

I SPEAK OF AFRICA

BY THE SAME AUTHOR :

TURBOTT WOLFE

For reviews see end of book.

I SPEAK OF AFRICA

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PREFACE

OF these pieces, one has appeared in an anthology, and several in periodicals, to whose editors I make the customary acknowledgments. Others are now seen for the first time. But with regard to "Portraits in the Nude," the circumstances of its first printing oblige me to display certain facts.

In 1926 I began, together with my friend Mr. Roy Campbell, the first literary movement in South Africa. The reader may find it strange that we should have thought it worth while to pay any respect to culture in that colony (our native land) over which a small white population is spread like a blight. Naturally our action came more out of sympathy with the oppressed native races than out of enthusiasm for the somewhat monotonous scenery of the veld, that blasted heath, and for its uncivilised white owners.

In June we started a monthly review, *Voorslag*, and in spite of continual interference we were

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able to produce two tolerable numbers in which the interests of business men, party politicians, paint fanciers, half-dyed blue-stockings, and half-witted catchpenny ink-sprayers were reduced to a minimum; and in which life, art, and letters were judged by international and æsthetic rather than by parochial or patriotic standards. Before the appearance of the third number, however, we were asked to put ourselves in submission to a "business editor."

We consequently resigned, abandoning *Voorslag* to this commercial dignitary, a genial and respectable trades-person, to whom I conceded the right of publishing the conclusion of "Portraits in the Nude" (most of which had come out in the first two numbers), in order to preserve for readers of the paper the integrity of the story. For this concession I was rewarded by seeing my work printed in a form differing from that in which I wrote it. Colonial squeamishness had demanded in the last scene not only a fig-leaf but an illegal operation. The deliberate and inexcusable mutilation of a MS. is typical of the colonial attitude to culture, an attitude which might be compared, not unjustly, with that of a dog to a lamp-post. However, that artists cannot live in South Africa

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is a fact that has been fully demonstrated by the lives of Thomas Pringle, Olive Schreiner, and others.

“Portraits in the Nude” is here printed for the first time as it was written. The book as a whole may be more fully understood if read in conjunction with Mr. Campbell’s forthcoming poems, which were mostly written at the same time, in the same place, and, to a great extent, in community of thought.

W. P.

TOKYO, 1927.

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PORTRAITS IN THE NUDE

CHARACTERS

TAKHAAR VAN RYN.

MINTA, *his wife.* OU TANTA MARIA, *her great-aunt.*

FRANS, *her eldest son.*

DIRK, *her second son.*

GOLGO, *her youngest son.* MANDABAZANA, *his friend.*

CORMORANT, *an Englishman.*

LILY DU TOIT, *a governess.*

MR. WINTERHALTER

MR. AND MRS. OSBOSCH } *Friends of the family.*

SHILLING, *a native servant.*

SARA, *his wife.*

I

A VIEW FROM ABOVE

THE immense plain was misted with a faint bloom. Thirty miles away a grass-fire gave the air a bluish tinge. Fifty miles away the mountains stood miraculous in tones of distance. The house, the sheds, and the kraals of Zonnebloem were far below, roofs and walls in a sharp perspective from this height. Further out, the yellow willows and a few silver poplars, with the purple-brown field jutting out beyond that Takhaar was ploughing. There he was, like an ant. The far cries of the Kaffir driver shouting to the oxen, the cracking of a whip, rose small and clear like bubbles in a lovely wine. Over to the right the dam lay bright and tragic, flat and open and serene in the ample afternoon.

II

THE COFFEE POT

THE family was sitting round the table. An oil-lamp hung from the ceiling, a lamp wonderful with lustres and brassy scrolls and a painted hood of glass. It threw a strange light on the faces of those present. Mrs. Van Ryn was just putting the tall brass coffee-pot on the table.

As it was cold, a fire was burning in the grate. Takhaar, from the plough, was standing at the window. He was looking at the sad light on the mountains. Tanta Maria sat at the side of the fire, her hands folded. Mrs. Van Ryn said:

“ You have come in.”

Then she went out to the back door to call Golgo.

“ Golgo! ”

Her voice outside the room, outside the house, sounded unearthly. It was the cold voice of a doll, and yet it vibrated a little with hidden energy and purpose. Some white turkeys near the house gobbled loudly, and all together, each time she called. It was a grotesque chorus.

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Lily was looking at her reflection in the coffee-pot. It was not the girl she saw in mirrors. Here her reflection was a little distorted. But she could approve, even in the hatchet-faced miniature, her vivacious elfin air, her oblique eyes, and fresh complexion. If this Englishman——

Golgo, who was drinking milk, suddenly upset his cup. Lily saw (reflected in the coffee-pot) the white liquid, small and swift, jut across the crimson cloth. She turned. Golgo had upset his cup.

“Golgo,” said Mrs. Van Ryn.

“O Golgo!” said Lily, “what are you doing?”

Ou Tanta Maria made a curious clucking noise of sympathetic remonstrance, crescendiminuendo. It seemed, on a small scale, like the gobbling of the white turkeys. She who had seen nearly a century of life, terrible and uncertain, warmed suddenly to a swift ineffectual benevolence. She put out her withered claw-like hand and plucked at the boy's sleeve. Golgo wept angrily.

“And what would Mr. Winterhalter say to a little boy who spills his milk?” she muttered relentlessly.

Mr. Winterhalter, a person of vast importance, was coming to-morrow to buy rams.

Golgo rushed out of the room.

III

A BUYING OF RAMS

CORMORANT and Dirk, standing on the verandah after breakfast the following morning, began to watch, at a great distance, a small cloud of dust running along the plain before the wind. It was a quarter of an hour before the motor-car came along the road between the gum trees and the willows. Whoever was driving the car knew his way. He drove up the hill and stopped at the back of the house. It was a man with a red face and a black moustache.

Although Mr. Winterhalter was a silent man he opened the mouth under his black moustache just wide enough to greet Cormorant. Then he looked heavily round for Takhaar, and followed him into the house.

Nádocsy Winterhalter was the son of a Hungarian count, of a family of the greatest antiquity and distinction, who had come to these parts, in the course of many wanderings, to augment a diminished fortune. Hereabouts he had lost the

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little he had left. Being, however, a man of resource, handsome, dashing and romantic, he contrived to live with a local Dutch heiress, of great wealth and ugliness, on her colossal farm. Her coarse and solid heart he enslaved, and on the rare occasions when she faltered he was profuse with promises of marriage. On one occasion, when her doubts mastered her, Count Winterhalter went so far as to change for her the name of her farm from Nord Brabant to Buda-Pesth. For three years he practised the most rigid economies, running the farm like a model, and then departed with most of his lady's money, leaving to her a much-improved farm and an infant Nádocsy as a souvenir. To them both he left the memory of his really charming character, a memory that was all, besides his name and that of the farm, that the younger Nádocsy had to remind him of his paternal origin. From his mother, now long dead, he had the gift of silence and his red face. So that when it came to a buying of rams the Van Ryns had to do the talking.

The sheep were herded in a roomy shed up the hill at the back of the house. It was nearly dark inside, owing to the smallness of the windows. The floor was soft, of dry olive-brown dung, so the sound was muffled of the scampering of the sheep. Winterhalter was deliberate in his choosing. Nobody spoke. Each ram chosen was dragged, unwilling, by the horns, to a gate in

the wall, and there let loose into the shed next door. There the selected could be seen standing, their heads erect, surprised at captivity; their horns curved back low on the shoulder, and then outward, with a round infallible curve; their eyes shining yellow, glassy, and lascivious in the light, or large and green and luminous in the dark.

Frans opened the gate in the walls, and they all went into the next shed. Winterhalter only rejected two of the rams he had chosen, and then came back and picked out one he had seen at the beginning. He had bought fourteen rams. This had been a great event.

“Coffee,” he said.

There is something, thought Cormorant, between him and Takhaar, some kind of enmity. As they came out of the half-light into the dazzling day Dirk knowingly winked his eye. What does he mean? Cormorant wondered. He felt as if he was taking part in some absurd ballet—Takhaar, very tall and very broad, grizzled; Winterhalter, fat, in a white dustcoat, with a scarlet face and black moustache; what a pair of buffoons! Looking up, one almost expected triangles of paint and large distorted grins to appear on their faces. And no word spoken! And Dirk winked again! Frans had remained with the sheep. It was his function in life to remain with the sheep.

After coffee, when Winterhalter was about to leave, Takhaar was talking, his huge hands

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holding the side of the car as if it was a toy. Cormorant found himself with Dirk.

"Why did you wink at me?" he asked.

"Mr. Winterhalter and my ma."

"I didn't see anything."

"No. That's just the joke. They were both pretending."

"Pretending what?"

"Don't you know? Hasn't Lily told you yet?"

"A liaison? Why should Lily tell me? Does your father know?"

"Of course he does, though he has never said a word."

"He doesn't mind?"

"No, he doesn't mind."

IV

A THOUGHT OF DIRK'S

WHAT a funny kerel this Englishman is, thought Dirk. He never talks about girls and love. Perhaps he knows nothing about them, or perhaps he is one of these dark horses——?

V

A THOUGHT OF MRS. VAN RYN'S

MR. CORMORANT is a very paying guest.

VI

A THOUGHT OF FRANS'S

CORMORANT's after this Lily. Ja, it's an ewe.

VII

TWO SERVANTS

SHILLING, a Xosa of light colour, with a reserved but engaging manner, was the chief farm servant. Sara, his wife, worked in the house. At this time the girl, though pregnant, went on with her work as usual. At this moment she was returning from the spring with a bucket of water on her head. Now she stood, hands at hips, talking gravely to Shilling, who was mending a plough.

Suddenly they both laughed.

VIII

AT LESSON TIME

ONE morning Cormorant went up into the berg, and Lily watched him going. She was trying at the same time to impress on Golgo (whose mind was at that moment a delightful and inviting playground of a dungheap, haunted by Mandabazana) that HOND spells "dog." But there was Cormorant, cold elusive Englishman, going away for a whole day. He would fall over a krans in the mountains and break his neck, and she herself would go and find his body; she would carry it back to Zonnebloem, its neck broken, on her own delicate back—

"Please, Miss du Toit," said Golgo, "why are you looking at Mr. Cormorant?"

"Golgo! Why aren't you looking at your work?"

"I don't like work. I like Mandabazana."

"O, never mind Mandabazana," said Lily. "Remember you're a little white boy, and must learn your lessons. Little Kaffirs belong to playtime."

"He's not a little Kaffir!" Golgo said tearfully, "and I don't want to be a little white boy!"

IX

A DEATH

At six o'clock in the evening Cormorant came down wearily over the last hill-top upon the assembled buildings of Zonnebloem, almost Egyptian in their solidity and isolation. Although it was nearly dark no light could be seen at any window. The house, with its blocks and angles, loomed bone-grey out of the black earth. A wavering light appeared just below Cormorant's way, as of a lantern held by somebody walking, moving about. It disappeared, but the inside of one of the sheep sheds became illumined with a faint radiance. Cormorant came down to the door and looked in. It was Frans, evidently taking a last look at some sheep. Those that were near the door scampered into the darkness at Cormorant's approach, and Frans, hearing the mild stampede, looked up.

"Who is there?" he asked in his dull way.

"Cormorant."

"You have come back then?"

"Yes, it seems so. What's the time?"

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"I don't know the time," said Frans.

"It must be late."

"Ja, it is late," he said slowly.

"Why is the house dark if it's so late? I see no light anywhere."

"My pa will not allow any lights to-night," said Frans. "We are in mourning."

He held up the lantern to show a band of black crape on his sleeve.

"But is somebody dead?" asked Cormorant.

"Ja," said Frans. "Somebody is dead."

"But why don't you tell me?"

"It was Ou Tanta Maria."

"Well, I am sorry," said Cormorant, surprised.

"Are you sorry?" asked Frans incredulously.

It was the first time Cormorant had seen him smile. The lights and shadows on his face and beard moved slowly, and took up a fixed position. Frans wore a smile. It took a long time to fade. "Are you sorry? It doesn't trouble me. What was the old ewe to me?"

"Aren't you coming in?" asked Cormorant.

"There is nothing to go in for. There is no supper to-night. My pa says we must fast until to-morrow."

"O nonsense!" said Cormorant, tired and irritated. "I'm going in. Aren't you coming?"

Frans took a long time to answer.

"By and by," he said at last.

He is afraid of Takhaar, thought Cormorant,

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walking angrily down to the house. He opened the back door. It seemed very dark all of a sudden. He stepped into the passage and bumped into somebody who was muttering.

"My God, who is that?" whispered Mrs. Van Ryn, standing stock-still. Cormorant could hear her breathing, panting.

"Cormorant," he said aloud.

"Shut up!" she said in a ridiculous stage-whisper. Then she dropped something hard on the floor. It could be heard rolling.

"Damn it," she whispered. "Where has it gone?"

"What is it?" asked Cormorant, groping on the floor. His head touched Mrs. Van Ryn's. He could smell her hair, which tickled his face. He found what felt like a candle. So it was.

"Here it is," he said aloud.

"O, why can't you whisper, Mr. Cormorant? Now we must go out quickly. Come along."

Cormorant was just going to make a scene, but he thought better of it. He would have liked to begin a long oration at the top of his voice about being a paying guest and wanting his supper, but there was so obviously something wrong that he judged it better now to follow Mrs. Van Ryn out into the darkness.

"Can you see?" she asked, groping for the door.

"No," said Cormorant, "I'm going to strike

a match." He began feeling for matches in his pocket.

"No, no!" said the stage-whisper, "for God's sake don't! Here, take hold of this. I know the way."

The way, indeed! thought Cormorant. What way? Take hold of this? He put out his hand. Now what on earth's this? It felt like a rope, but silky. It was a thick plait of hair. They made an absurd progress in the dark. Now they seemed to be going through another doorway.

"Let go," said Mrs. Van Ryn, "and give me your matches." Cormorant let go the pigtail and struck a match. She was holding out the candle towards him. He lit the wick with difficulty after striking three matches. Mrs. Van Ryn held up the lighted candle.

"Look at me," she said.

Under the left eye there was a gash in her cheek. The blood was beginning to dry on it, but some had fallen on her dark blouse, staining it darker. In guttering candle-light her face seemed whiter than usual, night darker than ever.

"That is why I didn't want to stay in the house," she said. Yes, her face was haggard.

"But who did that?"

"Mr. Van Ryn."

"Takhaar? Why?"

"You know my Ou Tanta's dead?"

"Yes, I've heard that she's dead. I'm very

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sorry. But you had better tell me from the beginning. I'm tired and my stomach is empty. I'm not well. If you don't tell me from the beginning I shan't understand anything at all. First let me get some water and wash that cut."

"No, no! You mustn't go into the house. Never mind me, I'm all right."

"Very well," said Cormorant, "I won't go into the house—yet." He slipped out into the dark, and made his way slowly and blindly down the hill. Twice he stumbled. He meant to get water from the spruit. He knew when he was near the willows: he could see nothing distinctly, but there was a light wind in the branches, and a damp leafish smell. He took off his hat and filled it with water at the spruit. Walking up the bank he caught his foot on a stone, and fell headlong, spilling all the water. It must have been five minutes before he got back to the shed. There was quite a wind blowing. Mrs. Van Ryn thought he was never coming back. Her face had begun to bleed again. She held the brim of Cormorant's hat in her hands. The water looked odd in the candle-light.

"It's quite clean," said Cormorant.

Suddenly a man's voice could be heard laughing very far away, ludicrously, a Kaffir at his kraal, his voice travelling on the wind.

"What is he laughing at?" asked Mrs. Van Ryn.

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Cormorant began bathing her face with a silk handkerchief that had been in his pocket.

"The colours in that handkerchief will give me blood-poisoning," she said.

"No they won't," said Cormorant. "I bought it in Regent Street."

"Is that in Capetown?" asked Mrs. Van Ryn.

"No," said Cormorant. "I wish your face would stop bleeding. I've done my best now. You'd better hold the handkerchief over it. Now for God's sake tell me what all this is about."

Mrs. Van Ryn gave a little sob.

"My Ou Tanta was not well this morning," she said hurriedly, shading the candle with her hand. "Ja, she was sick. She wouldn't get up at all. She ate only a little breakfast. Mr. Van Ryn and my sons were out all the morning, and Golgo was doing his lessons with Miss du Toit. At twelve o'clock Dirk came to me for some coffee. He must go to Mr. Winterhalter's, he said, on business. He would not come back to-night, he said to me. He would sleep at Mr. Winterhalter's. I said to him: 'Ou Tanta Maria is very sick. Come back early in the morning in case anything happens.' I don't know why I should have thought that anything would happen. Dirk said to me he would come back early to-morrow morning. After dinner my Ou Tanta seemed much worse. I went to Mr. Van Ryn and told him. 'Ha,' he said to me,

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'it is the will of the Almighty.' Then I was frightened. I don't mind if he keeps his religion to Sundays. There is no time in the week for prayers and suchlike. We all have our work to do. 'She is old,' I said. Mr. Van Ryn didn't answer. Now, I thought, if anything happens, my little Golgo must not see it. Why should children see death?"

A wet black stain was spreading through the silk handkerchief. It glistened in the guttering candle-light. The woman took the handkerchief away, and put it back again.

"So I said to Golgo: 'You run out and play with Mandabazana.' Then I went to Miss du Toit. I said to her: 'Lily, if anything happens, my dear, you must help me. I am frightened to be left alone with Mr. Van Ryn.' 'Why?' she said to me. 'He is your husband.' No, but I thought that was a surprising thing to say. I told her here was Mr. Van Ryn beginning to get religious even before my Ou Tanta was dead, and this a Monday too! Indeed, I could hear my poor dear Tanta. She lay breathing with awful difficulty. She has gone a long journey now. O how glad I am that I was with her when she passed away. After a long time I fastened the shutters at the windows and covered up her face. Then I came out and locked the door, hiding the key under my blouse. You see, I was afraid of Mr. Van Ryn. And there he

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was! He was wearing his dress of sacks. 'Is she dead yet?' he asked. When I told him she was, he went out on to the verandah with that bell of his (his holy bell, he calls it) and began to ring it. This was about four o'clock. He went on ringing and ringing. I went to find Lily, but she was locked in her room and couldn't get out. What could I do? Mr. Van Ryn had the key, and the window of that room doesn't open, so Miss du Toit couldn't get out that way. I thought, when Mr. Van Ryn sees food he will calm down. He must be hungry. Everything will come right. So I went to see about supper. It was getting dark, so I lighted a lamp. By the time I had finished laying the table I had a terrible headache. I thought, now I will go and take my hair down and brush it, then the pain will be soothed. I set the lamp on the dressing-table and began to brush my hair. I thought, well Frans isn't here, and even if he came would be no help to me. Dirk is away at Mr. Winterhalter's. Mr. Cormorant is in the berg. My Ou Tanta, my poor Ou Tanta, is dead: Lily is locked in her room. Little Golgo is with the Kaffirs. Whatever shall I do? Mr. Van Ryn will certainly kill me. By gums, he will! He was still ringing that confounded bell. I sat stock-still, looking at myself in the glass. I was very white. The bell stopped ringing. He was coming down the passage. He came in.

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He came in and shut the door. He said: 'You have been preparing food. How dare you prepare food when there is a dead person in the house?' I didn't answer. I felt quite sick with fear. He took hold of my hair and twisted it round his hand and began to pull it. Ach, that was the most terrible moment of my life. I went as mad as he is. Everything seemed to run from my head. I felt very strong. I took the comb in my hand (it is a heavy silver comb—it was a wedding present) and stood up. He was hurting my hair. I began to hack at his eyes with the comb. He let go my hair. But he picked up something and threw it at me. It must have been that (whatever it was) that cut my face like this. He upset the lamp. I ran out to another room. I got a candle. I ran down the passage. There you were——"

"Listen," said Cormorant, putting out the candle with his finger and thumb. They listened. There was nothing to be heard but the gentle rushing of the wind. Then a voice, an eerie old man's voice, could be heard whining in the darkness:

"O, Minta, Minta, where are you? God Almighty, you have blinded me! O my God, my girl, where are you?" It was the voice of Takhaar.

"Now I shall go to him," said Mrs. Van Ryn earnestly. "He is all right now," she explained,

over her shoulder, having already run past Cormorant out into the night.

Now she was soothing Takhaar with her voice, then with her lips and hands. They had gone into the house, those two. Cormorant waited. A light appeared. Then he went down himself.

It was as though the whole house had suddenly sprung to life. It was an awakening from a dream. There was a buzz of voices in several directions. Cormorant arrived in his room, washed, and changed his clothes. Then he came out, apprehensively, but looking perfectly calm, into the passage. In the dining-room the table was now laid for supper. On a very white tablecloth there was food. There was a cheerful fire burning. Frans was standing on the hearth (like a piece of meat roasting itself, thought Cormorant). Takhaar had a bandage over one eye. He was sitting at the head of the table and reading a newspaper with the other eye, fanatical in its isolation.

The liberated Lily came in, with a candle in her hand, and a big childish bow of black ribbon in her hair.

"I have been putting Golgo to bed," she said, as airily as she could. "He asks you to go and say good night to him, Mr. Van Ryn."

"What! When the air smells of death?" said Takhaar. "O, the little man!"

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And he went out.

Mrs. Van Ryn came in with the brass coffee-pot. She had two pieces of sticking-plaster on her cheek, under the eye.

Takhaar came in again immediately afterwards, and they all sat down to supper. None of them had had any food since lunch, and they all ate enormously except Lily.

"Miss du Toit isn't eating much," said Takhaar, with heavy facetiousness. "She must be in love."

Nobody answered, but Frans smirked slowly to himself, for the second time in a single day. She must be in love with me, his brain told him, working ponderously. And he looked at Lily with something like, yes, with something almost like interest.

X

A BURIAL

THEY are burying Ou Tanta Maria in the Zonnebloem burying-place, a grassy kloof. The sky is clouded. A grey sky and a raw wind, so that all those lights and colours that the sun day after day has brought about on this day are not seen, those ochres and yellows and hard shadows on the rocks, those running hues like fire or water in the grass. To-day the kranses, surface and fissure, are grey; so with the grass, the wandering stone-coloured sheep among the stones, the smoke from the kitchen chimney of Zonnebloem, the writhing wind-flowing foliage of the eucalyptuses, and the prospect towards far mountains. Two Kaffirs have dug the grave.

The blue-brown earth lay in a heap at the graveside, bending down with its weight the little hillside herbs. It had been a procession almost brisk from the house to here. Why should one move at a funeral pace? Was there no ploughing to be done? Were there not sheep

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to be counted? They came to bury the Ou Tanta, not to mourn for her. Now the coffin, a crude coffin, lay in the grave. Dirk and Frans had made it, closed it, and carried it up from the house. Takhaar stood at the foot of the grave, reading from the book of Genesis. The two Kaffirs, with their spades, are at the head. Cormorant finds himself facing Mrs. Van Ryn. A black hat she wears, wreathed with an endless veil of black lawn; a black woollen muffler; her dress is black; she is even wearing black gloves. She still has sticking-plaster on her face. She is agitated.

Takhaar's sonorous voice is carried away on the wind, the same wind that wags his unwilling beard as though it was of as little account as the grass, and eddies of sound reaching the nervous leaf-like ears of the kran-coloured sheep in the stones overhead cause them to lift their heads and hurry away, up higher; while one, far from the others, finding itself alone, bleats loudly lest it should be abandoned.

Takhaar closes the book and lowers his head, praying rapidly in a low voice. He lifts his hand. The two Kaffirs begin to throw earth upon the coffin with their spades.

XI

A JOURNEY

LILY went away for a holiday, and soon afterwards it was time for the family to leave Zonnebloem for nagmaal at Rooi Rivier.

Just before the wagon's departure, on a cold calm evening at sunset, Mrs. Van Ryn walked down the hill to where Cormorant was standing. She was dressed for travelling in a new black sunbonnet and a black dress. She wore, at the waist, a bunch of faded artificial violets. Her face was slightly flushed with excitement, and its usual white looked bluish-pink in the light of this tranquil evening. She was dabbing at her eyes with a black handkerchief.

"You are good to me always, Mr. Cormorant," she declared, with an excited sentimental sigh.

"I hope so," said Cormorant, very slightly embarrassed.

"I don't know, I don't know!" she said wildly. "I like to go to nagmaal—yes very much—but my dear Ou Tanta Maria cannot

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come with us, and Lily cannot come with us—Miss du Toit, that is—and I wonder if everything will be all right.”

The sun had set, and the sky near the horizon was tinted an icy pink.

Dirk came down from the house with Frans. Golgo ran after them, and finally came Takhaar, like a primitive Christian saint, but not like an old man, though his face was very lined under a great grey hat. He was carrying his bell.

“But you are not bringing your bell!” Mrs. Van Ryn exclaimed in a shrill voice.

Takhaar looked angrily and deliberately at his wife.

“Ja,” he said slowly, “I shall want it.”

She didn't answer, but a very curious smile made itself shown on her face.

“Aren't there any church bells at Rooi Rivier, daddy?” Golgo asked ingenuously.

Takhaar slapped the child savagely, twice, on the cheek. Golgo was too frightened to cry. His face was white in the half-light and his eyes were very bright. His cheek stung, but he was proud that he had been able to provoke his father, to whom he was devoted.

“Here's a fine way to start for nagmaal,” said Mrs. Van Ryn, enraged. “Leave the child alone!”

“Silence, vrouw!” thundered Takhaar.

They all climbed up into the tented waggon. Takhaar sat in front.

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“Loop!” he ordered in a loud voice.

Shilling cracked his whip and shouted to the oxen. The voorlooper's head could just be seen through a forest of horns. The waggon lumbered away under the first few stars.

“Ma,” said Golgo, “could Mandabazana come with us next time we go to nagmaal?”

But Mrs. Van Ryn didn't answer. That peculiar smile was at her lips again, though nobody could see it in the dark.

The waggon had been outspanned, and after supper Cormorant wandered along the road with Dirk. When they came back the others were beginning to compose themselves for sleep under the hood of the waggon. They had a lantern in there, and from it a faint radiance shone through the thick covering, outlining darkly the hood's framework like curved ribs, under which moved dimly the shadows of those within, moving shadows. Jonah and his family, thought Cormorant, in the belly of a whale.

He and Dirk slept on the ground under the waggon, sheltered by a bucksail. Early in the morning he woke up, when the wind rose and began to flap the sail against the wheels. Shilling, outside in the grey murk, was kindling a fire. The boy had gone after the oxen. Overhead the Van Ryns were astir. The sail began to flap violently in the wind. From where Cormorant lay he could see that the whole sky was overcast

with a thick fleece of racing clouds. It was very cold. Dirk sat up.

"It will snow to-day," he said, "before we get to Rooi Rivier." They all breakfasted bleakly round the fire roaring in the open gale, which couldn't tear away fast enough the flames and shreds of flying smoke. Afterwards they trekked, rolling slowly, cumbrously, over the long monotonous road. As the day went on it got darker.

After they had been outspanned for some time at midday the wind seemed to go down a little. It was all at once warmer.

"The snow is coming," said Takhaar. "Loop!"

The waggon wheels rolled forward. At the same moment snow began to fall.

It became a weary journey. The travellers were all crowded together under the hood in an atmosphere at once cold and stuffy. The snow could be seen falling thickly before black walls of mountainous rock on both sides of the road. As they progressed through the long afternoon the tracks of the waggon, at first blackish in the thin covering of snow on the road, became white as the snow got thicker. Shilling now was oftener cracking his whip and shouting to the oxen. If they didn't get to Rooi Rivier soon after nightfall, and if the snow continued, they might get into difficulties. But the snow stopped. The sky was very black. And at last there was hardly any wind.

Takhaar put his head out and then said:

"I think we are nearly there. As soon as we are outspanned we shall go to Mr. Osbosch. And what is Mr. Cormorant going to do? You can come, if you like, to Mr. Osbosch's. He will find you part of a bed, a corner somewhere. Or, if you will, stay with the waggon."

Cormorant said he would rather stay with the waggon—no doubt Mr. Osbosch wouldn't have room for any extra person in his house.

"He wouldn't have room for an Englishman in his house," said Dirk, with a hard laugh.

"O Dirk!" said his mother, defending Cormorant. "I don't think he would mind even an Englishman on a night like this."

"I won't trouble him," said Cormorant. "No doubt I can get on just as well without Mr. Oddsfish as Mr. Oddsfish can without me."

"Osbosch," said Dirk.

"To tell you the truth," said Cormorant, "I don't care tuppence what his name is."

The waggon was going over rough ground. It came to a halt.

"Here we are," said Takhaar.

They all climbed out, very elaborately. A short figure in a heavy overcoat came forward out of the gloom with a lantern.

"Good evening, Takhaar," said Mr. Osbosch.

"Here is Mr. Osbosch," said Takhaar in a loud voice.

The Van Ryns went off in great feather with this individual, who said they were quite right to leave the rooinek with the Kaffirs, and laughed unpleasantly with a bitterness which he had jockeyed himself, not without reason, into feeling for anybody who wasn't Dutch.

Just as Cormorant was going to sleep in the waggon he heard somebody say in a dirty voice:

“ This is the last time we come in to nagmaal with a —— waggon! A fine —— nagmaal this is! We'll have a —— motor-car next time! ”

This speech provoked a quantity of laughter, high, low, and boozy, together with an inaudible but evidently very humorous repartee.

Cormorant was soon asleep. So was Mr. Osbosch. He was snoring. His elbow was in his wife's ear. She grunted uneasily. Takhaar and his wife and Dirk and Golgo were all asleep in one double bed, for the Osbosches had only a small house.

XII

PORTRAIT OF A FARMER

WHO WAS AT ROOI RIVIER FOR NAGMAAL

A BLOOD-FACED hell-handed witless loveless man;
acred stone-squeezing leather-bellied blockhead.

XIII

NAGMAAL

THE next morning was Sunday. Cormorant and Shilling breakfasted at an open fire while the snow was thawing under a dazzling winter sun. Everywhere flames and smoke were pleasantly dancing, many fires being kindled round about. Over the tops of the waggons could be seen the little town of Rooi Rivier, the walls of whose houses were of stone and stucco, whose only trees were storm-twisted evergreens, and whose roofs of corrugated iron, unpainted, shone like silver in the sun, while snow-water gurgled in the gutters.

At a quarter to eleven Cormorant came round a corner to find himself right before the Dutch church, the glory and pride of Rooi Rivier. It was a great church of stone, very new, with a solid shining spire, the whole building in machine-made Gothic. A number of loud cheap bells began to jangle harshly in the tower. They were protesting, no doubt, at a certain rate of interest, because they had not yet been paid for. A few

pigeons fluttered on the roof, where they had already been able to leave little marks of disapproval.

Cormorant approached a gateway in a dusty hedge, entered, and knocked at the front door of Mr. Osbosch. It was opened by Dirk. They went in. There was a strong smell of nutmeg, hot air, cold air, dust, stale food, camphor, and dirty clothes.

"We are waiting in the sitting-room," said Dirk, "for Mrs. Osbosch. She is getting ready for church."

There they all were—Takhaar, gaunt, silent, and austere, in a black suit; Golgo, with a lace collar, looking like a fish out of water; Mr. Osbosch, swarthy and assured, with hard shiny black boots and hard shiny black eyes. The photographed heads of his father and mother, double-life-size, glowered on the wall. Mrs. Van Ryn, a trifle overdressed, seemed to-day a different woman. She was almost lively in her manner. She gave you an impression to-day of rosy cheeks and laughing eyes. You forgot the hard lines of her face because her mouth pouted a little, her mouth that was always set in lines of reticence, not a sensitive but a secretive reticence.

"Is Tossie nearly ready, Mr. Osbosch?" she asked coyly. "Here's Mr. Cormorant, and the bells are ringing." A tune uprose in Cormorant's memory:

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*"The bells are ring-ing
For me and my gal——"*

At that moment the door opened and in came Mrs. Osbosch with a disapproving look at him and a great rustling of cheap silk.

"Tossie, this is Mr. Cormorant," said Mrs. Van Ryn.

"Is it," said Mrs. Osbosch rudely. "Good morning."

"I am ready," she added, stuffily, for she had a pug nose. Poor Mrs. Osbosch! She was by heredity, by birth, education, taste and desire, a kill-joy. A stranger to happiness herself, she must needs play the preacher to reduce, to try and abolish the happiness of other people. How is it that everybody preaches, and how is it that most people preach the most iniquitous doctrines? The bells were silent, and through the window people could be seen arriving for the service. Mrs. Osbosch led the way out of the house and into the church, which was nearly full. As they went up the aisle Cormorant detected a strong smell of self-righteousness. He was stared at, especially by fat meisjes here and there, flappers with matronly figures, imitation daisies in their hats, meaty complexions, and an air of boorish perplexed heartiness. They nudged each other and giggled. One of them dropped a prayer book: being sternly reprov'd by an angular parent, she blushed as though her life depended

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on it. The party, still led by Mrs. Osbosch, found their way into a pew on the right-hand side of the nave near the front. Fancy allowing one's self, thought Cormorant, to be led by Mrs. Osbosch. She was followed by her husband, then Takhaar, Golgo, Mrs. Van Ryn. Dirk insisted on taking the outermost pew, because there was somebody he wanted to make eyes at, so Cormorant found himself sitting between Dirk and Mrs. Van Ryn. He looked about. Before him there were broad rough-hewn backs, behind him there were broad rough-hewn faces. The old looked solemn and the young looked old. Each lot of new arrivals provoked an excited whispering of personal remarks. The final peal of bells vomited a cacophonous warning through the roof. The service began. The Lord's House, the Lord's Day, the Lord's Table, the Lord's Supper, the Lord's Flock of Sheep, and the Lord's People's Pastor! The predikant, among his elders, was engaged in a long prayer which he was making up out of his head. He wasn't fluent, so when his thoughts jammed he repeated his last phrase in a voice twice as loud. In any case it was an aggressive voice.

The service was very dull. Now the congregation is standing and singing a supposed hymn of praise in the same way that it would sing a funeral hymn. It is a desolating tune, a narcotic noise. Now there is nearly silence, now there are prayers.

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Now we are all kneeling and now we are all standing and now we are all sitting—it is a kind of symbolic dance. Now we are almost at the culminating point of this nagmaal. They are preparing the Sacrifice of the Lamb.

Cormorant became aware of a slight commotion to his right. Takhaar, the large-bodied, was trying to get out of the aisle. He looked not at all at ease in his high celluloid collar and little black tie. His face was working convulsively. His coarse nose seemed to miss the mountain air. His monstrous hands (the destructive-constructive hands of Europe) would grip more contentedly the handles of a plough than that silly varnished chair-rail by which he strove to steady his swaying bulk in its awkward progress. Before he reached the aisle he scraped a chair, stumbled over a hassock, knocked a prayer book out of Golgo's hand, and kicked Dirk on the shin. Mrs. Osbosch blinked, Mr. Osbosch stared, Golgo asked a question in a stage-whisper about the state of his father's bowels, but Mrs. Van Ryn cared for none of these things; she was looking straight before her under heavy intoxicated eyelids, she was smiling dreamily.

Nearly the whole congregation turned to watch Takhaar going out, his black coat hanging awkwardly from his shoulders, swinging awkwardly. Mrs. Osbosch leaned over and tapped Mrs. Van Ryn on the knee.

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"Is he sick?" she asked.

"I don't know," said Mrs. Van Ryn.

"Shall you go out and see?" Mrs. Osbosch demanded.

"He may come back. If he doesn't, perhaps I'll go."

"No, it's better for you to go now. You must go now," Mrs. Osbosch ordered. "Shall I come with you?"

Mrs. Van Ryn seemed suddenly to recollect herself.

"No, no, Tossie," she answered. "It's all right. I'll go *now*. Don't you come."

She got up and moved into the aisle, and stood a moment (the congregation breathless with interest) to pat her hair with her hand. In the face of the mob her face looked determined again, yet charming, unusually charming. She didn't make for the main door at the back where Takhaar had gone out. She turned towards the chancel and then to the left down the narrow passage between the front row of people and the chancel step. She didn't hurry. All eyes followed her. She came to the side door. How her heart was beating! The door had a heavy latch. As she stepped out she turned once more towards the congregation, but her eyes were looking over their heads at the place she had left. She smiled. It was a womanly affectionate smile. It seemed to Cormorant that it was intended specially for him.

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“What has come over Minta? Mrs. Osbosch asked her husband. “What is she laughing at? Why didn't she go out at the proper main door?”

The same questions were being asked at the same time all over the church. The predikant raised his voice in prayer: he hoped to regain a little attention.

“Man, you'd better go out and see what's up,” Mrs. Osbosch whispered to her husband.

“Shut up, vrouw,” was the answer she got. “Can't you see they're doing the Lord's Supper?”

They took their places in the slow, shuffling queue that extended up the aisle in the direction of the Lord's Table. The odours of cheap scent and boot polish rose up continually instead of incense. Dirk had timed his departure for the Lord's Table to coincide with that of the girl he was interested in: he was even bold enough to whisper to her. Mrs. Osbosch, now some way ahead, stared indignantly at a female hat just before her nose, a hat which set a seal of triumph on the summit of the person who wore it. It was a remarkable hat, too romantic for nagmaal, more suitable, perhaps, for a harvest festival. Where did she get it? Mrs. Osbosch wondered. How much did she give for it? How dare she wear it? Even Cormorant, from where he sat, could hear a faint click-clacking of millinery grapes. No wonder Mrs. Osbosch disapproved.

It was an interminable service. The faces of

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those returning to their pews seemed to say: "Now we have patronised the Lord. We have done our duty." Now the last row of communicants was kneeling before the predikant. Cormorant wondered why Takhaar had gone out, and more why he hadn't come back. Perhaps he was ill.

"Do you know why your father hasn't come back?" he asked Dirk in a whisper.

At that instant a bell began to ring somewhere near at hand, just outside the church. No, it was not one of those bells in the roof. It was on a level with one's ears. Cormorant suddenly remembered that Takhaar had brought his bell on the waggon. The ringing grew much louder, and then stopped. Nobody seemed to have noticed it much. But the side door was opening, where Mrs. Van Ryn had gone out.

Enter a man, stark naked.

Good God, it's Takhaar. Who else could it be? Only one or two saw him as he came in. They were too flabbergasted to speak. The silence was almost complete. The last communicants were coming solemnly down the chancel. By now Takhaar was walking swiftly in the narrow passage between the front row of the congregation and the chancel step. Many had seen him now, and an angry murmur arose, that bestial voice of a crowd that knows what it wants and doesn't know why. Everybody craned their necks

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at what was certainly an unusual sight—the nude figure of a strapping bearded giant, a figure from Michael Angelo, carrying a copper bell, and walking like a prophet through the Lord's House, his eyes rapt.

“Ja, it's that mad Takhaar Van Ryn,” said a comfortable matronly voice, quite loud, behind Cormorant. “Magtig! but he's a strong man!”

There was already confusion. Somebody screamed. Two children howled. A woman fainted. Five others pretended to faint. Everybody was talking. All the fat maidens nudged each other frantically, blushed purple, nearly burst themselves with suppressed laughter. An elder in a frock-coat approached Takhaar with a firm step: he hoped that afterwards people would comment favourably on his presence of mind. Others began to follow him. Takhaar held his head high. He didn't utter a sound. But all at once, unexpectedly, every muscle in his body seemed to send up his arm, straight up, his hand grasping the bell, which came down in a noisy clangorous flash on the elder's head, who fell to the floor. Takhaar began to swing his bang-roaring bell up and down before him like a censer, but in an instant he was lost to sight in a swarming mob of black-coated Christians. The aisle was full of people—some were hurrying out, some were hurrying forward to be in at the kill. Everybody was talking and protesting. Mrs.

Osbosch had fled. Osbosch was in the fray. Golgo hid his face in Cormorant's coat and wept. Dirk had disappeared. Takhaar was hustled out by the mob, and some order was restored. The predikant addressed the people. Cormorant made for the side door.

There were not many people just outside the church, because Takhaar had already been taken over to the Osbosch's. It was now high noon. In the clear sunshine, in the open air, the black coats seemed to have lost their blackness. Here at the Osbosch's a pretty scene was in progress. At the front door of the house, before a considerable number of people, Osbosch was arguing with his wife. She was red with anger. She trembled all over. Even the bow of ribbon in her hat was quaking.

"How can I ever have him back in my house?" she demanded, with angry tears. "How can you all ask me to take him in? Can't you see that he has disgraced the church, he has disgraced us, us all——" The words stuck in her throat.

"No, no, wife," Osbosch protested, "you can't hold up the whole service just for our sake. We all know it's a disgrace, but the harm's done now. Let them bring him in now, quick, just for a time."

On the steps of the verandah Takhaar lay prostrate, held down by the elders, rural inquisitors. His eyes, because they had looked for

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God, were bound with a black tie : they had bound his wrists with a pair of braces : and his nakedness had been covered with an unwilling frock-coat. The copper bell had been set down on the verandah. Even the shape of it was ludicrous. It sat there, with its squat curves, the laughably innocent tool of fervour.

Takhaar (in a kind of trance) was carried in by five of the righteous: it took five of them to carry him in. His heavy muscular body was like the vast corpse of a rat being removed by ants. Those who had remained outside, all talking excitedly together, returned to the church. Dirk appeared. Then those emerged who had carried in the saint. They, too, returned to the Lord's House, but as they passed Cormorant they regarded him suspiciously.

"That — Englishman," said one to another, "I shouldn't be surprised if he's at the bottom of this trouble. Man, fancy the girls seeing Van Ryn like that, eh?"

The other did not laugh quite so boisterously as he felt inclined. Was it not the Sabbath Day?

Takhaar had been locked in his room, and the window shutters had been fastened on the outside. Meanwhile Mrs. Osbosch was having a bedroom scene with her husband on the subject of their guest. She could be heard sniffing more earnestly than ever. She didn't like to see any show of independence on the part of any of her family,

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her guests, her servants, or her friends. She was convinced that she herself was the hub round which her little universe was supposed to revolve. Her own children, three in number, had left her at the earliest opportunity, and although she was remotely fond of them she only regarded them as three manifestations of her own decorous personality. Of such a character, she had disliked Cormorant from the first, because he made no attempt to meet her on her own ground: so now with Takhaar, he had soared up and away like a rocket from the narrow and decent bounds of osboschity. He was out of reach, out of control, so therefore he was out of favour.

"But what can have happened to Minta?" she said. "What a worry! It is very inconsiderate of her to disappear like this." And she peeped in at the sitting room door as if she expected that Minta, at her words, would be bound to materialise.

"It's no good worrying," said Osbosch.

"No good worrying! It is for Minta to worry! Takhaar will have to pay damages! Poor Mr. Pfaff that he knocked down with his ridiculous bell! His head must be very sore. And an elder, too! Just when I want to talk to Minta about it—tsha! she's nowhere at all to be found."

Cormorant noticed a letter on the mantelpiece in the sitting-room. He didn't remember having

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seen it there before, so he went nearer to look at it. It was addressed: *To my Husband Takhaar.*

"Here's a letter," he said, "that might have something to say about Mrs. Van Ryn."

"Where? What?" said Mrs. Osbosch, dashing forward.

"But surely you're not going to open it?" said Cormorant: "It's addressed to Takhaar."

Somehow it seemed to him a much greater sacrilege that Mrs. Osbosch should touch Takhaar's letter than that Takhaar should have behaved as he had in the church.

"Ja, ja, we must open it," said Mrs. Osbosch. "Takhaar's not fit to read letters now."

It was a hobby, a favourite hobby, of Mrs. Osbosch's to tear open other people's letters, but it was a hobby in which she couldn't indulge. Now in a perfect frenzy (she was convinced that Minta Van Ryn was plotting against her) she tore open this envelope, and read the letter aloud.

*"Takhaar, I am going to Mr. Winterhalter for a time, as I told you. I won't be away very long. Don't forget that the key of the sugar-cupboard is hidden in my stocking under the mattress on our bed—I didn't like to leave it with Frans, he's so fond of sugar.
Your loving Minta."*

"But what is Minta doing?" Mrs. Osbosch almost screamed, in a shrill horror-struck voice,

and looked wildly round her. "Are they all mad, these people? Who is it she has gone to?"

"Winterhalter," said Dirk.

"And your pa knows?"

"O yes, he knows all right. It has been plain for a long time," said Dirk, grinning.

"Listen to this! And he laughs—the boy—he laughs!"

A loud knocking was heard. Takhaar was shaking his door.

"Ach, don't let him out!" Mrs. Osbosch clamoured, her hands clutching her breasts. But her husband rebelled. He went out of the room.

"Yes, what is it, Takhaar?" he could be heard saying.

"Don't let him out!" Mrs. Osbosch repeated in an agonised whisper from the sitting-room door.

"He'll break the door if I don't," said Osbosch.

It was the only clever thing he ever said.

Mrs. Osbosch ran into her bedroom and locked the door, but she didn't lose interest in what was going on.

"You want to come out?" Osbosch was saying. "Have you got all your clothes on? Will you come out quietly? Are you sure you'll come quietly?"

Osbosch opened the door and then led out Takhaar firmly by the arm.

"Here you are, man, sit down," he said when they reached the sitting-room.

Takhaar sat down.

"Now where is my holy bell?" he asked casually.

"Why, you don't want it now!" said Osbosch quickly.

"It's quite safe here, in the house," said Cormorant.

"I thank you, Mr. Cormorant," said Takhaar.

As for Mrs. Osbosch, in the next room, she had pressed her ear to the wall. She had wrinkled up her nose. She foresaw, in a beatific vision, the impression she would be able to make with her gossip about the Van Ryns. She would be, for once, the cynosure of Rooi Rivier. The Takhaar episode was the finest copy that had ever come her way. She hugged herself, in a fever of fear, excitement and righteous indignation.

"Ja, we shall be trekking to-morrow," Takhaar was saying.

Mrs. Osbosch couldn't hear him plainly, so, in order to be ready for his next word, she rapidly picked her ear with a hairpin. Why, he might say anything, he might do anything, a wild man like that! I never knew he was so wild, she thought. I do hope Mr. Osbosch will be able to grapple with him if he gets out of hand—now Takhaar was speaking again:

"Ja, but I'm hungry. It must be time for dinner, Mr. Osbosch?"

Mrs. Osbosch had no sense of humour. Now

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I must run quickly and get the dinner, she thought. That'll take his thoughts off. A few minutes later she and her husband could hardly believe their eyes—here was Takhaar calmly feeding his face as though nothing had happened! But Dirk and Cormorant were unmoved: they didn't even notice Mr. and Mrs. Osbosch exchanging glances.

"Ja, I'm very fond of Minta," Takhaar remarked at last, "and she is very fond of me. When she wakes up in the morning she likes to stroke my head. She's gone to Winterhalter's, you know. You know that white coat he always wears? She went with him in his car this morning. He always gets his rams from us, you know. I should like a little more beef, if you please, Mr. Osbosch."

Takhaar handed his plate. Osbosch began to carve the beef with an unsteady hand. This time it was his ears he couldn't believe.

XIV

DIRK

THE next morning it was discovered, when one had to get ready to return to Zonnebloem, that Dirk was extremely drunk. When this news was brought to Takhaar he was not vindictive.

“Dirk must be thirsty,” was all he said. “We shall not wait for him. We must go back to-day to the farm and he can come back when he is ready.”

Takhaar, Golgo and Cormorant, the only remaining members of the party of five that had set out for nagmaal, were almost as glad to leave the Osbosches as the Osbosches were to get rid of them. No sooner had they left the house than Mrs. Osbosch clapped on a bonnet and took her tongue out calling, to such effect that before the day was out Takhaar and his family and Cormorant had become dragons, portentous mythological figures, breathers of fire. On their way to the waggon these three, not yet fully anathematised, had called in at the post office, where

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Takhaar had sent a telegram for the recall of Lily (who must keep house at Zonnebloem until the return, at an unknown date, of Mrs. Van Ryn), and the girl behind the counter had looked at them all, especially at Takhaar, in a way that left no doubt in their minds of the impression he had made. In the streets they were stared at by the outraged bourgeoisie.

The waggon retreated over the plains and between the mountains. It moved with dignity. Very little was said by the travellers. Sweet was the desert air.

Dirk, meanwhile, was at the house of his fantastic friends the Fitzmichaels, the most disreputable and the most engaging family at Rooi Rivier. The first South African Fitzmichael, deserter from an Irish regiment, was the doubtful son of an Irish peer (who was really an Englishman, but whose mother was half-Danish and half-Spanish) and a gipsy. He married a black woman, who was so fat that the wedding ring on her finger became invisible, and who presented him with a son. He died of quenching his thirst. Meanwhile the son grew up and married the daughter of a half-caste Dutchman, whose wife's father might or might not have been an Anglo-Esthonian Jew. The family consisted at present of this second Mrs. Fitzmichael, who looked like an Italian, and her fourteen children,

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most of whom spoke only Afrikaans. It was one of the daughters who attracted Dirk, and it was with two of the sons that he had been drinking. The whole family lived in two rooms.

At the actual moment when Takhaar's waggon was leaving the outspan, Mrs. Fitzmichael was saying, in a fruity voice, to most of her children:

" —, you, — —'s! When shall you learn not to leave your — friends about just where I'm walking? Who is this —?"

She had nearly tripped over the body of Dirk, prone on the floor. He was still remarkably intoxicated. The girl was going through his pockets, where she found three shillings and sevenpence, a pipe, a box of matches, tobacco, and a button. She kept the money and the button, and divided the rest between a number of her brothers, one of whom was thoughtfully, solemnly, dropping the ashes of a cigarette into Dirk's ear, an occupation that he abandoned on the entry of another of his sisters, to whom he called out, very loudly on account of the screaming of a child on the other side of the room:

" Been after your — black boy again, eh? "

" What if I have? " said the girl, sticking out her tongue. " It's my — business, isn't it? "

" Well, don't you bring no more — niggers in here, my girl. "

" I shall if I — well like, " said the girl,

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and so, no doubt, she would, if she —— well liked.

Three large cockroaches ran across Dirk's face, one after the other, and a baby began to chew his bootlaces.

XV

DIRK AND SARA

TAKHAAR, having temporarily no woman in the house, had arranged that Sara, the wife of Shilling, should come in from the kraal and do such housekeeping as was necessary. Her child had been born while her masters were away at nag-maal. She wasn't very greatly concerned over the agonies of child-birth and the responsibilities of motherhood, but she enjoyed being able to wear the child outside instead of inside. She carried it now on her back, swaddled in a blanket, and solaced herself, as was her custom, with fumes of the strongest tobacco through a long-stemmed pipe decorated with blue and white beads. As for Shilling, he was active and agile, as he had always been; he had very little to say and a great deal to do, the perfect servant.

The day after Dirk came back Sara entered the kitchen at half-past three in the afternoon to make coffee. She came in leisurely, pipe before, baby behind, eyes downcast. It was a cold

afternoon. The sun was bright but gave no warmth. For once the Kaffir woman took the baby off her back, and laid it down on the floor, in a dark corner under a cupboard, where it would be safe. She thought it might be cold, so she covered it with a sack. Then she added some more fuel to the fire, and went out to fetch water.

For some time there was no sound in the bare sunny kitchen but the breathing of the fire and the wind hurrying on the roof. Dirk came in to get something out of the cupboard. He trod by mistake on the baby, which began to cry tinily under the sack. He swore. Sara came in again.

"Hau," she muttered, putting down her buckets and running forward to the baby. But she ran unexpectedly into the open arms of Dirk. The stem of the pipe between her teeth got snapped in half. She nearly became an unwilling lover. The baby's small and wailing voice rose as in muffled protest. The Kaffir woman bit the lobe of Dirk's ear and got away to the kraal, where she was reproved by her great-grandmother, who said, taking snuff:

"You're a fool, child of the child of my child. When a white man loves you it's easy to steal his money."

Sara ran back to her baby. She put it on her back again, and carefully wrapped in its blanket the fragments of her pipe. When Takhaar and the stolid Frans came in from the everlasting

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plough they found their coffee ready. Dirk sat with them at the table, and began to smirk like a satyr at Sara as soon as she set the coffee pot on the table, but she, in terror and loathing, never looked at him. Golgo was out with Mandabazana: now that his mother was away nobody remembered to call him in to coffee.

When Shilling heard about Dirk he shrugged his shoulders.

XVI

A BLACK CHRIST

WHEN Lily came back Cormorant had gone away on business. A few mornings after her return she got up confused by an acute headache. She would willingly have stayed in bed, but if she allowed herself to be ill who would look after the house and its inhabitants? Men are such fools, she thought, they can't look after themselves, and if I don't get up they'll waste the food, and start eating new things before they've finished the old. What would Mrs. Van Ryn say, who is so fond of her house?

When breakfast was over, and the men were all out in the fields, she looked at herself in the glass. You go out for a walk, she told her image, and leave the precious housework to-day. She pressed her cold hands against her temples. How her head ached! Something must be going to happen, she told herself. This pain is a sign—it's like the thunder before the rain—oh, nonsense—now I'll go out. She went up into the berg.

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Half an hour later Dirk came in to fetch his pipe, which he had forgotten when he went out. He was in a savage humour that morning, and he became no gentler when he couldn't find the missing pipe.

"Sara," he called, "have you seen my pipe?"

Sara was washing up in the kitchen, and didn't hear him call.

"Sara!" he called.

And still she didn't answer. He could hear a splashing of water, and the noise of plates being moved, so he knew what the woman was doing. Why didn't she answer? He felt a cold and terrible resentment at her silence. He went into the kitchen and seized her by the wrist. The wretched woman was beside herself with fear.

"What are you doing?" she cried.

She had never seen a face so hard, so set, so cruel. Dirk's eyes were wide and staring, and there was no colour in his cheeks. Of all things he laughed.

"Why will you not answer me when I call you?" he said bitterly.

"Au, baas, I didn't hear you," she pleaded hoarsely.

"You liar," said Dirk. "You black bitch."

Sara wrenched her arm free from his grasp and fled out of the house. The white man made as if to pursue her, and then turned and went out of another door. If you had seen him come out

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you would have noticed that he carried a sjambok. He mounted a horse, and rode at an even pace, without haste, for a distance of about two miles, until he came to his brother Frans, who was sowing rye in an enormous field. Frans turned and watched without any interest his brother's approach. Dirk leaned down and whispered something, and within a few minutes they were riding together, without haste, to the house. When they reached the house everything they did was done deliberately and with accord. First of all they released the two horses in a paddock. The two saddles, with the two bridles, remained side by side on the ground. The two brothers turned away, each retaining his sjambok in his hand. They walked over to the kraal, where Shilling was working in the sun. He was mending the wall, filling up gaps with stones.

"When is your Sara going to learn her manners?" Dirk asked, menacingly.

"I don't know, baas," said Shilling, in his mild, almost shrill voice, with a gentle smile, which didn't hide the fear in his eyes. He waited to hear what Sara had done.

"You don't know, you swine?" said Dirk. "You think you can cheek your baas, do you?"

Frans's whole face began to light up, as his father's did in moments of religious ecstasy.

"No, baas," said Shilling.

"'No'! Who are you saying 'no' to?"

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Dirk exclaimed, striking him suddenly on the head with his hand.

"No, baas," said Shilling, without even raising his voice, "you mustn't strike me; I am not a child."

"O, you're not a child?" said Dirk. "Go and fetch me a reim."

While he was fetching a reim the two brothers exchanged a few words, and then took off their coats and laid them on the wall. The morning was calm and cool. The sun was tranquil in a windless sky. Shilling returned with the reim.

"Do you know what this is for?" said Dirk, dangling it before him.

"No, baas," said Shilling, with his gentle smile.

"Undress yourself," said Dirk. "Make haste."

"No, baas," said Shilling, with his gentle smile.

The two brothers bound his wrists with the reim. He made no resistance. Frans produced a knife and ripped off Shilling's clothes. When he had done this, he jabbed the point of the knife, here and there, into the Kaffir's flesh. The two brothers bound Shilling to the wheel of the waggon. While they were whipping his face and stomach with their sjamboks, Takhaar, who had seen, from one of the windows of the house, what was going on, came out with his holy bell. He saw, in the scene before him, a symbolic sacrifice.

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He did not interfere with his sons. He stood, at some distance from them, his eyes half closed, and rang, slowly and solemnly, his bell.

Sara, who was returning, baby at back, from the valley, with a vessel of water on her head, heard the bell, and turned towards the house by a different path in order to see if anything was happening that the master should be ringing his bell on a weekday, on a weekday in the morning. She arrived, past the eucalyptus trees, suddenly upon the scene, and screamed. She seized the bucket of water she was carrying and flung it with all her might at Frans. It fell short and wide of him, on its side. The water sprang out in the sun like a flash of glassy fire, and the bucket clattered on the stones with a tinny hollow sound. The frantic Sara ran to Takhaar, clutched at his arm, and cried to him to stop his sons from killing her husband. But Takhaar, whose lips were moving rapidly in prayer, changed the bell over into his other hand, and continued his sacrificial tolling. Sara caught sight of her husband's eyes. She pulled, dragged the baby off her back, and ran forward, holding it out at arm's length before those eyes, those eyes. But Shilling didn't see the child. Shilling was bound. Shilling offered no resistance. Shilling didn't utter a sound. Sara put the baby down on the ground, and flew at Dirk. But he waited for her, as he had waited once before, with open arms. The

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impact of her assault bore him over backwards, and he sat on the ground, holding Sara in his arms, tightly in his arms, while she struggled and trembled and panted and struggled. With the black woman quivering in his arms he could think of nothing but Poppy Fitzmichael. Sara's baby, which was fat, stood happily on all fours, collapsed, sat up laughing, grasped its feet with its hands, began to gurgle unknown words of innocence, tumbled like a baby mountebank. Frans kicked Shilling on the buttocks with his heavy boots, once, twice, three times. Sara screamed.

It was at this moment that Lily appeared, who had hurried down the mountain at the first ominous sound of Takhaar's bell. She was in time to hear the sickening sound of Frans's boots on Shilling's flesh. She felt, she told Cormorant afterwards, quite hollow, as though there was nothing inside her.

"Give me your knife," she said to Frans.

He gave it to her. She approached Shilling. His eyes were shut. His mouth was open, but his teeth were clenched, white and bloody. Blood was oozing out between them. His face and body were lacerated. Lily cut through the reim which bound him to the wheel. He fell forward on the ground, rolled over. There was dust on his wounds. She stooped and kissed his forehead.

“Come here,” she said to Dirk and Frans. “Carry him into the house, and put him on my bed.” The two brothers obeyed her without any hesitation. She followed them into the house. But as for Sara, she began to beat her body, her swaying body, with her hands, and began nodding her head, nodding her head, and screaming and screaming and screaming. Lily came back to console her. She could not be consoled, but suffered Lily to lead her by the hand into the house.

XVII

A LETTER

BUDA-PESTH,
Wednesday.

My Dear Lily,

I will come back to-morrow morning. Mr. Winterhalter says will you ask Mr. Van Ryn to have the rams brought down from the berg? He is coming over with me, and wants to get ten or twelve rams more, as he finds he will need them. Have you got any meat in the house? Don't worry, anyway, because Mr. Winterhalter had a fat hamel slaughtered this morning, and we are bringing half over with us to-morrow. It will be nice to get back.

With love,

M. VAN RYN.

XVIII

A FAMILY GROUP

WHEN Cormorant got back to obeliskal Zonnebloem Lily came out of the house to meet him. The day was hot for early spring. She wore a loose white dress embroidered with yellow. She had just come out of the kitchen and her arms were all powdery with flour. From the heat of the day and of the kitchen her face was flushed, and as she stood in the shade, laughing, her teeth seemed very white, her eyes sparkling with a brilliant languor. She seemed to quiver with laughter as gracefully as a tree quivers in the wind, or a fish in the water. How quiet it was at Zonnebloem! All you could hear was the distant, the almost inaudible, mountain-weeping of a bird. They both heard it. It must have been a signal for them to embrace. They embraced. He smelt of tobacco and she smelt of cloves.

He followed her along the passage. She stood at the dining-room door and winked. Then she

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opened it and went in. It was an exciting moment.

The whole household could be seen grouped above and beyond her, it seemed, like a company of angels. They were all standing—that was what gave the heightened effect—and the room was cool and dark. All in that moment they seemed to Cormorant entirely united as a family, standing here, this warm morning, with warm colour in their morning-flushed faces, bright-dark-eyed, full of an astonishing tenderness. It was charming, this exciting moment.

Under the lamp stood Takhaar, lean and clean and dignified. He is silent, as you might expect of a man who dwells in the perfect security of a saint. His face has acquired that delicate wax-like look, which in the beauty of life suggests the beauty of death, a mask-like look that is only found in certain faces between middle age and old age. Takhaar is silent, his hands, those hands, breaking the patriarchal bread.

Almost her husband's serenity rests in Minta, that admirable slapper-slippered house-loving woman, whose lips do not at present wear that fantastic smile with which she went to nagmaal, whose lips are now slightly compressed, at this time when she walks through a tranquil plain of life, a bunch of keys swinging from her slowly swinging skirt. As a glass is filled with white wine she is filled with love. Her voice is tenuous

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and clear like tinted glass. Her eyes are clear like tinted love. She stood at the end of the table. In her hand was the brass coffee-pot. So she would stand till the day of her death. That was her figure, the squareness of her breasts under a frilly white blouse, her bottlewaistedness, her fat stomach, the fullness of her skirts, her hair dragged up from her Mongolian cheeks; those were her wide white hands, her nearly old eyes.

Frans chews food and laps up coffee, Frans with his jutting beard, his dumb hands, his vague eyes. He walks in his sleep. Unlike Takhaar he does not indulge in religious speculations. He does not test propositions. He is one who follows his feet; the shadow of the old European; an inconstant friend; a dangerous lover. What child is hidden in this womb of silence?

Dirk has on a bright blue cotton shirt. In his face is the light of uninjured innocence. One regrets nothing if one is a Van Ryn.

Golgo is here, reclaimed, in a lace collar. The man-child becomes the child-man, and reverses the order of the world.

"It's nice to see you back again," Cormorant said to Mrs. Van Ryn.

"You're quite like one of the family, I'm sure," she said after an awkward pause.

Cormorant regarded this sentiment doubtfully. He turned it over as you would turn over a tickey to see if it had a hole in it. Lily could

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hardly contain her laughter. She winked so earnestly that Golgo said, with his mother's precise solemnity:

“ Miss du Toit's winking.”

Lily blushed.

“ What are you winking at, Lily? ” asked Dirk.

“ Who's winking? ” said Lily.

XIX

A PORTRAIT IN THE NUDE

LILY was standing, late that night, before the looking-glass in her bedroom. Her clothes lay in a heap on a chair. They were still warm from contact with her body.

She made grimaces. She experimented with her smile and with her eyebrows. She put the candlestick on the floor, and tilted the looking-glass to see what lights and what shadows found themselves on her legs, loins, belly, breasts. She raised her arms slowly, and slowly waved them, to watch the increasing and decreasing shadows in her armpits, like two dark yawns, and the bulging and extending repose of her pectoral muscles. She turned round. She looked over her shoulder. She admired the curves of her back and bottom. There was a faint network of veins on her hips. She wagged her hips. She stooped down (and long shadows flew out behind her, along the floor, and up the wall) to pick up the candlestick, and although she wasn't fat several tender creases appeared across her flanks.

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She stood up again and balanced the candlestick on the top of her head, and watched, in the looking-glass, all the downglancing, formerly upthrown, shadows on her body. A spider on the ceiling felt the heat from the candle on high, and hurried away. She lifted her hands (and muscles and many lights and shadows moved with them) and took hold of her hair on either side of her head, and ran her fingers through it, in the candle-light. She took the candlestick and put it down on a table. She stood, hands at hips, in an easy attitude, looking at herself in the glass. She clasped her hands at the back of her head. I shall not have to wait long for him, she thought. How I wish he would come to-night! If he could see me now——!

But there was his face—she could see it reflected in the glass, through the crook of her arm.

No, these things do not happen, she thought. How could he possibly be here? Her heart beat frantically. She turned round. Yes, there he was. She had a beautiful body; she gave it to Cormorant. You, O you, O Cormorant!

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Sometimes the native knows and understands sub-
consciously things that we do not know or understand.

LOUIS COUPERUS.



The dim eye-vision and the powerful blood-feeling of
the negro African, even to-day, gives us strange images,
which our eyes can hardly see, but which we know are
surpassing.

D. H. LAWRENCE.



In dreams they fearful precipices tread,
Or, shipwreck'd, labour to some distant shore:
Or, in dark churches, walk among the dead;
They wake with horror, and dare sleep no more.

JOHN DRYDEN.



The sun is a red egg.

ZULU FOLK-SONG.

I

THE white storekeeper who sold Ula Masondo a blanket was a jovial-looking man. The morning had begun well, he thought, counting the money into the till: twenty-five shillings before breakfast.

"Good-bye," he said cordially when the native turned to go.

"Ja, baas, stay in peace."

The white man wondered "what that boy wanted with such an expensive blanket," for he fancied himself a little as a psychologist. He couldn't find a satisfactory reason, so he consoled himself with the thought that "those Masondos are all alike, extravagant, improvident, but you can't help liking them all the same."

It was breakfast time. He took the keys off a hook and closed the door and locked it, and began to whistle and to rub his hands, which were not cold, thinking of steak-and-eggs, the steak underdone, like the one in the story of the clergyman who asked for a "bloody steak," and lost his congregation by trying to please it. The storekeeper chuckled.

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“Yes,” he said musingly to his wife, “those Masondos. That young Ula was in this morning for a twenty-five-bob blanket. At this time of the morning! And what does he want with that, I should like to know? What I like about that family is, they’re not afraid to spend a bit of money, and they’re so united. It’s the old mother who keeps them all together, a fine old girl she is! Five strapping sons and four handsome daughters, and the old man not dead yet! The sons go out to work, and the daughters get married, but they all keep in touch with the old people. And so they’ll go on, generation after generation. Ula’s life’ll be just like his father’s. What is there to change? Except that the natives are getting to want more and more every year, and by and by little Freddy will be able to start a second Harrods here in Lembuland. Yes, they always come back to the old people, and you’ll come back too when you’re big, won’t you, Freddy?”

And he patted the curly head of a child at his knee, a little blue-eyed boy with a bib under his chin.

II

AWAY down the mountain path Ula Masondo was trying on his blanket in the sun, opening it, turning it, waving it, fluttering it. He held it up to the light. He ran his long straight well-bred hands across the glowing circles of black and rose and scarlet with which it was enflamed, as if with his slender and enquiring fingers he should find a flaw. Shifted by the wind, the brown paper in which the blanket had been wrapped rustled away over the long dry grass.

The whole valley was full of sunlight, and Ula Masondo's walk became a dance. For every three steps he took forward he took one back, and stamped his hard black feet in the soft brown dust. He began to hum a monotonous song, and soon the sound of his voice was drumming and vibrating, twisting and turning like a sombre serpent of sound. Out of his very nerves the hymn of the darkness of his happiness uncurled and uncoiled itself like a black and flexible snake.

Down he continued through the mealie field, where the last dry stalks, stripped of their cobs,

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scraped their bleached and pallid leaves in the wind, leaves and stalks bone-white like sticks and shavings in the sunlight. From the kraal his sister watched him coming down, stamping his feet, shuddering, and jerking his spine and his hips and his shoulders with vertebrate ecstatic movements swinging with circles of rose and scarlet and black.

She called out with astonishment, and others of the Masondos appeared to receive their splendid son. She snatched the blanket, and as she stretched her fat black arms there were dimples at the elbows. She swung it round her, and began, in the well-trodden open space between the huts, that were domes woven of grass, a grotesque dance. She threw herself about with the energy of a contortionist. It seemed that the blanket itself, furred and tigerish, was a skin to the supple and animated flesh with which it wobbled and waggled.

The voice of a herdsman from the next hill-top called out from the height and the distance:

“Wé, Ula, have you come back?”

“Ehé, I have come back!”

“You have got a red blanket!”

“Ehé, it is red!”

“It is very red!”

“Yes, like the blood of a white man!”

“Is it true?”

“Come down here.”

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As the herdsman was descending, others joined in the dance. Four casual naked brats clapped their hands, and nodded their round blunt heads, and capered on tiny legs, their stomachs tight and shiny, distended with food. A youth was playing a mouth organ, and a young girl played a jew's-harp, with a tinkling of ornaments at her wrist. Two young married sisters-in-law of Ula Masondo got excited, jogging the babies on their backs, while all the loose fringes of beads at their wrists and hips made a chugging, swishing noise which could be heard between the thudding of many feet.

Even the old mother came out and waved her hands. No one noticed her, and she at once lost herself in the rhythm of the dance.

The blanket passed from body to body, and the herdsman arrived, with a pair of sticks in his hand, and cried:

“Oyoyoyil”

His cattle could be seen drifting along the flank of the hill, as clouds go drifting across the sky.

III

THE thorn trees in the valley covered their shadows like cocks of fine plumage treading black hens, the bright branches extended like wings and quivering in the heat. Down near the stream the father of Ula Masondo was sitting, carefully combing his beard, picking his teeth, and pausing to take snuff out of a long spoon of horn. He could hear the dancing at the kraal, and he could hear the water running in the rocks.

He no longer works.

He will never go out again at dawn to work in strange places (as Ula Masondo will go tomorrow); he has his cattle, his cares, his tradition, his dignity, his gossip, his children, his grandchildren, his beer, his snuff, his old wife. A person of importance, he sits in the sun.

It is long since he went calling after his father's cattle. It is long since the rinderpest year, when the air stank with ruin. It is long since, with face daubed white, he suffered the proud privations of fasting and exposure and circumcision. It is long since he fought, in time of war or in

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time of peace, and was wounded and gave wounds. It is long since he went running to beer-drinks in the full moonlight, his feet beating faster than his heart.

It is long since he sat in the firelight of his second home, inside the hut, after work, with his young wife made a mother. He seems to see her again stooping to bring for him a gourd of sour milk, he seems to know again the clicking of the thick swathes of small white beads at her ankles, the flapping of a skin loincloth at her thighs, and her familiar feminine smell.

He remembers her singing when her voice was young and tender; he remembers her small hands with pointed nails long, long ago beating a tune with a reed on a wire, on a wire with a reed in the sun . . .



He went back to the family, and took the blanket. In a hubbub of conversation he solemnly held it up against the sun, while the lean brown hands of men and women and children began feeling all over its soft red surface, feeling sensuously, inquiringly, easily, slowly, nervously, fingers thick, fingers thin, fingers and thumbs.

A child stood apart, holding a mealie cob in one hand, and with the other scratching in its hair for lice with capable fingers.

IV

THE train was crowded, and it took two days and two nights to get to Goldenville from Lembuland.

In the excitement of the first day Ula Masondo and his fellow-passengers called out all sorts of pleasantries to the native people at the stations. And it was quite a long time before he forgot a girl he saw, whose figure was only half-developed; who smiled and said nothing, unlike her noisy companions; whose eyes were large and luminous like the eyes of a female antelope; and whose thin garments were waving in a fresh morning breeze.

After a time they ceased to call out, these travellers. They were benumbed by alternating sensations of heat and cold, and bewildered by the monotony of the journey. Often they fell asleep, sitting upright in their places. Sometimes they woke up with a start, sometimes they seemed to refuse to wake up even when shaken, their sleepy heads nodding almost as if their necks were broken.

It was the second day, and the train ran on through the cold bright air of a highveld afternoon.

ULA MASONDO

Quite suddenly appeared in the distance the first mine-dumps, which were sticking up beyond the horizon like the summits of snow-mountains. The passengers crowded to the window to see these peaks, on which the sun shone as it does on distant ships between a dark sky and a dark sea, and from round them, as from ships, stood out faint fumes of smoke, faint fumes in space. From the opposite window was visible a dump as big as a hill, quite near, rising sheer and white from the ground, with tiny trucks running along the top, against the afternoon sky. And on the other side of it the steel and iron and stone of the mine buildings stood drab and stern, bitter citadels of unreasoning industry.

The thin brown grass of the veld had already given way to dust. Natives stood about in groups, some in sordid rags, others in gaudy blankets. Or they could be seen walking singly or in pairs, with a confident but abstracted air, like followers of some unknown religion. They were all used to Goldenville, but among their compatriots in the train was the silence of apprehension.

The train was now running parallel with the Great Reef Road, along which hurried an incessant traffic of cars, bicycles, and pedestrians. Whole streets came into view, shacks of corrugated iron, varied with dingy plantations of gum trees, whose blue-grey leaves were powdered with red dust; and divided by straggling hedges.

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Some washing was hanging on a fence, flapping idly in a casual breeze. Dirty children were playing in a donga; they could be heard stirring with a stick among old tins in an ashpit. Some women were drinking tea on a verandah, and a fat old man with a very red face stood in his shirt-sleeves leaning against a gate. He was smoking a pipe, and his white trousers were braced up so high that the tabs on his brown boots were visible.

A native was playing a concertina. A dog lifted its leg against a lamp-post. A clanging tram hurried across an open space, and, although the sun hadn't set, all its lights were burning.

Rows of gaudy posters on a hoarding ran past as if on wheels, and a large white building was swinging into view with the easy grace of an acrobat. Trams, buildings, shops, many voices, and the train stopped in the great terminus like a cavern, like a nightmare, like a dread.

They were all hustled out. Jostling and unguided, as if they were sheep, they made their uncertain way down the platform, and the air was full of a strange and foreign newness.

"Here's an omen," said Ula Masondo, who knew what he felt but not what he meant.

V

As though he had lived through it all before, as though he would live through it all again, he suffered and never forgot the routine of work and rest at the Simeon and Steck Amalgamated, the sight of shivering groups standing in a darkening or a brightening air and waiting to descend at the skips, the voice of the shift-boss, the dampness and darkness below, the sensation in one's ears at the deeper levels, the dimness, and the moving lights, the hum of work in subterranean stillness, the stale fumes of gelignite and acetylene, and in the narrow stopes the loud staccato stutterings of the compressed-air drills, which men held in their hands like powerful animals that wanted to get away, jerked by a mechanical lust to fang the rock with steel.

When one came off shift at midday the sky was dusty grey like asses' skin, and the air was full of the perennial roar of the stamps rising and falling and roaring on revolving cams in the battery, whose walls were like cliffs scored with the sorrows of time; always roaring and shaking

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the ground, as the ground trembles to a war-dance of warriors, or summer thunder in the mountains of Lembuland.

When Ula Masondo came up out of the mine on a still, calm afternoon of winter he noticed, passing the engine-house on his way to the compound, the subdued and powerful humming of armatures, and saw a grey motor-car gliding down an avenue of gum trees to the manager's offices, and catching the sun between the shadows. A white borzoi dog was sitting at the back, and its long snout gave it a stupid and puzzled expression. As the car went past, Ula Masondo could hear its fat tyres treading richly on the gravel.

When he came up at evening the twin steel wheels of the headgear were spinning in an icy sky, and newly lighted fires were flickering in the dusk.

VI

WOMEN were not allowed in the compound, a bleak building that was always being cleaned.

Ula Masondo, from the time he was born, had never slept by himself, so when he was found lying one night with a friend for warmth and company he was told that he was risking a flogging for sodomy. So he lay alone, and for a long time was afraid: the air was thick with ghostly visitors.

On Sunday afternoons life improved. One could, for example, put off the blanket and wear clothes instead: and the wearing of clothes was a permanent adventure for one who had been naked for the first decade of his life.

It was possible to get about and show off, or to do nothing, as one felt inclined. One had money, and ceasing to be a novice and assuming the airs of a man, one could have a good time.

The leisure of Ula Masondo was controlled by a man ten years older than himself, a moody and unprincipled *skebenga* who stood six and a half feet tall, and whose name was Vilakazi. It

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was he who directed how and where their time should be spent. As Sunday only occurs once a week he believed it should be spent in going recklessly from one debauch to another. It is a not illogical belief for a man who has no free-will for six days in the week.

If the two wanted drink, as they always did, Vilakazi knew where to get it, sometimes from an Australian-German-Jew with a game leg who was generally in gaol, sometimes from a stout old Irishwoman who had come down in the world, and who, smiling gaily, was beginning to rise again behind the law by retailing methylated spirit at the price of French brandy.

If they wanted the fine fever of gambling Vilakazi arranged behind some obscure shanty a three-card-trick party.

On occasions of dispute Vilakazi gave blows where they were necessary, while Ula Masondo, loud with encouragement, danced at his elbow, and only took part when the scrap went against them.

When they wanted a woman, an appointment was arranged with Lu, a slightly coloured woman who existed for the arranging of appointments, or with Emma, a good-humoured young native woman, very smart with her tongue, who lived with a white man during the week and supported him by her earnings from black men on Sundays.

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Vilakazi, in return for his great usefulness, expected a willing audience for his long speeches of advice and anecdote, companionship and constant flattery. He and Ula Masondo were always together.

VII

"Wé, Vilakazi," said the younger man, "I have a letter."

"Where is it from, that letter?"

"From my home."

"What does it say?"

"This letter? It says I am the chief of my father's people."

"What!"

"It says I am the king of the white people."

"What!"

"It says you must give me money. It says only ten shillings."

"You are cheating me, my friend."

"It is true. Read my letter."

Vilakazi took the letter and looked at it vaguely, as though it didn't matter whether one read it or not. It was addressed in the difficult and showy calligraphy of one who felt that the ability to write is the highest good of education. On the back was a hieroglyphic drawing of a train.

Slowly Vilakazi read the letter through to himself. Translated, it was as follows :

ULA MASONDO

Greeting,

*my child it is far to talk how can people talk when you are far. There is no rain, the Great-great one is unwilling to send rain, it is the same in every place, we are dead as to our stomachs, there is no food. It is the same at Ovuzane and Ovuzanyana, above and at the rivers, it is the same here. The children are crying, there is no money for food, there is no money to buy food. We are telling that you must send money to buy food for us, even if it is a pound only, or only two pounds. There is tax to pay, we shall hope to get money for tax, but if we get money for tax we shall be crying as to our stomachs. How is it my boy are you well? As for me I am old I am done for I am a husk that is chewed and spat out and I cannot sleep always always I am coughing and your father has fever he is sick and all the people send greetings but they are dead as to their stomachs send if it is a pound only o my child my beloved
greeting from your mother.*

"Where does it come from, this letter?" asked Vilakazi without disclosing its contents.

"I am asking you."

"You see this letter? It is the letter of a fool."

"How is that?"

Ula Masondo stared at the letter, but it meant nothing to him; he couldn't even read his own name. The writing seemed to crawl across the

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page, a laborious puzzle with some significance hidden from himself.

"It is the letter of a fool," Vilakazi repeated.

"It is only greetings."

"Only?"

"Only."

"But I want to hear. Read it."

And Vilakazi read, pretending to spell out the words with great difficulty:

Greeting,

my child it is far to talk how can people talk when you are far. Here it is raining, the Great-great-one has sent rain, it is the same in every place, the people are very glad, we have plenty of grain for food and beer. It is the same at Ovuzane and Ovuzanyana, above and at the rivers, it is the same here. I think you are glad, I see you are glad, my boy. We do not want money now stay and earn money for yourself in the mines. How is it my boy are you well? We are all well my child my beloved and all the people send greetings and there are greetings from your mother.

"It is finished," said Vilakazi.

"Is that all?"

"That is all. Yes, it is only greetings. Can greetings fill a person's stomach? You are the child of a fool."

"O, silence," said Ula Masondo. "Give me the letter."

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“What! You tell me to keep silence! Do you think I am a liar, that you tell me to keep silence, my boy? Here, I will put your letter in my pocket. If you have it you will lose it, and it is safe with me. Some day we shall answer it; I will tell you when.”

Ula Masondo made no answer. It was Sunday afternoon, and he wanted an excitement of the blood, he wanted to drink and shout, to drink and forget.

VIII

ULA MASONDO put a cigarette in his mouth, and Vilakazi, with the gesture of a man who is sure of his power, held out to him a lighted match. A puff, two puffs of blue smoke rose in the windless air, and the two men turned to go.

Ula Masondo was wearing a red-brown suit: the short, close-fitting coat was fastened with a single button, and the trousers were cut with exaggerated fullness, drooping over silk socks and "ox-blood" shoes with high heels. Round his waist was a cord of pink wool with swinging tassels. In the band of his hat was stuck a cigarette-picture of an American film star in her bathing dress. In his ears were gilt ear-rings, he had three brooches in his tie, and a silk shirt. For these adornments he owed several pounds at a store.

Emma was waiting at the usual place. She didn't see the approach of her friends, being engaged in an exchange of repartee with a stranger on the other side of a wall.

Vilakazi pinched her plump arm, which was

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visible through a filmy blouse of lilac silk, cut low back and front to show an open-work camisole. Alternately pouting and using violent rhetoric she made out that she was offended. Ula Masondo took off his hat in the European manner, and there was a strong smell of pomade.

Finally the three went off arm in arm. Emma's heels were as high as those of Ula Masondo, and she walked with an easy abandon, swinging her hips. Round her neck she wore a string of metallised beads like swollen and tarnished pearls, and her ear-rings were flashing in the sun. As she walked, every nerve and muscle came into play, and even her clothes seemed part of her.

The three of them began to laugh. They were remarkably handsome, showing their teeth in a laughter that was not amusement.

IX

BEFORE long Vilakazi induced the younger man to surrender to him all his wages, and answered any protest by telling Ula Masondo that he was a boy and didn't understand the use of money. Ula Masondo wanted to pay off some of his debt at the store, where the white man was beginning to threaten him.

"Let him wait," said Vilakazi, "that little white man."

They began to play a new card game, very intricate, which Vilakazi learnt from an acquaintance, one Stefan, who belonged to a gang of *amaleita* and was always boasting of his exploits. At first they won steadily, and then continued to lose until they were several pounds in debt. Stefan suggested that they should join his friends, who knew a good way of making money, their custom being to station themselves on a lonely road behind the kopjes near the Simeon and Steck, and to lie in wait for solitary cyclists and pedestrians, on whom they would rush out with a volley of sticks and stones. After the assault

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there was robbery, and after the robbery there was flight! The scene of these operations had lately been changed, so there was little danger of arrest.

In a series of conversations Stefan became eloquent on the glories of crime. He related how certain ordeals were necessary for a full initiation into the *amaleita*; what punishments resulted from cowardice, disobedience, or want of secrecy; the special honours due to those who succeeded, single-handed, in robbing a man or raping a woman; and how by committing a murder and evading detection one became qualified for leadership.

He went into the technique of housebreaking, and disclosed the methods of detectives and policemen. Having himself served three terms in gaol he was able to give an extremely graphic account of those secret prison-gangs which are far more cruel than the *amaleita*. They consist of criminals, of all ages and of different tribes and races, who have been mostly transferred from that condition of unnatural celibacy, in which most natives are obliged to work, to one of closer confinement, in which by force they become abandoned, and by habit devoted, to the cultivation of the most horrible vices.

"There was a Chinese," said Stefan, assuming an air of indifference, and speaking in a rich and modulated voice, "who——"

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And, at the history of the Chinaman, upon the heart of Ula Masondo

*There fell, with darting flame and blinding flash,
Lighting the farthest heavens, from on high
A thunderbolt whose agonising crash
Brought fear and shuddering from a cloudless sky.*

Finally, Stefan gave a generalised description of the character of the white race, a description so penetrating and analytical that it would have put to shame many of those pretentious Europeans who mix science with politics and hypocrisy with everything, pretending to be clean, and riding so smugly every morning to their classrooms and laboratories on the top of a tram, a newspaper in the hand, a cigar in the mouth, a pince-nez on the nose, and a worm in the brain.

Such a speech as Stefan's could only be made by a native, because among living people it is only certain natives who understand the arts of conversation and oratory. Where there is intuition, what is the use of psycho-analysis? Where is the white man who can hide his character from a Kaffir?

Ula Masondo began to feel in himself, as the *leita* intended him to feel, slow stirrings of unreasoning resentment, the blending and brooding of deep dark organic untouchable agitations.

As for Vilakazi, he had been previously associated for a short time with other *amaleita*, and his

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brain, lately fuddled with excesses, was only waiting for some direct outside suggestion, like this of Stefan's, to become dominated once more by the idea of plunder.

And so, on a Sunday afternoon, when there was a sound of mission bells in the distance, when under a universe of clouds an angry and expanded sun was touching the horizon's rim, they walked back to the barrack-like compound with their hearts thudding in apprehension of dangers to come.

X

IN spare time Vilakazi and Ula Masondo now had nearly always the company of Stefan, the *leita* man-of-the-world, and also that of Emma, now unattached to her white man, lately convicted of forgery. She took to coming with a friend, called Smile by Europeans, and by his own people Isimayili.

It became the custom of these five to meet in a thicket of steenvrugte bushes on an unfrequented part of the kopje near the mine. Here, unseen by the rest of the world, they had a view of the road below them in the valley, and beyond, among the hills, a prospect of the roofs and dumps of the inner suburbs of Goldenville.

Ula Masondo, youngest and most ingenuous of the five, now lived in a constant excitement, almost willingly giving up his money to buy drink, cigarettes, and the goodwill of his elders, and quite willingly giving up all his attention to their talk. He had never felt so important, and was trying at one time to flatter the giant Vilakazi, to imitate Stefan, and to make an impression on

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Emma, when he was completely distracted by the novelty of Smile.

Smile, short and powerful, never stopped smiling when sober, but when drunk he tried to bite. He had already at different times bitten a horse, a postman, and a missionary, and when, on one occasion, he suddenly fastened his teeth in the arm of Emma, she uttered shriek after shriek as if her soul was leaving her body, and attracted the attention of a native policeman, who blew his whistle so near at hand, so unexpectedly, that Smile, drunk as he was, at once withdrew his incisive caress. The five of them lay flat on their bellies under the bushes, and Emma put her fist in her mouth to stop herself screaming, and nearly choked in consequence with pain, hysterics, and anxiety. They could hear the policeman panting past them on his way up the hill. He stumbled, rummaging among the rocks, and even stopped to beat the tops of the very bushes in which the party lay breathlessly hidden. When it was safe to speak again, Smile had begun to snore in a drunken stupor, and Emma was nursing her bleeding arm. The tears gushed down her face, and in future, as soon as Smile began to drink, she always sat as far away from him as possible, in order to avoid his sadistic attentions.

To his masters Smile appeared simply as a cheerful houseboy. He worked in a respectable

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slum for two small semi-detached houses that shared one kitchen. One of his masters was a solitary old bachelor, a retired sergeant-major with waxed moustaches. The other was a Flemish-South African carpenter who had formerly been in the Congo (O Cosmopolis!), and was so tolerant of Smile that he was ready to treat him almost as one of the family, but his wife, a Danish-Swiss, a lazy woman with a grudge against life, treated her husband like a child, her children like servants, and Smile like a dog. When she gave him his wages she used to say bitterly:

“Here’s your bone, *chien fidèle*. Now go and bury it.”

After which she would clout him with a frying-pan and go back to bed.

On Sunday mornings Smile wore a black coat, and carried in his pocket a Lembu Bible, for he belonged to one of those innumerable native sects that make of Christianity an exciting cult, and quote the Scriptures to their own purposes. In the afternoons he still had the Bible with him, and used also to carry a little cane, which he would wave like a wand, saying of somebody he disliked, in a tone of the utmost contempt:

“Hau! He’s just a heathen!”
or, describing something he liked:

“Truly, this tobacco is Christian!”
There was in his character a considerable strength.

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With little persuasion Emma would have allowed him to chew her into rags. As for Ula Masondo, he even got the permission of Vilakazi to buy a little cane, which he began to wave adroitly in imitation of Smile.

XI

As for Ula Masondo, fascinated by the daring and sinister insouciance of Stefan, obsessed with the Christian dandyism of Smile, and infatuated with the over-ripe charms of Emma, he began to feel more independent than usual of Vilakazi, his first patron and worldly guide. He and Vilakazi were, in fact, heading for a quarrel, when, in reviewing their debts, they found that some must be paid. Money they must have. While financial adversity kept them together, Smile, with a barbaric and original smile in which there was more naïveté than cunning, unexpectedly hinted at a sum that he supposed to be not less than £50.

It appeared that the carpenter and his family had decided to spend the next week-end visiting friends in the country, and Smile had already been told that he would be expected to guard the house.

"As if I was a watch-dog," he explained. But if only his other, ex-military master could be

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temporarily transferred from one house to the other, the money would be theirs.

Vilakazi had lately been thinking more of getting Emma than of getting money, but now he sat up, stretched his arms, and began to take notice.

"What money?" Stefan was asking with an air of tired dignity.

"The money we want!" said Smile, smiling.

"Where is it, this money of yours?"

"You say it's mine? The money of Shortlegs!"

"Who is Shortlegs?"

"My baas!"

"One of your baases, you mean. Where does he hide this money?"

"Under his bed."

"Shades of my fathers! How do you know?"

"I've seen him."

"What did you see?"

"I saw him put money in a box under his bed."

"How much?"

"A lot! Pounds and pounds!"

"Fifty pounds?"

"Do I know?"

"Where were you, then?"

"Looking through the window."

"Is it a big box?"

"No, small. So big."

"Is Shortlegs married?"

"No."

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"Has he got a girl?"

"Do I know? Sometimes he goes out at nights. Do I know where he goes?"

"It is plain what we must do."

"How, then?"

"Early on Sunday afternoon you, Isimayili, will be sitting in your outhouse talking to Emma. Then you will go and make a big fire of papers and sticks on the back stoep of the carpenter's house, and start shouting: 'Fire! Fire!' Emma will run through the kitchen and call to Shortlegs that the house is on fire. He will see that she is a fine girl and will come running with her to see what is the matter——"

"No!" said Emma vigorously, "I don't want that!"

"What do you want, then? It is your work, I say, to bring Shortlegs out of his house."

"I don't want! I don't want!"

"Shut up!" said Stefan. "When Emma and Shortlegs come through the kitchen you, Isimayili, will be shouting and beating out the fire—make as much smoke as you can!—then Vilakazi will run into the kitchen to stop Shortlegs if he tries to come back. Meanwhile, I will run in for the box, and I'll throw it over the wall to you, Masondo, who will catch it on the other side. Then you must run. I shall run just after you, and Vilakazi must run after me. But each of us three must run a different way, and we will meet

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here afterwards. You, Isimayili, will stay in your outhouse with Emma and say you know nothing about anything.”

Ula Masondo was amazed at the ingenuity of this plan.

XII

WHEN the time came, after many preliminary thrills, Ula Masondo heard a crackle of sticks and Smile's voice crying "Fire!" and peeped over the wall just in time to see Emma leaping out of the back door with a jingle of jewellery, followed immediately by the ex-soldier, who had just been to sleep. With a scarlet face and moustaches like hat-pins, this veteran was trying to make haste slowly like an officer and a gentleman, though his beery eyes were goggling with panic. As soon as he had dashed into the kitchen, Vilakazi followed, and Stefan sprang out from behind a water-tank and darted into the house.

There was at once a smell of smoke, and sounds could be heard of excited voices, pattering feet, and water hissing and sizzling.

Back came Stefan, hurdling over the wall, with the box under his arm. He threw it to Ula Masondo, and hearing a scuffle in the kitchen they both made off as fast as they could.

They were already crouching in the bushes,

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and trying to force open the box, when Vilakazi arrived panting and drenched with sweat.

“ How was it, Vilakazi? ”

“ Haul Isimayili put out the fire too quickly, and Shortlegs came back too soon. He isn't Shortlegs, he is Satane. He kicked like the devil and screamed like a pig. Can a person hold a screaming pig with a devil inside? There you are, I threw him under the table, and there you are, I have come! ”

He wiped the sweat from his face with a handkerchief of magenta silk, and then lay down on his back to recover his wind, but Stefan succeeding at that moment in bursting open the lid of the box, he at once sat up again. The money only amounted to £23, and the three spent the rest of the afternoon in the frantic exhilaration of deciding how it was to be divided.

XIII

SEVERAL times, during the week that followed, Ula Masondo felt uneasy at his work. The routine of the mine was becoming intolerable to him. He had a craving to go up and lie in the sun for days on end, doing nothing, saying nothing, nothing, nothing——

“Here, you!” said the shift-boss. “What’s up with you to-day? Get on with it!”

And as Ula Masondo turned his head, his teeth were even whiter than the whites of his eyes.

He suddenly wanted to provoke admiration, so he related to a man who was working on the same shift how a certain white man called Short-legs had been thrown under a table and killed, and when they were going to put him in his coffin they found he had feathers in his brains, and also that he had a tail.

“You are lying,” said the man.

“Can I lie?”

“Can it be true?”

“True! It’s —— true!” said Ula Masondo, in the European manner.

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“ There’s an omen! ”

“ Yes,” said Ula Masondo, “and then they found a doctor who had tried to cut it off when Shortlegs was alive, but every time he cut it off it grew again, and he always heard afterwards that one of his relations had died the same day.”

“ No, no, no! ”

But Ula Masondo felt confused and irritated, sick in his head, so he didn’t answer.

XIV

For the Sunday after the theft a party had been planned for the drinking of *skokiaan*. A quantity of that violent liquor had been prepared and hidden by Stefan in the bushes, and when Sunday came it was well fermented.

The five, reunited once more, settled down in their lair, and prepared to enjoy themselves, but the air was sullen and oppressive with foreboding. A thunderstorm was accumulating in the sky, and the hot blue clouds were collecting a sultry shadow over all the earth.

"I am going," Emma said suddenly.

"What!"

"Why?"

"Not now! We are just going to drink," said Stefan, whose breath was already thick with methylated fumes.

"I am going home to Lembuland."

"When?"

"Soon."

"To Lembuland!" exclaimed Ula Masondo.
"Is that your home?"

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“ Yes, didn't you know that? ”

It turned out that she lived on the side of Aucampstroom remote from the home of Ula Masondo, and within two days' journey on foot from there.

“ My time will soon be up,” said Ula Masondo. “ Wait, and we will travel together.”

“ What! ” said Emma. “ Shall I travel with a boy? ”

“ You will not go home, Ula,” said Vilakazi emphatically, “ when your time is up. You will stay here.”

“ Are you both heathens,” said Smile, with a sarcastic and superior smile, “ that you should wish to return to such a place? It is more Christian here.”

“ There is no money in Lembuland,” said Stefan. “ All the white people there are policemen and missionaries. How can you get money in such a place? ” And he put to his lips the tin of *skokiaan*, and took a long and solemn drink. When the tin was passed round Vilakazi drank the most, because, as he pointed out, he was the largest.

“ It is a drink for Christians,” said Smile, with a thirsty and Christian smile.

Stefan lighted his pipe. There was *dagga* mixed with the tobacco, and he puffed in silence, while there began to circulate dully in his veins the smoky blood of hallucination.

"I tell you, Ula, you will stay," said Vilakazi, leaning forward aggressively. Ula Masondo felt too giddy to answer, so he put in his mouth a red steenvrugte, whose juice tasted like an angel's egg, and spat out the stone with deliberate vehemence.

"And you, too, Emma, you will stay." Emma stared at him with intoxicated eyes, and made no answer.

"I am your baas." Vilakazi laid a possessive hand on her knee.

She made no move.

"I am your baas. You do what I tell you. You belong to Vilakazi."

Emma seemed to gather herself together, like a cat that is going to spring.

"You damn fool, you boy, you bloody nigger," she said, in the European manner.

She stood up, resting her hands on her hips. Below the waist she was in shadow, but Vilakazi, looking up, saw her eyes flashing, and the tawdry jewellery that glittered with the heaving of her bosom. He reached out a great hand and grasped her firmly by the ankle. As quick as thought she kicked him in the face with the other foot, sprang out of the bushes, and began to make her way, angry and graceful, down the hill.

Ula Masondo watched her stepping from rock to rock. Her short skirt was swinging from her hips, and her fat shapely legs curved down with

the smoothest of curves to the smallest of ankles. He felt that so long as Emma stayed in Golden-ville he would be unable to return to Lembuland.

Vilakazi, slowly recovering from a stupor of surprise, got up and lurched after her, calling out clumsy threats and the most original personal remarks. Emma, still without hurrying, turned round, put out her tongue, spat copiously, and proceeded.

Half-way down Vilakazi stumbled and fell. He got up cursing, and went lumbering on. There were several people in the road, and two natives, standing together, were watching his approach. When Emma reached the road they asked her a question, and seeming hardly to wait for an answer, rushed forward and closed on Vilakazi.

Ula Masondo wanted to make a move, but he was afraid of betraying the hiding-place. About to start up, he was restrained by the sight of Smile and Stefan lying face downwards, sodden and unconscious. He kept still.

When he looked down again, Vilakazi was standing between the two men. He held himself erect, his broad chest heaving, very dignified, although his pink shirt was torn, and handcuffs were shining like silver bracelets on his wrists. The two detectives knew that others besides Vilakazi were concerned in last week's theft, and they looked up the hill, and seemed to be staring

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at the steenvrugte bushes. But apparently they thought better than to come and search, and turned to march away with their captive.

Emma, frightened out of her wits, could be seen running far along the road, escaping on her splendid legs.

At this moment there was a roll of thunder. The storm, which had been working up all the afternoon, was about to break.

Ula Masondo, full of lonely dread at the arrest of Vilakazi, began to try and rouse his companions. . . .

XV

IN the mine next day there was a fall of rock. In a narrow stope Ula Masondo found himself cut off from the world. Only by a few feet did he escape immediate destruction.

As it was he found himself confined in a small space without light, or air, or any sound save that of his blood singing thickly in his ears. A lonely terror, increasing every moment, confused his thoughts.

"I am dead," he told himself at last; and to death he prepared to resign himself with the finest human courage.

But after a time he was still breathing; after a time he could hardly breathe, his lungs seemed to be full of earth, he could see nothing, think nothing, feel nothing, know nothing . . .

But he could distinctly hear the voice of his brother, telling him that a cow was lost, and they must go up into the Mountain of the Bushmen to look for it.

"No," said Ula Masondo, "I am afraid of Bushmen."

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"There are no Bushmen there now," said his brother.

"No," said Ula Masondo, "but I am not going."

He could hear the voice of his father ordering him to go.

"Go, boy! The mother of my father was the daughter of a Bushman. The spirit of her father is calling you to find our cow."

"There's an omen," said Ula Masondo, who knew what he felt, but not what it meant.

"We shall see the pictures," said his brother.

"What pictures?"

"The pictures of hunting. The cave-paintings of the Bushmen."

Ula Masondo was afraid. He shuddered with apprehension, and struggled, breath by breath by breath, to breathe an air that was dying.

XVI

THE accident had hardly taken place when a rescue-party was at work. Light shone on sweating backs and driving arms, and the silence staggered with the echoing shocks of assault made on the entombing rock. The shift-boss himself, who had once been rescued from death in a Mexican silver mine, worked like a madman to dig out Ula Masondo, now with his brother, searching in the Mountain of the Bushmen for a cow that was lost.

It was in a krans titanic
Of that berg volcanic
That a dark cave was hidden
Where no foot could have trodden.

There the leopard and snake
And tawny partridge
Prey and are preyed on,
Unstartled by cartridge,
Where never a gun
Echoing shocks
The listening rocks:

I SPEAK OF AFRICA

Where in winter
When the flinty crags
Receive the sun,
Far down, far down,
In the sombre forest,
Under thin ice
The waters splinter
In flakes of fire,
And in shallow pools
The shadow of a hawk
(Tense above the tree-tops)
Quivers like a fish
Among the shadows
Of basking fishes.

When those parapets shimmer
In the morning in summer
The antelope turns
From the heat of the height
To a stream in the ferns,
Bounding unhurried
From sun to shadow.
There the lory wings scarlet
His way at noon; twilight
Flutters with bats;
And at dawn the cliff
Is crowned with eagles.
There the wild cats
Crouch and tremble,
And await the screams

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Of the haunted jackal.
Has no foot trodden
Where the dark cave is hidden
In leaves and branches?

Not for centuries now
Cataracts, avalanches,
Have ruined the steep.
The cavern can keep
Its secrets in stillness,
In darkness, enfolded
In the wild fig trees,
Whose sinews are moulded
To the curves of the stone,
And whose roots are thrust
In a crevice of dust,
Clinging tightly within
To the nerves of the quartz,
And fed on the secret
And bitter, untasted
Dews of the desert;
While their leaves, unshaken
By wandering airs,
Are stirred by lizards,
A refuge for spiders,
An arbour for birds,
That gouge the soft fruit,
And swoop into space
With thin stabs of music
In a hollow of silence.

I SPEAK OF AFRICA

Has no foot trodden
Where the dark cave is hidden ?

On windless nights
When it is deserted
By the last baboon
The shafted radiance
Of the risen moon
Illumines like a lamp
The vaulted roof,
Where the moss is damp
And beaded with black
Dews bled from the rock;
Illumines like the ray
White and deific
Of an enormous Eye
This tongueless place
With light terrific.

In the flare and the hush
Appear the painted
Walls that were frescoed
When the floor was last trodden
Of this cavern hidden.

Now the air is tainted
With a sudden whiff
Of distant carrion,
And the silence shrills
With the urgent quills
Of vultures soaring
From the soaring cliff.

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But silence returns
And moonlight floats,
And the Eye returns
To men before men
In time before time,
Whose love and hunting
Are calcined in a blaze
Of light like chalk.
Life was their god,
And their god is transfigured.

Far down, far down,
Where are the savage
Cities of the future?

Where is steel? Here is stone.
What are tombs? Here's a bone.
What is science? Declare,
Does it beat still, your heart?
What is life? Here is art.
What are you? Here is splendour.
O traffic and travel and trade,
Here rolls the thunder,
Ula Masondo,
Of hoofs and of hearts and of honour!

When these colours fade
And lichens hang in their places,
When these forms lose their graces,
When these lines are not lines,

I SPEAK OF AFRICA

Blighted and bitten
By the secret acid
Of rhythmic ages,
O up then and out
And over the placid
And fiery sky of midday
Will take their way
These gymnosoph hunters
With their slow-stepping women
Stained with rose ochre
Proudly proceeding
In prancing procession
With the eland and the gnu,
While each coloured
Courser canters
With the zebra and emu,
While the pterodactyl
Waves them on like a banner,
Hunters and hunted
Flying forlorn,
Faint, faded and few,
To find fervour anew
Far ahead, far along
In the tranced and timeless blue.

What are you doing,
Ula Masondo?
Do you follow the Bushmen?
Do you travel to the valley
This side of the city?

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Travelling to the valley, he found it was full of waving fields, green woods, and flowering orchards. Beyond it there were hills, and beyond the hills there was a city, deserted by its inhabitants, and beyond the city was the sky, where the sun was a flaming and a throbbing embryo.

The plantations of trees in the valley were threaded with the smoke of occasional trains, with telegraph wires, and with random voices. And the houses of men of property were concealed in the trees, and even among the trees could be seen occasionally the movements of people of fashion, messengers on bicycles, or the fauns and fauna escaped from the cave.

In the orchards the women of the Bushmen were helping themselves to fruit, to naartjes and perskies; to the pamplemoes and the spanspek; to persimmons, pawpaws, and pomegranates.

There were also gardens of zinnias and marigolds, with ferns and palms and plaster fountains; the air-plant, the egg-plant, and the ice-plant; and lilies and orchids; the blood-flower, the eye-flower, and moon-flowers of the dead-white datura, supernatural flowers that Ula Masondo dare not touch, for they were crying to him with maddening voices, and wanted to possess his nerves.

And among the trees and gardens were sun-wonderful spaces where humming motor-cars, shining and powerful, travelled over the grass with the men of property. Sometimes these

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men could be seen on stoeps in the shade sipping tea and beer and blood and water; or sprawling stoutly in unbuttoned ease at gluttonous picnics; smoking pipes of leisure but not pipes of peace, while the days and hours turned over like tremendous wheels, unhurried and colossal and compelling, dripping with the opulent waters of time, turning the hidden machinery of the Cosmos, and the revolving words of God.

And at both ends of the valley rose dry and sandy hills to heights of granite and basalt, steep and rocky and veined with unsuspected ores; hills where the red wind carried the sound of itself and its heat from desolate hill-top to hill-top, day and night, year after year after year, and carried the stink and bleat of shaggy goats mouthing for herblets in the broken kranses, goats with coarse hair matted with burrs and their eyes bulging with starvation.

The red wind carried and lost the groans of pregnant women mounting and marching along the long and devastated pathways of parching precipices; with earthen urns of water on their heads; water drawn cold, but bitter and tepid before the bearers could get to the summit, their feet burning on the trodden grit and bruised with purple pebbles.

Horrent with thorns, the aloe, the snake-apple, the poison cactus, and the century plant clutch the dry earth with tortured roots, withering and

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sprouting and multiplying in the burning waste, while on cool and distant beaches the sea-wind unwinds a smoking iris from the spray, and somewhere gilded roofs vibrate and vanish in a soothing or a harrowing triumph of complaining pipes and prattling strings.

Here, in gullies and ravines, on arid flats, in scorched and sullen places, on chill and barren ridges, and in damp and noisome lairs, are human homes, coops of sticks that sag with dry-rot and choke with fungus, hatching vermin. Here the valley-dwellers never come, fearing infection of some hideous plague, ulcered out of such filth. They stay safe in their green retreats and suck stout through their moustaches, and marvel how these beasts can exist like *dassies* in their crannies, these human vermin, starved and swinking, scratching with hoes the scarlet sand, and sowing seeds that sprout as willingly as stones.

Let the valley-dwellers condemn their drudges to a life of deaths, but the soul screams out, and every sinew cracks.

Another whisky-and-soda? Thanks, I don't mind if I do.

Out of the strong comes forth sweetness, out of injury comes forth power, and out of torture comes forth mercy.

Out of the sodden fires of oppression rises the clear and unlaborious voice of the phoenix of freedom.

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And it sings the songs of the oppressed, who fear not thunder and lightning, for whom the sun has no warmth, the rain not tears enough of pity, for whom the moon is a drug, a promise, an echo, an Eye, and a voice.

The phoenix flies, and weeping fades, and only the wind is red, a tornado in the Kalahari of sleep, a stormburst in the Stormberg of patience!

Patience! patience! most dangerous of qualities, amplifier of the unknowable, tube of the trumpeting of a God tattooed with ten thousand moons!

A patient boy argues in the temple, and its foundations crumble.

A patient virgin may have to choose between taking the devil to bed and dying a maid.

A long-suffering labourer downs tools, and climbs in at a wench's window.

Patient women breed formidable sons, and patient men breed formidable thoughts.

The sun is an egg, and an egg is patient; the moon is an eye, and an eye is patient.

But a patient God expects every man to be a prophet, and every prophet to be a god.

Woe to them who awake too early, when all others are still asleep!

Woe to them who sleep, when one is awake!

Woe to the dreamer, but disaster to the enemies of his dreams!

A voice, and it shall be inherited, and the prodigal father shall never return!

"The edict is writing in African blood," announced the prophet, and the breath went out of his body.

"Europe cannot satisfy us," announced the prophetess, and the breath went out of her body.

The toad, the rat, and the scorpion howled with laughter, until they were driven to dance with death.

The pig and the spider grew fat, grew fat, until they were stabbed with the snake-tooth of a fountain-pen, from which outflowed for ever as from a black storm-cloud the jetting hot poison of ink, outshooting and venomous, and so they died.

And at their funeral was the frightful Cloacina, the squinting, the whey-blooded, who hunted for a husband till her elbows came through her skin, and she was left gorgoning gauntly in the Garden of Nunquam.

Death is sweet, fierce, and transitory; a copulation of butterflies in the Tranquil Islands. The face is disfigured, the features are distorted, the body is defiled, the nerves are undone, but the teeth are clenched in a smile, for they have bitten the truth, and though they be as white as sugar they are sharper than sin.

A smile, a smile!

Isimayili is smiling, Stefan is asleep, Vilakazi is bound, Emma is mine.

"Emma!"

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“ Here, look here! ” exclaimed the shift-boss, flashing a light. “ Here he is! Hark at this! This one’s still shouting! I hope he’s not out of his mind. All right, all right, boy, stop shouting! ”

But Ula Masondo had swooned at the inrush of air, and heard nothing. He was removed to the hospital.

XVII

TEN days later he walked out of the hospital with his hat cocked over one eye, and the other blinking in the sun. Although he moved with something of the natural style of his race, and although he was trying now to walk jauntily in the manner he most admired, an injury still obliged him to limp: it had been caused by an almost crushing weight that had lain on his leg while he was walled up in the mine.

The mine doctor had, as usual, entered particulars of his patient in the records: *Name, Date admitted, Symptoms, Treatment, Recovery*. He always enjoyed filling in the various details. He was still a young man, but he liked to be considered methodical. When he came to the section *Remarks* he paused a moment, the fountain-pen gleaming between his bloodless, soap-bleached fingers. Then he bit his lip with vexation, for he had almost forgotten his position so far as to write: *This boy's a bit queer*.

He was astonished at himself. He laid down his pen for a few seconds, and looked out of the

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window, from which he could see a cloud of red dust being blown along the Great Reef Road, obscuring and revealing the traffic like a dry and swirling fog.

The doctor left blank the space called *Remarks*, and turned over the page. In the evening he said to his wife:

“Such a strange thing happened this morning. We discharged a boy who wasn't quite right in the head. Partly shock, perhaps, and he was half suffocated. Fished out of that fall of rock Monday week. Lucky for him. Near thing. But he'll get over it. O, but what do you think? I actually found myself on the point of writing down in the records, under *Remarks*: *This boy's a bit queer!*”

“Well,” said she, “I suppose the world wouldn't have come to an end if you had, so why worry? Shall we have coffee here or on the verandah?”



Discharged from the hospital, Ula Masondo, his time up on the mine, received his wages, paid his debts, and went straight to Emma. She was in the family way, and didn't know for certain who was the father of her child, but felt inclined to give birth to it at home; and having received letters from her relations urging her return, she was on the point of leaving for Lembuland. When Ula Masondo proposed to go with her

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she assented with an ungracious fondness that he found at once attractive and exasperating.

So after a few days they found themselves on the platform at Goldenville, waiting for the train called the Kaffir Mail.

Ula Masondo was wearing as many of his best clothes as he could. The rest were contained in a suitcase of plum-coloured cardboard embossed to look like leather, which he carried in a hand resplendent with cheap rings. He was perched on high-heeled shoes which made him look as if he was standing on tiptoe. He wore voluminous tweed trousers fastened at the ankle with a buckle, and a wide scarf of purple silk under his coat.

Emma wore salmon-coloured silk stockings which cunningly suggested, at a close inspection, the blackness of her legs. Her underwear was visible through a thin silk dress, and its white mesh could be seen back and front against the blackness of her skin. She had made it herself with a crochet hook, as she had the two pillow-cases in her hand. These were stuffed with all her possessions, and both of them were worked with patterns of words in elaborate lace. The motto of one was *God is Love*; the other, *Forget-me-not*.

From her mouth dangled the ends of a pair of white silk shoe-laces, which she presently bent down to insert in her shoes.

. Her movement provoked a salvo of interested comment from a group of her returning fellow-countrymen, who were standing in the background; they were clad in blankets; tall and statuesque-like figures in a fresco.

Still with one shoelace in her mouth, fat and breathless she watched her interlocutors between her legs, and although her face was upside down they could see her handsome eyes glinting with the sparks of incipient repartee.

As soon as she stood up she flung round and struck a martial attitude. The speakers had the pleasure of bathing in a torrential fountain of facetious abuse that proceeded from her distorted mask. When the fountain had played, it was succeeded by a captivating pout which at once gave way in the most disarming and feminine of smiles. But receiving, with a chorus of pleasant-ries, no less than three simultaneous proposals of free love, Emma fixed her face in a sneer. When she sneered there was a contraction of the muscles in the small of her back.

At this moment the train came in.

"Come along, my boy," said Emma, and, with the complicated gait of a limping, laughing, puzzle-headed prodigal emotional aboriginal, amorous Bantu Christian dandy, Ula Masondo, on high unsteady heels, followed her into the train.

XVIII

News travels quickly in Lembuland, and although Ula Masondo had sent no word to his relations they all knew of his return. His mother took on herself the task of meeting him, and on the day of his arrival set off for Aucampstroom before there was light in the sky. She was accompanied by a younger woman, a daughter-in-law with a baby on her back.

At first the long grass was wet with dew, but it rapidly dried as the sun rose in a cloudless sky. The old woman soon began to feel the heat. She was walking with a staff, and her steps became laboured. The travellers rested for some time near a stream, in the cool shade of some *umhlambamasi* trees, whose glossy leaves made a green and over-arching canopy. It was noon before they arrived at Aucampstroom.

The train was due and the station was crowded. The two women withdrew a little way, and sat down on the ground in the sun. The old woman took snuff. Her wrinkled face was eager with the rare exaltation of the aged. As for the

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countenance of the younger woman, it was calm with the rich calmness of early maturity. The child at her back was asleep. She sat like an image, heavy-lidded and smiling in stone, with worshippers a thousand years dust in the desert, but warm and brown and coming to life with a flow of reflorescent energy, warm and coming to life like a goddess that wakes on a carved and sunlit crag above the snow in Turkestan.

*

A screaming whistle grew louder, the rushing train was black, and its opening side broke into many moving forms of noisy and emerging humanity.

The mother of Ula Masondo saw him directly he got out of the train, and ran towards him through the crowd, clapping her hands excitedly against her scrawny thighs. She pushed her head forward and peered up into his face.

He looked down at her, recognised her, looked away without making any sign, and turned to Emma, flashy with jewellery.

"Let's go, let's go!" he said impatiently. The mother laid her hands on his arm.

"My boy, you have come back," she said, nodding her head.

Ula Masondo turned on her.

"Who are you? What do you want?"

"What?" said the old woman slowly. "Are you coming, my boy?"

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She clutched at his coat, but he shook himself free.

"Who are you? Leave me alone," he said, "you bloody heathen."

His mother saw him walk away with Emma, then she went back, quite stupefied, to her daughter-in-law, whose face was almost expressionless.



Ula Masondo and Emma went to an eating-house and bought food, which they sat down to eat on a crowded verandah. Afterwards, somebody played a desperate syncopated twangling tune on an autoharp, and Ula Masondo began to dance on his high heels, limply, slackly, clapping solemnly-suddenly the upturned soles of his shoes, one-two, with the palms of his hands. His ear-rings were swinging and the streamers of pink wool at his wrist were describing flying curves in the air. There was a rash on one side of his face: it came into view as he turned in the dance.

When he had finished, he lighted a cigarette, and started off with Emma in the direction of her home.



The leaves of the station trees were applied in relief against a blank bright sky, and on the deserted platform the young woman sat impassively watching the mother of Ula Masondo

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beating the ground with her hands, nodding and nodding her withered head, her rheumy eyes screwed up in her dusty skin; refusing and refusing a consolation that was not offered; and crying again and again in a high small voice:

"Mayé, mayé, mayé, mayé."

But after a time she was silent, like a bird ensnared, that gives up its crying and fluttering and lies quite still, knowing it cannot escape; its eyes set in a glassy stare and its stillness the still-palpating annihilation of terror.

XIX

THE storekeeper, who had once sold Ula Masondo a blanket, was sitting at supper.

“You know those Masondos?” he said to his wife.

“Yes.”

“A shocking thing has happened. That boy Ula—used to be such a decent boy—came back from the mines about a week ago. Well, the old woman went down to meet him, and he refused to recognise her——”

“What!”

“Yes, refused to recognise her, his own mother, and told her that she was only a heathen. They say she came home in a terrible state, and they all thought she’d gone out of her mind. Two of the sons at once went off to see this Ula (the father refused to go) and found him at a kraal right on the other side of Aucampstroom, with some girl that he picked up in Goldenville. He told his brothers that he wasn’t coming home, and they couldn’t persuade him, they couldn’t do anything. Meanwhile the old woman

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surprised everybody by becoming unaccountably cheerful. They say she was laughing at everything for two or three days. Yes, and the day before yesterday, during a heavy downpour of rain that deadened all sounds, she hanged herself in an empty hut."

"O, *Fred!* Hanged herself?"

"*Hanged* herself! Mind you, it's only the second time I've ever heard of a native committing suicide. By Jove, there's an example for you, of a boy going away quite all right, and coming back with all this Christian dandy business that I can't stand at any price. Give me the raw nigger any day, is what I have always maintained."

"O, go on, Fred, you're the one that's always talking about increasing their wants, and getting the trade built up for little Freddie——"

"Yes, that's all very well, but if that Ula Masondo ever comes here again, won't I give him a piece of my mind!"

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I

A CAR stood outside one of the large white houses in the residential quarter of Dunnsport. It belonged to the doctor, who was making his third visit in twelve hours.

"Calm yourself," he said irritably to the frantic husband of the young woman. "I insist on your behaving calmly. Think of your wife."

"Think of her! I can think of nothing else!"

"She won't recover from the shock unless you control yourself. Listen."

He could hear his wife's voice. She was lying in the next room in a state of delirium.

"I want Charlie!" she was moaning in an unnatural voice.

The door opened, and a nurse came out. Her white clothes were slightly starched, and rustled as she moved. She beckoned to the doctor and they whispered together. The glare of the sun outside was reflected on the white walls of the room. The young man felt wounded by so

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much whiteness, the white suit of the doctor, the white veil of the nurse, the thought of his wife's white face on the pillow. In extreme terror he heard again the unnatural sound of her voice, and covered his face with his hands.

"Come now," said the doctor, "she will recover from the shock."

II

IN the dark bedroom the raving young woman, Vera Corneliussen, opened her eyes. She saw a view of the town as if she had been standing on the flat roof of the house. It is a winter's afternoon, she can see the pale cubes and masses of square, modern buildings, the colour of sand and stone, under the faint blue of the sunny sky. Far away down there, their flat walls peppered with windows, they seem of archaic simplicity, awaiting or surviving events, unreal yet too real, like the buildings in a dream. On several pinnacles tiny flags can be seen flying at half-mast, for somebody is dead. On this fine, still, winter afternoon these are the buildings of Egypt, or the ruined cities of Asia.

It is night. She is two years old. They are staying at a farm in the summer. Her sister is dead, and she can hear her mother and her father weeping. The night air is full of the noise of frogs. There is a full moon. Her bath stands under the window and the surface of the water

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wavers in the moonlight. She is frightened and begins to cry. Suddenly the moonlight disappears, as if a curtain had been drawn. It is the black nursemaid who has come to see what is the matter. Her hands are hot, her voice is soft, she has a strange, friendly smell.

When the child sits at meals a native man moves noiselessly behind her chair. He wears loose white clothes that smell of soap and flap coolly against his warm, dark skin. When she looks up at his face she can see a rose-brown flush that suffuses his cheeks. The palms of his hands are pink.

At Dunnsport, sitting on the beach, she sees a woman pouring cold tea out of a dark-green bottle.

"O, he's devoted to Trixie and Stanley," she is saying. "Just look at him now."

A native man is caressing, with his sensual lips, the feet of her child. He smiles, showing his primitive white teeth.

"I was glad I got rid of that other boy I had. You remember that boy Isaac I had, eh? He was only fourteen, and do you know before he'd been with the kiddies a week they began to come out with the most shocking language. You wouldn't believe the expressions they came out with. I tell you, Mrs. Dawcock, really, my ears was burning. And the habits Trixie and Stanley learnt from that Isaac! I haven't got them out

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of them yet. Precocious little monkey he was, that Isaac of mine."

There is a smell of straw. When she was twelve years old Vera Corneliussen was found in the loft with a native boy four years older than herself, and he was nearly flogged to death. Yes, of course, she is on the farm again. Smiling Morn is the name of the farm, but she remembers best the afternoons, the Sunday afternoons in winter. The long grass is dry and yellow, there is a low mud-house at the top of the slope above the river, whose bed is almost dry, with flat rocks under the silver-poplar trees which are only just losing their leaves, and in whose shade there is a damp, pungent smell. Somewhere the notes of a concertina are repeating over and over again a monotonous tune which makes her feel her heart could break, her heart could break in sobs, could break out sobbing, sobbing, sobbing.

She is at school. There is a scandal. One of the girls was caught, late at night, returning from the native quarters in her nightgown. Afterwards, she was supposed to have had a child. It was only by chance that Vera hadn't been with her; the girl had suggested that they should go together.

And then, on the coast, she sees the train tunnelling through the feverish brilliance and glossy profusion of the foliage, and afterwards people walking along the line. All the trees are

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quivering in a hot steam of mist, all listening, all the nerves of trees listening to the funeral tom-toms of the Indians at the compound, all day, all night, quite slow, dead and dull, at intervals, like hammers thudding, tom-toms in the head, thud, tom-toms in the heart, thud. A young man of the Indians was beautiful. They called him the Jewel of Asia.

Tin bungalows in the hot, dry, dirty, loose sand full of bones, tins, papers, sticks, and the droppings of animals. Some towels are hung out to dry on the verandah. Inside, the furniture is yellowish, the food tastes like metal, the conversation is like stale beer. A pimply clerk gets out of the train. He lives next door. His wife, like a bedraggled cockatoo, runs down to meet him.

A tired actress, who travels with a concert party, is staggering back through the sand after bathing. She is still wearing her bathing-dress (to which some sand is sticking as if it had been thrown there); it fits tightly to her skin, and is wrinkled on her massive legs.

Vera Corneliussen feels herself travelling along the coast. As she goes she sees cape after cape, lagoon after lagoon, and the long horizontal seas combing in wave after wave. Inland, the slender curving bamboos, always waving in the air with gentle unvarying gestures, are like fishing-rods that have waited so long for a catch that they

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have long since broken into leaf, and yet they continue in every wind to wave with a forlorn, despairing hope. And there are groves of wild bananas everywhere, which on still days are green, but which on windy days are blown back so that they show their silvery undersides, like dead fish floating in a whirlpool, floating belly upwards in mockery of the lashed and straining bamboos.

Inland, there is a venerable old Arab store-keeper whose body is like biscuit-coloured marble. He has a white beard, and wears a coat of purple silk and a skull-cap embroidered with threads of silver tinsel. His son, they say, is on a pilgrimage to Mecca; he has a Zulu concubine; he has few customers; he lies on a couch and spits where he pleases.

After the banana plantation and the mango orchard there is a small tin house, painted pale blue, from which proceeds domestic smoke with an aromatic smell. It is raining softly, a steam of smoke is everywhere, and she can hear a baby crying. Under the trees with large leaves white and speckled fowls stand huddled together while drops of rain run down their tail-feathers.

Then there is a ploughed field with a path across it, and then a cemetery. In the warm tropical rain stands a group of natives round a shiny wet coffin, and an old German missionary in black is holding up with one hand a large black umbrella with a thick, knobby handle,

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while the other supports a hymn-book. There is a nasal sound of singing. A black woman, under a wet white lace parasol, is wearing a pink dress which the rain has already spoiled: it runs with two colours, dark pink and light pink, in streaks.

Vera Corneliussen hears a motor-car, whirring with passionate and ecstatic compression like the respiration of some tremendous bird.

"It's a car! Mind you don't get run over!"

A cold sweat runs down her forehead, and the sun is sinking behind the hill. She can hear again the voice of the woman on the beach at Dunnsport:

"We took some bananas in a paper bag, but they weren't ripe, and a bottle of cold tea. There was a dead fly in it, and she had a shooting pain in her hip. It was very hot that day, and Steve's friend came, him that's been living with us, though time and again I've said to mother: 'Let him go out and work, Steve has to go out and work,' but he just stays on. Well, I said to Steve's friend: 'Look here, my lad, don't think I'm going to let you get funny with me. O yes, I give him something to think about. And all the leaves was turning brown. Yes, trying to get funny, he was.'"

III

IN Dunnsport Vera Corneliussen used sometimes to go and stay with her aunt Judith, a rich old maid, who lived in a house of which all the windows were sealed, and devoted herself to promoting the interests of the Fresh Air Fund. The house had a prickly garden, spiny with pointing palms as poisonous as fishbones, and in house and garden there was a deafening and hostile silence, and that air of secure and perpetual calm in which storms are born, in which they thunder and breed and die.

When Vera went out of Dunnsport it was nearly always to stay at New Havana, the home of her aunt Judith's brother, and once the centre of the social life of the commercial aristocracy of the coast. But even when she first went there those times had changed. The old white house was rotting in the bush. The road that once led to the old mill, through fields of coffee and arrow-root, was now a swamp, the building itself a roofless ruin. The vacant windows on the land side are full of branches tied and knotted to the

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walls and to each other by lianas thicker than ropes; the vacant windows on the shore side, like the lids of sightless eyes, are lighted by an upthrown glare from the dazzling white sand of the shore. From the beach, with savage constancy, comes the sound of the sea-waves pounding and sliding on an expanse of sand. In the tree-tops of the bush clatters the derisive laughter of monkey-birds. So perished the first glory of the Wesleyan conquistadors.

Now their fortunes were in plantations of sugarcane that cover all the inland hills, which look in the distance like grassy downs. Yet near at hand the cane is tall and dry and sharp, deadly dry to every sense, dry green, dry leaves, papery metal rustling or grating, leaf against leaf, all those jointed stems full of hot, sweet sap.

In the canefields there are long, straight, earthy roads for firebreaks, with the cane higher than her head on both sides extending out of sight with stiff and rustling monotony. At her feet a snake lies warming itself in the sun. There, in the distance, is an avenue of gum trees of a torrid greyness. Isolated *umdoni* trees, some dead and some leafy, are sticking up out of the cane: and occasional euphorbias, dark and fleshy and knotted and rigid, like many arms petrified in a moment of unanimous supplication to an unknown god.

At the new mill, as vast as a cathedral, the cane goes up and up in an endless everlasting elevator.

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She can hear the crunching sound of greedy and relentless jaws, and out runs the sap in astonishing quantities, as bright as vitriol and with the profusion of water. At the mill there are men running up and down steel staircases, men with red faces, men with brown bodies running along galleries, black men watching steaming vats with fumes of sulphur hovering over their surfaces, men pushing trucks, men feeding furnaces, men obeying machinery, machines obeying men, the inhabitants of a vast and noisy universe of sweat.

IV

It was at New Havana House that she first met George Corneliussen; it was there that she got engaged to him, it was there that they spent their honeymoon. This later house, which already has an air of slightly faded prosperity, is only thirty years old, and yet is completely hidden by the garden planted after it was built. It is at once forbidding and inviting, in a dark and ordered wilderness of firs and palms and eucalyptuses and flowering shrubs, and groves and groves of orange trees weighed down by masses of ripening fruit, that falls and rots with a rich and morbid odour in the damp shade, under firmaments and firmaments of hanging oranges. The house seems to be in a cave of permanent shadow, the sun is shining in some other world.

There is a dance. People are coming out from Dunnsport. It is dusk. She can see quiet and luxurious motor-cars following one another up the approach, with sombre regularity, like deadly thoughts succeeding one another in an unconscious brain. In the middle of the dance she is sitting

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out with George. He is smoking a cigarette. The trees are swaying in a wash of moonlight. A native servant comes to them with a tray and glasses.

"Here you!" It is the voice of George. "What's your name? What? Charlie, you say?"

She can see the moonlight on his teeth and on the whites of his eyes.

She is going with George to the mill. It is just before they are married. The clerk in the office is rather sallow. He goes out of the room. She asks George:

"Is he white or coloured?"

"Hush, he's what they call a Coast European."

Just at that minute the man comes in again: he must have heard what they were saying.

"After all," she says afterwards to George, "I suppose it isn't a sin to be coloured."

"But it's a sin to look coloured," he says in his pleasant voice. He is so kind and amiable, almost a boy, and he looks so delightful on a pony, his shirt open at the neck. He rides so well, and plays the gramophone so nicely.

"Quite enough people are touched with the tar-brush," he says; "we don't want any more. Just think, for instance, there's another of these Coast Europeans, also working in the mill, who can either go and have a drink in the European bar or in the Indian bar as he pleases. He's white enough for one, and dark enough for the other."

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“Dark enough, dark enough,” she repeats the words to herself.

It is the morning after her wedding-day. She is the first to wake. She is surprised to see that George's hair, always so smooth, so neatly parted, is all ruffled on the pillow. George, with his hair ruffled! It makes her laugh, but although the whole bed shakes with her laughing George does not wake up. She can hear the siren at the mill. It is seven o'clock.

After six months they are again staying at New Havana. She is always awake when the siren sounds at the mill. She is always the first down to breakfast. The servant Charlie waits on her at the table. He is taller and broader than George, and more graceful in his movements. His voice is deeper and more harmonious, his temper is better, he evidently has more character. Besides, he is magnetic. One morning she touches his hand as if by accident. He has an electric skin.

V

SHE has been married two years. There is no child. The man Charlie has left New Havana and is working for her in Dunnsport. George is away. She has quarrelled with him for being irreproachable. She is satisfied that it is a good reason for a quarrel. George has gone away for the week-end to play golf. He tried to pretend that he was going to a woman, but he knew that she knew his pretence. He hadn't the energy to look for one.

"You are content to leave me alone in the house?" she had asked him in the hall, as a servant was carrying his bag of golf-clubs out to the car.

"You aren't obliged to stay here. You can go to a hotel."

At night, when she was in her bedroom, she rang the bell. There was only one servant in the house that night. She had arranged it. Charlie is standing in the doorway.

It is seven o'clock; she can hear a siren. It is afternoon, the light of the sun is pale. It is before dawn; there is lightning in the sky and frost on the ground.

VI

GEORGE CORNELIUSSEN takes his hands away from his eyes. It is midday. There is a cry in the bedroom. He opens the door. Vera has twisted her body out of the bed. Her head is hanging downwards, so that her earrings are hanging upside down. The nurse runs forward, the husband runs forward, but the woman is dead.

Frightful Outrage in Town, Society Woman Victim, Dies of Shock, said the posters the next morning.

"What a shocking case," people said, opening their newspapers on trams, trains, and breakfast tables.

"Yes, these black brutes are all alike."

"Have they caught him?"

"He'll be hung."

"He ought to be lynched."

"I remember once——"

"I must really buy you a revolver." Everywhere the same remarks were to be heard, but in an hour the outrage would be forgotten, and the wind would blow one of the posters into the gutter, where a Eurafican peanut-seller, by shifting his feet, would, without knowing, partly obliterate the printed words.

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SATURDAY

WHEN people heard that Lena was going to live on her sister's farm they said:

"Now you'll see sparks! Can't you see them living together, these two, I don't think! I can see old Piet having a nice quiet time playing peacemaker." Within a week of her arrival Lena had said to Maud:

"You are an old cow. Look at the way you just let Piet have his own way in everything. You're just spoiling him. Why don't you put your foot down? Do you like being treated as if you were a cow? Heavens, if I wanted to be a cow I'd just stick a pair of horns on my head and moo." The truth, as usual, was unpalatable, and the two sisters had a scene.

Piet quickly developed a sly, sneaking regard for Lena, in whom he saw an independence and a vivacity that he missed in his wife, but he was afraid to reckon with his own feelings, and his thwarted lustfulness began to express itself in an

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annoying habit of teasing. He seemed, in his conversations with Lena, to amble and flap all round his feelings, lightly-awkwardly like a secretary-bird, afraid to attack and only making occasional jabs with its beak.

Sometimes she used to look at him pertly without saying anything, and he became more and more tormented by her mocking smile and straying hair, by the agility of her body, and by her liveliness.

"I saw Jenson this morning," he said one Saturday at lunch. "He says they're coming over to-morrow. He's bringing his brother too."

"His brother?" said Lena. "What's he like?"

"A good match for you."

"What, Jenson's brother!"

"Why not? He's a nice young chap, and we should have half the district in the family then."

"Ach, Piet, you think of nothing but land and making matches."

"I want to see you settled down."

"Do you, indeed?"

"But you don't seem to know much about men." He grinned, showing his teeth stained with pipe-smoke.

"I shan't get you to teach me," said Lena.

Her face was flushed.

"You may be soft about old men, but if you'll take my advice——"

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"I should be sorry to take your advice about anything!"

"You may be glad of it some day, my chicken. As I was saying, if you'll take my advice you won't be nasty to the young men, or you'll get left. You'll be an old maid yet."

"Do stop teasing her, Piet," said Maud.

"You don't call that teasing!" said Lena.

"Well, well, this won't buy the baby a new frock," said Piet, pushing his chair back from the table. "I must get on with the job."

Lena was so irritated by the shape of his hands that she got up and left the table

"D'you know what's wrong with her?" said Piet, watching her go. "She hasn't got enough work to do, that's what's wrong with her. Make her do more in the house."

He picked up his hat discoloured with sweat, and went out of the house into the brilliant sunshine.



At supper-time the lamp smoked, and the tea had been made with water that wasn't boiling. Piet smelt of tar and his hands were stained. He talked until his monologue became a soliloquy about the work on the farm.

"You girls are very quiet to-night," he said bigamously.

Lena looked at him brightly without answering. But Maud was in tumult. She couldn't, as it

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were, lay hands on a single one of her emotions. They tormented her like internal pains that you want to catch hold of with your fingers but can't touch, because they can only be got at with medicines.

"I'm tired, dear," she said, without even the enthusiasm of fatigue.

"What, has baby been giving you trouble? Or that girl in the kitchen? Tell me if that Annie gives you trouble again; I'll settle her, I'll give her something to remember me by."

"O she's all right now," said Maud, "since she got that hiding. It isn't that."

"What isn't that?"

"I'm just tired, that's all."

But she felt ill with choked resentment.

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SUNDAY

ALTHOUGH they used to come quite often, Maud was so taken this time by the idea of the Jensons' coming that she didn't know what to do. She dressed herself up, and hurried in and out at different doors. She also kept nagging at Lena, who had put a red Barberton-daisy in her hair and was smiling with her little mobile mouth. As the car came up to the door Maud exclaimed:

"Quick, take that thing out of your hair!"

"Why?"

"Take it out!"

"It's too late."

Maud was too much aware of the contrast between herself and Lena as she watched Mrs. Jenson getting out of the car.

Mrs. Jenson was one of those women who always feel naked if they are not wearing an apron. Now she was blinking in the sunlight, and standing awkwardly in her black shoes owing to the fact that her peculiar gait had worn down and

rounded off the outside edges of her heels. As she turned, her only ornament came into view, a comb that held up, just under her hat, some of her back hair, the rest of which curled over on her neck with the depressing appearance of dust that has drifted into some neglected corner no brush can reach. She turned to walk up the steps with Maud, and folded her parasol, and shadow fell like a shutter down her back and Maud's as they entered the verandah.

Simply by following after with the two men, Lena was beginning to lay waste a whole convention: because when South Africans visit each other in the country the sexes are nearly always segregated—a woman who talks to men is immoral, a man who talks to women is a 'ladies' man.' Lena was walking up with Jenson's brother, Piet and Jenson behind them.

"The animals went in two by two," she said, winking at Jenson over her shoulder. She liked Jenson, who admired her with the greatest caution on account of his wife. He returned her wink. Piet's face in the white sunlight looked lined and covetous, his eyes strenuously clear, as though they were searching an expanse of open veld, in the hope of coming soon upon further and further vistas. So many morgen, so many joys.

Jenson's brother's name was Jock, and his laughing mouth was full of chewing-gum. He

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had a permanent dazzle in his face, as if he never ceased being surprised at his own good health and good temper.

They all sat down to tea in the deep shade of the verandah, on the parapet of which there were elaborate green-and-white tins containing ferns and plants with red and variegated leaves. They sat round the table, which was covered by a cloth made entirely of lace.

Maud, who had always accepted without a struggle all the colonial customs and repressions, under whose influence she had been brought up, began pouring out the tea with puzzled concentration and slow dexterity, conscious of little but the painful effort of impressing the party with her gentility. Jenson was handing plates of little cakes of many shapes and sizes. Some had scalloped edges, others were covered with pink icing, which had seemed to Maud a suitable colour for the occasion: it was as though by having his tongue confused with pink icing Jenson might be persuaded to allow Piet certain desired concessions, grazing rights and water rights in further and yet further prairies of parched and rolling plain.

They were all sitting so near together that Jenson hardly had to move his feet; he just bowed from the waist, a plate lying flat on the palm of each hand. He bowed slowly up and down with movements as of some vast and grace-

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ful insect, first on this side, then on that side, so that Lena was moved to remark to his wife:

"Doesn't Mr. Jenson do it beautifully?"

Mrs. Jenson drew herself up another half-inch.

"He's quite the ladies' man this afternoon," she said, with as much pride as spite.

She had only taken one bite out of the tiny piece of bread-and-butter on her plate, and her little finger was like a hook on which to hang a whole system of genteel behaviour. Lena, noticing a cleft in the tip of Mrs. Jenson's nose, turned to Jock:

"Do have one of the ones with cherries on top," she said. "When I made them I put a double quantity of sugar in."

Maud would have liked her guests to think that a servant had prepared the food. She knew they would guess now that she and Lena had been cooking all the morning.

Jock ate four of the buns with cherries on top.

"What are those dark trees at the bottom of the garden?" he asked, beaming and chewing.

"*Cupressus lusitanica*," said Piet. It was all the Latin he knew.

"Come on," said Lena, "let's go and look at them."

She and Jock went down the steps together. Before they got to the trees they were arm in arm.

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Maud and Piet and Mrs. Jenson were left as silent as ruins after a cyclone. Only Jenson stood firm, and he smiled. Piet, in an attempt to recover the lost proprieties, took him off to look at a pigsty.

*

That night Lena went to bed early. She wanted to think about young Jenson, who had promised to come to-morrow afternoon and take her out for a ride.

When she was in her nightdress she lighted a cigarette. Then she took out of a drawer a tin box containing a broken necklace of green glass beads which she wanted to wear next day. She sat on the bed, her short strong legs hanging over the side, and the box of beads lying open in her lap.

There was a knock at the door, and Maud came in just as Lena was thoughtfully killing her cigarette.

"You're not *smoking*," said Maud with concentrated passion.

Lena looked up. Her sister was wearing a long plain dressing-gown which flapped round her feet, and made her seem taller than she really was. So long and soft and angry, she stood there like a spectre out of a forgotten time. Indeed, although under thirty, she belonged to a period that seems to have come to an end.

Lena began crooning to herself:

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*“ Half a woman and half a tree,
She can't change it,
She can't change it,
So we'll chop her up for firewood
In the sweet by and by.”*

She sucked a thread, slipped it through a bead, which she held between her fingers as delicately as a grape, and then began casually tying a knot.

“Hullo,” she said to Maud, without looking up.

“Lena,” said Maud with false quietness (she was almost suffocated with rage), “what would mother have said?”

“What about?”

“What about? You know what about! About the way you behaved this afternoon!”

“Me?”

“You! What would mother have said?”

“I don't see what mother's got to do with it. When people are dead——”

Maud began to cry.

“O dry up,” said Lena, getting into bed.

“You little beast,” cried Maud in a broken voice, “you devil! How *can* you be so wicked, so ungrateful, *wicked*—a Kaffir woman wouldn't behave the way you behave—you may treat me like this, but don't speak—I can't bear it—don't ever speak slightly of mother again! How

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you *dare* even think of it! And then to say it to *me*——”

Maud saw the room dancing through her tears, and Lena being tossed in the bed as if it was a boat.

“Tell me what I’ve done,” said Lena, “if it amuses you.”

“*Tula!*” said Maud harshly, as she would say to a native servant she wanted to silence.

“How you *can*——”

“This isn’t the kitchen,” said Lena.

“Kitchen! You talk to me of kitchens! *My* kitchen! A lot you’ve ever done in *my* kitchen! You’re a little butterfly, aren’t you? A little butterfly!” she repeated scornfully. “O no, in the upper ten we never go into our kitchens, do we?”

“Never,” said Lena.

“O *no!* Here you live, you’re *content* to live, in *my* house, *my* house, doing no work, living on Piet’s labour, and then you can’t even be polite to him; day in, day out, fine or wet, *he* has to go out and work, and here you come and we treat you like a queen and what thanks do *I* get? Eh? Tell me, what thanks, I say? You taunt me with kitchens, you snake! You lie in bed and thread your dirty beads like a fine lady and insult my friends, *my* friends, while I can go hang. Selfish, you’re worse than that——”

“Insult your friends?”

“Look at the way you treated Mrs. Jenson!

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She'll never come here again! You know Piet wants to get grazing rights from him, and land, and you can't even be polite. No, I shouldn't think Mr. Jenson's ever been so insulted! You talked like a bad, fast woman! What would poor, poor dad have said?"

"First it's poor, poor mother, and then it's poor, poor dad, and then it's poor, poor grazing rights. Really, Maud, you don't know what you're talking about."

"You mock at your parents! You mock at God! You mock at my husband, *my* husband! You mock at me! Wait! Wait!! I'll show you whose house this is——"

Lena was frightened. Her heart was beating at a terrible pace, her lips were dry, and her tongue seemed to stick to the roof of her mouth. It was all she could do to control herself.

She affected to yawn.

"My dear Maud, if you can't talk quietly, why not go to bed?" Her voice trembled. "Good night." She turned over and pretended she was going to sleep.

"Bed! bed!" Maud's voice vibrated so that she couldn't utter another word.

She wanted to strike her sister, and lifted her hand, but let it fall again. She wanted to point out that Piet was *her* husband, but all she could do, trembling and with set lips, was to walk slowly out of the room.

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MONDAY

MAUD used to sleep in the afternoon. Before getting ready for her ride Lena wanted to tell her she would be out for tea, so she went and knocked at her sister's door. There was no answer, so she looked in. The blinds were down, and Maud was still asleep. Lena closed the door softly, and went back to her own room.

Having achieved, at the end of an hour, that look of unstudied disorder which was part of her charm, she sauntered out, and stood waiting at the gate for young Jenson. After some time she began strolling up and down outside, and, as she walked, impatiently tapped her shoes with a little riding-switch she carried.

Meanwhile Maud had got up, and happening to go out on the verandah to see if the plants had been watered she noticed a figure in blue sauntering down the road beyond the gate with a light and youthful step, the figure of Lena. She would have liked to call out to her, but she was

too far away. She would have liked to follow her, but somehow she daren't.

There went Lena in her blue dress, her best dress, right out there in the veld, where no white woman should ever walk alone, where she herself had never been alone, walking with a step not only jaunty and eager, but obviously purposeful. Why was Lena walking on and on, right out there, with that showy yellow scarf round her neck? All Maud's anger began to get up again, and her hand shook, so that the water which should have nourished a fern poured over on to the floor.

She was wondering what to do, when she saw young Jenson riding up, leading a horse with a saddle on its back. Good heavens, Lena must be going off, eloping, with that boy! Piet wouldn't get his grazing rights! Should she go and see if Lena had left a note on her dressing table?

The sky seemed strangely dark, the floor was unsteady under her feet. She sank into a chair and closed her eyes. . . .

*

The next thing she knew was the voice of Annie, the maid. Maud opened her eyes, and started up quickly.

"Annie! What is it? What is the time? Why, it's nearly dark!"

"Please, missus, time for baby's bath."

They both hurried indoors, but Maud was the quickest.

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In a few minutes she was stooping over the bath. The curtains were drawn, and the room was full of yellow lamplight. The baby sat up in the bath with a very straight back, and patted the surface of the water, which was in shadow, with its hands. Bright drops flickered in the light, and sprayed upwards on to Maud's face and neck. Her mouth protruded in an expression of strong, stupid yearning. All her thoughts and anxieties began to give way to pure feeling, and when she was drying the baby she pressed it against her, almost with violence.

"We don't care, do we, darling?" she said. "Who's mother's little own one and only? There, there, there, there."

When she got up, a brooch fell off her dress into the bath with a splash, and lay gleaming through the soapy water, where it seemed to be winking at her. She pressed her lips deep, deep with a furious kiss into the baby's soft white cheek. This sudden pressure made the infant's mouth project in an innocent pout, while its bright black eyes reflected tiny yellow dots of lamplight.

Intoxicated with joy, she closed her eyes and rocked herself from side to side, hugging the child, and oblivious, as she brushed with her lips the silk of its hair, of time and place, of her husband, her sister, and herself.

POTTED TONGUE

POTTED TONGUE

It was a fine morning at the height of the season, and the large wooden pavilion on the beach at Medusenberg was crowded with people. Drabthorpe, a stockbroker who had been able to retire from business quite early in life, was sitting at one of the tables with his wife. She did not mind his meek appearance, his sandy hair and his spectacles, because he was excessively rich. She watched him lighting a cigar, holding it between the tips of all his fingers as he used to hold his fountain-pen when unscrewing it. Match in hand, he suddenly turned round, as if in alarm. He had heard a familiar voice.

“Mrs. Whobody!” he exclaimed.

A woman with an eager, colourless face was leaning over the back of his chair. She had a bulbous ornament in her hat.

“Do you know my wife? Nell, Mrs. Whobody.”

“O, how do you do, Mrs. Drabthorpe! I’ve heard such a lot about you and always wanted to meet you, and I expect you’ve heard all about me by now. Nobody wastes much time about laying

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all *my* cards on other people's tables, so I have to get my own back; but one thing you may as well make a note of is that I'm not half as bad as I'm made out to be, and another thing is that most people are much worse than I make them out to be. I don't suppose you've had time to make up your mind about me yet; you're not like me, I have to make up my mind about people long before I meet them."

"Are you staying long in Medusenberg?" said Drabthorpe.

"O yes, for three months. And what about you? I suppose you'll soon be going back to Goldenville? O Mrs. Drabthorpe, you'll have an awfully good time up there. Do you know, I ran into Lady Karroo just now; I'd no idea they were down here. You haven't met the Karroos yet? O, I must who's who them for you. The old man was a drunken crofter who emigrated to South Africa in the year one, and made a perfect pile of money out of I.D.B. and selling Capesmoke, and his name was Carew. Well, the son went one better, he was christened Gillie because his father said he wasn't ashamed of his origin, and I think he must have been quite a decent old boy to have said that; but this is where the joke comes in: he also changed his surname from Carew to Karroo because he said he wasn't ashamed of the place he'd made his money out of, and he even went so far as to call one of his

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daughters Ida B. Karroo in memory of the I.D.B. business. So now the son is Sir Gillie Karroo, Knight, and his wife who I met this morning and once jumped through the hoop at a circus, though she isn't half as sporting as you'd expect from that, is too exclusive to live and has almost succeeded in excluding herself completely from all decent society and never opens her mouth without a reference to 'Sir Gillie.' She even calls him 'Sir Gillie' to his face. And before she joined the circus she used to scrub the floor in the ladies' cloak-room at Paddington or it may have been Euston, but now of course there's only one part of London that would hold her, and that's very much W. and not N.W. She spends all her time opening bazaars and quoting Burns in his discreeter moments. If only she'd shut the bazaars and her mouth we'd all be better pleased, but since somebody put in the papers that Sir Gillie is the Laird of Goldenville she feels that she has really got something to live up to.

"Where was I? O yes. You know the Duke and Duchess of Scilly have been staying up there for a couple of months? They're on their way round the world, and the other day the Karroos made up a party to go and swim in the Bisley-Watts's private swimming-bath, and the Duke and Duchess went too. Suddenly the Duchess appeared, as bare as a board, and began to dance all round the edge. She drank three cocktails

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before they could get her to put her clothes on. Poor thing, she's not quite right in the head, except when it suits her, which is where money matters are concerned, and it's an awfully good excuse for having a good time. That cousin of hers, the Baron de Zu, is the really mad one. I've never seen such a person; his conversation is absolutely astonishing, he's got an absolute kink, he says that civilisation is dead and that Europeans ought to mix with Kaffirs if they want to save themselves from extinction. He's always running about with a microscope or a tape measure, and Professor Grimm says he's quite a distinguished scientist, but then I don't suppose he's quite right in the head himself; I don't think these scientist chaps ever are; anyway Professor Grimm's very good-looking, I suppose nobody would deny that, and the Baron de Zu dances divinely and would be quite all right if he would stop talking about his ancestors; I was brought up to think that one should never talk about one's ancestors, even if one hasn't got any.

“Talking of professors, do you know Professor Truncheon? He occupies the chair of Universal Literature in the university. He lately acted as judge in a versifying competition. One of the competitors sent in one of the best-known sonnets of Shakespeare. It failed to win him even a consolation prize, and was returned with a kindly letter of advice and encouragement.

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Where was I? O yes, I know. The other day I was at the hairdresser's when the Duchess was there. I saw her ogling little Mandini, the hairdresser, through her front hair. And that grotesque Miss Montauxsources was there, the lady-in-waiting. Her body is shaped like a stick, she has a Tunbridge Wells voice, and I'm sure she suffers from ingrowing hips. Then the Duchess gave a dance last week at the Polo Club. She collects such dreadful people for her parties. I was there too.

"I saw Dr. Skintight—you know him?—the specialist in the treatment of confidential diseases. He is a very florid man, and I never think his manner is quite jolly enough to disguise the fact that he has risen in the world.

"And such a lot of old men with dewdrops on their noses and old women with dewlaps on their chins. Sir Barron and Lady Organ, of course, they go to everything, and get uglier every day. They have no children, only a wee dog called Peekaboo with a rancid bark. Sir Barron has a face like a cow's bottom, and the sound of his voice is like the sound of a rural dean's grave opening on Judgment Day. Lady Organ has a sterile smile, and believes in the Colonial Woman, because she is one herself. When she laughs the sound is like the leavings of a vegetarian dinner of turnips and milk choking their way down a sink. Poor old Topsy Organ, her

front view is like one of those comfortable old-fashioned arm-chairs, shapeless but inviting, snug but not stylish. The recreations of Sir Barron are bridge, tricycling, and conversation in clubs. You know what I call Topsy? I call her the hippopotamus-goddess. Ha, ha, ha.

"Where was I? O yes, I know. The dance at the Polo Club. And of course Mrs. Fowlish was there. She breeds expensive imported terriers, which she feeds in her drawing-room on expensive imported chocolates. They have been taught to sit up on their hindquarters at feeding time, which is more than Mrs. Fowlish can do, because she's got no hindquarters. She was born in a dorp and talks through her teeth. Her neck looks as if it hadn't been washed, and her husband has no chin and reads Dickens. She introduced me to a girl from Honduras, or was it Honolulu? I forget; I'm always so careless about the Dominions. Anyway, Mrs. Fowlish came up to me and said:

" 'Betty, do let me introduce you to Union Jack.'

" 'What!' I said, ' Union Jack?'

" 'Hush, dear, she is the daughter of Sir Frederick Jack. She's rather sensitive about her name, so be careful what you say.'

"And now I hear this girl's engaged to a Dutchman: you see what comes of having a name like that? I danced with Mr. Tench and with

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Major Shaddock, who always dances as if he was trying to balance a bottle on his behind, and with Sir Frederick Jack, who dances as if he was trying to balance two bottles on his behind. Then I danced with Captain Steptoe, the A.D.C., who has a prominent Adam's-apple and an anxious expression. I was admiring the Duchess.

“ ‘Isn't she wonderful?’ I said. ‘That lovely, fresh English look——’

“ ‘What?’ he said. ‘O, fresh enough, I admit. Too fresh for me. The idea of bit and saddle makes her kick up her heels to the stars. No, too fresh for me; she bucks one off every time. I'd rather a good quiet mare that would lollop along and do what she's told, what?’

“I'll tell you who was there too, Madame Ondegrasse, the singer. She was afraid to laugh for fear of cracking the paint on her cheeks, and afraid to dance for fear of cracking her glossy shoes. O yes, and Bobby Godsend. You know the Godsend? Brother and sister, tall and dark, with juicy voices. Phyllis has a sinewy stomach which, owing to the way she carries herself, projects when she is dancing. Bobby was wearing his new horn-rimmed spectacles.

“ ‘What a nice bright band,’ he said. ‘It's just like a mental dose of salts.’

“He felt that he had been too daring, so he hummed a little tune to cover his embarrassment, and, of course, mine. I was talking to him one

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morning in the street. He had a pleasant smile and a slender volume of very Georgian poetry under his arm. Just at that minute Margery Mainchance turned up.

“ ‘O I say,’ he said, ‘ isn’t it a lovely morning after all that wind? Just like a dose of salts.’

“ ‘ Isn’t it!’ said Margery, ‘ but I can’t stop.’

Bobby turned to me.

“ ‘She must have taken a dose of salts,’ he said.

“ ‘But where was I? O yes, I know. I was discussing the Duchess with the Baron de Zu.

“ ‘Who would pretend,’ he said, ‘ that she’s anything but an imbecile? She has a passion for swimming, and look at her ankles! All the weakest blood in Europe is in that woman, and yet she’s got the vitality of a horse. O, but it won’t last! She hasn’t got the brains of a louse, and look at that wretched child of theirs! They call it the Marquis of London, but its nose bleeds if you look at it ; if you speak to it, it goes off in a dead faint; and when the moon rises, it wets its bed. O yes, it’s very nice to be a royalty. Look at its father. The Duke of Scilly, indeed! He’s got seven Christian names, and he has epileptic fits three times a week. And then people get angry with him if he talks to the same girl twice; if he’s five minutes late for a public function, everybody clamours for a republic; and if he’s five minutes early they say he’s too

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official. His father never learnt to read and write because they said his brain wouldn't stand the effort: he had Buonaparte blood which ought to have made him arrogant, and Hohenzollern blood which ought to have made him more arrogant, but his chief occupation was the embroidering of antimacassars. His mother lived on opium and black currant tea and had herself flogged every day by an ex-pugilist. She had two sisters, twins, grand duchesses; one had four thumbs and the other had none.

"Where was I? O yes, I know. Mrs. Quicksand was there too. She likes to be in the public eye. Of course you know Mrs. Quicksand? You know how they made their money, don't you? They used to make young English officers drunk during the Boer War, and then get their money away from them. Some people say that she's the daughter of a haberdasher in the Isle of Man, or is it a candlestickmaker in the Hebrides? Others that she's the widow of an Italian prince; others that her brother is a butcher in Swedish East with a Chinese wife. She certainly looks half Chinese herself, but she keeps a good cook anyway, so what does it matter? They say she can never have a child because her husband lacks the wherewithal.

"And would you believe that Basil Steptoe had the impudence to say to me:

" 'I hear you've been saying the most frightful

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things about the Duchess. What are you going to do about it?'

"Really, I could have cried with rage. You'd think I was just a common gossip. I may talk about people, but what else is there to talk about? Besides, I only say what everybody knows; I never invent things. O, but there's Lady Karroo signalling to me. I can see she wants to introduce me to a man I've known for years. I am awfully, really awfully, glad to have met you, Mrs. Drabthorpe. It's always such a rush down here at Medusenberg, but I do hope next time we meet we shall really have time for a chat. Which hotel are you at? The Pacific? O splendid, then I shall see you again to-night. Good-bye, good-bye."

"Robert," said Mrs. Drabthorpe, "have you got many friends like that?"

But Drabthorpe didn't answer. He was fast asleep.

STEPHEN JORDAN'S WIFE

STEPHEN JORDAN'S WIFE

"HULLO, hullo, hullo!" Colonel Gunn-Drummond cried out heartily from the station platform. He was a lawyer and a volunteer, and his eyes had grown narrow with commercial intrigue. "Come along and have a drink."

After the death of his wife Stephen Jordan had been for some time in a dangerous state of grief, and had felt that he must have a complete change from the farm, so he had written to his old friend Gunn-Drummond to say that he was coming to Dunnsport. They were out of touch, they hadn't seen each other for fifteen years (and then only for a few minutes), but in youth they had been inseparable.

Now here they were driving to the colonel's club in the colonel's motor-car. They settled down in two chairs on the long verandah, then, while Jordan was filling his pipe, the colonel lighted a cigar, and began reciting his reminiscences.

The June morning was bright and still. Motor cars glided along the Promenade, and motor-boats glided across the Lagoon, leaving long, horizontal

I SPEAK OF AFRICA

lines quivering along their course. The ships in the docks were tall and calm like old and coloured temples, the stains on their sides like stains of sacrificial wine, libations to some unknown gods whose voices were the faintly raucous sirens, disturbing with occasional cries, long-drawn and sad, the too perfect peace. In a haze of heat over the horizon a few clouds scudded away in an unfelt breeze, a few young clouds like *amorini*.

A long cigar-ash dropped softly to the floor. The day itself was like an ash, soft and warm and whitish-blue, placidly burnt-out, and ready to be dispersed by the first puff of moving air.

*

Jordan closed his eyes, and seemed to see, in a mountain solitude, the gate of a stone kraal dragged slowly open. It is before dawn, and the air is cold. An immense flock of ewes and lambs makes its way down to the plain ; a loud maternal bleating mingles with the quavering cries of innumerable lambs; distance soon reduces the bleating to a buzzing; and, just as the sun rises, the diminishing white backs of the sheep are concealed in a tingling haze of gold dust raised by the already inaudible trotting of thousands of little horny hoofs. He sees his wife calling him to breakfast. She hasn't had time to do her hair, her red hair, and although her voice sounds harsh and she looks slatternly, there is something irresistible about the way she calls him, as

STEPHEN JORDAN'S WIFE

she stands there with her feet in flat, thick slippers. . . .

*

"Let's collect a four for bridge," said the colonel, to whom this tranquil morning was somehow intolerable. "But come along first and have a drink." The two men looked out towards the Island under four white eyebrows like ragged cocoons. They both turned and went indoors.

A light wind got up, feathering the surface of the Lagoon, and swaying the palms on the Promenade, and rocking the geraniums in the plaster urns in front of the club.

"I see by the paper," said Jordan at lunch time, "that they've been having some native trouble in Lembuland."

"There's bound to be trouble sooner or later," said the colonel confidentially. "You've got to keep the nigger in his place. It's these agitators, these damn Labour people, all these trade unionists and communists and what-not. I'd shoot them all if I had my own way. O, there's bound to be trouble sooner or later."

"I said they've *been having* trouble."

"Well, they've got guns, I suppose."

"Guns aren't everything."

"What are they, then?"

"No, no, I mean——"

"Waiter"—the colonel turned aside—"what is this stuff? Hey? It's *fish!* When will you learn

that I never eat fish? Take it away! Jordan, in that last game, with such an excellent hand, you ought to have gone two no trumps——”

Jordan was silent.

Colonel Gunn-Drummond coughed stridently. Outside, in the street, a piece of newspaper was flung up by a gust of wind. It soared above the trees and then almost stood still; it rocked and swayed, and rocking and swaying it was carried whitely along the blueness of the air in a rakish and leisurely pursuit of the *amorini*.

“Do you happen to remember,” said the colonel, leaning across the table, “that Maggie Feverdew that ran off to the Cape with an Irishman?”

“Not that one—with red hair?” said Jordan, abruptly.

“That’s the one! What a bitch!”

“But what about her?” asked Jordan, in a dull, strained voice.

“The other day I was inquiring what became of her. By Jove, I thought, if she has children they must be grown up by now.”

“Yes; all these children who grow up make us look like grandfathers.”

“O no, nonsense,” protested the colonel. “I can still use a gun.”

“You and your guns!”

“Well, a man that can’t shoot isn’t a man at all, to my thinking.”

STEPHEN JORDAN'S WIFE

" But you were inquiring—— "

" And in my opinion a man who isn't as much at home in the saddle as anywhere else—— "

" About Maggie Feverdew—— "

" And who can't—— "

Jordan was dragged down, as in a backwash, down the steep but crumbling bank of the colonel's manliness. He was one of the last surviving members of the colonel's acquaintances to attempt conversation with him.

" Remember," said the colonel menacingly to the waiter, who was putting coffee before him.

" Don't forget next time, NO FISH! "

He turned to Jordan.

" Maggie Feverdew. Yes, I was inquiring about her. I met a man who knew her and her husband."

" Her husband! "

" Yes; she left the Irishman, it seems, to marry this man."

" What—what was his name? "

" I forgot to ask what his name was, but of course she didn't get on too well with him. Can you imagine Maggie Feverdew getting on well with anybody? You know she died only the other day? Towards the end she used to contradict immediately every statement that was made, a habit that must have been unhelpful to argument."

" Whereabouts did they live? "

I SPEAK OF AFRICA

"On a farm, it appears, somewhere near Rooi Rivier. Isn't that somewhere in your part of the world? Didn't you ever come across them?"

"It is possible."

"You don't remember."

"Well, I—— Tell me what the husband was like."

"Quite a decent sort of fellow, I believe. One of these dull, steady, plodding sort of fellows that never do much good for themselves. Not enough fire to beat her. That's what she wanted. Beating with a stick. Well, they tell me the husband was very patient. Maggie's mouth was like a gun, and her speech was like the noise of a machine gun. She used to scream when she saw a cockroach, and in the winter, when the cockroaches were less active, she used to scream at the thought of them. When she screamed, one felt a burning sensation in the pit of the stomach. Ha, ha, ha! The husband, to get away from her, used to go out all day into the mountains. There was also a widow, they say, in the nearest town, where he had to go more and more frequently on business." The colonel winked. "When his wife got to a time of life when he felt that he ought to be sorry for her he found that it was impossible. She wasn't even sorry for herself. She was unpitiable. She would talk of nothing but the least fortunate events of her past life: she knotted them into a scourge,

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which she swung round and round until she died."

"I doubt if that's exactly true," said Jordan, in a difficult voice.

"What! Why? You doubt if it's true! But I had it from this man himself, who knew them personally. Yes, that was the end of Maggie Feverdew. Come along and have a drink, and then we'll get back to our bride."

*

"Game and rubber," said the colonel at the end of the afternoon. "Now, unfortunately, I'm dining out to-night. Jordan, you'll be all right? I've taken a room for you here, for the time being. It's two doors from mine. Come along and have a drink, and then we'll go upstairs."

When they were coming down again the colonel smelt of soap.

"Yes, if only your hand had been dummy," he said. "The ace, the king, and the queen—two spades. You want practice. You'll be all right then? Good night."

He went out of the front door with a jaunty air. As he descended the steps, an eyeglass, dangling on a black cord, slid like a pendulum against the highly starched front of his shirt.

Jordan dined alone. He seemed thoughtful, and hardly answered when the waiter spoke to him. He was thinking about Maggie Feverdew, who had been his wife.

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Afterwards, he went for a stroll on the Promenade, and for a long time watched the lights trembling in the Lagoon. But suddenly something seemed to snap in his brain, and he threw himself on to a seat.

It was one of the cruellest moments of his life.

The crude light of an arc-lamp seems to him to rustle like a mocking-bird in the parched and papery palms. It is the stirring of the wind that he hears, and the slip-slapping of water upon stone. The distinct, the almost mechanical noise of the coming and coming of the wavelets of the inflooding and infinitely rippling tide is the noise of a retribution, the bubbling of the blood of a battle inevitable. His eyes are open, but he sees nothing. The whole of his body is drawn upon a rack, he is drowning in wave upon wave upon wave of elemental emotion, his head is fire, his viscera are water, his heart is a rushing mighty wind, he writhes, he is possessed of a devil, he thrusts at the ground with his feet, as though they shall take root like the roots of a tree.

There were footsteps on the stone, and not far to the right two people were approaching, a man and a woman, between the iron railings and the water on the one hand, and the large trees, the lights, the town murmur, the façades, upon the other. Little did they see, lovers, her head on his shoulder, his arm round her waist. Their united shadow as they went past ran round them

STEPHEN JORDAN'S WIFE

on the stone away from the light of the arc-lamp, ran round them quickly to escape the prophetic eyes of Jordan. His face was in darkness, but at his huddled figure the girl, her head half turned, cast a brief, a questing and at once disparaging glance. He is a tramp, she thought, and at once resumed what she was saying, in a vulgar voice that seemed loud and clear and terribly significant:

“ . . . that's what I told her, and Percy told her, too. . . . ”

And walking along, she whispered to the man, who in his turn glanced at Jordan, that they must say nothing until they were out of earshot—their words were not for tramps. Their heels on the pavement rang like metal in the frantic, empty night. Jordan laughed, and followed quietly, dancing a fabulous cakewalk a few steps behind the lovers. The girl heard him; a garnet flashed in her ear like a drop of blood; she clutched at the man's shoulder, and he turned.

“ What's it, eh? ” he said hurriedly, walking deliberately up to Jordan, who shrugged his shoulders, waved his hands, and said not a word.

“ What's the game, eh? ” said the man in a threatening voice too low for the girl to hear. He wore a cap and a bow-tie. He threw his cigarette over the railing into the water. He gave Jordan a blow in the jaw. Jordan made no attempt to defend himself.

I SPEAK OF AFRICA

“What d’you mean,” said the man, “by monkeying about when a fellow’s with his girl? You ought to be in a bleeding asylum, you ought!”

“O come on, Eddy,” said the girl.

“Now get off,” the man said to Jordan, “before I fetch you another one on the face.”

The girl dragged him away.

“Excuse the language, eh?” he said, squeezing her arm, and smirking, as they departed. They both looked back once, but they could not see that Jordan was shuddering all over. He spat out a quantity of blood on the pavement, and then, holding a handkerchief to his mouth, returned to the club.

THE PENSIONER

THE PENSIONER

[A] SHORT man with a smiling face jumped into a crowded compartment of the excursion-train just as it was leaving the terminus. He squeezed himself into a seat near the window,] and muttered: "What a near thing! Nearly got left that time!"

[The] two young women nudged each other, and the [old Scotchman in the opposite corner looked up over his spectacles. The man who was reading a novel took no notice. But the woman who was sitting next to him, and had a little boy of two on her knee, turned round and said pleasantly,] but in the rather false voice of one who has only acquired expensive tastes since childhood:

"The train is very crowded."

"It's very full, very full," said the short man eagerly. "But it's the time of year. It's always the same, this time of year."

At this moment the ticket-examiner appeared.

"Tickets, please."

I SPEAK OF AFRICA

While the passengers were fumbling for their tickets he caught sight of the short man.

"Hallo, Joe, I didn't see you there!"]

"Hallo! You didn't, eh? Well, what d'you think? I'm out of it."

"You're what?"

- ["I'm out of it, I say. On pension from to-day."

"Go on!"

"From to-day."

"Well, I never. You're one of the lucky ones."

"Yes, just going down to Port Reuben to fix up a little place."

"Where's the wife and kiddies?"

"Left them in Dunnsport, then I'm going to fetch them down on Thursday."

"Going to live down there, eh?"

"Yes, going to settle down there."

The official looked up from the last ticket, which he was in the act of clipping.

"Good luck to you, Joe. I've got six years to go yet. Remember me to the wife and kiddies."

He disappeared, and the old Scotchman looked round over his spectacles.

"Were you in the civil service?" asked the overdressed lady with the little boy.

"In the railways. Twenty-five years to-day."

"Fancy! You will be glad of a rest. O mind, Bobby, don't lean out of the window!"]

THE PENSIONER

"Eh?" said the child, turning round.

"Don't say 'eh,' dear," said the mother. [The short man grabbed the seat of the little boy's trousers and held on to it while the child flattened its nose against the window, and began to breathe on the glass.

"O, thank you," said the mother } whose face was so heavily powdered that the mole on her cheek could hardly be seen.

"O mummy, I can't see aooout."

"Don't say 'aoaout,' dear. Say 'out.'"

The child had breathed all over the lower part of the glass, and had begun to cry, finding the landscape blurred.

The short man wiped the glass with his cuff.

"There you are, sonny," he exclaimed, beaming.

"O thank you," said the mother. "Say, 'thank you,' dear."

The two young women nudged each other and giggled.

The train ran round a curve, and the sea came into view.

"O look, the sea!"

Everybody, except the man who was reading a novel, looked out of the window. Owing to the rapid movement of the train, which caused it to sway, the sea appeared to move up and down vertically as it does sometimes when seen from a ship.

"It's two years since I saw it," one of the young women remarked.

It was now late in the afternoon. The train ran round another curve, and a ray of light from the sun travelled slowly round the compartment like a searchlight. The married woman blinked, like an animal that puts its head out of a hole in the ground, and one could see that some of the powder had been rubbed off her neck on to the collar of her coat. The old Scotchman was looking indignantly out at the sun, resenting its intrusion, when a train drew up at a station in the shadow of some trees. The man with the novel got out without even looking at his fellow-passengers, and then the short man said "Excuse me," and put his head out of the window.

As if by some inevitable attraction the station-master appeared, a dark man with silver braid on his cap.

"Hullo, Joe," he said, "where are you off to? Still in the land of the living, eh?"

"I'm out of it," said the short man.

"What d'you mean; you're out of it?"

"On pension."

"Get away."

"From to-day."

"You're one of the lucky ones, you are. Where's the wife and kiddies?"

At the next station the old Scotchman got out, glancing round over his spectacles with an ex-

THE PENSIONER

pression of scorn at the married woman and her child, the two young women, and the short man.

The train ran round another curve, and one could see the waves breaking almost under the window.

"Excuse me, is the next station Seaview?" said the married woman.

"Yes, the next!" said the short man. "Is that yours?"

She put a straw hat on the child's head. It took the elastic from under its chin and began to chew it, while the mother collected her attaché case, her parasol, and her vanity bag. When the train stopped, the short man obsequiously lowered the child by the armpits until its feet touched the platform.

"Good evening; thank you," said the mother rather stiffly, tipping up her nose, which was heavily powdered like a marshmallow.

A stout man with his shirt-sleeves rolled up came to the door.

"Hullo, Joe," he said, "where you off to?"

"Ha, now you're asking."

"What've you done with the wife and kiddies?"

"I'm out of it."

"You're what?"

"From to-day."

"What's from to-day?"

"Pension, my lad."

I SPEAK OF AFRICA

"You're finished, eh? From to-day? You're one of the lucky ones, you are. I've got eighteen months to go yet. You're well out of it."

"Going down to fix up a little place."

"Well, you are——"

The whistle sounded.

"Ta-ta, Joe."

"Ta-ta."

He found himself alone with the two young women.

"You young ladies seen this?" he said, pointing to the open page of a magazine.

They took it coyly, and giggled.

"When does Faraway Halt come?" they said.

"It's the next."

One of them stooped to pull out a suitcase from under the seat. She had small ears.

"That's all right. I'll give your things out to you."

The train stopped, and immediately one could hear the wind in the banana trees.

"Oo, they want us to break our necks!"

The two young women jumped down into the sand, and the pensioner handed them their things.

"That's all," they said facetiously, "in case you thought there was any more. Thank you verree much. Good night."

He settled down in his corner of the empty compartment. The sun was just setting, and made his face look very red and happy, but

THE PENSIONER

showed up the few silver threads in his short, dark, vigorous hair.

"Still young enough to enjoy life," he thought, stretching lazily. "Wonder if they'll send the boy down to meet me. Fish supper and a good cup of tea. A little place, all fixed up by Thursday. Must have a chat to the station-master. He hasn't got long to go, Edwards hasn't."

He ran to the window. Nearly there. He closed his eyes for a moment from sheer excitement.

"Haven't felt like this since I was a boy," he thought.

PORT REUBEN: the letters were spelling themselves out before his eyes, black on a white board, against a pale sky, just after sunset.

Glad he'd only brought this little bag. He opened the door and stepped out, thinking: When alighting always face the front.

It was about a hundred yards from the station, and the wheels went over his head.

Mrs. Jeffkins was the only one who actually saw it happen. She had her little girl with her, and they were on their way back from the beach: Elsie was carrying her bucket and spade. She remembers giving a scream and dragging the child by the wrist. Elsie tottered after her on unsteady legs, trailing her little spade, which left in the sand a long wavy line.

THE STRONGEST WOMAN IN
THE WORLD

THE STRONGEST WOMAN IN THE WORLD

DORA came for the second time to an afternoon party at De la Garde's. He was a bachelor, the consul for Madagascar, and knew all the best people in Goldenville. He was so good-looking, such a man of the world!

Nearly everybody stayed on to dinner. Dora sat next to De la Garde, and to show off to him drank a little more than she was used to. He kept saying the most amusing things, and every time she laughed so loudly that people turned round to look at her. Once they had looked she wanted to make them look again. When she was as happy as this she knew she looked her best. She could feel the warm blood mantling her cheeks. She felt that it would take very little to provoke her to further laughter.

"Even the women can't help admiring me," she thought. "They try to feel jealous, but directly they look at me their jealousy turns to admiration. If only people can see me, can look at me, I believe I can do anything with them. O,

I SPEAK OF AFRICA

I love everybody and everybody loves me! I'm the strongest woman in the world!"

And she roared with laughter again, though nobody had made a joke. When she was saying good-bye, one of the last to leave, De la Garde tried to kiss her, but she ran away from him.

"Next time!" she cried, putting her head out of the window as the car drove off, but she was annoyed to see that De la Garde had already gone indoors. She immediately wondered whether her husband would be waiting for her at the flat, or whether he would be asleep.

As she walked along the empty passage, where only one light was burning, her footsteps seemed to fill the whole building with hollow echoes. When she opened the door of the flat she could hear behind her the rising sound of the descending lift. The lift-boy had looked sleepy, and the light dazzled her.

"Hullo, where have you been?" said Richard, appearing in his pyjamas while she was taking off her coat.

"You look tired out," he said, putting his arms round her. She put her head back and closed her dark-shadowed eyes, expecting a kiss. Her husband kissed her eyelids, and then her mouth.

"You worried me, Dora," he said. "I didn't know where you were. Why, you're still in your morning clothes!"

THE STRONGEST WOMAN IN THE WORLD

"I didn't dress," she said, thinking it was silly of him to notice; though only yesterday she had reproved him for not admiring what she had on.

"But you ought to consider my position, darling. What will people say if you're not properly dressed?"

She felt exhausted and irritated, and a sudden resentment began to stir in her.

"What's wrong with this frock?" she said. "Don't you like it? You ought to have married a mannequin, but if you think you have you're mistaken."

"Dora!"

"O I'm sorry, Richard. I don't mean that. I'm so tired I don't know what I'm saying."

"But where have you been?" he said tenderly, holding her tightly in his arms.

"Don't hold me like that," she said. "I can't breathe."

He released her, waiting for an answer.

"Why do you keep asking me?" She stepped back from him, her eyes glittering. "I suppose I can go where I please? I'm not a servant! If you want to know, I went to De la Garde's."

She turned away.

"Not again!" He aimed his eyes at her like a gun. "To dinner?" She turned round quickly.

"That's right! Go on asking! And how many spoonfuls of soup did you eat, darling? And how many mouthfuls of fish? And how

I SPEAK OF AFRICA

many cocktails did you drink? And did you say: 'Thank God for my good dinner'? Ask a few more questions! Go on, keep it up, keep on asking! Don't leave me in peace, whatever you do!"

"Dora!"

She turned her back to him.

"I wish you'd take the trouble to put on an evening frock when you go out to dine," he said coldly.

"I never went out to dine!"

"But——"

"I went to tea." She hardly knew what she was saying.

"Tea?" Richard looked at his watch. "It's a quarter to one."

"Need you behave like a policeman? Go to bed and leave me alone!" She stamped her foot.

"What have you been doing?" he said slowly and searchingly, full of suspicion.

She felt a sudden temptation to say that De la Garde had been making love to her.

"What d'you mean?" she said.

"I want to know."

"You fool!" she cried, "asking me all these questions at this time of night! Go to bed, for heaven's sake, and leave me in peace! Go and dream of the mannequin you ought to have married and then come and accuse me of all sorts of crimes I have never committed! I never

THE STRONGEST WOMAN IN THE WORLD

thought you could be so beastly to me, so cruel, so wicked! Go away, get out, go to bed, leave me alone——”

She began to sob with long-drawn, dry, noisy, hysterical sobs.

“Don't act,” said Richard.

“Act! Act!” Her voice rose. “Act! You're the one that's acting! You think you can act the policeman to your own wife——” It didn't sound to her like her own voice. She burst into tears. Hot, angry tears of helplessness gushed from her eyes. She flung herself on the sofa.

Richard let her cry for a minute or two, and then came towards her, awkwardly.

“I'm sorry, darling,” he said, with an affected lisp. “Don't get so upset, my poor girly. Come to Dicky, Dolly darling.”

She sat up, with her arms hanging slackly on either side of her. Tears were still running down her face. She put out the tip of her tongue sideways and caught a salty drop as it reached the corner of her mouth. One tear, getting colder as it went, ran down her neck, under her dress, down between her breasts. Another followed it, and she shivered.

It is said, thought Richard, that women like not only to be dressed, they like also to be undressed, so he carried her into her room, undressed her, and put her to bed like a child.

The strongest woman in the world!

ART AND COMMERCE

ART AND COMMERCE

SILBERGROSCH, financier, political heel-sniffer, and lard-faced amateur of music, saw himself as the commercial and intellectual dictator of Dunnsport. In a single day, for instance, he had to open the new Commercial Intelligence Bureau and also the League of Ready-made Culture for the People.

To the men of commerce he appeared punctually, and then, choosing his words carefully, made a brief but pregnant speech which consisted mostly of the following passage:

“ I think it is a most desirable thing that you have been able to form yourselves into an official body like this, because, apart from serving your own ends, you will at once have a status, and by having a proper opening ceremony like this, and by constituting yourselves properly as an authorised body, you will give, I think I may say you have given, yourselves at once that useful and important thing, an official status. This will at once enable the government, who are often at a loss to know who to turn to for reliable informa-

I SPEAK OF AFRICA

tion, to refer to an official body which they will always be able to consult with safety whenever they require reliable information, as they so often do, on commercial matters, those commercial matters which are, or which ought to be, so near and dear to the hearts of every one of us, if we are to be useful citizens," etc.

At last, out of a sea of applause, the gentlemen of commerce were able to poke up their heads, and to look at each other and nod with approval. Mr. Silbergrosch was thanked for his kindness in attending, and for his too brief speech, "but which has been so very much to the point," and leaving the commercial gentlemen still nodding at one another he immediately left for his next engagement at the new League. The only member of his first audience who also formed part of his second was a newspaper reporter.

To the lady æsthetes, vegetarians with bobbed hair and blue spectacles, Mr. Silbergrosch appeared punctually, and then, choosing his words carefully, made a brief but pregnant speech which consisted mostly of the following passage:

"I think it is a most desirable thing that you have been able to form yourselves into an official body like this, because, apart from serving your own ends, you will at once have a status, and by having a proper opening ceremony like this, and by constituting yourselves properly as an authorised body, you will give, I think I may say you

have given, yourselves at once that useful and important thing, an official status. This will at once enable the government, who are often at a loss to know who to turn to for reliable information, to refer to an official body which they will always be able to consult with safety whenever they require reliable information, as they sometimes do, on matters of culture, those matters of culture which are, or which ought to be, so near and dear to the hearts of every one of us, if we are to be useful citizens," etc.

"Look at the reporter: he's not taking notes," said one of the ladies to another, and she got up and tapped him on the shoulder.

"I have a note of the speech," he said, smiling, and tapping his breast pocket. "It was kindly supplied by Mr. Silbergrosh himself before the meeting began."

At last, out of a sea of applause, the lady æsthetes were able to poke up their heads, and to look at each other and nod with approval. Mr. Silbergrosh was thanked for his kindness in attending, and for his too brief speech, "but which has been so very much to the point," and leaving the lady æsthetes still nodding at one another with approval he immediately left for his next engagement.

AT THE BIOSCOPE

AT THE BIOSCOPE

It was his wife who suggested, less than a week after they were married, a visit to the bioscope. They held each other's hands in the dark, and the film flickered and swam with alternate events and mottoes. He could not follow their sequence, but he could see distinctly the face of a woman unknown to him. Even in the light of the interval he could see her face, and even in the face of his wife: other eyes than her eyes, another mouth than hers, another woman. He shuddered.

"Are you cold?" his wife whispered, clasping his hand.

"No," he said. How could he say that he had seen a strange woman? "It was a goose walking over my grave."

"Don't say that!" She pressed his hand again.

Suddenly the audience burst out laughing at a joke on the screen, and one voice went on louder and later than the others.

"Let's go," he said.

They went, but even in the tram, even when

I SPEAK OF AFRICA

they were drinking tea in the dining-room at home, even in bed, the strange woman was visible through the sound of those unwinding reels that tick like clocks, the films of existence, the scenarios of love, the picture-dramas of death, the photo-plays of emotion, the cinematechnics of sentiment, the panoramas of memory and the circuses of circumstance.

THE TRIUMPH OF JUSTICE

CHARACTERS

WHITE, *a farmer.*

MRS. WHITE, *his wife.*

NEGRO, *a native.*

A JUDGE.

*A very large black CAT with staring eyes, huge claws, and
a purr like a petrol engine.*

A POLICEMAN.

THE TRIUMPH OF JUSTICE

Scene.—Before WHITE'S house, a bungalow with a verandah reached by three steps from the ground. A projecting wall with a gable and a large window facing front fills the left end of the verandah, under which, and opposite the steps, is the front door. The extreme left of the scene shows a prospect of bare wald.

*

NEGRO. Africa, Africa, Africa! When the white man came here, we had the land and he brought the Bible: now we've got the Bible and he's got the land. He calls himself a Christian, but he isn't. He thinks he can rule us by law, but he can't. He sees we are long-suffering, and he thinks we shall suffer him for ever. But we shall not await for ever the triumph of justice—

WHITE [*coming out of the front door*]. You're a very impudent, an insolent boy! Why the hell don't you take off your hat and say "good morning" to me?

NEGRO [*who wears no hat*]. If I was wearing one I might think of taking it off.

I SPEAK OF AFRICA

WHITE. Then why the hell don't you? Can't you see that I'm a white man?

NEGRO. O yes, I can see you're not an angel.

WHITE. Come on, now! I don't bandy words with niggers! What is it you want?

NEGRO. Ah, what do I want? Now you're asking perhaps more than I know, perhaps more than even you know. What do I want?

WHITE. Well, what the hell do you want?

NEGRO. What is my heart wanting?

WHITE. Heart! Where could you get a heart? You're only an animal. You're black.

NEGRO. I'm black. And heartless. And an animal. But even animals, black animals, even black animals have hearts. I have a heart to love and a heart to hate. I was going to tell you what I want. I don't want land——

WHITE. You won't get it! What you will get is a good sjamboking.

NEGRO. Or your Christian religion——

WHITE. Shut up, you stinking black heathen! If I didn't want to keep my hands clean I'd come and slap your dirty black face.

NEGRO. Or your system of government——

WHITE. O Christ, what do they teach them in these missions? Listen to the words! Long words for a black nigger! But wait till you see the length of my sjambok!

NEGRO. Nor do I want to hear your voice.

THE TRIUMPH OF JUSTICE

WHITE. What you do want is a bloody good hiding, and you'll get it, too!

NEGRO. I should like to put some one in your place who would give me what I want.

WHITE. O Jesus! These missionaries! This black beast is a red Bolshevik! Help!

[The window opens outwards on a hinge, like a casement. The painted curtains move with it. A void is revealed within. MRS. WHITE appears. Her top half leans out of the window.]

MRS. WHITE. What is it, dear?

WHITE. It's a Bolshevik! O these missionaries!

MRS. WHITE. Never mind, dear. Tell him to go away.

NEGRO. I refuse to move from this place. If I can do nothing else, if I am tied hand and foot, I can still torment you with the truth.

[The CAT appears from the left, and rubs its back delightedly against NEGRO's legs. It purrs terrifically, and then goes out again.]

MRS. WHITE. O, O, what's that? Another huge black beast! What is it?

WHITE. It looks like a gogga.

NEGRO. It's a cat.

WHITE
MRS. WHITE } A cat? Never!

NEGRO. There are certain things that do not admit of argument. I am not a liar.

WHITE. You are. Why don't you take off your

I SPEAK OF AFRICA

hat to the missus? Can't you see she's a white lady?

NEGRO. No, and I am not wearing a hat.

WHITE. O, don't argue with me! If I say you're wearing a hat you're wearing a hat, you nigger, you! Why the hell don't you go away? If you don't go away I'll blot you out!

NEGRO. No.

WHITE. What d'you mean—"no"?

MRS. WHITE. Why don't you get a gun, darling, and blow his dirty brains out?

WHITE. Christ, I will!

[WHITE takes down a gun from the wall and fires two shots at NEGRO. Nothing happens.]

MRS. WHITE. You missed him, dear.

WHITE. I'll be damned if I did!

NEGRO. He didn't miss me. He hit me. But I hardly felt anything. Bullets don't affect me. You can't do anything with guns. That's a white man's illusion.

MRS. WHITE [*gaping with astonishment*]. He must be a gogga, too. Why don't you have the law on him, dear?

WHITE. By gum, I will!

[WHITE runs out to the right. MRS. WHITE closes the window, and comes out of the front door. She ambles down the steps; pauses; glances in the direction her husband has taken, and comes sidling up to NEGRO.]

THE TRIUMPH OF JUSTICE

MRS. WHITE. You know, I like you better than my husband.

NEGRO. Indeed?

MRS. WHITE. You're so handsome.

NEGRO. I know.

MRS. WHITE. I wish you was my husband. Really I do.

NEGRO. Do you?

MRS. WHITE [*coyly*]. Ow, come on now—don't you like me?

NEGRO. No.

MRS. WHITE. Ow, don't get nasty about it.

NEGRO. I won't.

MRS. WHITE. But you are.

NEGRO. What am I?

MRS. WHITE. Handsome. Really you are. Come along in now. I'll give you a drink before Mr. White comes back with the judge. Make hay while the sun shines, as they say.

NEGRO. I don't drink.

MRS. WHITE. Well, tobacco, then.

NEGRO. I don't smoke.

MRS. WHITE. Well, come and give me a kiss. [*She squeezes his hand.*] Now, say you don't kiss.

NEGRO. I don't kiss other men's wives, white or black.

MRS. WHITE. Ow, don't you really, now? A proper Mr. Proper, aren't you?

NEGRO. Yes.

I SPEAK OF AFRICA

MRS. WHITE. Come in quick, now. I want you, dearie.

[*No answer.*]

I order you to come in, you nigger. Come in here, now. Come in, I say.

[*No answer.*]

Body and soul, I love you. Come in, lovey. It's not every nigger can get a white wife for the taking.

[*No answer. MRS. WHITE goes closer to NEGRO, leering. NEGRO looks away in disgust. MRS. WHITE changes her tone.*]

Very well, d'you know what I'll do? I'll have you run in for indecent assault. I will. You see. I'll tell the judge you tried to assault me. They'll hang you, you nigger. They'll beat you to death. And if you did try to assault me now, I'd have you arrested just the same. Now then!

[*She hears WHITE returning.*]

Help! help! help! This nigger—O, this nigger! He wants to assault me!

NEGRO. Liar!

MRS. WHITE. Help! help!

[*WHITE comes running in, followed by JUDGE, who wears an enormous white wig.*]

O, O, O!

JUDGE [*to NEGRO*]. Consider yourself arrested on a charge of attempted rape.

NEGRO. I don't.

THE TRIUMPH OF JUSTICE

JUDGE. Don't what?

NEGRO. Consider myself arrested on a charge of attempted rape.

JUDGE. You are. You do. Don't answer back. Your name and address?

NEGRO. Negro, Africa.

JUDGE. What do you mean?

NEGRO. Exactly what I say. Civis Africanus sum.

WHITE
MRS. WHITE. } What does he say?

JUDGE. It is Latin. He says he's a dirty black nigger.

WHITE
MRS. WHITE. } Latin!

JUDGE. Occupation?

NEGRO. What occupation?

JUDGE. Contempt of court! What is your occupation?

NEGRO. I have told you. Civis Africanus sum.

JUDGE. What do you mean by it?

NEGRO. By what?

JUDGE. By your offence.

NEGRO. What white man's nonsense is this?

JUDGE. Hold your tongue! Answer my question!

MRS. WHITE. This nigger attacked me and my husband——

JUDGE. Are you giving evidence?

I SPEAK OF AFRICA

[NEGRO *laughs uncontrolledly, and they all stare at him.*]

Police!

[*Blows a whistle. Enter POLICEMAN.*]

Arrest this nigger!

MRS. WHITE. —me and my husband your worship and when Mr. White went for help this dirty nigger attacked me, alone, a defenceless European lady—

[*She winks at the POLICEMAN*]

—and I understood his purpose and screamed and Mr. White—

JUDGE [*to NEGRO*]. Have you anything to say for yourself?

NEGRO. A great deal. More than you will live to hear.

JUDGE. Then hold your tongue. Guilty or not guilty?

NEGRO. Don't ask silly questions.

JUDGE [*frantically, to POLICEMAN*]. Tie him up! Thrash him!

[*POLICEMAN slips a monstrous pair of handcuffs on NEGRO's wrists.*]

The jury will now retire!

[*WHITE and MRS. WHITE march into the house.*]

The jury will now give the verdict!

[*WHITE and MRS. WHITE come out again.*]

WHITE
MRS. WHITE. } Very guilty.

NEGRO. Of what?

THE TRIUMPH OF JUSTICE

JUDGE
WHITE. }
MRS. WHITE. } Silence.
POLICEMAN. }

[Enter CAT, purring loudly.]

NEGRO. Hullo, pussy cat!

JUDGE.
WHITE. }
MRS. WHITE. } He calls it a cat!
POLICEMAN. }

NEGRO. Now, my cat, d'you know what justice is?

CAT. Miaow!

NEGRO. Well, punish the guilty.

[CAT stands on its hind legs, and knocks over
JUDGE. It behaves like a man.]

Good. Now, my cat, bring me the judge's wig. I'll be the judge for a change.

[It is brought. He puts it on.]

That's it. Now let me loose. Policeman, take off these handcuffs.

[POLICEMAN does so, and then cowers for mercy.]

NEGRO. Constable, destroy first that woman.

POLICEMAN. Sir?

NEGRO. At once.

POLICEMAN. Yessir.

MRS. WHITE. You dare touch me, you swine!

WHITE. You dare touch my wife, you swine!

NEGRO. He dare.

CAT. Miaow!

I SPEAK OF AFRICA

POLICEMAN. I dare.

[*He deals MRS. WHITE a blow on the head.
She falls.*]

WHITE [*folding his arms; aside*]. O well, it's her troubles, not mine. God wills her to die. Alles sal reg kom. Not much hunting will find me another petticoat.

CAT. Miaow!

NEGRO. White!

WHITE. Yes?

NEGRO. You will address me as "sir."

WHITE. Yes, sir.

NEGRO. Now I can have what I want.

WHITE. Take what you want, sir.

NEGRO. Your life?

WHITE [*cringing*]. O please, sir——

NEGRO. It is worthless. I shall take your money and your land. The money you got by my labour, the land by my ignorance, so they are really mine.

WHITE. Yessir.

CAT. Miaow!

NEGRO. Pussy, do you like meat?

[*CAT purrs loudly.*]

You may have that creature. Take him home to your kittens—though there's not much on him.

[*CAT seizes WHITE, and runs off to the right, purring.*]

Cat's meat. Constable, that's a good cat.

POLICEMAN. Yessir.

THE TRIUMPH OF JUSTICE

NEGRO. By the way, constable, what's the good of you?

POLICEMAN. Yessir.

NEGRO. I am asking you a question.

POLICEMAN. Yessir.

[*Re-enter* CAT.]

CAT. There's nothing on that poor white. He's full of sawdust. Can I have the policeman?

[*Purrs.*]

POLICEMAN. Help!

NEGRO. Yes, you can.

CAT. Miaow!

[*Bears off* POLICEMAN.]

NEGRO [*flinging off the wig*]. Civis Africanus sum!

CURTAIN

THE MAN IN THE CORNER

CHARACTERS

AN INSPECTOR *and destroyer of locust-swarms.*

A MISSIONARY.

A FARMER.

A JOURNALIST.

A MAN *who sits in the corner with his hands hidden in his pockets. The expression on his face never changes.*

SCENE.—A second-class compartment on the South
African railways.

THE MAN IN THE CORNER

JOURNALIST. Now, gentlemen, what do you think of the native question?

[*They all start talking at once in loud voices. Not a word can be distinguished.*]

Come now—here—I say—order, order! One at a time!

FARMER. What I always say is that Kaffirs and locusts are the curse of this country.

INSPECTOR. No, no, man. You couldn't make a living without the Kaffirs and I couldn't make a living without the locusts. And you see this gentleman here? [*indicating* MISSIONARY]. He couldn't make a living without the Kaffirs either. And this gentleman writes for the papers [*indicating* JOURNALIST] and the papers are for us. Our friend in the corner [*indicating* MAN] is evidently independent. So the fact is, you see, gentlemen, that I am the only one here who doesn't depend for a living on the native question.

[*Uproar.*]

JOURNALIST. Here—I say—come on—that'll do—don't all speak at once!

I SPEAK OF AFRICA

MAN. Do you know what I think? I think the way you all regard the native question is morally and economically unsound.

[Uproar.]

JOURNALIST. Now, now—silence—please!

MISSIONARY [to MAN, *severely*]. Even if we admitted what you say, you must remember [*impressively*] we have to think of our children.

MAN. Ah, that's just where you fail. You think of your children, but you don't think of your grandchildren.

FARMER. What do you mean?

MAN. I'll show you. Now let me ask this clergyman a question. [To MISSIONARY] What do you teach the natives in your mission?

MISSIONARY. We teach them to read and write their own language.

MAN. Is that all?

MISSIONARY. That's all. It's quite enough too. It's as much as the native mind can grasp in one generation.

FARMER. Or in ten generations.

MAN. Indeed? Well, now I'm going to tell you a home truth. [To MISSIONARY] You only teach the natives so little because you know they are quick to learn. You want to make sure that your children will have a job. If you teach the natives too much you think your children will have nothing more to teach them. You may be able to keep your job for your children, but by

THE MAN IN THE CORNER

the time your grandchildren grow up the natives will be able to teach themselves.

[*Uproar.*]

INSPECTOR. Shame!

MAN. No, I know all about you, too. You are not only afraid that your children will get no job, but you are afraid of losing your job yourself. What do you do on that farm you visit so often? I know.

INSPECTOR [*angrily*]. What do you mean?

MAN. You know what I mean.

FARMER. Why, what does he do?

MAN. He spends half his time destroying locusts and half his time breeding them. *He must create locusts to destroy.* If he killed them all he would be out of a job, don't you see.

[*Uproar.*]

INSPECTOR. Liar! Devil!

MAN. So, you see, your position is quite like the missionary's.

MISSIONARY. Devil! Liar! Antichrist!

JOURNALIST. Come, come, now—we needn't have any unpleasantness. Our friend must have his little joke.

FARMER [*savagely*]. Now I know why there are so many locusts. And now I know why there is a native question.

JOURNALIST. No, no—a joke—just a joke, I'm sure.

[MISSIONARY and INSPECTOR *laugh heartily.*]

I SPEAK OF AFRICA

FARMER. I don't see any joke. What this gentleman says is quite true.

[MISSIONARY *and* INSPECTOR *laugh more heartily.*]

MAN. Yes, what I say is quite true.

FARMER. I should like to shake hands with you.

MAN. Why? I haven't done anything. I only go about with my eyes open.

JOURNALIST. Will you write me an article on the native question?

[MISSIONARY *and* INSPECTOR *laugh very heartily indeed.*]

MAN. With pleasure.

FARMER. What a treat to meet a man who has got his eyes open, and who really tackles things! I must shake hands with you.

[MAN *takes his hands out of his pockets. They are black. He removes the white mask from his face, which is that of a native. He grins. There is complete silence for a moment, and then a greater uproar than ever.*]

CURTAIN

SOME PRESS NOTICES OF *TURBOTT WOLFE*

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