky, and did not think it necessary to change his tweeds for dinner.

The Carden family had long since seen how matters were between Hilary and Allingham, and, among themselves, its members were unsparing in their censure of the transport rider; but they quickly learned the unwisdom of commiserating Mrs. Allingham, while their deadly fear of anything in the nature of a scandal kept their mouths closed as regarded the outer world. They professed, and possibly felt, a supreme contempt for the man-in-the-street, while the Dartons and their younger friends were avowed admirers of the problem play; but, none the less, respectability was the premier deity in their pantheon. Moreover, Allingham never refused a loan, or suggested payment of either principal or interest, while he was supremely indifferent as to the appearance of the

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various learned works for which he had subscribed. Perhaps there was something a little galling in his attitude—one does not like to be under an obligation to an uncultured bullock driver—but, at least, the pill was a gilded one, and, so long as Hilary did not find out, there was no reason why Allingham should not go on making up deficits in the Carden and Darton exchequers.

They were always glad to have Hilary in town. In a way, they told themselves, their hospitality to her went far toward wiping off her husband's loans; while, undoubtedly, she was an attraction on "at home" days. Gervase St. John, for instance, the future laureate, came chiefly to meet her, and she had obviously been the inspiration of four or five of his shorter poems. The family, itself, saw nothing to cavil at in the friendship. Hilary was far too well brought up to risk compromising herself, while it was but natural she should feel the need of an intellectual companion after standing the combined dullness of Cottington and John Allingham. Moreover, Hilary had told them nothing of Glen Carrig and its mistress. Had she done so, possibly they might have taken things more seriously, fearing the rebound; but they believed that the Allinghams were perfectly loyal to one another in all the essentials—that is, in everything but mere sentiment—and therefore they did not worry. If anyone had hinted that Hilary and Allingham were of a different clay from themselves, that under the civilized exteriors were a passionate man and woman, the Cardens and the Dartons would have been first

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shocked then incredulous. Except in books, only the congenitally bad had passions; and the Allinghams were not likely to err in that direction. There might not be perfect love, but there was perfect respectability, and, after all, that was the main thing.

CHAPTER XXIV

IT was a mere trifle which, in the end, brought matters to a crisis between the Allinghams. Neither of them had been expecting anything of the sort. They were both very miserable; but their unhappiness was of that passive sort which may last for years, until it becomes a part of the settled order of existence. The recent declaration of peace, by rendering a return to South Africa easy, had made Allingham more than ever anxious to get back, if only for a trip, but of that he had said nothing to Hilary, who, on her part, had not told him that Gervase St. John's latest volume of poems had been dedicated to herself. She was not afraid that he would be jealous; such an idea never entered into her head; but she feared his indifference.

Allingham was rather late in coming down to breakfast on that particular morning, and Hilary had already gone through her letters, which were lying on the table beside her plate. As Allingham stooped down to give her the perfunctory kiss on the forehead, which was now the only one of the day, his eye caught an envelope addressed in Mrs. Ingram's unmistakable handwriting.

He said nothing at the moment, but as soon as he had sat down and picked up his own letters—there

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was one from Mac, postmarked Fort Alexandra, and one from Mr. Carden—he put them in his pocket unopened, and turned to his wife.

“What has Mrs. Ingram got to say, dear?”

Hilary flushed; she thought she detected a certain eagerness in his voice, and her latent jealousy was aroused instantly. “She asks us to go to dinner on the tenth. You may go, if you like. I shall not.”

“Why not?” he demanded.

“Because I detest the woman. You ought to know that. I wonder she has the insolence to ask me, after the way she has come between us. I hated her from the very first day I met her on that horrible mine, when I saw what an influence she had over you, even though she had a husband living at the time. She simply took the house down here in the hopes of getting you into her clutches again. I suppose she was short of money, and reckoned on borrowing it from you. Even if I have said nothing, you mustn’t think I have been blind all these months, John.”

Allingham had gone very red. “You are talking utter nonsense, Hilary,” he said sternly. “You know perfectly well that I have never given you cause for jealousy, as I trust you have never given me.”

She looked at him with wet, flashing eyes. “What do you mean by that? How dare you insinuate such a thing? You know when I am away I am with my people, and you could come, too, if you cared in the least about me, or were not so taken up with this—this woman.”

Allingham’s temper was up. “Your people?” he

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echoed. "Are they such good friends of mine? As for Mrs. Ingram getting money out of me—" He did not finish the sentence, for Hilary had pushed her chair back and rushed out of the room.

Instantly Allingham was full of contrition, and hurried after her; but he knocked at her locked door in vain. Listening carefully, he thought he could hear her sobbing, but there was no other answer. He went back to the dining room, helped himself to a stiff whisky-and-soda, then rang for the servants to take away the untasted breakfast. It was no use making any pretense with them. They were bound to know; everyone in the place would know; though, thank Heaven, there was barely another year of his tenancy to run. He was half inclined to leave the place at once, and try to start afresh in some other neighborhood. Cottington had been a failure all along. There was nothing for him to do, nothing for Hilary to do. He was sick of the village and its associations, and, for the moment at least, sick of Mrs. Ingram. Now the quarrel had come, he regretted it bitterly and longed to make peace. He was ready to take the whole blame on himself, humble himself before her.

He had another whisky—it was curious how his nerve had gone—then went upstairs and knocked again at his wife's door; but, though he could hear her moving about, he got no answer. He knocked again and again, with the same result; then his contrition began to turn back to anger, and he went down to his smoking room, banging the door after him.

For a while he sat gloomily, an empty pipe in his

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mouth; then, suddenly, he remembered Mac's letter, and took it out of his pocket.

"I expect the war will be over by the time you get this," Mac wrote, "and everyone will be busy cleaning up the mess. I don't suppose it will affect us much here in Alexandra. . . . There is very little news. Mahan, the trader at M'Bouka's, died last week—chronic dysentery tempered with whisky. The boom is still expected shortly, as of old. . . . The country generally has gone ahead a good deal in the four years you have been away. As you say you have nothing to do, I wonder you don't come out for a trip this dry season. It would be a change for both of you, and all your old friends would be more than pleased to see you. I am not wholly unselfish in making the proposal, as I have taken up a large block of land not very far from the 'Marvel,' fine grazing veld, and I want to go in for cattle properly. I have got a little capital now, another legacy, but it is hardly enough; and I wondered whether you would care to go in as a sleeping partner. Of course you know the business better than I do. If you come out, you could have a look at the land, and we could talk things over. I know if I came home I should inevitably spend all my money. I sometimes wish I were as lucky as you, with the best of reasons for keeping straight." Allingham smiled bitterly as he read the few concluding lines of the letter; then he lighted his pipe, and proceeded to think the matter over carefully.

The idea appealed to him. As Mac said, he knew the cattle business thoroughly, and cattle had always

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been lucky with them. If he were to put two or three thousand into it, he would probably get a very large return on his money. At any other time he might have demurred at the notion of trusting cattle of his to another man; but just now he was eager for an excuse to get back to Africa, and, consequently, was ready to see all the good points in Mac's proposition, and be blind to the weak ones, at least until he got out there.

The more he considered the matter, the better he liked it. Though he would not admit the fact, even to himself, he was ready to seize on any pretext for the trip. Probably, when they had really started, Hilary would enjoy the voyage, and, having her to himself once more, right away from her own people, it was more than likely that the barrier between them would be broken down. Yes, he would certainly go. The moment he could see her, he would show her Mac's letter and explain his plans. She ought to be very pleased, he told himself, with a rather grim smile. Apparently, Mrs. Ingram was her main source of grievance, and now he proposed to meet her wishes by putting six thousand miles between himself and that lady. Probably, the Cardens would object—the thought of them suddenly reminded him of the letter from his father-in-law, which was still in his pocket.

He tore the letter open and read it, with a gathering frown on his face. It was much the same as usual. It began with an apology for coming to him again, and went on to ask for a loan, though the apology seemed perfunctory, and the writer evidently con-

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sidered he was not trespassing on his son-in-law's generosity in making the request. It was the miserable "Marvel" once more. Mr. Carden had thought that the shares must rise on the proclamation of peace, and had been bulling them, hoping to get back his former losses. Instead, they had gone down, the effect of peace having been discounted weeks before, and he had made a serious loss. The letter was querulous, almost childish. Obviously, the writer seemed to have some idea that Allingham was to blame for the vagaries of "Marvel" shares; though he did not add that it was Mrs. Darton's extravagance, the rent and furnishing of the large house she had just taken, and the select parties she was giving there, which had run him so short that he had speculated in the hope of being able to make up what she had got from him.

Allingham put down the letter with a curse. If Hilary only knew who had really had the money which she seemed to suspect had gone to Mrs. Ingram! Then he had a look at his pass book, and, finding that unsatisfactory, sat down and wrote a note to his stock brokers, instructing them to sell out certain shares. He made a wry face as he sealed the envelope. The market was very bad, and Mr. Carden's loan would cost him far more than the actual sum he paid over to that gentleman. Moreover, he had a shrewd idea that, as with his previous advances, he would never see a penny of either principal or interest. Still, it was impossible to refuse—at least, impossible for him—and by lending the money he would be making it more difficult for Mr. Carden to oppose his African schemes.

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He had hardly finished his letter when the door opened and Hilary came in. She was dressed to go out, and was looking very pale.

"I am going to town, John," she said coldly.

A shade of annoyance crossed Allingham's face. He had been reckoning on a long talk with her that afternoon. He did not expect a complete reconciliation immediately. Time, and separation from her own people, would be necessary for that; but, by taking all the blame on himself, he had hoped to make this easier.

"Must you go, dear? I wanted to have a chat with you. I am very, very sorry if I hurt your feelings this morning. I think we both said things we didn't mean."

Hilary shook her head. "I meant what I said."

He tried to ignore the interruption, and went on. "I know you have had an awful lot to put up with from me; but I know now where I've been wrong, and I want to go away from here and start afresh. We haven't got so far apart that we can't do that, have we, Hilary?" There was a note of appeal in his voice which almost made her relent; but she was a Carden above all things, and she remembered that fact in time.

"Let's start afresh, Hilary," he went on, undeterred by her stony silence. "It's not too late, you know it's not too late. I've heard from Mac this morning, asking me to go out to Africa on a matter of business. It would give us a chance to cut the whole lot here, and be together, you and I."

He said nothing about its merely being a trip, and she misunderstood him. "You want me to go out to

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that horrible country, to live there, away from the 'whole lot,' by which I suppose you mean all those who really care about me. I never thought you were so utterly selfish. You, of course, are free to go; but I stay here."

Even then he made another attempt. "It would only be for a trip. We should be back in six or eight months."

But she would not listen to him. "When we were married it was agreed that we should remain here, and I thought, being a fool, that you would stand by that agreement. Apparently, I was wrong. You have neither respected yourself nor respected me. And now you propose to take me back to your old associates, to bring me down to their level."

She had reached the limit of Allingham's patience, and he flared up suddenly, volcanically.

"By heavens, if I go alone, I shall stay there."

She shrugged her shoulders and turned toward the door. "Very well. We understand one another at last."

Allingham heard the front door clang behind her without any of the remorse he had felt a little while before. He was too thoroughly angry to analyze things. The melodramatic girlishness of her behavior did not strike him, possibly because of that very boyishness in his own character which Mrs. Ingram had detected long ago.

Hilary had gone, apparently for good; and, as matters stood, he was glad of it. Their marriage had been a ghastly mistake all along. They were utterly

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unsuited to one another, utterly out of sympathy with one another. They were tied for life, and it never entered into his head that the tie might be broken; but before he met Hilary, women had played so small a part in his career that it seemed quite possible to go back to the country where, once more, they would be a negligible factor. He sat down and tried to work it all out, calmly and sanely—to find a way to minimize, as far as possible, the effects of the mistake he had made. He would go back to Africa, join Mac, raise cattle and sell them, make money, build himself a nice place, and then, when middle age came on, then— He jumped up with a wholly involuntary cry. The loneliness, the utter desolation of it! Mac might, probably would, marry and have children; but he, himself— The thing was unthinkable, abominable. He would be in Africa, Hilary in England; bound to one another, and yet severed hopelessly. It was not his fault, after all. He had tried his utmost to heal the breach, but she had repelled him scornfully, almost with insult; and he thought he knew her well enough to be sure that she would never abandon the position she had taken up. Like all her family, she was obsessed with a sense of her own rectitude, or, at any rate, of the correctness of her own standpoint. He had been weighed and found wanting, and, even if he did grovel sufficiently to come into line with the Carden ideal, he would always be the criminal on probation—his every act would be criticised, even more severely than before.

And on the other side there was the Road, and all

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that the Road stood for—freedom, good-fellowship, utter lack of convention. He could be a man again, doing a man's work—and doing it alone. He wavered from one point of view to another, wildly, almost insanely. At heart, he was madly in love with Hilary, as he had always been in love with her; but he would not admit it to himself, and he fought hard to feel bitter against her, to plan out his life irrespective of her. Not once, but half a dozen times, he gulped down a whisky-and-soda; but, though the spirit did not seem to affect his head, it did not help him to a decision. At last, in sheer desperation, he picked up his cap and his old sjambok and went out. At first, he walked aimlessly through the village, absolutely heedless of the salutations of the few cottagers he met; but, as he began to descend the hill, he suddenly found himself face to face with Mrs. Ingram, who had come across the fields from one of the big farmhouses where she was wont to buy her butter and eggs.

The day being warm, she was dressed in something light and clinging, and, despite his troubles, it struck Allingham that he had never seen her look so pretty, even on that long distant day when he had first been her guest in the grass hut at the back of the Marvel mine. As he shook hands with her, some of his worries, a very great part of them, seemed to fall from him, though he did not notice her quick, inquiring survey of himself.

For a little while, they walked on in silence toward the homesteads; then, "Am I to expect you to dinner on the tenth?" she asked.

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Allingham started. "No. I—I'm afraid not," he stammered.

Mrs. Ingram smiled to herself; but she did not ask the reason for the refusal, and he gave no explanation.

They had reached the bottom of the hill before Allingham spoke again. "My wife has gone to town unexpectedly. Will you ask me to lunch?"

Mrs. Ingram smiled again. "Well, there's not very much, I'm afraid; but I can't be so ungracious as to refuse you, as Mrs. Allingham has left you alone."

"Yes," he repeated very quietly, "Mrs. Allingham has left me alone."

Lunch proved to be a very silent meal. Allingham made one or two spasmodic attempts at conversation, but achieved no success, and Mrs. Ingram was wise enough to wait for what she saw was coming.

"Come and smoke in the morning room," she said, when her guest had passed the cheese untasted. "I know you must have a pipe immediately after a meal, and I think I shall have a cigarette, too."

Allingham gave a queer little smile—Hilary hated women who smoked, tobacco not entering into the Carden scheme of things.

Mrs. Ingram settled herself and her fluffy draperies satisfactorily into a big chair, lighted a cigarette, then looked inquiringly at her guest. "Weren't you going to tell me something, Mr. Allingham?" she said at last.

Allingham started. He had been staring out of the window, picturing Hilary, tall and cold, retailing her grievances to Mrs. Darton, and now he faced round

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and saw this dainty little woman, this woman who understood the Road, smiling at him, with a cigarette between her lips.

"I'm going back to Africa," he said abruptly.

Mrs. Ingram nodded. "I thought as much," she answered.

For a full minute there was silence. Then: "My wife won't go," he said.

"Ah!" It was impossible to say what Mrs. Ingram's exclamation meant. Anger, commiseration, triumph; it might have been any of these.

Allingham looked at her with blazing eyes. She was a wonderfully alluring woman, and she was the one woman, the only woman, who had ever understood, and, suddenly, he began to pour out his grievances, passionately, almost incoherently; while she lay back in her chair and listened, the sole sign of her emotion being her rising color. But when he began to include her in his plans, she cut him short, and he finished lamely, so lamely that she laughed, despite herself. Then she, too, stood up, her cigarette still between her fingers. Somehow, in after years, the memory of the thin whisp of smoke from that same cigarette often came back to him. He saw it coiling upward with a placid slowness, as though rebuking his passion and his haste, and, after a pause, Mrs. Ingram's words came, placidly, too, or if not placidly, at least calmly, for he had given her time to collect her thoughts.

"Mr. Allingham, if any other man had tried to say the same to me I should have taken it as a deadly

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insult, the worst insult a man could put on a woman, on his hostess." She emphasized the last word. "But I know you, fortunately for us both. I think you had better go home now, and forget all about this."

Her words fell on him like a douche of cold water, bringing him back from melodrama to everyday life. He tried to keep his passion alive, but it was too late; and he ended by muttering something almost commonplace.

Mrs. Ingram laughed again, this time bitterly. "Mr. Allingham, I'm forgiving you because you never really meant it. You have treated your wife abominably all through—oh, yes, I mean it!—you are selfish and weak and childish." She ticked his qualities off relentlessly on her fingers. "You have married a woman whom you don't try to understand, and you are ready to ruin her life to satisfy your vanity. I used to like you, very, very much; but if you want to regain my good opinion you will have to change enormously. Now, good-by." She held out her hand to him, and he took it mechanically, then left her without another word.

CHAPTER XXV

HILARY ALLINGHAM seldom lost her composure for long. She pulled herself together while going up to town, and, when she sat down to lunch with Mrs. Darton, even that lady's keen eyes failed to detect that anything unusual had occurred. True, at first, when she saw her sister arrive unexpectedly, the elder woman felt a momentary anxiety lest Allingham should have mentioned Mr. Carden's request for a loan; but Hilary's manner quickly relieved her of that fear, and, for once, she felt almost grateful to the transport rider. He was a boor in many ways; but, at least, he had sufficient sense of proportion not to try and make a merit of being allowed to help his relations by marriage. Possibly, he was beginning to understand them, to realize that, to people of their type, money is not the reward of work, but the means of doing further work. Neither Mrs. Darton nor any of her friends troubled about appreciation from outside; they were quite content to be honored within their own circle; and they were perfectly indifferent to the criticism of those Philistines, mostly paid Fleet Street reviewers, who pointed out that nothing they produced made the world one jot better or happier. Still, though the archæologists and the poets may scoff at the world's verdict, they need

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the world's money. In simpler days, men who worked for art's sake used to have patrons, to whom they groveled when occasion demanded; but the present generation has grown wiser, and has invented subscribers, who can be treated with due hauteur. Allingham was an ideal subscriber, and Mrs. Darton would have regretted deeply any breach with him, much though she despised his intellectual attainments.

As usual, there were two or three guests to lunch, one of them being Gervase St. John, who greeted Hilary with undisguised pleasure. Tall and slightly built, with pale, clean-cut features, the poet was distinctly a good-looking man; and though the average healthy-minded girl would have much preferred Allingham to him, he had an air of refined courtesy and flattering deference which Hilary found wonderfully soothing. She sat next him at lunch; and before the meal was over she had her feelings sufficiently under control to impart her news to Mrs. Darton.

"Jessie, did I tell you John was going to take a trip to Africa very soon? He has some business matters to see to."

Mrs. Darton gave a little cry of surprise. "Surely you're not going with him to that horrible country, Hilary?"

Mrs. Allingham knew that Gervase St. John was waiting anxiously for her answer, and the knowledge gave her a feeling she could not analyze, half alarm, half pride.

"No, I am not going," she replied. "One visit to Africa was enough for me."

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The other guests departed soon after lunch; but Gervase St. John remained, and it was not long before Hilary found herself alone with him in the drawing-room. As a rule, she was perfectly at ease in his company, but on this occasion she felt nervous and uncomfortable, and was inwardly furious with her sister for the way in which she had been left. For a moment, she thought of following Mrs. Darton, then changed her mind, and, getting up suddenly, went to the big window overlooking the street. St. John followed her reluctantly.

"What is the attraction there, Mrs. Allingham?" he asked.

Hilary tried to smile. "Oh, nothing special. I don't know why I got up."

"Then come and sit down and talk to me. It's so seldom we get a chance," and almost without her knowing how it was done, he got her back into a chair; then, "I'm so glad you are staying, alone," he said abruptly.

Hilary went rather white, but he did not seem to notice it. "You will be alone now," he went on quickly. "You don't care for him, I know you don't, and you do care for me."

She stood up suddenly, with her eyes blazing, but, being obsessed with his own conceit, he misunderstood what their fire meant, and put his arm round her waist. "Hilary, darling, Hilary, now—" and he tried to whisper something in her ear.

She shook his arm off with an almost savage gesture, and smote him across the mouth, cutting his lip

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with one of her rings. "Oh, you cad, you cad! If Jack were here I would tell him to flog you with his sjambok." Then she rushed out of the room, leaving him dabbing the cut with his handkerchief, and cursing.

Upstairs she met Mrs. Darton, and poured out her story wildly; but, instead of sympathizing, her sister drew away coldly.

"How can you be so ridiculous, Hilary! It's abominable to make a scene in my house, with one of my guests. You might have a little sense. Everyone knows that you and John Allingham don't get on together; while Gervase St. John will soon be one of the leading men in London. I don't suppose he will come here again after this," she added querulously.

Hilary dried her tears instantly. "Do you mean to say you would have him? Then you will never see me here again. He's a cad and a coward and a beast. I told him I would ask Jack to flog him."

Mrs. Darton shrugged her shoulders contemptuously and hurried downstairs to interview her guest. They were still talking in the drawing-room when Hilary let herself out of the front door, and were so interested in their conversation that they never heard her go.

Hilary beckoned a waiting hansom and got in. Her one idea was to go home, but a glance at the watch on her wrist showed her that she would have at least two hours to wait in that uncleanly barn, Fenchurch Street station—trains to Cotington were few and far between—so she told the cabman to drive her to her father's house. Probably there would be no one

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at home except her mother, whom she hardly counted, and she could rest there quietly and think things over. Not that she really wanted to think; all she cared about now was to get back to her husband, to feel safe again, safe, and clean morally. She felt as if she had touched some foul thing, the stain from which only Allingham's hands could wipe away.

To her surprise, Mr. Carden himself met her in the hall.

"I didn't expect you to-day, my dear," he said. "You never said you were coming up. Your mother is unwell, most unwell, and I think she is sleeping now, so you had better not disturb her. Come into my study, and I will ring for the maid to make you a cup of tea. I did not go to the office to-day—the 'Archæological Survey' must get on without me for once. And how are you, my dear, and how is John?"

He was talking rapidly, nervously; for he could see his daughter was upset, and his conscience led him to connect her agitation with the letter Allingham had received that morning.

Hilary sank back into a chair, and drew her gloves off slowly. She had no intention of confiding in him, and she was sorry he had even seen her, so she made no reply to his speech.

Her silence seemed ominous to Mr. Carden; obviously, she had heard something from Allingham, and would turn on him the moment she had collected her thoughts, so he resolved to forestall her.

"I was sorry to have to write to John again, my dear, most sorry; but it was inevitable. I shall be able

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to repay him all soon, I am sure of that; but the Marvel mine has been most unlucky to me all through."

In a flash Hilary understood. She had known all along that they were not spending anything like Allingham's income, and yet he had always been a little short of ready cash. Mentally, she had accused him of squandering it on some secret dissipation, or of lending it to people like Mrs. Ingram; but now she knew. Her own family, those whom she had tacitly held up to him as examples, had been bleeding him, and, out of consideration for her, out of his great love for her, he had held his tongue. Suddenly she grew very hard. She forgot that she had ever been Hilary Carden, and remembered only that she was Mrs. Allingham.

"How much did you ask him for, this time?" she demanded.

Mr. Carden fidgeted with a pen. "A hundred, my dear; it was the least I could manage with. Your sister's expenses have been heavy, most heavy; and I am afraid I was injudicious in trying to make money again over those wretched 'Marvel' shares. The first time should have taught me wisdom."

"And how much have you had altogether from my husband?" Unconsciously, she emphasized the last two words.

Mr. Carden winced. He had not expected this, and he tried to temporize; but she was utterly relentless. They had been robbing her husband.

At last: "I think it is five hundred and fifty, my dear. Nothing much, really, and I shall repay it all."

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Then, seeing the look in her eyes, he went on desperately: "It was that unfortunate speculation I made while we were at the 'Marvel.' Mr. Lestrangle led me astray. He swindled me, in fact; as I explained to John long ago. And since then I have had so many calls from Jessie. She is making a great success socially, and, of course, it all means expense. I am sure that neither you nor John will grudge me the money."

Under the circumstances, he could have said nothing more unfortunate; but he did not know that Hilary had come straight from an interview in which she had learned the inwardness of Mrs. Darton's successes. Still, her next words gave him a distinct shock.

"You lost money on the 'Marvel,' and so you were anxious to get me off your hands. Did my husband know of this when he married me? Did you sell me to him?" Her whole future depended on his answer, and when that came she would not accept it without proof.

"Jack would not lie to me." Could this be the Hilary who, a few hours before, had imagined herself essentially a Carden? "Jack would not lie to me, but I could not ask him the question. Prove to me when you had the first check from him."

Mr. Carden looked at her desperately. "I have not got my bank pass book here."

Hilary glanced at her watch. "You have still time to send for it before the bank closes. I must see it before I go. There is a cab outside. Write a note and send one of the maids for it. I will pay for the cab," she added scornfully.

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Mr. Carden was beaten. He had grown old in an atmosphere of shams and unrealities, and now it was his own child who was stripping the veil from it all. He wrote the note to the bank, and Hilary herself sent the maid off; then they sat in silence, waiting for the cab to return.

"Honor thy father and thy mother." The words of the Decalogue drummed through Mr. Carden's ears, and, had he dared, he would have waxed eloquent on them; but, somehow, the set, white face opposite him was not that of his daughter, but of John Allingham's wife.

"And, forsaking all other, keep thee only unto him, so long as ye both shall live." Suddenly he remembered the marriage vow, which he had often heard pronounced, more or less as a formula. Had this daughter of his really taken it in its widest sense, and was she at last prepared to throw all family conventions aside in order to keep literally to the thing she had vowed? He shuddered a little at the idea. In his own way he loved her very dearly, and it was terrible to think of losing her thus over a mere trifle.

Hilary sat very still, with her hands in her lap. Everything seemed to have gone to pieces that day, and yet she felt that when she saw her husband and explained things all would be right, so far as he and she were concerned—and, after all, what else mattered?

The servant came back at last with a large, sealed envelope, which she handed to Mr. Carden, who tore it open hurriedly, then held out the pass book to his

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daughter. Once, the mere action would have been enough for Hilary; now, however, she scanned the figures carefully, then, with a sigh of relief, gave it back to her father. She had found the date of Allingham's first loan, and she remembered the occasion with a quick sense of shame. She had been very hard on her husband the evening before, and this was how he had repaid her hardness.

She looked at her watch, then stood up suddenly. "I must be going," she said briefly.

Mr. Carden rose, too. "I hope, my dear, that this will not——"

Mrs. Allingham cut him short. "We shall send you the money you asked for, but, in future, my brother-in-law must pay Jessie's debts. I will not have my husband bled in this way."

As she drove away, Mr. Carden went back to his study rather mournfully. "We shall send you the money——" He did not like that ominous pronoun. This new Hilary would be quite capable of putting a stop to all further advances.

Hilary got down to Fenchurch Street just in time to see her train go out; consequently, it was after nine when Jones's fly finally landed her home.

The housemaid looked at her in surprise. They had not expected her back that night.

"Master is in the smoking room," the servant explained in answer to a question.

Hilary went straight in, just as she used to do in the early days of their marriage. Allingham was sitting in a big chair with a whisky bottle and siphon by

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his side. He jumped up quickly as she entered, and, though she had never seen him the worse for liquor yet, the flush on his face showed her that he had very nearly overstepped the mark. She had thrown her veil back, hoping he would kiss her, but he never seemed to think of it.

"I didn't expect you back so late," he said dully.

She took a step forward. "I couldn't stay in town. I didn't want to stay. John, I want you to take me to Africa with you."

His face showed his surprise. "Do you really mean that?" he asked.

She came a little nearer, and steadied herself by the back of his chair. "I want to go to Africa with you. Will you take me? We will arrange it all in the morning. I am too tired now to talk about it. You look tired, too. Won't you go to bed?"

"Yes, we will arrange it all in the morning," he answered in the same lifeless tone; then he opened the door for her, but he made no attempt to follow her, and she went upstairs alone.

CHAPTER XXVI

ALLINGHAM was anxious to sail for Africa as soon as possible, and, greatly to his surprise, Hilary was ready to fall in with his plans in that respect; yet it was only too evident that she took absolutely no interest in the trip itself. She had never questioned him about his schemes, and he had volunteered very little information. In many ways, he wished she were not going with him; for every time he looked at her he thought of what had passed at Mrs. Ingram's, and the recollection gave him a bitter sense of shame. He had betrayed her, or, at any rate, he had proposed to betray her; while her offer to accompany him had now robbed him of the last shred of excuse.

When she came home after the interview with her father, Hilary had fully intended to tell Allingham everything; but he had not given her the chance that evening, and by next morning she had changed her mind. She remembered her grievances against him, not the least of which was that, after all the sacrifices she had made for him, all the efforts she had made to get him back into civilized ways, he was returning to Africa, to the evil influences and the roughness and the discomforts from which she had rescued him. She had wasted her life for his sake, and now her only

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reward seemed to be that she had quarreled with her own people. Still, she kept it all to herself—there was no one in whom she could confide—and though her husband could not help noticing her changed attitude toward her father and sister, he speculated vainly as to the cause. He did not ask, fearing that by so doing he might throw her into their arms again, and, as a result, the explanation, which, at heart, she longed to give, remained unspoken.

Allingham arranged to have the furniture warehoused, and placed the house once more in the hands of Mr. Fisher. "I don't think we shall care about living here again, when we come back. Do you? We can find some place more convenient," he said to Hilary.

Mrs. Allingham nodded. It merely confirmed her impression that he did not intend to come back. She had fought the influence of the Road for nearly five years, and now the road had won. She had ceased to struggle any longer against it. What was the good? It had been too strong for her all along—hers had been a losing game from the beginning—and the defeat was the more bitter because at one time she had been sure she would triumph.

They might have been so happy but for the road. She had hoped to see him settle down to something useful, to have him honored and respected, to be able to feel a legitimate pride in him and his success, to be in a position to look down on other women whose husbands were not as hers. But the road had always been in the background of his life, and, instead of look-

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ing forward and forgetting it, Allingham's thoughts had always been of the past—the past in which she had played no part.

The breach with her own family, the discovery of Mrs. Darton's treachery and her father's meanness, had made her gentler, more submissive to her husband. She felt that, in some things, she had misjudged him; and Mrs. Ingram had gone away suddenly to the South of France; but still she could only see Allingham as a man who did nothing, and would do nothing, who was willing to sacrifice her feelings and her comfort in order to get back to his old, low haunts and his old, vicious associates. And yet she had a feeling that she dare not be away from him. Gervase St. John's notes, and even the volume of poems dedicated to herself, had been tossed contemptuously in the fire the night she had returned home unexpectedly; but the memory of it all remained; and, if only to gall Mrs. Darton and her friends, she was determined to remain by her husband's side.

The voyage out was much like any other voyage on a Cape mail boat at that time. Until Madeira was reached and passed, the majority of the passengers were too seasick to trouble about anything; while the rest watched each other cautiously, wondering who was going to leave at Funchal and who was going right on; speculating as to which were the two peers whose names appeared in the passenger list, and which was the famous music-hall favorite; forming little temporary cliques in the ladies' saloon and the smoking room; lavishing sweet words on the head steward

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in the hope of being promoted to the skipper's table when the presumably tuberculous intruders for Madeira had cleared off.

Once the island had disappeared below the horizon, the real voyage started, and people began to know one another. As the purser put it to Allingham, they were a "mixed crowd," typical of the new South Africa, which came into being when the first millionaire proved that in the subcontinent, as in most other places, money is greater than the law. There were a score or so of Imperial officers returning to their regiments, full of the consciousness of having helped to bring the war to a successful issue, and distinctly proud of their own knowledge of the country and its ways. Of course they knew the veld; had not they spent month after month trekking across it? Then there was a considerable number of those patriots—they were British, they had naturalization papers to prove the fact—whose burning anxiety to possess a vote had been one of the immediate causes of the war. They were not suited to soldiering—in fact, their desire to avoid military service had, in many cases, been the primary reason for their quitting the Fatherland—but they had been on the spot in London, ready to wag square and approving heads at the crowds cheering the news of victories, and to take immediate advantage of any movement in the share market. Now they were going back, to reconstruct the shattered mining industry, and, incidentally, to avoid the annoyance of paying the high income tax necessitated by the war.

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A dozen or so military ladies, whose conversation seemed to consist exclusively of reminiscences of mutual friends at Bangalore, or Malta, or Gib., were going out to join their presumably longing husbands. The contingent of bagmen, aggressive, self-assertive, blatantly commercial even when dressed for dinner, spent the greater part of the day in the smoking room where it tossed for drinks, and discussed such thrilling subjects as underwear and ready-mades, and the terrible influence of the war thereon.

The remainder of the passengers was nondescript. A few Cape Colonials reveled in the knowledge that the withdrawal of martial law allowed them to voice their disloyalty openly. Their friends and relations, who had been caught in open rebellion, with the blood of the loyal colonists still warm on their hands, the money and watches of the loyalists still in their pockets, were suffering the horrible penalty of disenfranchisement. But what matter? No British Government ever hardened its heart against sedition for long; and they knew that, in all probability, at the next general election their brethren would once more be able to obey the precept of the predicants, "Vote early and often."

Younger sons, who were going out to farm the illimitable veld, which they fondly supposed would repay their toil; Oxford men, without the slightest practical knowledge of the world, on their way to swell the ranks of the Civil Service; a missionary or two, whose successful efforts with the collection box had led to an unfortunate falling off in the matter of

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apostolic simplicity; a popular novelist, who had suddenly been seized with a desire to see whether the country and the natives of whom he had been writing for the last ten years were anything like the pictures he had drawn of them—these, with one or two really distinguished men, whose presence, somehow, passed almost unnoticed, made up the rest of the purser's "mixed crowd."

"It was different in the old days," that officer said to Allingham, whom he had invited to share a small bottle in his cabin. "Then, we used to have men who could do things; now, we get the men who are reaping the reward of what the others have done."

Allingham laughed. "This is the Transvaal and Cape Colony lot. We've got a different crowd up country."

But the purser shook his head. "I think most of them have gone under or cleared off. Still, you'll see for yourself. Things have changed, you know. South Africa has been in the melting pot, and it hasn't come out refined. I've been on these boats fifteen years now, and, judging by what I've seen, if I could stay another fifteen I should have to get the menus printed in German or Yiddish, and turn the bathrooms into sausage stores. I wish they'd treat those aliens as they used to treat the lepers in the Middle Ages—make them wear a gaberdine and ring a bell when they walked abroad." He knocked the ashes out of his pipe viciously, and gulped down the remainder of his wine.

"Was it Müller?" Allingham asked, mentioning

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a passenger whom he had noticed talking excitedly to the purser just after breakfast.

The purser nodded. "Mr. Müller, of Port Elizabeth, Johannesburg, and either Hampstead or Houndsditch. Young Dimsdale, his cabin mate, complained of his habits in the cabin, so I told the chief steward to have a spittoon put in there, just as a hint; and he don't like it. I've mentioned the matter to the old man, as a precaution, and to the medico; but we daren't say much. The Company wants their money, and they don't run us short of bath towels, like you fellows do."

They were just entering the tropics, and Hilary was sitting alone, in the lee of one of those piles of egg baskets with which the promenade deck is usually encumbered after leaving Madeira. Just round the corner, two or three young military officers had drawn up their chairs round that of a gray-haired little old man, who, despite his unobtrusive simplicity, had a name which was famous throughout the Empire. He had been Imperial Commissioner on the ever-shifting frontier for nearly a score of years, and his fund of reminiscences was seemingly inexhaustible.

At first, Hilary, who could hear every word, tried to go on with the book she was reading; but she very quickly gave up the attempt and sat listening intently. She had never realized the romance and the heroism of the frontier before; and, as she drank it in from the lips of the man who did know, whose judgment no one would dare question, she felt a queer sense of shame at her own narrowness of vision. After all, there were greater things than low side win-

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dows, eighteenth-century memoirs, and modern problem plays.

Presently, she heard her husband's step coming along the deck; then the old Commissioner hailed him. "Allingham, pull up a chair. I was trying to recollect which year it was we held up those three wagon loads of guns going to the Matabele, the lot that Durban town councilor was connected with. I remember you rode out as guide to show me the short cut across the veld, which enabled us to stop them at the Drift. It would have been a bad business if they had gone through. As it was, we were only just in time."

"What happened to the town councilor, Sir Harry?" It was one of the officers who asked.

Hilary heard both her husband and the Commissioner laugh, then the latter answered: "He never came within my reach, and I could prove nothing against him in Natal. Now, I hear he has been knighted, and is a millionaire and a pillar of religion in Durban. He laid the foundations of his fortune by supplying the natives with rifles wherewith to kill the British, and now he has completed the edifice by robbing the British Army during the late war. And he was not the only one who began as a gun runner, as Mr. Allingham can tell you."

It flattered Hilary to hear her husband referred to as an authority, and she listened eagerly for more; but, a moment later, the name of a certain great pioneer of the Northward Trek came up, and one of the officers, a very junior subaltern, made a sneering remark

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about the way in which all the well-known hunters and explorers had refused to take any active part in the war.

His words were received in awkward silence, and Hilary felt instinctively that the others were looking at her husband; then, suddenly, a chair was pushed back, and she heard Allingham walk away without having attempted to reply. When he was out of hearing—

“Mr. Robertson,” Sir Harry said gravely, “if you knew more of South Africa—which, so far, you have only seen under entirely abnormal conditions—you would not have said that. But for these hunters and explorers and transport riders, men like my old friend, John Allingham, the Empire would have had very little to win or lose in the continent. The German and the Portuguese would long since have annexed all that was worth having. You speak of their having been backward in the war. Let me tell you this—and I think I may claim to speak with authority—the men who pushed the great road up northward, men of whom Allingham is a splendid type, have done so much for the Empire that they had a perfect right to take their own line as regarded the war. Some had quitted Africa for good, broken down in health; others had memories of old-time friendship with the Transvaal Boers, which made them reluctant to fight; but, whatever the reasons, newcomers like yourself have no business to criticise them. The pioneers took the whole risk themselves, from the natives, from the climate, from hunger, thirst, and lions. They went

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unofficially, and if they died, probably no one ever knew of it—certainly the press never hailed them as heroes—and the profit they got out of it was never in proportion to the risks they ran. You were sent out to do the work for which the nation had trained you, and you had the whole power of the Empire behind you.” Then he, too, got up, and went after Allingham.

Hilary was still sitting there, thinking over what Sir Harry had said, when the bugle sounded for luncheon. She could remember almost every word of the conversation, and it filled her mind so completely that, on meeting the Commissioner during the afternoon, she could not help confessing she had overheard him.

“It was awfully good of you to say such nice things of my husband,” she said gratefully.

The old gentleman took her hand and pressed it. “My dear, I was only saying what I know to be true. You ought to be very proud of him.”

CHAPTER XXVII

HILARY found the journey from Capetown to Buluwayo far more pleasant than she had expected. For one thing, the railway service had been improved greatly during the past five years; but the main difference between this and her former trip lay in the fact that Allingham understood how to travel, while her father did not. There was no anxiety about the baggage, no frenzied hurrying to and fro, counting the packages; waiters and porters and cabmen did not wax rude about their tips, not because Allingham was lavish, but because they saw at a glance that he knew his business.

Moreover, Hilary's sense of dependence on her husband grew greater every day. It was wonderfully pleasant to feel that he knew exactly what to do, that he could take all the worries off her hands. He was on his own ground now, and every hour of the day she had occasion to compare him favorably with their fellow-travelers. The combination of a gentleman and a man of action seemed rather rare, a fact which puzzled her a little, for she had not noticed it on the occasion of her former visit. Now, excluding the military, most of their fellow-passengers on the four days' train journey were either men fresh from home, with manners and no practical experience, or Afrikanders, with practical experience and no manners.

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Somehow, she had grown almost shy with her husband. The bitterness she had felt during those unhappy days at Cottington had all vanished, though much of the sorrow remained. They had drawn no nearer together, chiefly because he gave her no chance. He was gentle, attentive, and almost fastidious in his respect for her, in his observance of the little courtesies of life; but that was all. He neither asked for her confidences nor gave her his. Often she told herself that it was best so, that, after the wretchedness of the past year, the present state was an unspeakable relief; and, if only they could continue on the same lines, they might in time attain, if not happiness, at least a certain degree of peace. But it was not always so, and, on more than one night she had cried herself to sleep, either from anger or from longing for the days which were gone forever.

Once she caught Allingham off his guard for a moment. They had passed Mafeking early that morning, and were well up into the dreary bush-covered wilderness of the Bechuanaland Protectorate. She had not seen her husband for several hours, and was beginning to feel a little worried. He was not wont to leave her for so long without coming to ask if she were in need of anything. Vaguely alarmed, she got up at last and went down the corridor in search of him, finally discovering him on the rear platform of the end coach. He was hatless, with an empty pipe in his mouth, and as she came out he looked round with an unusual softness in his eyes.

"I've been watching the old Road," he said very

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quietly, nodding toward the bush on the right of the line.

Hilary followed his gaze. Now that he pointed it out, she could see that the clearing running through the bush parallel to the line had once been a wagon track; but the red sand was almost covered with the encroaching undergrowth, while, where it did remain clear, the rains had washed it into great ruts. Even to her eyes, it was obviously disused, abandoned. A few more wet seasons and there would be no trace of it left.

Suddenly, she was conscious of a great pity for Allingham. For the moment, at least, her jealousy of the road had gone, and, for the first time for many months, she slipped her arm into his.

"Do you recognize this part?" she asked, for want of anything else to say.

Allingham nodded. "I've been over it too often to forget. I shot a blue wildebeeste under that little bit of kopje there, a big bull, but lean as a rake. Swartboy made his skin into reims for the red span. There's a drift just along here, a nasty little sand river. I remember finding old Harry Boyle stuck hopelessly there. Harry died in Khama's town six years ago." He sighed regretfully. "I'm afraid a good many of the old crowd are gone. They lived pretty hard, you see. . . . Look how closely the railway people followed our road. I wonder how they would have got on without us. We shall see the drift I spoke of in a minute. Ah, there it is, with the banks absolutely washed away. No wagon will ever go across there again."

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She glanced up at him, and thinking she saw something very like tears in his eyes, pressed his arm gently. Almost unconsciously, he returned the pressure. She could afford to be generous, for had not the railway beaten the road? Farther up country, beyond Buluwayo, it might be different; but in her sudden access of tenderness, she was ready to shut her eyes to the possibility of that.

Allingham did not look at her. He was still staring out across the bush, but now his eyes were so misty that he could not distinguish anything definite; even the road had gone. He was trying to make up his mind to speak; but before he could frame the words, the brakes were put on with the suddenness dear to the heart of the South African guard, and the engine came to a standstill beside a water tank, which, with a large name board and a tin shanty for the pump driver, constituted a typical Bechuanaland railway station.

A tall white man, who had been sitting on a kit bag in the little patch of shade furnished by the tank, strolled forward to the platform on which the Allinghams were standing. He swung himself up lightly, then, as he faced Hilary, raised the big cowboy hat which he had been wearing well down over his eyes.

"How do you do, Mrs. Allingham?" he said.

Hilary started, while her husband frowned. It was Cuthbert Lestrangle. He was thinner than of old, and his hair and mustache were turning gray; but his manner was the same as ever, alert, masterful, almost domineering.

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Hilary held out her hand with a rather wistful little smile. "I expect you are surprised to see us, Mr. Lestrangle?"

He shook his head. "No, not exactly. Mrs. Ingram wrote that you were coming."

The smile left Hilary's face, which grew cold and hard at once; but the boss, who was just shaking hands with Allingham, did not appear to notice the change.

Hilary stood for a minute, listening apathetically to the others; then, without a word of excuse, she went forward to her own compartment, while, after seeing his baggage put on the train, Lestrangle strolled up the corridor in search of the conductor.

Allingham remained behind, full of bitter thoughts against this man who seemed always to be crossing his life. But for the boss there might have been an explanation with Hilary; now, owing to the mention of Mrs. Ingram's name, this seemed farther off than ever. All his wife's jealousy of the other woman had come back, and she would not even listen to the confession he intended to make, although, until that had been made, he felt he could never really look her in the face. He had forfeited the right to ask anything of her.

Mentally, he cursed Lestrangle. The boss had been his evil genius all along. But for him Mrs. Ingram would never have come back into their lives, a score of miserable things would never have happened. Once, he had detested Lestrangle as the representative of the new order, the railway, and the mine; now, it had become a personal matter. Even the road was

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nothing compared to his wife. And yet, face to face with the boss, his resentment always seemed to subside. Only once, in Malongesa's kraal, had he shown fight, and, even then, he had finished so lamely that, at their next meeting, the other had ignored the quarrel.

Cuthbert Lestrangle had a reserved compartment, in which he spent most of the time writing; consequently, the Allinghams hardly saw him again until they reached Buluwayo. Hilary made no further reference to what had passed on the rear platform, and Allingham himself was too miserable and disappointed to make another attempt at explanation. As a result, when the train steamed into the station, outwardly, at least, they were as far apart as they had been on board ship.

There was a mule cart waiting for the boss, and he insisted on driving the Allinghams down to their hotel. "I shall see you again," he remarked as he said good-by. "You are going down to the Marvel district, are you not? You can travel most of the way by rail now, Mrs. Allingham. That part has changed very much since I drove you up."

Hilary went pale. Suddenly, she remembered the little hut in Fort M'Bendese, and Allingham lying helpless, swathed in bandages. The boss noticed her look, and turned away very quickly, to answer Allingham, who was saying: "Did you find my way down through the hills, after all? I saw by the map the railway had passed them."

Lestrangle nodded. "Yes, I came on the pass

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myself about the time you left the country," he replied quietly, as though they had never quarreled over the matter.

Allingham colored and bit his lip. He recalled what Mrs. Ingram had said about this man being too strong for him.

CHAPTER XXVIII

ALLINGHAM had a bath, to get rid of the dust of the train journey, then strolled down to the bar, in the hope of meeting some one he knew. But, though there were eight or ten men in the place, the faces were all strange to him. Yet there had been a time when he had known pretty well half the population of the country.

The barmaid looked at him inquiringly.

"Give me a bamboo," he said in answer to her unspoken question.

The girl seemed puzzled. "We don't have that drink up here," she said.

Allingham laughed. He had been served with scores of them over that same counter. "It's gin, angostura, sherry, and sour lime juice," he explained.

A couple of men standing next him put down their drinks to listen; then one of them remarked: "That's a new drink to me. I'm an old hand up here, and I never heard of it before."

"Is that so?" Allingham answered with a smile.

The stranger nodded wisely. "Never heard of it before," he repeated, then he turned to the barmaid, "It's quite new up here, isn't it, Bessie? . . . I suppose you have come to have a look round, sir?"

Allingham admitted the fact, and the other went

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on: "The country is going ahead now. We've got beyond the rough-and-ready stage, and can call ourselves civilized. Still, it has been an uphill fight, because, though you might not believe it, there were a good many who preferred the semisavagery of the early days. But of course they had to go; we were not going to stand that sort of thing." He looked toward his companion, a rather pale youth, who assented solemnly.

Allingham glanced at the other men in the bar. There had been a distinct change in the Buluwayo type during the last five years. The riding breeches and highly polished puttee leggings were not so much in evidence as formerly, and the hunting stocks, once beloved of the Buluwayo civilian, had been replaced by high and orthodox white collars, things which had been absolutely unknown in the early days, when even the Deputy Administrator used to attend race meetings in a soft shirt open at the throat, and without a jacket.

"I suppose you are going to stay a few weeks?" the stranger's voice broke in. "If you are thinking of buying land, or anything like that, I can give you every information about the country." He fumbled in his pocket, and produced a card which proclaimed him to be that mysterious animal, a commission agent. "I have farms in every district. If you like, I can procure you a Cape cart, and an experienced guide to show you the land. I haven't the pleasure of knowing your name, but——"

Allingham cut him short. "Thanks, I don't

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think I will trouble you. You see, though I have been home for five years, I was a transport rider up here for a long while, and I think I know every district. John Allingham my name is."

The stranger flushed, then, being a good-natured little man, he laughed. "You might have told me before," he said rather ruefully. "And now you will have another of those mysterious drinks with me?"

A few minutes later, Allingham left the hotel and strolled down the well-remembered street. He was conscious of a distinct sense of disappointment. All the men he passed were strangers to him; many of the names over the shops were fresh; and when, at last, he did find one store he knew, a place which used to be a favorite haunt of transport riders, and he turned in to buy some tobacco, the other customers stared at him rudely, while his name conveyed nothing to the manager, a brother of the old proprietor.

Allingham glanced round the shelves. "I used to get all my trek gear here. Don't you keep it now?"

The manager shook his head. "No demand for it," he said curtly.

When he joined his wife at dinner, her quick eyes saw that something was wrong.

"Haven't you met anyone who remembered you, John?" she asked.

He laughed a little bitterly. "It isn't that they don't remember me. They have never known me. Why, the only wagons I saw were broken-down affairs, rotting on an empty stand. The town itself is the same dreary, half-finished hole it used to be; and

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I suppose there are a lot of the same officials and mining-office people; but as for the transport riders and those—" He shrugged his shoulders and stared out of the window.

Hilary watched him a moment, then laid a gentle hand on his arm.

"Your dinner is getting cold, John. . . . You are sure to meet some of your old friends later on. Did you hear anything of my brother, Phil? I was in hopes he would have met us."

Allingham pulled himself together; he had quite forgotten this brother-in-law of his, as, in fact, he had forgotten a good many other things which concerned Hilary. "Phil? Oh, I suppose he has been shifted, probably to Gwelo or Salisbury. I will find out for you to-morrow."

Allingham had been expecting Mac to join them in Buluwayo; consequently, he had made no attempt to catch the first train to the Marvel district. However, on the morning following his arrival, he received a wire from Alexandra stating that his prospective partner was in hospital with a touch of fever, and could not come down for a week or so. Allingham swore feelingly. He loathed Buluwayo more than ever, and the idea of making a stay of indefinite duration was horrible to him. All at once, he decided not to wait for Mac, but to take the next train down the new branch line. Still, that did not go till Monday, and it was now only Friday.

Cuthbert Lestrangle must have mentioned Hilary's return at the club; for, soon after lunch, one of her

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former acquaintances called with his newly married wife and carried her off for the rest of the day. Allingham excused himself from going. The people were strangers to him, and he was conscious of a kind of ashamed relief at being free of his wife's society for a few hours. He had spent the morning lounging about the hotel, though, as Hilary was quick to note, he showed no desire to visit the bar. Nor had he gone back to his old style of dress. Outwardly, at least, there was nothing to distinguish him from the other tourists staying in the place.

As soon as his wife had gone, Allingham went out with the intention of looking up his old lawyer; but, though he found the office, there was a new name on the door.

"He joined Plumer's column for the relief of Mafeking, and got killed somewhere in the Protectorate," a clerk explained in answer to his inquiries. "His partner? Came to grief over the mining slump, and is in the Transvaal now, broke to the world. . . . Anything we can do for you?"

Allingham shook his head, then thanked him, and strolled across the road to the surgery of the man who had set his broken leg at Fort M'Bendese. In this case, the brass plate was still the same; but it was a stranger who came into the waiting room with his card in his hand.

"Dr. Sennen is on a trip home. Still, I am doing his work," and he looked at the visitor interrogatively, as though expecting him to state his complaint.

Allingham smiled. "No, I'm quite fit, thanks. I

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only wanted to look him up. He fixed this leg for me some years ago." He stayed chatting a few minutes, then rose to go. "I suppose I'm taking up your time rather unprofitably?" he said.

The doctor glanced round the empty waiting room. "Does it look like it?" he asked ruefully. "If you're not in a hurry, come into my own room and have a whisky."

Allingham accepted with alacrity. He was horribly bored, and, apparently, the other was in like case.

The doctor did not think much of Buluwayo, and he said so emphatically. "I've been here four years, and the town has been going down all the time. There's no money in the place now the railway has gone past it. Instead of being a great distributing center, it's just a station on the line. I suppose the population has increased since you left; but it's merely a population of employees, which has to spend its whole salary in keeping up appearances. Buluwayo men now don't go out into the veld and come back with fever, and, even if they did, we should have to wait years for our fees. I suppose you see a big change?"

"Change!" Allingham echoed. "It's like a new place to me, so far as the people are concerned. Cuthbert Lestrangle is about the only man I've met whom I know. Tell me, do they still hate him as much? Has he been hooted in the market square again?"

"Hardly," the doctor answered with a smile. "He has lived all that down, or rather killed it by the force of his personality. They may hate him still

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—a good many do—but they know better than to say so.”

At last, a patient came in, and Allingham got up reluctantly to leave. “Well, you’ve helped me to kill part of the afternoon very pleasantly. I wish you would come to dinner, and help me kill the evening. My wife has gone out with some friends of hers, and it’s horribly dull.”

The doctor shook his head. “I should like to, awfully, but I’m fixed up for to-night. Still, I hope to see you again.”

Allingham shook hands and limped back to the hotel. It was a long time since he had felt so lonely, and he regretted bitterly that he had not gone with Hilary. He had a drink brought to him in the courtyard, but he would not go in to the bar. Somehow, the latter had lost all its attraction for him; and yet there had been a time when it would have seemed the natural place in which to while away the hours. Now, it actually repelled him, possibly because of the memories of other days.

A group of tourists, lately returned from a trip to the Matoppos, annoyed him with their chatter about their adventures, which seemed to consist in the fact of their having been forced to use condensed milk, and make their midday tea over a fire in the open; though one of the party had actually seen a troop of baboons. For a little while he listened, despite himself; then got up impatiently and went into the smoking room. There, however, he found a plethoric-looking chairman of a mining company, newly out from home on a

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tour of inspection, holding a kind of informal reception of his admirers, or rather of the admirers of his reputed wealth, and talking loudly and pompously of the great future of the properties whose destinies he controlled. Allingham picked up a paper and tried hard to read; but, somehow, the group fascinated him, and he could not help contrasting the loud-voiced garrulity of its members, their rather feeble witticisms and ostentatious display of knowledge, with the grim strength of Cuthbert Lestrangle. After all, the boss really belonged to the pioneer days; he might have done more than anyone else to change the old order of things; but, at least, he had taken the same risks as the men he displaced. He had nothing in common with this blatant, soft-handed crowd which had never risked anything, and was now reaping the whole reward of the pioneers' work.

The evening passed slowly. Allingham dined alone, then went for a stroll; but the streets were deserted, and he soon returned, to sit in the hall and wait for Hilary's return. When, at last, she did come back, he greeted her with an eagerness which reminded her of the old days.

"I wish I had gone with you," he said. "It has been most disgustingly lonely here."

Hilary rewarded him with a smile. "I found it rather dull without you, though I'm afraid you wouldn't have liked the men I met. Why, even I knew more about wagons and so on than they did."

As they got up from breakfast on the following

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morning, Allingham suggested that Hilary should go down to the market square with him.

"It's Saturday," he added. "The one day when Buluwayo manages to rouse up to some sort of life. The market is always worth seeing."

Hilary assented readily. She had awakened with his words of the evening before still in her ears, and she did not want to be away from him again.

As they walked down the wide, dusty street, Allingham looked around eagerly in the hopes of seeing some familiar face; but there were few people about, and those few were all strangers.

"I suppose we are a little late," he said. "The sales have probably begun."

But when they turned the corner into the big market square, he gave a gasp of surprise. There was not a single span, not even a loose bullock. Instead of the four or five hundred white men he had expected, there were half a dozen down-at-heel Britishers standing on the outskirts of a little crowd of Greeks, Russian Jews, coolies and natives. The two seedy-looking auctioneers were unknown to him, while one glance at the goods they had to sell was more than sufficient—a few old stretcher bedsteads, some mattresses and clothing which seemed to clamor for a trip to the refuse destructor, a barrow load of second-hand hardware, and a pile of obviously blown tins of meat.

Allingham could hardly believe his eyes. He had seen ten thousand pounds' worth of stock change hands there in half an hour. He had been able to go on that square and find in every second man an old per-

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sonal friend. Now, there was not ten thousand pence worth of stuff for sale, and not a single man he knew, or wanted to know.

Hilary, too, had seen the market, if not in its best days, at least before it had declined greatly, and she understood something of what he must be feeling. She glanced upward at his face, then, with a quick gesture of sympathy, laid her hand on his arm. "I expect they have the market on some other day now, John. Perhaps every second Saturday, or something like that. Shall we go back? I am sure you hate these horrid aliens as much as I do."

Allingham assented willingly, and they were just leaving the square, when he heard some one hurrying up behind him, calling his name.

"Baas, Baas Allingham!"

He knew the voice instantly, and turned round to see Swartboy, looking exactly the same as ever, except that the wizened old face was now one huge smile of sheer delight. Even Hilary could not help feeling moved at the joy in the little man's countenance, as he came up, hat in hand.

"Baas, my own Baas! You've come back, at last. I knew you would, and I beat that foolish Zulu Joseph only a month ago over that same matter. He said the Boers had killed you. And the missus, too." He turned to Hilary, and she saw that there was something very like tears in those queer old eyes. "And the missus, too! Now I shall be happy again. Shall I bring my blanket to where you are staying, Baas, or shall I wait in the Location?"

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Allingham turned to his wife a little doubtfully, but Hilary did not hesitate. "Of course you must take him," she answered promptly. "You couldn't possibly refuse, and you know how useful he is."

Her husband's face brightened; he had feared she might object. "Come to the hotel this afternoon, Swartboy," he said. "I will tell you then what we are going to do."

The little man's face beamed again. "I will come, Baas, I will come indeed." Then he went back toward the square with a swagger in his gait. "That is my own Baas, for whom I have been waiting," he remarked, as he joined the little group of down-country Kaffirs. "Now I shall be all right. We are going up to the Mashona districts, where you can hardly tell the people from the baboons, to buy many young cattle, black oxen with short horns. Then we shall break them into the yoke, and make spans indeed."

"Where will you use the spans?" one of his hearers demanded. "By the time you have them trained, there will be only railways."

Swartboy snorted scornfully. "My Baas is not a Dutchman who rides transport for money; he just wants spans, that is all. And, anyway, he can ride almost as fast as their foolish railway," he added with a splendid contempt for truth.

Still, when he met Allingham at the hotel after lunch, his attitude was very different. He was keenly anxious to find out whether his old Baas was thinking of returning to the road, and was greatly relieved

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when he heard that he merely intended to go in for cattle breeding.

"There is no longer any real transport, Baas," he said. "You see one or two little wagons carrying wood on the mines, or fetching whisky and meat in tins to the stores; but it is not as it was in our days, when we used to outspan twenty or thirty wagons together. All the old transport riders are gone. I ask 'Where is Baas This, where is Baas That?' and always the answer is: 'Dead.' And the drivers! oh, Baas, the drivers! Zulus, and mission Kaffirs, who steal the strops off the skeys at night, and even Mashona! Baboons from the granite hills driving oxen! No, Baas, there is no longer any transport; only bad wagons, and bad oxen, and thieves and hill men carrying whips which they cannot use."

"And what have you been doing all the time?" Allingham asked. "I thought you bought some cattle yourself?"

Swartboy nodded. "Ja, Baas, but I sold them to the soldiers for food; then I came here, to wait for you."

"Who told you I was coming back?" Allingham asked.

The driver laughed. "I knew you would, Baas. Every white man who has been on the Road comes back, if only to have a look. They must come back; the Road calls them. But, beyond that, I asked Baas Lestrangle four months ago, and he said you would be here soon."

Allingham knit his brows. Four months—it was

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only two months since he, himself, had determined to return. "Are you sure it was four months, Swart-boy?"

"Certain, Baas, because my cow had a calf that same day, and so I have kept count."

The white man walked up and down the courtyard two or three times. There was something uncanny in the way Cuthbert Lestrangle seemed to foresee his movements. It was almost as though the boss had willed him to come back, and he had obeyed involuntarily. The thought irritated him intensely for a moment, then he put it resolutely to one side, having other things to ask the driver.

"Where are our old spans and wagons, Swart-boy?"

The light went out of the Basutu's eyes. "Oh, Baas! the fool who bought the red span and the mixed span tried to go down to the Portuguese with them, and got into the tsetse fly belt. All the cattle died, save Rooiland and Vaalpans. Klaas, who went, too, says M'Kombe's men broke up the wagons for the iron. Dingaan's span went south, to Khama's country, and I never heard of it again. Maybe it is still there, being driven by some Mangwatu dog. But my span, Baas, my beautiful span, which never needed the whip, and pulled like one ox when I said 'Yeck, yeck'—his voice broke a little—"my span, Baas, was sold for meat to a butcher two years ago, when the soldiers were here." He paused and drew his hand across his eyes, making no disguise of his emotion. "I tell you, Baas, they don't want transport now. All they know

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is meat, and trains, and machines-which-never-stop-making-a-noise."

Allingham nodded. He had never realized before how fond he had been of those cattle. When he sold them, he had been an invalid, with his mind full of Hilary Carden. Now, however, he saw matters in a different light. How often he had seen Swartboy's span "pull as one ox," fighting through a heavy place; once they had dragged a düsselboom clean out of the fore tongue; and twice the mixed span had rushed a loaded wagon out of the horribly steep Tebekwana Drift without assistance. Ah! they had been cattle indeed; and now they were all gone.

Swartboy seemed to read his thoughts. "Where will you find hind oxen like Biffel and Fransman, or a front ox like Jonkman, Baas? Our spans were the best in the country."

"Well, you must try and breed some more, Swartboy, on this farm near the 'Marvel.' I will tell Baas Mac to make you head boy."

The Basutu shook his head mournfully. "I can breed them, Baas, and the veld there is good; besides which, the big machine will have scared away the lions and other schelm. But they will only be bred for meat, to be killed and sold in a store, like pigs or goats. There is no real transport now—no one wants the Road any more, Baas, no one wants it any more. The railway is almost up to the Zambesi, and the Road ends there."

CHAPTER XXIX

AT dinner that night, rather to his own surprise, Allingham found himself telling Hilary of the fate of his cattle, and he was even more surprised to find that she sympathized with him.

"I was very much afraid of them at first," she said. "But I soon found they were gentle, patient old things, especially those of Swartboy's. I remember that time the brake went wrong, and you raced down the hill leading those cattle. I didn't think of it at the moment; but next day it struck me how horrible it would have been if that huge wagon had come on top of them."

"What were you thinking of at the moment?" he asked.

"Of you, of course," she answered simply.

Allingham's eyes grew bright; it was a long time since she had spoken like that to him; then, without any warning, he began to discuss their future movements. Hitherto, he had told her practically nothing, thinking she was not interested; but now he went into matters thoroughly, asking her advice, and trying to discover her wishes.

"I should think two months hence ought to see us back in Capetown," he said. "Unless you would like to go home by the East Coast route."

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Once, she would have welcomed the idea of such an early departure; now, she rested her chin on her hand and looked at him thoughtfully. "Two months? Will that give you enough time to do all you want? There must be a lot of people you would like to see again now you're out here; and it isn't as though there was any special reason for our hurrying home. It's not as if we were keeping up an establishment in England. We're delightfully independent in that way."

She smiled as she said it, and, for an instant, Allingham felt a fierce desire to blurt out his confession, and then to take her in his arms and with his kisses make her forget, or at least forgive, what he had just told her.

They were alone in the dining room, the rest of the guests having already finished their meal and departed, and in another moment the words would have been said, beyond recall; but, before he could speak, he heard a voice he knew well giving a curt order to the head waiter, and Cuthbert Lestrangle stalked in, dusty and travel-stained.

The boss saw the Allinghams at once, and came across to their table. "I've just got in from a long journey in a Cape cart; and, as I knew there wouldn't be any food ready in my own quarters, I turned in here," he explained. "So you must excuse me, Mrs. Allingham. I am sure you will, as I've often seen your husband looking as bad, or even worse."

He stayed chatting for a moment, then went over to a table the waiter had hurriedly prepared for him;

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but Allingham's chance had gone; for, when they got into the hall, they found Hilary's friend of the day before waiting to carry her off to a musical evening.

The branch railway did not run right down to the "Marvel" as yet, but stopped short at a newly founded township, the very name of which was strange to Allingham. The place was not even as big as Fort Alexandra, but, having been planned on a less ambitious scale, the buildings were close together, instead of straggling over a large stretch of tin-strewn veld. But this was not the only point of difference, for the inhabitants were like the buildings, more modern, more businesslike, and, perhaps, more ornamental. There were at least twenty white women, not including the hospital staff; and, as a result, the cemetery was still almost empty, for men had other places to go to besides the canteen. But if the township gained in respectability, it lost in romance. Practically the whole of the inhabitants worked for a wage. Even the stores belonged to big companies. Men cared little about the idea of a boom, which would only entail extra work, probably without extra pay. They were entirely prosaic in their ideas. They had their food regularly, and very few of them had ever known what it was to be really hungry or really thirsty; just as few of them could have hit a running buck, had there been any buck left within the five-mile radius, which was about the limit of their explorations. A good many wore white collars, some even dressed for dinner. They were quite good fellows in their way; but

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when Allingham made a tour of inspection the morning after his arrival, the only familiar face he discovered was that of the sergeant who had cared for him at Fort M'Bendese.

"I saw that nigger of yours a couple of hours ago, and he told me you were back," the sergeant said as he led the visitor into his room and produced a bottle of dop. "Good boy that, a deuced good boy. They're getting rare now, that sort. And so you want to go down to that farm Captain MacMurdo was after? You won't get a Cape cart here, or a traveling wagon; but I have a Scotch cart and four bullocks, and I can take you down in that."

Allingham reflected a moment. "The hotel seems very decent, and I was suggesting to my wife she might stay there while I was having a run round. Let me see, you have met her, I think?"

The sergeant looked up quickly. "So you married her in the end? Lucky man. I don't suppose I shall ever get out of this now. I've been at it too long, and one gets habits, you know." He nodded grimly at the bottle. "I was in the old Bechuanaland Border Police—you can reckon from that how many years' service I have—and yet, though I know the country from one end to the other, I should probably starve if I left the force. They want men of a different stamp to-day. And so I stay on here, with no earthly hope of anything. . . . Oh, well, it's no use grouching. . . . So you will come on the Scotch cart? Will to-morrow at dawn suit you?"

Allingham thanked him, arranged a few details as

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to stores, then went back to tell his wife. "I think it will be best for you to stay here; in fact, you couldn't go on a Scotch cart; and the trip won't take me long. I'm afraid you will find it horribly dull, though I hear there are one or two very nice women here, and they're sure to call. Unfortunately, I don't know a soul in the township except the police sergeant."

Hilary assented to the arrangement, rather unwillingly. "I suppose it must be so; but you will be very careful, won't you, John? Remember, it's years since you slept in the open, or anything like that."

Her husband was staring out of the window at a span of oxen, the first real span he had seen for five years, which was passing down the street, so he had not noticed the anxious look in her eyes.

"Oh, I'll be careful," he answered without turning round, "and the sergeant says there's a store of sorts now at the Five Mile Water. We can put up there. Mac's farm lies along that spruit, you see."

Hilary sighed, and went back to the book she had been reading. If he had only asked her, she would willingly have braved the ten miles' journey in the Scotch cart. . . .

The old main road, from Buluwayo to the new township, was already more or less overgrown. The stores along it had been closed, and even Fort M'Bendese, one of the oldest landmarks in the country, had been abandoned; but the fifteen-mile stretch, from railhead to the "Marvel," was still in use, and was outwardly exactly the same as when John Allingham saw it last, five years previously. Yet, somehow,

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it was different, possibly because he saw it with different eyes. It was the old Road, his Road, and yet he felt essentially a passenger. Though it was all so familiar to him, he did not feel he had any part in it. In the old days, it had gone on indefinitely; now, it seemed a mere track, which began at the township and ended at the "Marvel," a mere temporary connecting link, which would soon be replaced by the railway. He did not attempt to analyze his feelings as he lay smoking under the big mimosa tree at the midday outspan. All he knew was that he was intensely disappointed with everything, and very anxious to get his trip over.

The past seemed curiously dim and distant, and his thoughts were almost entirely of the future during the early part of the afternoon trek; but when they reached the top of the last big rise, the things of five years ago came back with startling suddenness, for the roar of the Marvel mill swelled up to him on the breeze, and there ahead, standing out clearly in a stretch of veld, now practically denuded of bush and trees, were the mine buildings and smokestacks in all their blatant hideousness.

Swartboy, who was driving the cart, turned to him with a shake of his head. "The big machine goes on, Baas, always goes on. Do you remember the day it started?"

Allingham nodded, but did not answer. He was trying to catch its message, to make out the old rhythm, "Eight-pennyweights-to-the-ton and not-a-pennyweight-more," but, try as he would, he could not

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hear the words. It was just a steady roar, unvarying, purposeful, triumphant.

He turned to the sergeant. "How many stamps have they got in the Marvel mill now?" he asked.

"Sixty," the sergeant answered. "They started with only twenty, you know. The mine went all to pieces for a time. The output fell to below eight pennyweights to the ton, and there was a lot of queer stories going round. But Lestrangle stuck to it; picked up the rich part of the reef which Ingram swore he had lost, and now the mine is paying hand over fist. They say that all the time the mill was shut down, nearly two years, the boss was carrying on the underground development at his own expense, as the company had no money left. He's a man who won't be beaten."

CHAPTER XXX

THE store at the Five Mile Water, a low galvanized-iron shanty with some seedy-looking wattle-and-dab huts behind it, stood on the outspan where Allingham had made tea for Mrs. Ingram. There had been other changes, too. Much of the surrounding bush had been cleared away; the road had been diverted a hundred yards to a new drift across the spruit; and some one had started mine workings on a reef almost opposite the store, though these were now abandoned, the rough pole-built headgear and the dump of broken rock alone remaining to tell of the prospector's ruined hopes.

It was dark when the cart reached the water, and Allingham could make out little; but he was up at dawn next morning, and, leaving the sergeant slumbering peacefully in the one guest's room, went out on to the stoep. For a full minute he stood very still. The place should have had so many memories, have stirred so many chords; and yet as he gazed round, everything seemed strange with the exception of Malongesa's kopjes, behind which the sun was just rising.

Suddenly, he found himself wondering how the old head man was getting on under the new conditions. He glanced round toward the kitchen; there was no one moving yet, no prospect of breakfast for a couple

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of hours; so he could go to the kraal and back without the sergeant or the storekeeper being any the wiser. He did not want them to know that he had paid a visit to a Kaffir because he was hungering for the sight of some one belonging to the old life

He went to his room very quietly, picked up his rifle and a handful of cartridges, and started off as fast as his lameness would allow in the direction of the kopjes; but he had not gone a hundred yards before Swartboy was at his heels. The driver had been watching him from the doorway of one of the huts. He had got his beloved Baas back at last, and he had no intention of losing sight of him again.

"You are going to see the baboon folk, Baas? Good. We will see if they ask for money this time. Still, I will say this for the head baboon, that when he heard of how those mad, ill-trained oxen of Joseph's had trampled you, he came all the way to Fort M'Bendese to ask how you were getting on."

Once, it would have been impossible to walk a quarter of a mile through that bush without seeing the fresh spoor of antelope, both big and small; now, they reached the foot of the kopjes without having noticed a single hoof print. It was the time of day when the guinea fowl are most clamorous, yet not a solitary note broke the stillness. The path leading into the kraal was distinct as ever, having been beaten hard by the passage of generations of feet; but Allingham noticed that there was no spoor in the dust; and so, when he rounded the last neck of rock at the foot of the hill, he was not wholly unprepared for what he saw.

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Malongesa's village had disappeared. True, one hut yet stood, leaning over drunkenly, with its roof fallen in, and a couple of grain bins, perched high on the bowlders, still defied the weather; but those were all. The other huts had been fired, leaving mere rings of black ashes mingled with the red clay of the walls. The gateway of the cattle kraal, having been made of hard-wood poles, was erect, but the rest of the fence had already been destroyed by the white ants; and inside, what had been the inclosure, was a tangle of wild pumpkins. A few lizards running over the rocks, and a couple of crows in the tree which had once sheltered the primitive forge, were the only living things in sight.

Allingham sat down on a big bowlder and surveyed the ruins gloomily. "How long have they been gone, Swartboy?" he asked at last.

The Basutu scratched his head. "Four years, I should say, Baas, perhaps more. Look, even the ash heap has nearly disappeared. I suppose it was the big machine drove them off."

The white man refilled his pipe, passed his pouch over to Swartboy, then forgot to strike the match he held in his hand. He was cursing his folly in having returned to the country. Once he had gone, he ought to have stayed away altogether; he might have foreseen that everything would have changed. Instead of being welcomed as a man who had come back to his own, he was a stranger in a strange land.

"There is some one coming down the kopje," Swartboy's voice broke in abruptly on his thoughts.

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Allingham looked up to see what appeared to be a very old native wrapped in a rag of blanket, making his way cautiously among the rocks and fever trees on the hillside.

A minute later, Swartboy spoke again. "It is the head baboon himself, Malongesa. How he has changed!"

Malongesa came forward with uncertain steps, and squatted down stiffly at Allingham's feet.

"Chief, great chief! So you have come back," he said. Then, mechanically, he opened an old snuff-box, then seemed to remember, and put it back. "I have had no snuff for a long time, not since I came out of prison," he mumbled.

The white man leaned forward to catch his words. "So you have been in prison, Malongesa. What was that for?"

Malongesa looked away. "You remember my daughters, chief?" he said at last. "You chased two white men away from them, and, had you stayed, all would have been well. But when you were gone those same white men came, many, many times, though I knew nothing of it, until at last I found there would soon be children." He paused and stared at the ground, then went on again. "I found that out, and yet, as you know, both were promised in marriage, and I had already got some of the cattle to be paid for them. I was disgraced, chief; all the countryside knew it, and I could not return the cattle, for one I had sold to pay taxes to the mine."

"What did you do?" Allingham asked gently.

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Malongesa's bleary eyes flashed for a moment, then the fire died away again. "One of my daughters escaped, but one I found and slew, according to our laws. Then the police took me; and I heard I should be hanged in the white man's way; but the great chief at the mine"—he mentioned Lestrangle's native name—"he interfered, and, instead, they put me in prison for three years; at least, they said it was three years. All I know is I was old like this when I came out of the stone walls." He tried to draw his bit of blanket round him, and, though the day was warm, he shivered possibly at the recollection of the awful confinement in the close prison, infinitely more terrible to a savage than to a civilized man.

"I came back here," he went on in a low monotone, "and found my village like this. They thought they would never see me again, and they fled down to the low country. But my wife had died of sorrow for me, and I had no children left. So I stayed here, in a little cave behind that great boulder, and there I shall die. My food, chief? There is another village in those hills near by, and the women bring me food secretly. If the police knew I was here, they would drive me out, because, they say, every man must live in a village so that he can be made to pay taxes. But this is my village, chief. Here I was born, as my father, and my father's father before him, and here I shall die. I know no other place, and I am no more alone here than I should be anywhere else. . . . Am I not afraid of lions, chief? Why should I be? There are no lions now; the machine which never stops has driven away

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all the game, just as it has driven away the black folk."

Allingham got up abruptly and paced to and fro. He was in raging passion against everyone connected with the mines, but most of all against Philip Carden, Hilary's own brother, who had done this vile thing. As he looked round at the desolate village and the broken-down figure squatting on the ground, he was bitterly ashamed of the men of his own color. Suddenly, there came back to him all the hopeful platitudes he had heard from the lips of Mr. Carden and his kind, about civilization, and the march of progress, and light in darkest Africa. And this was typical of the results of progress—some piles of ashes, a tangle of wild pumpkins, a childless, heartbroken old man shivering under the remnant of a shoddy trade blanket, and, in the distance, the Marvel mill grinding out dividends for shareholders six thousand miles away.

He was powerless to right matters. Civilization and progress are very sacred things, or, at least, very potent fetiches, which means much the same. All he could do was to give the old man some money, which brought a momentary gleam of gratitude into those dim eyes, and presently to send Swartboy back with enough tobacco and salt to last him for many months to come, for more months than he was likely to live. For once, Swartboy made no protest at his generosity; Malongesa's story had moved the Basutu more than he cared to admit to himself.

Allingham got back in time to join the sergeant and the storekeeper at breakfast.

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"Been having a look round?" the storekeeper asked. "I expect you find it changed a bit since you were here last? We've six or seven mining camps now within a mile of here, all of them out to the back of this, in the direction of Mr. MacMurdo's farm. That way," nodding toward Malongesa's kopjes, "there's nothing except a deserted village. There's a queer story about that place. Some of the youngsters from the 'Marvel' got fooling round the girls, and the result was the head man killed one of his daughters. There was the usual outcry, of course—that tribal law must be put down, and the old chap hanged. But the boss took the thing up, and you know how much he cares for any party, missionary or antimissionary, puritan or polygamist. And the government dare not offend the leading mining man in the country. So he had his own way. The white men concerned were turned off the 'Marvel' at an hour's notice, cleared clean off the company's property. They say Lestrangle wasn't safe to speak to for a week after."

The sergeant yawned. "I remember the affair. There was a lot of feeling about it, and a lot of sympathy for the fellows. So many white men do the same. I believe they hooted Lestrangle in one or two townships."

Allingham laughed harshly. He could imagine the cold contempt on the boss's face, and, for the first time, his mind went out in sympathy to the man. But he changed the subject abruptly, for he did not want Phil Carden's name to come up. He was now more anxious than ever to get his inspection of Mac's farm

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over, and to hurry back to his wife; for there was always the chance that, in some way or other, she might hear this hateful story. Had it not been for the look of the thing, he would have gone straight back, without troubling about the business which had brought him there. He had lost all interest in it already, and had practically determined to have nothing to do with the scheme beyond, perhaps, lending Mac some capital.

The farm lay a couple of miles up the spruit, and proved to consist of a nice stretch of open country. Allingham did not worry to go all over it. He saw its cattle-raising qualities at a glance, while, by climbing a small kopje, he got a fair idea of its extent.

"What do you think of it, Swartboy?" he asked as they went back to the road.

The Basutu shrugged his shoulders. "It's good veld, Baas; and there are no schelm about. But raising oxen for meat—" He shook his head mournfully.

It was almost dark when they reached the store, but the proprietor had heard their voices, and came out to meet them. "I'm sorry, Mr. Allingham, but I've had to take your room. The boss has just brought in a sick prospector he found on the veld, and he's got him there now. He's sent his Cape cart into town for the doctor; but I doubt if the old chap lasts till he comes."

As they got on to the stoep, Lestrangle hurried out of the room. "Have you got any decent champagne, Jones?" he said curtly to the storekeeper. "Bring it in then, quick. Halloo, Allingham. It's old Kerridge. He's going fast."

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Allingham followed him in to where the sick man lay. Kerridge looked very thin, very old, and the badger-like hair was almost white; but he was quite conscious, and he recognized Allingham immediately.

"Glad to see you," he murmured. "Nasty dose this time, niggers ran away—no food—too weak to trek—he found me," indicating Lestrangle with his eyes.

The boss, who had opened the champagne, passed his arm round the old man with infinite gentleness, and held the glass to his lips; but it was evident that Kerridge could hardly swallow. For a while, he lay motionless, utterly exhausted, then he signaled to Allingham again.

"He's a white man; we were all wrong about him; tell your wife."

Allingham nodded, and Kerridge closed his eyes, as if satisfied at having got something off his mind. The boss, who had been out for something, came in again, and touched Allingham on the arm. "I'll see to him," he whispered. "I'll call you if anything happens."

He placed a chair by the bedside, and sat very still. Allingham went out noiselessly, leaving the door ajar. From time to time, he looked in, always to see the same thing—the boss in shirt sleeves and stockinged feet, with his chin resting on his hand, watching the dying man. Allingham would gladly have shared his vigil, for Kerridge was his friend; but Lestrangle had told him to go, and, somehow, it never occurred to him to disobey. Moreover, he recognized that this other

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man, who was hated and feared from the Crocodile to the Zambesi, was by far the tenderest nurse he had ever seen.

The hours passed slowly. The doctor could not arrive before eleven o'clock, probably not before midnight. The sergeant had already drunk himself into insensibility, while the storekeeper was little better—the fear of the Angel of Death was on them, and they had been trying to forget. But Allingham had barely touched anything, and, after a time, he left the others, and sat down on a pile of grain bags outside the sick room.

It was half past eleven when the boss called him in a quick whisper. "He wants you, Allingham."

Kerridge's eyes were wide open and he was apparently stronger; at any rate, his voice was clearer. "I wanted to tell you I've struck it rich at last; three ounces to the ton at last. I knew I should, that things would pan out in the end. I'm going in now to register it, and then I'll sell and go home." He paused and stared at Lestrangle. "You won't do me out of it, will you? No, I know you won't now. You're a white man, after all, a real white man." His voice suddenly grew very faint, and they had to stoop down to hear it. "Three ounces . . . a tail half round the pan . . . struck it at last——"

Allingham and Lestrangle exchanged glances; then the boss bent down and felt his heart.

"The doctor is too late," he said simply.

CHAPTER XXXI

THEY covered over all that was left of Kerridge, and then they went across to the bar. Lestrangle gave one glance at the inmates—the sergeant stretched out on a canvas steamer chair, the storekeeper snoring with his head resting on a small table.

“Come outside, Allingham,” he said. “I want to have a talk with you.”

Allingham obeyed, and they sat down on the edge of the stoep, with their backs against a pile of cases. The moon had just risen behind Malongesa’s kopjes, and, in its soft light, the whole scene seemed transformed. The tins and bottles strewn about the ground became so many stones; the dump by the abandoned mine shaft was a mere blur, an ant-hill, perhaps; the old pit headgear was lost against the blackness of the hills behind it; while the wagon track gleamed white and distinct among the scrub. Allingham gazed at it in silence; it was the old road again, for a few brief hours.

“I am going home for good. I’ve already resigned, and have just been making a last tour round.” Lestrangle’s voice broke in on the transport rider’s thoughts.

The latter started, then repeated the words: “Going home for good?” It was difficult to imagine the country without the boss.

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Lestrangle nodded. "Yes. I'm going to be married—to Mrs. Ingram."

"Ah!" Allingham turned round and stared at him in amazement. "Is it—is it something recent?"

The boss shook his head. "No. It goes back sometime." But he volunteered no details, and Allingham never learned any.

For a few minutes, they smoked in silence, then the boss spoke again, quietly, deliberately. "That poor old fellow in there hated me. More than once, when he was drunk, he swore he would shoot me. You've always hated me, too, Allingham. Why was it?"

Allingham flushed, and tried to stammer out a denial, but Lestrangle stopped him. "I know why. It was my fault, in a way. I came out to this country to do certain work, and I didn't mean to let anything stop me. You know the type of man I had to handle—Ingram, and Greener, and the Cornish miners, not to mention the waster class they sent from home, like young Carden. I couldn't pick and choose out here, and, unless I had treated them like dogs, I should have got nothing done. I made them hate me. I know; but I've accomplished my object." He paused and lighted a fresh cigarette.

"What was your object?" Allingham asked.

"To prove that the mines up here were payable, and induce men to believe in the country to clear the way for civilization, to complete the work you fellows began so that settlers can come—settlers, Allingham, not merely the leaderless legion and the employee, but men who will build homes." Unconsciously, he had

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raised his voice, and his words began to pour out in a torrent, as he sketched out the future he foresaw.

Allingham listened in amazement. Cuthbert Lestrangle as an idealist! "But that sort of thing never made a country yet." He nodded his head in the direction of the Marvel mill.

Lestrangle brushed the idea aside. "Of course it never did; but the mines are just a phase. They bring people here, however, and now I have made the one thing pay, men will believe other things can pay—cattle, agriculture, even manufactures. But for the mines we should have had no railways, and even you must admit now that the road had served its purpose. I had to do a lot of things I didn't like, possibly a lot of things I regret; but I am leaving, feeling I have succeeded. The other mining men were here simply for what they could make; I am leaving poorer than when I came up."

The other looked at him with astonishment; rumor declared Lestrangle to be almost a millionaire.

The boss understood the look and laughed quietly. "I know what you are thinking of—the fluctuations of 'Marvel' shares. Well, I subscribed for thirty thousand when they were issued, and I have neither bought nor sold one since. I have always been the largest shareholder. . . . The big drop in the second output? Buluwayo was perfectly right; there was six weeks' gold and a month's tonnage in the first return; but I did not know till afterwards. I had so much to do outside the 'Marvel' that I had to trust Ingram and Greener and the assayer. They worked together and

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hoodwinked me. It was simple enough, as you will know. Of course they were bulls first, then bears, and made thousands both ways. I did not sack them on the spot, because it would have made the scandal infinitely worse. Then, too, Ingram had deliberately lost the best part of the reef. He and Greener had planned the whole thing months before Ingram himself came up. You know I engaged him through Greener's recommendation. Greener and the assayer? Oh, they started as contractors during the war, down at Durban, and made a very big pile, I believe."

"Mrs. Ingram used to say the mill said 'Eight-pennyweights-to-the-ton and not-a-pennyweight-more,' Allingham said slowly. "Did she suspect?"

Lestrangle nodded. "By that time, she knew Ingram only too well. She took a liking to you at once, and she was afraid he might get you to speculate on his advice. It was her way of warning you."

Allingham stared out into the night; he was thinking of how he had repaid Mrs. Ingram. "I behaved confounded badly to her in the end," he blurted out.

The boss laid a kindly hand on his shoulder. "She has forgotten it, and you had better forget it. You haven't told your wife?"

The other looked away and shook his head. "Not yet," he muttered.

"Don't then. Remember Leslie is going to be my wife, and I ask you not to. Will you promise? Don't be a fool in the matter. I know perfectly well how you felt at the time, and how you feel now. Things

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will come all right. I knew they would when I arranged for you to come out this time."

"You arranged!" Allingham echoed the words.

"Yes, I told MacMurdo to write that letter."

Lestrangle gave a little laugh. "You see, I knew that when she got away from her people and you saw the changes out here, you would get to understand one another. Don't shake your head, man; you will. And promise not to tell her about that other affair." His voice was insistent, almost imperious, and as usual, he had his way.

For a while they smoked on in silence. Allingham was conscious of a great sense of relief, tempered, perhaps, by a little humiliation; for in the last hour he had come to the point of admitting the truth of what Mrs. Ingram had repeated so often—that Lestrangle was always too strong for him. He had fought the man and been beaten, almost every time; and yet, as he glanced at the stern face by his side, he was conscious of a sense of respect, almost of affection. He had seen the human aspect of the boss, and, at last, he understood him. Now, he was all on fire to get back to Hilary, and see if in that matter, too, the other was right.

"Your brother-in-law has been shifted right up north," Lestrangle said suddenly. "I thought it better, in case Mrs. Allingham should hear that story." He was staring out toward Malongesa's hills as he spoke.

"I was over there to-day," Allingham answered.

"That extra hut tax was one of my mistakes," the boss went on. "I saw it afterwards. Those niggers

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are no good for mine work. Then, the fear of being turned out of their village seemed to send them wrong, women as well as men. Still, once we get a white population, with white women to shame men into self-respect, those things will cease to happen. This is going to be a British colony with clean ideals. The Afrikaner will never rule it."

Allingham thought of Buluwayo and knit his brows. "I don't like your new population."

"It hasn't come yet," Lestrangle answered promptly. "We're in a transition stage. Those you've met lately represent a phase, just as the mines do. I can see it all. We shall have settlers, instead of employees; British traders instead of Greeks and Germans. But you and I will have no part in it, John Allingham; because we've done our work, and the need for us has gone. They've forgotten you already; they will only remember me as a man they hated." There was a deep note of sadness in his voice, and once again Allingham's heart went out to him.

The boss was right, the need for both of them had gone.

A minute later, they heard the shout of a mule driver, and the Cape cart bringing the doctor came in sight round the bend.

"It's a pity I sent for him," Lestrangle remarked. "Still, there was just a chance. I'll give you a lift into the township after the funeral, if you like. Your friend, the sergeant, will hardly be cheerful company."

Hilary Allingham found the hours pass with ter-

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rible slowness. It was the first time during their married life that she had been alone in a strange place. A few months previously she would have been bitterly angry with Allingham for leaving her; now, she blamed herself with equal bitterness for allowing him to think she preferred to stay. She remembered the accident which had occurred but a few miles up that same road, and she went cold at the thought of what might happen this time. Her place was at his side, to see he ran no unnecessary risks.

Allingham had said that some of the women were sure to call. Such would certainly have been the case in former days, when the few married women in the country were so sure of their own position, so generally respected, that they risked nothing in visiting a stranger. But now society had changed; a distinct element of snobbishness had crept in; and it was not until the afternoon of the third day that the magistrate's wife called on Hilary, in consequence of the magistrate himself having learned that the Allinghams had been seen in Buluwayo talking to Cuthbert Lestrangle.

"If they're friends of Lestrangle's, and he finds she has been left alone all this time, he may be very nasty about it; so you had better go and call on her, my dear," the official said.

Hilary was undisguisedly glad to see her visitor. She did not expect her husband back for another twenty-four hours, and the hotel had become absolutely unbearable; consequently, she was very ready to allow herself to be carried off to tea.

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The hostess proved to be a very vivacious little lady, so full of gossip and information concerning the township that she had learned practically nothing concerning her guest when a couple of other visitors were ushered in. They had noticed Hilary being taken up to the house, and they had come with the idea of making a closer inspection of the unknown.

Mrs. Allingham detected their purpose at once, and assumed her coldest manner. She had no intention of being pumped by strangers whom she hoped never to see again. Like the magistrate himself, who presently came in, they were both Cape Dutch by birth, and intensely anxious to maintain the dignity of their official positions as wife and sister of the Mining Commissioner. Finding they could get nothing out of the stranger, they began to patronize her as a mere newcomer, who still had everything to learn regarding the country. As a result, Hilary's nerves were all on edge by the time they took their departure, and she longed to escape back to the loneliness of the hotel. After all, she had only another twenty-four hours to wait before Allingham, her husband, would be back.

But the magistrate's wife would not let her go so easily. She insisted on her guest staying to dinner, and Hilary found it impossible to refuse, much though she wished to do so. The evening passed even more slowly than it would have done at the hotel. The magistrate, a stodgy person, obsessed with a sense of his own official importance, talked at great length of official affairs, and of the great work which he and his colleagues were doing. The only other guest, his

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clerk of the court, a very small man, whom Hilary had noticed standing in the hotel doorway, apparently for the sake of displaying his inordinately large hat and its white puggaree, was silent in the presence of his chief; but after dinner he seated himself next to her, and bored her intensely with very long stories of his own rather prosaic adventures. At last, it was time to leave, and Mrs. Allingham rose with a deep sense of relief. Her host, himself, made no offer to accompany her back to the hotel, but the clerk of the court accepted the task with alacrity.

The greater part of the way Hilary barely heard a word he said. She was wondering where Allingham was spending the night, if he had a proper bedstead, or if he were trying to rest his lame leg on the hard ground; and she returned mechanical answers to her guide's remarks; but, just as they came in sight of their destination, she suddenly heard him saying:

"Your husband has gone down to look for a farm, hasn't he, Mrs. Allingham? It's a pity I didn't meet him. I could have shown him round. I know every inch of the veld. You see, I'm an old hand up here. Your husband is one of the lucky ones, who is able to come up afterwards, when the bully beef and mealie meal days are over. He should have been here——"

It was a stupid speech, and the normal Hilary would have ignored it, but the Hilary of that evening was distinctly overwrought, and turned on him fiercely.

"Mr. Gruggen, my husband was up here when you were still at school. Why, he made this very road, he made it! You talk about his coming up when all the

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hardships were over? If it hadn't been for him and his friends, none of you would be here now. But he doesn't brag and boast, though I know; and men, real men, whose opinions are worth having, know." Then, without a word of farewell, she hurried on, into the hotel.

There may have been tears in her eyes which made it hard for her to see clearly, or it may only have been the change from the darkness outside into the bright light; but, whatever the cause, she ran right up against Cuthbert Lestrangle, who was standing in the hall, talking to Mac, the latter having just come in by the evening train.

"Oh!" she exclaimed. "I didn't notice you, Mr. Lestrangle."

The boss saw at a glance that something had occurred. "I've brought your husband back. He's in his room now," he said.

Her eyes lit up suddenly; then, without a word of thanks, or even of greeting to Mac, she hurried down the corridor. She did not pause an instant at the door, but threw it open, and went straight in.

"Jack!" she cried. "Oh, Jack, dear, I'm so glad you've come back." . . .

"I shall never let you go away from me again," she said an hour later. "Never, Jack, never!" She disengaged herself from his arms and stood up. "I know I've been very silly—oh, yes, but I have, though I do understand now, really I do; and I'm so proud of you. . . . No, you're not to say it was your fault, because it wasn't. And all the time you were

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so good to father and Jessie." His face grew hard for a moment.

"I think we'll forget all about that, dear," he said gently.

"I shall not," she answered. "I shall treasure the memory as a proof of your goodness."

He caught her hand. "You shall do what you like, dearest, as long as you promise never to call me John again."

She laughed happily, girlishly, and flung her free arm around his neck. "Never, never, never, sweetheart mine. You're all mine now, in spite of the Road."

"The Road has gone out of our lives forever. I've seen the end of it. You need never be jealous again," he replied.

She shook her head vehemently. "No, no. It will always be there, another memory to treasure. The Road was always real; I met you on it; and all my happiness comes from the Road."

EPILOGUE

FATHER MARTIN opened Mac's letter eagerly. "I'm glad they don't forget us," he remarked to Daddy Hurst and Sandy Graham, the only other occupants of the bar of the Thatched House. "Let me see, it's over a year since the Allinghams were out here. You remember I met them in Buluwayo. Jack seemed pretty sick with the country, though I told him he would find Alexandra hadn't changed like the other districts, but he wouldn't come up. He seemed afraid his wife might get fever, and be knocked up by the coach journey."

He glanced through the letter, making comments as he went. "Halloo, listen to this. Mac is married to little Molly Rainer that was. Her first husband was a silly young ass, who killed himself with drink on the 'Marvel.' 'The Honorable Mrs. MacMurdo sends her love to you all,' he writes. I am glad about that. He says his family made a fuss, but as his brother now has three sons, he doesn't see where their kick comes in. She says, 'Tell daddy he must not drink too much whisky'—One for you, daddy—. . . Listen to this, 'The Allinghams have called their daughter "Alexandra," and made you god-father.' Sandy, let us have a large bottle at once. Throw away your whisky, daddy. We must celebrate

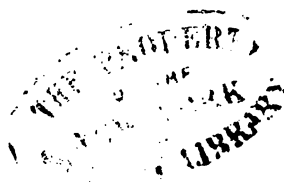
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this properly. Is there anyone else left now who knew Jack and his wife? ”

Daddy Hurst shook his head mournfully. “ No, I’m afraid not. They’ve cleared off, or died, rather quickly lately. I can’t understand a man leaving the district just as things were beginning to improve. We three are the only members of the old crowd left now. Well, here’s luck to your goddaughter, Father.” He took a long draught of his champagne, and as he put his glass down his face was bright again. “ We ought to be able to do something handsome for her when the boom comes, eh, Father? eh, Sandy? ”

(1)

THE END





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