

CLUTTERBUCK'S TREASURE

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Title: Clutterbuck's Treasure

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Release Date: August 13, 2014 [eBook #46582]

Language: English

*** START OF THIS PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK CLUTTERBUCK'S TREASURE ***

Produced by Al Haines.

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Cover art

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"INSTANTLY A THIRD SHOT WHIZZED PAST OUR SANCTUARY." (See page 42.)

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Title page

CLUTTERBUCK'S TREASURE

BY
FRED WHISHAW

LONDON
HENRY FROWDE
HODDER AND STOUGHTON
1910

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CLUTTERBUCK'S TREASURE

CHAPTER I A COWARDLY ATTACK

When my father died and left me unexpectedly penniless, all those kind friends whom I consulted upon my obvious failure to find anything to do were quite agreed as to this fact: that when a young man is desirous of finding employment in this world, and of making his way and keeping his head up among his fellows, his failure to do so, if he does fail, must certainly be his own fault. He lacks, they said, either energy or perseverance or pluck, or all three; in a word, he wants "grit."

Therefore the reader will kindly understand this about me as a standpoint: that since I failed miserably to find employment befitting a young person of my position, at a time when it was necessary to find employment or go to the wall, I must—by all the rules of the probabilities—not only have gone to the wall, but also be deficient in all those qualities which are most dear to the British intelligence, namely—pluck, perseverance, and so forth.

And yet I did not go to the wall. On the contrary, I am, though still a young man, in an exceedingly comfortable position; while as for the British virtues which I am supposed to lack, I do not think—though I will not boast—that the reader will hesitate to acquit me of the charge of wanting every quality that goes to make an average Englishman, when he shall have read the curious tale I have to unfold.

My father's death, followed by the unexpected revelation of his insolvency, was a terrible blow to me. I had been educated without regard to expense. At Winchester I had plenty of pocket-money, and was, for this reason—and because I was a good athlete and but a moderate scholar—a popular character. At New College, Oxford, during the one year I spent there, I was in a set whose ideas centred rather upon the pleasures of life than upon its duties and responsibilities.

I still had plenty of money, and undoubtedly the last thing in the world that would have been likely to trouble my head at this time was any reflection as to where the funds came from. My father, as I believed, was a rich man, a member of the Stock Exchange, and having the disposal, as I had always understood, of practically unlimited supplies of money.

Then came the telegram from home announcing disaster, and at a moment's notice I found myself fatherless, penniless, and as good as hopeless too; for at my age, and with my inexperience, I was utterly at a loss to know what to do or how to set about to find some means of supporting myself.

My father's business, it appeared, had suddenly and completely collapsed. He had "got himself cornered," as I was informed, though I did not understand the term, and had lost every farthing that he possessed and more. The shock of it all had proved fatal to my poor parent, and he had succumbed suddenly—a broken heart, as I heard someone say; but I fancy my father's heart had always been a weak point in his economy, and the collapse in his fortunes doubtless gave to it the finishing touch.

So then, at the age of nineteen, I found myself master of my own fortunes, which certainly looked very like *misfortunes*; and in that stress of circumstances it was that I applied to my friends for advice, and received from each the assurance that if I possessed those British qualities to which reference has been made I should certainly find something to do; and that if I failed to "get on" I might rest assured that I had no one to thank but myself. Nevertheless, I found nothing to

do. There could be no talk of any of the learned professions; I was too old for Sandhurst, even if I could have passed the examination; the navy was, of course, out of the question.

My ideas wildly wandered from professional football or cricket to enlistment in the line, and from that to life in the bush, or digging for hidden wealth in the soil of Rhodesia or of Klondyke, but the expense of the outfit and journey rendered this latter project impossible. There remained ultimately two resources from which to choose: enlistment or desk-work at a London office, which I believed I could obtain without difficulty if I should be reduced to so unpalatable an alternative.

But office life, I felt, would be worse than purgatory to me. The very idea of confinement and the lack of plenty of fresh air and exercise was intolerable, and I ultimately resolved that I would take the Queen's shilling, and submit to barrack discipline and all the indignities of existence among my social inferiors rather than bind myself for ever to the misery of the city. Indeed, I had quite made up my mind to journey to Trafalgar Square, in order to interview one of the recruiting sergeants generally to be found at the north-eastern corner of that favourite rendezvous, when something happened to set my ideas flowing in a new channel.

My father's house, in our days of prosperity, had been one of those fine mansions overlooking Streatham Common; and though I had left the dismally stripped and dismantled place as soon as the miserable formalities of funeral and sale were over, I had taken a cheap lodging in Lower Streatham, because in the chaos of my ideas and plans it appeared to me that I might as well stay in the neighbourhood of my old home as anywhere else, until the fifty pounds still remaining to my credit at my Oxford bankers had gone the way of all cash, or until I should have made up my bewildered mind as to where, in all this wide and pitiless world, I should go for a living.

I had practically determined, as I say, to enlist, and was walking one warm summer evening along the green lane which runs from Thornton Heath to Lower Streatham, deep in somewhat melancholy reflection upon the step I was about to take, when a noise of scuffling and bad language distracted my thoughts from the contemplation of to-morrow's barrack-yard trials, and brought them up with a run to the consideration of the present instant. I suppose the noise that they were themselves making prevented the four persons taking part in the scrimmage, which I now suddenly saw, from observing my approach, for they continued to tussle and to wrangle on their side of the hedge, while I watched them for a moment from mine, desiring, if possible, to discover what the quarrel was about and on which side the right lay, if either.

Then I soon perceived that the fight was an iniquitous and unequal one, for

three younger men had set upon one elderly person and were obviously engaged in attempting to relieve him of his money and valuables, an attempt which the old gentleman made gallant but naturally futile efforts to frustrate, hitting out right valiantly with his umbrella, but doing far more violence to the Queen's English than to the heads and persons of his assailants, upon whom the blows of his feeble weapon produced little effect.

I need scarcely say that, having ascertained what was passing, I did not waste time in making up my mind as to which side should receive the favour of my support, and in far less time than it takes to write the words, I had burst through the hedge and rushed to the assistance of the swearing and furious old gentleman.

At my appearance one of the fellows bolted like a hare across the field towards Norbury, and I saw no more of him. Now, I had paid some little attention to the study of self-defence while at Oxford, and though the remaining two rascals stood up to me for a moment, I soon placed my right fist in so convincing a manner upon the tip of the nose of one that he went down like a nine-pin and lay where he fell, while the other, after feinting and dodging and ducking for a few seconds as I squared up to him with the intention, if necessary, of treating him like his fellow, suddenly turned, darted through the hedge, and was away down the lane towards Thornton Heath in the twinkling of an eye, I following.

Away we went at hundred-yards' speed, he leading by about ten paces, and for about fifty yards it was anybody's race. Then I began to gain, and, seeing this, the fellow threw something down and ran on; he careered for another half hundred paces and then ridded himself of something else; and I, fearing, if I continued the pursuit, to lose my chance of recovering the old man's property—which, I rightly conjectured, was what the fellow had relieved himself of—stopped to pick it up while I could. I thus allowed my friend to escape, which was, of course, what he most desired at the moment, even more than the possession of the pocket-book and the gold watch which I soon found in the road and recovered.

Then I returned to the spot where I had left my fallen foe and the old gentleman whose property had been the original cause of disagreement between the contending parties.

CHAPTER II

THE OLD MISER

I found my ally beating the prostrate enemy with his umbrella, and still using language which would have been unseemly in any person, and sounded doubly shocking in the mouth of an old man.

"Come," I said, "you needn't swear, sir; and I wouldn't continue to whack a man who is down, if I were you."

"Kill him! kill him—the cowardly rascal! Kick him on the head and kill him!" shrieked the infuriated old gentleman; "they have robbed me between them, and I'll have his life for it! I'm a poor man, and they've taken my all; kick him in the head, if you're a man, and kill him!"

I could not help laughing. "It's because I'm a man that I shall do nothing of the kind," I said. "Stop dabbing at him with your umbrella and attend to business; here's your property—take it." I presented him with his pocket-book and watch as I spoke, and never did I behold so complete a metamorphosis in the expression of a man's face as now passed over his. He seized his property with both hands and hugged it to his breast. He beamed and chuckled over it, mumbling inarticulate words of delight as he fondly drew forth a bundle of notes and counted them.

It struck me that here was a considerable sum of money for a poor man to carry about with him; for though he jealously hid from me the figures that would have revealed the value of the notes, I was able to observe that there were at least fifteen or twenty of these, which, even supposing them to have been mere "rivers," would represent a decidedly respectable sum. The old fellow observed me watching him.

"Private papers, private papers!" he muttered; "letters from my dead wife that I would not lose for their weight in diamonds!"

"You old humbug!" I thought; "if ever you had a wife you starved her, I'll bet."

But the condition of our prostrate enemy began to give me some anxiety, and I was obliged to transfer my attention from the old miser to him. He lay groaning and snoring, his eyes shut, and his nose still bleeding a little. Suddenly he opened his eyes slightly and looked at the old man and at me. He scowled as he saw me, but his lips muttered "Water!"

"Go and fetch the man some water—you, sir," I said; "you can finish counting your notes afterwards. I would go, but I dare not leave him with you."

"Water for the rogue that robbed me? Not I," said the old fellow; "let him lie and rot first!"

"Then I will go," I said, for positively the rogue looked like expiring, and I was really anxious for him. If he were actually as bad as he looked there was not much danger in leaving him. I knew of a duck-pond near a farmhouse close by, and towards this I proceeded at my best speed, for the fellow must not be allowed to die—rascal though he undoubtedly was.

The rascal, it appeared, had no intention of dying, however, just at present; for when I returned with water from the duck-pond, he had departed, and departed—as I gathered—in company with the old gentleman’s pocket-book, for its owner sat on the grass evidently dazed, nursing a portion of the *porte-monnaie*, for which, I suppose, he had made a good fight, if the jagged and torn appearance of the remnant was any indication of a struggle.

I could see our friend careering down the lane, some distance away, towards Thornton Heath, well out of reach of pursuit, and I was straining my eyes after him in hopes of marking him down somewhere, when the old miser behind me suddenly interrupted my reflections by bursting anew into a paroxysm of abuse and bad language, which threw even his previous excursions into the shade.

Whether I or the thief, or both of us, were the objects of his frenzy was not very apparent, for his vituperations were incoherent and inarticulate; but I gathered presently that I was at least in part responsible for the disaster, for he inquired, with many added flowers of speech, why I had been so foolish as to go for water and leave him with a cold-blooded ruffian who had robbed a poor old man of his entire fortune.

I was sorry for the unfortunate victim to my ill-judged humanity, and did my best to soothe him.

“You must stop the notes at once,” I said; “and as for the fellow himself, why, we’ll describe him to the police and identify him in no time; we shall get your money back, never fear.”

“It’s a lie!” he shrieked; “I am ruined! I shall never see a penny of it; you and your accomplices will fatten upon the old man’s savings. Curse you all! I wish you were dead!”

“Thank you,” I said; “if that’s the case I shall wish you good afternoon and depart, or my accomplices will levant with my share of the spoil.” I started to go in the direction of Streatham. The old fellow came to his senses at once.

“Stop a minute!” he cried; “I don’t mean that. Stop and help me to recover my money.”

“What, from my own accomplices?” said I. He took no notice.

“Help me to recover my money,” he continued, “and to bring that rogue to the gallows, and—and you won’t be sorry for it!”

“It isn’t a hanging matter,” I said; “but I am ready to help you if you talk like a sensible man. How much has the fellow taken?”

This was an unfortunate remark, for it instantly plunged the old man into renewed paroxysms of rage and woe. I therefore did not pursue my inquiries, but led my friend slowly towards Streatham, he spluttering and muttering his maledictions, I patiently awaiting the dawn of reason. I inquired, however, presently, whether he knew the numbers of his stolen notes, and as my companion inquired,

in response, whether I took him for a fool, I concluded that he did possess this information.

The old man grew calmer after a while, and I accompanied him first to the police station, and afterwards to the telegraph office, where he wrote and despatched a wire to the manager of the Bank of England. The clerk read out his message as we stood at the counter, and I was astonished and rather shocked to learn that my new friend's loss, according to his list of notes, amounted to something very near three hundred pounds.

During the next few days my acquaintance with the strange old man ripened considerably; for together we were called upon by the police authorities to attend, at least once *per diem*, at the Streatham police station, in order to identify the culprit among a large assortment of suspicious characters brought up daily for our inspection. I think it was on the fifth or sixth day after the robbery that our pilgrimages to the police station were at last crowned with success, and we had the pleasure of seeing once again the unmistakable features of the rogue we were in search of, and afterwards of getting him condemned by a magistrate to a period of enforced virtue and innocence. We were, moreover, successful in recovering a portion of the stolen property, though not all of it—a circumstance which greatly pleased me, for I honestly believed that the lost three hundred pounds represented the whole of my old friend's worldly possessions, as he had led me to understand, and I had been grieved to think of the poor old fellow's sudden misfortune and ruin through the guile of a fellow-creature.

Mr. Clutterbuck, which was the old miser's name, lived in a small villa in Lower Streatham—a dingy, dull-looking house situated in the midst of a moderate garden surrounded by a high brick wall. So far as could be seen, there was no way of entering the abode excepting by a small door in the wall leading up through the square garden to the house; and though I several times, during that week of attendance at the police station and the police court, accompanied the old man home, he never once invited me within doors; neither did he ever express to me one word of thanks for the services I had rendered him in connection with the loss he had sustained and the recovery of a good portion of his property.

Meanwhile, however, this affair had delayed my enlistment for more than a week, and during that period I received an invitation from a college friend in the country to pay him a visit at his house in Gloucestershire; an invitation which I gladly accepted, thanking my lucky stars that some good, at least, had thus come of my strange encounter with the eccentric old miser, Clutterbuck.

Assuredly, when I parted from him for the last time, after the completion of the business which had brought us daily together for a week or near it, I never supposed that any other good could possibly proceed from the acquaintance, or from the delay in my "career" which the affair had occasioned. After my visit to

Gloucestershire I should return to London and enlist without further delay; and as for old Clutterbuck, I had neither expectation nor desire ever to behold his face or hear his name again. For how could I know that—

As a matter of fact I never did see the old man again. I went to Gloucestershire and forgot him, or at all events forgot to think of him, until—nearly a month after—I received a letter which brought him suddenly and very forcibly to remembrance—a letter which was destined to lead to a complete “general post” of all my ideas and plans in life, driving from my mind all thoughts of enlistment and office drudgery and everything else of the kind; a letter which told of the miser’s end and gave me hope of a new beginning, and which proved, after I had learned its full significance, that even misers may remember benefits conferred, and show a sense of gratitude for which they do not, as a rule, obtain much credit.

I read the letter, first, with my heart all a-flutter with excitement; but presently my agitation cooled down, for, I reflected, even though I should have been chosen as the old man’s heir, or part-heir, what could the old fellow have to leave?

“Don’t be a sanguine fool, man!” I said to myself. “There isn’t much in the business.”

Which showed that, though good at games, I was no better prophet than I was scholar!

CHAPTER III

THE GREAT PRIZE IS OFFERED

The letter, so far as I can remember the wording of it, read something like this—

“DEAR SIR,”—(it ran)—“By desire of the late Mr. William Clutterbuck I have to invite you to be present at his burial, on Friday next, in the churchyard of St. Mary’s, Norbury, and also at the subsequent reading of my late client’s will on the same afternoon at Aston Villa, Lower Streatham.”

The signature was that of some lawyer.

“By George! Peter, old chap,” said my college chum, to whom I handed the

letter after reading it, "you're in for a legacy, you lucky old rascal! Who is it?—an uncle? You won't have to enlist after all!"

"Uncle?" I repeated; "no! I haven't such a thing in the world; and as for legacy—there may be a fiver or so in it, but nothing more. It's an old fellow who carried all his fortune in a pocket-book and got it stolen;" and I told Henderson the whole story of my futile attempt to defend old Clutterbuck's property in Green Lane a month ago.

Henderson was immensely interested.

"Don't you make any mistake; that pocket-book never contained his entire fortune," he said. "The old boy was a miser on the face of him, any fool could see that; he may have got a hundred thousand hidden in a cellar, half eaten by the rats, and all left to you. Why, man, I have heard of huge fortunes left to fellows for far less."

And Henderson proceeded to tell me of how a man he had read or heard of was left fifty thousand for letting an old lady look over his hymnbook in church; and how another fellow got as much again for paying an old gentleman's omnibus fare when the conductor refused to give him change and threatened to be disagreeable; and many other choice examples of a similar character.

But I was firmly convinced that there was nothing romantic forthcoming as the result of my acquaintance with old Clutterbuck, at least nothing more romantic than a five- or ten-pound note, and I took the train to Paddington with the sense that the journey was an unmitigated nuisance, since it was unlikely to lead to anything seriously interesting, while it cut short an extremely pleasant visit in a circle of society from which I should perforce be excluded before long in my capacity of plain Tommy Atkins, the recipient of the Queen's shilling and wearer of the uniform of the humblest of her servants militant.

Steggins, the lawyer, was, however, decorously polite when I made my appearance at Aston Villa. There were three or four other persons present, expectant legatees like myself, I concluded; so that the contents of dead Mr. Clutterbuck's pocket-book were to be divided among five, at least, of us. There was nothing in the business—I was certain of it; I had been a fool to leave my comfortable quarters in the country upon such an errand; would that I had stayed!

Mr. Clutterbuck had died, I was told, of heart disease. He had never quite recovered the shock of the assault in Green Lane, and it was believed that he had encountered one of his assailants on the day of his death and recognised him, and that the excitement of the *rencontre* had proved fatal. My fellow-legatees were, it appeared, relatives of the deceased, and one and all of these looked askance at me as an interloper, several of them inquiring of Steggins, in my hearing, what I had had to do with the testator, and what claim I possessed upon the property.

Mr. Steggins replied that he believed I had performed some service to the

deceased for which the testator was grateful.

"What's the figure, Steggins, old man?" asked one. "How does the old boy cut up?"

"That's what we are about to learn," said the man of law.

We did learn it a few minutes later; and a very remarkable lesson it was!

I suppose that Mr. Clutterbuck's testamentary dispositions were just about as surprising and unexpected as such dispositions can well be, unless indeed they had emanated from an absolute lunatic, and this Mr. Clutterbuck certainly was not. We who were present as expectant legatees were taken aback, one and all, and when I use this expression about my own feelings I am choosing an exceedingly mild one.

As a matter of fact, I was, to use a more serviceable word, "flabbergasted." For me alone of those present the large amount of money which the testator had to dispose of was an absolute surprise. I learned afterwards that all the rest were well aware that their relative had been possessed of considerable wealth, though perhaps none of them may have realised the real extent of his hoarded riches. At all events no one could possibly have guessed how the eccentric old man intended to dispose of his money. So that in this matter the surprise of the rest was as great as my own.

"The will, gentlemen," said Mr. Steggins, preparing to read that document, "is very short, very clear as to its dispositions, though not worded in the customary legal phraseology" (I could not help laughing at the *non sequitur* involved in this explanation), "and exceedingly eccentric. It begins with the words, 'The Prize to the Swift,' which sentence heads the document as a kind of text, and it continues as follows:—

"I wish to preface my testamentary dispositions with the remark that my personal estate amounts, at the time of writing, to exactly ninety-seven thousand eight hundred and ninety-two pounds three shillings and sixpence, free of legacy duty. The accumulation of this sum of money has occasioned me much hard labour, much thought, much disappointment, many dangers, much travel by land and sea. I have no intention that my heir should acquire that which has been gained by the sweat of my brow without corresponding labour and suffering on his own part."

"That is the opening paragraph of the will itself," said Mr. Steggins; "this is how it proceeds:—

"I have therefore decided that, as I have indicated in the initial sentence of this my will, the prize shall go to the swift. Let me explain my meaning. Those of my possible heirs who have known me long are aware that I have devoted considerable time during recent years to foreign travel. During one of my latest journeys I took the opportunity to bury a box containing treasure at a place

indicated in the map of Bechuanaland which I have sketched.

”I now bequeath to him who first succeeds in reaching that spot, and in finding the treasure, the entire fortune which I possess, and which I estimate to be the equivalent of the sum quoted above. Those whom I have authorised by name to compete in this race for wealth are advised that many qualities of mind and body will be called into requisition by the winner: such as energy, perseverance, pluck, judgment, acuteness. Without the determination to employ each and all of these qualities, it would be useless to undertake the search which must be the toilsome preliminary to enjoyment of my wealth.

”The competitors who shall alone be legally competent to inherit from me are the following:—

”William John Clutterbuck, nephew.

”James Strong, nephew.

”Charles Strong, nephew.

”John Ellis, cousin.

”Godfrey Bernard Hewetson, of 13 Enderby Terrace, Streatham, to whom I am indebted for a service rendered.”

(This last name is my own.)

”If none of these five persons shall have succeeded within three years of my death in finding the buried treasure, my lawyer, Mr. Steggins, shall have power to seek new instructions within the sealed letter which has been entrusted to him for that purpose.

”Each competitor, as above enumerated, shall receive, immediately after the reading of this my will, one-fifth share of any money found upon my person or within my house at the time of my decease. To save trouble, I may add that any such money will be found within my pocket-book; there is none anywhere besides the notes and change therein contained. The house and garden will, of course, remain the property of the successful discoverer of the rest of my estate.’

”The will ends there,” said Steggins; ”but there is a postscript which I may read out, though it has no actual bearing upon the matter in hand:—

”I should like to add’ (writes the testator) ’that, since none of my relatives have ever shown me the slightest affection, or paid me any attention which was not obviously interested, I should be glad if the last-named among the competitors—Mr. Godfrey Bernard Hewetson, who has, at least on one occasion, done me a very signal service—should prove himself, as I fancy he is as likely as any to do, the successful competitor. My relatives are, so far as I know them, but poor specimens of humanity, and little likely to carry away the prize in a competition requiring such qualities as energy and courage. I have authorised them to compete, however, as a matter of family duty. Possibly the desire for gain may transform one or all of them into animated human beings.’”

The faces of those surrounding the table at which Steggins had sat and read this remarkable document were black enough when he had finished. One or two men swore audibly. Every one of them scowled at me, as though I were in some way to blame for the eccentric dispositions, which had evidently disappointed them.

As for me, I was so dumbfounded by the stupefying thoughts and considerations to which the recital of Mr. Clutterbuck's dispositions had given rise, that I think I must have made a poor show as I sat and blushed and helplessly blinked my eyes, while the others burst into a torrent of angry conversation.

CHAPTER IV

I ENTER FOR THE RACE

"Do you consider, Mr. Steggins," said one, "that any British jury would regard the precious document you have just read as the work of a sane man?"

"Certainly," replied Steggins; "I don't see how any British jury could help themselves. It is surely proper that you gentlemen, his only relatives, should have been accorded equal chances of becoming his heirs with this other gentleman, in whose favour his sympathies had been gained."

"That is not the point," said another—one of the Stronges, I think; "the question is, What right has this Mr. Hewetson to benefit, and whether undue influence can be proved?"

"Very doubtful indeed, I should say," said Steggins. "I happen to know that, beyond the fact that Mr. Hewetson saved the life of Mr. Clutterbuck, as the deceased firmly believed, and afterwards assisted him in the recovery of certain bank-notes of which he had been robbed, the testator had no acquaintance whatever with this gentleman; his act is one of disinterested gratitude."

"How do we know that this person is not in possession of private information which will enable him to discover the treasure while we are helplessly searching for it all over Africa?" asked another of the amiable nephews. The question aroused me from my stupor, and from this moment I was myself again.

"To suggest such a thing is an insult to the deceased," said Steggins gravely; "and as for searching all Africa, the little map which you hold in your hand, together with the footnotes explaining it, affords a precise guide to the spot, within an acre or so, in which the treasure is declared to lie buried."

"As to that," I broke in hotly, "allow me to add my assurance that I know no more about this matter than has been read aloud by Mr. Steggins. I have no information whatever beyond that which the map and explanations convey. If any gentleman present still feels doubt as to my *bonâ fides*, I shall be grateful if he will kindly mention it." No one spoke. "As a matter of fact," I continued, "I shall probably take no part in the search for this problematical treasure. I shall consider the question, but I shall perhaps decide to remain at home."

I did not say this because the idea of a journey to South Africa was in any way distasteful to me. On the contrary, nothing, I felt, could possibly be more congenial than such a trip, especially when combined with the delightful excitement of a search for hidden treasure.

The fact was that I did not see my way to undertaking the journey, for the best of reasons. My last fifty pounds were all but spent already; my one-fifth share of the old gentleman's petty cash could not well amount to more than thirty pounds (it was actually twenty-eight pounds four shillings and twopence). How should I equip myself for the enterprise, or pay my passage to the Cape and the expenses of the trip up-country afterwards?

My fellow-heirs did not, however, set much faith in my assertion, so I gathered from their looks, though none of them replied in any way to my remark. This galled me again, and I added that I intended to consider the question thoroughly before finally deciding. I should not, I said, surrender my rights if I could help it!

Before leaving the room, I took the precaution to interrogate Mr. Steggins as to certain matters: whether, firstly, Mr. Clutterbuck had actually been in possession of the large sums of money he claimed to dispose of; and whether, secondly, my own legal position, supposing that I should be fortunate enough to find the treasure, would be unassailable; whether, in two words, there was any treasure to find, and whether the "finder" would be recognised by the law as the "keeper."

Steggins assured me that he knew for a positive fact that a very few years ago Mr. Clutterbuck had undoubtedly possessed at least as large a fortune as that named in the will, and that it was extremely unlikely that he should have spent all or any large portion of it in the interim. My position would certainly be unassailable. It might be argued that the journey to South Africa for the purpose of burying his fortune in order that his heirs might not succeed to it without personal trouble was the act of an eccentric; but the desire to test the perseverance and energy of his heirs was sane enough, and the device—if clumsy—was not an insane one. Mr. Clutterbuck had disliked his nephews, Steggins explained, and had often declared that he would "make the lazy young rogues sweat a bit before they touched his money." The will had been made out before the event which introduced myself to his notice, and my name had been added.

"Mr. Clutterbuck often expressed the wish," concluded Steggins, "during the last week or two of his life, that you should be the successful one, and disappoint these nephews of his, upon whom, as I say, he did not waste much affection."

And no wonder, thought I, for a more disagreeable-looking set of fellows than the three nephews I do not think I ever saw. The cousin was an elderly man, and was a person of a different stamp from the rest, two at least of whom obviously belonged to that class of society of whom it is often remarked that one would not care to meet them alone in a dark lane.

Steggins's remarks were rather encouraging, and I began seriously to regret that my funds—or, rather, my lack of them—was likely to prove a stumbling-block to success, or even to any attempt on my part to take a hand in the extremely "sporting" game which dead Mr. Clutterbuck proposed to us. The more I thought over it the more I deplored the poverty which not only stood in the way of my winning this tantalising race, but which actually made it impossible for me to find the preliminary entrance fee! And such a prize at stake—oh, why had I not a few hundred pounds! Truly my luck was abominable!

I returned the same night to Henderson's place in Gloucestershire, and talked the matter over with my college chum.

To my surprise and great pleasure Henderson, who was a year senior to me at Oxford and had just taken his degree, received my news with extraordinary excitement and delight. Not only did he instantly insist upon my "entering for the race," as he called it, but he insisted also upon constituting himself my "backer" and trainer, and announced his intention of coming with me to see fair play.

Henderson had no reason whatever to mind the expense of journey and equipment. I should pay him back my share, he laughingly declared, out of the treasure when we found it! He had nothing in the world to detain him in England at present. On the contrary, he longed for a big travel before settling down to country life as a Gloucestershire squire. This business was simply a godsend for both of us!

Needless to say, I was easily persuaded that it was even as Jack Henderson declared, and that he really desired to accompany me and to take the risk of my being able to repay him some day for his outlay on my behalf. As a matter of fact, I am quite as certain that Jack really wished to go (he was always a sporting character, was Jack Henderson) as I am that he cared no more whether I ever repaid him my expenses than he reflected whether these should amount to one hundred pounds or two thousand.

Actually they came to a good deal, because Jack Henderson insisted upon

doing everything in the best style. We should enjoy a bit of sporting, he said, after I had found the cash; and therefore we provided ourselves with heavy rifles for big game, small ones for antelope, shot guns, revolvers, knives, ammunition enough of every kind to stock a fortress, and every luxury and convenience that the up-country sportsman in Africa can possibly expect to require.

What is more, in spite of all the purchases and preparations we made, we were on board ship within forty-eight hours of my return to Gloucestershire, fortified with the knowledge that none of my fellow-competitors could, at all events, have stolen a march upon me in this, the first move of the campaign; for the *Chepstow Castle*, the fine steamer in which we had secured berths, was the first vessel that had left any London dock for the Cape since the day on which Steggins read out the will and metaphorically fired the pistol which started us five competitors upon our race.

I had secured a flying start at anyrate.

CHAPTER V TREACHERY!

For several days I was under the impression that, for some reason or other, the rest of Mr. Clutterbuck's potential heirs had left me to "walk over." Probably, I thought, they intended to allow me to find the treasure unchallenged, and would contest the will and my right to inherit after I should have saved them the trouble of unearthing the money. This, I felt, was foolish of them, because my position, according to Steggins, was unassailable. It could easily be proved that I had not, and could not possibly have, exerted any undue influence upon the old man. They might contest as much as they pleased, but no British jury would listen to their nonsense, and I should remain in blessed possession! I should, moreover, have all the fun of this "big travel," as Henderson called it, and the excitement of the treasure hunt thrown in! Poor-spirited creatures these nephews of old Clutterbuck; the old man had not been a bit too hard upon them in the postscript to his will!

But about the fifth day out I was almost sure that I caught sight of one of my rivals—the man called James Strong, who had made certain unpleasant innuendoes as to my good faith after the reading of the will. The fellow stood, half hidden, behind a donkey-engine on the deck used by second-class passengers,

well wrapped to the chin in a waterproof or some kind of long cloak. I suppose I must have betrayed the fact that I had recognised, or half recognised, him, though I did my best to conceal it; for the next time that I came in sight of the spot which he had occupied he had disappeared, and I did not see him again.

Anxious to discover whether the fellow really had been James Strong, or merely some second-class passenger whose appearance bore an accidental resemblance to that individual, I made friends with the steward of the second-class mess, and begged from him a sight of the list of passengers under his charge; but in his list there was no person bearing the name I sought, neither was there a Clutterbuck nor an Ellis.

"They may be on board under assumed names!" suggested Jack Henderson, but I scouted the idea.

"Why should they?" I said. "They would gain nothing by that sort of game, for we should be sure to see them at landing, if not before; and, besides, what if we didn't see them?"

"Why, then we should conclude that we had the hunt to ourselves, don't you understand," explained Jack, "and that would suit them very well."

"Why so?" continued dense I.

"Because in that case we would not hurry up-country, but allow them to get a start of us and have first dig for the treasure."

"That's true, by George!" I assented reflectively; "you are a sharper customer than I thought, Jack!" and from this moment until we reached the Canaries, where we were delayed a couple of days on account of something going wrong with our screw, I kept a very sharp lookout for my co-heirs among both second-class and steerage passengers.

Once I was almost certain that I saw both James Strong and his brother; and once, too, I thought I recognised the other nephew, Clutterbuck; but in each case I was unable to determine the matter with certainty, because the suspected individual disappeared as soon as observed.

Under the circumstances, both Henderson and I thought that it would be wise to waste no time at all at Cape Town. We would buy horses and spades, and be off without delay, taking the train as far as it would carry us in the required direction, and acting generally as though my suspicions as to the identity of the second-class passengers were actually verified.

But all our good intentions to frustrate the guile of those who thought to get the better of us by superior cunning were nipped in the bud by an unforeseen and very unfortunate occurrence.

Our propeller went wrong, and it was found necessary to put into port at the Canary Islands in order to repair the damage, which the captain hoped would be effected in a day, but which actually occupied two days. A strong south-

east wind happened to be blowing, and this rendered the harbour at Las Palmas unsafe; we were therefore obliged to lie in the protected waterway between the islands Graciosa and Lanzarote, a very fine anchorage of one mile in width, the former of these islands being uninhabited (excepting by seagulls and other fowl), while Lanzarote can boast of a small population.

Jack Henderson and I, together with many of the other passengers, landed on the second day to stretch our legs, some visiting Lanzarote, while we and a few others chose Graciosa. Captain Eversley impressed upon all who went ashore that it was absolutely necessary to be on board by seven in the evening, as at that hour the *Chepstow Castle* must sail, whether all were aboard or not. Since we had not the slightest intention of remaining ashore so long as this, however, we allowed the captain's warning to be adopted and digested by those to whose intended proceedings it might be applicable. As for ourselves, we started with our shot guns for a walk along the rocky beach.

It was a fine day, and the walk was pleasant enough after the protracted confinement aboard ship, and Jack and I felt buoyant and happy as we trudged along the sand and shingle at the foot of some fine cliffs that frowned down upon us from the shore side, banging our guns off at every winged creature that would give us a chance at anything like shooting distance, and laughing and singing after the fashion of schoolboys let loose. The head steward had provided us with sandwiches, and these we consumed as we lay sprawling in the sunshine on the sand, having walked and scrambled a mile or two over very rough "going," and intending after lunch and a rest to turn and go back to our ship.

We had heard a few shots now and again from the top of the cliff, and had agreed that the same idea must have occurred to others of the passengers besides ourselves—namely, to employ some of their spare time and work off some of their energy in banging at the sea-birds that circled and flitted about the rocks in hundreds; but beyond congratulating ourselves upon the fact that we were well below the line of fire, and not likely to be hit by a stray shot, we had not paid much attention to the cannonading of our neighbours. I believe I had fallen asleep. It was warm, sleepy weather, and the sand couch we lay upon, with our backs to a rock, was very comfortable. Suddenly Jack seized my arm and shook me.

"Good Heavens, Godfrey!" he said, "look out, old man; did you hear that last shot? It was ball, I'm certain, and the bullet struck this rock—there's the mark, see! Somebody had a shot at us. Slip behind, quick!"

Wide awake now, I slipped behind the rock in a moment, Jack doing the same; and we were only just in time, it appeared, for at the same instant a second shot was fired and a splinter flew from the rock close to the spot which we had occupied.

"Shout out at them that there are people here!" I said. "They must be firing at a mark!"

"Firing at a grandmother!" laughed Jack; "we were the mark, man. Wait a bit, look here, I'll show you!"

Jack adopted an old device: he took his cap, and placing it at the end of the muzzle of his gun, held it up over the top of the rock behind which we cowered, as though someone had popped out his head to look abroad. Instantly a third shot whizzed past our sanctuary.

"There," said Henderson; "that's James Strong, or his brother, or the other rascal!"

"Oh, impossible!" I said. "No fellow could be so base as to attempt to murder us in cold blood. Besides, we are not even certain whether they were on board."

"Well, you may take it from this moment that they *were!*" said Jack, laughing; "they have sent in their cards. Now let's think what's best to be done. We can't go back along the sands because we shall be within shot pretty nearly all the way. We must make a bolt for the cliff, get under its shelter, and either storm their position or hide there until they are gone."

"What! and miss the steamer?" I said, "we can't afford to do that, Jack!"

"Can we better afford to get ourselves knocked down like cocoanuts at a fair?" asked Henderson pertinently. "We shall have to make a bolt for the cliffs; when there we'll try to climb the rocks so stealthily that we surprise the enemy and fall upon him unawares."

This seemed the only feasible course, under the circumstances, and we decided to take it.

CHAPTER VI

RATS IN A TRAP

It is not the pleasantest thing in the world to be obliged to bolt like a rabbit across the open, even for twenty yards or so, under a hot fire.

"We must hope they are poor shots!" said Jack, smiling grimly. "If they couldn't hit us lying quietly on the sand they are not likely to bowl us over running."

"Count the shots they fire," I said; "then we shall know how many of them are in it."

"Now," whispered Jack, "we'll draw their fire with the cap once more; and the instant you hear the shot run for all you're worth to the base of the cliff. Do you understand?"

I nodded my head. I was horribly frightened, I confess. I do not think I am a coward when I can hit back if assailed, but I always lose heart when helpless. To cut and run for other fellows to shoot at you is, to a reflective mind, one of the most unpleasant things a man can be called upon to do.

However, there was nothing else to be done. Jack held up the cap; two shots were fired at it, and away we ran.

Three more reports rang out as we raced across the open, and, to my horror and despair, Jack fell. All my terror vanished at the sight, and only rage remained. I seized Jack's feet with an exclamation—it may have been an oath and it may have been a prayer—and dragged him along on his back in a manner which must have been dreadfully trying to a wounded man. One more shot was fired, but it flew over our heads; I heard the whistle of it distinctly. I deposited my burden at the foot of the cliffs,—the whole affair did not last four seconds,—and to my astonishment and intense relief the victim rose to his feet and laughed consumedly, though not noisily.

"I'm awfully sorry I frightened you, old man," he said, "but it was part of the game; I only invented it on the spot, or I would have warned you."

"Aren't you wounded?" I gasped.

"Not a bit of it!" said Jack. "I shammed on purpose. I'm hoping they'll come down now they imagine there's only one to deal with. If they do, there'll be 'ructions'!"

I cordially agreed with Jack on this point. I would not mind all three nephews, and would gladly throw in the cousin as well, at close quarters and in equal fight. Any fool can frighten me if he shoots at me from an ambush.

But though we waited in silence for some little while the enemy made no sign, and we came to the conclusion that the risk of being seen and recognised weighed more with them than the desire to wipe me off the face of the earth at any hazard.

"They've got to deny all knowledge of this little affair when we meet on board ship, you see," explained Jack.

"But they are sure to have another shot at us before they leave us," I rejoined. "Even if we creep along under the lee of the cliffs they'll find some place where they can sight us, confound them!" I looked up and around uncomfortably. I hated the position.

"We won't let them 'draw a bead' on us if we can help it," said Jack. "What say you to creeping quietly along for half a mile, and then trying to scale the cliffs? I'd give something to surprise the rogues, and have a shy at them at close

quarters as they come along!”

This very distinctly met my views, and we started at once, creeping over rocks, springing quickly over level stretches of sand, wading here and there,—getting rapidly over the ground one way or another,—and all so close to the steep cliffs that unless a man lay on his waistcoat at the top and looked over the edge he could not have seen us. But we came to no place where the rocks looked climbable or anything like it; and we reached, instead, a spot where the sea had advanced to the foot of the rocks, and was breaking against them at a depth of a few inches.

”By George! how the tide has come up!” said Jack, looking serious; ”we must dash through this, and hope that it will be all right beyond.”

But though we plunged and waded for a couple of hundred yards beyond the corner, we found that the water became deeper rather than shallower, and that unless we returned at once we should have to swim back to the dry beach. There was no disguising the fact—we were cut off by the tide!

I am afraid we both used strong language when, after wading back to the beach, we realised what this misfortune meant for us. It meant, of course, that in all probability we should be left behind by the *Chepstow Castle*, for it was now past five o'clock, and likely enough the tide was still coming in. It was too excruciatingly cruel for anything excepting naughty words, and we must be forgiven if one or two of these slipped out in a moment of bitter disappointment.

There was, however, no actual danger in our position. As we could see by the mark of high water on the cliffs, we should not, in any case, get much more than a foot-bath if we remained where we now stood. That was a comfort, so far as it went, and something to be thankful for. But to think that those rascals—the Strongs, and the rest of them—would gain a week's start in the race for Bechuanaland! It was too bitter to speak of, and for the first hour or two we dared not trust ourselves to mention the grievance, lest the fires that smouldered within should burst forth and consume us.

We employed our time in making frantic efforts to scale the cliffs, and we succeeded in getting ourselves, each in turn, into positions of unique and unparalleled peril, out of which each had to be rescued by the other; but as for climbing the cliff, we never reached anywhere within hail of the top, and if we had persevered from that day to this we should never have succeeded in attaining thereunto.

Sorrowfully we came to the conclusion, at last, that there was nothing for it but to wait for the fall of the tide with all the patience and philosophic calm we could command; and these, I fear, were qualities which no known instrument could measure, for there was scarcely a microscopical trace of either in the pair of us.

At seven o'clock by my watch, punctually, we heard the booming signal of the *Chepstow Castle*, and we knew what that meant only too well. It meant that the steamer was leaving the anchorage, having on board my rival competitors, as well as our rifles and ammunition and revolvers, and everything we possessed, and that for a week or so after reaching Cape Town these men would be adding every hour and every minute to the odds against me in the race for old Clutterbuck's treasure.

"We shall meet them coming home with the money-box," said I presently, following the train of my own thoughts, "about half-way to Vryburg; and we can't well scrag them at sight, for we have no absolute evidence that it was they who shot at us."

"If we had," Jack assented, "we could relieve them of the money-box, and all would be well. However, they may not have found it by the time we reach the spot. We don't stand to win, I confess, but we won't quit the field till we are beaten hopelessly out of it."

"We shall have to keep our eyes open in the veldt as we go," I said, "for evidently the fellows are not particular."

"They wouldn't dare murder us there," rejoined Jack. "There was not much risk here, you see. Oh, what wouldn't I give to have the rascals just exactly here now, where my fist reaches!"

I agreed that this would be sweetly consoling. One might spend a quarter of an hour, I said, very happily in pummelling Messrs. Strong and Clutterbuck; but obviously there were few things less likely than that we should see either or any of them again this side of Vryburg, so that there was not much use in hoping for it.

It was nine in the evening before we found ourselves able to return to the spot at which we had landed, and when we reached it we learned from an Englishman who was about to return in his boat to Las Palmas, whence he had come during the day on sport intent, that we were too late.

The *Chepstow Castle* had sailed, as Captain Eversley had declared he would, at seven o'clock.

CHAPTER VII

GHOSTS

Our new friend professed the utmost sympathy when we somewhat shame-facedly explained that we had been caught by the tide, and concealed a smile; but he proved a good fellow by offering to put us up for a few nights until the arrival of the next steamer going Capewards, an offer which we gladly and gratefully accepted. This good fellow informed us that he had seen the last boatful of passengers taken on board at about six o'clock or half-past, and in reply to my inquiry added that the last to arrive had been a party of three with guns; they had a few seagulls with them, he said, and had declared that no one else remained on shore so far as they were aware.

"And when are we likely to get on from here?" asked Jack; to which our host replied that it might be a fortnight and might be a week, and possibly a steamer might arrive this very night. There was a cargo steamer overdue now that was to touch here on her way south.

In the morning there was a joyful surprise awaiting us; for when we awoke and looked out upon the bright waters of the Las Palmas harbour, there—black and ugly in the morning sunshine, but of all sights the most beautiful in our eyes to-day—floated a big English cargo-steamer, already busily engaged in discharging that portion of her cargo which had been consigned to Las Palmas. Needless to say, we lost no time in going on board, and as little in settling with the captain to take us on to Cape Town, for a consideration. We would have paid ten times the price with pleasure if he had asked it.

The *Panther*, our new vessel, was to sail by sunset that very evening, so that—by a happy turn of Fortune's wheel—we should, after all, have waited but twenty-four hours in this place. The *Panther* would travel considerably slower than the *Chepstow Castle*, however, so that we must still lose another day or two in time before Cape Town should be reached; but, under the circumstances, things might have been so very much worse that we were inclined to be perfectly contented for the moment, though we suffered many an hour of mental torture before arriving at the great southern city.

For the trusty ship *Panther* bore us at a uniform rate of about twelve knots per hour, and we realised as we neared Cape Town that the *Chepstow Castle* must be several days ahead of us: we had hoped and expected to travel faster than this. Nevertheless the unforeseen occasionally happens, and a pleasant surprise was in store for us on our arrival; for when Jack and I sought out the local offices of the company to which the last-named steamer belonged, in order to claim our goods and be off northwards as quickly as possible, we were informed, to our huge delight, that the *Chepstow Castle* had not yet arrived. She had had trouble with her propeller, the clerk informed us, and had been delayed, first at Las Palmas and afterwards at Walfisch Bay.

Then that clerk nearly had a fit, because Jack and I manifested the wildest

delight and roared with laughter; I am not sure that we did not execute a step or two of an improvised skirt dance. The clerk smilingly observed presently that if we were in hopes that somebody we expected in the *Chepstow Castle* was going down to the bottom, or anything of that sort, it was his duty to disappoint us, because the steamer was all right and perfectly safe, and would arrive this evening.

"Oh no," said Jack very heartlessly; "our rich uncles and aunts are not on board!"

"I thought they must be," said the clerk, "as you seemed so pleased to hear of the ship's accident." He eyed us as though doubts as to our sanity had begun to dawn in his mind.

"Why, man," said Jack, "we are passengers ourselves—that's the joke of it!"

"Passengers on board what ship?" asked the clerk.

"The *Chepstow Castle*" exclaimed Jack.

Then the doubts as to our sanity which had dawned in that clerk's mind ripened into certainty, and he began to look about for a safe place; he also grasped his ruler in case of emergency, resolved, no doubt, to sell his life dearly.

"We got out at Las Palmas," I explained. I made the remark in sympathetic sorrow for that clerk's agony of mind. But my explanation did not reassure him much.

"You can't be in two places at once," he said. "If you got out at Las Palmas, you are there still. Besides, if you got out you surely knew enough to get in again?"

"We'd have got in again if we could," I said, "but we missed the boat and had to come on by the *Panther*, which arrived this morning. Here are our tickets—they will prove that we started by the *Chepstow Castle*."

The clerk examined our tickets and wiped his forehead; then he looked us over, laughed almost as loud as we did, and said it was rather funny that we should have turned up first after all. If he had known what a poor joke it was for some others on board the *Chepstow Castle*, I daresay he would have laughed still more. As it was, he entered so heartily into the spirit of the thing that he obtained permission for us to board the steamer in the company's tug so soon as the ship should arrive in sight, a permission which we were right glad to have, because we were somewhat anxious as to our property on board, in case certain persons should have found means during our absence to possess themselves of that which was not theirs.

There was also another reason for our desire to go on board in the darkness and unexpected. We desired to do a little spiritualism in real life, and to appear before our friends the Strongs in the morning as though we had never left the ship.

"Nothing like playing the ghost for getting at the truth of things," said Jack, as we left the office. "We shall see by the rascals' faces, when they catch sight of us, whether it was really they who fired the shots at us!"

That shipping clerk was of the greatest service to us in another way, for he gave us much excellent advice as to how best to proceed in our journey up-country, what natives to engage, how many oxen to purchase, and the best kind of waggon, together with a quantity of other useful information as to roads and the chances of sport to be obtained. It was dusk by the time the *Chepstow Castle* arrived in the offing, and we boarded her during the dinner-hour, when of passengers there were none on deck. Captain Eversley was on duty, however, and our ghostly reappearance began propitiously with that cordial officer, who first stared at us in a bewildered manner and afterwards burst into laughter.

"Well, you are nice sort of young fellows," he said; "you ought to be still vegetating at the Grand Canary if you had your deserts! What became of you?—lose yourselves?"

"Caught by tide," Jack explained, "and brought on by a freighter."

"Come for your things, I suppose?" said the captain. "All right; I had them removed from your cabin because two second-class passengers asked to be allowed to pay the difference and come in when there was room. The steward has your property. They're all at dinner below; you'd better join them—they'll take you for ghosts."

"Who are the fellows in our cabin?" I inquired.

"Brothers, I believe, called Smith," said Eversley. "They have a friend among the second-classes; they have not been popular among the state-room people. We have wished you back more than once."

We thanked the captain and retired, as he had suggested, below. Here our sudden appearance caused first a dead silence of amazement, followed by the uproar of a dozen or two tongues speaking at once; and then, to add to the dramatic interest of the situation, one of the passengers rose from his seat at the lower end of the table as though to leave the room, uttered a kind of groan, and fainted. I saw him and recognised him in a moment—it was Charles Strong. His brother, seated beside him, quickly dragged his unconscious relative away.

A word or two of explanation soon convinced our late fellow-travellers that we were not ghosts, and in order to reassure them more fully as to our substantiality we both sat down and made a remarkably good dinner. I am sorry to say that it was the unanimous opinion of all present that, had we been still looking out for a sail at Las Palmas instead of comfortably dining almost within the harbour of Cape Town, we should have had nothing but our own foolishness to thank for it.

As for the Strongs, or Smiths, no one had a good word to say for them. They

never spoke, we were told, at meals, and they spent all their time conspiring and whispering together over maps and papers on the second-class deck, where they had a fellow-mystery. They were set down by universal consent as miners or gold-diggers who had received a "tip" as to some rich spot, which they intended to find and exploit. Universal consent had not made such a very bad guess, as it turned out.

CHAPTER VIII

NECK AND NECK FOR THE FIRST LAP

When we went to claim our property afterwards from the steward's pantry—which we did in some anxiety, seeing who our successors in the cabin had been (for we naturally concluded that the Stronges would not have paid money for the pleasure of occupying our berths unless they had had designs upon something we might have left there), we missed my small handbag.

"Were these new fellows in the cabin before our things were removed?" we asked of the steward.

"Oh no, sir," said that functionary; "one of them looked in to see if it would suit, but he wasn't there five minutes; you wouldn't surely suspect the gentleman of"—

"Oh dear, no!" I said, "certainly not, steward; probably my little bag escaped your notice and his too. Go and ask for it, like a good man; it was under the sofa when we were in the cabin, and it's probably there now."

The steward went off on his mission somewhat flustered; for it was a reflection upon his carefulness that the bag had been left behind. When I said that it might have escaped Strong's notice as well as his own, I really meant what I said, though the sceptical Jack grinned at my "innocence," as he called it. The bag contained, as Jack knew, a few exceedingly important articles—namely, my slender stock of ready money (about thirty-five pounds), a copy of the all-important map and instructions for finding Clutterbuck's treasure, my revolver, and a few other things of less importance.

Nevertheless, when the steward brought the bag to me a few minutes later with "Mr. Smith's" apology, and declared that the latter gentleman said that neither he nor his brother had seen or touched it, I believed him. I was the more disposed to acquit the Stronges when I opened the bag and found money, map,

revolver, and everything else still within it just as I had left them; but subsequent events proved that Jack's scepticism was in the right after all, though we did not discover this until later.

We saw no more of the Strongs that evening, and when—very early in the morning—we went on deck to see the ship moored in dock, we found that our friends had already departed.

"We can afford to make a good breakfast and give them that much start," said Jack; "for they will probably have a lot to buy and to arrange before they can start, while most of our preliminary arrangements were made yesterday." Therefore we made a good breakfast.

The train, we found, would take us as far as Vryburg, after which we should have to purchase horses and push along over the Chartered Company's road towards Bulawayo. Our destination was several days' journey short of that town, however, and lay some way to the east of the pioneer waggon-road used by the company during the first Matabele campaign. At Vryburg we encountered the Strongs and Clutterbuck at a horse-dealer's yard. They, like ourselves, had come to buy horseflesh, and we surprised them in the midst of their bargaining.

There was no particular reason for pretending that I did not recognise them, for it was likely enough that we should be near neighbours when it came to digging, and we were all encamped upon a couple of acres of land. I therefore addressed them, and bade them good-morning, by name.

They growled an unwilling greeting in return.

"We're all here, I see, excepting Mr. Ellis," I continued. "I suppose he is to follow later?"

"I know no more about him than you," said James Strong surlily. "Who's this, may I ask, with you, and what right has he to come digging for our treasure?"

"Is he digging for our treasure?" I asked.

"That's what he's here for, you bet," said Strong; "if he finds it, let me tell you, your claim won't stand, remember that."

"My good man," said Henderson exasperatingly, "do wait until you have caught me at it! As my friend suggests, I am not thinking of digging; I am here to keep him company, and to act as a kind of bodyguard."

"Can't the poor fellow take care of himself?" said Strong, laughing rudely; "what's he afraid of? We are all respectable people here!"

"You see," said Jack, with exasperating coolness, "in some countries the bullets fly very promiscuously; people have been known to shoot at seagulls and to hit men. Now only the other day, at an island called Graciosa"—at this point the second Strong dragged his brother away to look at a horse, and as the proprietor of the establishment beckoned us mysteriously aside at the same moment, we saw no more of our friends at this time; when we returned to the yard they had

taken their departure. The horse-dealer's object in beckoning us aside was, it appeared, to inform us that—if we liked to pay for them—he had a horse or two which would be likely to suit gentlemen like ourselves much better than this rubbish.

We were quite ready to pay for a good article—delighted; at least Jack was, and I was quite glad that he should. After all, if the fellow mounted us better than the Strongs & Co., the privilege would be well worth paying for.

We certainly paid for it, at anyrate; but whether our horses were really much, or any, better than the "rubbish" that fell to Strong's lot is a question. Possibly Strong squared the horse-dealer before we came; if so, he was no fool, and perfectly within his rights.

We had bought our waggon and oxen, seasoned or "salted" animals chosen without regard to expense, and had engaged a Kaffir driver and a native of Bechuana or Somali land to act as huntsman, in case we should find the treasure and have time upon our hands for some big-game hunting afterwards.

All these matters had been arranged before we left Cape Town, and our party were even now trekking slowly northwards towards the appointed rendezvous on the Bulawayo road, at the point, in fact, where—as per map—our side route branched off from the main road.

We had left the heavy rifles and most of our ammunition to be brought on after us by the waggon, and we hoped that by the time the question of the treasure had been decided we should find our property waiting for us at the rendezvous. Jack said we should "do a bit of sporting" whether we dug up the treasure or no.

So that we had not much in the way of impedimenta actually with us. Each carried a light spade, a blanket, a waterproof coat, a light rifle, a revolver, cartridge-belt and case, saddle-bags with tinned food and biscuits, a bottle of brandy as medicine, and little else besides. Thus equipped, however, we both felt that we could easily and comfortably spend a week or two without any more of the comforts of civilisation than we carried about us, and we set out upon our hundred-mile ride in the highest possible spirits, even though we were well aware that "the enemy" were on the road before us.

"I don't want to kill anybody if I can help it, you know, Peter," Jack had said (he always called me Peter, though my name is Godfrey; I was called Peter at school, for some inscrutable schoolboy reason!), "but I'm hanged if I am going to let these fellows have any more shots at me gratis. If any fellow lets fly at me again and misses, he's a dead man if I can make him one!"

I quite agreed with Jack that we would not again play at being targets without taking our turns at the shooting afterwards. I do not relish the idea of shedding human blood any more than Jack, but one must draw the line somewhere, and we were going to draw it at those who took shots at us from an ambush; for

such we would have no pity.

On the evening of the first day we came up with our friends the Strongs. They were encamping on the banks of a river over which there was a ford.

Our horses were not tired, we had not ridden very hard, and we agreed that this would be a good opportunity to push on and obtain a good start of the Strongs. The complacency with which these men had settled down in this place and were, apparently, prepared to see us pass them in the race, perplexed and puzzled us not a little. We were suspiciously inclined towards them, and it appeared to us that they would not allow us to get ahead so easily without a good reason. However, it was unlikely that we should learn their reason by asking for it, and we did not desire more of their society than was absolutely necessary; we therefore agreed to push on—to play our game and allow them to play theirs. We could take care of ourselves, though they were three to two.

So we proceeded to ford the river, the Strongs watching us intently, though they pretended to be taking little notice of us. Jack's horse led the way, and was wading in the water considerably over his knees, when something floating in mid-stream caught my eye, and I invited Jack to stop a moment and look at the object. Jack pulled up at once and stared with me at the dark-looking thing floating slowly with the current.

"I should say it was a log of wood if I did not happen to know that crocodiles abound here," he said.

"If it's a log of wood it's a nimble one," I rejoined; "for see, Jack, it is coming this way, partly against current."

For reply, Jack wheeled his horse round and plunged madly for the land.

"Back to the shore, Peter, quick!" he shouted, "for your life!"

CHAPTER IX MORE TREACHERY

When we reached the bank and looked round, the dark object had disappeared, but almost immediately it reappeared within five yards of us. We could see it plainly now—a huge, scaly head, half out of the water, and a wicked little eye looking straight at us as though gloating over the feast it had just lost by a hair's-breadth. It was horrible.

"Oh, the cruel-looking, bloodthirsty, gaol-bird brute!" muttered Jack, rais-

ing his rifle. "Thank Heaven we were not a quarter of a minute later, Peter! Now watch—this is for his eye-socket."

As the little rifle sent out its message with a light, ping-like report, there was a strange upward lift of the great head, a vast commotion for a moment of the water, then the tail went up and the head went down; there was a little reddening of the muddied stream, the crocodile disappeared, and the tragedy was over.

To my surprise, Jack immediately turned and made for the group of men—the two Strongs and Clutterbuck—sitting by their camp fire and watching us; he still held his rifle in his hand—his little double-barrelled sporting weapon. I took my revolver and followed him, for I did not know what he meant to do. Henderson strode right up to the group and addressed them without any kind of preface.

"If I were certain you fellows were aware that the crocodile held the ford," he said, "I'm hanged if I wouldn't chuck you in after him, one by one."

"Words don't cost much," said James Strong; "we are three to your two. It is foolish to boast of what you would do if you were strong enough."

"You are right; words are cheap," said Jack; "but for want of something trustier I must ask you to give yours that you knew nothing of that crocodile. If you cannot give me an assurance on this point I shall do as I threaten. I know you are three to two, but we need not fear a set of cowards who shoot at helpless persons from an ambush."

James Strong flushed and glanced at his companions, who reddened also. Nevertheless, he maintained a bold front, and replied readily enough—

"We have not come into the interior of Africa to guess riddles. I know nothing about any crocodiles; but if one had eaten your friend there as he crossed the ford we should not have gone into mourning. It might have had you too, without many tears from us. As to shooting from an ambush, you may explain what you mean if you please, or do the other thing if you prefer it. There's no law against riddles and lunatics that I know of, in these parts."

"Very well, then; so be it," said Jack. "At the same time let me tell you this: Prevaricate as you will, we know well enough what we know; you shot at us from the cliffs at Graciosa—good. Luckily you are very bad shots, all of you. Now I am a dead shot. I have twice been in the Queen's Hundred at Wimbledon and Bisley, and my friend here is not far behind me at a mark. What you are to understand is this—that if any of you fellows at any time fire at us, either of us, and miss, we shall shoot back, and we shall not miss; if we can't get a shot at you at once (for you are likely to be behind an ambush), we shall let fly at our next meeting. Bear this in mind for your good."

"Come, chuck the sermon," said James Strong, who was the spokesman of the party, and a very rude one at that.

"Very well," said Jack, "words are thrown away upon fools; next time I shall shoot."

And with this crude repartee we left these worthies and crossed the ford, and gained a good ten miles upon them by nightfall.

Now that my tale is taking us rapidly towards the spot in which, according to our maps, old Clutterbuck's treasure lay buried, it would be as well to present for the reader's assistance a copy of the map and instructions as we each received them from Steggins the lawyer on the day of the reading of the will.

Here is the copy, which I present to the reader with apologies for its shortcomings as an artistic production. I could have made it more presentable and accurate, but it is better to reproduce it as I received it.

[image]

Explanation of Map.

"Take the road to Bulawayo from Vryburg.

"Ride about one hundred miles to a village called Ngami; there turn aside eastward into the veldt. Head straight for a conical hill fifteen miles distant from the road and visible from Ngami. At the foot of the mountain is a sandy plain covered with rocks and occasional thorn bushes. Between the highest thorn bush and the slope of the hill is an open space of sandy soil about two acres in extent, and covered with scrubby grass. Within this area I have planted four posts. The treasure is buried at a spot within the space defined by these four posts."

Jack Henderson and I rejoiced greatly when we off-saddled that night ten miles ahead of the others. This would give us a good start of them, and, unless we had our own lack of energy to blame, we should never allow them to make up the difference. We were to have first dig, after all! We drank a little hot brandy and water in memory of our crocodile; for to him, we agreed, we owed the advantage we had now gained. But for his good offices our friends would certainly have pushed on farther.

"Perhaps," I suggested, "it was all a trick—their camping there, I mean—and they are even now at our heels and coming up hand over hand!"

"By Jove! you may be right, Peter," said Jack. "I had not thought of it. I'll tell you what, man; it won't do for both of us to sleep at the same time. We must

take watches—at all events just now, while we are in the neighbourhood of these bad characters!”

We were to discover before very long that we could not afford to camp out in these African forests without setting a watch, even when far away from bad characters of the biped persuasion! There are some very shady characters in Bechuanaland that walk on four feet, and perform all manner of wickedness under the cover of night! We had not realised this fact as yet, but we were to realise it pretty soon. Nevertheless, in compliment to the poor opinion we held of the Strongs and their ways, we agreed to divide our night into two parts, and that one of us should sleep while the other watched, and *vice versa* at “half time.”

I was not sleepy, and undertook the first watch, and a right creepy function I found it. Those who have never slept out of their own beds would scarcely believe in how many unexpected and unrecognisable voices old Mother Night can speak. In the heart of an African forest she has tongues innumerable, and, moreover, all of them weird and startling, while some are absolutely terrifying.

We had built up a good fire, and had taken the precaution to pile up an ample supply of fuel almost at hands’ reach from the spot at which I lay with my toes to the blaze. But when it became necessary to rise from my place and walk two yards to the pile of firewood in order to add fuel, I must confess with shame that I was so thoroughly cowed and frightened by a feeling of supernatural awe, brought on by the thousand weird and startling noises to which I had lain and listened for two hours or more, that I could scarcely summon sufficient nerve to assume an erect attitude, but lay trembling on the ground endeavouring to gather the courage which had left me, a prey to unworthy feelings of horror.

”However,” I reflected, ”if I do not keep the fire up, all these awful beasts that are now prowling about in the darkness and dare not come near will become bolder, and”— This thought settled it, and I arose, sweating with foolish terror, and piled a mass of dry material upon the languishing flames at my feet.

CHAPTER X

A SERIOUS CHECK

As I did so there was a scuffle and a yelp a few yards away, by a bush, and in the light that the fire shot suddenly around I distinctly caught sight of a brute which I believe was a hyena.

After this I lay with my revolver in my hand, determined that if any savage brute became bold enough again to venture within sight of me I would let fly at him, at the risk of frightening poor slumbering Jack out of his wits. Better than to have a loathsome hyena or jackal come nibbling at one's leg while one lay asleep. A single shot would probably ensure quiet for the rest of the night.

Before my watch was over I did catch sight of another beast, or rather, I suppose, of the same one. I raised my revolver and pulled the trigger. The weapon misfired.

The "click" of the hammer was sufficient to scare my friend away for the time being; but it was not pleasant to think that our ammunition was not to be relied upon, and I determined to overhaul the stock in the morning. Meanwhile, I changed the cartridges in my revolver, for the little weapon had been loaded ever since leaving England, and it was possible that these were damp.

What if some brute had really attacked us, or—which was at least as likely—if the Strongs had crept up and fallen upon us, and our safety had depended upon this cartridge which had misfired? Ugh! I lay a while and reviled, in thought, revolver, gunner who made it, cartridge filler, and everyone remotely connected with the matter, including myself for neglecting to change the charge. Then I had a better thought, and offered up thanks for being saved twice this night from disaster: from the crocodile first, and afterwards from all kinds of unknown horrors lurking around us in the darkness.

After all, I reflected, whether we are at home in bed or in the midst of an African forest, we are in God's hands, to save or to kill. How pitifully helpless is every human being that lies and sleeps unconscious, and how entirely at the mercy of a Providence which one has probably angered times unreckoned! Misfortune might as easily assail us at home in bed as here in the veldt, if it were so willed! Disaster, after all, can no more befall me here than there unless the Almighty decrees it.

This reflection was of much comfort to me subsequently, throughout many a weird and creepy night—in hours of real danger, compared with which the mostly imagined perils of that first night out were as the merest child's play.

Jack was made of sterner stuff than I, and even the unseen perils of the darkness and of the ambush scarcely affected his nerves.

His watch passed off, it may be assumed, without much trial of his courage, and when I awoke at high daylight one of the first things my eyes beheld was the carcass of our friend the hyena, which Jack had shot with his revolver. The report had not disturbed me, which may be taken as evidence that it must have been fairly "bedtime" when the end of my watch opened for me the door of slumberland.

We covered thirty good miles that day, and though we continually looked

out for them, we saw nothing of "our friends the enemy." The night passed without adventure, and—though I cannot honestly say that I was absolutely free from those feelings of dread which had so unmanned me on the previous night—I am justified in declaring that I was not nearly so frightened at this second experience.

On the third day, towards evening, we came to a village, and here I was for turning aside into the veldt eastwards.

"Westwards," corrected Jack.

"No," I said, "eastwards, surely!"

"I bet you sixpence your map says westwards!" said Jack. "I was looking at it yesterday, and noticed it particularly!"

Now I could have taken the most solemn oath that I had read "eastwards" in the instructions at the foot of the map, and the route shown, as I remember, was to the right of the road, which would be eastwards.

Yet now, when I looked at our plan, the route was undoubtedly shown as lying to the left of the road—westwards—just as Jack said.

So to the left we went, and rode for an hour towards a hill whose outline we could just make out in the dim distance. Then the darkness came on, and we off-saddled for the night, full of spirits; for to-morrow, we thought, we should be on the very spot, and at work within a few yards of the treasure itself, and with a good start of our rivals into the bargain.

We were up and away with the first rays of light in the morning, and rode fast and joyously forward, merry as two schoolboys out for a jollification.

"It's a longish fifteen miles to *that* hill, I know," said Jack when we had ridden ten miles. "The map says fifteen miles; but we rode an hour last night and have ridden another to-day, and I'm hanged if we are any nearer than we were before."

This seemed true enough.

"It doesn't look what I should call 'conical,' either," I added. "I should call it a flat-topped thing if I were asked."

"So should I," said Jack; and we rode on.

"I wonder if there can be any mistake," I said, when we had ridden another ten miles and had stopped for a long rest.

"What kind of a mistake?" asked Jack.

"Why, about the map. That hill positively looks as far off as ever."

"It really does," Jack assented. "It must be a good fifty from the road."

"Perhaps the old boy wrote fifty and not fifteen, as we both seem to remember it," I said, fishing in my saddle-bag for the case which contained my map.

"I'm sure it's fifteen there," said Jack, "for I took the precaution of making

a copy of both plan and instructions at Cape Town, in case those rascally friends of yours should get hold of our map and leave us to dig up all Africa for our treasure. I remember the wording quite well—it was 'westwards,' and fifteen miles to a conical hill, over a sandy plain."

These words of Jack's made me think—not those which referred to his taking of a copy of the map; I had done the same myself while on board the *Chepstow Castle*, and had my copy in my pocket at this moment. The words which struck me were those which referred to my "rascally friends," and suggested the possibility of the stealing of our map by them. The idea reminded me that my black bag with the map in it had been at their mercy in the cabin of the *Chepstow Castle* for a week or more; though, it must be remembered, my money was apparently left untouched, as well as my revolver and the other things. Could they have tricked us by altering the map?

Flushed and excited at the very idea of such a thing, I communicated my idea to Jack.

"Good Heavens, man!" said he. "I never thought of it; yet it's the most likely thing in the world. Let's have a look at the map!"

CHAPTER XI

STALKING A MAN

We scanned that map over and over, but could find no trace of alterations. Jack suggested that it might be altogether new—a bogus copy, in fact; almost exactly like the real one, in case we should remember the original, but incorrect enough to lead us astray at the critical moment.

"What a pity my copy was done *after* these rascals had had their chance of doctoring it," said Jack; "otherwise we should soon see whether this one has been got at."

"But I have a copy done *before* we were left at Las Palmas!" I cried. "We can compare it with that, which *must* be right!"

"Peter, you are a trump!" said Jack, banging me on the back. "You're a glorious fellow! Produce it at once! Ha! ha! When in doubt, play Peter!"

I produced my copy, a rough thing, but accurately copied in the most essential portion, which was that which supplied instructions as to this very place. We compared my copy with the original, as we had supposed it to be, and found that

it was as we suspected. We had been duped. The rascals had substituted for my original map a production of their own, made so like the former in the matter of handwriting and style, and even paper, that it would easily pass, if unsuspected, as the real article.

Furious with rage, we turned and retraced our way towards the road. We had come nearly thirty miles westward instead of turning, as we ought to have done, to the east, and had wasted a day and a half—it was intolerable! If we had met the Strongs at this time there would have been a battle; we were blood-hot, and should not have spared them. They had tricked us, and had, in all probability, unearthed the treasure by this time, and departed with it. I could not trust myself to speak as we rode swiftly back, in grim silence, upon our own tracks. Jack said nothing either.

That night, as we lay by our fire, it suddenly occurred to me to look at my revolver. It, after all, had been in my small black bag as well as the map. Probably they had tampered with it; for, otherwise, why should my weapon have missed fire and Jack's not? They had soused my cartridges—that much was pretty certain; but perhaps they had done the revolver some injury besides.

I examined it carefully. The lock worked all right; the drum revolved perfectly. I looked down the barrel; looked straight down it at the firelight, and saw nothing.

"Well?" said Jack.

I handed him the revolver. Jack looked down the barrel as I had; then he took a thin stick and poked at it.

"The demons!" he said; "they've choked it with lead or something. Curse them! it would have burst in your hand if you had fired it! We'll pay them out for this, Peter, if we have to chase them half round the world for it!"

Thirty miles back to the waggon road, twenty miles farther northwards, and then at last we were at the spot where, according to the original map, we should have turned off at the village called Ngami. Our bogus map gave no name to the village, which showed, as Jack said, the fiendish cunning of the Strongs; for if they had called it Ngami, we should have gone on until we had reached a village of that name, and from it we should have plainly seen, as we now saw, the conical hill on our right. As it was, we had gone sixty miles out of our way, and might have gone six hundred, or, indeed, never have struck the right road at all, but for my happy idea on board ship to take a copy of the map in case of accidents.

It was dusk when we arrived, riding with exceeding caution, within a mile or so of the conical hill. Here we dismounted by Jack's orders; for he, by the most natural process in the world—namely, the simple slipping into his proper place, as nature intends that people like Jack should do—had assumed the leadership of

our party of two. It was quite right and proper that he should lead, for Jack had twice the resource and the readiness that I had been furnished withal; his wits were quicker workers than mine, and his judgment far more acute and correct. Jack decreed, then, that we should dismount and wait, and listen. If they had not yet found the treasure, he said, they would, of course, still be upon the ground; and if there, they would certainly light a fire when darkness fell.

"Then will come our chance!" added Jack.

"Of doing what?" I asked. "You don't think of shooting them asleep, Jack, surely!"

Jack laughed gently. "That's what they deserve, the blackguards!" he said. "Why do you suppose they spiked your revolver? I'll tell you. So that when they attacked you, as they fully intended to do, and would do now if we gave them the chance, you should be harmless and unable to hit them back."

It certainly did seem pretty mean, viewed in this light—a cold-blooded, premeditated, murderous kind of thing to do. The idea made me very angry. It gave me that almost intolerable longing one sometimes feels—which, at anyrate, I feel—to punch some offender's head; it is a feeling which generally assails one at helpless moments, as, for instance, when a schoolmaster (whose head cannot be punched with propriety) takes advantage of his position to bombard some wretched victim, who can utter no protest, with scathing remarks.

"What are we going to do, then?" I continued. "Of course we are not going to murder them in cold blood; but can't we punch their heads?"

Jack laughed. "Oh, it may come to that, likely enough," he said; "but what we must go for first is to disarm them. It is perfectly impossible to live near these men in any sort of comfort or security unless we first deprive them of their rifles and revolvers. That's what I want to do to-night. One or two of them will be asleep, the other watching. We must stalk them at about midnight, cover them with our revolvers, and make them 'hands up!'"

"No good covering them with my revolver," I said. "I'd better cover a pair with my rifle, and you the other fellow with your pistol. They know mine won't go off, well enough!"

"That's true," said Jack. "All right, your rifle then. We must shiver here till about midnight; you won't mind that for once."

And shiver we did for several hours, as much with excitement as with the cold of the night; for at about nine o'clock we saw the glow of a fire a mile or so away, which gave us the welcome assurance that our friends had not, at anyrate, found the treasure and departed.

I entreated Jack several times to let us be up and at them; but Jack was inexorable, and would not budge until our watches told us that midnight had come. Then Jack arose and stretched himself.

"Are you ready?" he said.

"Rather!" said I; "come on!"

"No hurry," continued my friend exasperatingly. "Change your cartridges first; so. Now take a drop of brandy neat, to correct the chill of the night—not too much. We may have to shoot a man; are you up to doing it?"

"If necessary," I said; "but I'd rather not."

"Of course not, nor would I; but if there is any hitch, or if either of the men show signs of being about to put in a quick shot, yours or mine must be in first; do you understand? Am I to command, or would you prefer to? It is better that one should take the lead."

"You, of course!" I said.

"Then do just as I tell you when we are among them. Now, are you ready? Then come along!"

Cautiously and softly we crept towards the place where the fire twinkled and glowed in the distance. As we came nearer, we could see that it had been built up close to a mimosa bush which lay between us and the circle of light shed by the burning brushwood. This was favourable to our purpose, for we were enabled to creep along without the danger of being seen, as we might have been even in the dark, had we been obliged to cross one of the wide open spaces which checked the plain.

No thieving jackal or designing lion could have stalked that party more patiently and noiselessly than we did; foot by foot, and yard by yard, we drew nearer to our prey, and at last we had reached the mimosa bush and were watching them as they lay, the rays of their fire all but shining upon us as we crouched, but falling just short. Jack placed his hand upon my arm, and whispered—

"James Strong watching, very sleepy," he breathed, scarcely audibly; "the others fast asleep. I take James, and you the other two. Are you ready? Follow me and stand at my side, but keep your rifle at your shoulder from now on, and never lower it for an instant. Are you ready?"

"Ready!" I managed to whisper, but my lips were so dry that hardly any sound came from them. Then Jack instantly rose and stepped out into the firelight—I following him.

CHAPTER XII

SCOTCHING A SNAKE

James Strong was lying half waking and half sleeping, his rifle at his side; he saw us instantly, however, as we stepped into the firelight, and was on his feet in a moment, dragging his rifle up with him.

"Drop the gun, James Strong," said Henderson, "and put up your hands. I am covering you, you see, and this is not the revolver you choked. Drop it at once, or I fire. I will count three. One—two"—Strong let the rifle fall. Neither the thud of this nor the sound of Jack's voice awoke the other two, who still slept, I covering them with my rifle.

"Pick that thing up, Peter," said Jack. "I'll see to the covering." I did as my captain bade me.

"Chuck it on the fire," he continued. "I shall pay you for it, Mr. Strong, but I am afraid you are scarcely to be trusted with a rifle just at present."

I heard Strong grind his teeth as I picked up his gun, took the cartridges out, and threw the weapon on the fire.

"Sit down, Mr. Strong, and empty your pockets," continued Jack, and his victim obeyed, because he could do nothing else.

"Take those other rifles, Peter, and do the same by them," pursued Jack; "then wake those fellows, and see if they sport revolvers. Have you none, Mr. Strong? Come, produce it if you have. Feel his pockets, Peter, and his saddle-bags. What, has he none? Well, you shall give him yours, Peter, one day; perhaps he will know how to get the lead out since he put it in!"

Strong's face through all this was not a pleasant study.

I obeyed Jack's decrees to the letter. I collected all the weapons—three rifles and one revolver—and threw them on the fire; I awoke the two sleepers, who swore frightful oaths when they realised the position of affairs, and cleared their pockets and wallets and saddle-bags of cartridges, all of which I confiscated.

"Good-night, gentlemen," said Jack, when my work was finished. "I shall repay you for all that has been taken from you to-night. Your zeal, you will understand, has been a little too great; you have given yourselves away. But for your premature attempt to rid yourselves of us on the island, and for one or two foolish matters since then, we might never have been aroused to our danger, and you would certainly have enjoyed many opportunities of shooting us at your leisure—in the back, of course. Now, you see, we have the whip hand of you."

"And you will use it, curse you," said James Strong, "to prevent us taking our legal share in the search for my uncle's property. I know you!"

"Nothing of the kind, my good man," said Jack cordially. "Dig away, by all means; you shall see that neither of us will interfere."

"Yes, and if we find the treasure, you will shoot us down; I know you, I say!" replied Strong. We made allowance for his temper, which was shocking to-day; but then his provocation had really been considerable.

"If you find the treasure you shall take it away with you in peace, so far as my friend and myself are concerned," said Jack. "We shall not shoot you, and you can't very well shoot *us* without rifles, can you? Good-night all; come, Peter."

We could see our good friends frenziedly poking among the embers for their burning weapons the moment we had departed; but, as Jack remarked, they were welcome to the barrels, and since he had taken care to keep up the conversation long enough to allow the woodwork to burn away, that would be all they would get.

Returning to our camp, we made up a fire for ourselves and tossed up for first sleep, for we must keep a stricter watch than ever now, or these desperate fellows would steal our weapons and turn the tables upon us. So we slept and watched by turns until morning, and it was on this night that I heard for the first time in my life the roar of a lion. It was not very near at hand, but, far away as it was, it sounded terrible enough to the inexperienced ear, and I thought over all I had read of the ways of lions in the works of Mr. Selous and other African sportsmen, and recalled an awkward propensity some of them have of coolly coming into camp and foraging among the waggons even in the glare of the firelight. If this brute were to come now and help itself to Jack Henderson before I could interfere, what a truly terrible thing it would be! The idea impressed me so deeply that I awoke Henderson and told him there was a lion roaring somewhere within hearing.

Jack was very sleepy, and my watch was only half over, which made him ridiculously angry to have been awaked.

"Well, what then?" he said. "Let him roar and be hanged! if he didn't wake me, why should you?"

"Why, he might come and bag you while you slept," I said; "travellers say they do that kind of thing."

"Well, what are you there for, man?" said Jack angrily, settling himself to sleep again. "You are there to shoot James Strong, or lions, or she-bears, or anything else that comes and plays the fool around here. For goodness' sake don't wake a fellow to talk about the habits of lions—shoot him if he comes, that's all you have to do!"

I suppose the lion had other engagements for that night, for his roars receded farther away and were lost, presently, in the distance.

We were up in the morning at the first glint of light, for we were naturally anxious to see the ground upon which our labours were to be lavished until the envious soil should reveal to us or the others the secret of old Clutterbuck. There it was, the open space of sandy hummocky soil, and there were the posts, three of them at least; we could not see the fourth. And there, too, was the upturned earth over a considerable area, representing the day's work, or the day and a

half's work, of the Strongs, who had evidently toiled for all they were worth in order to make the most of the start they had gained upon us. The result of this haste on their part was to be seen in the shallowness of their digging, which appeared to have nowhere extended to a greater depth than six to nine inches. As we stood and surveyed the ground, our three friends came with their spades and set to work at once. They scowled at us ferociously, but made no reply to Jack's polite "Good-morning."

"I daresay they *are* rather annoyed with us," said Jack. "Now, Peter, don't be lazy, but begin to dig at once. I'm your bodyguard, remember, and shall do no work except thinking."

"Aren't you going to dig?" I said.

"Certainly not," said Jack; "I'm not one of the authorised. If I dug and found the treasure, there might be a legal point. Now dig up, man, and don't argue; you're wasting your time. Think of the nuggets and diamonds only awaiting the magic touch of your spade! George! if I had a legal position, wouldn't I dig!"

I did dig. I dug that morning until the sweat poured from my face and head like drops of rain. I dug till my arms and back ached so that I almost cried with the pain, while Jack sat or lay and watched, keeping an eye on the Strong party and entertaining me with light conversation. By the evening I was perfectly exhausted, and the greater part of the space of about two acres had been dug over, though not to any great depth, by one or other of the four workers, yet nothing had been discovered.

When Jack awoke me to take my watch at half-time that night, he said—

"Peter, I've been thinking."

"What about?" I asked sleepily.

"About that fourth post," he said.

CHAPTER XIII

AN UNEXPECTED TRAGEDY

"I was wondering what has become of that fourth post," continued Jack. "It can't have disappeared very well."

"It doesn't matter much," I rejoined, "for it can only have been in one spot—the fourth corner of a square; the other three are absolutely symmetrically placed. We can easily judge of the position of the missing one."

"I'm not so sure," said Jack. "I don't think it's a trick of the Strongs, for they seem to take it for granted, as we have done, that the area is a square. I shall look about for it to-morrow while you dig."

"I wish you'd dig while I look about!" said I; "it's the most fatiguing thing I ever tried in my life."

"That's because you never did a day's work till yesterday, my son; but cheer up, you'll find it less fatiguing every day, take my word for it." Jack yawned and lay down, and in a minute was fast asleep. As for me, I very nearly fell asleep also—in fact, I believe I was actually dozing—when my friend the lion suddenly roared from somewhere so close at hand that my heart went into my boots and I felt my knees tremble together as I lay. So loud was it that even Jack awoke and started to his feet.

"What on earth was that?" he said. "Did someone shoot?"

"It was a lion's roar, close behind us here in the bush," I said, my teeth chattering. I don't think I am a coward, but I do hate dangers that I cannot see.

"By George!—fancy those wretched chaps over by that fire," said Jack, "without rifles; what a state of terror they will be in!"

What a good fellow Jack was! I had never thought, in my selfishness, of the infinitely more dangerous position of the others.

At this moment the lion roared again.

"Listen to that!" continued Jack. "What a voice the brute has! It's enough to terrify anyone, especially unarmed people. Ought we to go and stand by those chaps, think you, Peter?"

I am glad to think that I replied in the affirmative.

"And yet," said Jack, "I'm not sure that one of us hadn't better stop here to take care of our horses. Shall we toss up who goes? You see, it was we who disarmed the poor beggars; we can't very well leave them unprotected when real danger comes."

I cordially endorsed the sentiment, and though I would far rather have let our horses go by the board than separate from Jack in this crisis, I tossed up with him as to who should go and who stay.

"Heads stay—tails go," said Jack. "You toss."

I tossed, and the coin showed tails.

"Tails; then you go—lucky rascal!" said Jack; "you get all the fun. Shout for me if anything happens. Cæsar! there he is, roaring again, and nearer their camp. Be off, Peter, and mind your hide!"

I have said that I do not consider myself a coward, but assuredly the greatest coward in the world could not have been more frightened than was I during that most weird and uncanny walk through the darkness towards the twinkling glow of the Strongs' camp fire, but a very few hundreds of yards away. The word

darkness hardly expresses the almost opaque blackness of the night as I stumbled over hummock and thorn bush in the direction of the fire.

Beasts were abroad, it appeared, in horrible profusion. Scuttling, growling, rushing, they seemed to jump up from before and around me at almost every step, as though an army of them were stalking me, and came repeatedly within springing distance, only to lose heart as I approached, and dash away into the darkness.

I have since come to the conclusion that these were hyenas, for no other beast would be likely to be about in close proximity to a roaring lion.

The lion advertised himself freely. Once, at least, he roared within twenty yards of me, and though I held my rifle to my shoulder ready for him, I quite gave myself up for lost. But his designs were not, it appeared, directed against myself, for a moment after he roared again much nearer to the Strongs' camp fire, and presently from beyond that point.

I could hear the Strongs talking excitedly and loudly, and could see that they were busily engaged in piling brushwood upon their fire, for at intervals it seemed to blaze up brightly and to smoke more vigorously. The lion, I could not help thinking, was prospecting both our party and theirs, and walking round and round both, working himself up to the necessary pitch of audacity for an attack.

So, stumbling, groping, creeping upon my uncanny way, I came at last within fifty yards of the Strongs' camp. The lion had been silent now for several minutes, a fact which rendered my horror all the more intense, because I could no longer tell where the brute was, and, for all I knew, he might be at my heels or a couple of yards away on either side of me, licking his lips, and, as it were, choosing his joint in preparation for a spring.

Of a sudden I was startled by the most piercing shrieks and yells that I had ever heard. The noise came from the Strongs' camp, and set the seal of horror upon my soul, so that I fell on my knees then and there and prayed aloud with the most intense earnestness I had ever put into prayer. Then I sprang to my feet in a flush of shame. The lion, I suddenly realised, had made his appearance among these wretched, unarmed folk, while I, their protector, knelt and prayed like a coward for the safety of my own skin!

Aroused and stimulated by this thought, I rushed madly for the camp, careless now of the darkness and danger and horror of the night, and in a moment or two had reached, breathless, the circle of light shed by the Strongs' fire. Here a weird sight presented itself to me.

Clutterbuck knelt and gabbled prayers aloud, his eyes, almost starting from his head, fixed upon a spot just on the verge of the firelight, where James Strong stood, armed with a burning log, cursing as loudly as the other prayed, and staring into the darkness beyond.

Both started as I appeared, but both immediately looked away from me again and resumed their occupations.

"What is it?" I gasped. "Has anything happened? Where is your brother, Strong?"

"It's the most infernal murder, that's what it is!" shouted the fellow, turning suddenly upon me and stamping his foot; "as clear a case of murder as ever a criminal committed!"

"What has happened, man? Was it the lion?" I cried. "Stop your blithering and tell me; we may save the fellow yet!"

James Strong growled out some curse.

"Yes; go out into the dark and save him. You are a likely man to do that, you coward!" he shrieked; "you who rob men of their defences and leave them at the mercy of brute beasts. This is as clear a case of murder as need be, and you shall hang for it yet!"

Sick at heart, but not any longer with fear, I seized a burning brand, and, shouting for Jack, rushed away into the bush in the direction which I supposed the brute had taken.

But though I wandered alone for a while, and with Jack, who soon joined me, for another longer while, we found no trace of either victim or lion, and we were obliged to give up the search in despair.

And here I may say that his shriek as the lion sprang upon him was the last that was ever heard of poor Charles Strong. We picked up a piece of cloth which had been a portion of his coat, but beyond this we never found sign of the unfortunate fellow, whose fate sat like a midnight horror upon our souls for many a day.

CHAPTER XIV

A GLIMPSE OF THE WINNING-POST

There was no digging done the next morning, for both we and the rival camp spent all our time wandering about in the forlorn hope of finding poor Strong—wounded, but perhaps still alive—left by the lion, who, we hoped but scarcely believed, might have been terrified by our shouts and by the shots we fired for the purpose of frightening the brute, and have dropped his victim and departed.

James Strong, though frequently within speaking distance of us, neither

spoke to us nor looked at us, excepting now and again to scowl fiercely as his way, in the searching, crossed ours. But Clutterbuck spoke to me several times and to Jack also, entreating us, for the love of Heaven, either to provide him with firearms, or to take him at nighttime under our protection. If he had to pass another night unarmed, he said, after this, he should certainly go mad.

We promised, however, to protect the unfortunate fellow, and this soothed him wonderfully.

That night both James Strong and Clutterbuck were encamped close to our fire, between their own and ours, the two fires being built up within ten yards of one another. Strong was too proud to ask for protection as Clutterbuck had, but anyone could see that he was glad and greatly relieved when we came and made our camp near theirs. I was sorry for the fellow, rogue though he was, and thought that it was certainly the least we could do to take him under our wing, since we had deprived him of the means of protecting himself.

As for his brother's death, I do not take any share of responsibility for that misfortune. For, as we learned afterwards from Clutterbuck himself, in all probability no shot would have been fired even if the three men had still been in possession of their rifles.

According to Clutterbuck's narrative, the thing happened something like this: He, Clutterbuck, had been deputed to watch for the first three hours of the night, the two Strongs sleeping meanwhile. But Clutterbuck himself fell asleep, and allowed the fire to languish and almost die out, when of a sudden the roaring of the lion awoke not only him but the Strongs also. Then all three men rushed about, getting brushwood and sticks to make a blaze that would keep the lion at a distance; but while poor Charles Strong was ten yards away in the bush there was a sudden roar and a scuffle, and a shriek for help from him, and that was all that either Clutterbuck or James Strong knew of the matter. Neither of them had seen the lion.

All this Clutterbuck himself told me as we lay awake together on the first night after the mishap, during my watch. The poor fellow, naturally a timid creature, was far too frightened to sleep, and was, I think, grateful for being allowed to talk.

The lion did not come near us, neither did he treat us, even at a distance, to any of those terrible roars which I had found so unmaning. Clutterbuck was even more communicative to Jack when his watch came round; he told Jack many interesting things, and among others this—which I suspect the artful Henderson gradually wormed out of him—that he found himself a companion and partner of the Strongs, whom he disliked, by the stress of circumstances rather than of deliberate choice.

Our suspicions as to the affair near Las Palmas were well founded, said

Clutterbuck; for it was the simple truth that the Strongs and he himself set out that day with the deliberate purpose of murdering us. It was James Strong's idea, he declared, and his brother had accepted it readily. He, Clutterbuck, had pretended to do so, but in reality had had no intention of hurting us.

"No, no, Clutterbuck, that won't do!" said Jack at this point of the narrative; "for we counted the shots fired, and there was at least one volley of six shots! You fired with the rest, man; I am not so easily taken in!"

"That's true enough," said Clutterbuck; "but did I hit you?"

"No, that you certainly did not," replied Jack; "but then you are a very poor shot, my friend!"

"I fired wide on purpose, I'll swear to it!" said Clutterbuck.

After this, Jack inquired about the crocodile, and found that here, too, the Strongs had cherished amiable intentions with regard to us. They saw the brute right enough, and that was why they left us to ford the river and themselves stayed behind.

"You ought to have warned us somehow," said Jack.

"I dared not," said the other. "James is an awful fellow, and his brother is nearly as bad—was, I mean—poor chap!"

As for the spiking of my revolver and the changing of the map, Clutterbuck knew nothing of either. It was done in the state-room, and he was not there to see.

"You would probably have been shot as you forded the river," he continued, "if you hadn't rather frightened the Strongs by what you said a moment before—that you were a crack shot, and would have no mercy if they missed you."

"So you see, Peter," concluded Jack, telling me all this afterwards, "it pays to blow your own trumpet sometimes. They wouldn't have hit us, probably, but then we should have been obliged to make three bull's-eyes of *them*, and that would have been unpleasant too!"

But all this while the treasure still lay hid in the bosom of the veldt. Charles Strong's death was very terrible, but I must dig, dig. Regrets and sentiment are mere waste of time with one hundred thousand pounds waiting to be dug out of the earth!

Whatever measure of grief James Strong may have felt for his unfortunate brother, his sorrow did not prevent him betaking himself very seriously to his digging work as soon as day dawned on the second morning after the mishap. He went about his business in grim silence, vouchsafing us, as before, neither word nor look.

Neither were we dilatory. I went back to my digging with back and shoulders still stiff from the labours of the first day, while Jack expressed his intention to search about for the fourth post.

"Either there's some trick about the position of that post," he said, "or it has got moved away by an accident; some elephant or other big brute has used it for a scratching-post, or knocked it down and perhaps rolled it away; in any case, we ought to know where it was."

I still thought that in all probability the fourth post had simply completed the square suggested by the other three, and that it had been in some way removed from its place—perhaps by an elephant, as Jack said, or more likely by a gust of wind. I did not consider the question at all important.

As it proved, Jack was right. He found the fourth post twenty yards at least out of the square, and planted right in the middle of a prickly-pear bush. But though I extended my operations to the new ground introduced by the change of area, and though the two other men and I together dug it superficially over, so that the entire space between the four posts had now been dug up—to a certain depth—the result of the day's work was "nothing to nobody," as Jack facetiously expressed it. Indeed, I, for one, began to wonder whether we had embarked upon a wild-goose chase, and whether the hundred thousand pounds ever existed save in the imagination of old Clutterbuck; and again, whether, supposing the money to have actually existed, the old miser had not purposely so hidden his treasure that no other human eye should ever behold it, since he himself could no longer gloat over it. But when I communicated these views to Jack Henderson, he said—

"Bosh! man; don't be a fool. Dig for all you're worth!"

If real hard work could have insured success, it would have been a difficult matter to judge between James Strong and myself as to who should bear away the prize. Clutterbuck laboured away too, after his kind; but he was of a different kidney from ours, and I think I turned up more soil in an hour than he did in half a day.

For the best part of a week we vied thus with one another, toiling day-long in the sweat of our brows and meeting with no success.

On the evening of the sixth day Jack said to me, as we walked together towards our camp fire—

"Do you believe in second sight and that kind of thing, Peter?"

"No," I said, "I don't. Why?"

"Because I have a kind of idea that I know where the treasure may be," said Jack unexpectedly.

I laughed.

"I too am beginning to have a pretty firm conviction as to where it is," I said.

"Tell me where *you* think first," continued my friend; "and then I'll tell you my idea."

"Nowhere," said I; "at least, nowhere that you or I, or anyone else, will ever

know of.”

”Well, now listen to my idea; you can act upon it or not, as you like. Have you thought of removing the posts and looking into the holes?”

”No, I haven’t,” I said; ”but I’ll do it.”

”Do it when the others are asleep to-night,” Jack rejoined.

”Why, what’s the hurry?” I asked. ”Must I grope about in the dark, and all among the hyenas and lions? Hang it all, let me wait till morning!”

”The thing is, it’s a new idea; and if Strong sees you removing one post, he’ll remove another, and Clutterbuck a third, and you split your chances. *They* may look under the right post while you are busy unearthing the wrong one!”

”You seem to be very cocksure of your posts, old chap!” I said, laughing.

Jack’s answer astonished me.

”Do as I tell you,” he said; ”and begin with the erratic post in the thorn bush. I have a very strong idea about that post.”

”Why—have you seen anything?” I gasped. Jack’s manner impressed and excited me.

”It’s like this,” he said; ”and, of course, my idea may be worth nothing. The post is not very tightly fixed in the ground, and to-day I shook it about and up and down. Well, it seems to rest upon something hard and smooth, that’s all. I left it for you to pull up.”

CHAPTER XV

EUREKA!

Jack’s communication rendered me frantic with excitement, and I instantly determined that I would do as he had suggested. The idea of wandering about the bush at night, alone, was not pleasant; but if the treasure were really at the foot of Jack’s post, why, it would be worth running the gauntlet of a score of lions to get it. Besides, I could take a torch. Of course, the hard and smooth surface the post rested upon might prove to be a stone and no more; still, I would go and see for myself.

Jack and I divided the watching every night. We could not, of course, trust either of the others to undertake the duty. Such a step would have been suicidal indeed on our part; for James Strong, at anyrate, and possibly Clutterbuck also, would have taken so good an opportunity to rid himself of a rival and of a rival’s

inconvenient friend at a swoop. Hence both men were allowed to sleep, if they would, all and every night.

This evening we supped well upon an antelope shot by Jack in the bush while we laboured in our treasure-field, and by the time darkness was well set in, James Strong and Clutterbuck were already in full snore. Then, moving cautiously, I took rifle, spade, and torch, and sallied forth, not without some trepidation, upon my enterprise.

Whether owing to the occasional shots fired by us in this place in the pursuit of game, or whether by reason of their natural dislike for abiding in the continued proximity of mankind, we had not been bothered during the last few days by the presence of many hyenas or other creatures of the kind about our camp. A few days ago, if I had undertaken the gruesome night enterprise upon which I had now embarked, I should have been startled almost at every step by some suddenly rushing or creeping brute; but to-night I was left to pursue my journey almost in peace.

I had no difficulty in groping my way to our treasure-area, which resembled a ploughed field by this time, with all the digging and re-digging it had suffered. Nor was I long in discovering the post as to which Jack had formed so strong and optimistic an opinion.

After all, it was not unlikely that our old miser should have planted a post over the grave of his treasures, and I was somewhat surprised that it had not occurred either to me or to the Strong faction to remove the posts and look underneath them, since we had dug up the whole of the area enclosed by them without result. Doubtless it would have occurred to us to do so after we had dug a little deeper in the space enclosed.

At all events, here was Jack's post, and I laid hold of it and shook it, and moved it up and down just as he had described that he had done himself. Sure enough, the post struck hard and dead on some flat, unyielding substance beneath. My heart beat in a ridiculous fashion—was I really on the brink of a discovery that would place me for ever out of reach of poverty and of the necessity to embark in some lifelong, uncongenial occupation? I felt so faint in the agitation of the moment that I was obliged to pause and gather strength before I was sufficiently master of my energies to lay hold of the post and pull it up.

"Now, Godfrey," I said to myself, "don't be a fool. In moments of difficulty preserve an equal mind; if you can't do that, what was the use of your learning Horace? Pull yourself together and play the man!"

I seized the post and tugged at it. It was stiff enough to resist displacement, though it had wobbled about when shaken to and fro. But having once mastered my agitation, I was equal to any amount of exertion; and by dint of working it backwards and forwards and up and down for five minutes, and twisting it round

in my embracing arms, I succeeded at last in raising and removing it. My torch had gone out meanwhile, and I could see nothing, of course, in the dark hole which had formed the socket of the post.

Kneeling over it, therefore, with palpitating heart, I plunged my hand down. My arm did not reach the bottom in this way, however, and I lay down on my side and plunged it in a second time to the very armpit. This time the ends of my fingers just touched the bottom of the hole, and distinctly felt what seemed a cold, flat substance lying there, but could not grasp and raise it.

I tried to keep cool and think how best to act under the agitating circumstances.

Then I lay down again, after scraping away some of the sandy soil at the edge of the hole, in order to gain a few inches in reach by getting my shoulder lower; and this time I was able to distinguish, by the touch, a small tin box, and to get my fingers under it. In the joy of that moment I could scarcely forbear to shout aloud. Eureka! I had found the treasure! I was a rich man; the whole world was my own—to the full extent of about ninety-eight thousand pounds odd.

Slowly and carefully I raised the little box to the surface; my grip upon it was as tight as that of a drowning man to the hand that will save him. Up it came, a small tin thing like a cheap money-box by the feel; now I had it safely, and was standing shaking it, half dazed, trying to realise what its discovery meant for me. Oh for a light, that I might open it and gloat without delay over its thrice-blessed contents!

The next moment I was careering at full speed towards the camp fire to tell Jack of the marvellous success of my night enterprise, and to open with him the treasure-box that burned my hands as I carried it. But stay! what if James Strong were awake? Could I postpone the joy of raising the lid of that box until the morning, and the almost equal delight of telling Jack all about it? No, I felt I could not. If I might not open the box, and talk about it too, I should certainly "go crazy."

As I approached the fire, however, I saw that both James Strong and Clutterbuck were fast asleep, Jack watching. He heard me coming, though I crept softly for fear of awakening the sleepers, and long before he could possibly have seen me he had his finger to his lip in token that caution was required. I concealed the box in the "hare-pocket" of my Norfolk jacket, and stepped into the firelight. I suppose that Jack thought I was about to speak, for he said very softly, "Ssh!" and made a warning gesture.

It was tantalising indeed. Nevertheless, I sat down by the fire close to Henderson, and for a few minutes neither of us spoke or whispered a word. The only sign that passed between us was an interrogatory uplifting of the eyebrows by Jack, which I took to mean, "Any success?" and to which I responded with the

very slyest possible closing of the left eyelid, which I intended to signify "Rather!"

After about ten minutes of listening to James Strong's measured snoring and Clutterbuck's groans, grunts, and snortings, Jack leant over and whispered—

"Strong sat up and looked around while you were away. He made as though he did not notice your absence, but I have an idea that he knew all about it. We must be very careful indeed. Have you really had any luck?"

"The best possible," I whispered back. "Can I show you something?"

"Wait a bit, old man!" said Jack, pressing my hand; "this is splendid! I congratulate you; but for Heaven's sake be careful! I don't trust that fellow Strong's sleeping; he may be wide awake, watching. He's as cunning as they're made."

"Let's try him," I suggested. "I'll suddenly cough loudly, and you keep a careful watch on his eyes; probably he'll wince if he's awake."

"Go on, then," said Jack. I didn't cough; I said "Hello!" very shortly and sharply. Strong gave a slight start, but then so did Clutterbuck, and both went on sleeping.

"We'll give them another ten minutes," whispered Jack, "and then risk it."

At the expiration of that period I looked inquiringly at Jack, and he nodded affirmatively.

Slowly and cautiously, and with my eyes fixed upon Strong's face, I drew the tin box from my deep pocket; I heard Jack's breath come quick and short as he caught sight of the prize. It was, as I thought, a plain tin money-box, painted black and gold, such as anyone may buy at any ironmonger's for a few shillings. It was tied round with a wire, but unlocked, and with trembling fingers I removed the wire and opened the lid.

Within was a second tin box, a small thing like a sandwich-box, and this too was unlocked.

I paused to take a look at the sleepers; both were still, apparently, as fast asleep as ever.

"Go on!" whispered Jack; "it's all right."

I put my hand inside the case and produced a leather pocket-book, and from this I drew an envelope!

"Ah, a cheque!" whispered Jack; "and a fat one if it's for the lot!"

There were several papers in the envelope. First a letter, which I put aside to read later, because the rest were bank-notes, and I was anxious to learn the amount of my inheritance.

Then came two terrible shocks, one after the other.

Shock number one. There were twenty five pound notes. No more, and no

less!

CHAPTER XVI

"ALL THAT GLITTERS IS NOT GOLD!"

One hundred pounds!

A nice little sum in itself, but not one that would tempt a man to imperil his life in as many ways as it contained notes! Surely the old man had not brought me all this distance to give me one hundred pounds at the end of it? The letter would prove to be an order upon his bankers for the bulk of his fortune. The hundred was intended to cover my expenses home to England.

In so far as concerned the hundred pounds my surmise was correct enough. But the letter was not a bank order. It was a very original document, and I purpose giving it *in extenso*. Here it is:—

"THE PRIZE TO THE SWIFT.

"To my Heir: a message from the tomb.

"MY DEAR HEIR,—If ever you read these words it must happen after my death, because I shall take care that no man handles my money until I am in my grave. That is why I call this a message from the tomb. The dead can gain nothing by lying; therefore I give you no other assurance that what I have to say is the absolute truth.

"You have done well to come so far, whichever of my potential heirs you may be. My treasure is not here, neither are your journeys at an end.

"From South Africa to the Finnish Gulf is a considerable stretch, but one hundred thousand pounds is a large sum; it is a sum that has occasioned its owner more trouble to acquire than is involved in a pleasant journey from Africa to Finland. If it is worth your while to undertake this journey, you will act as I shall presently direct you; if not, you will leave my money to rest where it is, and where, assuredly, neither you nor any relative of mine shall ever find it.

"If my treasure fall into hands for which it was not intended, may my curse rest upon it for ever; and if none find it from this day until the day of resurrection, I, William Clutterbuck, shall be just as happy. Let him who is wise read the

following instructions, and obey them to his profit:—

[image]

Old Clutterbuck's Second Map

"The island is about five miles in length. Steamers from Hull or London to Cronstadt pass within half a mile of lighthouse.

"Special arrangements must be made with shipowners to land upon island.

"An open space will be found in the forest at about the spot indicated by a cross. Here are four posts, defining the area within which it is necessary to dig.

"The Prize to the Swift.

"W. CLUTTERBUCK."

By the time I had read to the end of this precious document, my heart was in the usual condition of hearts whose cherished "hope" has been deferred. The disappointment was almost more than I could bear; the thing was so unexpected, and the pill so bitter.

If I had followed the impulse of the moment I should have torn that hateful letter into a thousand pieces and danced upon it, then and there, to the tune of all the worst names I could think of to revile its author withal. Yet, when I glanced at Jack to see how he took this disappointment, I saw that he was shaking with suppressed laughter.

"I would give worlds to have known that old chap!" he whispered. "It is the finest notion for giving healthy occupation to a set of lazy nephews that ever an uncle devised. He was a grand old fellow, this, Peter!"

"What nonsense you talk!" I whispered. "I believe the whole thing is a hoax, from beginning to end. The man was mad on all matters concerning money. He was determined no one should ever touch his treasure, since he could not carry it away himself, and this is his dodge; he will trot us backwards and forwards after the infernal stuff until we die or get our throats cut, and the money will rest unfound in Timbuctoo, or Jerusalem, or the Grand Canary!"

"I don't think so," said Jack. "I believe the old man was entirely sane and entirely serious. Just think; if you had a lot of money to leave and no one to leave it to (he didn't know *you*, remember, when he wrote this!), except a set of good-for-nothing scamps like these Strongs, and"—

As Jack referred to Strong by name, I glanced up at the sleeping form of that individual, whose very existence I had forgotten for the last few minutes in the excitement of examining the money-box and its contents, and to my horror I distinctly saw that his eyes were wide open, and that he was both looking and listening with every faculty at high pressure. He closed his eyes the instant he saw me look up, and was, apparently, as fast asleep as ever.

I whispered my discovery to Jack, but that practical person was not in the least discouraged.

"Much good may it do him!" he said. "Take a copy of the map of the island, though," he added, "and of the instructions."

And this I did, then and there.

It was, of course, useless after this to attempt to conceal our discovery from James Strong and his companion. We therefore determined to take the bull by the horns—in other words, to inform them we had found all there was to be found, and that, consequently, we intended to depart, in order to return presently to England.

It fell to me to undertake the duty of making this communication to my fellow-competitors. I did not care for the job, but, desiring to get it over, I plunged "into the middle of things" at breakfast, in the morning.

"James Strong," I said, "I think I ought to inform you that I have found what we all came to seek, and that it is all up with your chance and Clutterbuck's. I should recommend you to return quietly to England, and if you give me no further trouble I shall take no further steps about the affair at Las Palmas."

"You're a pretty cool hand, I will say," said Strong, forcing a laugh. "And you won't take steps about Las Palmas, won't you? You are too generous to live, hang me if you aren't! And do you suppose I'm going to keep quiet about my brother's murder?"

"Take proceedings against the lion by all means," said Jack with a laugh. "What a fool you are, James Strong! Why can't you talk sense among grown men? We are not schoolboys, my friend; you can't frighten us that way. Now, what do you want for your spoilt guns—the three of them?"

"Curse you and your money!" said Strong; "we shall see what I want for my spoilt guns when we get back to England."

"Very well," said Jack; "then I shall settle with Mr. Clutterbuck."

We did settle with him, paying him one hundred pounds for the three burned guns, to which Jack generously added another hundred pounds for expenses, advising Clutterbuck to return to England at once, and to have, in future, as little to do with Mr. James Strong as circumstances permitted; and this advice Clutterbuck promised to take to heart. I certainly considered Henderson's settlement in the matter of guns and expenses an extremely generous one.

Then those two rode away from the field, leaving me the conqueror. My victory was a barren one, as I feared; but still, I had found all there was to find, and Jack had quite persuaded me by this time to follow up my success, and to treat old Clutterbuck and his "message from the tomb" with perfect seriousness—nay, I was determined that I would have that hundred thousand pounds if I had to seek it in the ends of the earth, and to dig up half a continent to find it!

CHAPTER XVII

LOST!

As for Jack and me, since we had in our pockets the map of the spot in which the treasure lay awaiting our pleasure to come and dig it up, and since James Strong could not possibly know to what quarter of the world we had been directed, or, indeed, any part of the purport of the miser's eccentric letter, we determined to enjoy a week or two of real sport before returning to civilisation and the digging of treasures in high latitudes.

We had given Strong no weapons, since we could not trust him; but to Clutterbuck, who was nervous of travelling unarmed, we presented my old revolver, choked as it was with lead, together with a handful of cartridges, Clutterbuck vowing by all his gods never to give the weapon to Strong, or even to let that untrustworthy person know that he had it.

After he had made us this solemn promise, I revealed to Clutterbuck a plan I had thought of for clearing the barrel. It was simple enough. All he would have to do would be to heat the jammed portion of the barrel in the fire, when the lead would quickly melt and come out.

James Strong's face was a study as he rode away with his companion, and Jack made the remark that he would not for a good sum be in Clutterbuck's shoes and have to ride back all the way to Vryburg, if not to Cape Town, with such a murderous-looking, scowling ruffian as James Strong in his present temper.

"Oh, well," I said; "Clutterbuck's the grey mare this time. It's he that has the pistol, and therefore the last word."

"Yes, if he can keep it," said Jack sagaciously. "But I should be surprised to hear that the poor chap reaches Cape Town in company with his share of the two hundred pounds or the revolver either. However, that's not our affair. I hope we've seen the last of both of them for many a long day, or for ever; and the latter

for choice.”

After this, for a space, we gave my co-heirs no further attention, but devoted ourselves entirely to the delights of sport.

We first rode back to the village of Ngami in order to see whether our ox-waggon and hunters had arrived, but did not find them waiting for us, as we had hoped might be the case. We therefore decided to employ the hours or days of waiting in a little impromptu sport in the neighbourhood.

We had no guide, and were without any very large stock of ammunition for the light rifles which we had brought with us; therefore, we agreed, it would be foolish to venture too far into the bush. It would be well too, if possible, to keep our conical hill in sight as a landmark in our guideless wanderings.

So away we rode into the jungle, with our rifles slung over our shoulders, half a hundred cartridges apiece disposed about our persons, a blanket each, plenty of matches, very little food of any kind,—for we would shoot our dinner day by day,—and, lastly, with old Clutterbuck’s absurd but invaluable ”message from the tomb” buttoned up safely within the inner pocket of my Norfolk jacket, and a copy thereof in Jack’s secret waistcoat lining in case of accidents.

It was a somewhat unfortunate circumstance that we went astray at the very outset. A herd of beautiful elands crossed the open before our very eyes, and we did the most natural thing for Englishmen of our age: we tally-ho’d and galloped away in pursuit; and a fine chase those elands led us, heading straight for the jungle a couple of miles farther away.

Up to this point our conduct had been that of fairly sane men; but no sooner did the big antelopes disappear, at a distance of some two hundred yards in front of us, into the dense forest, than without a thought we plunged in after them, gaining rapidly upon the hindermost, at which we had fired three shots as we rode, and which—with rare bad luck for the eland, for we were not accustomed to firing at full gallop—we had wounded.

We rode madly into the thick cover, straining every nerve to overtake our prey. We could hear them crashing their way through the trees, very close at hand, and this excited us to even greater exertion.

The result was a foregone conclusion. When, a quarter of an hour later, we succeeded in overtaking the wounded beast and administering the *coup de grâce*, and had admired to the full the splendid proportions of the beautiful dead animal at our feet, it struck us that we had perhaps done a rash thing in venturing into this jungle.

”I wonder where we are?” one of us remarked laughingly.

”Do you remember the way out of this place?” asked Jack of me, looking around him.

The tangled growths on every side were of such density that it was impos-

sible to see fifty yards in any direction.

"We must follow our tracks back, I suppose," I said. "That won't be difficult, will it, as the elands crashed through the same way?"

Jack did not think it would be very difficult, neither did I. Yet, after we had ridden back for a few hundred yards we came to a place where the right way might be any one of three ways; for either our herd had dispersed at this spot, or other companies of deer or other wild animals had passed, making several trampled tracks which our inexperienced eyes could not distinguish from our own, and any one of which might, as I say, be the right one.

"This is the way, I believe," said Jack, showing one trampled path.

But I was almost sure that the right course was not this, but another. We argued; we laughed; we grew serious; we argued again; but all that we said and adduced in support of our respective contentions only tended to puzzle us both the more. In the end we were no nearer a solution of the difficulty, but rather, if possible, further away; for I believe it is a fact that we were both so muddled by the arguments, and by the general sameness of the look of the place in every direction, that we neither of us knew at last which trampled path we had selected in the first instance to swear by. I daresay I changed over to Jack's and he to mine.

At all events, we eventually agreed to one thing, and that was that we were most distinctly and decidedly lost.

We climbed a tall tree or two in the hope of thus seeing, over the heads of the rest, our old friend the conical hill; but not a thing could we detect near or far but the waving tops of other trees in apparently endless lines of hopelessly innumerable and impenetrable leaf-screens.

We inspected every apology for a track until it branched off into two or more other paths. We rode for several hours, absolutely ignorant whether we went deeper into the forest or towards the open out of which we had entered it, until at last Jack pulled up, tied his horse to a tree, and threw himself down on the ground, rolling from side to side in a paroxysm of laughter, which I found very contagious and in which I joined immediately.

Of course, there was nothing to laugh at that I knew of; on the contrary, our position was somewhat serious. Nevertheless, I laughed simply because Jack did, until he suddenly looked up and pointed, and then at last I saw the reason of his mirth. Our dead eland lay about fifteen paces from us. We had ridden for four or five hours, and had returned to the spot from which we had started!—at

which discovery I laughed again until I nearly cried.

CHAPTER XVIII

HOW WE BURIED OURSELVES ALIVE FOR THE LOVE OF SCIENCE

"Talk of returning to one's mutton!" said Jack; "here's our venison!"

I confess I was uncommonly glad to see that eland; for since breakfast I had scarcely tasted food, and the prospect of camping out for the night upon a little tinned meat and a couple of biscuits had not presented itself to my imagination in the brightest of colours.

Under the soothing influence of roast venison, however, and a comfortable fire, our prospects for the night brightened very considerably, our only source of anxiety for the present being the want of a "long drink." We had our brandy-flasks still nearly full, for we were resolved to keep the spirits for medicinal purposes only; but as the stuff was unmixed with water, we were unable to satisfy our thirst by means of a pull from the flask. We were lucky enough, however, to come across a kei-apple tree which provided us with a kind of dessert; not particularly luxurious certainly, but palatable enough to thirsty souls with nothing to drink.

That night passed without adventure. We heard wild animals in the distance, but none came very near us, and if they had we were growing accustomed to them by this time, and my spell of night-watching was passed without serious attacks of "creeps" and "horrors," such as had rendered my first night or two in the bush periods of mental torture to me.

On the morrow we breakfasted upon more of our eland, and cut and cooked sundry slices to take away with us. Our Kaffir apples again served as substitutes for "drinkables," but I think either Jack or I would have given pretty nearly all we were worth for a cup of tea or a drink of water.

"We must get out of this jungle to-day, Peter," said Jack, "and find some water; kei-apples are not good enough."

I quite agreed. We must get out of this jungle, if only for the sake of having a long drink.

Our horses, which had filled themselves with the cactus-like growths abounding at our feet—elephant's-foot, or Hottentot bread, and other delicacies of a like nature—were presumably as anxious to find water as we were. They carried us in whatsoever direction we urged them, but went listlessly, as though

by no means in love with our enterprise.

When we had wandered thus for a few hours, and were growing somewhat depressed by reason of our continued failure to find a way out of the jungle, I proposed to Jack to allow the horses to go where they liked.

"They can't make a worse business of it than we have done," I added; "and they may possibly be guided by instincts which we don't possess."

"Good idea," said Jack; "we'll try it."

The result was rather astonishing.

Those two sagacious creatures, feeling their bridles loose upon their necks, and recognising that they were to be permitted to go where they pleased, pricked up their ears and started off at a quick walk.

"I wonder if they really know where they are going, or whether this is only a kind of 'swagger'?" said Jack. It certainly seemed as though they knew all about it. Why should they not, after all, as well as any other animal that is wild and has a vested interest in the forest? Horses came originally from a wild stock, and doubtless possess the inheritance of their species—namely, the instinctive power to find their way unerringly from point to point as well through pathless jungle as over the easy open.

At any rate, our good steeds had scarcely travelled an hour without our interference when we saw to our delight that the forest grew thinner and the light stronger, and a few minutes later we were actually in the open, with the jungle behind us. We could see our conical hill in the distance, but on the other side of the belt of forest through which we had so laboriously passed. It was also clear to us that there existed a way to Ngami, skirting the forest, which would obviate for us the necessity to plunge again into those dangerous fastnesses; and this discovery was a great relief to our feelings, for it would have been a sore test, to my nerves at least, to re-enter those dark shades in order to get into the road for home.

Meanwhile our horses walked briskly onwards, as though determined to see through the matter which had been entrusted to their instinct; and whether my readers believe it or not, it is nevertheless the fact that they travelled as straight as the bee flies, never diverging by a yard from their line, until presently they brought us up on the banks of a wide stream, into whose cool current they promptly plunged their noses, and we ours, in very abandonment to the luxurious delight of thirst-quenching.

This little adventure, or misadventure, was a lesson to us, and a most useful one, throughout our wanderings in search of big game during the next month or more; and as at this time we passed through several "scapes" and incidents of an interesting if alarming kind I now purpose to set down one or two of these for the benefit of those of my readers who have a taste for adventure and wild beasts. I

do not mean to describe in detail the whole of our month of jungle life, but merely to pick out an incident or two as samples of the rest, for an average volume would not contain the narrative of all we saw and did during those momentous thirty days.

Jack and I slept that night by the river which the instinct of our horses (as I suppose) had discovered for us; and, it being a warm evening, we determined to do without a camp fire for once, and to conceal ourselves by means of deep holes dug in the ground, in which we would crouch with our heads and shoulders concealed in the scrub, or by boughs lopped from tree and bush. We had heard of hunters adopting this plan at spots by a river's bank to which wild animals were in the habit of coming down to drink at night, in order to obtain easy shots from their ambush at the unsuspecting lion, leopard, antelope, elephant, or what not, that came to slake its thirst at the stream.

So Jack and I dug holes, being provided with spades brought for quite a different purpose, and lopped heaps of branches and scrub with our hunting-knives; and when darkness fell we got into our graves, a yard or two apart, within whispering distance, and piled branches and greenery around the mouths of each pit so that we might put our heads and shoulders out, if need be, and still not be seen; and then we waited for developments.

The night was full of a holy calm, warm and still, and instinct with a kind of sense of waiting for something to happen. One felt that the silence and peace were very delicious, but that this sort of thing could not continue long, and must not, for it would grow intolerable after a while.

Then, just as one began to weary of the strain of the stillness and utter noiselessness, a leopard, or some such creature, came to the rescue, far away, and roared half a dozen times on end.

I thought, and whispered my conviction to Jack in the next grave, that this habit of roaring when about to go a-hunting was a very foolish trait in leopards, tigers, and other beasts of prey. It amounted to calling out, "Now, then, all you fat deer and juicy antelopes, you'd better clear out or I'll have you for supper!"

Jack said it reminded him of a master at school, who used to call out "*Cave, gentlemen, cave!*" before going the round of the studies, and was, in consequence, the favourite master in the school.

I was just beginning to propound my opinion as to which was the greater and which the lesser fool, the master or the leopard, when suddenly a sound as of a gust of wind broke in upon us, came nearer, disintegrated itself into the noise of the scurrying of many feet, and in a moment we were in the midst of a splendid squad of antelopes, plunging, bucking, kicking, boring, leaping, grunting, squeaking,—all intent upon the water, and each creature apparently in mortal fear lest its companions should drain the supply before it had its share.

One or two of the beautiful little animals actually leaped over my head as I ducked to avoid being kicked, and I put out my hand and patted another which stood close by, to its unspeakable surprise and terror, causing it to dive madly in among its fellows and raise a pandemonium in the ranks, for which, I am sure, the rest could have discerned no reason. Probably my friend obtained the character of being a mad antelope among his companions from that night forward.

All this—the confusion and the trampling of the mud at the water's edge and the drinking—lasted about five minutes; then, as though they had suddenly realised that they were doing an exceedingly rash and foolish thing, the whole family, as with one accord, turned right about and galloped away into the darkness. A moment—and they were here; another—and they were gone thither whence they came, and where that was, no man knows.

What had startled them? The plunging of our horses, perhaps; for those poor picketed beasts were, for some reason or other, very nervous, and we could hear them stamping their hoofs and shaking their heads as though anxious to break away. A hyena or two were prowling about in the neighbourhood, disagreeably noisy as usual, but the horses could scarcely be nervous on their account.

Suddenly all is explained: the hasty "skedaddle" of the antelope herd; the agitation of our horses; the sudden hush of all voices of the forest. Somebody is arriving—a great and majestic and terrific personage, at whose coming my coward heart goes with a jump into my boots. It is a lion—and a hungry one!

CHAPTER XIX

A NIGHT WITH A LION

Without a sound, without a roar, without warning of any kind whatever, the great creature is suddenly standing before us. He was on his way to the river, doubtless, and became aware, by means of his acute gift of scent, that visitors were somewhere in the neighbourhood.

This is Leo Rex; and he is saying to himself, "Well, I may be mistaken, but unless I were assured to the contrary I should be inclined to think that there was a man about! Yes, I am sure of it. And—yes, upon my life, horse too; is it horse, now, or bullock? Certainly something civilised—horse it is! Well, now, this is really very surprising and delightful! You are in luck to-night, your majesty! Let

me see, shall it be man first or horse, or a long drink?"

Then the king decides that he will first roar. That, he thinks, will start the game. At present he does not know *exactly* where the man is; after a good roar from him there will probably be a rustle and a bolt; as when a terrier gives tongue at a thorn bush in order to set a-running the rabbit that lurks therein.

So the great king set up a terrific roar, and the immediate effect was—besides nearly deafening Jack and me, and frightening me half out of my wits—to terrify our poor horses to such an extent that both broke away at the same moment and fled. We heard the clatter of their hoofs as they galloped away into the sanctuary of the darkness, and we could make out also that the great beast standing so close to us raised his head to listen.

I daresay he was blaming himself in the worst feline language for being so foolish as to drive away good food in this way. I do not know for certain what he thought, for at this moment Jack took his turn at the game of startling poor me, and, before I had any idea of his intention, crashed off first one barrel and then the other, the two reports being almost simultaneous.

I do not know how it was, but I had not thought of shooting; I do not think my rifle was out of the pit. It had been understood between us that we were to observe, this night, not kill; the fact being, of course, that we had not expected a lion to come down to the water, but at most a herd or two of antelopes or zebras, or perhaps an eland. I was not prepared for action when Jack fired, and the succeeding events somewhat took me aback.

It all happened in a single moment, however, so that my confusion did not last more than a second or two at most. It was like this: at Jack's shot the huge brute first gave forth the most awful roar that ever assailed human ears, then in an instant it launched itself into the air, alighting, as I saw to my horror, exactly upon the spot from which Jack had fired. Probably the smoke hung over the place and attracted it.

For an instant I gave up Jack for lost, and the sudden horror of the catastrophe so paralysed me that I had neither thought nor power of action. The next moment the idea came to me that I might at least discharge my rifle into the brute's body, and perhaps prevent it from carrying poor dead Jack into the jungle and eating him there.

The lion was standing over Jack, roaring loud enough to be heard at the Cape, and doubtless tearing the flesh from my friend's bones; but it was too dark to see anything. I could distinguish an opaque mass standing close at my elbow, and I knew this to be the lion; but it was impossible to discern what he was doing.

I put my rifle to my shoulder, but could not see the sights; then I stretched the weapon to arm's length until I could feel the end of it against the brute's ribs, and pulled the trigger—both triggers.

I thought that the great roar to which he had previously treated us had been a fairly effective production, but a terrific noise, half roar, half bellow, to which he now gave vent, put the first completely into the shade. At the same time the brute, so far as I could distinguish, seemed to rise up on his hind legs, paw the air, and fall over backwards.

I thought of dead Jack, and fury lent me courage; I reloaded both barrels of my rifle, climbed out of my pit, and placing the muzzle once more to the brute's side—though he lay quite still and did not seem to require a second dose—I fired both cartridges simultaneously. At the same moment a wonderful thing happened.

Out of the pit in which he had lain hid suddenly popped Jack's head, and Jack's voice cheerily hailed me.

"Peter, old man!" it said, "I'm really awfully obliged to you!" At the words so fierce a flood of joy rushed up to my throat that all utterance was choked and I could say nothing. "You have saved a very precious life," continued Jack. "Do you know the brute was simply feeling for me with his claws when you fired and stopped his game? Look here!"

It was not of much use to look, for the night was pitch dark; but I may say that afterwards, by the firelight, I was somewhat shocked to observe that Jack's Norfolk jacket about the left shoulder was torn to shreds, and that his arm was considerably scratched beneath it. If the pit had been an inch or two shallower, Jack's arm would have been lacerated in a fearful way; as it was, the brute only just touched him.

We found the lion was as dead as a post when we had fired some brushwood and were able to examine him, which we did without loss of time, for it was unpleasant to feel that the brute might possibly be still alive, and gathering up his dying energies for a little *vendetta*, to be enacted upon us so soon as one of us should come within grabbing distance of that tremendous mouth of his!

I confess that I was very proud and happy over that dead lion. It was "my bird" undoubtedly; for though Jack was a crack shot and had fired both barrels at it, at a distance of about ten paces, or not much more, yet he had missed it clean. He could not see the end of his rifle, he explained, and had simply pointed the weapon according to the grace that was in him, hoping for the best results. The results were a clean miss and a big lion sitting, as he picturesquely put it, on the top of his head and digging at his arm. As a matter of fact, I believe this is what happened: the lion, enraged by the shot, instantly sprang towards the only visible thing that it could see, which was the white smoke of Jack's rifle.

It had alighted with its great carcass stretched over the pit, the hind legs short of the aperture, head and shoulders beyond it, but one of its front legs happened to fall just inside the hole; and it was in struggling to regain its footing

and draw its great arm out of the mysterious hole into which it had fallen, that the brute spoiled Jack's coat and very nearly spoiled his arm and shoulder as well.

My shots came at the right moment, and the mystery which that lion must have already felt to exist with regard to the banging and the hole in the ground, and things in general, was, for that lion, never solved. He went away to the Happy Hunting Grounds with his last moments in this world made mysterious by unguessable and incomprehensible riddles, leaving me a very proud and elated young person.

Perhaps other lions who have been shot by a visible creature, and with whom my first victim has by this time scraped acquaintance in those shady retreats, have now explained it all for him, and have described what an artful, tricky, fire-spitting, incomprehensible race are we humans, who have about as much strength in our whole bodies as lions have in one muscle of their forearms, but who can nevertheless spit fire at a lion from the other end of nowhere, and burn him up in an instant from out of sight.

CHAPTER XX

OUR TRUSTY NIGGER TO THE RESCUE

We did not attempt to skin that lion, for the best of reasons—because we did not know how.

Simple Jack was very much inclined to try, because, said he, it could not be very difficult. He had heard that if one cut it straight down the proper place one could pull the whole skin clean off over the beast's head, like a fellow having his football jersey pulled off after a match. But I did not encourage his enterprising spirit in this matter, because I did not think Jack's theory would "come off," or the lion's skin either.

We made up a splendid fire after this adventure, and passed the rest of the night in comfort and self-laudation. We could not expect to see much more animal life out of our pit ambushes after all the banging and talking in which we had indulged.

But we heard several hyenas—probably the pilots and squires of Lord Leo, departed—which came around and said a great many things in derisive tones, as it seemed to us; but whether they intended thereby to rejoice over the downfall of a tyrant, or to abuse us for depriving them of their patron and food-provider;

or whether, again, they were addressing their remarks to the lion himself, ignorant of his death, and assuring him, wherever he might be, that he was wasting invaluable time, inasmuch as two fat and juicy young men were ready and waiting for his kind attention down by the river, I really cannot say, not knowing hyenese.

But this I know, that once, when Jack and I had both (oh, how imprudently!) just dozed off for a few minutes of repose, I suddenly awoke to the consciousness—like a person in a ghost story—that we were "not alone."

Up I started, and up started Jack also, aroused by the same sound that had awakened me. What was it?—another lion?

Not only was it not another lion, but lion number one had disappeared. We sat up and rubbed our eyes. We stood up and looked carefully around, and asked one another what in the name of all that was mysterious was the meaning of it?

At the sound of our voices there was a scuffle behind the scrub close in front of us, and a pattering of feet; growlings, moanings, yelpings followed the scuffle: and we ran, rifle in hand, to solve the mystery.

There lay our lion, dragged from the spot in which he had died, and there, under the lee of a prickly-pear bush, his friends the hyenas would, in another minute or two, have torn him to pieces.

I did not know then that the hyenas would have eaten their lord and patron. It struck me that they had dragged away his carcass in order to hide it, in honour, from his enemies, perhaps to bury it. I mentioned this to Jack, who laughed rudely.

"Bury it?" he said. "Yes; in their stomachs."

I had conceived quite a wrong idea of the relations between the hyena and the lion, it appeared. The respect of the former for the latter, I now know, though great during life, vanishes with the breath of his nostrils. The hyena flatters and adores the lion while he can roar and kill food for him; but when the lion dies the hyena instantly eats him if he can get hold of the royal carcass.

The morning after our exploit with the lion, which had first so nearly eaten Jack and afterwards been itself so nearly devoured by hyenas, we left our quarry to take care of itself, for this was the only course open to us, and went on foot towards Ngami, leaving it on the ground at the mercy of vultures or hyenas, or anything else that should smell it out and descend upon it. We went on foot, because our horses had broken away and departed, as we feared "for good," whither we knew not.

But to our great joy and surprise, when we reached a grassy glade near the village (having walked about ten miles from the spot in which we had passed the night), we suddenly came upon them feeding quietly, with their torn halters dangling on the ground, neither surprised nor disconcerted to see us.

They allowed themselves, moreover, to be caught by us, which was really exceedingly obliging of them, for there they were with the whole of Africa to run about in if they pleased, and no one to prevent them; and yet they submitted tamely to be placed once more under the yoke, and to enter into bondage upon the old conditions!

At the village of Ngami we found our waggon, with its, to us, invaluable accompaniment of native hunter and Kaffir driver, and its welcome load of little luxuries such as bottled beer, and big luxuries such as express rifles, with other delights.

The native hunter was a Somali, and knew a little English. His name, for those who liked it, was M'ngulu; but we felt that we could never do justice to such a name as that without a special education, and called him "M" for short. He had convoyed other bands of young English sportsmen, and knew enough English words to convey his meaning when he wanted anything, such as tobacco, which he called "to-bac," or whiskey, which he called "skey," but which, since we soon found that he was better without it, we never offered him.

I do not think our Kaffir driver had a name of his own; we called him "Nig," or, sometimes "Hi!" and he was equally pleased with either, being an extremely good-natured person.

M'ngulu, or M, took to us at once. I think it was on account of the lion of the previous night, to whose remains we very quickly introduced him. I had made sure that the hyenas would have picked its bones by the time we reached the spot, but, to my joy, there the brute lay, untouched. As we neared the place, however, three huge vultures rose from a tree close by and flapped lazily away to another a few yards farther down the bank, which showed that we were only just in time to save our property.

It was a treat to see M skin that lion, or any other animal. There was no mystery about the proceeding when *he* had a hand in it. Off came the skin as easily as if the fellow were divesting himself of his waistcoat, which, by the bye, is a garment that he did not actually wear. When I come to think of it, I am afraid I should be puzzled to tell you what M *did* wear. I do not think it can have been much, or I should have remembered it.

When M saw that we had really killed a lion, and without his assistance, he evidently felt that he was in for a good thing. He had cast in his lot with a couple of great sportsmen, and that was enough to make him very happy.

Those who had recommended M'ngulu to us informed us that he knew Bechuanaland as well as most men know their own back gardens. You might set him, they said, anywhere within a hundred or two miles of Vryburg, blindfold; then remove the handkerchief and ask him where he was, and he would tell you. I do not know that this was an exaggeration. I am certain that we, at all events,

never succeeded in finding a place which he did not know, or pretend to.

M now desired to be informed where we wanted to go to, and in pursuit of what game?

"Oh, elephant," said Jack. "Let's have a turn after the elephants first, Peter; don't you think so?"

I did, and remarked forthwith to M'ngulu, interrogatively, "Elephants?"

"Oh, elfunts," said M. "M'ngulu know—not here—come."

And M'ngulu took a turn to the north-east and went away with us after those elephants, up through the continent of Africa, as though he knew every clump of trees from sea to sea, and all that dwelt therein.

Wherever the elephant country may have been, we occupied a week in getting there; a week, however, which was not wasted, but which was full of adventure and delight; of days spent in stalking or tracking, and of nights luxuriously passed within the waggon under the comfortable knowledge that M'ngulu lay asleep without by the fireside with one eye open, and that if a lion or any other large beast were to move a whisker within a mile or so, M would know the reason why.

And at length one day, as we passed by a dense copse of trees whose appearance was unfamiliar to us, M remarked, "This right tree; elfunt like him not far now!" from which we inferred that we had passed into a district which produced the food beloved by the big creatures we had come to find.

Soon after this we made a camp, by M'ngulu's directions, and left the waggon under the care of the Nig, to whom we presented a rifle for use in case of accidents, and departed, all three of us, on horseback into the jungle.

Jack said that it was to be hoped no one would alarm Nig and cause him to wish to fire that rifle; for that would be a fatal moment for poor Nig, who knew no more about firearms than he did about the rule of three. Nig spoke English fairly well, and we asked him at parting what he would do if attacked by a lion? Whereupon the Kaffir seized his rifle (which was loaded), and waved it wildly about his head (with accompaniment of bad language and war dance), in a fashion that caused us to ride away in great haste over the veldt, and not to draw rein until we were well out of range of his weapon. It was on the second day after leaving camp that we saw our first elephant, and made our acquaintance for the first time with an animal actually and undoubtedly "possessed," and a pretty

lively introduction it was for us!

CHAPTER XXI

THE BAD ELEPHANT

We were riding slowly, in Indian file, through a rather dense belt of forest, M leading, when that worthy suddenly drew up and slowly turned his head round to shoot a warning glance at us. When he did this old M always looked so exactly like a setter drawing up to a point, that it was all Jack and I could do to avoid laughing aloud.

At this particular moment, laughter or anything else of a noisy description would have been a grave mistake, for M was very much in earnest. He beckoned us up to him, and pointed to a tree which had been almost stripped of its leaves and smaller twigs, and said, "Elfunt—bad elfunt!"

"Why *bad?*" whispered Jack to me; "and how does he know whether it is bad or good?"

To this I could give no reply, for I could not imagine wherein consisted the goodness or the badness of an elephant. There did not appear to me to be anything peculiarly wicked in an animal helping itself to its natural and favourite food without M'ngulu's leave; and I confess that up to this point my sympathies were in favour of the elephant and against his traducer, M; but I was to learn presently that this elephant was a very bad animal indeed—a really wicked creature without one redeeming feature about his character.

It seems that the acute M'ngulu formed his opinion as to the elephant upon whose traces he had suddenly chanced by the manner in which he had eaten his breakfast. He had not only stripped the tree, but had savagely pulled it about and broken its branches, scattering bits far and wide, and from this fact M promptly concluded that he was a bad or "rogue" elephant—namely, one who by reason of his evil temper has found it impossible to remain with the herd to which he belongs, and has therefore separated himself or been forcibly separated from his fellows, and has departed to vent his fury, in future, upon trees, or strangers, or anything that is encountered.

"You know," said Jack, when we discussed this question together afterwards, "it's a capital idea! Why don't we fellows of the human persuasion adopt the plan? Fancy, if one could always banish sulky chaps, at school or anywhere,

and send them away to rage about the place until they recovered their senses and returned mild and reasonable!”

I said that I scarcely thought the plan would work in polite society, because, though the community to which he belonged would no doubt be excellently well rid of the rampageous one, the rest of the world would probably object to his being at large, and would likely enough return him to the fold in several pieces.

M’ngulu followed up that elephant, by some mysterious process of his own, for two hours, at the end of which period we had drawn so close to the quarry that we could distinctly hear him somewhere in front of us, still breakfasting, apparently in his own distinctively ”roguish” way, for there was a sound of continual rending and tearing of branches, and the ground here and there was littered with wasted food which, Jack whispered, might have been given to the elephantine poor instead of being chucked about in this ruthless way!

A minute or two more, and M’ngulu stopped, sitting motionless upon his horse, finger to lip. Wondering and excited, we followed his example, sitting like two statues.

Presumably M’ngulu had caught sight of the elephant, but I could see nothing of the brute; neither could Jack, it appeared, for he craned his neck to this side and that, and looked excited but vacant. The rending noise had ceased. Doubtless the ”rogue” was becoming suspicious; perhaps he had heard us, or seen us, or scented us.

”That’s the worst of having a Somali hunter,” whispered Jack; ”one *can* smell them quite a long way off! Any fool of an elephant ought to”—

But Jack’s frivolity was suddenly broken off at this moment by a loud ejaculation from M’ngulu, who turned swiftly about at the same instant and whipped up his horse, shouting out something to us in his native lingo, which we took for instructions to follow his example.

Off we scudded, all three of us, separating as we went; and as we turned and fled I heard a sound which was somewhat terrifying to the inexperienced—a shrieking, trumpeting noise, accompanied by the crashing of trees and shuffling of great limbs; and I knew, without being told, that the ”bad” elephant had taken this hunt into his own hands.

In spite of all the noise and circumstance affording unmistakable evidence that our friend the ”rogue” was really close at hand, I had not caught sight of him up to this time, and it was only when M’ngulu had galloped away in one direction and Jack and I (rather close together) in another, and when the elephant had very wisely selected M to pursue, that we two got our first glimpse of him.

He was a huge fellow, and he looked very much in earnest as, with his big, sail-like ears stretched to their full width on either side of his head, his trunk uplifted and his tail cocked, he went crashing after our nimble nigger, trumpeting

and squealing like a steam-engine gone mad. I felt some anxiety on M'ngulu's account as pursuer and pursued disappeared in the dense depths of the jungle through which we had come.

M was by far the worst mounted of the three of us, and was armed only with one of our small rifles, a bullet from which might stop an elephant once in a thousand shots, and, certainly, would do nothing of the sort the other nine hundred and ninety-nine times. It would appear that the angry brute had appreciated these facts in choosing M'ngulu to vent his fury upon instead of one of us, for we were armed with our express rifles, bought by Jack with a view to this very work, and we were besides, much better mounted than our good nigger.

But we need not have feared for M'ngulu. That acute person knew very well indeed what he was about; and as Jack and I still sat wondering whether we ought to follow in his tracks, or whether M would have the gumption to bring the elephant round so as to pass within easy shot of us, we became aware that M'ngulu had proved himself to possess the required quality, and was, indeed, at this moment approaching with the elephant at his horse's heels.

The first indication of this was a violent trembling and quaking on the part of my horse as the crashing and trumpeting began to tend in our direction instead of away. Jack's horse, on the contrary, showed signs of a desire to bolt; and it was with difficulty that he restrained it until, just as the hunt came in sight, the brute gave itself up to complete terror, and, refusing all persuasion, twisted round and galloped madly away in the opposite direction.

Mine showed a less frantic disposition. Though it quaked and shook like a man in an ague fit, it stood its ground and allowed me to bring my heavy rifle to bear upon the furious brute as it came by.

Away darted M'ngulu's terrified horse, making better pace than ever it had made before this day, straining every nerve to keep ahead of the mad brute behind it. Even old M looked a little nervous, I thought, glancing back over his shoulder at the pursuing "rogue," and shouting something to me as he flew by. I did not catch what he said. The elephant was distinctly closer to his horse's heels now, than when, a few minutes ago, they had disappeared in the jungle, and it certainly seemed to me that it gained at every stride; no wonder poor M looked nervous. A considerable responsibility attached to my shot, I felt; for if I could not stop the brute he would undoubtedly have M or his horse in another minute unless they contrived to dodge him.

I could still hear Jack's horse crashing away in the distance, and Jack's voice remonstrating with it very loudly and heartily; there was no help to be expected from him in this crisis.

All this takes so long to describe, while the thoughts themselves passed like lightning through the brain.

I brought my rifle to bear upon the brute as well as I could for the trembling of my horse, and pulled the trigger just as it passed within thirty yards of me, aiming for its heart, which I hoped and believed was to be found just outside the top of the shoulder. I pulled both triggers at once, feeling that this was a crisis, and that I should not get another chance of putting two heavy balls in at a favourable distance and in a vulnerable spot.

The immediate effect of my shot was twofold. In the first place, the recoil of the rifle from the double discharge was so great and unexpected as to cause me to lose my balance and fall backwards clean out of the saddle. That was the effect as it concerned myself. As for the elephant, it stopped short in its career, falling forward upon its knees, and smashing both of its fine tusks with the concussion.

For a moment I fancied that I had killed it outright at a shot; but the next I discovered that this was far from being the case, for in an instant the great beast struggled to its feet and looked about it with the nastiest expression in its eyes that ever disfigured the optics of man or brute. Blood streamed down its side, but not from the shoulder or near it; I had missed my mark by a good foot, and wounded it in the ribs—badly no doubt, but not in such a manner as to render it immediately harmless.

I had fallen off my horse, as I explained, and was at this moment behind it, with one foot in the stirrup, about to remount, watching the elephant over the top of the saddle, uncertain whether it would be wiser to trust to my horse's legs or my own; and whether, indeed, there would be time to mount and get under way before the brute discovered us and charged.

The elephant did not allow much opportunity for reflection. He turned his head in our direction as soon as he was upon his feet, and of course saw my terrified horse.

Up went his trunk, out went his great ears, forth bellowed his scream of rage. Silenced as he had been, for a moment or two, by the sudden shock of his wound and his fall, he was doubly furious and vindictive now by reason of the pain he had been caused, and in less time than is occupied by the pious British man who calls at need upon his patron saint, Jack Robinson, the great animal was in full descent upon my horse.

CHAPTER XXII

I AM MOURNED FOR DEAD

My steed was doomed; that was clear enough, for it still stood, helpless and terrified, rooted to the spot and quaking with abject, nerveless fear. Apparently terror had completely bereft it of the power to move, for from the moment (only half a minute ago, in spite of all this talk and telling!) when it caught sight of the "rogue" in full pursuit of M'ngulu until now, it had stood with forefeet apart, ears cocked forward, eyes and nostrils dilated, trembling and snorting, and insensible to direction from the saddle.

As for me, seeing that my horse was doomed, and that if I had still been mounted I should probably have shared its fate, I thanked Heaven for my escape and sprang back into the bush without further ado, leaving the poor brute to its evil destiny. Safe behind a dense, thorny bush I was free to reload my rifle and watch, if I desired it, the elephant's behaviour with regard to his victim.

This was not a very pleasant sight, and the idea of what would have become of me had I remained in the saddle, trying to get the horse to move, until too late, made me quite faint. It is enough to say that when the "rogue" had done with the poor beast there was not an unbroken bone in its body; for he had knelt upon it, danced upon it with his huge feet, gored it with the stumps of his tusks, thrown it hither and thither, and torn it to bits with his trunk, and, in a word, vented upon it an abandonment of fury which was absolutely terrific to behold.

So quickly did he perform his work, in the madness of his rage, that I, who was obliged to set to work cautiously and with little movement for fear of attracting his attention, had not finished loading my rifle when the second act of the tragedy began.

It was M'ngulu who reappeared next upon the boards. He came galloping up, wailing and weeping at full voice, under the impression, I suppose, that I had fallen a victim as well as my horse; and as he dashed past the elephant's nose, he first spat at it and cursed it, and then fired off his rifle in a very "promiscuous" manner, one handed. This, though it did not injure the elephant, served to enrage him yet further; and involved M'ngulu in a second race for life.

Of this race and of its upshot I was not a witness, for our good nigger and the raging "rogue" at his heels passed immediately out of my sight, and it was only when I heard in the distance first one shot and then two more that I knew where to look for the hunt. Having now reloaded my rifle, I felt justified in rejoining the chase on foot; and careered away at my best pace in the direction of the shooting. I presently encountered both Jack and the nigger galloping back to meet me so rapidly that I thought at first they were pursued, and hid myself behind a tree in order to save my own skin and perhaps get a telling shot as the brute passed me. But there was no elephant, and M'ngulu was weeping and wailing, and Jack's face looked white and scared and haggard.

"Jack!" I shouted as the pair rode by. "Hold on a bit! Where's the?"—

Jack pulled up in a instant, so did M, who ceased wailing on the spot, and, jumping off his horse, commenced dancing around Jack and me in a manner that made me suspect for a moment that the madness of the elephant had infected him.

"Good Heavens, man!" cried Jack, "I thought you were done for. This fool of a nigger has been telling me you were dead—'White man Peter dead—kill,' he has been saying, and crying and wailing fit to raise the dead."

"I wish he could raise my dead horse," I said; and I described to Jack my own escape.

"Great scissors!" cried Jack. And for some little time such foolish and unmeaning expressions as "Cæsar!" "Snakes alive!" "Scissors!" and so on were the only remarks I could get my friend to make.

"I don't know which was the bigger fool," he said at last, "your horse that wouldn't go or mine that wouldn't stay. This fool of a beast of mine took me half a mile away before he would consent to return, and I only got a look in at the hunt *then* thanks to old M here, who kindly brought the elephant to me as I was not allowed to go to the elephant."

"Still," I said, "I think your horse was less of a fool than mine under the circumstances. It's no fault of my poor brute that I was not made jam of by that raging beast. By the bye, I suppose you killed it between you, as you are here and the elephant is not?"

"He's dead," said Jack. "You made two good holes in him, but in the wrong place. M'ngulu brought him by me, and I put in a lovely bull's-eye in the forehead. He went down like a sheep, but struggled upon his knees again. Then I put in a second near the same spot, and M fired off his piece and nearly knocked my cap off—he never went near the elephant. He is a free cannonader, is M; I don't think we'll give him rifles to hold in future, Peter—at least, not loaded ones."

We were now at the scene of the bad elephant's demise, and Jack showed me where he had stood, and where M'ngulu, and how it had all happened. M's bullet had really passed very close to Jack's head, it appeared, for the tree trunk was splintered by it a foot or two above the spot where Jack had been standing.

There lay the "bad 'un," terrible even in death; a big, vicious, mangy, bony, ungainly elephant as ever went mad and was expelled by a respectable herd. His tusks had been good, but they were spoiled by his first fall, and though we collected the pieces, and M deftly dug out the roots, they were useless as specimens. We made them over to M, however, who sold them, I daresay, for a good price.

After this we shot two or three other elephants before returning southwards; but in each case it being we who hunted them and not they us, as in the instance of the "bad 'un," the record of our achievements would be uninteresting in comparison, and I shall leave the tale of them to the imagination of my read-

ers, who know well enough how the thing is done, and resume the thread of our history proper, which must be pursued without further digressions; and those who have skipped the hunting adventures may now read on in the certainty that the Treasure business will in future be strictly "attended to," and that they will not be called upon to skip again, unless, indeed, it be from pure excitement in the incidents of the legitimate story of the hidden money.

Had we known it, we were on the brink, even now, of a very terrible incident indeed.

CHAPTER XXIII

A RUDE AWAKENING

Our hunting trip over, Jack and I left M'ngulu, our Somali hunter, and the nigger driver in charge of the ox-waggon, which was to follow us at leisure to Vryburg. On their arrival we purposed to sell oxen and horses and waggon, pay off our men, and depart by train for Cape Town, thence to England, and thence again to our new treasure island in the Gulf of Finland.

As on our ride from Vryburg, we now took nothing with us excepting our light rifles and ammunition, our one remaining revolver, brandy, blankets, a small supply of tinned food, and two small kegs of water (of which we had learned the necessity by the bitter experience of our two days' waterless wanderings in the jungle near Ngami).

It was but a hundred or so of miles to Vryburg, but we were determined to enjoy the return ride thoroughly, and to keep ourselves in food by the way through the medium of our rifles, though we did not look to have anything in the way of adventures, since our friends James Strong and Clutterbuck were no longer by to afford us the excitement of a race to the treasure ground, with its added interest of possible shots from behind or from an ambush.

I cannot say that I was sorry to feel that Strong was well out of the way, and probably half-way to England by now. I do not like the feeling, when travelling, that every tree may have an enemy behind it, only waiting for an opportunity to put a bullet into you as you come along. I am a plain man, and like a quiet manner of travelling best—the civilised kind, without the excitement of ambushes and cock-shots, and so on.

We did not go far each day, for there was no hurry. M'ngulu and the nigger

were going to spend a few days at Ngami, to rest the oxen, before starting after us; but we ourselves would rather pass our time in the veldt than at Vryburg. So we hunted antelopes, and shot all manner of birds that looked queer but tasted excellent, and we camped out at night, and enjoyed life amazingly, as any two young Britons would under similar circumstances; for we had had a successful and delightful hunting expedition, and we were on our way home to England with the secret of the treasure safely buttoned up in our breast pockets; the object of our journey had been attained; the present moment was full of delight—what could any man desire more than this?

We were no longer afraid of lions at night. As a matter of fact, they were rare enough so far south, and in all probability the one we had shot at Ngami, before the waggon reached us, was the same animal which had captured and devoured poor Strong, junior, that terrible night at the treasure field. There were plenty farther north, as we well knew. But now we were thirty or forty miles south of Ngami, and on the highroad to Vryburg, and there was not much danger of a night surprise from any of our old friends.

Hence we were somewhat careless when on the watch over the camp fire. Nominally we still took our sleep in turn and watched during the interval; but as a matter of fact, the function of watching was honoured by us in the breach more than in the observance, and it often happened that we both slept soundly for hours together. Thus when, on the fourth night, a most unexpected and alarming surprise broke over us, like a thunderclap from a clear sky, we found that we had been living in a fool's paradise.

For once, old Jack—generally so much more to be depended upon than I, being a more gifted person all round, and infinitely smarter and more wide awake than your humble servant, the present scribe—old Jack, the acute, was caught napping. It was his watch, and he ought, undoubtedly, to have been awake—wide awake. Instead of that he was asleep—fast asleep—when, as he described the event afterwards, he was awakened by being stirred in the ribs by someone's foot.

Assuming that it was I who took this liberty with him, Jack lashed out with his own foot, and hacked someone violently upon the shin, eliciting an oath which, I am glad to say, Jack instantly realised could not have proceeded from lips so refined as mine.

"Come, sit up!" said a strange and yet familiar voice, with added expletives which I omit. It may be taken as understood that in the subsequent conversation there was an oath to every three words of one of the speakers, for this was a person who, I may tell you, was quite unable to speak the Queen's English without a large admixture of strong language: there are such people—more than are needed.

Jack opened his eyes with a start, and recognised James Strong. Then he twisted round and felt for his rifle, which lay at his side ready for emergency; but he could not find it.

Strong, who held a revolver in his left hand, laughed aloud.

"No, no," he said; "I've seen to it; you taught me that trick, you know. See there!"

Jack followed Strong's eyes to the fire, and there he beheld the butts of our two rifles blazing merrily among the twigs and logs.

"Burn nicely, don't they?" said Strong. "Now chuck that revolver of yours in. No, no! none of that, my lad; if you turn the muzzle anything like in my direction I shoot. I can get mine off long before yours is pointed my way. Drop it out of the pouch, anyhow it comes. You needn't touch it. Open the pouch and shake it out—so!"

Jack was obliged to obey, for Strong's revolver covered him all the time, and Strong was a man to shoot in a moment if it suited him. Jack's revolver fell at his feet.

"Kick it towards me!" said Strong, and Jack was obliged to do so. Strong kicked it into the fire.

"Now then," he said, "that little matter being settled, hand me up the letter you took from Clutterbuck's tin box."

"I haven't it," said Jack; "Godfrey has it."

"Turn out your pockets," said Strong. "You took a copy; I saw you do it. Now, please, no shilly shally—out with everything."

Strong turned over with his foot the few articles which Jack produced from the pocket of his Norfolk jacket. The copy of our precious document was not there.

"Take off that waistcoat," said Strong; "Or, stay, what do I care where you have hidden the blessed thing? Look here, I give you one minute to produce it."

There was nothing to be done. Poor Jack was obliged to reveal the secret places of his waistcoat lining, and to bring out the required document. What else could he do? The man with the revolver is bound to have the last word. If I had been awake, instead of sleeping like a pig by the fire, we might have had him; as it was, Jack was at his mercy.

"Now," said Strong, "go away into the bush; step out one hundred yards, and stay there while I negotiate this snoring tomfool here!"

Jack, feeling, as he said afterwards, that a worm would have appeared a dignified creature in comparison with himself, stepped out his hundred yards, or pretended to; as a matter of fact he remained behind a thorn bush about seventy paces away, determined to rush in at any risk if the fellow threatened me any harm.

Then Strong woke me as he had awakened Jack, by stirring me with his foot, and I am thankful to think that I too "landed him one" for his trouble; for I lashed out just as Jack did, and my foot certainly encountered some portion of his frame, and as certainly elicited flowers of speech which I omit.

"Come, get up!" he said sulkily; "the game's played out."

I started to my feet, feeling for my rifle; it was gone, as the reader knows. Only half awake, I stared at Strong; then I looked round for Jack, who had disappeared.

Strong's revolver covered me all the while, just as he had held Jack in peril of instant death.

"Jack!" I screamed. I do not know what I thought. I believe I had an awful fear that Strong had murdered and buried him. "Jack, where are you?" To my intense relief Jack shouted back—

"All right, Peter; do as he tells you, just now!"

Strong laughed loudly, and swore atrociously.

"D'you hear that?" he said. "You are to do just as I tell you; the captain says so. If you don't, your brains will fly in about two seconds. Your rifles are burnt, so is your revolver; your smart friend wasn't quite acute enough to-night, and he's a prisoner. Hand up the letter, or cheque, or bank order, or whatever it may be that you took out of Clutterbuck's tin box that night. You thought I was asleep, curse you, but that's where you spoiled yourselves."

I handed Strong the document he asked for. "There goes," I thought, "my chance of the treasure!"

Strong glanced at it and pocketed the paper.

"Any bank-notes in that pocket-book?" he said; "if so, hand them over." I had thirty pounds in cash, which he took. I had subscribed the rest to make up Clutterbuck's two hundred pounds.

"Now," resumed Strong, "if you move a finger while I'm in sight I shoot. Come, hands up! Stand!"

He left me standing like a confounded statue, with my hands over my head. Then he laughed, swore a disgusting oath at me, loosened the bridle of his horse, which was tied to a tree quite close at hand, and started to ride away.

CHAPTER XXIV

STRONG SPRINTS AND GAINS A LAP

Jack was at my side in a moment.

"Quick," he whispered "let's mount and be after him; I shall never be happy again until I have kicked that fellow within an inch of his grave!"

We dashed into the wood for our horses—they were not where we had left them. Of course they were not; the man would have been a fool to leave us our horses—we might have raced into Vryburg before him, and got him arrested! Strong was about as perfect an example of a scoundrel as you would find in Africa or any other continent, but no fool!

We stood and stamped and murdered our native language, diving to the lowest depths of our vocabularies for expressions of hatred and rage and of abuse, and the promise of future dire vengeance. We still stood and raged, when suddenly Strong came riding back.

"You have disobeyed orders," he said; "don't blame me for enforcing discipline. Go back to your place, you—Henderson, or whatever your name is!—hands up, you other!"

"I shall have it out of you, one day, for this, you infernal scoundrel," said Jack, whose temper was now beyond his control. "Get down and fight me on the ground—you may have your revolver, I'll use my fists."

"You fool!" rejoined Strong with an oath; "a man does not ask a leopard to spit out his teeth before attacking him. Go back to your place, I tell you, or I fire!"

Jack did not move.

"You are a murderer already," he said, "and you know it. What have you done with Clutterbuck and his money, you scoundrel? That's his pistol you hold; do you think I don't know it? Never fear, you shall hang one day, my friend!"

For answer James Strong fired his revolver straight at Jack's head. I do not think he had intended from the beginning to murder us. Either he had calculated that his plans would work out without the need of killing us; or he had reflected that his own skin would be the safer, when in England, if he spared ours; for inquiries would certainly be set on foot if Henderson disappeared though few would know or care whether poor I disappeared or not.

But when Jack accused him of murdering Clutterbuck, his comrade—a crime which in all probability he had actually committed, though Jack only drew his bow at a venture—Strong changed his mind and suddenly determined that it would be the safer plan to shoot us both down. Accordingly, he first fired at Jack and missed him clean. Then he fired another shot and missed again, and swore, and turned his pistol on me and fired three shots at me; at the third I fell, feeling a sharp pain in my shin-bone—my leg would not support me.

Jack had drawn a log from the fire and was about to hurl it at Strong when he fired his last shot, at Jack this time, and rode away into the grey of the early morning, before the last named could launch his clumsy missile at him. The

shooting of the six shots did not occupy altogether more than ten seconds.

Jack sprang to my side, white and terrified.

"For Heaven's sake, Peter, where are you hurt?" he gasped. "Can you speak? Are you dying? Where is the pain?"

"My leg," I said, writhing, for the pain was very severe. "It's only a broken leg—but it'll lose us the race!"

As a matter of fact, my leg was not broken, as the term is generally understood—there was no bone setting required; but the bullet had carried away a splinter of my shin-bone, having all but missed me, but taking, as it were, a little bite out of me as it passed.

Nevertheless, trivial as the wound was, this misfortune delayed us three weeks at Vryburg; for though Jack doctored me with all the devotion and skill that he could command, the weather was hot, and I suppose there were some wretched little bacilli about of the kind "to play old gooseberry with open wounds," as Jack learnedly expressed it; for my shin became very painful and inflamed before we reached Vryburg, and I was obliged to take to my bed at the hotel there and remain in it for a tantalising spell of three weeks.

As for our journey to Vryburg, I performed it in the waggon. Jack carried me, or half carried me, back to a village on the highroad which we had passed through on the previous evening without stopping, and there we awaited the arrival of the waggon, sleeping in a native hut and collecting, I suppose, the bacilli that were destined to play the part with my wound which Jack described as "old gooseberry." Had we stayed in that village on the previous evening we should have learned that a white man had been living in the place for a month, waiting for friends to come down from Bulawayo, and that he was living there still. This was, of course, our friend Strong, who had deliberately waited a month for us, in ambush, and had sallied after us when we passed through, and caught us napping, as described, over our camp fire.

But we learned another significant fact bearing upon this matter. When the white man originally came to the village a month ago, he was, we were told, accompanied by a friend who lived with him in a hut which the white men made for themselves. But after about a week the little white man disappeared, and the big white man explained that he had gone on to Cape Town, being tired of waiting.

But after another week—that is, a fortnight ago—Umgubi, who was a kind of village herdsman, and looked after the cattle belonging to the chief men of the place, came upon the body of the little white man in a nullah with steep banks two miles or so off the road. Then the big white man said that the little one must have gone astray and fallen down into the nullah, or else an eland or some other big animal had attacked him and pushed him down; and all the natives of the

village said that he must have terribly offended his gods for so great a misfortune to have happened to him, and that doubtless an eland had pushed him over into the nullah, or else he had fallen over by himself without the eland.

Only, if that was the case, said our informant innocently, why was there a bullet-hole in the back of his head!

It was when M'ngulu and the nigger had arrived with our waggon and translated the tale for us that we heard the details of this story of Strong's villainy; and I may honestly say that, though shocked to hear of poor Clutterbuck's end, I was not altogether surprised. It was a comfort to think that we had done our best for him by furnishing him with a pistol, while Strong was left quite unarmed. If Clutterbuck, with so great an advantage, was unable to retain the upper hand, there could be, after all, no one to blame but himself.

How Strong dispossessed him of the revolver; by what stratagem or plausible arguments or threats he succeeded in persuading Clutterbuck to part with all that stood between himself and his murderous companion; and how, when he had obtained the weapon, he used it for his fell purpose, will, I suppose, never be known. Perhaps the dark tale of deceit and murder will be revealed at the last tribunal of all; but it is certain that the tragedy must remain one of the mysteries in this life.

Meanwhile, where was the murderer? Half-way towards Hogland and my hundred thousand pounds?

As for ourselves, we determined to collect what evidence we could in order to bring the miscreant before the judges at Cape Town, if we could catch him there; but events proved that the fox was not to be so easily run to earth as we had hoped.

To this end we telegraphed from Vryburg, just a week after our own interview with James Strong, explaining that we had evidence of his connection with a murder, and giving his name and appearance.

But when, three weeks later, we reached Cape Town, we found to our disappointment that the police had utterly failed to find Strong. No person of that name, or answering to the description, had either been seen or had taken passage by any of the late steamers bound for home. The nearest approach to our description of the man "wanted" was of one Julius Stavenhagen, who had sailed in the *Conway Castle* before our telegram was delivered.

Jack and I looked at one another on receiving this information. If this were Strong himself—and we had a firm conviction that such was the case—then he had not only escaped just chastisement for his crime, but he had also obtained a

three weeks' start of us in the race for Clutterbuck's Treasure.

CHAPTER XXV

LAPPED, BUT STILL IN THE RACE

It may strike some of those who read this narrative that, considering the fact that we had (in a cowardly manner, as they may deem it, and with far too much regard for the safety of our skins) surrendered to James Strong not only our invaluable map of the spot to which we were directed by old Clutterbuck's "message from the tomb," but also the copy of that document which we had been prudent enough to make in case of emergency—that, considering these facts, it did not really matter very much whether Strong sailed for England with one day's start of us or one year's; for he now possessed every available clue to the discovery of the treasure, while we had none whatever.

Our game was played out and lost. Strong had won. We might sail for England to-morrow or this day five years, but James Strong would now both possess himself of and retain the hundred thousand pounds for which we had toiled and travelled and suffered, simply because we were ignorant where to look for either the treasure or for him.

Yet this was not the case, for we—Jack and I—had been in this matter craftier than the fox and wiser than the eagle; and each independently of the other, too.

We discovered this on the morning after Strong's checkmate of us, as I lay by our camp fire, when, intending to spring a mine of surprise and delight upon Jack, I started bewailing the shipwreck of our hopes to find the treasure. Strong had stolen from us, with fiendish cunning, both the plan and the copy. I dwelt upon this disastrous fact because I intended presently to send Jack into ecstasies of admiration for my sagacity by informing him that it did not really matter a bit, seeing that I had committed the whole letter to memory, and knew by heart every jot and tittle of plan and instructions.

But Jack spoiled my little game by saying—

"Oh, I don't think you need worry, old man, about the loss of the 'message from the tomb.'"

"Why not?" I asked.

"I know it by heart," he said, "every word of it; and the plan too—I could draw it exactly. Look here!"

This was disappointing, for I really had thought I was going to score for once over my acute one!

However, we praised one another, and came unanimously to the conclusion that any two foxes would have to take a back seat for cunning if he and I were to drop treasure hunting and take to robbing farmyards! And that is how it came about that the loss of our papers was not so serious a disaster for us as it might have been if we had been "other than we were"—*i.e.* less clever.

So three weeks after Mr. Julius Stavenhagen's departure, or, if you prefer it, Mr. James Strong's, Jack Henderson and I sailed at last from Cape Town; a bad second, of course, but still not without hope that Strong might hitherto have failed to find the treasure when we should have reached the island of Hogland, or Hochland; indeed, it might even prove that, fearing lest we should have remembered the name of the island, he might have hesitated to visit the place at all, in case we should follow and denounce him for the murderer he was.

I did not greatly rely on this last faint hope, however, for Strong was not the kind of man to surrender an undoubted advantage for any consideration of craven expediency. He would rather occupy the island of Hogland, and shoot us if we appeared to disturb him; and that was what we must look out for, supposing that we ever found the island with Strong in possession.

"It would simply amount to a shooting match in that case," said Jack; and I think he just about expressed it.

My leg was quite cured by this time, and my only trouble on the voyage to England was that the *Bangor Castle*, which is one of the fastest passenger steamers afloat, did not travel quickly enough. I was beginning to consume my soul in anxiety to be even with James Strong for his smart trick upon us, and to be "one point ahead" in the matter of the treasure.

But we reached England in due time, and I journeyed straight up north to Hull, in order to lose not a moment in making arrangements for our departure; while Jack took the train at Paddington for Gloucestershire, binding himself first by a solemn promise to come up north the instant I telegraphed for him.

My faithful old friend had vowed to see me through with this treasure hunt, and declared, moreover, that he considered himself under a solemn obligation to discover James Strong and see him thoroughly well hanged for his misdeeds.

So away went Jack for Gloucestershire, and I travelled northwards to Hull and interviewed without delay the shipowners, Messrs. Wilcox, who, I found, ran a line of regular steamers from this port to St. Petersburg and Cronstadt. And first I inquired, with not a little anxiety as to the reply, whether there really existed in the Gulf of Finland any such island as Hogland. The clerk's answer was encouraging.

"Why, certainly!" he said. "Here, Captain Edwards, you can tell this gentle-

man all about what he wants to know far better than I can. Captain Edwards has just returned from a trip to Cronstadt, and must have passed this very Hogland a few days since."

"At five forty-five last Sunday afternoon," said the captain, a quiet and most gentlemanly little man, who, I was afterwards to learn, was a pronounced favourite not only with his employers but also with every passenger who had the good luck to take the trip in his fine steamer, the *Thomas Wilcox*.

"Do passengers ever land there?" was my next question.

"Well, they don't get a chance, as a matter of fact," said Captain Edwards; "for we never stop. There is nothing particularly attractive in the island to cause passengers to wish to land and explore it. Stay, though; I have heard of one visitor to the place—in fact, I took him off the island eventually, though it was not I that landed him."

"Not just now—this month?" I blurted. The communication gave me a shock, for it struck me that the passenger referred to could be no other than James Strong, who, if he had already visited and left the island, must have taken the treasure with him.

"Now? Dear, no!" said Edwards. "Four years since, at least—if not five. An old fellow—cracky, I should say. He gave out on board the *Rinaldo*, tripping from Hull to Cronstadt, that he was in search of an island to bury treasure in, and asked to be landed in Hogland when he passed it. You remember the story, Mr. Adams?"

Mr. Adams laughed, and said he had heard about it.

I laughed too, to hide my deeper emotions. This was delightful confirmation of my best hopes!

"Was he landed there?" I asked. The captain's first words rather staggered me.

"No, he wasn't," he replied. "He couldn't be without permission from the Russian Government. But he went on to St. Petersburg, got his permission, and was landed by the *Rinaldo* on her return journey. I took him off and brought him home. Dotty, I should say, decidedly. He was in the rarest spirits, and declared that he had tricked his blackguards of heirs, as he called them. They were not going to touch his money, he said, before they had sweated a bit to earn it—just as he had. Nobody believed he had a farthing to leave. He was dressed like a pauper, and disputed his steward's bill."

Nothing could have portrayed my late revered acquaintance more realistically than these words.

"It's sport, I suppose, isn't it?" continued Captain Edwards. "I am told that numbers of wolves, foxes, and game birds of all kinds come over the ice in winter, and some are caught there when the thaw sets in. You might have a pleasant

week—lonely, though; only a few fisherfolk and the lighthouse people. The island is five or six miles in length.”

I blushed, and declared that sport was—in part, at least—the object of my visit; but that my main idea was to make some investigations in the hope of finding coal and iron, which were supposed to exist in the islands of the Gulf of Finland as on the mainland of Esthonia on the Russian side of the water.

”Oh, I see!” said Captain Edwards. ”Well, look out for my old friend’s treasure if you get digging. Who knows you mayn’t hit upon something that will pay you even better than coal and iron!”

Captain Edwards laughed merrily at his little joke; he did not dream how near he came to touching the truth.

”Get yourself ready in a week,” he added, ”and I’ll take you out. You’ll have to get leave, though, before you can land. Try the Russian Consul; he’s a sensible chap, and isn’t likely to refuse anyone with commercial intentions that might benefit his country.”

I thanked Captain Edwards, and left the ship-owners’ office to digest what I had heard.

James Strong had apparently not sailed for Hogland from Hull; or, if he had, he had not revealed his intention to land before sailing. If that was the case, then he would not be landed at all—unless, indeed, he relied upon getting permission from the authorities in St. Petersburg to visit the island, and then returning thence to the spot.

After all, thought I, he would scarcely be so rash as to give himself away by announcing who he was, and why he desired to visit the island of Hogland. He would reflect that the first thing we should do on reaching England would be to travel up to Hull and inquire after his movements; and whether our designs upon him should prove to have reference to the treasure or to the welfare of his neck, he would naturally prefer to keep his whereabouts a secret. He would guess that, though we had lost our maps, we might at least remember the name of Hogland, and that it lay somewhere between St. Petersburg and Hull.

CHAPTER XXVI

HOW WE PROSPECTED FOR COAL

I happened to have some distant relatives in Hull, and, partly because I could

not as yet make up my mind upon the particular cock-and-bull story that would best serve me with the Russian Consul, and partly because, I suppose, if one possesses very few relatives of any kind the heart warms towards even very distant ones when there is a chance of making or renewing acquaintance with them, I determined to pay them a call.

I was glad afterwards that I did so; for my father's cousin and his people were pleasant folk, and I have since learned to know and value them well. But over and above these good and sufficient domestic reasons there was another. My relative was well acquainted with the Russian Consul, I found, and not only did he offer to introduce me to that official, but even volunteered to go with me and use his good offices in persuading Mr. Oboohofsky to grant my request.

My cousin, moreover, knew something of mining matters, and was somewhat enthusiastic about my idea of coal and iron to be found in paying quantities in Hogland. There were coalfields in Esthonia, he said; why not in the islands off the coast? Why not, indeed? I began to look upon Hogland as a kind of "land of promise," and grew quite in love with my own ridiculous fable of exploiting the place for mineral wealth, though at the same time I was somewhat ashamed of myself for, as it were, taking in my relative in this matter. There might be coal and iron, however, in the place, and if I happened to find any, why, so much the better; my cousin should have the entire profit and exploitation of it for himself.

Still, I would not promise to dig very deep for it; that would depend upon the depth at which old Clutterbuck had buried his money-boxes; I should go no deeper than that!

The Russian Consul was a practical person, and did not feel so enthusiastic about my mining schemes as I had hoped he would. He wanted to know why on earth I had thought of going to the Gulf of Finland for coal; whereupon I trotted out my Esthonian coalfields—knowledge culled from some physical geography book, and, by some inscrutably mysterious process of mind, remembered where most other items of knowledge were clean gone out.

Then he asked, why particularly Hogland? And it was at this point of the conversation that I showed a readiness of resource and a nice appreciation of difficult situations, otherwise "corners," and of how to get out of them, which, if I could only act at all times up to the "form" of that morning in September, would undoubtedly lead me into very high places in the diplomatic and political world.

I pointed out to the Russian Consul that for purposes of coaling the Baltic fleet a fuel-producing island like Hogland, in mid-channel on the direct line from Cronstadt to everywhere else, would be an unspeakable boon to the nation. At present most of the coal used by Russian warships came from Hull and other English and Welsh ports. But what if the Baltic were blocked in time of war?

The Russian Consul did not burst into tears, and, while thanking Heaven for

this revelation of the terrible possibilities of the future, entreat me, with streaming eyes, to go to Hogland and find a little coal for his imperial master's warships; but he laughed, and said that the English were wonderful people, and seemed to be for ever prepared to take a great deal of trouble all over the world on the chance of very small results, and added that he hoped, if I found my coal, that I would make him a director of the company started to work it and would present him with a few shares.

I promised that if I found coal I would let him know, but we have never corresponded.

However, thanks to the good offices of my cousin, who was quite intimate with the Consul, and my own obvious enthusiasm, which he did not for a moment suspect to be founded on any more substantial basis than coal—and extremely problematical coal at that—Mr. Consul Oboohofsky granted my request for permission to land at Hogland, and countersigned my passport to that effect with the words—"Bon pour l'île de Hochland;" and Jack Henderson's also.

This matter being satisfactorily arranged, and there being still four days to pass before a start could be made, I ran down to Gloucestershire and spent that time with Jack and his sister, who is one of the sweetest girls that ever—but no, I think I will not enter into that matter in this place; if I have anything more to say about the Hendersons and their family circle I shall say it later on.

Enough that on the Saturday following Jack and I returned to Hull and took ship on board the *Thomas Wilcox*, whose captain had special permission from his owners to land us on the island of Hogland. I confess that I left the shores of England feeling depressed and miserable, and disinclined to go and dig for treasure or anything else, and that I looked long and sadly back at the dull shores of the Humber and wondered whereabouts exactly lay Gloucestershire, and what the good folks at Henderson Court were doing just at this moment, and especially Gladys—there I go again!

The North Sea is a cruel, ruthless body of water, and a stumbling-block to passengers. I had travelled to the Cape and back, and scarcely felt inconvenience; but here, one day out from England, I was treated to such a pitching and a rolling and a tumbling that my very soul refused comfort, and I lay and wished I was dead like any novice upon shipboard; and so did Jack, which was a great consolation to me, and did me more good than all the ministrations of the benevolent chief steward and the encouragement of kind Captain Edwards.

But all was forgotten and forgiven when Copenhagen was reached and the historical castle of Elsinore, one of the ugliest fastnesses, I should say, that ever mason put together for the joint accommodation of long-dead, disreputable kings, exemplary living monarchs, and respectable ghosts.

We passed Elsinore at midnight, and I did think that—as we had paid a good

sum of money for our passages, and had stayed up and yawned for an hour beyond our usual sea-time for retiring—there might have been some little spiritual manifestation for our benefit. But Hamlet's father is, I suppose, laid by this time; or the rebuilt castle, upon whose battlements he used to walk, is not to his taste (in which case he is the ghost of a wise and discriminating spirit!), for he never appeared to us; and we were obliged to retire to bed baffled and disappointed, resolved to pen a complaint to the Psychical Research authorities, who ought to see that passengers *viâ* Elsinore are not disappointed in this way.

And so on into the Baltic, and past many islands belonging to Denmark and Sweden, and with distant glimpses of a most uninteresting-looking mainland; and presently the Gulf of Finland was reached, and our pulses began to beat once more with the old ardour of treasure hunting—a sensation we had almost forgotten since the agitating days of the Ngami search, and the many exciting adventures and crises through which we had passed in the last three months.

As we drew hourly nearer to our island, my excitement grew positively painful. I was oppressed with a kind of horror that we should find Strong waiting to be taken off, with a smile of triumph upon his face and a cheque for one hundred thousand pounds securely buttoned up in his breast pocket!

Captain Edwards, who proved a good and kind friend to us throughout, strongly recommended us to take with us to Hogland a sailor—one whom he could easily spare us, since he was now within a twelve hours' run of his destination—of Russian nationality, who could speak English. He had more than one such "hand" on board, and we arranged with a certain Michail Andreyef to land with us and act as our interpreter—a post which that gentleman, having ascertained that no work of any kind would be involved in the situation, accepted with alacrity at a moderate wage; and remarkably useful he proved to us in our sojourn in that lonely island.

I do not think that Michail, good man, would have landed with us if he had known that there was no drinking shop on the island; but he found out our flasks after a day or two, and these no doubt afforded him some little consolation, though, of course, the contents did not last him long, and he was only drunk three days on the entire proceeds. And now here, at last, was Hogland itself—our Eldorado, as we hoped, if only James Strong had not already landed and ruined our prospects!

How I stared at it, and wondered and wondered whether the fateful tin box that contained old Clutterbuck's cheque lay somewhere within its soil, peacefully slumbering until the right man came along to unearth the treasure! And oh! how

I wished it might prove that Strong had neither arrived nor forestalled me!

CHAPTER XXVII

ELDORADO OR—HOGLAND

The island looked bare and desolate enough from the point of view of the deck of our steamer, long and rather narrow at each end, but bulging in the middle to a width of several miles; covered with pine forests and patches of moorland, and with a high backbone of tree-clad hills running down the middle from end to end. It was exceedingly like the old man's map as we remembered it, and the first sight of it so whetted my enthusiasm and treasure-ardour that I could scarcely contain my joy when we steamed into view of it.

Jack and I, nevertheless, made the most of the bird's-eye prospect of the island which we now obtained; for we knew well that such a survey of the place might be exceedingly useful to us in our subsequent investigations. We saw the spot which appeared to us to answer to that described in our lost maps as the grave of Clutterbuck's Treasure, and we noted the best way to get to it, which was by the seashore to the left from the lighthouse.

The keepers of that most useful building must have been surprised indeed to see a large British steamer stop within half a mile of the hungry-looking rocks upon which their house and tower were erected; for though such vessels passed daily, none ever stayed. Three men, two women, and several children came out in a hurried way and stood staring like startled rabbits at us and our proceedings before bolting back to their holes as the boat approached into which we had transferred ourselves and our luggage, guns, spades, and provisions.

So far as these good folk were concerned, we might as well have had no passport at all; and as for the "bon pour Hochland" of the Consul, if we had written across the document any such legend as, for instance, "Herrings at tenpence a dozen," it would have served the purpose equally well. For the lighthouse keeper, after having studied the passports wrong way up, and scratched his head for inspiration, and spat on the ground in true Muscovite protest against the incomprehensible, and having crossed himself in case there should be anything appertaining to the evil eye or the police (which he regarded as amounting to much the same thing) about the proceedings, gave it up as a bad job, and inquired of our interpreter, Michail, what on earth we had come for.

I fancy Michail indulged in some pleasantries at our expense, for the two women and three men and seven children, standing gaping around us, all burst out laughing at the same moment, and the conversation among them "became general."

Presently, however, Michail informed us that it was all right, and that we might remain if we pleased. He said a small offering to the lighthouse keeper, for "tea," would be acceptable, and this we cheerfully provided, with the result that that gentleman and all his following were our sworn friends for life, in the hope of more tea-money some other day.

We were offered quarters in the wooden houses in which these good people lived; but when we entered their abode and learned that we should be expected to herd in one suffocatingly hot room, together with every person whom we had yet seen, and perhaps others to whom we had not yet been introduced, and to sleep on straw upon the floor, or on sheepskins upon the top of a huge brick stove which occupied half the room, we explained to Michail that we had other engagements. There were several reasons for this decision besides those given—some crawly ones and some jumpy. We saw a number of the former on the walls, and had already begun to suspect the presence of the latter nearer still to our persons.

Michail might come back and sleep here, we told him, after he had accompanied us to the small fishing village where we desired to make a few inquiries.

This seemed to please Michail, who, we concluded, had some good reason for liking the poor dumb animals on the wall better than we did. I suppose there is good in most things, if one can only discern it through the evil.

Michail inquired, at our request, whether anyone had landed here lately, within the last month or so; upon which the lighthouse keeper informed us that the last stranger who had visited the island, so far as he knew, was a madman from England, or Germany, or other foreign parts, where everyone, he was told, was more or less mad. This English lunatic had landed here a few years ago; he had gone and hidden himself in the woods for a week, alone, sleeping, he believed, at the village at the other end of the island, and passing his time counting the trees in the forest, or doing something equally insane. After a week he had returned, and had been taken on board by a steamboat.

"No one else, this month?" we insisted.

"Certainly not," said the man; why should anyone come to the island if he could live on the mainland, where there were drink-shops?

This was unanswerable, and quite delightful too, though how it happened that we had contrived to arrive before the wide-awake Mr. James Strong was more than I, or Jack either, could imagine.

"Perhaps he was wrecked, and drowned on the way here," I suggested.

Jack dissented. That would not be "playing the game," he said; Mr. Strong was born to be hanged; of that there could be no possible doubt whatever. Perhaps he would arrive while we were still on the island! Michail must keep a lookout, and come and warn us if anyone landed. We had no particular desire to be bombarded again by Mr. James Strong.

As an additional precaution we promised the lighthouse keeper the sum of ten roubles, which is about equal to one pound, if he refused to allow any other person to land, and were comforted by that individual's assurance that he would refuse admittance to the Tsar of England himself for such a sum of money as that.

Then we went to the fishing village in order to glean any information that the inhabitants might have to dispense at their end of the island; but to all our questions as to whether any person had landed on the island within the last month, the "elder," or head man of the village, to whom we applied, declared that he knew nothing and cared nothing about anybody or anything; and that, when it was necessary, he also saw nothing and heard nothing.

"Ask him, Michail, if a rouble would refresh his memory as to anything he may have seen or heard," suggested Jack.

The head man said he did not know; it might.

Then he took the rouble, and declared that no one had been near the island for years.

This was very satisfactory, and we added a second rouble in the joy of our hearts; at which evidence of our generosity Alexander, the elder, crossed himself and prayed aloud for the welfare of our souls. Then he said he had some articles for sale which might be useful to us if we intended to try a little sport on the island, and produced—to our surprise—an English-looking revolver. I was about to take it from his hand, when Jack snatched the weapon from me.

"Why, great skittles! Peter," he cried. "Look at it! Look at it, man; look at it! What do you see?" Jack burst out laughing, and then suddenly grew grave. I took the weapon from him to examine it, surprised at his excitement.

"It's loaded," I said, "in four chambers."

"Yes; but look at it well!" he cried. "Don't you know it, man?"

I looked again, and the weapon almost dropped from my hand. It was my own revolver, not a doubt of it—my own name was scratched along the lower side of the barrel. It was the same that Strong had choked with lead, that I had afterwards presented to Clutterbuck, that Strong had stolen from that unfortunate fellow, and with which he had murdered his companion; the same with which he had attacked ourselves on the road to Vryburg, at our last encounter with the rascal, and a bullet from which had taken a bit out of my shin-bone.

For a moment or two I was too bewildered to collect my thoughts. Jack brought me to my senses.

"Well," he said, "what do you make of it?"

"I make of it that we are too late," I groaned. "The rogue has been too quick for us, confound him!"

"Yes," said Jack, "that's what I'm thinking too. But how did this fellow get hold of the pistol?"

It was a question to which I could find no reply.

"Ask him where he got the pistol from," said Jack to Michail; and our interpreter put the question as desired.

The reply was that the pistol was for sale; would we buy it? The elder knew nothing about the antecedents of the weapon, but it was his property, and for sale.

"Ask him if he will remember anything about its history if we buy it," said Jack.

The elder was of opinion that he might remember a little for ten roubles.

This sum was instantly transferred, and our friend presently informed us, through Michail, that the weapon had belonged to a Swedish person who had come over from the coast of Finland, from Helsingfors, in a sailing boat about three weeks ago, and who had made him a present of it. That was all he had to say. The Swede had departed a fortnight ago.

At this reply my heart sank lower than before, for here was the confirmation of my worst fears. All was lost—that much was obvious. James Strong had been too smart for us. He had travelled *viâ* Sweden and crossed from Stockholm to Helsingfors, sailing over to Hogland from that port—absolutely the simplest, and at the same time the most artful, course he could pursue, seeing that he was unwilling to travel direct from Hull by reason of the obvious publicity of such a proceeding.

All was lost—that was now certain. I was a pauper again. The only consolation was that, so far as I could see, I could not have done anything to circumvent Strong. He had had too long a start.

CHAPTER XXVIII

WHAT THE ELDER DID WITH STRONG

Jack looked as dejected as I did.

"The only thing I don't understand is," he said presently, "why Strong

should have presented the fellow with his revolver. Do you suppose he intended us to find it here, as a sort of mocking message to us that we had failed?"

"More likely he wished to be rid of an awkward piece of evidence in case he was ever collared by us," I said. "If we ever caught him, and he had this thing in his possession, we should easily have proved our accusations against him."

"Of course he found the treasure," said Jack, "or he wouldn't have gone away."

"Of course," I echoed dismally.

"Still," said Henderson, "it would be interesting to hear all about *how* he found it and where; I'd give another ten roubles to be told all this grimy gentleman knows."

I was not at all certain that it would be an unmixed joy to be taken and shown the pit out of which another fellow had dug the treasure which I had so ardently hoped to make my own. But Jack was evidently anxious on the subject, and curiosity was burning a hole in my resolution as well. I reflected a minute or two.

"Well, ask him if you like," I assented presently; "it will be a painful thing for me, though, I can tell you." More painful than Jack guessed, perhaps; for I was tenfold more anxious to be rich to-day than I had been a few months since in Africa. I had found a new reason, down in Gloucestershire, for wishing to own the treasure, and now all hope of possessing old Clutterbuck's golden hoard had vanished. Painful? It would be *torture* to be shown the hole in which the treasure, and all my hopes of happiness with it, had rested but a short three weeks since; to be ruthlessly torn from their sanctuary by the bloodstained hands of a double-dyed rascal like James Strong.

"Michail," said Jack, "tell the fellow there is more tea-money to be had if his memory improves."

Michail conveyed this intelligence to his grimy companion, who grinned and scratched his shaggy yellow locks, and spat and made a gesture as though he now abandoned in our favour all previously observed considerations of discretion. Then he bade Michail tell us that for a second ten-rouble note he would tell us the whole history of the pistol, which he had just remembered.

Jack was artful this time, having gained experience upon this artless island. When he had heard the story, he said, he would hand over the tempting-looking red bank-note for ten roubles, which he now carefully removed from his purse and displayed, invitingly held between his fingers.

Then the elder, after looking wolfishly at the note and indulging in a final scratching among his tousled locks, began his tale, which proved to be a sufficiently exciting one.

"It was a lunatic of a Swede," he said, "who had sailed over in a small sailing-

boat from Helsingfors, and had moored his craft over there at the Finnish side of the island and come ashore. He couldn't talk a word of anything that anyone could understand in the island, and would not come to the village, but slept on the shore close to his boat; and if anyone came near to have a look at him he stamped and raved and scolded them away again.

"On the morning after the first night I went down to the shore to see what the Swede was about," continued the elder, "that being my duty as elder of the village, and I took with me Kuzmá, my brother-in-law, and Gavril, my brother; for we have no right to admit strangers upon the island without passports. But this fellow had no passport, and threatened me with his fists for demanding one of him.

"So Kuzmá and Gavril and I sat down on the shore to watch what the Swedish lunatic would do.

"He waited, hoping that we would go away; and we waited, to see what he wanted on our island. He did nothing but read letters and look this way and that through the trees, and then down again at his letter, like any lunatic.

"Presently he grew tired of waiting, and stood up and shouted at us to go away. We did not understand his lingo, but that was doubtless the meaning of it, only the man was so angry that he could hardly speak, but only screamed at us and stamped his foot. Kuzmá grew a little frightened and said, 'Shall we go, brothers? This man is mad; it would be wise to preserve our bodies from harm.'

"But I said, 'No. We will pretend to depart, and hide ourselves among the trees; then we shall see but not be seen!' So we departed and hid ourselves where the mad Swede could not see us.

"After a while," continued the elder, "the madman took his letters and a spade, and wandered about among the trees until he came to a certain place, and there he began to dig.

"We desired to know, naturally, why he dug in the earth of our island, and while he was very busy with his digging we came nearer to see what we could see.

"And then, of a sudden, Kuzmá coughed, and that mad Swede looked up and saw us.

"Holy Saint Vladimir, equal to the apostles, preserve us from such demons as that Swedish maniac when he caught sight of Kuzmá and me and Gavril! He rushed straight at us like a wild bull, bellowing and shouting, and then—what think you, Mercifulness?—he whipped this very pistol from his pocket and banged one shot at Kuzmá and one at me. Me he missed, by the mercy of the Highest, and thanks, doubtless, to the interposition of my patron saint, Alexander of the Neva; but Kuzmá was struck by a bullet in the arm, and lay yelling on the ground."

The elder here paused in his narrative, which, for me, was about as interesting a tale as ever human lips unfolded, and spat five several times on the earth, crossing himself after each performance of the function. I waited impatiently for him to recommence. Jack's face, which I glanced at, was a study; he too was absorbed by the interest of the tale.

When the elder had finished his semi-religious duties, he continued—

"Gavril," he said, "my brother, to whom may the saints ensure a heavenly kingdom for his behaviour that day,—Gavril, with his staff, whacked the Swede on the head before he had quite killed Kuzmá and me, and knocked him senseless; in which condition Gavril and I put him in his boat and sailed across to Narva, where we gave in our evidence against him in the police court. We showed the pistol, and promised to produce Kuzmá when his arm was well enough to allow him to travel. This is his pistol that you have bought; and that is my tale. It's all I know, and may the holy saints preserve those who are honest folk, and punish the evil doers! If I have pleased your Mercifulness, I will place the ten-rouble note along with the other."

Thus, or to this effect, did the elder wander along, Michail laboriously translating, and then he stopped, having said his say.

"Good Heavens! Peter," said Jack after a pause, "that's a tale well worth ten roubles, I fancy; what say you?"

"Stop a bit," I gasped. "Ask him, Michail, what the Swede got out of the earth? Does he know what the fellow was digging for, and did he find it?"

"He did not give himself time," said the elder. "He flew at us before he had dug for half an hour. As for that which he expected to find, how should a plain fisherman know that? He was mad; what would a madman expect to find growing upon an island, that he could dig up with a spade? Gold and jewels, perhaps!" The elder laughed aloud and spat freely. Jack still withheld the note.

"At anyrate, he found nothing?" he asked.

"Nothing but sand, Mercifulness."

"And what has become of the Swede?" said I. "Was he detained at Narva?"

"Detained at Narva to be tried, Mercifulness," said the elder. "But there is hope that when the police behold Kuzmá's arm, which will be next week, the rascal may journey to Siberia without further trouble."

Jack handed in the ten-rouble note; our friend had certainly earned it; for though, of course, I would not go so far as to say that this elder told the truth (being a Russian that, of course, would be impossible; the only Russian who ever told the truth is dead), yet that his tale was not all lies was proved by the pistol.

Jack thought of a way of obtaining a little supplementary evidence in corroboration.

"Get him to show us where the Swede shot at him," he said, addressing

Michail. "It would be interesting to see the mark in the tree made by the bullet fired at the elder."

Strong's latest victim had no objection to giving us this pleasure, and we were conducted to a place in the wood, and shown a tree which had an undoubted bullet mark some seven feet up the trunk.

"Ah! I see," said artful Jack. "So that is where you stood, and Kuzmá here, and the mad Swede came rushing from over there."

"No, not there," said the elder; "your Mercifulness may see, if you will, where the fellow was digging in the ground when we saw him. Heaven! to come all this way to dig!"

CHAPTER XXIX

MUCH DIGGING

The elder's invitation fell out very propitiously with artful Jack's designs, and we were shown the open space among the trees where Strong had commenced his digging operations, which had come to such an untimely end. There was the hole he had dug when interrupted and made to lose at once his temper and his chance of wealth.

There too were the four posts, arranged exactly as in Bechuanaland, in an irregular square. Strong, remembering where the treasure had been found in the first instance, had gone straight to the corresponding corner here, had pulled up the outer post, and begun to dig about its socket. Jack laughed.

"The old fellow wouldn't have been likely to hide it in the same spot twice," he said; "that would be too easy for us!"

I suggested that, at anyrate, we must not lay ourselves open to suspicion by digging about or even remaining in the neighbourhood of this particular spot, or we should have the whole village coming and digging with us. We must pretend that our curiosity was satisfied by the sight of the scene of the struggle, and that there our interest in this spot ended. We must do a little hunting or fishing for a day or two, and then return unsuspected to our real labours.

So we hired the elder and Gavril, the hero of the broomstick which had overthrown James Strong, and went a-fishing among the tiny islands and rocks that fringed the shores of Hogland itself, and here we spent a day very pleasantly in allaying the suspicions of the elder and in catching some good fish, in weight

from one to fifteen pounds, including a few which I believe to have been large lake trout. The water here was scarcely brackish and the fish we caught were all denizens of the fresh water.

But excitement and longing to be up and about so as to discover the hidden treasure, burned like a banked fire within my bosom, and I was feverishly anxious to be ashore once more and at work.

We were out all night, and a cold function indeed it was; and right glad were we that we had brought our flasks to keep us alive and help our circulation to maintain the struggle. It was now that Michail discovered the existence of those flasks, for we had presented both the elder and our interpreter each with a small portion of the contents, and both men had found the English brandy to their taste. The consequence to us was, that when we landed and retired to sleep those two artless Russians stole our flasks and disappeared.

Now this, far from proving, as at first sight it might seem, an unmixed disaster, was, as a matter of fact, the greatest boon that could have happened to us; for though there was not very much of the spirit in our stolen flagons, yet it was strong, and there was enough to keep both men handsomely employed in recovering from its effects for three days.

Those three days of investigation, free from inquisitive observation and possible interference, were exactly what we most desired, and at the very first opportunity we shook off both the elder and Michail, who were already in secret possession of the flasks and quite pleased to be shaken off, and set to work in earnest at our digging.

The area to be investigated was of the same shape as our African treasure-field, but smaller by half, for which mercy I was grateful to destiny; for even half the old area was quite sufficient for the digging of two men, unless they happened to desire to dig themselves into their own graves, which Jack and I certainly did not.

Needless to say, Jack now felt no compunction about taking his turn with the spade, for I might fairly consider myself the only competitor now left "in the running." Poor Clutterbuck murdered; young Strong eaten; James Strong in Siberia, or on the way there—there were none left to contest my claims.

So Jack dug with me, and very hard work he found it, and very stiff he felt at the end of the first profitless day; so that I was able to screw out of him a kind of apology for his want of sympathy with my stiffness at Ngami. We had half intended to set a decoy for wolves, of which there were said to be a few on the island; but we were both too tired for anything of the sort, and preferred to sleep, wrapped in our blankets, over a fire in the forest, as in the African days, only with dark pines waving over our heads, and a sharper air biting at the exposed parts of our persons, instead of strange palmy and ferny trees, and prickly-pears and

kei apples, and a soft, hothouse kind of air around us.

On the second day we toiled from morn till dewy eve, but found nothing to repay us, and by that time the surface of our ground was upheaved from end to end to the depth of a spade-head. Then we determined to spend the third day in trying various experiments.

We were full of excellent ideas, but the same thoughts had unfortunately not occurred to old Clutterbuck while hiding his treasure.

First of all, we procured from the village a ball of string; they had plenty there, for the making and mending of nets.

Then we fastened an end to one of the posts and carried a line across diagonally to a second, and from a third across to the fourth, as from A to B and from C to D in the chart—

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A      C
      E
      D  B
  
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Where the strings crossed at E, we dug a deep hole and had great hopes for the result. But it seemed that this excellent plan had not occurred to Mr. Clutterbuck; he had not concealed his wealth in accordance with our ingenious geometrical device. Then we went and borrowed a horse and a plough from the fisherfolk, who had a field or two near the village for the growing of their rye and potatoes. And with that plough we turned up every scrap of our acre of land, and began to grow desperate because there was not a vestige of treasure or anything else but sandy soil and a few worms.

Then we sat down to reflect, and gnashed our teeth, and took in vain the name of old Clutterbuck who had beguiled us to this forsaken island to dig for treasure which he had never buried.

"I believe Strong found it, after all," said Jack—"found it in five minutes in the very first hole he made."

"If I thought that I would go to Siberia after him," I said, "and screw his neck till he gave it up."

"My dear man, he couldn't take a load of treasure with him to Siberia!" said Jack. "The authorities would have it in a minute."

"It might be all in one cheque," said I; "and he's hidden it—swallowed it, or put it in his boot or something."

"Well, you can't very well follow him to Siberia with a stomach-pump in one hand and your revolver in the other," laughed Jack; "but you may bet, if he

had found the stuff he would not have been so quarrelsome; he would have been too pleased with himself to rush straight at these poor peasants and empty his revolver at their heads!”

This seemed true, and we turned our thoughts once more to the invention of devices that might have occurred to the old man for the more ingenious concealment of his treasures. It could scarcely be supposed that the old miser really desired to defeat altogether the ingenuity of his heirs, should they prove to be in possession of a quantum of that commodity; for if it had been his intention to deprive us altogether of the money, he need never have made us his potential heirs. The money must be here—that was as good as certain.

Then we tested other geometrical designs. We counted as many feet towards the middle, from each post in turn, as the old man had lived years, seventy-one; and we dug deeply at each seventy-first foot. We turned up the soil at the spot where fell the only shadow of the day—the shadow of a tall pine whose topmost boughs afforded us a few feet of shade towards evening; but nothing came of it. We tried many other devices, each more deeply ingenious, not to say “far-fetched,” than the last; but the third day drooped and faded, and still we were no wiser than before.

That night Michail returned to camp, looking as though he had passed through great tribulation and had been making good resolutions. He slunk in and lay down by the fire, and slept so soundly that no ordinary artillery firing a royal salute at his ear would have disturbed him.

We were sorry to see Michail, for we did not desire his presence here. We wished we had another flask for him.

This wish was redoubled when in the morning, as we dug and delved—toiling and perspiring and almost despairing, though still manfully playing up to the motto of my own family crest: “*Dum spiro spero*” (which Jack translated “Stick to it, boys, till you’re pumped!”)—while Michail still slept, the elder appeared suddenly upon the scene. He too bore traces of bacchanalianism, though he did not seem to have suffered so severely from the malady as Michail. The elder was surprised to see us working, and asked us what we were about.

We gathered that this was the meaning of the elder’s remark, but until we had kicked Michail into the realms of consciousness in order to translate it for us we could not be certain. Michail awoke at the seventeenth kick, and said he had not been asleep, but had been lying and thinking. He told us what the elder had said, the elder repeating it.

“Tell him that’s our business,” said Jack surlily—he was disgusted, like myself, with the failure of our labours; “and that he’d better go home to the village and mind his own.”

“Oh,” said the elder, on hearing this, “certainly I will obey; I had no wish to

intrude upon their Mercifulnesses; only I thought their Mercifulnesses might be digging here in order to find a certain tin box with a letter in it which I myself found near this spot some years ago!"

The spade dropped from my hand; Jack's fell also.

"Michail," he said, or gasped; "what does the fellow mean? Where is the tin box and the letter that he found here? Ask him quickly, idiot, or I'll brain you with my spade!"

The elder was not disturbed by our excitement; he said he thought the tin box was somewhere up at the village; he wasn't quite sure!

CHAPTER XXX

I TAKE A STRONG LEAD IN THE RACE

Jack seized the elder by the shoulders and shook him—shook him handsomely and thoroughly till his splendid white moujik-teeth rattled in his head. The elder burst into tears and fell on his knees as soon as Jack let go of him, crossing himself repeatedly and jabbering vociferously. The fox had changed in an instant into a rabbit, and a timid one at that. It was impossible to translate what he said, Michail protested. On being pressed to do so, Michail observed—

"He say his prayers," and I think that must have been about the measure of it; at all events, he was saying nothing about tin boxes.

"Tell him we don't wish to hurt him," said Jack; "but we intend to have that tin box; and if his memory does not improve in the next five minutes, so that he leads us straight to where he has hidden it, something dreadful will happen to him."

This truculent message was given to the elder, who allowed himself but one more minute for the consolation of prayer and then took to his heels for the village, we taking care to keep up with him. Jack's threat seemed to have wonderfully assisted the process of recalling the past, for Alexander led us straight to his own house, into the living room (where his astonished wife and five amazed children were feasting upon black bread and dried fish, their mouths, opened to receive those dainties, remaining open by reason of their surprise), and without hesitation opened a kind of cupboard in the corner in which he kept his three teacups and his two tumblers (one cracked), together with his store of vodka.

From this receptacle, which he opened but a fraction, as though jealous

lest we should steal a peep at his teacups, he quickly produced a tin box, the facsimile of that which I had unearthed in far-away Bechuana. The elder crossed himself, spat on the ground, made a droll gesture of surrender to superior force, and banged the box down upon the table.

Then his face assumed a beseechful, maudlin expression, and he said that he had done as the gentleman desired, but if the gentleman considered it worth a gratuity that he should have safely preserved this box until the gentleman came for it, why—

”Tell him to go to the deuce,” said Jack; ”and wait there till we see what’s in it and what isn’t. Here, Peter; it’s yours—examine.”

I opened the box: there was another within it, as before; neither was locked; and as before, inside the inner receptacle was an envelope, and within the envelope a letter; no cheque to bearer, no bank-notes for one hundred thousand pounds.... My disgust and disappointment were too great for words; I could not speak; I could not even swear; I believe I burst into tears.

”Come, come!” said Jack bracingly, ”don’t give way, old chap; it’s just as well there are no diamonds or gold—this elder fellow would have had the lot! Cheer up, man, and read the letter, or I will! I for one don’t mind another journey—I haven’t travelled half enough yet! Read the letter!”

It was all very well for Jack. The issue was nothing to him (comparatively speaking); to me it was everything—all the world, and the happiness of life!

”I told you how it would be,” I raved; ”the old rascal meant to swindle us from the beginning. He will keep us travelling from pillar to post in this way till the worms have eaten up his hoardings and his miser’s carcass as well. The whole thing’s a fraud, Jack, and I am the victim.”

”You’re better off than the other victims, at all events,” said Jack. ”Read the letter, man. Don’t abuse the old boy till you know he deserves it.”

”Confound the letter,” I said, ”and him too! Read it yourself—I’m sick of the business!”

I was, as my conduct indicates, very angry, very disappointed, and very ridiculous. I have since exonerated Mr. Clutterbuck and apologised to Jack, many a time. I still think, however, that the old man’s methods were extremely exasperating; and though ashamed of my loss of temper, I am not in the least surprised that I should have succumbed to my feelings of rage and disappointment.

But there was one thing which I have never regretted in the slightest degree, and that is, that when Michail suddenly laughed out at this point, finding, I suppose, something comical about my words or actions, I laid hold of him by the shoulders from behind, and walked him twice round the room and out at the door, I kicking and he yelling. After this I felt consoled and returned to hear Jack read out the letter.

It was very much like the other.

"The Prize to the Swift," the document began, and continued as follows:—

"Do not despair, you whose energy has proved equal to emergency. Having succeeded up to this point, you are sure to succeed to the end. My treasure is not here. I would never leave it so far from home and at the mercy of prying strangers in a foreign land. How do I know that I am not watched at this moment by jealous eyes from the fishing village a mile away? This box will possibly be dug up after my departure, but I do not dread such an event, since it will add, perhaps, to your trouble in finding it, my most indolent relatives and heirs, and that is a contingency which I hail with joy. That any finder of the box will destroy it, I am not afraid. He will rather keep it by him and sell it to those who come to seek it.

"As for you, my treasure is where it should be, and must ever have been, for I would never trust it elsewhere—in my own country and in my own home. Where else should it be? Return, then, successful pilgrim; seek nearer home. Where my treasure is, there is my heart, or near it. I lie buried in Streatham churchyard; my treasure is not far away from my bones! ... Dig, dig, and dig again.

"The only land upon which I or my heirs possess the right of digging is my own garden in Streatham. Dig there, my friend, and success to him who digs wisest and deepest.

"My portrait is part of the spoil for the winner; it was done for me by a pavement artist for two shillings and three pence, but do not throw it away on that account. It is the portrait of your benefactor, and his blessing will go to him who preserves it well."

The letter ended here, without signature or date.

CHAPTER XXXI

THE ELDER MAKES A GOOD BARGAIN, AND
MICHAEL A POOR ONE

"What does he mean?" I growled. "Where's the portrait?"

Jack looked in the boxes, and turned the letter round; there was no sign of a drawing or of anything connected with portraiture.

I walked up to the elder's cupboard and looked in. Besides the teacups and other domestic treasures there was a tin case, in size about one foot by nine inches. I took this without permission from the elder, who had disappeared after Michail. I opened it.

Sure enough, it was a portrait of old Clutterbuck—the vilest that could be conceived, but still recognisable. The old man could never, I should say, have laid claim to good looks; but the "pavement artist" had scarcely done him justice; he had, in fact, represented his client as so repulsively hideous that the lowest criminal would probably have reconsidered his position and turned over a new leaf if informed that he possessed a face like this of poor maligned Clutterbuck.

"By George!" said Jack, "the old chap couldn't have been very vain to bequeath such a thing as that to his heirs. What a terrible specimen he must have been! Was he like this thing?"

"He wasn't as bad as that," I replied. I felt that I had a grievance against the man, and I was not inclined to give him more than the barest justice; but I was bound to admit this much.

"I'm glad to hear it," said Jack; "for if he had been, I think I should have lost my faith in the *bonâ fides* of his letters and of the whole thing. That pavement artist ought to have been hanged, and his body danced on. What, in Heavens name, did the old man want to leave you a thing like that for? Why couldn't he get himself photographed if he was sentimentally anxious that his heirs should possess his portrait?"

Jack laughed; I could not help joining in. It was really rather funny; and the more one looked at the picture the more one felt inclined to laugh. The artist was evidently not ashamed of his work, for he had painted his name in full at the foot of it, "Thomas Abraham Tibbett," bless him! I know his name well—I read it every day of my life, for his masterpiece hangs over my washstand, and I look at it whenever I feel low in spirits and think that a little T. A. Tibbett will do me good.

"What a merciful dispensation that one can't see his eyes, or, rather, that they are looking downwards and don't follow you about as they do in some portraits that are not by pavement artists," said Jack. "Look at them; there'd be a lifetime of nightmares in a pair of eyes like those, if they happened to be looking up."

I have often thought how true this was, and have rejoiced that the artist of the pavement mistrusted his skill and made the eyes as he did; but for my joy there are more reasons than now appear.

Michail and the elder were outside when we left the house. I think they were conspiring against us; no violence, or anything of that sort—a mere conspiracy of roubles. Michail desired a solatium for the kicks he had received from me; the elder grieved because he had delivered up his tin box, under the influence of fear, without pecuniary equivalent.

Both were sulky and uncommunicative, or perhaps assumed sulkiness for their own ends. The only information that we could obtain from Michail, in reply to our requests that he would inquire of the elder where and how he found the tin boxes, was that Kuzmá was going to sail across to Narva to give evidence against the Swede who had shot him.

"What has that to do with it?" said Jack.

Michail grinned and scratched his head, and said something in Russian to the elder, who did likewise and cleaned up his mouth with the back of his hand besides.

"Well?" said Jack; "go on!"

"The other great lord kicked me in a painful manner!" continued Michail, placing his hand near the afflicted part.

"He will kick you again in a still more painful manner," said Jack, "if you don't explain yourself."

"There is plenty of good vodka at Narva," said Michail, "forty, fifty, or sixty copeks the bottle, or two-forty for a *vedro*." (A *vedro* contains, approximately, a gallon.)

"Oh, I see," said Jack. "All right, sonny, you shall be healed, don't fear; and the other fellow too, but ask him about the boxes first!"

"Tea-money first!" said Michail. "Alexander says the little box is worth five roubles and the big one ten. At Narva, if I complained against the merciful gentleman for kicking me, he would be detained and fined. A gallon of vodka and twenty roubles is my price for being kicked by the honourable lord."

"Kicked how many times?" said Jack. "For that sum we shall certainly kick you round the island, my friend. The police at Narva will fine as much for one kick as for thirty. We shall take all our kicks, remember!"

Michail decided not to go to Narva, and to charge me for the original kicking only—the price of which was fixed at a *vedro* of vodka, to be brought back from Narva by Kuzmá, and one rouble.

As for the elder, we paid him for the tin boxes, for, after all, they were treasure-trove, and might prove to be very much more valuable to us than the price asked.

This little matter being satisfactorily settled, Alexander the elder deigned to inform us how he came by the property.

This, he said, was a very simple matter. He had had the things five years,

keeping them because he felt sure someone would arrive one day to find them. Five years ago an old Englishman had come on the island, all alone, to seek rare flowers and plants, as he informed everyone through a pilot at the lighthouse, since departed, who spoke English.

The elder had watched the old man's botanical researches, and saw him collect a number of roots of "*brusnika* and other rubbish," and saw him also plant four posts in the wood, digging holes for each and putting them in and piling earth to keep them steady. Then he had dug a fifth hole, somewhere near, and buried these boxes in it, laughing and jabbering to himself, said the elder, like a madman. The rest was very simple. Old Clutterbuck sailed away in the English steamer that stopped to pick him up, and the elder quickly went and dug up the boxes, hoping to find cash, but discovering nothing more valuable than a letter he could not read. He had thought of destroying both this and "the picture of the devil," as he called old Clutterbuck's portrait, but had taken the wiser course of preserving both in case someone to whom they were not valueless should come to find them.

When Strong arrived and commenced his digging operations, the elder hoped that his opportunity had dawned; but Strong proved to be a madman with whom it was impossible to enter into negotiations.

The rest, of course, we knew.

Were we really on the road to success at last? At all events, Jack and I had the grace to admit that we had enjoyed fairly good luck after all, supposing that the letter was actually the passport to wealth which it purported to be. If the elder had destroyed it we should never have got any farther than Hogland in our researches! As for the picture, he might have done what he liked with that, we thought; though, since it seemed to be the desire of the testator that we should keep it, we piously determined to do so.

So that here we were with our object attained, or attained so far as it was possible to attain it, and with another week or so on our hands to be spent on this island before the steamer could be expected to return and fetch us away. What was to be done, and how should the time be spent?

There was fishing, and there was wandering about with our shot guns, in hopes of picking up a few grouse or other game which might be met with in the moorland and woods which covered the island. But the elder made a tempting suggestion which we caught at, though we did not anticipate much result from his idea.

There were three wolves on the island, he said, half-starved and rather savage. They lived here because they could not return to the mainland, whence they had come in the days of ice, last February or March. If we liked to pay for a sheep, he would kill one and lay it down as a decoy. On the third night,

if we passed the hours of darkness in a tree over the spot, we should probably have an opportunity of shooting the brutes, and a good thing too; and it was in consideration of this fact that the elder would let us have a sheep for a merely nominal sum—fifteen roubles.

We agreed to pay this sum, so the sheep fell a victim, and was laid to rest not in but upon the earth beneath a tree.

Meanwhile the wounded Kuzmá was about to sail for the mainland in order to bring up his bandaged arm in testimony against James Strong, and the question arose whether Jack and I were not bound to accompany him in order to do what we could to ensure a fair trial to a fellow-countryman in distress.

He had done his best to murder us more than once, true. He had also foully done to death his own cousin, the younger Clutterbuck; and he had only failed to shoot down three innocent Russian peasants because one of the three had had the cleverness to knock him on the head before his purpose was half accomplished.

Yet, for all his crimes, we felt compunction about allowing him to pass, friendless and helpless, into the hands of those who are ever ready, as Englishmen (who know nothing about it) invariably believe, to draft their victims away to Siberia whether guilty or innocent. He deserved "Siberia," whatever that name may imply, as thoroughly as any rascal; but, somehow, though neither of us would have moved a finger to save his neck had it been in danger at the hands of an English hangman, yet we felt inexplicably averse to permitting Russians to have the twisting of it.

Why this was so I do not attempt to explain—it is a psychological problem which I leave to other heads to solve; all I know, is that it was only the sturdy good sense of Jack Henderson that prevented me from stepping on board his fishing-lugger with Kuzmá, and another peasant, and sailing away to Narva to make a quixotic fool of myself in defence of the indefensible James Strong.

CHAPTER XXXII

WE RECEIVE A TERRIBLE SHOCK

As it was, we contented ourselves with sending a letter to the British Consul there (supposing that there existed such a functionary), exhorting him to use his influence to obtain a fair trial for the rogue called James Strong, and to see that he was not sent to Siberia without good and sufficient cause shown.

"Great Jupiter!" said Jack, when he had read over my letter. "Why, man, we have evidence enough to send the fellow to Siberia, or to the next world for that matter, half a dozen times over!"

So we had, of course.

"And I'll tell you what, Peter!" continued Jack, "it will serve us well right, when we've got the rascal out of his scrape by our confounded meddling, if he turns up just in time to snatch the treasure out of your fingers at the very last minute. What'll you do if he shows up at Streatham and claims the right to dig with you, neck and neck for the last lap?"

"Oh, come," I said, "that's quite a different thing! I should let him hang in England, fast enough, but it's unpleasant to think of Russians stringing the poor beggar up far away from friends and country!"

Doubtless Jack agreed with me, for he took no steps to prevent the despatch of my letter. But it has since struck me that it is, after all, very doubtful whether the proximity of "friends and country" would have comforted Strong much if he had had the rope round his neck, even an English rope.

What with fishing all day and sitting shivering in pine trees all night (like a couple of frozen-out sedge-warblers, as Jack picturesquely expressed it), we contrived to pass away the time for the best part of a week, and then Kuzmá arrived, having prepared for us a surprise which for absolute breathless unexpectedness undoubtedly broke the record in so far as my own limited experience went, or Henderson's either!

Michail came running up to the moor where Jack and I were busily engaged in trying to induce a covey of grouse to allow us within range of our guns, and imparted the exciting information that Kuzmá's boat was in sight.

At the news Jack and I gladly conceded the honours of war to our covey of grouse and hastened down to the shore to see Kuzmá's boat, for it had come to this, that we were so very hard up for excitement on this island that we would have gone miles to see anything or nothing.

"There are three men on board," said Jack, as the boat came nearer, running straight for the shore before a fresh breeze. "I suppose they've brought a police officer along to make inquiries on the spot."

"I hope he won't ask *us* to go to Narva as witnesses!" I laughed. "That would be a bad look-out for poor Strong, Jack, eh?"

Jack was gazing at the boat as it neared the land; I gazed too, watching the jolly little craft cut the water into an endless V as it flew scudding towards us, as though rejoiced at the prospect of getting home.

"Peter," said Jack presently, "look at the fellow in the bows; he's got his head round this way. If I were not absolutely certain that such a thing were impossible, I should say it was James Strong."

"*What?*" I shrieked, "which? where?" I stared at the man; it *was* Strong, there could not be a doubt of it—there was no mistaking his face, even at this distance.

"Good gracious! Jack, what are we to do?" I said, trembling at the knees like any coward. "Heaven help us, what will happen now?" I added. My nerve seemed to have taken to itself wings at the sight of James Strong!

"Why, what's the matter, man?" said Jack. "It's a mystery to me how the fellow happens to be in that boat, but you may take your oath that he's pretty harmless as far as *we* are concerned; he won't catch us napping again, if we have to watch him all day and night till the steamer comes!"

I recovered presently, and called myself many evil names for yielding to a craven instinct at sight of this ill-omened person. I was not really afraid of the fellow; it was the unexpected that upset me—it always does.

As a matter of fact, there was little to be afraid of in the wretched man. It was not the James Strong whom we had known in Africa that landed among us that afternoon in Hogland. It was a poor, broken-spirited, hopeless creature that raised his arms with a cry of despair at seeing us, and hid his face and trembled and refused to leave the boat when Kuzmá and others beached it and ran it, with him still seated in the bows, up the shore. I felt quite sorry for the terrified wretch.

"Well, James Strong," said Jack, "this is an unexpected meeting, after all that has passed! How come *you* here, pray?"

"I didn't expect to find you on the island," said Strong. "Oh, curse my luck!" he added, in a wailing tone which changed into one of sudden ferocity as his eye fell upon Jack, who was laughing at him.

"Yes, it *is* poor luck for you, I admit," said the latter, "but, if it is any comfort for you to know it, you would have been too late in any case, for we have got all there was to find."

"I don't believe a word of it," said Strong.

"And what's more," continued Jack, ignoring Strong's remark, "the elder had it all the while, and would have given it to you if you hadn't shot at him. So you see what comes of evil temper, James Strong. Now, if you had not shot poor Clutterbuck, and tried to murder my friend and me, you might have followed us to England, and perhaps, even yet, have robbed us of our possessions. As it is, you see, if you come to England you will certainly hang!"

James Strong swore one of his vile oaths and spluttered there was no proof. Who was going to believe our lies? It was much more probable that we had shot Clutterbuck than he, and any jury of Englishmen would see that the whole yarn was a foul conspiracy. Then he changed his tone and whimpered, and said he had passed a miserable fortnight in the Russian prison in Narva, and beseeched us, if we were men and Englishmen, to help him escape to England and thence

anywhere we pleased. The Narva police would be after him by to-morrow for a certainty, even if these Russian fiends did not carry him back and deliver him up.

"Tell us your story, with as few lies as you can put into it," said Jack, "and we'll think what's best to be done with you."

CHAPTER XXXIII

HOW STRONG ESCAPED FROM PRISON

"You're such an infernal blackguard, you see, Strong," continued Jack, with engaging candour, "that one must be very careful in dealing with a man like yourself. It seems to me that it's Siberia or the gibbet, my friend; and upon my word, I don't quite know which to advise in your best interests. Tell us what happened at Narva."

James Strong was considerably cowed by his experiences, and obeyed without further demur. Undoubtedly, his tale was full of untruth, but as he gave it to us I will pass it on to the reader. We were able to learn a truer version subsequently.

Strong declared that he had been taken to Narva by the fishermen, having been bound by them while still unconscious from the effects of a blow on the head from Gavril's staff. At Narva he was thrust into a miserable prison or police cell, where he was interrogated by persons who could not understand him, nor he them. A Swedish interpreter was brought, and Strong was knocked about and bullied because he protested that he could understand Swedish no better than Russian. He repeated the word "English" in hopes that an English interpreter would be produced, but none appeared. He was half starved and atrociously bullied by Russian policemen, and so the time passed until the witness Kuzmá came to give evidence against him. At the trial the English Consul came and spoke for him (this was in consequence of our letter, no doubt), but he was taken back to his cell, the Consul informing him that he could do nothing to save him from the consequences of his violence. He would probably be convicted of attempted murder and deported to Siberia.

That night was celebrated, Strong explained, some Russian church holiday, and everyone was drunk or half drunk. He succeeded in escaping from the wooden building in which he was confined, and in finding his way down by the river to the port, securing a small boat, which proved to be rotten and to leak

vilely, in which he put out to sea; he hoped to get away and finally return somehow to Hogland, where he might even yet find the treasure before we arrived, and escape with it on the first steamer that passed.

"You can't blame me for that," interposed Strong at this point. "I had as much right to the treasure as you, if I could find it first."

"Oh, quite so, Strong," said Jack. "We don't always approve of some of your methods—as, for instance, of your attempts to remove us out of the way, us and poor Clutterbuck—but we never denied your right to compete. Proceed. Whom did you murder, and how, in order to escape from your cell?"

"You never give me a chance, curse you!" said Strong, looking livid with rage. "I have never killed a human creature. Clutterbuck fell down a nullah and broke his neck. I shot wide of you on purpose—it was necessary to frighten you off—and these fellows too. Did I murder one of them or one of you?"

"What about my leg, Strong? you infernal lying blackguard!" I said.

"I was bound to keep you back how I could," he cried hotly; "I am sorry I hurt you, but that's not murder, and you know it."

"I know it was meant to be," I said.

"It was not," he cried; "I fired wide on purpose. One doesn't hit a man in the leg if one means killing."

"Oh, come, Strong; you are a poor shot, you know, at the best!" said Jack. "We don't forget Graciosa! Go on with your story."

"Oh, curse Graciosa, and you too!" said Strong surlily, and not another word could we get out of him at this time.

But Kuzmá told us the rest of it—that is to say, from the point at which Strong left off—though we only heard the true version of his escape from Narva at a later date, and from another source.

Kuzmá returning to Hogland in his fishing-boat, had seen in the distance, when about an hour out from Narva, a small craft occupied by one man, who seemed to be in difficulties, since he shouted and gesticulated.

As Kuzmá and his companion consulted whether to head for the small boat in order to offer assistance, they suddenly observed that the vessel had disappeared. Sailing up to the place where it had sunk they had come upon a man swimming, whom they did not recognise for Strong until they had pulled him on board.

When they did recognise him, said Kuzmá, they were for pitching him back into the sea; but Strong had a knife, and looked so dangerous, that they thought it wiser to bring him along, which they did. They knew nothing of his escape or anything else, excepting that they fully intended to make a little money out of the job, presently, by restoring him to the authorities, and claiming a gratuity.

Had they known more, they would probably have smashed in his head with

an oar, and pitched him back into the gulf. Cash rewards are very, very pleasant things; but under some circumstances Kuzmá would have felt even greater satisfaction in smashing a head than in earning money by preserving it whole for others to smash!

On the following day we might fairly begin to look out for the return of our good steamship the *Thomas Wilcox*, and it became necessary to settle something as to James Strong and his fate.

The Russians, Kuzmá and his friends, being aggrieved parties, and also interested in a pecuniary way in returning the prisoner to his bonds, were naturally all for conveying him back to Narva under strong escort; but this James Strong besought us with tears and piteous entreaties at all hazards to disallow. He would assuredly be sent to Siberia or starved or flogged to death, he protested; nothing could save him. "For the love of Heaven," he begged us, "let me sail with you from this accursed place."

"But I can't, we can't do it, as honest men!" said Jack, in some perplexity for the wretched fellow. "Don't you see, man, that if you set foot in England we are bound to denounce you?"

"Then land me at Copenhagen," said Strong, "or anywhere."

"But you'll take the first steamer on to Hull, and the difficulties will all begin again," said I.

"I won't—I swear it!" he cried. "I'll sign anything you like."

Jack and I held a consultation over this knotty question. No doubt it will be said that our duty was obviously either to abandon the miscreant to these poor fellows, whom he had deeply aggrieved, and who would restore him into the hands of those who would try him; or else to take him to England ourselves, and arraign him there.

And yet, stern and judicial reader of these lines, we felt that either course would be equally repugnant to us. We could not allow these Russians to have their will of the fellow; how did we know that they would not knock him on the head, without trial, so soon as we were afloat? As for taking him to England and accusing him of murder, fully as we believed him guilty, we were without absolute proof, and the work of establishing a case against him was not an enterprise we cared to undertake.

In the end we decided to buy the man off from these islanders for the sum of one hundred roubles, which they gladly accepted, and to allow him to accompany us as far as Copenhagen, where he should land. In consideration, therefore, of a signed statement from him that he was guiltless of the murder of Clutterbuck, who, he solemnly declared, had fallen in fair fight during a struggle for the revolver, which had exploded and killed Clutterbuck on the spot; in consideration, I say, of a declaration to this effect, Jack and I both undertook to leave

Strong unmolested so long as he did not cross our path in England. So sure as he ever came near us again, for good or ill, he should be denounced by us without further compunction.

CHAPTER XXXIV

EXIT STRONG

We did not altogether believe Strong's story even then; I believe it now still less, in the light of subsequent information bearing upon his conduct at Narva. Taking him all in all, I daresay, and indeed I hope, that I shall never look upon the like of James Strong again; for I do not suppose the earth contains many such callous and sanguinary rascals as he, and it would be more than my share of ill luck to come across two such scoundrels in the course of one lifetime.

I will not dwell upon his "gratitude" and joy when our decision was communicated to him. He had knelt weeping before us, praying aloud and blubbering while we had the matter in consideration, and when the thing was decided he—well, it was a sickly exhibition, and, of course, his gratitude was only sham. He would have stabbed either of us in the back any minute, for a five-pound note.

Thus, when the good ship *Thomas Wilcox* arrived off the island next morning early, we took leave of our gentle but avaricious elder and his friends, and left the island without much regret, and James Strong went with us.

"Well," said kind and hearty Captain Edwards, shaking each of us warmly by the hand, "found your coal?"

As for me, I had completely forgotten our coal-mining enterprise, and was foolishly taken aback by the remark. But Jack, as usual, was "all there."

"There is certainly coal in the island," he said; "but I don't think it will prove to exist in paying quantities."

I don't think it will either; for, so far as I know, the only coals to be found in the place are the few ashes shot out by steamers passing the island near enough for their siftings to be washed ashore.

"Ah, that's a pity!" said Edwards; "I was looking forward to be a director, one day! So your trip's been a failure?"

"Well, not altogether," said Jack, grave as a judge; "we've enjoyed some good fishing, and haven't had a bad time altogether."

We paid Strong's passage to Copenhagen, and landed him there. Not wish-

ing to enter into particulars as to his story, we gave out that he had come to the island a month ago, *viâ* Helsingfors, upon much the same errand as ourselves; and if Captain Edwards was surprised to hear that there had been three fools instead of two in the matter, he was too polite to say so. But after Strong had, to our relief, finally departed, and we were once more in full sail for England, we received a piece of news from Captain Edwards which gave us what is commonly called "a turn," and we were glad at first that we had not received it but a few hours earlier. We had just seen Strong off, and were sitting and talking in the dining-saloon, discussing various matters, when Edwards suddenly startled us by saying—

"Nice pranks a countryman of ours has been playing at Narva!"

"What—Strong?" I blurted in my foolishness. Jack coughed as though choking over his glass of sherry.

"How your mind is running upon Strong, Peter!" he said. "At Narva this was, Captain Edwards said; didn't you, captain?"

"Yes, at Narva," said Edwards, suspecting nothing; "it's a place not so very far from Hogland, on the Esthonian shore. The fellow was a sailor apparently, and had behaved violently towards other sailors, Russians—I don't know the history of it; but he was placed in 'quod' for his misdeeds. Well, what does the fellow do one night, finding that most people about the lock-up were drunk by reason of a church holiday (it's a sin to be sober on a church holiday, you must know, in Russia); what does he do but set fire to the place, stick a knife into one policeman, brain another with a stool, and escape in the confusion down to the water, where he gets to sea in a leaky boat, and goes Heaven knows where?—probably to the bottom, for the boat is described as a totally impossible craft."

"Do you mean to say, captain, that the two men he attacked are actually dead—murdered?" I asked, feeling that I was paler than I ought to be to hear of these excesses in a stranger.

"Why, certainly," said the captain; "he appears to have run amuck entirely; and I should say that if he went to the bottom he did a deuced wise thing, for if they catch him there'll be a bad quarter of an hour for him; on that you may bet your pile."

"Anyone burnt?" said Jack. He too looked somewhat appalled by these revelations.

"Most probably—I only saw a telegram, mind you, in the French paper, the *Journal de St. Petersbourg*. There must have been a number of drunken people about the place,—bah! it isn't a pretty story. Upon my word, you have both gone quite pale over it. Pass the sherry, Mr. Henderson—help yourself and your friend; you both look to require it."

Talking over this horrible story with Jack, afterwards, we agreed that if we

had known of this before leaving Hogland, we could not possibly, in conscience, have allowed the fellow to escape. We must have sent him back to Narva. It was lucky indeed that Kuzmá had known nothing of it, having simply picked the man up in mid-sea!

"What should we have done if Captain Edwards had told us this story while Strong was still on board?" I asked.

"Nothing," said Jack. "What would have been the use? It would have been very awkward for Edwards; and besides, rogue as Strong is, I don't think I should hand the poor wretch back to Russian judges any the easier after this. Heaven only knows what would happen to him!"

At all events, it was a matter to be thankful for that we were at length happily quit of this nightmare, and, as we hoped, for ever.

As we hoped, yes. But it's a delusive thing, this bubble "Hope," and very given to bursting!

It was during lunch that Captain Edwards had told Jack and me all about the Narva business, and it was while sitting and smoking a pipe in my cabin an hour later that it suddenly occurred to me—I don't know why—to have a look at old Clutterbuck's last letter and the daub which was supposed to be a reproduction of his features upon canvas.

I did not suspect anything. On the contrary, it never for one moment occurred to me that anything could have happened to the things. They were useless to anyone but myself, unless it were Strong; but that thoroughly cowed individual would never have dared possess himself of them—why should he? It was impossible for him to show himself in England, for he would know that we should have no mercy if he were deliberately to disobey orders and risk his neck in this way.

I suppose I wanted to have a peep at the things—my stock in trade, such as it was; just as one enjoys taking out one's money, from time to time, and counting it, in the mere pleasure of possession. I can think of no other reason why I should have gone to my portmanteau to have a look at that foolish old letter and that unspeakable caricature. At anyrate I went.

The portmanteau was unlocked, and strapped only on one side, because of the nuisance of hunting up keys and unfastening buckles when at sea. Dressing in a cabin with a rocking floor beneath one's feet is an extremely disagreeable process, and I am always unwilling to add to the necessary time to be expended in the operation by fastening up bags and portmanteaus.

Let them lie open, day and night—there are no thieves to come picking and stealing at the first-class passengers' end of the ship! That is what had been my idea in the matter, an idea supported by the reflection that I had nothing worth stealing. But when I went to the portmanteau and found that both letter and picture had totally disappeared, I realised, not for the first time, that Mr.

James Strong was an individual whose craftiness should not be measured with the ordinary tape-yard applicable to the shrewdness of others. He required a measure all to himself. He had got the better of us again!

CHAPTER XXXV

MORE CHECKS

I rushed upstairs to Jack, who had gone on deck.

"Jack," I cried, almost shouting in my excitement,— "he's done us again!— he's got the things! Heaven only knows what he means to do with them, but he's got them and—and we haven't!" I concluded lamely.

"What do you mean, man?" said Jack. "Who's got what?"

"Why, Strong—Strong again! Don't you understand?—he's stolen the letter and the picture too, and Heaven only knows where he's gone with them."

It was now Jack's turn to be moved.

"Impossible!" he exclaimed; "he would never dare; why—man alive!—he knows well enough he must swing if he sets foot in England, and what use are the things to him anywhere else?" Jack rose and strode about the deck.

"He might have done it out of spite, though," he added next minute; "very likely he was determined that if *he* couldn't have the money, at all events *we* shouldn't have it either. Are you sure they are gone?"

"Come and see for yourself," I said; and together we hurried down again, through the saloon and into my cabin.

Here we turned out every single article that my portmanteau contained; we searched every corner of the tiny room in case the things should have been mislaid; but we found nothing, and finally, in desperation, we called up the steward and cross-questioned him as to whether anyone could possibly have entered the cabin, either by day or night, without being seen by him or by his sub.

But neither did the steward know anything of the lost articles, nor would he admit that anyone could or would have entered the saloon without his being aware of the fact.

"Why, my pantry's at the foot of the stairs," he said, "and if I'm not in it Arthur is, and the stewardess is generally knocking around about here too; how's anyone going to pass the lot of us without someone knowing of it? Besides, we don't keep no thieves aboard *this* ship," he concluded, with displeasure. "No one

but me and Arthur's been in this 'ere cabin since you came aboard at Hogland, and that's a fact!"

"No, you're wrong there, steward!" I said, "for that Russian sailor Michail came in to close the portholes last night, and woke me; what's more, he said you sent him."

The steward admitted that this suddenly recollected circumstance was correct. He had forgotten it, he explained. Michail had come to him at about two in the morning, and had asked whether he should close the passengers' windows, as the wind seemed to be rising and the portholes might ship a sea or two presently. "If you suspect him, or me, or any of us, all you have to do is to examine our things," the steward ended.

But we disclaimed any such desire. We would like to see Michail, however, and as soon as possible; for if the things were not forthcoming, we must—as Jack expressed it—"get out at Elsinore, and walk!"

So Michail came up for examination.

Did he often volunteer for the duty of closing portholes at night? we asked.

Michail said he did it sometimes; he generally offered to do it because he liked the job; the passengers now and then gave him a small gratuity. On this occasion, Michail added, the gentlemen had given him nothing, but it was not too late should they desire to repair the omission.

"Wait a minute, Michail," said Jack. "The time has not yet arrived to speak of gratuities. What about this portmanteau, here? Have you seen it before?"

"Often," said Michail; "it is the very one I carried ashore on Hogland, for the gentleman with red hair." (My hair is *not* red, it is a warm yellow; Michail meant me, nevertheless, for Jack's locks are raven black.)

"Yes; but have you been a-fishing in it lately—just an innocent search, you know, for something of interest; not a burglary of course."

Michael started back in horror and surprise. "Do the *barins* take me for a thief?" he asked with some indignation.

"That was the idea," said Jack, quite coolly. "But you may have been acting for another—for that other Englishman, for instance, Strong."

"Which Englishman is that?" asked Michail innocently; "one of the sailors?"

"The Narva man; you know well enough!" said Jack.

Michail crossed himself very devoutly. "*Barin!*" he said; "as if I would act with that *skoteena!*" (rascal)

"Come, Michail," continued Jack, "will ten roubles do it?"

"There is nothing to tell of myself," said Michail reflectively; "but for the sum of money mentioned, I might possibly be induced to tell you something that I heard him say to one of our men in the fo'c'sle."

"Well," I said, "go on Michail. It sounds promising. When did he say it, and

what did he say?"

"It was yesterday," replied Michail; "you two were walking on deck, and I saw him point to you and say those two passengers had the worst tempers of any two men he'd ever seen; they go mad angry every two or three days, he said, and tear around, playing Old Harry with everything. Very likely they'll want to be landed in the middle of the North Sea, and they'll paint everything red till they're allowed, too; and I shan't be there to see the fun, he said, for I shall have been put ashore at Copenhagen."

"What did he mean by that? You're romancing, Michail!" said Jack severely.

Michail replied that he would scorn to tell us anything but the plain truth, though he was always glad to tell that—for a consideration.

"Well, you've earned nothing yet, my friend; the ten roubles remain with me, so far. You'd better remember a little more if you want the money."

"That was all the *skoteena* himself said," Michael continued; "but if the *barins* desire it, I will tell them what some of those in the fo'c'sle thought about it."

"Go on," said Jack; "what did they say?"

"They said—when the *skoteena* had told us about your tempers and what you would do in the North Sea after he had gone—that he wouldn't say a thing like that unless he had a reason for it; and probably the reason was that he had got hold of some of your property, and you'd find out about it in a day or two and go mad with rage, and want to be landed wherever was nearest so as to go after him."

"Oh, that was it, was it?" said Jack.

Michail received his ten roubles, and Jack drew me aside.

"I'll tell you what it is, Peter, old chap; Michail's right. Whether he said it because he has a guilty conscience, and wants us off the ship; or whether Strong really used the expression he attributes to him, one thing's certain—we must land."

"Where can we?—anywhere here along the Danish coast? By George! if we catch him again, Jack, he shan't escape us, eh?"

"He should swing if it depended upon me, now, and I could prove anything," said Jack grimly. "But come and interview Captain Edwards, and see if he'll stop the ship and land us." Captain Edwards was upon the bridge with the pilot, whom we had shipped at Copenhagen.

"Of course," Jack added, as we caught sight of the jolly-looking, weather-beaten Dane standing beside our own skipper—"the pilot! We'll ask Edwards to let us go ashore in his boat, with him; that'll probably be Elsinore. Confound it all, though, we shall be six hours behind him at Copenhagen!"

"But why, what's up, what's happened?" asked bewildered Captain Ed-

wards, when we had made known to him the nature of our request; "has the other fellow bolted with the money-bags?"

We explained that this was just about the state of the case; the man had robbed us, and we must land and be after him.

"Are you quite sure it was he?" continued Edwards; "it would be funny if you went after this fellow and left the real culprit, *plus* your property, on board!"

But we explained that there was no reasonable doubt as to this. The only person now on the ship who might possibly have had a hand in it was Michail, and we begged the captain to keep an open eye on this rascal, and even have him watched on landing in Hull. It was possible that he might have in his possession a picture belonging to us, and of some value.

"What! a work of art?" laughed Edwards. "May I ask how you came to be travelling about and landing and prospecting on Hogland in company with a valuable work of art?"

Well, we thought it best—and probably the shorter way as well—to tell the skipper all about it, and we did so. Now that Strong was out of our hands we need not scruple to conceal the fact that he was perhaps the greatest rascal unhung, and that he and the hero of the Narva exploit were one and the same person.

Captain Edwards was naturally somewhat excited.

"The scoundrel ought to have been sent back to Narva," he said, "not brought on here and set free. You deserve what's happened for setting such a monster loose upon society. It's not fair dealing towards your kind, young men, upon my soul it isn't; you may take that from an older man than yourselves. However, please God you'll catch him yet. You must land with the pilot, of course; that'll be at Elsinore, in half an hour's time. You'd better get your traps ready."

We went down to prepare for our departure. In the cabin a thought occurred to me. What if Michail and Strong were in direct collusion, and had agreed upon a base of action such as this: that Michail should convey to us, just as he had done, by innuendo, that Strong had stolen our property, in order that we might be induced to land at Elsinore and hurry back after him by train to Copenhagen; that meanwhile Strong should have caught the first train to Elsinore, and—having "done" the distance by land much faster than we should have accomplished it by water—be waiting at Elsinore or beyond it, knocking around in a small boat all ready to be picked up at dusk by his friend Michail. In that case he would have left the property on board, and would simply continue his journey to Hull, and land there in two days and a half, or three days, while we were still hunting him, goodness knows where, all over the Continent, perhaps!

"Well," said Jack, "if that *is* the plan, Master Strong will find himself in the wrong box. I don't believe he could get taken on board out of a small boat without

stopping the ship, or the captain or mate knowing something of it; but if he did, Edwards knows all about him now, and he'd be as safe here as in Newgate, *pro tem*. Let him come, by all means; the arrangement would be all right for us even though we did lose a few days travelling about the Continent."

Nevertheless we warned Captain Edwards that it was just possible Strong might turn up again beyond Elsinore and demand to be taken aboard, or perhaps be assisted by Michail in making a secret reappearance.

"Not he!" said Edwards; "he wouldn't risk it—don't you make any mistake! I only wish he would. It would be putting his head in a bag with a vengeance!"

I think I ought to make an apology, at this point, to the memory of the astute Mr. James Strong. I ought never to have imagined him capable of so crude an enterprise as that which my fancy accused him of undertaking.

CHAPTER XXXVI

WE FIND AN OLD FRIEND

The ugly castle of Elsinore was in sight when we came on deck, and a few minutes later the pilot's own little craft, splendidly sailed by his mate and a boy, came alongside, and without asking us to stop for her, made fast to us and raced along in our company.

After a hasty farewell with Captain Edwards, and a whispered injunction under all circumstances to keep a good look-out upon Michail, we threw our portmanteaus into the arms of the astonished Dane below, and followed the pilot down the steps swung over the side of the ship for our accommodation.

Though the pilot lived at a village at some little distance from Elsinore, he kindly agreed to convey us to the railway station at the latter town, and with a fair wind we soon made the jetty close to the very spot from which the trains start. Here, having paid off our gallant boatmen, we jumped ashore and hurried with all speed to the station, to find that we had just missed one train and that we could not now catch another for an hour and more. This was tantalising and vexatious; but at least we were ashore and in full chase after our quarry, and that was a source of some comfort to us.

Together we paced up and down the platform of Elsinore Station. We tried to converse. I asked Jack what he thought would be Hamlet's opinion of the state of affairs if he were to "come down" and see a railway station within a stone's-

throw of his capital castle of Elsinore.

Jack replied that all depended upon whether Strong should have been lucky in catching his train; if one had started from Copenhagen soon after he landed there, then his advantage over us would be very great, and probably our best way would be to let him go, and hurry back to England, ourselves, by land.

Presently, standing at a spot whence he commanded a good view of the castle, Jack observed that if Hamlet's father's ghost ever walked upon the parapet of the great ugly building nowadays, he must be as active as a cat, for there would be a lot of climbing to do, there being a kind of miniature turret at every few yards which the ghost would have to negotiate if he desired to get along.

To which I replied, in a contemplative fashion, that in any case we knew well enough without the paper where we had to dig for the money, and the only thing that really mattered was the picture. The question was, did we absolutely require the daub to help us find the treasure, or not? At anyrate, Strong knew too much to come fooling around in England. He must know that we would nab him at once. There was no fear of Strong himself turning up. From all of which it will be gathered that our conversation was a little mixed. However, the train started at last, and we left Elsinore behind us.

At Copenhagen many inquiries had to be made, and at first we were somewhat helpless; for though the language sounded sufficiently like English to make it additionally annoying that we could not understand it, yet neither we nor those with whom we attempted to converse could make head or tail of that which we or they respectively tried to convey. At the station we could do nothing towards making our wishes known, and at length we determined to visit the nearest hotel and engage an interpreter, if such a person existed.

Here we were lucky, for we found the very man, and to him we confided our need, namely, to get upon the track of an individual who landed from an English steamer, and had, presumably, gone on by the first train elsewhere.

"But where?" asked our commissionaire; and to this question we had, of course, no reply.

"We must begin at the beginning, and go down first to the landing-stage," said our friend.

Now this was annoying, because the journey would be a loss of time; but it was obviously the correct course, and we took it. We must begin our inquiries from the spot at which he first touched land.

Down at the wharf our Dane interviewed several boatmen, all of whom had seen the *Thomas Wilcox* arrive and depart, and all of whom agreed that a passenger had landed and had engaged a conveyance and driven away.

"To the station, of course," said I. "Why do we wait? This is all a waste of precious time!"

"Which station?" asked our Dane grimly; and, when I had no reply to make, he added, "That is what we have come for to find out."

It seemed, however, that the point was a most difficult one to establish, and that we should be obliged to drive to each station in turn, thereby wasting more time, until there wandered upon the scene, presently, a Danish youth who said he had taken the passenger's bag out of the boat and put it into the carriage. The passenger was a German, he said.

"How do you know that?" asked Jack, through the interpreter.

"Because he wanted to get to Kiel," said the boy; "he knew no Danish, and could only hold up his finger to the driver and say, 'Skielskor, for Kiel!'"

This was good enough for us. We drove rapidly towards the station, feeling that we were about to make a real start at last.

The clerk at the booking-office remembered the man we wanted. He had hurried into the station and said, in an interrogative manner, "Skielskor?" and when the clerk had replied that it was all right, if he meant that he required a ticket for that place, he had repeated, "Kiel—Bremen?" Whereupon the clerk, seeing that conversation would be difficult, had tentatively offered two tickets, one to Skielskor, and the other through to Kiel; of which he had selected and paid for the latter. He had left just an hour ago.

"Can't we get to Kiel direct by water, quicker than by land to Skielskor, and thence across?" asked Jack. "If there should be a steamer going just about now, we might possibly cut him off at Kiel."

Fortune favoured us quite handsomely this time.

Hastening back to the waterside we actually found a Kiel steamer about to depart; that is, a large steamer lay in mid-channel, having arrived since we were down here half an hour before; she had stopped to put down passengers, just as the *Thomas Wilcox* did, and would proceed almost immediately.

We signalled her to take us on board, and left without a moment's delay.

"Great Scott, Jack!" I exclaimed; "Strong will have the luck of the evil one himself if he reaches Kiel before us now; this is splendid!"

We ascertained that, all being well, we should reach our destination considerably before Strong could do so, he travelling by land and then by small steamer to Kiel, even though he should catch one just about to start. Under these circumstances the jubilation which we felt was most justifiable, and over a capital dinner we spoke with delight of the joy in store for us, when we should stand on the landing-stage waiting for the arrival of the little Skielskor steamer, and see the countenance of Mr. James Strong change when he caught sight of us there.

"Will he have a fit, think you, Jack?" I asked in glee.

Jack said he thought it quite likely; it would appear so uncanny to the wretched chap, and so utterly unexpected. "I should certainly have a fit under

similar circumstances," he added.

We went to bed with the conviction that fortune was treating us kindly this time, and that to-morrow had consolations for us in expiation for the shocks and disappointments of to-day.

But these rascally to-morrows never perform exactly what is expected of them. Our programme was all of the colour of the rose, and justifiably so; but certain circumstances marred the order of events, and things fell out differently.

Now our steamer, the *Peter der Grosse*, had come from Cronstadt, just as our own *Thomas Wilcox* had, and in Russia at this time the cholera was having one of those periodical innings which it enjoys at regular or irregular intervals in that country. And when we arrived at Kiel and requested to be landed as quickly as might be, we were met by the stunning statement that this would be impossible until the quarantine officer should have come on board and passed us.

"How long will that be?" we asked, and were informed that it might be a couple of hours and might be twelve.

"They are very particular here," said the captain, "and are as likely as not to leave us half a day or so, just to give the germs a chance, in case they should require this much extra time to develop."

As a matter of fact, the quarantine officer did not visit us until nearly evening, we having arrived before midday. Just before his arrival I had noticed a little Danish steamer creep into harbour, and through the captain's glasses I distinguished, or thought to distinguish, the words "*Helma*—*Skielskor*."

"Jack," I said, "look at the little craft just running into harbour—here, take the glasses."

Jack took them and had a long steady gaze at the small steamer.

"You're quite right," he said presently (I had expressed no opinion whatever!); "he's just done it; that must be his boat; there's no question of it!"

Then Jack muttered an expressive word between his teeth, and I another.

Then I looked at Jack and he at me, and—having nothing better or wiser to do, I suppose—we both burst into a roar of laughter.

It was sickening to see the fellow just gliding out of our very hands; but at the same time it was really very funny.

"Never mind," said Jack. "We'll be after him directly, and we know he's going *via* Bremen. Perhaps we may catch the same train yet."

But we were not destined to reap this crop of good fortune. The quarantine officers came on board and examined carefully every creature in the ship. This occupied a couple of hours. Fortunately for us, we were able to prove that we had joined the steamer at Copenhagen; still more so, we were not asked for passports, otherwise the fact would have been revealed that we too had come from Russia, and we, like the rest of the passengers, would have been delayed in quarantine

for twenty-four or forty-eight hours, or whatever the term may have been.

As it was, we were allowed to land, though the rest were detained; and without a moment's delay we made for the station, calling on the way at the jetty, at which lay, sluggishly steaming, the little Skielskor steamer which had arrived a short while since.

We inquired of the captain, as best we could, as to the passengers he had brought over. Was there an Englishman? we asked; and we described our friend Strong. The captain who—excellent man!—spoke English, replied that most certainly there had been an Englishman among his passengers, a charming, cheery sort of person, who had laughed and drunk Swedish punch all the way, and told capital stories. He was a generous kind of a man too, and had stood drinks all round. He had also made him, the skipper, a little present which he declared to be of some value, though it could not be said to have the appearance of much intrinsic worth, so far as he, the skipper, was able to judge!

"Oh," said Jack, not greatly interested; "and what was that?"

"The picture of an old man—Dutch School; after Gerard Dow, so he said," laughed the skipper. "You can see it, if you like; you may be a judge of these things. Lord knows why he gave it me—drunk, I suppose!"

CHAPTER XXXVII

MR. STRONG MAKES AN EFFECTIVE REAPPEARANCE

This communication was as exciting as it was utterly unexpected. We entreated the skipper, as calmly as we could, to produce his work of art. He did so. It was the portrait, of course.

And we to talk of ill-luck! Why, supposing the thing to be really of any value to us, it was a stroke of the most magnificent good fortune to have found it in this way! I realised this fact as the skipper brought the ugly thing out, and—with a laugh—placed it on the table before us.

"There," he said; "a beauty, isn't it? If it's by Gerard Dow, why, I don't think much of Gerard Dow, and that's the truth. Any offers?" he added, with another laugh.

"Ten shillings!" said Jack, laughing also. "It isn't Gerard Dow, nor yet *after* him; but I collect these old Dutch daubs, and I'll take it off your hands for a half sovereign."

"That and a drink round," said the skipper.

And ten minutes later we were driving in a German droschky to the station, having our newly-recovered treasure in tow.

It mattered little, now, whether we caught Strong or not. As a matter of fact he would be more of an embarrassment than anything else. What should we do with him if we caught him?

At anyrate, however, we would shadow him and see what he intended to do. If his destination should prove to be England, then matters would be different and it would be our duty to follow and arrest him.

"We can't prove anything," I said.

"We shall have to try," replied Jack. "A rogue like him can't be allowed to prowl about England free." This was, of course, perfectly true.

"Why did the chap steal the portrait, only to chuck it away again?" I said presently, as we drove along. "Simply to annoy us, or prevent us finding the treasure, even though he daren't go and dig for it at Streatham himself?"

"That's the idea, I should think," said Jack; "that if *he* can't have it, *you* shan't!"

Upon reaching the station we found that Mr. Strong was, at anyrate, not to be caught in Kiel. The Bremen train had left just an hour ago, with him in it. There would be another in fifty minutes.

"Gad, Peter, we are in the race, at anyrate, after all!" said Jack, with a guffaw; "if we have any luck in the trains we may catch him yet."

"Let's find out how long he'll have to wait at Hamburg for the Bremen train," I suggested.

We did so, and found to our annoyance that our train reached Hamburg just ten minutes after Strong's was timed to leave that station for Bremen. There would be another one, however, in an hour or less, and a quicker one than his; so that we might get him at Bremen, It would depend upon what should be his next destination.

"It doesn't much matter," I reflected. "If we don't catch him at Bremen we'd better just see where he's gone to and then set off for Streatham, *viâ* Hanover and Flushing, as quickly as possible. Are you very keen to see him, Jack?"

"It depends," said Jack. "I should dearly like to see him, just once more, in a dark lane and without witness or revolvers, but with a pair of football boots upon my feet. That would be very sweet indeed. At a crowded station, one might get in a little comforting language; but kicking would be out of the question, and therefore the case would not really be met. However, it would be nice just to see his face, when *he* sees *ours*, and to tell him one or two things about himself."

So we took train for Bremen *viâ* Hamburg, and at this latter place we found, to our amusement, that our train, though starting after Strong's, who had already

gone on, ran into Bremen a short while before the other; ours being an express.

"Gad, Peter, this is splendid!" cried old Jack, rubbing his hands with delight.

It really was; it was splendid! Destiny was playing a strong game in our favour; there was no doubt about it.

We should thus have the ecstatic pleasure of meeting Mr. Strong upon the platform, and of observing his expression of delight upon seeing us waiting for him.

It was at some little station outside Bremen, and about five miles from that city, that we overtook Strong's train, which, no doubt, was waiting there in order to allow the express to go by.

We did not know it was Strong's train, of course. We discovered the fact in this way—

I was reading, Jack was looking out of the window. Suddenly he startled me with an exclamation. He was staring, all eyes, through the glass, which was closed on account of the dustiness of the German railways.

"What is it?" I inquired. I looked out, but saw nothing very startling or unusual; a train lay alongside of ours, and Jack was staring, as it appeared, into one of the carriages.

"What is it?" I repeated.

"Hush!" said Jack. "Don't make a row, but just look in there—the compartment exactly opposite this one. Don't speak too loud or you may awake the dear kind soul."

I looked, and first my heart gave a great jump; then, almost immediately, I was attacked by the most violent desire to laugh aloud, and I sank back in my place and heaved about, stuffing my handkerchief into my mouth to prevent an outburst of noise therefrom.

For it was Strong himself, alone in a carriage, and fast asleep—the pretty innocent—not dreaming of the possibility of enemies at hand! Happy; at peace with all the world; slumbering upon his second-class cushions in all the guileless confidence of a weary child. It was too beautiful for words.

Almost immediately our train started with a sudden jerk, and spoiled our contemplation of the sweet picture before us. But in marring one it gave us another—a mere lightning flash of a picture, this last, certainly; but one which I would not have missed for untold sums, and the memory of which is even now a constant delight to me whenever conjured up by the wizard Imagination.

The movement of our train caused Strong to open his eyes languidly and to raise them towards the cause of his awakening.

At the same instant he caught sight of Jack's face and then of mine, and a more sudden and startled rushing of a sleepy intelligence into full and disgusted wakefulness I have never beheld. Strong's eyes went from languid and fishy

expressionlessness into swiftly alternating phases representing surprise, disgust, rage and terror; they seemed to start from his head and to grow, visibly, to about twice their normal size. It was a noteworthy and unforgettable spectacle; it was beautiful. As we passed out of his scope of vision, we saw the fellow start from his seat as though to put his head out of the window and follow us away with his eyes.

"Did you ever see the like of that?" exclaimed Jack, subsiding into his seat and beginning to roar with laughter.

"I never did!" I concurred. "The only thing is," I added, "the rascal will get out, now, and not come on to Bremen."

"That doesn't matter a bit," said Jack; "let him; it will save us trouble; we don't want him now, for we have the picture, which is all he took from us barring Clutterbuck's letter, of which we each have a couple of copies, besides one apiece by heart."

"He may come on to England after us," I said. Jack laughed.

"I don't believe it. He wouldn't dare. This last fright would put him off even if he had contemplated it. As a matter of fact, I don't believe he ever meant digging. He wouldn't have given away the picture if he had, for he could scarcely have failed to suppose that it has something to do with the treasure finding, though I'm bound to say I, for one, can't imagine *what!*"

"Then why did he steal it from us?" I exclaimed.

"Malice, my dear chap; pure, unadulterated malice and devilment; the rascal wouldn't be happy unless he were playing Old Nick upon someone or other." I daresay Jack was perfectly right.

We waited at Bremen Station, however, for the arrival of Strong's train, in case he should be in it, and—as it happened—we should have saved ourselves both time and vexation of spirit if we had gone on and left him.

Strong was in the train. He came out as bold as brass, and showed no fear or surprise when he met us upon the platform. He even wished us good-evening, and asked us how we came to be here and not on board the *Thomas Wilcox*, in the middle of the North Sea.

"Well, you're a darned cool hand, Strong, I must say!" said Jack. "What about the work of art, and the other things?"

"What work of art?" he asked, positively without a blush.

"Clutterbuck's picture—you know quite well what we mean," I said. "You stole it out of our cabin."

"I never went near your blamed cabin," he said; "you'd better prove what you say. You're too jolly fond of accusing innocent people, you two bounders. If I had you in a quiet place I'd make you swallow all those infernal lies about me that you invented on Hogland."

"Oh, that's your line is it, Strong?" said Jack "You're going to figure as the injured innocent, are you? All right, my man; you're safe here in Germany, but don't you show yourself in England."

"You cannot prove anything, curse you!" cried Strong, "and you know it."

"Very well; quite likely; at the same time, think twice before crossing the Channel; we may have a little evidence up our sleeve that you don't know of."

Strong uttered one of his oaths, which need not be repeated.

"You deny stealing the picture, then?" continued Jack.

"I may have it and I may not," said Strong, too angry now to care what he said. "At anyrate, it seems *you* haven't."

"Never judge by appearances, Strong," said Jack, "we have it, all right, such as it is. Pity to allow a work of art by G. Dow to remain in the hands of a man who can't even recognise the beauty of it. Your friend sold the keepsake you gave him—unkind of him, wasn't it?" Strong winced.

"You have the luck of the devil," he snarled. "What's your game? You can't touch me, here; you know that. Michail took the picture; I didn't want the infernal thing—he took it in revenge for your kicking him on the island—there! You're welcome to it; it's as like my darned uncle as two peas, I'm sick when I look at it. It may help you to find the treasure, though how in perdition it's going to do it beats me. If you want my opinion, there isn't any treasure—at least, not for you or me. The blamed old miser played a trick on us all; it's rotting somewhere, like him; and no one'll ever dig up the money any more than his carcass. The whole thing's blamed, bally rot, and we've all been a parcel of silly idiots; that's my opinion—take it or leave it."

"We'll leave it, thanks, Strong," said Jack; "and we'll leave you too, if you'll excuse us. Good-night, my man; you'd better keep this side of the Channel, that's *our* opinion, take or leave *it*."

Strong darted a look of anger at Jack, and turned on his heel with an oath. He slunk out of the station and disappeared in the dusk outside.

We were in two minds whether to follow and keep him in sight, or let him be. But we decided to let him go, since he did not appear to have any intention of molesting us further.

So we sought out a hotel near the station and engaged a room together, for it would be just as well to double our chance of hearing Strong should he, by any chance, resolve to make another attempt to deprive us of the picture, or otherwise rob us, and somehow force an entry into the room.

As it happened, we were disturbed before we were an hour older; but not by Strong.

A very unexpected and exasperating thing happened—comical too, after a fashion, especially after the event.

We were seated over our supper in the coffee-room of our hotel, when a scared-looking waiter informed us that both the English Herren were wanted downstairs.

"By whom?" we asked in some surprise.

"By the police," said the man; "should he invite them upstairs, or would we step below into the entrance hall?"

Jack and I looked at one another. What did this mean?

"We will come down," said Jack; and to the great hall below we descended. Here an astonishing spectacle greeted our eyes: a group of policemen in uniform; a man in civilian garb, presumably an interpreter; and—Mr. James Strong!

CHAPTER XXXVIII

ARRESTED

"Yes," observed Mr. Strong, upon our appearance, "these are the very men. Tell the police, Mr. Interpreter, that these persons have robbed me; the robbery was effected while *en route* from Russia; they are, I believe, in possession of a work of art belonging to myself; their luggage had better be searched."

I was absolutely speechless with surprise. This was certainly the most audacious act I had ever heard of. I did not know whether to be more furious or amused.

Jack apparently decided in favour of fury. "You infernal rascal, Strong!"—he began, but Strong said something to the interpreter, who signed to the police, who promptly laid hold of Jack and me. It was too ridiculous.

"Strong, you"—Jack began again, and—"Gad, Strong, if I don't"—began I; but our policemen would not have us speak, and marched us up to our room, Strong and the interpreter following, bidding us in curt military fashion hold our tongues. It was a ridiculous position. I have laughed over the memory of it scores of times; I even felt inclined to laugh then. What could Strong's motive be in acting in this way? He could not want the picture, or he would never have given it to the skipper at Kiel. Had he thought better of it, and determined, if possible, to get us locked up here for a few days while he hurried away to Streatham to dig without us?

He couldn't, surely! Why, we could prove our right to the work of art by telegraphing to Kiel, and, if necessary, producing the skipper to witness to our

purchase. Besides, he would have to prove *his* right to the thing before they could justly deliver it over to him.

It must be an act of spite, then, conceived in the simple desire to score one against us.

Of course the picture was found in my portmanteau. Equally, of course, we protested that it was our own, while Strong declared that we had stolen it from him during the voyage to Copenhagen. No less was it to be expected that upon seeing the work of art, both policemen and interpreters smiled grimly, and that one of them observed—

"Was ist aber Dass für ein Teufelskopf!"

In the end, the police took possession of the disputed picture, but allowed us to remain in peace at the hotel. This was, however, Saturday night, so that the examination into the matter of ownership which, we were informed, it would be necessary to hold, could not be brought into court before Monday.

This was very unfortunate, for if Strong should really have devised this little interlude with the sole desire to gain time, in order to reach the treasure-ground in Streatham a day or two before us, he had certainly gained his end.

It was in vain that we assured our captors that we could easily prove our title to the work of art by simply telegraphing to Kiel, to the man from whom we purchased it.

"That will be very good evidence on Monday, supposing that the seller appears in person," said the police. "Meanwhile, we will take care of the work of art, and on Monday you shall speak, and your friend here shall speak, and the plaintiff shall speak, and then we shall see to whom the beautiful picture belongs."

"This gentleman will not wait to hear the case argued," said Jack, indicating Strong; "he will be in England by Monday!"

"Then he will lose the picture," said the man, shrugging his shoulders. "Whoever remains alone to claim it, to him we shall consider that it rightfully belongs."

"You're a nice, audacious blackguard, Strong, I will say!" muttered Jack to our friend, as—accompanied by his little band of interpreter and police, with the picture—Strong left the room; "I warn you, you'd better be out of Streatham by Tuesday, for by all that's certain, we shall have no mercy if we catch you on our side of the water!"

"Don't fret," said Strong; "I shall have the cash by that time, and you may catch me when you can find me."

"Do you really mean to dig, Strong?" I said. "I wish you'd take advice and keep away; we don't want to be the cause of your hanging, but we shall be forced to give you up if we catch you in England; you must know that."

"Well, catch me there, curse you!" said Strong rudely. "You'll have to be a

darned sight sharper than you've been yet, either of you, before you touch either me or the money! That's my last word."

"Well, we are off by the next train," said Jack (to my surprise); "so you'll not get the start you expect. You don't suppose we're going to wait for that ridiculous picture, do you?"

Strong looked foxily at Jack for a second or two; but he said nothing, and followed the others from the room.

"Lord!" said Jack, when they had gone, "I don't know whether to laugh or cry; what a mysterious, incomprehensible, snake of a beast it is! What's his game? One thing is clear, either it hasn't struck him (which is improbable), or he has decided against believing, that the picture has anything to do with finding the money."

"So have you, apparently," I said; "for you told him that we were not going to wait for it."

"That was bluff, man; don't you understand? It was said to frighten him from going on by the first train to Streatham; because, don't you see, if he thinks that we are going at once, why, *he* can't."

"Do you think he's still after the treasure?" I asked.

"That's what I can't make out," replied Jack; "it would be a fearful risk for him to be about the place when we are there too, he knows that well enough; yet I can't help thinking that he has not abandoned all hope of the money. He's such a snake, that's the mischief of it; who's to know what his game is? At anyrate, we must wait and get the picture. It may and may not have a bearing on the search, but we won't risk anything."

"What if he waits too, and claims it?"

"That is not at all likely; he doesn't want the picture. I should say he'll be up at the station for the next Flushing train, and if he doesn't see us there, he'll go on. Perhaps we'd better show up at the station in order to prevent his departure."

We agreed to do this, and having found out that a Flushing train started early on Sunday morning, we both drove to the station, great-coated as though for travelling, and stood about near the train as though intending to board it at any moment.

Carefully we scrutinised the faces of all who passed and repassed us, about to travel by the express, but we did not see Strong. He had not thought good to journey to England, then; probably Jack's hint that we were intending to travel by the first opportunity had deterred him. Presently, after much bell-ringing and whistling, and loud-voiced invitations, from stentorian German throats, to take our seats, the train slowly began to move forward.

"Well, *that's* all right," said Jack; "he isn't in *there*, anyhow."

"Good-morning, gentlemen both," said someone leaning out of a carriage

window—the last carriage—just as we were about to turn and depart. "Wish me luck with my digging, won't you? Forty-eight hours' start ought to do me, eh? Well, ta-ta; take care of the picture—it's a beauty, it is!"

Strong bawled out the last sentence or two at the top of his voice from far away down the platform, to the surprise of a few porters and loiterers who gazed at us suspiciously. Jack shook his fist in Strong's direction, a civility which was replied to by that individual by a grimace, and a gesture of the hands—as the train passed round a curve and out of sight—which might have been intended to signify digging, and might not.

Jack burst out laughing; I did not feel mirthful.

"It's all very well," I said, "but I don't like it. He has forty-eight hours' start of us. He may find the treasure in that time, by some fluke."

"He's been too clever for us, Peter, and that's the plain truth," laughed Jack. "Mind you, I don't think he'll find the money, and maybe he doesn't intend to try; but we have been badly scored off, and there's no denying the fact. We must hope it is only spite. I daresay it's that."

But on Monday morning when we turned up at the police court to claim our work of art, the police, finding that Strong had departed without waiting for the case to be heard, exclaimed—"Lieber Gott im Himmel! you were then right!" upon which the interpreter added that he supposed the other Englishman had not waited for the original because the copy which he possessed of it, and which he had shown him, the interpreter, was probably sufficient for him.

"Had he a copy?" asked Jack quickly.

"Certainly," said the man; "a very exact one. Done, he told me, by a clever sailor on the ship which brought him from Russia. He had it painted as a precaution, he said, lest certain persons should steal the original for their own purposes."

The police allowed us to take away our work of art, however, without further difficulties.

"Gad," said Jack, as we left the court, "my opinion of that chap's cuteness strengthens every day! he *has* intended, all along, to have another dig for the treasure. He expected to gain a day by being set down at Copenhagen; he gave away this picture simply because he didn't require it, having got safely away with the other; this may be only the copy."

"It looks like our old friend," I said moodily; "but one can't tell. Anyhow, we've lost, Jack; it's very sickening after all we've been through"—

"Nonsense, man! the battle isn't lost until it's won. Do you suppose Strong is going to win right off, in a day and a half? Why, there's a fortnight's hard digging in a garden of that size! Don't lose heart so easily, Peter, it doesn't become you."

It was all very well, I thought, for Jack to be sanguine and spirited. He had

nothing hanging upon the issue of this matter, excepting the sporting desire to win, and the friendly wish that I—as his chum—should succeed. To me success was absolutely everything!

We caught a train on the Monday evening, and reached Flushing in due course; but the weather was so terribly stormy that the steamers were not running.

This circumstance put the coping-stone to my disgust and depression. It was too bad—too utterly unfortunate. The delay would cost us another twenty-four hours, every second of which time was a clear profit to Strong.

When the weather moderated, and the steamer was advertised to start in the evening, we found that an immense number of passengers had assembled to make the crossing. We obtained berths with difficulty, and at some additional expense. At supper I asked the steward whether his steamer was always crowded in this way.

"Oh dear, no, sir," said my friend; "most of these passengers have been waiting two days and more. We haven't run since the gale began—Sunday night." A moment later, the significance of this statement suddenly occurred to me.

"Why, Jack!" I exclaimed, "then"—

"Yes," said Jack. "Either he's on board now, or else he has seen us, and remained behind on shore; at anyrate there's been no digging done at Streatham."

"Thank God!" I exclaimed. "I was a brute to rave about bad luck, Jack, before I knew."

"Yes," said Jack, smiling; "the winds and waves and all the elements seem to have fought on our side this time, old man! It strikes me we are going to win yet."

At Queenborough Station, in the morning, we scrutinised every passenger that landed from the *Princess Clementine*. There were many pale, sea-sick, travel-worn people that came ashore to take train to London; but we were both certain that Strong was not among them. Neither did he alight at Victoria. There was no doubt about it; for once Strong's cleverness had been over-trumped by the forces of nature!

CHAPTER XXXIX

DIGGING AGAIN

Jack was determined to see me through with my treasure hunting, now—as we hoped—at its last stage, and came with me to Streatham without even a flying visit to his Gloucestershire home; which was good of old Jack.

Arrived at Streatham, we put up at the best hotel we could find, and lost no time in walking down to old Clutterbuck's house in the lower town. The place looked gloomy and forbidding, and we rang at the garden gate—the only entrance—with a feeling that our trouble was not quite over yet, and that in all probability the old man would have exerted his eccentric ingenuity to the uttermost in order to make the last stage of our search at least as difficult and toilsome as any, in spite of the seemingly simple instructions of the letter, which were merely to go and dig in his own garden at Streatham, and find what we should find.

As a matter of fact, we encountered one difficulty before getting farther than the garden gate—the *outside* of it, I mean; for an old caretaker answered the ring, and, opening the door an inch or two, but without removing the chain which secured it, peeped out and asked us what we wanted.

I said that we had authority from its late master to take possession of the house and garden.

The old fellow produced from his pocket an envelope, from which he drew a scrap of paper.

"Is your name William Clutterbuck?" he asked.

"He's dead," I replied.

"James Strong?" he continued.

"Oh, hang it, no! not that blackguard," said Jack. "It's all right, old gentleman; this is Mr. Clutterbuck's heir."

The old caretaker took no notice of this remark.

"Charles Strong?" he continued, unmoved.

"He's dead too," I said.

"Ellis?" said the old fellow, doubling up his paper and preparing to return the envelope into his pocket.

"No," said I, "but"—

"Then you don't come in here," concluded the man, banging the door in our faces and double-locking it.

The old caretaker's arbitrary action nonplussed me for the moment.

"But my name is down in the will together with those you have read out," I cried through the panels. Jack stood and laughed. I heard the old man stumping towards the house. I shrieked out a repetition of my last appeal. He paused and spoke. An errand boy stopped to look on, and whistled "D'isy, D'isy, give me your answer do," so loudly that I could scarcely hear the reply.

"No, it ain't," shouted the old fellow back again. "For I copied these down

from it myself, and there wasn't another. And what's more, this 'ere door don't git opened to no one else but these four, and if yer wants to git into the garden, yer'll 'ave to climb the wall and see what yer'll git from the dawg. He's loose in here—speak, Ginger!"

Ginger spoke, and the utterance was certainly alarming. Ginger's voice was a deep bass, and it seemed to say—unless my imagination gave it a meaning which it did not really possess—that it was as well for those outside that there was a wall between them and Ginger. It was ridiculous; but it was extremely aggravating also.

"But my name was added afterwards," I pleaded, while Ginger barked and Jack laughed, and the errand boy, interested, stopped whistling to hear the reply. This was not encouraging.

"Garn!" said the rude old man; "I know what I knows; you go and git yer 'air cut, and come back and show me the will."

"I can do that easily enough," I shouted, "and the lawyer who drew it up too, so you'd better save trouble and let me in at once."

"You find me a lawyer and a will as gives more than four names, and in you may walk," said the heroic caretaker; "and till then you can take yourself off or do the other thing—but out you stay!"

This was evidently the ultimatum, for the old fellow could be heard stumping up towards the house. The dog Ginger remained and continued his observations in the same tone until we retired. The errand boy remembered an engagement and departed, disappointed with us, no doubt. We ought, of course, to have scaled that wall and been eaten by Ginger in order adequately to perform our duty to that errand boy; but we had other views, and went and called on the lawyer, Steggins.

That good fellow was sincerely glad to see me, I believe, and to hear that I was the successful competitor up to this point. We told him—in skeleton form—of our adventures, promising him a detailed account if he would dine with us at the hotel, which he gladly undertook to do. Then we told him of our difficulties with the old caretaker, who had received his instructions, evidently, before my name had been added to the will. Steggins laughed.

"What, old Baines?" he said. "I'll soon put that right; we are old friends, he and I. But I'm afraid this other gentleman, Mr.—er"—

"Henderson," interposed that worthy.

"Mr. Henderson cannot take any part with yourself in the digging operations; the instructions are so clear that *only* the successful competitor is to be allowed in the house or garden until the treasure has been found. Otherwise, you see, all the rest might have remained at home, and still have been in at the death, so to speak. They might simply wait till the report went about that you

were busy digging in the garden, and would then come and take a hand on equal terms with you, who had had all the trouble."

This seemed true. It was annoying, however, that I was not to have the benefit of Jack's help in my last dig. As I told Jack, I had particularly wished him to have half the work of digging.

"And half the fun of being worried by Ginger!" added Jack; "thanks awfully, Peter. It will be rather fun to stand outside and hear you 'Good-dogging' Ginger, and presently your squalls when he lays hold of you!"

"Ginger's all right," laughed Steggins. "He's almost as old as his master, and hasn't a tooth in his head; besides, he's the friendliest of animals, and wouldn't injure a baby."

"His voice doesn't sound like it," I said. "Jack grew quite pale when he heard it." Jack shinned me under the table for this, I am sorry to say. He is a vindictive and un-Christian-like person, is Jack, when his pride is touched.

"Ginger's voice is his fortune," said Steggins; "it always has been; he's the finest dog for the other side of a wall that ever I saw."

I may say that presently, when Steggins had taken me down and introduced me to Baines and Ginger as the *bonâ fide* heir-at-law, I found that Ginger was quite as benevolent a being as Steggins had described him. He was a St. Bernard, of enormous size and the very mildest of manners, and his voice was a complete fraud, for whereas it threatened gore and thunder, its real purport and intent were nothing more shocking than small beer or milk and water. For all he knew, I might have been a murderous desperado, but he took to me at sight, like David to Jonathan.

Old Baines, too, was polite enough on his own side of the wall, and showed me over the house and garden. He was surprised when I asked for spades, but produced one nevertheless; however, when he had watched me turn over the first few sods of turf, he retired muttering into the house, and I could see plainly enough that the new proprietor was, in his opinion, about to prove a disappointing master, inasmuch as he was harmlessly but hopelessly mad.

The garden measured sixty-three yards by forty-eight, and on that first morning of my solitary digging I ardently wished, with all my heart, that it had been one-quarter the size. For to dig up a garden of this area, and dig it deeply too, as the latest instructions suggested, and all by oneself, was a task involving more trouble than is agreeable, or ever has been, to the present scribe, who is no lover of monotonous drudgery.

There were a few trees here and there, but not a flower-bed in the place; the whole area was roughly covered with turf upon which coarse grass had been allowed to grow throughout the summer, which grass I was obliged to mow down with a scythe before I could proceed in any comfort with my digging.

Jack did not desert me, though he might not assist me on my own side of the wall. He remained at the hotel, where I lunched and dined with him daily; and during these meals we consulted upon my labours and the direction these should take; and sometimes Jack would come and carry on a conversation from the top of the wall, upon which he climbed when none were by to see. Ginger used to look up and wag his tail affectionately upon the stranger appearing in that unorthodox fashion within the domains he was kept to watch over. If Jack had been a burglar, Ginger could not have looked up more lovingly at him as he sat on the wall and gave the dog bits of biscuit.

Several days passed, and the late Mr. Clutterbuck's garden now resembled a ploughed field; but never a glint of gold had I struck yet, nor a glimmer of diamonds, nor the pale crisp delight of a bank-note or cheque.

Mr. Baines knew nothing, he protested, about anything whatsoever; he merely thought me a madman, and considered it the safer way to leave me entirely alone. I questioned him, now and again, as to whether he had ever observed the late lamented, whom he had served as *factotum* in life, employed in digging or in taking measurements in the garden; but to all these inquiries Mr. Baines gave answers courteously but plainly pointing to one and the same conclusion—namely, that though old Clutterbuck had been undoubtedly a "skinflint" (as he picturesquely described the parsimonious character of the deceased), yet he had always shown himself a *sane* skinflint, and therefore unlike the gentleman who now took his place as master of the establishment. By which Mr. Baines meant to infer that old Clutterbuck neither took measurements nor dug in the garden, and that I—who did both—must therefore be mad. He did not say so in as many words, but he made it pretty clear that this was his meaning.

There was no assistance to be got out of old Baines.

CHAPTER XL

JACK PROVES HIMSELF A GENIUS

After all, it was only natural that "the testator," desiring to give his heirs as much trouble as possible, should scarcely confide his secret to one who would probably reveal it, afterwards, to the first that offered him half a crown for the information.

At the end of the fourth day I was very tired and rather depressed. I had measured the garden from end to end and across, and dug down at every spot

where, according to carefully thought out calculations, stretched strings would cross one another; I tried every dodge I could think of or that Jack could suggest. I gazed a dozen times at the old portrait, and could suck no inspiration from it; indeed, as regards that work of art, I had quite decided ere this that the thing was no more than a sickly joke on the part of its grim old original. I took Clutterbuck's age and measured it out in feet, and dug at the end of the seventy-first, and in inches, and diagonally in yards, starting each from the house, and the two first from the centre. I pulled up the old stump of a cut-down tree and looked inside the hole it left behind. I think I really tried nearly every device that the mind of man could conceive, but nothing had as yet come of my labours excepting fatigue and depression and stiffness.

Then, one day, on returning to the hotel, weary and cross by reason of repeated failure, I found Jack studying the portrait of old Clutterbuck, which annoyed me still more; for I was angry with the miser and his detestable expedients for keeping his money out of the hands of honest persons who had worked for it and fairly earned it.

"Look here, Peter," said Jack, smiling, "here's fun for you; see what I have found on the back of this work of art—read it for yourself!" He passed the portrait over to me.

I took it with, I am afraid, a growl of ill-temper, and read the words he had pointed out to me. They were written very faintly and in pencil on the back of the portrait, at a spot where the paper had become loose under the beading, and ran as follows—it was a doggerel rhyme, and this fact annoyed me still more in my ridiculously furious state of mind at the moment:—

"If you'd save yourself some trouble,
Dig at three foot six, and double!"

"What does it mean?" said Jack.

"Oh, take the confounded thing and chuck it into the fire!" I said sulkily.

"Well, but what *does* it mean, if it means anything?" Jack insisted. "You've got to take tips if you can get them, you know; so make the most of this, though it does seem to convey a rather unpleasant meaning. As I understand it, you have to dig to a depth of seven feet—that is, *double* three foot six, and"—

"What!" said I hotly, "dig over the whole garden to a depth of seven feet? I'll see the old skinflint"—

"Don't swear," said Jack, though I had not sworn; "but keep cool and help me to think this matter out. Now look here: he said, 'Dig at seven feet in order to save yourself trouble,' or words to that effect. Now, I can't help thinking he

meant this for a tip; for if it meant that you were to dig over the whole garden to a depth of seven feet, what trouble would you save yourself by doing that? What the old boy meant was, find the right spot, and *then* dig down seven feet."

"Yes," I said, laughing mockingly and throwing the portrait on the table, "find the right spot; that's just the *crux*! If you'll kindly find the spot for me, I'll dig to any depth you like—sink an artesian well, if you please; but where the dickens *is* the spot?"

"You are angry and disinclined to speak like a sensible creature," said Jack. "Have your dinner, and then perhaps you'll be in a fit mood to listen to an idea which has struck me."

This rather sobered me.

"Have you really an idea?" I asked, flushing.

"Yes," said Jack, "I have; but I'm not going to tell you till you've dined. A full man is a less dangerous being than an empty one; you might fall upon me and rend me now, if you thought my idea absurd, as you very likely may."

Entreaties broke like little waves upon the shingle of Jack's obstinacy. I said I was sorry for being rude and angry; I begged to hear his last new idea. Jack's only reply was—

"Dinner's at eight; you'd better change those digging clothes and make yourself look like a decent Christian, if you can."

Jack was perfectly right. Dinner made a wonderful difference in the view I took of things in general; it always does. After dinner, armed with his pipe, sitting over an early fire in our private sitting-room, Jack dismounted from his high horse and admitted me into his confidence.

"I daresay you won't think anything of it," he said; "but it was the portrait of old Clutterbuck that set me dreaming."

"*What!*" I said, jumping to my feet and seizing a dessert knife, "you don't mean to say, after all my digging, that the money's hidden in it?"

"Why, man, no! I never thought of that," said Jack. "However, open the back carefully and see, if you like."

I did so; I ripped the back off and looked in the space between it and the canvas upon which the odious caricature was painted. An earwig ran out, but there was no treasure. I threw the thing back upon the table, and the knife with it.

"Don't fret," said Jack; "that's not what I meant at all. What I did mean is this: do you suppose that any sane man—and you cannot say that old Clutterbuck was anything else—would any man who was not insane take the trouble to carry a picture to the Gulf of Finland and bury it there for his heirs to find—an odious misrepresentation of his features too—unless there were some object to gain by so doing? In a word, what I can't understand is how both you and I should hitherto

have accepted the ridiculous fact without suspicion.”

”But we *did* suspect,” I cried. ”We said at the time that the thing was about as idiotic as it could be; but when one’s right to benefit by a will depends on the sanity of the testator, one doesn’t like to air one’s opinion that he was mad, even though one may think so.”

”Depend upon it, the old boy was no madder than you or I,” said Jack gravely. ”I am beginning to think that he was very sane indeed, and that he has managed the whole of this business with consummate skill—always bearing in mind his expressed desire to make his heirs sweat for their money. Now listen here. I have been thinking while you did your hard labour in the garden, and I am now perfectly convinced that the old fox did not bury his precious piece of rubbish because he valued it or thought his heir would. Quite the contrary. He knew that it was extremely likely that his heir—probably James Strong, as he supposed at the time—would chuck the portrait in the fire with a curse at the memory of the original. And why, think you, did he take the trouble to have this picture painted and to bury it and solemnly bequeath it to his heir if he suspected that the finder would burn it?”

”It beats me,” said I. ”Go on.”

”Because he knew that the portrait was indispensable, or nearly so, to the finding of the treasure,” said Jack mysteriously. ”See here. He hates Strong and the rest, and knows they hate him. Therefore he makes his portrait indispensable in the hope that they will destroy it, and with it their chance of finding his money.”

”Very well,” said I, ”let us admit all that; but how *can* the portrait be indispensable to, or have any connection with, the finding of the hidden treasure?”

”That’s what we have to learn,” said Jack; ”but I have evolved a theory on that point also.”

I laughed.

”Upon my life, Jack, it’s too funny,” I said. ”You are as ingenious as Machiavelli himself; but how are you going to connect that awful daub with the buried treasure? You can’t do it; I defy you!”

”Well, I’ll tell you, anyhow; it may be as ridiculous as you suppose, and it may not,” said Jack. ”You see the eyes of the awful personage in the picture: look here, I hold the portrait thus. Now get in front of the thing and try if you can find a place where the eyes focus you; you’ll have to lie down on the carpet.”

Still amused, but interested nevertheless, I lay down along the carpet, as desired, and presently found a spot where the eyes certainly seemed to gaze at me.

”Well,” I said, ”what then? They are to gaze at the spot where the money lies hidden? Is that it?”

"That's just exactly it," said Jack, flushing a little.

CHAPTER XLI

THE EXCITEMENT BECOMES INTENSE

"But, man alive," said I, "where's the picture going to hang, or be held, in order to point out the spot?"

"That's what we've to find out," said Jack. "If my theory is right, the old boy will have prepared a place for it to hang. Are there trees, or nails in the wall?"

"There are trees, certainly," said I; "I don't know about the nails. And am I to dig a seven-foot hole wherever the confounded picture will hang?"

"Yes, you are," said Jack imperturbably, "and you know it. And now you had better go to bed; partly because you'll require some rest for these seven-foot holes, but chiefly because you are in such an evil humour to-night that I'm blessed if I will endure your society any longer!"

And so to bed I went.

That night I dreamed a great many wonderful dreams, and in each and all of them I was digging and for ever digging, and the treasure was still unfound or, when found, snatched from me! In one of my dreams, I remember, I fancied that I had hit upon the right tack, when of a sudden three huge Mahatmas bore silently down upon me from the world of spirits and demanded of me what I sought.

They looked out upon me with piercing black eyes set into cavernous sockets framed in dead-white faces, and they flapped their sable mantles over me and frightened me.

"Oh, sirs," I said, "I am seeking for buried treasure; I am within an ace of finding it and yet have not found it. Help me, I beseech you, to light upon it, and you shall do with me as you will!"

"Treasure is vanity, vanity, vanity!" cried one of the Mahatmas.

"Gold is dross, dross, dross!" wailed a second.

"Nevertheless, I will show you where to find it!" sang the third, in a mournful monotone. "Come!"

I dreamed that I followed the Mahatma back, earthwards, and we alighted in Clutterbuck's garden. He did but turn over one spadeful of earth, and there lay revealed a sack of glittering gold pieces. Instantly the two other Mahatmas flew shrieking to the treasure and fought for it, tearing the black mantles from

one another's shoulders. But the third slew them both from behind, and, seizing the sack of gold, fled over land and sea, I, shrieking, after him.

But just as I was overtaking him he turned, and I saw his face—it was James Strong. At the same moment he cried aloud, and said: "For treasure I have sinned and murdered, and lo! I have bartered my soul in vain—for see what this gold of yours is!"

With the words he poured the gold out of the sack's mouth, and behold! it was ashes, and they fell hissing into the sea.

In another of my dreams I was busily digging, while the dog Ginger watched my efforts. Suddenly I turned up a sod in which lay a piece of bread, and in the bread was folded a cheque for one hundred thousand pounds; but even as I read the figures, and was about to cry aloud for joy, the dog snatched both bread and paper from my hand, and swallowed them.

All this dreaming went to prove that I was far more interested and influenced by Jack's rather brilliant idea than I had chosen to show; his suggestion was on my mind and had "murdered sleep," quiet, solid sleep, such as I usually indulged in. Consequently, I was up very early on the following morning in order to set about putting the new idea to a trial. I hurried through breakfast, and was out of the hotel and busy at work in the garden before Jack was dressed.

First I tried the trees.

There was a willow, a fine tree with two big branches, almost as large as the parent stem, about ten feet from the ground. There was no excrescence from this tree small enough to hang the picture upon, and I passed on to the next, a poplar. Here, at about five feet from the earth, there was a twig from which the picture might be got to hang in a lopsided kind of way; but the twig was evidently a young shoot, and had probably sprung into existence since the picture had been taken to Hogland and buried, so that I spared myself a seven-foot dig beneath that poplar.

Then there was a lime, a small one, near the end of the garden; and into the trunk of this tree, on the wall side, I discovered that a nail had been knocked. I grew hot and cold at the sight, for I thought I had "struck oil" at last.

But, alas! when I had hung the picture by its little ring to this nail, and tried to get my face where the eyes would be fixed upon it, I found that the portrait glared at a spot about half-way down the brick wall, and not at any place on the ground whereinto a man might sink a spade.

There were no more trees, and I now turned my attention to the wall itself, and looked for nails up and down, and from end to end. I found one, to my delight, and having hung up the portrait, was engaged in the occupation of lying on my stomach and wooing the stony glare of old Clutterbuck's lack-lustre eyes, when Jack mounted the wall just above it, and nearly fell off again for laughing

at the ridiculous spectacle which he said I presented. However, I focussed the eyes, and planted a stick in the exact spot.

"It's the only nail in the garden, Jack," I cried excitedly. "I do believe we've hit off the place at last!"

"Good!" said Jack grimly; "now dig for all you're worth!"

I did dig. I dug that seven-foot hole as though at the bottom of it some terrible earthworm had seized by the throat all that I held most dear in the world. Never were seven feet of earth displaced in quicker time by human energy.

But there was nothing there.

"Dig another three-foot-six!" said Jack from the wall. "The rhyme may mean 'Three foot six, and double *that* besides'—that is, ten feet six in all."

Breathless, despondent, stiff, half dead with fatigue, I dug on till the water was up to the top of my boots; it was of no use.

"I won't dig another inch!" I groaned; "not to-day, at all events."

"Come out then, and consult," said Jack. Even he seemed dejected with the last failure.

I came out, dead beat.

"Are there no more nails in the wall, *anywhere*?" he asked.

"Not one," said I. "I couldn't dig again to-day if there were!"

"Have you tried the trees?"

"Yes; there's nothing to hang the confounded thing from on any of them."

"I see the cut-up trunk of a felled tree against the shed, over there. When was that one cut down?"

I didn't know.

"Ask old Baines," said Jack.

Baines was within doors, though Ginger was with me; the dog had been a terrible nuisance all day, licking my face when I had to lie on my waistcoat in order to focus those eyes, and while I was digging the huge hole standing at the brink and whining and howling as though he expected me to unearth a huge cat for his delectation. As a matter of fact, he would have run away if a mouse had jumped out. Ginger was not a brave dog; he was too benevolent to be really brave.

I went and fetched Baines, and asked him who had cut down the tree, and when and why?

Baines said that he had felled it a year ago at his master's orders.

"What for?" I asked. But Baines did not know that. Only, he said, he had strict orders not to burn the wood, or even touch it, for some reason or other.

This seemed rather curious, and I reported to Jack on the wall.

"Great scissors!" said that most ingenious individual; "go and see if there's a nail in the trunk!"

To my astonishment and delight, there was a nail; I shouted this news to Jack.

"Oh, hang it all, I'm coming over!" cried Jack; "this is too exciting for sitting on walls," he added, as he joined me and looked at and felt the nail for himself. "Where was this tree?" I took Jack and showed him the big hole in the centre of the garden out of which I had dug the root.

"Come on," said he; "we must have that root in again! Shove!"

Together we shoved the stump back into its own place, taking care to fit it into the hole exactly as it had rested there in life, and to keep its sawn surface level with the earth in order that the sundered portions of the trunk might be made to stand one upon another and all upon the parent stump, straight and without tipping forward or backward.

CHAPTER XLII

ALL OVER BUT—

Then we brought the round thick logs which had formed the trunk, and which had been sawn into lengths of about four feet, and piled them one on top of another in their own order, which was obvious and unmistakable on account of the lessening girth of the trunk as it went higher. We piled three of these, fitting them one upon the other as they had stood in life, and the nail was in the fourth, with which we crowned the edifice, Jack standing upon a step-ladder and I handing up the logs.

"There!" he said, when he had built up the edifice to the height of some fifteen feet; "there's our tree as it stood in life, wobbly, no doubt, and insecure; but it will bear the picture though it wouldn't stand much of north-easter. Hand up the work of art."

We hung up the portrait, and again I lay on the ground here and there and ogled the hideous thing until I had wooed its eyes to meet my own.

Then we dug together. Jack had thrown all ridiculous fastidiousness to the winds of heaven, and helped me like a man and a sensible being.

Together we dug, and the hole rapidly grew, and with it grew also our own excitement and Ginger's, who looked on whining, as before, for the game that we were to start from our burrow for him to run away from. We had had no lunch, and the afternoon was fleeting fast; but we dug on.

Now the grave was two feet deep, and now four, now five. I had never felt so excited as this, even at that supreme moment when my fingers touched the tin box in the African veldt.

Now the hole was six feet in depth, and Jack's head, when he stood up, was just below the earth-level. Ginger, in his excitement, pulled Jack's cap off and laid it on the ground beside him, probably determined that if we were to disappear altogether, he would preserve at least a memento of us to swear by.

Six feet and a half, and now my spade (it *was* mine; I am glad it was mine), my spade struck against something hard and metallic.

"Hullo!" cried Jack, who heard the sound.

"Only a stone, I'm afraid!" said I, trembling so that I could hardly raise my spade. Jack stopped work to watch.

"Your first blood!" he said. "Dig again and see; if there are honours, they shall be yours!"

There *were* honours. Half impotent with excitement, I dug again.

It was no stone. Trembling, I cleared the clayey soil from the object, whatever it might be, and revealed a vessel of hardware.

"Pull it out, pull it out, man!" said Jack; "don't stand quaking there!"

I made an effort, and removed the thing and handed it to Jack; I felt cold and faint with the excitement. I could only just see out of my eyes sufficiently to recognise that the object I had found was a large earthen jar, corked and sealed round.

Jack scrambled out of the hole and gave me a hand; I climbed out in a dream.

"Open it," he said.

"No—you," I gasped. I sat down and watched, only half alive.

Jack put the vessel on the ground and broke it neatly in two pieces. Inside was a small tin box, hardly larger than the envelope which Jack drew forth from it after prising it open.

"Another sickening disappointment?" I gasped.

"I don't know," said Jack; "read it, and see."

"I can't," I said; "open it and read it to me; if it's another sell, I shall curse Clutterbuck and die."

Jack—looking pale and thin—broke the seal of the envelope. I saw the colour rush back to his face.

"What is it, in Heaven's name?" I said; "don't madden me!"

"All right this time, old boy," cried Jack, handing me the paper with flashing eyes—"a cheque to bearer."

It was so. A cheque for ninety-seven thousand odd pounds!

I do not know what I did. Jack, who sometimes tells the truth, says that I deliberately stood on my head on the very top of the pile of earth we had dug out of the hole, and that Ginger licked my face just as I had reached the third bar of the National Anthem (performed then positively for the first time in that position!) and brought me down with a run. Personally I do not recollect the episode.

The cheque was duly paid, the bank manager gravely smiling as I handed it to him in his private room. He was, I found, partially in the secret. He asked for, and I gave him, a short account of my adventures, when he was kind enough to express the opinion that I deserved the money.

CHAPTER XLIII

—THE SHOUTING

That evening Jack and I gave a party. That is, we sent down to old Baines a box of cigars, a bottle of champagne, and a hamper of delicacies which—I have since reflected—must have made him very unwell, if he ate them. We did not forget Ginger; Ginger enjoyed, that night, a meal which he must, I am sure, have believed to have been cooked in the Happy Hunting Grounds, and to have been sent specially from that abode of canine bliss for the comfort of his declining years. To this day I sometimes see him, when asleep, licking his lips and going through the action of masticating imaginary food. Well, I believe he is, at such moments, enjoying once again—in the sweet glades of remembrance—the ecstasies of that *gala* banquet.

As for ourselves, Jack invited me and I him to a *Gaudeamus*, and together we celebrated the occasion in a manner befitting so glorious a finish to our wanderings and toil (not that Jack ever did much of the digging!) and sufferings and disappointments, and so on. Together we fought o'er again every encounter, whether with Strong, with elephants, with lions, or with the devils of despair and disappointment, and it was on this festive occasion that Jack made me promise to write down for your benefit, my dear reader, the record of our experiences and adventures. I may say that we drank your health, dear owner of this volume, whoever you may be, and voted you an excellent fellow for buying, or having presented to you, the book; and wished you were twins and each had a copy,—all

for your own benefit, you know, because the tale is a jolly good—but perhaps I had better leave all this for others to say; only I should just like you to know that we thought of you, as of a wise person to have possessed yourself of the book, that's all. Well, among other things that night, absurd things that—in our joy and triumph—we said and did, we drank Strong's health and wished that he might escape the hangman's rope; we also breathed a fervent wish that we might never see the rascal again, and then, in more serious mood, discussed the question as to whether it was at all likely that we ever should.

We both decided that it was extremely unlikely. He certainly had audacity enough and—to do him justice—pluck enough for five men; but when a man knows that he is a murderer, and a double or treble murderer, and that if his crimes could be brought home to him he must "swing" for them, he is not likely to haunt those parts of the world where he would be most in danger. The world is big enough. He would keep away from us, at anyrate!

"I wonder what he is doing now?" said Jack with a laugh; "and where he is, and what he would say or do if he knew of to-day's little success, eh?"

"Well, I'm glad on the whole that he doesn't," I said; and in this conclusion Jack concurred; for, without being exactly afraid of the fellow, we had had enough of him, and that's the truth.

Now, the longer I live in this world the more I realise that we human beings are but a poor, blind, helpless lot of creatures; we are best pleased with ourselves when we have, in reality, little cause for satisfaction; we imagine ourselves safely out of what is familiarly termed "the wood," when, as a matter of fact, a very jungle of trouble lies immediately before us, could we but see it! Here is a case in point. We were very, very happy that night, and apparently with every legitimate reason; moreover, when I laid my head upon the pillow at about twelve o'clock, I imagined that I should awake at eight or so, ready to step into a new bright world which the sunshine of yesterday's success should have transformed for me into a very paradise of bliss. I had every reason to suppose that this would be so. I never for one moment imagined, for instance, that this might be the last time that I should lay my head to rest in this world, and that the sleep I now courted should be an endless one in so far as concerned the usual awaking to a terrestrial morrow!

And yet this came very near to being the actual and exact state of the case.

It was, I think, about two or three o'clock in the morning, when some pleasant dream I was enjoying began to be marred—I remember the feeling quite well—by a kind of choky sensation, a difficulty in breathing. I can even recall the fact that some friend—a dream-friend, I mean—made the heartless remark that prosperity was making me so fat that the function of getting breath had become a labour to me.

But the sensation became rapidly unpleasant and intolerable, and I awoke suddenly, sweating and in terror. What had happened to me?

Then I heard Strong's voice, very subdued and soft, but certainly Strong's voice. Could this be still a part of the dream?

No, it was reality; Strong's voice was a reality; so was a handkerchief which he had tied over my mouth, gag-wise; so was a candle which he had lighted in the room, and the light of which revealed the detested face and ferocious expression of the scoundrel as he bent over me, and hissed his oaths and threats into my ear.

"Ah, you're awake, are you?" he murmured (I omit the oaths with which he befouled his language)—"I have you at last, you see, you infernal"—(I really cannot repeat the names he called me, they were too vile even to mention), "say your prayers, for you're off this time, to glory!"

I could not speak for the gag upon my mouth. I tried to raise my hands, but I found the rascal had tied them together at the wrists. I could hardly breathe, for the bandage was so tightly drawn that I was half suffocated already.

Strong saw that this was so. He put his hand behind my head and slightly loosened the handkerchief.

"Now, you whelp of Satan," he said, "get out of bed and show me where you've hidden the treasure, curse you! I've wasted time enough over it already. Don't pretend this hundred pounds odd, in your letter-case, is the lot. Lies won't do, you're off to Kingdom Come in two minutes; you'd better not go with a lie on your lips! Come,—I saw you find it,—you'd better be quick!"

I glared at the scoundrel, but did not move. I was thinking hard! Oh that I could get my hands free and be at him! or my mouth, that I might shout for Jack—who was in the adjoining bedroom. My heart was almost bursting with rage and hatred for this man; yet I was absolutely helpless; I could do nothing.

"What, you won't budge, won't you?" said the scoundrel. His face, at this crisis, looked exactly what I should imagine the devil to be like: the very incarnation of hatred and malice and all evil—but I daresay my own was not, at the moment, a type of innocent beauty and passionless charm, any more than his!

Strong placed his hand behind my neck a second time, and tightened the gag. I was suffocating—I kicked and struggled—my heart was bursting, my brain reeled and swam, my veins swelled—I sweated from head to foot in my agony and terror, and then—at the critical moment—by God's mercy an idea occurred to me.

I sprang out of bed and rushed to the wash-hand stand, and, whether by kicking, or falling over upon them, or pushing with bound hands or with elbow, I contrived, somehow, before Strong realised my intention, to send the jug and basin crashing upon the floor with a noise, I suppose, that would have awakened an army of men a mile away. At the same moment I lost consciousness, and

therefore for the events of the next few minutes I am indebted to second-hand information.

This is, I understand, what happened.

Jack is a lightish sleeper. He was dreaming, he says, of a cricket match in which he once took part at "Lords," playing for his school against the M.C.C. in the great annual function held, as a rule, on the first two days of the holidays. Jack was batting, it appears, to Strong's bowling. Dream-bowling is sometimes very difficult to play by dream-batsmen. It depends very much upon whether the batsman has dined judiciously or the reverse. Jack had assisted at a banquet, as has been shown; and Strong's bowling was giving him a lot of trouble. Strong had sent down four balls, of which the slowest, Jack declared, could have given points to a flash of buttered lightning. One of them killed the wicket-keeper; and another, being a wide, lamed short-slip for life; no one knew what became of the other two balls, they were never caught sight of at all. Then Strong sent down the fifth, and Jack—though he saw nothing of it—slogged at it for all he was worth. The wicket-keeper, it seems, just before he died, had assured Jack that Clutterbuck's treasure would be lost to us for ever, and that Strong was to be declared the legitimate proprietor of the same, by special rule just passed by the committee of the M.C.C., unless he contrived to make four runs in this over. So that it was absolutely necessary, Jack explained, to hit this fifth ball to the boundary.

By some fluke Jack caught the ball full; he did not see it; he admits having shut his eyes; Strong's face was more than he could stand up to. He lashed out at it blindly, and sent it flying, at the rate of a million miles an hour, over Strong's head, straight for the pavilion seats.

That marvellous fellow, Strong—the dream-Strong—rushed after it, and careered so fast (at the rate, in fact, of a million and one miles per hour) that he was just able to leap into the air at the very pavilion rail and touch the ball.

He could not hold it, however, and, losing his balance—owing to the great pace at which he had travelled—he flew head over heels clean through the glass windows of the pavilion, and alighted upon the luncheon-table, which fell with a frightful crash.

This crash was my little contribution to Jack's dream; it was the overthrow of my jug and basin, and the tumult of it roused Jack in an instant. He sprang from his bed, wide awake, and seeing that a light burned in my room, and hearing—as he thought—some sound there, pushed the door open and entered, full of wonder and some alarm.

He was just in time to see a figure disappearing out of the door, and without stopping to help me—indeed, he declares that he didn't notice me lying there in the corner!—sprang away after the man at the door, believing that it was I, and

that I had gone suddenly and mysteriously mad.

Things went propitiously. Several people rushed into my room, wakened and startled by the crash of china and the sound of feet scudding down the passage; and one of them speedily removed the bandage from my mouth and the cord from my wrists. I think this saved my life. Indeed, I was already half dead, and even when released I did not for some minutes recover consciousness.

Meanwhile, Jack had scudded after Strong without knowing whom he pursued.

Strong made for the outer hall, intending to escape from the hotel; but delay at the front door, which he found locked, enabled Jack to run him to earth.

Strong fished out a revolver and pointed it at Jack's head, but Jack luckily dashed it aside, and it fell upon the marble floor of the entrance hall, exploding as it did so, with a startlingly loud report, which effectually roused those few people sleeping in the hotel whose slumbers had survived the upsetting of my jug and basin.

Then Jack, recognising Strong at last, fell upon the scoundrel and administered the grandest possible thrashing and kicking that you can imagine. That thrashing of Strong, Jack always says, did him a heap of good, and made a new and self-respecting man of him again; for he had lost of late some of his self-respect by reason of Strong's indisputable cleverness in Copenhagen and Bremen, where he had scored heavily against us.

When, however, he had "scarcely begun," as he says, the process of kicking and punching the wretched man, the performance was interrupted by an inrush of frightened people, who had heard a pistol-shot and were rushing downstairs to see what was the matter.

So that there was no difficulty about securing Strong; and that arch scoundrel was presently led upstairs to my room, bound tightly at the wrists, in order that I might testify to his identity as set forth by Jack.

Well, there was little doubt about that, and as little trouble in getting the midnight burglar transferred from the hotel to the police cell. He had been caught red-handed. My money and my letter-case, with my own cards in one of the pockets, were found in his possession, two hundred pounds in notes, the bulk of Clutterbuck's cheque had of course been deposited by me in the bank. It was as clear a case of burglary as ever delighted policeman's ears, and the constable, summoned to remove Strong, looked as pleased as one who has come, unexpectedly, into a good thing.

We found that Strong had—under an assumed name, of course—actually slept for three nights within a room or two of us! He had taken care to remain invisible at all such times as we spent within the hotel, however; but had kept a watch upon our actions, and had even—as he declared—watched me find the

treasure,—peeping over the wall at a spot where his face was well hidden by the branch of a spreading tree. He probably concluded that I should have the entire proceeds of the cheque with me in the hotel. It was just as well that I took the precaution to bank the money, however; for had he found it, he would have got clear away without awaking me. As it was, he deliberately awoke me in order to compel me, by the torture of suffocation, to point out where I had hidden my property.

There is not much more to tell. The magistrate committed our rascal for trial at the Croydon sessions, and in due time he was sentenced by the court to a term of hard labour. Jack and I consulted earnestly as to whether we ought to reveal the miscreant's criminal acts in Bechuana and in Narva; but we decided that it would be useless to attempt to prove the major offence of murder; we were without evidence of any kind; and, after all, so long as the fellow was safe within stone walls and under many locks and keys at Millbank or Portland or at Dartmoor, or wherever it might be, it would be out of his power to commit further mischief.

Did he intend to murder me in the hotel, I wonder? Jack says he thinks not; but then Jack did not feel the torture of that gag, and the horror of imminent suffocation as I did; and I am certain that, whether Strong intended it or not, I should have died then and there, if my good friend had not rushed in and released me in the nick of time.

I suppose there are not many, even among the convicts in Dartmoor, so utterly evil and cruel in disposition as this man James Strong, and I am glad that I may here take leave of him—in these pages at least—for good and all. I daresay the reader is as glad to be rid of him as I am. I humbly hope and pray that I may never meet him again in this world.

And now at length I was able to enter into peaceful possession of my hard-earned inheritance of Clutterbuck's treasure. I had worked and suffered much for it, and I think on the whole that I deserved it. Of course, money earned by regular daily toil is, in a way, more worthily obtained; but since destiny placed in my way the opportunity to make my fortune, as it were, by a single sustained effort, the only condition being that I should possess the necessary pluck and perseverance to continue that effort right up to the goal, Success, why, I am not troubled with any compunctions as to the comparative shortness of the road which, in my case, led to wealth and prosperity. Nevertheless, feeling that I should better enjoy my prosperity if I were assured of the well-being of those (always excepting James Strong) whom my own success had, in a manner, disappointed of expected benefit, I sought out, through Steggins, the relatives of the murdered Clutterbuck,

who—I found—had been a widower. He had left two children in poor circumstances, and the future of these youngsters I shall make it my business to secure. They are living in comfort with a sister of their dead father, and will never know, I hope, but that their parent perished through an accidental fall into an African nullah.

Ellis, the cousin, a meek person, who refused from the first to take part in the treasure hunt, though one of the five potential heirs of the old man, was, I found, fairly well-to-do, and declined with thanks my offer to make him a small allowance.

As for myself—well, you have probably had enough of me by this time. But I will just mention this much: that the little affair down in Gloucestershire to which I have once or twice made slight allusion ended in accordance with my dearest hopes; and that Jack and I are now even more than school and college chums, being united by a tie whose name is Gladys, and who is certainly one of the sweetest— But no! I will not go into that. She suits me excellently, and that, after all, is the main thing!

We live in Gloucestershire, near Henderson Court, in a house that was once a farmhouse but which has been glorified for our benefit by Jack, who is its owner.

Jack and I have not many elephants and lions, or even ibex and elands, about the premises; in fact, I do not remember to have shot a single one. But we have plenty of rabbits and not a few partridges, and occasionally a pheasant or two. As for our ".500 Expresses," they are hanging ready on the wall in case any of the above-mentioned types of the larger animals should come down into Gloucestershire; so that we are all right.

Ginger came to the wedding. He *would* come into church with the rest of us, and he sat between two school children and behaved shockingly; for he nosed all the hymn-books off the pew in about half a minute, and howled aloud when I told Gladys that with all my worldly goods I her endowed.

Jack said afterwards that there spoke the spirit of old Clutterbuck, who was doubtless present in the form of Ginger, and who hated to hear me make over his property in this way without forcing Gladys to do a single day's work for it.

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