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THE GOLDEN KEY

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

CHAPTER XXIII.

After six weeks incessant throbbing the great engines were still, and the Dunottar Castle lay at anchor a mile or two from the African coast and off the town of Attra. The heat, which in motion had been hard enough to bear, was positively stifling now. The sun burned down upon the glassy sea and the white deck till the varnish on the rails cracked and blistered, and the sweat streamed like water from the faces of the laboring seamen. Below at the ship's side half a dozen surf boats were waiting, manned by Kru boys, who alone seemed perfectly comfortable, and cheerful as usual. All around were preparations for landing—boxes were being hauled up from the hold, and people were going about in search of small parcels and deck-chairs and missing acquaintances. Trent, in white linen clothes and puggaree, was leaning over the railing, gazing towards the town, when Da Souza came up to him—

"Last morning, Mr. Trent!" Trent glanced round and nodded.

"Are you disembarking here?" he asked.

Da Souza admitted the fact. "My brother will meet me," he said. "He is very afraid of the surf boats, or he would have come out to the steamer. You remember him?"

"Yes, I remember him," Trent answered. "He was not the sort of person one forgets."

"He is a very rough diamond," Da Souza said apologetically. "He has lived here so long that he has become almost half a native."

"And the other half a thief," Trent muttered.

Da Souza was not in the least offended.

"I am afraid," he admitted, "that his morals are not up to the Thread-needle Street pitch, eh, Mr. Trent?"



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But he has made quite a great deal of money. Oh, quite a sum, I can assure you. He sends me some over to invest!"

"Well, if he's carrying on the same old game," Trent remarked, "he ought to be coming in! By the by, of course he knows exactly where Monty is?"

"It is what I was about to say," Da Souza assented, with a vigorous nod of the head. "Now, my dear Mr. Trent, I know that you will have your way. It is no use my trying to dissuade you to listen. You shall waste no time in searching for Monty. My brother will tell you exactly where he is."

Trent hesitated. He would have preferred to have nothing at all to do with Da Souza, and the very thought of Oom Sam made him shudder. On the other hand, time was very valuable to him and he might waste weeks looking for the man whom Oom Sam could tell him at once where to find. On the whole it was better to accept Da Souza's offer.

"Very well, Da Souza," he said. "I have no time to spare in this country and the sooner I get back to England the better for all of us. If your brother knows where Monty is, so much the better for both of us. We will land together and meet him."

Already the disembarking had commenced. Da Souza and Trent took their places side by side on the broad, flat-bottomed boat, and soon they were off shorewards and the familiar song of the Kru boys as they bent over their oars greeted their ears. The excitement of the last few strokes was barely over before they sprang upon the beach, and were surrounded by a little crowd, on the outskirts of whom was Oom Sam. Trent was seized upon by an Englishman who was representing the Bekwando Land and Mining Investment Company and, before he could regain Da Souza, a few rapid sentences had passed between the latter and his brother in Portuguese. Oom Sam advanced to Trent hat in hand—

"Welcome back to Attra, Senor?" Trent nodded curtly.

"Place isn't much changed," he remarked.

"It is very slowly here," Oom Sam said, "that progress is made! The climate is too horrible. It makes dead sheep of men."

"You seem to hang on pretty well," Trent remarked carelessly. "Been up country lately?"

"I was trading with the King of Bekwando a month ago," Oom Sam answered.

"Palm-oil and mahogany for vile rum, I suppose," Trent said.

The man extended his hands and shrugged his shoulders. The old gesture.

"They will have it," he said. "Shall we go to the hotel, Senor Trent, and rest?"

Trent nodded, and the three men scrambled up the beach, across an open space, and gained the shelter of a broad balcony, shielded by a striped awning which surrounded the plain white stone hotel. A Kru boy welcomed them with beaming face, and fetched them drinks upon a Brummagem tray. Trent turned to the Englishman who had followed them up.

"To-morrow," he said, "I shall see you about the contracts. My first business is a private matter with these gentlemen. Will you come here and breakfast with me?"

The Englishman, a surveyor from a London office, assented with enthusiasm.

"I can't offer to put you up," he said gloomily. "Living out here's beastly. See you in the morning, then."

He strolled away, fanning himself. Trent lit a long cigar.

"I understand," he said, turning to Oom Sam, "that old Monty is alive still. If so, it's little short of a miracle, for I left him with scarcely a gasp in his body, and I was nearly done myself."

"That is," Oom Sam said, "veree wonderful The natives who were chasing you, they found him, and then the Englishman whom you met in Bekwando on his way inland, he rescued him. You see that little white house with a flagstaff yonder?"

He pointed to a little one-story building about a mile away along the coast. Trent nodded.

"That is," Oom Sam said, "a station of the Basle Mission and old Monty is there. You can go and see him any time you like, but he will not know you."

"Is he as far gone as that?" Trent asked slowly.

"His mind," Oom Sam said, "is gone. One little flickering spark of life goes on. A day! a week! who can tell how long?"

"Has he a doctor?" Trent asked.

"The missionary, he is a medical man," Oom Sam explained. "Yet he is long past the art of medicine."

It seemed to Trent, turning at that moment to relight his cigar, that a look of subtle intelligence was flashed from one to the other of the brothers. He paused with the match in his fingers, puzzled, suspicious, anxious. So there was some scheme hatched already between these precious pair! It was time indeed that he had come.

"There was something else I wanted to ask," he said a moment or two later. "What about the man Francis. Has he been heard of lately?"

Oom Sam shook his head.

"Ten months ago," he answered, "a trader from Lulabulu reported having passed him on his way to the interior. He spoke of visiting Sugbaroo, another country beyond. If he ventured there he will surely never return."

Trent set down his glass without a word, and called to some Kru boys in the square who carried litters.

"I am going," he said, "to find Monty."

CHAPTER XXIV.

An old man, with his face turned to the sea, was making a weary attempt at digging upon a small potato patch. The blaze of the tropical sun had become lost an hour or so before in a strange, grey mist, rising not from the sea, but from the swamps which lay here and there—brilliant, verdant patches of poison and pestilence. With the mist came a moist, sticky heat, the air was fetid. Trent wiped the perspiration from his forehead and breathed hard. This was an evil moment for him.

Monty turned round at the sound of his approaching footsteps. The two men stood face to face. Trent looked eagerly for some sign of recognition—none came.

"Don't you know me?" Trent said huskily. "I'm Scarlett Trent—we went up to Bekwando together, you know. I thought you were dead, Monty, or I wouldn't have left you."

"Eh! What!"

Monty mumbled for a moment or two and was silent. A look of dull disappointment struggled with the vacuity of his face. Trent noticed that his hands were shaking pitifully and his eyes were bloodshot.

"Try and think, Monty," he went on, drawing a step nearer to him. "Don't you remember what a beastly time we had up in the bush—how they kept us day after day in that villainous hut because it was a fetid week, and how after we had got the concessions those confounded niggers followed us! They meant our lives, Monty, and I don't know how you escaped! Come! make an effort and pull yourself together. We're rich men now, both of us. You must come back to England and help me spend a bit."

Monty had recovered a little his power of speech. He leaned over his spade and smiled benignly at his visitor.

"There was a Trentham in the Guards," he said slowly, "the Honorable George Trentham, you know, one of poor Abercrombie's sons, but I thought he was dead. You must dine with me one night at the Travellers! I've given up eating myself, but I'm always thirsty."

He looked anxiously away towards the town and began to mumble. Trent was in despair. Presently he began again.

"I used to belong to the Guards—always dined there till Jacques left. Afterwards the cooking was beastly, and I can't quite remember where I went then. You see—I think I must be getting old. I don't remember things. Between you and me," he sidled a little closer to Trent, "I think I must have got into a bit of a scrape of some sort—I feel as though there was a blank somewhere."

Again he became unintelligible. Trent was silent for several minutes. He could not understand that strained, anxious look which crept into Monty's face every time he faced the town. Then he made his last effort.

"Monty, do you remember this?"

Zealously guarded, yet a little worn at the edges and faded, he drew the picture from its case and held it before the old man's blinking eyes. There was a moment of suspense, then a sharp, breathless cry which ended in a wail.

"Take it away," Monty moaned. "I lost it long ago. I don't want to see it! I don't want to think."

"I have come," Trent said, with an unaccustomed gentleness in his tone, "to make you think. I want you to remember that that is a picture of your daughter. You are rich now, and there is no reason why you should not come back to her. Don't you understand, Monty?"

It was a grey, white face, shrivelled and pinched, weak eyes without depth, a vapid smile in which there was no

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meaning. Trent, carried away for a moment by an impulse of pity, felt only disappointment at the hopelessness of his task. He would have been honestly glad to have taken Monty whom he had known back to England, but not this man! For already that brief flash of awakened life seemed to have died away. Monty's head was wagging feebly, and he was casting continual little, furtive glances towards the town.

"Please go away," he said. "I don't know you, and you give me a pain in my head. Don't you know what it is to feel a buzz, buzz, buzzing inside? I can't remember things. It's no use trying."

"Monty, why do you look so often that way?" Trent said quietly. "Is some one coming out from the town to see you?"

Monty threw a quick glance at him and Trent sighed. For the glance was full of cunning, the low cunning of the lunatic criminal.

"No one, no one," he said hastily. "Who should come to see me? I'm only poor Monty. Poor old Monty's got no friends. Go away and let me dig."

Trent walked a few paces apart, and passed out of the garden to a low, shelving bank and looked downward where a sea of glass rippled on to the broad, firm sands. What a picture of desolation! The grey, hot mist, the whitewashed cabin, the long, ugly potato patch, the weird, pathetic figure of that old man from whose brain the light of life had surely passed forever. And yet Trent was puzzled. Monty's furtive glance inland, his half-frightened, half-cunning denial of any anticipated visit suggested that there was some one else who was interested in his existence, and some one, too, with whom he shared a secret. Trent lit a cigar and sat down upon the sandy turf. Monty resumed his digging. Trent watched him through the leaves of a stunted tree, underneath which he had thrown himself.

For an hour or more nothing happened. Trent smoked, and Monty, who had apparently forgotten all about his visitor, plodded away amongst the potato furrows, with every now and then a long, searching look towards the town. Then there came a black speck stealing across the broad rice-field and up the steep hill, a speck which in time took to itself the semblance of a man, a Kru boy, naked as he was born save for a ragged loin-cloth, and clutching something in his hand. He was invisible to Trent until he was close at hand; it was Monty whose changed attitude and deportment indicated the approach of something interesting. He had relinquished his digging and, after a long, stealthy glance towards the house, had advanced to the extreme boundary of the potato patch. His behavior here for the first time seemed to denote the hopeless lunatic. He swung his long arms backward and forward, cracking his fingers, and talking unintelligibly to himself, hoarse, guttural murmurings without sense or import. Trent changed his place, and for the first time saw the Kru boy. His face darkened and an angry exclamation broke from his lips. It was something like this which he had been expecting.

(To be continued.)

ORIENTALS MAKE MUNITIONS.

French Employing Many in the Work Successfully.

In order to secure the maximum of production in its arsenals and to avoid as much as possible the necessity of calling on men of military age, the French Government recently began the experiment of employing native laborers from Cochin, China, Anam and Tonkin.

Fifty of them were sent to the aeronaut and munition shops at Tarbes, Castres and Toulouse. Results exceeded expectations and a second batch of 600 were sent to France. They will be followed by 4,000 others, and soon the number of native workers will exceed 10,000.

Good luck and bad habits are seldom even on speaking terms.

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Fashion Hints

Odds and Ends of Gossip.

The newest of new blouses are yet of the frail fabrics, the crepe georgette, chiffon, silk lace and filmy net, but even so, they button up the back. Even so the collars are cut low in the front, scooting up in the rear, high above the ears and sometimes fanning the coiffure. The sleeves are adorable, quaintly old-fashioned, and as piquant as the left eye of a coquette. Puffs, madame, and more puffs, one upon another, falling, tumbling, rippling down the arm, from neck line to little finger tip. Also, there are high puritanical cuffs of exquisite frail embroidery! French-bound buttonholes are seen also.

Separate waists for street suits are as good as ever. The princess gown couldn't oust them. They are necessary because they are comfortable and convenient. A Goupy model is all in white, of silk veiling and a new fine net-corded velvet. Very lovely! A saucy little bodice in cream satin is trimmed with sulphur-colored Ottoman velvet ribbon. A Paquin dream of becomingness is of deep violet chiffon, trimmed richly and splendidly with violet ribbon with picot edge.

As companion for a Drecoil costume of peacock green velour de laine, there is a blouse made of yellow radium silk, elaborately embroidered in gold and silver thread, with just enough cinnamon brown thread to give character and strength to the design.

Jacket effects appear now in blouses. A white chiffon has a little bolero of white Lierre lace and on the bolero is a wide collar and revers of lace. The long undersleeves are of chiffon, and the three-quarter oversleeves are of lace. On the front of the bodice, forming a vestee effect, is a clever design done in old blue ribbons.

A blouse of white crepe Georgette has a straight-across shoulder yoke, which is embroidered with blue silk half moons and eyelets, which decorative effect is also used for roll collar, cuffs and revers. The sleeves are long, with flaring cuffs.

Peachblow crepe de chine is used for a bodice that looks like a rosy cloud at sunrise. The fronts are pin-tucked in groups on either side of a wide front hem, and the upper portion has a simulated yoke made by exquisite drawn work done by hand. The roll collar is of crepe, and there is an additional flat collar at the back of martin.

Collars are unique, cuffs are unusual, sleeves are of many kinds—in fact, every garment is something new.

A Watteau costume by Paquin in tints of pale rose and pale blue is exquisitely trimmed with garlands of hand-made flowers. The bodice of this gown has wide shoulder bands of pale blue velvet ribbon, holding in place a silver lace cape at the back. This lace cape idea is shown in a different form in a gown by Drecoil that is all in black, a very smart dinner dress for older women. This is in black tulle, the skirt trimmed with wide bands of satin ribbon edged with kolinsky, the bodice short sleeves, very décolleté, with cape effect at the back of black Chantilly.

Taffeta is being replaced by faille, both in plain weaves and in piquantly brocaded effects; and grosgrain, which is somewhat similar to faille, but has a tighter weave and is therefore stiffer, although not heavier, is by some houses preferred to faille. The word "stiff," however, must not be taken to mean a fabric that is not pliable, for although there is decided substance to the new grosgrains and satins, they are not unwieldy fabrics, but lend themselves pliantly to the present mode of puffs and flounces.

Credulous.

"Very credulous, is he?"

"Why, you could sell him a mort-gage on a castle in the air."