

# THE GOLDEN KEY

Or "The Adventures of Ledgard."  
By the Author of "What He Cost Her."

## CHAPTER XIII.

It is interesting that Mrs. Da Souza, excellent wife and mother though she had proved herself to be, had never admired her husband more than when, followed by the malevolent glances of Miss Montessor and her friend, she, with her daughter and Da Souza, reentered the gates of the Lodge. The young ladies had announced their intention of sitting in the fly until they were allowed speech with their late host; to which he had replied that they were welcome to sit there until doomsday so long as they remained outside his gates. Mr. Da Souza lingered for a moment and laid his finger upon his nose.

"It ain't no use, my dears," he whispered confidentially. "He's fairly got the hump. Between you and me he'd give a bit not to have us, but me and him being old friends—you see, we know a bit about one another."

"Oh, that's it, is it?" Miss Montessor remarked, with a toss of her head. "Well, you and your wife and your little chit of a daughter are welcome to him so far as we are concerned, aren't they, Flossie?"

"Well, I should say so," agreed the young lady, who rather affected Americanisms.

Da Souza stroked his little imperial, and winked solemnly.

"You are young ladies of spirit," he declared. "Now—"

"Hiram!"

"I am coming, my dear," he called over his shoulder. "One word more, my charming young friends! No. 7, Racket's Court, City, is my address. Look in sometimes when you're that gay, and we'll have a bit of lunch together, and just at present take my advice. Get back to London and write him from there. He is not in a good humor at present."

"We are much obliged, Mr. Da Souza," the young lady answered loftily. "As we have engagements in London this afternoon, we may as well go now—eh, Flossie?"

"Right along," answered the young lady, "I'm with you, but as to writing Mr. Trent, you can tell him from me, Mr. Da Souza, that we want to have nothing more to do with him. A fellow that can treat ladies as he has treated us is no gentleman. You can tell him that. He's an ignorant, common fellow, and for my part I despise him."

"Same here," echoed Miss Montessor, heartily. "We ain't used to associate with such as him!"

"Hiram!"

Mr. Da Souza raised his hat and bowed; the ladies were tolerably gracious and the fly drove off. Whereupon Mr. Da Souza followed his wife and daughter along the drive and caught them up upon the doorstep. With mingled feelings of apprehension and elation he ushered them into the morning-room where Trent was standing looking out of the window with his hands behind him. At their entrance he did not at once turn round. Mr. Da Souza coughed apologetically.

"Here we are, my friend," he remarked. "The ladies are anxious to wish you good morning."

Trent faced them with a sudden gesture of impatience. He seemed on the point of an angry exclamation, when his eyes met Julie Da Souza's. He held his breath for a moment and was silent. Her face was scarlet with shame, and her lips were trembling. For her sake Trent restrained himself.

"Glad to see you back again, Julie," he said, ignoring her mother's outstretched hand and beaming smile of welcome. "Going to be a hot day, I think. You must get out in the hayfield. Order what breakfast you please, Da Souza," he continued on his way to the door; "you must be hungry—after such an early start!"

Mrs. Da Souza sat down heavily and rang the bell.

"He was a little cool," she remarked, "but that was to be expected. Did you observe the notice he took of Julie? Dear child!"

Da Souza rubbed his hands and nodded meaningly. The girl, who between the two was miserable enough, sat down with a little sob. Her mother looked at her in amazement.

"My, Julie," she exclaimed, "my dear child! You see, Hiram, she is faint! She is overcome!"

The child, she was very little more, broke out at last in speech, passionately, yet with a miserable foreknowledge of the ineffectiveness of anything she might say.

"It is horrible," she cried, "it is maddening! Why do we do it? Are we paupers or adventurers? Oh, let me go away! I am ashamed to stay in this house!"

Her father, his thumbs in the armholes of his waistcoat and his legs far apart, looked at her in blank and speechless amazement; her mother, with more consideration but equal lack of sympathy, patted her gently on the back of her hand.

"Silly Julie," she murmured, "what is there that is horrible, little one?"

The dark eyes blazed with scorn, the delicately curved lips shook.

"Why, the way we thrust ourselves upon this man is horrible!" she cried. "Can you not see that we are not welcome, that he wishes us gone?"

Da Souza smiled in a superior manner; the smile of a man who, if only he would, could explain all things. He

patted his daughter on the head with a touch which was meant to be playful.

"My little one," he said, "you are mistaken. Leave these matters to those who are older and wiser than you. It is but just now that my good friend said to me, 'Da Souza,' he said, 'I will not have you take your little daughter away! Oh, we shall see! We shall see!'"

Julie's tears crept through the fingers closely pressed over her eyes.

"I do not believe it," she sobbed. "He has scarcely looked at me all the time, and I do not want him to. He despises us all—and I don't blame him. It is horrid!"

Mrs. Da Souza, with a smile which was meant to be arch, had something to say, but the arrival of breakfast broke up for a while the conversation. Her husband, whom Nature had blessed with a hearty appetite at all times, was this morning after his triumph almost disposed to be boisterous. He praised the cooking, chafed the servants to their infinite disgust, and continually urged his wife and daughter to keep pace with him in his onslaught upon the various dishes which were placed before him.

Before the meal was over Julie had escaped from the table crying softly. Mr. Da Souza's face darkened as he looked up at the sound of her movement, only to see her skirt vanishing through the door.

"Shall you have trouble with her, my dear?" he asked his wife anxiously.

That estimable lady shook her head with a placid smile. "Julie is so sensitive," she muttered, "but she is not disobedient. When the time comes I can make her mind."

"But the time has come!" Da Souza exclaimed. "It is here now, and Julie is sulky. She will have red eyes and she is not gay! She will not attract him. You must speak with her, my dear."

"I will go now—this instant," she answered, rising. "But, Hiram, there is one thing I would much like to know!"

"Most women, Hiram—not me! Do I ever seek to know your secrets? But this time—yes, it would be wiser to tell me a little!"

"Well?"

"This Mr. Trent, he asked us here, but it is plain that our company is not pleasant to him. He does his best to get rid of us—he succeeds—he plans that we shall not return. You see him alone and all that is altered. His little scheme has been in vain. We remain! He does not look at our Julie. He speaks of marriage with contempt. Yet you say he will marry her—he, a millionaire! What does it mean, Hiram?"

"The man, he is in my power," Da Souza says in a ponderous and stealthy whisper. "I know something."

She rose and imprinted a solemn kiss upon his forehead. There was something sacramental about the deliberate caress.

"Hiram," she said, "you are a wonderful man!"

## CHAPTER XIV.

Scarlett Trent spent the first part of the morning, to which he had been looking forward so eagerly, alone in his study with locked door to keep out

all intruders. He had come face to face with the first serious check in his career, and it had been dealt him, too, by the one man whom, of all his associates, he disliked and despised. In the half-open drawer by his side was the barrel of a loaded revolver. He drew it out, laid it on the table before him, and regarded it with moody, fascinated eyes. If only it could be safely done, if only for one moment he could find himself face to face with Da Souza in Bekwando village, where human life was cheap and the slaying of a man an incident scarcely worth noting in the day's events! The thing was easy enough there—here it was too risky! He thrust the weapon back into the drawer with a sigh of regret, just as Da Souza himself appeared upon the scene.

"You sent for me, Trent," the latter remarked timidly. "I am quite ready to answer any more questions."

"Answer this one, then," was the gruff reply. "In Buckomari village before we left for England, I was robbed of a letter. I don't think I need ask you who was the thief."

"Really, Trent—"

"Don't irritate me; I'm in no humor for anything of that sort. You stole it! I can see why now! Have you got it still?"

The Jew shrugged his shoulders. "Yes."

"Hand it over."

Da Souza drew a large folding case from his pocket, and after searching through it for several moments produced an envelope. The handwriting was shaky and irregular, and so faint that even in the strong, sweet light of the morning sunshine Trent had difficulty in reading it. He tore it open and drew out a half-sheet of coarse paper. It was a message from the man who for long he had counted dead.

"Bekwando."

"My dear Trent,—I have been drinking as usual! Some men see snakes, but I have seen death leering at me from the dark corners of this vile hut, and death is an evil thing to look at when one's life has been evil as mine has been. Never mind! I have sown and I must reap! But my friend, a last word with you. I have a notion, and more than a notion, that I shall never pass back alive through these pestilential swamps. If you should arrive, as you doubtless will, here is a charge which I lay upon you. That agreement of ours is scarcely a fair one, is it, Trent? When I signed it, I wasn't quite myself. Never mind! I'll trust to you to do what's fair. If the thing turns out a great success, put some sort of a share at any rate to my credit and let my daughter have it. You will find her address from Messrs. Harris and Culsom, solicitors, Lincoln's Inn Fields. You need only ask them for Monty's daughter and show them this letter. They will understand. I believe you to be a just man, Scarlett Trent, although I know you to be a hard one. Do then as I ask."

"Monty."

Da Souza had left the room quietly. Trent read the letter through twice and locked it up in his desk. Then he rose and lit a pipe, knocking out the ashes carefully and filling the bowl with dark but fragrant tobacco. Presently he rang the bell.

"Tell Mr. Da Souza I wish to see him here at once," he told the servant and, though the message was a trifle peremptory from a host to his guest, Da Souza promptly appeared sauté and cheerful.

"Shut the door," Trent said shortly. Da Souza obeyed with unabashed amiability. Trent watched him with something like disgust. Da Souza caught the look, and felt compelled to protest.

"My dear Trent," he said, "I do not like the way you address me, or your manners towards me. You speak as

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though I were a servant. I do not like it at all, and it is not fair. I am your guest, am I not?"

"You are my guest by your own invitation," Trent answered roughly, "and if you don't like my manners you can turn out. I may have to endure you in the house till I have made up my mind how to get rid of you, but I want as little of your company as possible. Do you hear?"

Da Souza did hear it, and the worm turned. He sat down in the most comfortable easy-chair, and addressed Trent directly.

"My friend," he said, "you are out of temper, and that is a bad thing. Now listen to me! You are in my power. I have only to go into the City to-morrow and breathe here and there a word about a certain old gentleman who shall be nameless, and you would be a ruined man in something less than an hour; added to this, my friend, you would most certainly be arrested for conspiracy and fraud. That Syndicate of yours was a very smart stroke of business, no doubt, and it was clever of you to keep me in ignorance of it, but as things have turned out now, that will be your condemnation. They will say, why did you keep me in ignorance of this move, and the answer—why, it is very clear! I knew you were selling what was not yours to sell!"

"I kept you away," Trent said scornfully, "because I was dealing with men who would not have touched the thing if they had known that you were in it!"

"Who will believe it?" Da Souza asked, with a sneer. "They will say that it is but one more of the fairy tales of this wonderful Mr. Scarlett Trent."

The breath came through Trent's lips with a little hiss and his eyes were flashing with a dull fire. But Da Souza held his ground. He had nerved himself up to this and he meant going through with it.

"You think I dare not breathe a word for my own sake," he continued. "There is reason in that, but I have other monies. I am rich enough without my sixth share of that Bekwando Land and Mining Company which you and the Syndicate are going to bring out. But then, I am not a fool! I have no wish to throw away money. Now I propose to you therefore a friendly settlement. My daughter Julie is very charming. You admire her, I am sure. You shall marry her, and then we will all be one family. Our interests will be the same, and you may be sure that I shall look after them. Come! Is that not a friendly offer?"

For several minutes Trent smoked furiously, but he did not speak. At the end of that time he took the revolver once more from the drawer of his writing-table and fingered it.

"Da Souza," he said, "if I had you just for five minutes at Bekwando we would talk together of blackmail, you and I, we would talk of marrying your daughter. We would talk then to

some purpose—you hound! Get out of the room as fast as your legs will carry you. This revolver is loaded, and I'm not quite master of myself!"

Da Souza made off with amazing celerity. Trent drew a short, quick breath. There was a great deal of the wild beast left in him still. At that moment the desire to kill was hot in his blood. His eyes glared as he walked up and down the room. The years of civilization seemed to have become as nothing. The veneer of the City speculator had fallen away. He was once more as he had been in those wilder days when men made their own laws, and a man's hold upon life was a slighter thing than his thirst for gold. As such, he found the atmosphere of the little room choking him, he drew open the French windows of his little study and strode out into the perfumed and sunlit morning. As such, he found himself face to face unexpectedly and without warning with the girl whom he had discovered sketching in the shrubbery the day before.

(To be continued.)

## SAVAGES AND EYESIGHT.

Our Sight To-day is as Good as That of Savage Races.

Does the life led by savages quicken their power of eyesight and their sense of hearing?

There is little doubt but that their sense of hearing is trained to a remarkable degree. The very silences among which they live, their sports and recreations, all train the ear to such an extent that comparison with an individual who lives in the hub of the universe is hardly fair.

But in the case of eyesight we have the pull over them, notwithstanding the fact that the average civilized man and woman abuse their eyesight every day. The most recent tests prove that our eyesight to-day is quite as good as that of savage races, if not better!

And, what is more, the eyesight capacity of men who existed thousands of years ago was very similar to that of men to-day. This is proved by the fact that in the writings of the ancients, the conspicuous star-cluster, Pleiades, popularly known as the Seven Stars, appeared to them as to us, since it is only the six brightest which were and are visible with the naked eye, although by very bright moonlight one smaller star was also visible then as it is to-day.

The more some people tell you the less you believe.

"Before I married my wife I could have listened to her sweet voice for hours," said Smith to his friend. "Yes—and now?" asked the friend. "Now," said Smith, with moisture in his eyes, "I have to."

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