Mitford Bertram

The Sign of the Spider

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Mitford B.

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Содержание

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CHAPTER I.
"SWEET HOME!"

She was talking *at* him.

This was a thing she frequently did, and she had two ways of doing it. One was to talk at him through a third party when they two were not alone together; the other to convey moralizings and innuendo for his edification when they were – as in the present case.

Just now she was extolling the superabundant virtues of somebody else's husband, with a tone and meaning which were intended to convey to Laurence Stanninghame that she wished to Heaven one-twentieth part of them was vested in hers.

He was accustomed to being thus talked at. He ought to be, seeing he had known about thirteen years of it, on and off. But he did not like it any the better from force of habit. We doubt if anybody ever does. However, he had long ceased to take any notice, in the way of retort, no matter how acrid the tone, how biting the innuendo. Now, pushing back his chair from the breakfast-table, he got up, and, turning to the mantelpiece, proceeded to fill a pipe. His spouse, exasperated by his silence, continued to talk at – his back.

The sickly rays of the autumn sun struggled feebly through the murk of the suburban atmosphere, creeping half-ashamedly over the well-worn carpet, then up to the dingy wall-paper, whose dinginess had this redeeming point, that it toned down what otherwise would have been staring, crude, hideous. The furniture was battered and worn, and there was an atmosphere of dustiness, thick-laid, grimy, which seemed inseparable from the place. In the street a piano-organ, engineered by a brace of sham Italians, was rapping out the latest music-hall abomination. Laurence Stanninghame turned again to his wife, who was still seated at the table.

"Continue," he said. "It is a great art knowing when to make the most of one's opportunities, which, for present purposes, may be taken to mean that you had better let off all the steam you can, for you have only two days more to do it in – only two whole days."

"Going away again?" (staccato).

Laurence nodded, and emitted a cloud or two of smoke.

There rumbled forth a cannonade of words, which did not precisely express approval. Then, staccato:

"Where are you going to this time?"

"Johannesburg."

"What? But it's nonsense."

"It's fact."

"Well – of course you can't go."

"Who says so?"

"Of course you can't go, and leave us here all alone," she replied, speaking quickly. "Why, it's too preposterous! I've been treated shamefully enough all these years, but this puts the crowning straw on to it," she went on, beginning to mix her metaphor, as angry people – and especially angry women – will. "Of course you can't go!"

To one statement, as made above, he was at no pains to reply. He had heard it so often that it had long since passed into the category of "not new, not true, and doesn't matter." To the other he answered:

"I've an idea that the term 'of course' makes the other way; I *can* go, and I am going – in fact, I have already booked my passage by the *Persian*, sailing from Southampton the day after to-morrow. Look! will that convince you?" holding out the passage ticket.

Then there was a scene – an awful racket. It was infamous. She would not put up with such treatment. It amounted to desertion, and so forth. Yes, it was a "scene," indeed. But force of habit had utterly dulled its effectiveness as a weapon. Indeed, the only effect it might have been calculated to produce in the mind of the offending party had he not already secured his berth, would be that of moving him to sally forth and carry out that operation on the spot.

"Look here!" he said, when failure of breath and vocabulary had perforce effected a lull. "I've had about enough of this awful life, and so I'm going to try if I can't do something to set things right again, before it's too late. Now, the Johannesburg 'boom' is the thing to do it, if anything will. It's kill or cure."

"And what if it's kill?"

"What if it's kill? Then, one may as well take it fighting. Better, anyway, than scattering one's brains on that hearth-rug some morning in the small hours out of sheer disgust with the dead hopelessness of life. That's what it is coming to as things now are."

"All very well. But, in that case, what is to become of me – of us?"

A very hard look came into the man's face at the question.

"In that case – draw on the other side of the house. There's plenty there," he answered shortly, re-lighting his pipe, which had gone out in mid-blast.

The reply seemed to fan up her wrath anew, and she started in to talk at him again. Under which circumstances, perhaps it was just as well that a couple of heavy bangs overhead and a series of appalling yells, betokening a nursery catastrophe, should cut short her eloquence, and start her off, panic-stricken, to investigate.

Left alone, still standing with his back to the mantelpiece, Laurence Stanninghame put forth a hand. It shook – was, in fact, all of a tremble.

"Look at that!" he said to himself. "The squalid racket of this rough-and-tumble life is playing the devil with my nerves. I believe I couldn't drink a wineglassful of grog at this moment without spilling half of it on the floor. I'll try, anyhow."

He unlocked a chiffonier, produced a whisky bottle, and, having poured some into a wineglass, not filling it, tossed off the "nip."

"That's better," he said. Then mechanically he moved to the window and stood looking out, though in reality seeing nothing. He was thinking – thinking hard. The course he had decided to adopt was the right thing – as to that he had no sort of doubt. He had no regular income, and such remnant of capital as he still possessed was dwindling alarmingly. Men had made fortunes at places like Johannesburg, starting with almost literally the traditional half-crown, why should not he? Not that he expected to make a fortune; a fair competence would satisfy him, a sufficiency. The thought of no longer being obliged to hold an inquest on every sixpence; of bidding farewell forever to this life of pinching and screwing; of dwelling decently instead of pigging it in a cramped and jerry-built semi-detached; of enjoying once more some of life's brightnesses – sport, for instance, of which he was passionately fond; of the means to wander, when disposed, through earth's fairest places – these reflections would have fired his soul as he stood there, but that the flame of hopefulness had long since died within him and gone out. Now they only evoked bitterness by their tantalizing allurement.

Other men had made their pile, why should not he? Rainsford, for instance, who had been, if possible, more down on his luck than himself – Rainsford had gone out to the new gold town while it was yet very new and had made a good thing of it. Two or three other acquaintances of his had gone there and had made very much more than a good thing of it. Why should not he?

Laurence Stanninghame was just touching middle age. As he stood at the window, the murky September sun seemed to bring out the lines and wrinkles of his clear-cut face, which was distinctly

the face of a man who has not made a good thing of life, and who can never for a moment lose sight of that fact. There were lines above the eyes, clear, blue, and somewhat sunken eyes, which denoted the habit of the brows to contract on very slight provocation, and far oftener than was good for their owner's peace of mind, and the bronze underlying the clear skin told of a former life in the open – possibly under a warmer sun than that now playing upon it. As to its features, it was a strong face, but there was a certain indefinable something about it when off its guard, which would have told a close physiognomist of the possession of latent instincts, unknown to their possessor, instincts which, if stifled, choked, were not dead, and which, if ever their depths were stirred, would yield forth strange and dangerous possibilities.

He was of fine constitution, active and wiry; but the cramped life and squalid worry of a year-in year-out, semi-detached, suburban existence had, as he told himself, played the mischief with his nerves, and now to this was added the ghastly vista of impending actual beggary. Whatever he did and wherever he went this thought would not be quenched. It was ever with him, gnawing like an aching tooth. Lying awake at night it would glare at him with spectral eyes in the darkness; then, unless he could force himself by all manner of strange and artificial means, such as repeating favourite verse, and so forth, to throw it off, good-bye to sleep – result, nerves yet further shaken, a succession of brooding days, and system thrown off its balance by domestic friction and strife. Many a man has sought a remedy for far less ill in the bottle, whether of grog or laudanum; but this one's character was in its strength proof against the first, while for the latter, that might come, but only as a very last extremity. Meanwhile ofttimes he wondered how that blank, hopeless feeling of having completely done with life could be his, seeing that he was still in his prime. Formerly eager, sanguine, warm-hearted, glowing with good impulses; now indifferent, sceptical, with a heart of stone and the chronic sneer of a cynic.

He was one of those men who seem born never to succeed. With everything in his favour apparently, Laurence Stanninghame never did succeed. Everything he touched seemed to go wrong. If he speculated, whether it was a half-crown bet or a thousand-pound investment, smash went the concern. He was of an inventive turn and had patented – of course at considerable expenditure – a thing or two; but by some crafty twist of the law's subtle rascalities, others had managed to reap the benefit. He had tried his hand at writing, but press and publisher alike shied at him. He was too bitter, too bold, too sweeping, too thorough. So he threw that, as he had thrown other things, in sheer disgust and hopelessness.

Now he was going to cast in the net for a final effort, and already his spirits began to revive at the thought. Any faint spark of lingering sentiment, if any there were, was quenched in the thought that the turn of the wheel might bring good luck, but it was impossible it could strand him in worse case. For the sentimental side of it – separation, long absence – well, the droop of the cynical corners of the mouth became more emphasized at the recollection of that faded old figment, "home, sweet home," and glowing aspirations after the so-called holy and pure joys of the family circle; whereas the reality, a sort of Punch and Judy show at best. No, there was no sentimental side to this undertaking.

Yet Laurence Stanninghame's partner in life was by no means a bad sort of a woman. She had plenty of redeeming qualities, in that she was good-hearted at bottom and well-meaning, and withal a most devoted mother. But she had a tongue and a temper, together with an exceedingly injudicious, not to say foolish twist of mind; and this combination, other good points notwithstanding, the quality which should avail to redeem has hitherto remained undiscoverable in any live human being. Furthermore, she owned a will. When two wills come into contact the weakest goes under, and that soon. Then there may be peace. In this case neither went under, because, presumably, evenly balanced. Result – warfare, incessant, chronic.

Having finished his pipe, Laurence Stanninghame got out a hat and an umbrella, and set to work to brush the former and furl the latter prior to going out. The hat was not of that uniform and glossy smoothness which one could see into to shave, and the umbrella was weather-beaten of aspect.

The morning coat, though well cut, was shiny at the seams. Yet, in spite of the wear and tear of his outer gear, with so unmistakably thoroughbred a look was their wearer stamped that it seemed he might have worn anything. Many a man would have looked and felt shabby in this long service get-up; this one never gave it a thought, or, if he did, it was only to wonder whether he should ever again, after this time, put on that venerable "stove-pipe," and if so, what sort of experiences would have been his in the interim.

Now there was a patter of feet in the passage, the door-handle turned softly, and a little girl came in. She was a sweetly-pretty child, with that rare combination of dark-lashed brown eyes and golden hair. Here, if anywhere, was Laurence Stanninghame's soft place. His other progeny was represented by two sturdy boys, combative of instinct and firm of tread, and whose gambols, whether pacific or bellicose, were apt to shake the rattletrap old semi-detached and the parental nerves in about equal proportions; constituting, furthermore, a standing bone of parental contention. This little one, however, having turned ten, was of a companionable age; and to the male understanding the baby stage does not, as a rule, commend itself.

She was full of the racket which had just taken place overhead; but to this Laurence hardly listened. There was always a racket overhead, a fight or a fall or a bumping. One more or less hardly mattered. He was thinking of his own weakness. Would she feel parting with him? Children as a rule were easily consoled. A new and gaudy toy would make them forget anything. And appositely to this thought, the little one's mind was also full of a marvellous engine she had seen the last time she had been taken into London – one which wound up with a key and ran a great distance without stopping.

Being alone – for by this time he had come to regard all display of affection before others as a weakness – Laurence drew the child to him and kissed her tenderly.

"And supposing that engine were some day to come puffing in, Fay; to-morrow or the day after?" he said.

The little one's eyes danced. The toy was an expensive one, quite out of reach for her, she knew. If only it were not! And now her delighted look and her reply made him smile with a strange mixture of sadness and cynicism. And as approaching footsteps heralded further invasion, he put the child from him hurriedly, and went out. Hailing a tram car, he made his way up to town to carry out the remainder of his sudden, though not very extensive, preparations.

Now on the following evening arrived a package of toys, of a splendour hitherto unparalleled within that dingy suburban semi-detached, and there was a great banging of gorgeous drums and a tootling of glittering trumpets, and little Fay was round-eyed with delight in the acquisition of the wondrous locomotive, ultimately declining to go to sleep save with one tiny fist shut tight round the chimney thereof. That would counteract any passing effect that might be inspired by a vacant chair, thought Laurence Stanninghame, amid the roar of the mail train speeding through the raw haze of the early morning. Sentiment? feelings? What had he to do with such? They were luxuries, and as such only for those who could afford to indulge in them. He could not.

CHAPTER II.
ADAM'S FIRST WIFE

The R. M. S. *Persian* was cleaving her southward way through the smooth translucence of the tropical sea.

It was the middle of the morning. Her passengers, scattered around her quarter-deck in the coolness of the sheltering awning, were amusing themselves after their kind; some gregarious and chatting in groups, others singly, or in pairs, reading. The men were mostly in flannels and blazers, and deck-shoes; the women affected light array of a cool nature; and all looked as though it were too much trouble to move or even to speak, though here and there an individual more enterprising than his or her fellows would make a spasmodic attempt at a constitutional, said attempt usually resolving itself into five and a half feeble turns, up and down the clear part of the deck, to culminate in abrupt collapse; for it is warm in the tropical seas.

"What a lazy Johnnie you are, Stanninghame! Now, what the deuce are you thinking about all this time, I wonder?"

He addressed, who had been gazing out upon the sea and sky-line, plunged in dreamy thought, did not even turn his head.

"Get into this chair, Holmes, if you want to talk," he said. "A fellow can't wring his own neck and emit articulate sound at the same time. What?"

The other, who had come up behind, laughed, and dropped into the empty deck-chair beside Laurence. He was the latter's cabin chum, and the two had become rather friendly.

"Nothing to do and plenty of time to do it in," he went on, stretching himself and yawning. "I'm jolly sick of this voyage already."

"And we're scarcely half through with it? It's a fact, Holmes, but I'm not sick of it a bit."

"Eh?" and the other stared. "That's odd, Stanninghame. You, I should have thought, if anyone, would be just dog-gone tired of it by now. Why, you never even cut into any of the fun that's going – such as it is."

"You may well put that in, Holmes. As, for instance – listen!"

For the whanging of the piano in the saloon beneath had attained to an even greater pitch of discord than was normally the case. To it was added the excruciating rasp of a fiddle.

"Heavens! Are they immolating a stowaway cat down there?" murmured Laurence, with a little shudder. "It would have been more humane to have put the misguided brute to a painless end."

Holmes spluttered.

"It reminds me," he said, "of one voyage I made by this line. Some of the passengers got up what they called an 'Amusement Committee.'"

"A fearful and wonderful monster!"

"Just so. It's mission was to worry the soul out of each and all of us, in search of some nefarious gift. Oh, and we mustered plenty, from the 'cello to the 'bones.' Well, what is going on down there now is sheer delight in comparison. Imagine the present performance heaped up – only relieved by caterwauls of about equal quality – and that from 6 A. M. until 'lights out.'"

"I don't want to imagine it, thank you, Holmes; so spare what little of that faculty I still retain. But, say now, when was this eventful voyage?"

"In the summer of '84."

"Precisely. I remember now. It was in the newspapers at the time that in more than one ship's log were entered strange reports of gruesome and wholly indefinable noises heard at night in certain latitudes. Some of the crews mutinied, and there was an instance on record of more than one hand,

bursting with superstition, going mad and jumping overboard. So, you see, Holmes, your 'Amusement Committee' doubly deserved hanging."

The delicious readiness of this "lie" so fetched Holmes that he opened his head and emitted a howl of laughter. He made such a row, in fact, that neither of them heard the convulsively half-repressed splutter which burst forth somewhere behind them.

"Well, you were going to explain how it is you haven't got sick of the voyage yet," said Holmes, when his roar had subsided.

"Was I? I didn't say so. What a chap you are for returning to worry a point, Holmes. However, I don't mind telling you. The fact is, I enjoy this voyage because it is so thoroughly and delightfully restful. You are not only allowed to do nothing, but are actually expected to perform that easy and congenial feat. There is nothing to worry you – absolutely nothing – not even a baby in the next cabin."

"I don't mind a little worry now and then," objected the other, in the tone and with the look of one who was ignorant of the real meaning of the word. "It shakes one up a bit, don't you know – relieves the monotony of life."

"Oh, does it? Look here, Holmes; I don't say it in an 'assert-my-superiority' sense, but I believe I'm a little older than you. Now, I've had a trifle too much of the commodity under discussion. In fact, I would take my chances of the monotony in order to dispense with any more of the other thing."

Holmes cast a furtive and curious glance at his companion, but made no immediate reply. He was an average, good-looking, well-built specimen of Young England, and his healthy sun-burnt countenance showed, in its cheery serenity, that, as the other had hinted, he was not speaking from knowledge. At any rate, it was a marked contrast to the rather lined and prematurely careworn countenance of Laurence Stanninghame, even as his frank, jolly laugh was to the half-stifled grin which would lurk around the satirical corners of the latter's mouth when anything amused him.

"What a row those women are making over there!" remarked Laurence, as peal after peal of feminine laughter went up from one of the groups above referred to.

"That ass Swaynston, I suppose," growled the other. "Don't know what anybody can see funny about the fellow; he makes me sick. By the way, I haven't seen Miss Ormskirk on deck this morning."

"That'll make Swaynston sick, won't it? Isn't he one of her poodles?"

"Eh? Her what?"

"Fetch and carry; stand up on his hind legs and beg. There – good dog! and all that sort of thing, you know; go to heel, too, when ordered."

Holmes laughed again, this time in rather a shamefaced way, for he was conscious of having filled the rôle whose subserviency was thus pungently characterized by his cynical companion.

"Oh, dash it all, Stanninghame, don't be such an old bear!" he burst forth. "A fellow can't help doing things for a devilish pretty girl, eh?"

"A good many fellows can't, apparently, for this one. Directly she appears on the scene they go at her like flies at a honey pot. There's the doctor, and the fourth brass-button man – er, I beg his pardon, the fourth 'officer,' – and Swaynston, and yourself, and Heaven knows how many more. And one gets hold of a cushion – which she doesn't want; another a wrap – of which the same holds good; two of you strive to rend a deck-chair limb from limb in your eagerness to dump it down on the very last spot in the ship where she desires to sit, what time you are all scowling at each other as though there was not room for any given two of you in the same world. I don't want to hurt your feelings, Holmes, but, upon my word, it's the most d – ridiculous spectacle on earth."

"I don't see why it should be," was the half-snuffy rejoinder. "There's nothing ridiculous in common civility."

"No, only to see you all treading on each other's heels to do *konza* to a woman who's nearly losing her life trying not to laugh at the crowd of you."

"Hallo! what's this?" sung out Holmes, not sorry for an excuse to change the subject. "Why, you used a Zulu word, Stanninghame, and yet you say you never were in South Africa before."

"Well, and then? I've once or twice known fellows use a Greek word who had never been near the land of Socrates in their lives."

"Still, that's different. Every fellow learns Greek at school, but no fellow learns Zulu, eh?"

"You can't swear to that. Well, never mind. Perhaps I have been mugging it up as a preliminary to coming out here. Note, however, Holmes, that I used the word advisedly. *Konza* does not mean to show civility, but to do homage, and that of a tolerably abject kind – in fact, to knuckle under."

"All the same, I believe you have been out here before," went on Holmes, staring at him with a new interest. "Only you're such a mysterious chap that you won't let on."

"Have it so, if you will. Only, aren't you rather drawing a red herring across the trail, Holmes? We were talking about Miss Ormskirk."

"Um – yes, so we were. But, have you talked to her at all, Stanninghame? I believe even you would be fetched if you did."

"H'm – well, I'd better leave it alone then, hadn't I, seeing that I undertook this voyage not for love, but for money? What's her name, by the way?"

Holmes stared. "Her name," he began – "Oh – er – I see; her other name? By Jove! it's an odd one. Lilith."

"An old one too; the oldest she-name on record, bar none."

"What? How does that come in?"

"Tradition hath it that Lilith was Adam's first wife. That makes it the oldest she-name on record, doesn't it?"

"Of course. What a rum chap you are, Stanninghame! Now, I wonder how many fellows could have told one that?"

"Well, I am a 'know-a-little-of-everything,' they tell me," said Laurence, without a shade of self-complacency. "But, I say, what do these two want bothering around? Not another subscription already?"

Two individuals, armed with mysterious pencil and paper, were moving from group to group, with a word to each. The hawk-like profile of the one bespoke his nationality if not his tribe, even as the pug-nosed, squab-faced figure-head of the other spoke to his.

"It's the 'sweep,'" said Holmes, with kindling interest. "They're going to draw it in the smoke-room. Come along and see it. It'll be something to do."

"But I don't want something to do. I want to do nothing, as I told you just now, and – Hallo! By George, he's gone!"

One glance at the retreating Holmes, who was making all sail for the smoke-room, and Laurence tranquilly resumed his former occupation – gazing out over the blue-green surface, to wit. Not long, however, was he to be left to the enjoyment of the same.

"Can I have this chair? Is it anybody's?"

He turned, but did not start at the voice, which was soft and well modulated. The two deck-chairs had been backed against the companion, in whose doorway now stood framed the form of the speaker.

Rather tall, of exquisite proportions, billowing in splendid curves from the perfectly round waist, the form was about as complete an example of female anatomy as humanity could show of whatever race or clime. The head, well set, was carried rather proudly, the cut of the cool, light blouse displaying a pillar-like throat. Hazel eyes, melting, dark fringed; brows strongly marked, enough to show plenty of character, without being heavy; hair abundant, curled in a fringe upon the forehead, and drawn back from the head in sheeny, dark brown waves. Such was the vision which Laurence Stanninghame beheld, as he turned at the sound of the voice. Well, what then? He had seen it before.

"It isn't anybody's chair," he replied, rising.

"Oh, thank you," she said, stepping forth. "No, don't trouble; I can carry it myself," she added.

"Where do you want it taken to?" he said, ignoring her protest, and thinking, with grim amusement, how he was about to fulfil the very rôle he had been satirizing his younger friend about, namely, fetch and carry for the spoilt beauty of the quarter-deck.

"Oh, thanks; anywhere that's cool."

"Then you can't do better than leave it where it is," he rejoined, with a quiet smile, setting down the chair again and resuming his own.

Lilith Ormskirk smiled too, but she made no objection, sliding comfortably into the chair, and gazing meditatively at the point of the neat and shapely deck-shoe just peeping forth from beneath her skirt.

"What are they doing over there?" she began; "drawing the 'sweep,' are they not? How is it you are not there too, Mr. Stanninghame? Even those of the men who won't help us in getting up any fun are always ready enough for anything of that kind. Well, I suppose it gives them something to do."

Something to do! that eternal "something to do!"

"But that's just what I don't want – not on board this ship, at any rate," he retorted. "It's a grand opportunity for lazing, an opportunity that can't occur often in life, and I want to make the most of it."

She glanced furtively at his face. It was a face that interested her, had done so since she first beheld it. A very out-of-the-common face, she had decided; and the careless reserve, the very indifference of its owner's habit of speech, had powerfully added to her interest. They had met before, had exchanged a few words now and again, but had never conversed.

"A thing that is a standing puzzle to me," he went on – "would be, rather, if I knew a little less of human nature – is the alacrity with which people waste their precious time in order to make a few shillings. It isn't a craving after profit either, for there can't be much profit about it. Yet Myers there, the Hebraic instinct ever to the fore, must needs throw away the splendid recuperative opportunities afforded by a sea voyage, must needs spend the whole of each and every morning getting up that miserable 'sweep.' It must be the sheer Hebraic instinct of delighting to handle coin – the ecstasy of contact with it even."

"And the other – the one who helps him? He's not Hebraic?"

"No, he's English. Therefore he must be forever 'getting up' something. We pride ourselves upon our solid deliberation, yet we are about the fussiest and most interfering race on the face of the globe."

"Then you don't have anything to do with the popular midday delight?"

"Oh, yes. I hand them my shilling every morning when they come round, and pouch tranquilly later on what they see fit to restore to me as the result of that modest investment."

She laughed, and as she did so Laurence looked her full in the face. He wanted to find out again what there could be in this girl that reduced everybody to subjection so utter and complete. Was it in the swift flash of the fringed eyes, in the sensuous attractiveness of a certain swarthy, golden, mantling shade of colour which harmonized so well with the bright clearness of the eyes, with the smooth serenity of the brow? He could not determine; yet in that brief fraction of a moment, as he looked, he was uneasily conscious of a certain magnetic thrill communicating itself even to him.

"You are stronger-minded than I am," she said. "I'm afraid I bet shockingly at times."

"Well, whenever I do I invariably lose, which is a first rate curative to any temptation towards that especial form of dissipation."

"Look now, Mr. Stanninghame, I'm going to take you to task," she went on. "Why won't you ever help us in getting up anything?"

"But I do help you."

"You do? Why, there was that concert the other night – you refused when you were asked to take part in it."

"But I did take part in it – as audience. You must have an audience, you know. It's essential to the performance."

"Don't be provoking, now," she said, with a laugh which belied the rebuke, for this sort of fencing delighted her. "You never take part in our dances."

"Dances? Did you ever happen to notice the top of my head?"

"I don't think so," she replied, with a splutter of mirth, wondering what whimsicality was coming next. "Why?"

"Only that its covering is getting rather thin, as no self-respecting haircutter ever loses the opportunity of reminding me."

"That's nothing. Look at Mr. Dyson, for instance. Now he might say that. Yet he is a most indefatigable dancer."

"Yes, and that ostrich-egg of his bobbing up and down above the gay and giddy rout is one of the most ridiculous sights on earth. Are you urging me to furnish a similar absurdity?"

"But you might do something to help amuse us. In fact, it is only your duty."

"Hallo! Excuse me, Miss Ormskirk, but that's exactly what that fellow Mac – Mac – something – I never can remember his name – the doctor, you know – was trying to drive into me the other night. I told him I didn't come on board this ship for the purpose of amusing my fellow-creatures – not any – but with the object of being transported to Cape Town with all possible despatch."

"Then you leave the ship at Cape Town? Are you, too, going on to Johannesburg?"

"Not being dead, yes."

"Not being dead? Why, what in the world do you mean?"

"Oh, only that Holmes was asking after all his old friends one night in the smoke-room, and all who were not dead had gone to Johannesburg. Others I've heard talking the same way. So I've got into the habit of thinking there are but two states – death and Johannesburg."

"Tell me, Mr. Stanninghame," said Lilith, struggling with a laugh, "are you ever by any chance serious?"

"Oh, yes; I'm never anything else."

She hardly felt inclined to laugh now. There was a subtle something in the tone – a something underlying the whimsicality of the words, that seemed to quell her rising mirth. Again she glanced at his face, and felt her interest deepen tenfold.

"We may meet again then," she said, her tone unconsciously softening; "I am going to Johannesburg soon."

Meet again? Why, they had only just met; and what was it to him? Yet still more was he conscious of a thrill as of latent witchery thrown over him, as he lounged there in the warm luxuriousness of the tropical noontide, with which this beautiful creature at his side, in her careless attitude, all symmetry and grace, seemed so wholly in keeping.

"What a strange name that is of yours," he said, in the abrupt, unthought-out way which was so characteristic of him.

She started slightly at its very abruptness, then smiled.

"Is it?" she said; "well, your own is not a very common one."

"No, it isn't; which is a bore at times, because people will persist in spelling it wrong. It might have been worse, though. They went in for giving us all more or less cloth-of-gold sort of names, though mine smacks rather of the cloister than of the lists. One of my brothers they dubbed Aylmer. He was in a regiment, and the mess would persist in calling him Jack, for short. He resented it at first – afterwards came to prefer it. Said it was more convenient. Well, it was."

"Mine is older than that. The very oldest feminine name on record," she said, with just a spice of quiet mischief. "Lilith was Adam's first wife."

If she thought the other was going to look foolish at hearing his own words thus reproduced in such literal fashion, she never made a greater mistake in her life.

"So tradition hath it," he rejoined, with perfect unconcern. "It's a queer out-of-the-way sort of name – I'm not sure I don't rather like it. There's a creeping suggestion of witchery about it, too, which is on the whole attractive."

He was looking at her straight in the eyes, for they had both risen, the luncheon-bell having rung. She unflinchingly returned the glance, which on both sides was that of two adversaries mentally appraising each other prior to a rapier-bout.

"Then beware such unholy spells," she replied, with a light but enigmatical laugh. And turning, she left him.

Now Holmes, who, bursting with astonishment and trepidation as he beheld how his friend was engaged, came bustling up, with a scared and furtive demeanour.

"By the Lord, old man, we just have put our foot in it," he sputtered. "All the time we were sitting here, Miss Ormskirk was just inside the companion. She must have heard every word we said."

"Don't care a hang if she did."

"Man alive, but we were talking about her! About *her*, and she heard it! Don't you understand?"

"Perfectly; still I don't care a hang. A hang? No, nor the rope, nor the drop, nor the whole jolly gallows do I care. Will that do?"

Holmes gasped. This fellow Stanninghame was a lunatic. Mad, by Jove! Still gasping as he thought of the enormity of the situation, he left without another word, diving below to try and drown his confusion in a whisky and soda, iced.

But the other, still lingering on the now deserted deck, was conscious of a very unwonted sensation. The spell which he had derided so bitterly when beholding others drawn within its toils had begun to weave itself around him. This vague stirring of his mental pulses, what did it mean? Heavens! it was horrible. It brought back old memories, whose tin-pot unreality was never recalled save as subject matter for bitter gibe and mockery. He could not have believed it possible.

"It's the nerves," he told himself. "These years of squalid worry have done it. My nerves are shaken to bits. Well, I must pull them together again. But oh, the bosh of it! the utter bosh of it!"

CHAPTER III.
"BEWARE SUCH UNHOLY SPELLS!"

The sway of Lilith Ormskirk over the saloon and quarter-deck of the *Persian* was as complete as any woman's sway ever is. From the grizzled captain – nominally under whose charge she was making the voyage – down to the newly emancipated schoolboy going out to seek employment, the male element was, with scarcely an exception, her collective slave. Among the women, of course, her rule was less complete; those who were furthest from all possibility of rivalling her in attractiveness of person or charm of manner being, of course, the most virulent in their jealousy and the expression thereof. Lilith, however, cared nothing for this, or, if she did, gave no sign. She was never bitter, even towards those whom she knew to be among her worst detractors, never spiteful. She was not faultless, not by any means, but her failings did not lie in the direction of littleness. But she always seemed bright and happy, and full of life – too much so, thought more than one of her perfervid adorers, who would fain have monopolized her.

She was in the mid-twenties – that age when the egotism and rather narrow enthusiasms and prejudices of the girl shade off into the graciousness and *savoir-vivre* of womanhood. She could look back on more than one foolishness, from whose results she had providentially escaped, with an uneasy shudder, followed by a heartfelt thankfulness, and a sense of having not only learnt but profited by experience, which sense enlarged her mind and her sympathies, and imparted to her demeanour a self-possession and serenity beyond her years.

We said the male element, with scarce an exception, was her collective slave. Such an exception was Laurence Stanninghame.

Without being a misogynist, he had no great opinion of women. He owned they might be delightful – frequently were – up to a certain point, and this was the point at which you began to take them seriously. But to treat any one of them as though the sun had ceased to shine because her presence was withdrawn, struck him as sheer insanity. It might be all right for youngsters like Holmes or Swaynston, the licensed fool of the smoking room, or Dyson, to whose senile enthusiasm for the mazy rout we have heard allusion made – the latter on the principle of "no fool like an old fool"; but not for him – not for a man in the matured vigour of his physical and mental powers. Wherefore, when forced himself to acknowledge the spell which Lilith had begun to weave around him, he unhesitatingly set it down to impaired nerves.

As a direct result, he avoided the cause. It was a cowardly course of action, he told himself. He was afraid of her. If she could throw the magic of her sorcery over him during a brief ten minutes of conversation, what the very deuce would happen if he allowed himself to be drawn into anything approaching the easy-going shipboard intimacy – deck-walking by moonlight, chairs drawn up in a snug corner during the heat of the day, and so forth! Who knew what latent capacities for being made an ass of might not develop themselves within him. He felt really alarmed.

Let it not be supposed that any scruple on the ground of conventionality, obligation, what not, entered into his misgivings. For Laurence Stanninghame had been clean disillusioned all along the line. He hadn't the shred of an illusion left. He had started life with a fair stock-in-trade of good intentions and straight ideas, and, indeed, had acted up to them honestly, and in good faith. But now? – "I've had a h – l of a time!" he would exclaim to himself, during one of those meditative gazes out seaward, for which we heard his younger friend taking him to task. "Yes – just that." And now, only touching middle life, he believed in nothing and nobody. He had become a cold, keen, strong-headed, selfish cynic. If ever his mind reverted to the fresher and more generous impulses or actions of his younger days, it was with a contemptuous self-pity. His view of the morality of life now was just the amount of success, of advantage, of gratification to be got out of it. He thoroughly indorsed the

principle of the old *roué's* advice to his grandson: "Be good, and you *may* be happy – but you'll have d – d little fun," taking care to italicise the word "may." For he had found that the first clause of the saw had brought him neither happiness nor fun.

With his fellow-passengers on board the *Persian* he was neither popular nor the reverse. Among the men, some liked him, others didn't. He was genial enough, and good company in the smoking room, but wouldn't do anything in the way of promoting the general amusement – and that voyage was a particularly lively one in the matter of getting things up. The fair section of the saloon was puzzled, and could not make up its mind whether to dislike him or not. For the first, he consistently, though not ostentatiously, avoided it, instead of laying himself out to make himself agreeable – though indications were not wanting that he could so make himself if he chose. For the second, the fact that he remained an unknown quantity was in his favour, if only that the unfamiliarity of reserve – mystery – never fails to appeal strongly to the minds of women – and savages.

It was not so difficult for him to avoid Lilith Ormskirk, if only that until that morning he had hardly exchanged a hundred words with her at a time. Wherefore the upshot of his resolve was noticeable neither by its object nor by the passengers at large. Holmes, indeed, who, having recovered from his consternation, had been secretly watching his friend, was anticipating the fun of seeing the latter fall headlong into the pit whose brink he had so boldly skirted, so openly derided. But he was disappointed. Laurence, if he referred to Lilith again, did so in the same casual, indifferent way as before, nor did he ever terminate any of his dreamy and seaward-gazing meditations in order to open converse with her, even with such inducement as solitary propinquity on more than one occasion.

"By Jove! the fellow is a cross between an icicle and a stone," quoth Holmes to himself, in mingled wonder and disgust.

It was night – warm, sensuous, tropical night. There was dancing in the saloon, and the glare from the skylight and the banging of the piano and chatter of voices gave forth strange contrast to the awesome stillness of the great liquid plain, the dewy richness of the air, the stars hanging in golden clusters from a black vault, the fiery eye of some larger planet rolling and flashing among them as the revolving beacon of a lighthouse. Here the muffled throb of the propeller, and the rushing hiss of water as the prow of the great steamer sheared through the placid surface, furrowing up on either side a long line of phosphorescent wave. Such a contrast he who stood alone in the darkness, leaning over the taffrail, could appreciate nicely.

There were quick, light footsteps. Somebody else was walking the deck. Well, whoever it was, he himself was screened by the stem of one of the ship's boats swung in and resting on chocks. They would not see him, which was all right, for he was in a queer mood and not inclined to talk. After a turn or two, the footsteps paused, then something brushed his elbow in the darkness, as suddenly starting away, while a half-frightened voice exclaimed:

"Oh, I beg your pardon. I couldn't see anything in the dark, just coming up out of the light of the saloon, too. Why, it's Mr. Stanninghame!"

To one who had been out of doors even a few minutes it was not very dark, for the stars were shining with vivid brilliancy. It needed not the sense of sight, that of hearing was enough. Nay, more, a subtile sixth sense, whatever it might be, had warned Laurence Stanninghame of the identity of the intruder.

"No case of mistaken identity here," he said. "But how is it you are all by yourself?"

"Oh, I got tired of all the whirl and chatter. I craved for some fresh air, and so I stole away," said Lilith. "Why, how heavy the dew is here in these tropical seas!" she added, withdrawing her arm from the taffrail upon which she had begun to lean.

The man, watching her furtively, said nothing for a moment. That same chord within him thrilled to her voice, her propinquity. Doubtless his nerves, high strung with recent worry, were playing the fool with him. He was conscious of a kind of envenomed resentment, almost aversion;

yet his chief misgiving at that moment, which he recognized with added wrath, was lest she should leave him as quickly as she had come.

"All by yourself as usual!" she went on, flashing at him a bright smile. "Thinking, I suppose?"

"I don't know that I was. I believe I was trying to realize the immensity and silence of the midnight ocean, as far as that tin-pot racket down there would allow one to realize anything. Then it occurred to me how long it would take for the intense solitude to drive a man mad if he were cast away alone in it."

"Not long, I should think," answered Lilith, gazing seriously out over the smooth, oily sea. "The horror of it would soon do that for me."

"And yet why should it have such an effect at all?" he went on. "The grandeur of the situation ought to counterpoise any such weakness. Given enough to support life without undue stinting, with a certainty of rescue at the end, and, I think, a fortnight as castaway in these waveless seas would be an uncommonly interesting experience."

"What? A fortnight? A whole fortnight in ghastly solitude! Silence only broken by the splash or snort of Heaven knows what horrible sea monster! Any consideration of peril apart, I am sure that one night of it would turn me into a raving, gibbering lunatic."

"Perhaps. People are differently built. For my part, discounting the 'sea monster,' I am certain I should enjoy the experience. For one thing, there would be no post."

"But no more there is here on board," she said, struggling with the laugh which the dry irrelevancy had brought to her lips.

"No – but there's – Swaynston."

This time the laugh came rippling outright, and through it came the sound of footsteps.

"Oh, here you are, Miss Ormskirk. I've been looking for you everywhere. This is our dance."

Lilith, catching the satirical twinkle in the other's eyes in the starlight, did not know which way to turn to control an overmastering impulse to laugh uninterruptedly for about five minutes, the cruel part of it being that the interrupter was Swaynston himself.

The latter, a pursy individual, was holding out an arm somewhat in the attitude of a seal's flipper; but Lilith did not take it.

"Do be very good-natured and excuse me," she said. "I don't want to dance any more to-night; the noise and heat have made my head ache."

"Really, really? I'll find you a chair then, in some quiet corner," fussed Swaynston. But Lilith seemed not enthusiastic over that allurement, and finally, with some difficulty, she got rid of him; he grinning "from the teeth outwards," but consumed with fury nevertheless.

So that was why she had stolen away from them all, to slip up and talk in a quiet corner with that fellow Stanninghame, who was probably some absconding swindler, with a couple of detectives and a warrant waiting for him in Table Bay? Thus Swaynston.

Nor would it have tended to allay his irritation could he have heard the object of it after his departure.

"So you think he is worse than the post?" she said, with a laugh in her eyes. "Yet he is one of the most devoted of my – poodles."

The demure malice of her tone no more disconcerted the other than that former endeavour to show him she had overheard his remarks by quoting his own words.

"Oh, yes," was the unconcerned reply. "He sits up on his hind legs a little better than any of them."

For a few moments she said nothing, seeming to have become infected with her companion's dreamy meditativeness. Then:

"And you are not tired of the voyage yet? You were saying the other day that its monotony was enjoyable."

"I say so still. Look!" he broke off, pointing to the sea.

A commotion was going on beneath its surface. Their grisly shapes vivid in the disturbed phosphorescence, drawing a wake of flame behind them, rushed two great sharks. Hither and thither they darted, every detail of their ugly forms discernible on the framing of the phosphorescent blaze, even the set glare of the cruel eye; and, no less nimble in swift doubling flashes, several smaller fish were trying to evade the laws of nature – the absorption of the weakest, to wit. There was something indescribably horrible in the fiery rush of the sea-demons beneath the oily blackness of the tropical waters.

"How awful! how truly awful!" murmured Lilith, with a strong shudder of repulsion, yet gazing as one fascinated at the weird sight.

"Yet it is the perfection of an object lesson, one that comes in just in time to point the moral to my answer," he said. "If those fish, now in process of being eaten, were caught and kept in an aquarium tank, it might be more monotonous for them than furnishing fun and food to the first comer in the way of bigger fish. Possibly they might yearn for the excitement of being harried, though I doubt it. That sort of philosophy is reserved for us humans. If we knock our heads against a brick wall we howl; if we haven't got a brick wall to knock them against we howl louder."

"And the moral is?"

"*Dona nobis pacem.*"

"I see," she said at last, for it took her a little while to thoroughly grasp the application, partly distracted as her thinking powers were in trying to find a deeper meaning than the one intended. "Yet peace is a thing that no one can enjoy in this world. How should they when the law of life is struggle – struggle and strife?"

"Precisely. That, however, is due to the faultiness of human nature. The philosophy of the matter is the same. Its soundness remains untouched."

"Yet you are not consistent. You were implying just now that, failing a brick wall to knock our heads against, we started in search of one. Now does not that apply to those who go out into the world – to the other end of the world – instead of remaining peacefully at home?" she added, a sly sort of "I-have-you-there" inflection in her tone.

"Pardon me. My consistency is all right. Begging a question will not shatter it."

"Begging a question?"

"Of course. For present purposes the said begging is comprised in the word 'peacefully.' See?"

"Ah!"

Again she was silent. The other, watching the flash of the starlight on the meditative upturned eyes, the clearly marked brows, the firm setting of the lips, was more conscious than ever of the latent witchery in the sweet, serene face. He would not flee from its spells now, he decided. He would meet them boldly, and throw them off, coil for coil, however subtilely, however dexterously they were wound about him. Meanwhile, two things had not escaped him: She had yielded the point gracefully, and convinced, instead of launching out into a voluble farrago of irrelevant rubbish, as ninety-nine women out of a hundred would have done in order to have "the last word." That argued sense, judgment, tact. Further, she had avoided that vulgar commonplace, instinctive to the crude and unthinking mind, of whatever sex, of importing a personal application into an abstract discussion. This, too, argued tact and mental refinement, both qualities of rarer distribution among her sex than is commonly supposed – qualities, however, which Laurence Stanninghame was peculiarly able to appreciate.

Then she talked about other things, and he let her talk, just throwing in a word here and there to stimulate the expansion of her ideas. And they were good ideas, too, he decided, listening keenly, and balancing her every point, whether he agreed with it or not. He was interested, more vividly interested than he would fain admit! This girl with the enthralling face and noble beauty of form, had a mind as well. All the slavish adoration she received had not robbed her of that. It was an experience to him, as they lounged there on the taffrail together in the gold-spangled velvet

hush of the tropical night. How delightfully companionable she could be, he thought; so responsive, so discriminating and unargumentative. Argumentativeness in women was a detestable vice, in his opinion, for it meant everything but what the word itself etymologically did. Craftily he drew her out, cunningly he touched up every fallacy or crudeness in her ideas, in such wise that she unconsciously adopted his amendments, under the impression that they were all her own.

"But – I have been boring you all this time," she broke off at last. "Confess now, you who are nothing if not candid. I have been boring your life out?"

"Then, on your own showing, I am nothing, for I am not candid," he answered. "On the contrary, it is an unadvisable virtue, and one calculated to corner you without loophole. And you certainly have not been boring me."

He thought, sardonically, what any one of those whom he had caustically defined as her "poodles" would give for an hour or so of similar boredom, if it involved Lilith all to himself. Some of this must have been reflected in his eyes, for Lilith broke in quickly:

"No, you are not candid. I accept the amendment. I can see the sarcasm in your face."

"But not on that account," he rejoined tranquilly, and at the same time dropping his hand on to hers as it rested on the taffrail. The act – an instinctive one – was a dumb protest against the movement she had made to withdraw. And as such Lilith read it; more potent in its impulsiveness than any words could have been. "Listen!" he went on. "I suppose there is a sort of imp of scepticism sitting ever upon one shoulder, and that is what you saw. Something in my thoughts suggested a droll contrast, that was all. So far from boring me, you have afforded me an intensely agreeable surprise."

"Now you are sneering again. I will not talk any more."

He recognized in her tone a quick sensitiveness – not temper. Accordingly his own took on an unconscious softness, a phenomenally unwonted softness.

"Don't be foolish, child. You know I was doing nothing of the sort. Go on with what you were saying at once."

"What was I saying? Oh, I remember. That idea that board-ship life shows people in their real character. Do you believe in it?"

"Only in the case of those who have no real character to show. Wherein is a paradox. Those who have got any – well, don't show it, either on board ship or on shore."

"I believe you are right. Now, my own character, do you think it shows out more readable on board than it would on shore."

"Do you think you have me so transparently as that? What was I saying just now on that head?"

"I see. Really, though, I had no ulterior motive. I asked the question in perfect good faith. Tell me – if anyone can, you can. Tell me. Shall I make a success – a good thing of life? I often wonder."

She threw up her head with a quick movement, and the wide, serious eyes, fixed full upon his, seemed to flash in the starlight. He met the glance with one as earnest and unswerving as her own.

"You rate my powers of vaticination too high," he said slowly, "and – you are groping after an ideal."

"Perhaps. Tell me, though, what you think, character-reader as you are. Shall I make a success of life?"

"I should think the chances were pretty evenly balanced either way, inclining, if anything, to the reverse."

"Thanks. I shall remember that."

"But you are not obliged to believe it."

"No. I shall remember it. And now I must go below; it is nearly time for putting out the saloon lights. Good-night. I have enjoyed our talk so much."

She had extended her hand, and as he took it, the sympathetic – was it magnetic? – pressure was mutual, almost lingering.

"Good-night," he said. "The enjoyment has not been all on one side."

Left alone, he returned to his solitary musings – tried to, rather, for there was no "return" about the matter, because now they took an entirely new line. His late companion would intrude upon them – nay, monopolized them. She had appealed powerfully to his senses, to his mind, how long would it be before she did so to his heart? He had avoided her – he alone – up till then, and yet now, after this first conversation, he was convinced that of all gathered there he alone knew the real Lilith Ormskirk as distinct from the superficial one known to the residue. And to his mind recurred her former warning, laughingly uttered: "Beware such unholy spells!" With a strange intoxicating recollection did that warning recur, together with the consciousness that more than ever was it needed now. But as against this was the protecting strength of a triple chain armour. Life was only rendered interesting by such interesting character studies as this. Oh, yes; that was the solution – that, and nothing more.

This was by no means the last talk they had – they two alone together. But it seemed to Laurence Stanninghame that a warning note had been sounded, and one of no uncertain nature. His tone became more acrid, his sarcasm more biting, more envenomed. One day Lilith said:

"Why do you dislike me so?"

He started at the question, thrown momentarily off his guard.

"I don't dislike you," he answered shortly.

"Then why have you such a very poor opinion of me? You never lose an opportunity of letting me see that you have. What have I done? What have I said that you should think so poorly of me?"

There was no spice of temper, of resentment, in the tone. It was soft, and rather pleading. The serious eyes were sweet and wistful. As his own met their steady gaze, it seemed that a current of magnetic thought flashed from mind to mind.

"I hold no such opinion," he said, after a few moments of silence. "Perhaps I dread those 'unholy spells,' thou sorceress. Ah! there goes the second dinner-bell. Run away now, and make yourself more beautiful than ever – if possible."

A bright laugh flashed in the hazel eyes, and the white teeth showed in a smile.

"I'll try – since *you* wish it," she said over her shoulder, as she turned away.

CHAPTER IV.
THE LAND OF PROMISE

The throb of the propeller has almost ceased; faint, too, is the vibration of the slowed-down engines. The *Persian* is gliding with well-nigh imperceptible motion through the smooth waters of Table Bay.

It is a perfect morning, cloudless in its dazzling splendour. In front, the huge Table Mountain rears its massive wall, dwarfing the mud-town lying at its base and the bristling masts of shipping, its great line mirrored in the sheeny surface. Away in the distance, the purple cones of the Hottentots Holland mountains loom thirstily through a glimmer of summer haze. A fair scene indeed after three weeks of endless sea and sky.

"And what are your first impressions of my native land?"

Laurence turned.

"I was thinking less of the said land than of myself," he answered. "I was thinking what potentialities would lie between my first impressions of it and my last."

Just a suspicion of gravity came over Lilith Ormskirk's face at the remark.

"And are you glad the voyage is at an end, now that it is?" she went on.

"You know I am not. It was such a rest."

"Which I was everlastingly disturbing."

"By wreathing those unholy spells. Lilith, thou sorceress, how long will it be before those talks of ours are forgotten? A week, perhaps?"

"They will never be forgotten," she answered, her eyes dreamy and serious. "But now, I must go below and finish doing up my things. We shall be in dock directly."

A great crowd is collected on the quay as the steamer warps up, above which rise sunshades coloured and coquettish, pith helmets and sweeping puggarees, and more orthodox white "stove-pipes." Then in the background, yellow-skinned Malays in gaudy Oriental attire, parchment-faced Hottentots, Mozambique blacks, and lighter-hued Kaffirs from the Eastern frontier. The docks are piled with luggage, for the privilege of carrying which and its multifold owners Malay cab-drivers are uttering shrill and competing yells. On board, people are bidding each other good-bye or greeting those who have come to meet them; and flitting among such groups, a mingled expression of alertness and anxiety on his countenance, is here and there a steward, bent upon sounding up a possibly elusive "tip," or refreshing an inconveniently short memory.

Near the gangway Lilith Ormskirk was holding quite a farewell court. Her "poodles," as Laurence had satirically defined them, were crowding around – Swaynston at their head – for a farewell pat. The last, in the shape of Holmes and another, had taken their sorrowful departure, and now a quick, furtive look seemed to cross the smiling serenity of her face, a shade of wistfulness, of disappointment. Thus one in the hurrying throng at the other side of the deck read it.

"What a tail-wagging!" almost immediately spake a voice at her side.

She turned. Decidedly the expression was one of brightening.

"I thought you had gone – had forgotten to say good-bye," she said.

"I was waiting until the poodles had finally cleared. Now, however, I have come to utter that not always hateful word."

"Not in this instance?"

"Yes, distinctly. I have just heard there is to be a special train made up – we are in too late for the regular mail-train, you know. So I shall leave for Kimberley in about two or three hours' time."

Lilith looked disappointed.

"I thought you would have stayed here at least a few days," she said. And then the friends who had met her on board returned, and Laurence found himself introduced to three pretty girls – fair-haired, blue-eyed, well-dressed – eke to a man – tall, brown-faced, loosely hung, apparently about thirty years of age – none of whose names he could quite succeed in catching, save that the latter was apostrophized as "George." Then, after a commonplace or two, good-byes were uttered and they separated – Lilith and her party to catch the train for Mowbray, her late fellow-passenger to arrange for his own much longer journey.

Having the compartment to themselves, one of the blue-eyed girls opened fire thus:

"Lilith, who is he?"

"Who?"

"He."

"Bless the child," laughed Lilith, "there were about half a hundred he's."

"No, there was only one. Who is he? What is he?"

"I don't know," replied Lilith, affecting ignorance no longer.

"You don't know? After three weeks on board ship together? Three whole weeks of ship life, and you have the face to tell me you don't know anything about him. After the way in which you said good-bye to each other, too? Oh, I saw."

"Well, I don't know."

"Or care?"

"Chaff away, if it's any fun to you," answered Lilith quite serenely, as the trio rippled into peals of laughter.

"I liked the man, liked to talk to him on board – you are welcome to the admission – but all I know is that he is going to Johannesburg. We may never see each other again."

"These English Johnnies who come out here, and whom one knows nothing about, are now and again slippery fish," gruffly spoke the brown-faced one. "Watch it, Lilith."

"I thought this one looked as if he might be interesting," said another of the blue-eyed girls. "Pity he wasn't staying a day or two. We might have got him out to the house and seen what he was made of."

"Watch it," repeated George sententiously. "Watch it, Lilith."

Meanwhile, the object of this discussion – and warning – having resignedly "passed" the Customs at the dock gates, was spinning townwards in one of the innumerable hansoms. Sizing up the South African metropolis, it gave him the idea of a mud city, just dumped down wet and left to dry in the sun. Its general aspect suggested the vagaries of some sportive Titan, who, from the summit of the lofty rock wall behind it, had amused himself, out of office hours, by chucking down chunks of clay of all sorts and sizes, trying how near he could "lob" them into the position of streets and squares.

At that time the railway line ended at Kimberley – the distance thence to Johannesburg, close upon three hundred miles, had to be done by stage. It occurred to Laurence that, having a couple of hours to spare, he had better look up the coach-agent and secure a seat by wire.

The agent was not in his office. Laurence Stanninghame, however, who knew the ways of similar countries, albeit a new arrival in this, inquired for that functionary's favourite bar. The reply was prompt and accurate withal. In a few minutes, seated on stools facing each other, he and the object of his search were transacting business.

The latter did not seem entirely satisfactory. The agent could not say when the earliest chance might occur by regular coach. He might have to wait at Kimberley – well, it might be for days, or it might be for ever. On the other hand, he might not even have to wait at all. He could not tell. Even the people at the other end could not say for certain. Laurence began to lose patience.

"See here," he said somewhat testily. "I haven't been long in your country, but that's about the only reply I've been able to meet with to any question yet. Tell me, as a matter of curiosity, is there any one thing you are ever certain of out here? Just one."

The agent looked at him with faint amazement.

"There is one," he said; "just one."

"Well – and that?"

"Death. That's always a dead cert. Let's liquor. Put a name to it, skipper."

The special train consisted of a mail van and a first-class carriage. There being only three or four other travellers each had a compartment to himself, an arrangement which met with Laurence Stanninghame's unfeigned approval. He did not want to talk – especially in a clattering, dusty railway carriage. At intervals the passengers foregathered for meals at some wayside buffet or accommodation house, – meals whose quality was in inverse ratio to the exuberance of the prices charged therefor, – then each would return to his own box and smoke and read and sleep away the little matter of seven hundred miles.

On they sped for hours and hours – on through sleepy Dutch villages, whose gardens and cultivation made an oasis on the surrounding flats – on, winding in a slow ascent through the gloomy grandeur of the Hex River Poort, with its iron-bound heights rearing in mighty masses from the level valley bottom. Then it grew dark, and, the dim oil lamp being inadequate for reading purposes, Laurence went to sleep.

"Afar in the desert I love to ride,"

sang Pringle, the South African bard.

"Pringle was a liar, or a lunatic," quoth Laurence Stanninghame, to whom the passage was familiar, on opening his eyes next morning and looking around. For the train was speeding – when not slowing – through the identical desert of which Pringle sang; that heart-breaking, dead-level, waterless, treeless belt known as the Karroo. Not a human habitation in sight, for hours at a stretch – the same low table-topped mountains rising hours ahead, and which never seemed to get any closer, looking, moreover, in the distant, mirage-effects, like vast slabs poised in mid-air and resting on nothing. At long intervals a group of foul and tumble-down Hottentot huts, with their squalid inhabitants – lean curs and ape-like men; their *raison d'être*, in the shape of a flock of prematurely aged and disappointed-looking goats, trying all they are worth to extract sustenance from the red shaly earth and its sparse growth of coarse bush-like herbage. Looking out on this horrible desert, the eye and the mind alike grow weary, and the latter starts speculating in a shuddering sort of a way as to how the deuce anything human can find it in its heart to exist in such a place. Yet though an awful desert in time of drought it is not always so.

But gazing forth upon the surrounding waste, Laurence was able to read into it a certain charm – the charm of freedom, of boundlessness, so vividly standing out in contrast to his own cramped, narrow, shut-in life. All the changed conditions – the wildness, the solitude, the flaming and unclouded sun – were as a new awakening to life. The current of a certain joy of living, long since sluggish, congealed, now coursed swiftly and without hinderance through his being.

Now through all those hours of tedious travelling – in the flaming glow of day, or in the still, cool watches of the night, he had with him a recollection – Lilith Ormskirk's face haunted him. Those eyes seemed to follow him – sweet, serious; or again mirthful, flashing from out their dark fringe of lashes, but ever entrancing, ever inviting. Her whole personality, in fact, seemed to pervade his mind, warring for sole possession, to the exclusion of all other thought, all other consideration. Into the conflict his own mind entered with a zest. It was a psychological struggle which appealed to him, and that thoroughly. She should not, by her witchery, take entire possession. Yet the recollection of her was so potent that at length he ceased to strive against it. He gave way, – abandoned himself contentedly, voluptuously to its sway, – even aiding it in the pictures it conjured up. Now he saw her, as he had first passed her, day after day on board ship, with indifference, with faintly ironical curiosity; again, as when they had first begun to talk together; and yet again, when he had found

himself resorting to all manner of cowardly mental expedients to persuade himself that he did not revel in her dangerously winning attractiveness, and sweet sympathetic converse. In the monotonous three-four time beat of the wheels he could conjure up her voice – even the colonial trick of clipping the final "r" in words ending with that letter – as to which he had often rallied her, while secretly liking it – for this, like a touch of the brogue, can be winsome enough when uttered by pretty lips. Now all these reflections could not but be profitless, possibly dangerous, yet they had this advantage – they helped to kill time, and that during a thirty-odd-hour journey across the Karroo. Well, it is an advantage!

On through the long, hot day, and still that memory was with him. The solitude, the stillness, the mile after mile over the desolate and barren waste, the novelty of the scene, the monotonous rattle of the wheels – all went to perpetuate it. Then the sun drew down to the horizon, and the departing glow, striking upon the red soil, painted the latter the colour of blood, making up an extraordinarily vivid study in red and blue. Overhead a cloudless sky, the horizon all aflame, and the whole earth, far as the eye could reach, steeped in the richest purple red. Laurence fell fast asleep.

He dreamed they were steaming into Charing Cross Station. Lilith was waiting to meet him. He swore, in his dream, because they had halted on the railway bridge too long to take the tickets. Then he awoke. They were steaming slowly into a terminus, amid the familiar flashing of lamps and the rumbling of porters' trucks. But it was not Charing Cross, it was Kimberley.

Not long did it take him to collect his scanty baggage and fling it into a "cab," otherwise an open, two-seated Cape cart. Hardly had he taken his seat than the driver uttered a war-whoop, and, with a jerk that nearly sent its passenger somersaulting into the road, the concern started off as hard as its eight legs and two wheels could carry it.

The night was dark, the streets guiltless of lighting. As the trap zigzagged furiously from one side of the way to the other, now poised on one wheel, now leaping bodily into the air as it charged through a deep hole or rut, it was a comfort to the said passenger to reflect that the road being feet deep in sand one was bound to fall soft anyhow. Yet, candidly, he rather enjoyed it. After thirty-three hours in a South African "Flying Watkin" even this spurious excitement was welcome.

They shaved corners, always on one wheel, sometimes even scraping the corners of houses, and causing those pedestrians in their line of flight to skip like young unicorns. Then, recovering, the startled wayfarers would hurl their choicest blessings after the cab. To these, the madcap driver would reply with a shrill and fiendish yell, belabouring his frantic cattle with a view to attempting fresh feats. They succeeded. It only wanted a bullock-waggon coming down the street to afford them the opportunity. The bullock-waggon came. Then a dead, dull scrunch – an awful shock – and the cab was at a standstill. The waggon people opened their safety-valves and let off a fearful blast of profanity; the cab-driver replied in suitable and feeling terms, then backed clear of the wreck and whipped on.

Vastly amused by this lively experience, Laurence still ventured to expostulate, mildly, and as a matter of form. But he got no more change out of his present Jehu than Horace Greeley did of Hank Monk. The reply, accompanied by a jovial guffaw, was:

"All right, mister. You sit tight, and I'll fetch you through. Which hotel did you say?"

Laurence refreshed his memory – and swaying, jerking, pounding, into ruts and holes, the chariot drew up like a hurricane blast before quite an imposing-looking building at the corner of the Market Square. Having paid off the lunatic of the whip and stood him a drink, Laurence engaged a room, and wondered what the deuce he should do with himself if delayed here any time. For the glimpse he had obtained of the place seemed not inviting. The same crowded bars, the same roaring racket, the same dust – yea, even the same thirst. He had seen it all before in other parts of the world.

He was destined to wonder still more, and wearily, what he should do with himself; for nearly a week went by before he could secure a seat in the coach. A great depression came upon him, begotten of the heat and the drowsiness and the dust, as day after day seemed to bring with it no emancipation from the wind-swept, tin-built town, dumped down on its surrounding flat and sad-looking desert

waste. Yet nothing akin to homesickness was there in his depression. He wanted to get onward, not to return. He was bored and in the blues. Yet, as he looked back, the feeling which predominated was that of freedom – of having a certain measure of life and its prospects before him. Stay, though. His thoughts would, at times, travel backward, and that in spite of himself, and they would land him with a lingering, though unacknowledged, regretfulness, on the deck of the *Persian*. Well, that was only an episode. It had passed away out of his life, and it was as well that it had.

But – had it?

At last, to our wayfarer's unspeakable joy, deliverance came. It had been Laurence's lot to travel in far worse conveyances than the regular coaches which at that time performed the journey between Kimberley and Johannesburg, a distance of close upon three hundred miles; consequently, although not among the fortunate ones who had secured a corner seat, he managed to make himself as comfortable as any traveller in comparatively outlandish regions has a right to expect. His fellow-passengers consisted, for the most part, of mechanics of the better sort and a loquacious Jew – not at all a bad sort of fellow – in conversation with whom he would now and then beguile the weariness of the route. And it was weary. The flat sameness of the treeless plains, as mile after mile brought no change; the same stony kopjes; the same deserted and tumble-down mining structures; the same God-forsaken-looking Dutch homesteads, whose owners had apparently taken on the *triste* hopelessness of their surroundings; the same miserable wayside inns, where leathery goat-flesh and bones and rice, painted yellow, were dispensed under the title of breakfast and dinner, what time the coach halted to change horses, and even then only served up when the driver was frantically vociferating, "All aboard!" Thus they journeyed day and night, allowing, perhaps, three hours, or four at the outside, for sleep – on a bed. But the latter proved an institution of dubious beneficence, because of its far from dubious animation; the said "animation" scorning blithely and imperviously accumulations of insect powder, reaching back into the dim past, left there and added to by a countless procession of tortured travellers. Howbeit, of these and like discomforts are such journeyings productive, wherefore they are scarcely to be reckoned as worthy of note.

CHAPTER V.
KING SCRIP

"Hallo, Stanninghame! And so, here you are?"

"Here I am, Rainsford, as you say; and from what I have heard in process of getting here, I'm afraid I have got here a day too late."

The other laughed, as they shook hands. He was a man of Laurence's own age, straight and active, and his bronzed face wore that alert, eager look which was noticeable upon the faces of most of the fortune-seekers, for of such was the bulk of the inhabitants of Johannesburg at that time.

"You never can tell," he rejoined. "Things are a bit slack now, because of this infernal drought; but a good sousing rain, or a few smart thunder showers, would fill all the dams and set the batteries working again harder than ever. It's the rainy time of year, too."

It was the morning after Laurence's arrival in Johannesburg, and, while sallying forth to find Rainsford, the two had met on Commissioner Street. The brand-new gold-town looked anything but what it was. It did not look new. In spite of the general unfinishedness of the streets and sidewalks, the latter largely conspicuous by their absence; in spite of the predominance of scaffolding poles and half-reared structures of red brick; in spite of the countless tenements of corrugated iron, and the tall chimneys of mining works which came in here where steeples would have arisen in an ordinary town; in spite of all this there was a battered and weather-beaten aspect about the place which made it look centuries old. Great pillars of dust towered skywards, then dispersing, whirled in mighty wreaths over the shining iron roofs, to fall hissing back into the red-powdery streets whence they arose, choking with pungent particles the throats, eyes, and ears of the eager, busy, speculative, acquisitive crowd, who had flocked hither like wasps to a jar of beer and honey. And to many, indeed, it was destined to prove just such a trap.

"Well, what do you advise, Rainsford?" said Laurence, after some more talk about the Rand and its prospects.

"Wait a day or two. You don't want to buy in a falling market. There are several good companies to put into, but things haven't touched bottom yet. When they do and just begin to rise, then buy in. Meanwhile lie low."

"You speak like a book, Rainsford," said one of two men who joined them at that moment. "There's a capital company now whose shares are on the rise again. Couldn't do better than take two or three hundred of them. What do you say?"

"Name?"

"Bai-praatfonteins."

"I'll watch it!" said Rainsford, with an emphatic and negative shake of the head.

"I say, you don't want a couple of building stands? They'll treble their value in as many weeks. Going cheap as dirt now."

"Not taking any, Rankin," was the uncompromising reply, for Rainsford knew something about those building stands.

"You're making a mistake. Bless my soul, if only I had the money to spare, I'd take them at double myself. I'm only agent in the matter, though. I can't do any business at all with you fellows this morning."

All this was said in the most genial and good-humoured tone imaginable. The speaker was a spare, straight, neatly dressed individual of middle age. His face was of a dark bronze hue, lit up by a pair of keen black eyes, and his beard was prematurely gray, almost white. The expression of keenness on a deal was not characteristic of him alone. Everyone wore it in those days.

"That was a great old shot you did on me, Rainsford, with those Verneuk Draais," cut in the other man, in a jolly, hail-the-maintop sort of voice. He was a tall, fair-haired, athletic fellow, whose condition looked as hard as nails. "*Ja*, it just was."

"Well, I'll buy them back if you like, Wheeler."

"How much?"

"Sixteen and a half."

A roar of good-humoured derision went up from the other.

"Sixteen and a half? And I took them over from you at twenty-eight. Sixteen and a half?"

"Well, are you taking?" said Rainsford.

"Dead off," returned the other.

"What do you say, you fellows?" cut in the first who had spoken. "A little 'smile' of something before lunch won't do us any harm. Eh? what do you say?"

"*Ja*, that's so. Come along," sung out the tall man, spinning round upon one heel and heading for the Exchange bar.

"There's nothing like an Angostura to give one an appetite," said the dark man to Laurence as they walked along. "It gives tone to the system. Angostura – with a little drop of gin in it."

"With a little drop of gin in it?" repeated Wheeler, with a derisive roar. "That's where the tone to the system comes in – eh, Rankin?"

"Only just out from home, are you?" said the latter to Laurence as, having named their respective "poisons," the original four, with two or three others who had joined them *en route*, stood absorbing the same. "Heavens! did you ever hear such a row in your life?" he went on, as through the open door connecting with the Exchange came the frantic bawling of brokers, competing wildly for Blazesfonteins, and Verneuk Laagtes, and Hellpoorts, and Vulture's Vleis, and Madeiras, and Marshes, and up and down the whole gamut. And there in the crowd lining the bar, and in the crowd outside the Exchange, and in the crowd upon Market Square, where the auctioneers stood, well-nigh elbow to elbow, bellowing from their tubs, and where you might bid for anything from a building stand or a pair of horses to a concertina or a pair of stays – everywhere the talk was the same, and it was of scrip. King Scrip ruled the roost.

Just then, however, the subjects of King Scrip were undergoing rather an anxious time, for the drought was becoming serious. Dams being empty, batteries could not work; result, scrip drawing within alarming distance of touching its own value – paper, to wit. And as the dams became more empty, those with an "n" appended became more and more full – yea, exceeding full-bodied, and both loud and deep. In the churches they were praying for rain, – praying hard, – for rain meant money; and in the bars they were "cussing" for lack of it, – "cussing" hard, – on the same principle. Then the rain came, and in the churches they sang "Te Deum"; and in the bars they drove a humming trade in champagne, where "John Walker" had been good enough before. Up went scrip, and Laurence Stanninghame, having judiciously invested his little all, cleared about three hundred pounds in as many days. Things began to look rosy.

By this time, too, Laurence got sick of hanging around the Exchange and talking scrip. He had no turn that way, wherefore now he was glad enough to leave his affairs in the hands of Rainsford, who, being an inhabitant of Johannesburg, was, of course, a broker; and, having picked up a very decent No. 12 bore on one of the open-air sales aforesaid, laid himself out to see what sport was obtainable in the surrounding country. This was not much, but it involved many a hard and long tramp; and the Transvaal atmosphere is brisk and exhilarating, with the result that eye and brain grew clearer, and his condition became as hard as nails. And as there is nothing like a thoroughly healthy condition of body, combined with an equally healthy mental state, – in this instance the elation produced by an intensely longed-for measure of success, – Laurence began to realize a certain pleasure in living, a sensation to which he had been a stranger for many a long year, and which, assuredly, he had never expected to experience again.

For the market still continued to hum, and by dint of judicious investments and quick turnings over, Laurence had more than doubled the original amount he had put in. At this rate the moderate wealth to which he aspired would soon be his.

And now, with the ball of success apparently at his feet, so unsatisfying, so ironical are the conditions of life, that he was conscious of a something to damp the anticipatory delights of that success. Those long, solitary tramps over the veldt after scant coveys of partridge, or the stealthy stalk of wild duck at some *vlei*, were very conducive to introspection; that wealth which he imagined within his grasp did not now look so all-in-all sufficing, and yet he had deemed it the end and all-in-all of life. Even with his past experience – the depressing, deteriorating effects, mental and physical, of years of poverty in its most squalid and depressing form, "shabby-genteel" poverty – he realized that even the possession of wealth might leave something to be desired. In fact, he became conscious of an unsatisfied longing, by no means vague, but very real, which came to him at his time of life with a sort of dismayed surprise. He would give up these solitary wanderings in search of sport. The sport was of a poor description, and the intervals between were too long. He had too much time to think. He would knock around the town a little for a change, and talk to fellows.

One morning he was walking down the street with Rainsford and Wheeler, – the latter, who was an up-country hunter, busy, in pursuance of the prevailing spirit, in trying to trade him sundry pairs of big game, horns, and other trophies, – when he heard his name called in a very well remembered voice. Turning, he beheld Holmes.

"Stanninghame, old chap, I *am* glad to run against you again!" cried the latter, advancing upon him with outstretched hand.

"I begin to believe you are," answered Laurence genially, with a comical glance at the other's beaming countenance. "Why, you actually have a look that way. When did you get here?"

"By last night's coach. And, I say," – trying to look wondrously mysterious and knowing, – "who do you think travelled up by it too?"

"I can't even venture the feeblest guess."

"Can't you?" chuckled Holmes. "What about Miss Ormskirk, eh? How's that?"

"So? Now I remember, she did say something about a possibility of coming up here before long," replied Laurence equably, while conscious that the announcement had convulsed his inner being with a strange, sweet thrill. For it came so aptly upon his meditations of late. The one unsatisfied longing – her presence. And now even that was to be fulfilled.

"You don't seem to take it over enthusiastically, Stanninghame," went on Holmes. "And you and she were rather thick towards the end of the voyage," he added mischievously.

"Did you ever know me enthuse about anything, Holmes? But it's about lunch time; let's go and get some, and you can tell me what you have been doing since we landed from the old *Persian*, and what the deuce has brought you up here."

This was all very friendly and plausible; but before they had been seated many minutes at lunch in a conveniently adjacent restaurant Holmes was discoursing singularly little upon his doings spread over the weeks which had elapsed since he had landed, but most volubly upon his recent coach journey congested within a space of three days – to which topic he was tactfully moved by his audience of one and also by his own inclination, as will hereinafter appear.

"Was Miss Ormskirk travelling alone, did you say, Holmes?" queried Laurence, in initiation of his deft scheme for "drawing" the other.

"Not much. There was a big parchment-faced Johnny with her. He scowled at me like sin when we were introduced – was inclined to be beastly rude in fact, until he saw that I – er – that I – talked most to the other; then he got quite affable."

"To the other? What other? Out with it, Holmes," said Laurence, with a half smile at his friend's thinly veiled embarrassment.

"Oh, there was another girl in the crowd – Miss Falkner – deuced pretty girl, too. The sulky chappie was her brother."

"Whose brother? Miss Ormskirk's?" said Laurence innocently.

"No; the blue-eyed one's. At least they both called him George."

"Yes. I remember they came on board the *Persian*. You had landed already, I think. From your description I recognize them. So they are up here? Where are they staying?"

"At that outlying place where the coach first begins to get among houses. I can't remember the name. There's a biggish pub, you know, and a lot of houses."

"Booyseus?"

"That was it; Booyseus. They asked me to go and see them. You'd better come along too, Stanninghame. I say, d'you think it'd be too soon if we went to-morrow, eh? Sort of excuse to ask if they'd recovered from the journey – eh?"

"Was George so very exhausted then?"

"Oh, hang your chaff, Stanninghame! What do you think? You're an older chap than I am, and know more about these things. Would it be too soon if we went to-morrow?"

"Be comforted, Holmes. As far as it rests with me, you shall behold your forget-me-not-eyed charmer to-morrow if she's at home."

The conversation worked round to the inevitable topic, King Scrip. Holmes was fired with eagerness when in his unenthusiastic way the other began to tell of such successes as he had already scored. For he, too, had come up there to take advantage of the boom. He was eager to rush out there and then to buy shares. Nothing would satisfy him but that Laurence must take him round and introduce him to Rainsford on the spot.

But on the way to that worthy's office something happened. Turning into Commissioner Street, they ran right into a party of four. Result – exclamations of astonishment, of recognition, greetings from both sides.

Three of the quartette we have already made the acquaintance of. The fourth, Mrs. Falkner, a good-looking middle-aged lady, was the aunt of the other three, and with her they were staying.

"I've heard of you, Mr. Stanninghame," said this one, when introductions had been effected. "I hope you have made a success of Johannesburg so far. Everybody turns up here. I can hardly come up to the camp – we used to call it that in the old days. I was among the first up here, you know, and it's difficult to get into the way of calling it the town – I can hardly come up here, I was saying, without meeting some one or other I had known elsewhere."

"Yes, it's an astonishing place, Mrs. Falkner," answered Laurence. "Only bare veldt but a very few years ago, now a population of forty thousand – mostly brokers."

She laughed, and Lilith cut in:

"I thought you were going to adopt the Carlylean definition of the people of England, Mr. Stanninghame."

"Oh, that'll come in time. I only trust I may not hold on too long to come under its lash."

"Let us hope none of us will," said Mrs. Falkner. "Oh, dear, we are all dreadfully reckless, I fear. We are nothing but gamblers up here. Have you caught the contagion too, Mr. Stanninghame?"

"I'm afraid so," he answered, thinking how, even among the softer sex here, King Scrip bore the principal sway.

He was thinking of something else at the same time. Lilith was looking even more sweet, more bewitchingly attractive than when last he had seen her. There was a warm seductive glow of health in her dark brilliant beauty, a winsomeness in her simple, tasteful attire – the cool easy-fitting blouse and skirt in a soft harmony of cream colour and light gray, and the plain, wide-brimmed straw hat of the "sailor" kind – which made, to his eyes, an irresistibly entrancing picture.

She, no less than himself, was comparing notes – as two people will who have been apart for a space, and have thought much of each other in the interim. He, too, was improved in appearance. The

fine climate, the open-air life had lent a deeper bronze to his face and a clearness to his eyes – even as an emancipation from sordid cares, together with a present modicum of success and a prospect of further in the future, had imparted a certain stamp of serenity to his expression which was not there before. "Air, freedom, life's healthier side are good – success is good – all good things are good – behold their result," was Lilith's inner verdict as the summing up of this inspection.

Now George Falkner's efforts at cordiality were about as effective as the demeanour of a crusty mastiff encountering another of his kind well within sweep of his owner's lash. His jealous soul had noted the glance exchanged between his cousin and Laurence Stanninghame – the responsive glance which for a brief second would not be disguised; the great and deep-reaching gladness, which shone in both pairs of eyes as a result of this meeting. He stood gloomy and grim, while the two were talking together, and then rather brusquely – and to the disgust of Holmes, who was discoursing eagerly with pretty Mabel Falkner – he reminded his aunt that they were due to call at So-and-So's, and were far behind their time.

"Ah, yes, I was forgetting. Well, good-bye, Mr. Stanninghame. I hope you will come and see us. It is nothing of a walk out to Booyseus, and besides, there are several omnibuses in the course of the day. Mind you come too, Mr. Holmes. Good-bye."

And the four resumed their way, and so did our two.

"Jolly, genial old party that Mrs. Falkner," pronounced Holmes, half turning, slyly, to sneak a last glance after the blue-eyed and receding Mabel.

"Spare my susceptibilities, Holmes, even in your exuberance. That 'old party,' as you so unfeelingly define her, cannot own to more than two or three years seniority over my respectable self – four at the outside," said Laurence maliciously.

"Oh, go along with you, old chap," retorted Holmes, yet conscious of feeling just a trifle foolish. "But, I say," eagerly, "can we still go and look them up so soon as to-morrow, eh?"

"Don't let that misgiving interfere with your beauty sleep, Holmes," was the reply, dashed with a touch of good-humoured impatience. "People are not so beastly ceremonious over here."

"I've brought you another sheep to shear, Rainsford," said Laurence, as they entered the broker's office. "Don't clip him any closer than you did me, though he's dying to set up as a millionaire on the spot."

And then, having effected this introduction, he left the pair to do business or not, as the case might be, and strolled back to his own quarters.

What was this marvellous metamorphosis which had come upon him, flooding his life with golden waves of sweetness and of light? Now that he had beheld Lilith once more, he realized what entire hold she had taken of his thoughts since they two had parted on the deck of the *Persian*. It was a certainty there was no getting away from – but a certainty now which he was not in the least desirous of getting away from. He had beheld her once more. Their meeting had been of the briefest, their interchange of remarks of the most commonplace, every-day nature. Yet he had beheld her, had listened to the sound of her voice, had looked into her eyes. And the glance of those sweet eyes had been responsive; and his ear could detect a subtile note in the tones of her voice. Sweet Lilith! the spells she had begun to wreathe around him, so unconsciously to herself, so unconsciously to him, when first they talked together, were drawn, woven, more thoroughly now. And in his strange, new revivification – the return of strength and health and spirits – he rejoiced that it was so, and laughed, and defied circumstances, and Fate and the Future.

CHAPTER VI.
"PIRATE" HAZON

If the population of Johannesburg devoted its days to doing *konza* to King Scrip, it devoted its nights to amusing itself. There was an enterprising theatrical company and a lively circus. There was a menagerie, where an exceedingly fine young woman was wont nightly to place her head within a lion's mouth for the delectation, and to the enthusiastic admiration of Judæa, and all the region round about. There were smoking-concerts galore – more or less good of their kind – and, failing sporadic forms of pastime, there were numerous bars – and barmaids, all of which counted for something in the relaxation of the forty thousand inhabitants of Johannesburg – mostly brokers. We are forgetting. There were other phases of nocturnal excitement, more or less of a stimulating nature – frequent rows, to wit, culminating in a nasty rough-and-tumble, and now and then a startling and barbarous murder.

Now, to Laurence Stanninghame not any of the above forms of diversion held out the slightest possible attractiveness. The theatrical show struck him as third-rate, and as for circuses and menageries, he supposed they had been good fun when he was a child. He did not care twopence about the pleasures of the bar unless he wanted a drink, and for barmaids and their allurements less than nothing. So having already, with Rainsford or Wheeler, and seven other spirits more wicked than themselves, gone the round three or four times, just to see what there was to be seen, and found that not much, he had subsided into a good bit of a stay-at-home. A pipe, a newspaper or book, and bed, would be his evening program – normally, that is; for now and then he would stroll out to Booyseus. But of that more anon.

The hotel at which he had taken up his quarters was rather a quiet one, and frequented by quiet people. One set of rooms, among which was his, opened upon a *stoep*, which fronted a yard, which opened upon the street. Here of an evening he would drag a chair out upon the *stoep* and smoke and read, or occasionally chat with some fellow-sojourner in the house.

One evening he was seated thus alone. Holmes, who had taken up his quarters at the same hotel, was out, as usual. We say as usual because Holmes seldom stayed in at night. Holmes was young, and for him the "attractions" we have striven to enumerate above, and others which we have not, were attractions. He liked to go the round. He liked to see all there was to be seen. Well, he saw it.

One evening Laurence, seated thus alone, became aware that another man was dragging a chair out upon the *stoep*, intending, like himself, to take the air. Looking up, he saw that it was the man to whom nobody ever seemed to talk, beyond exchanging the time of day, and that in the most curt and perfunctory fashion. He had noticed, further, that this individual seemed no more anxious to converse with other people than they were to converse with him. He himself had never got beyond this stage with him, although on easy and friendly terms with the other people staying in the house.

Yet the man had awakened in him a strange interest, a curiosity that was almost acute; but beyond the fact that his name was Hazon, and the darkly veiled hints on the part of those who alluded to the subject, that he was a ruffian of the deepest dye, Laurence could learn nothing about him. He noted, however, that if the man seemed disliked, he seemed about equally feared.

This Hazon was, in truth, somewhat of a remarkable individual. He was of powerful build, standing about five feet nine. He had a strong, good-looking face, the lower part hidden in a dark beard, and his eyes were black, piercing, and rather deep set. The bronze hue of his complexion, and of the sinewy hands, seemed to tell of a life of hardness and adventure; and the square jaw and straight, piercing glance was that of a man who, when roused, would prove a resolute, relentless, and a most dangerous enemy. In repose the face wore a placidity which was almost that of melancholy.

In trying to estimate his years, Laurence owned himself puzzled again and again. He might be about his own age or he might be a great deal older, that is, anything from forty to sixty. But

whatever his age, whatever his past, the man was always the same, dark, self-possessed, coldly reticent, inscrutable, somewhat of an awe-inspiring personality.

The nature of his business, too, was no more open than was his past history. He had been some months in his present quarters, yet was not known to be doing anything in scrip to any appreciable extent. The boom, the one engrossing idea in the minds of all alike, seemed to hold no fascination for Hazon. To him it was a matter of absolutely no importance. What the deuce, then, was he there for? His impenetrable reserve, his out-of-the-common and striking personality, his rather sinister expression, had earned for him a nick-name. He was known all over the Rand as "Pirate" Hazon, or more commonly "The Pirate," because, declared the Rand, he looked like one, and at any rate ought to be hanged for one, to make sure.

Nobody, however, cared to use the epithet within his hearing. People were afraid of him. One day in the street a tough, swaggering bully, fearless in the consciousness of his powers as a first-class boxer, lurched up against him, deliberately, and with offensive intent. Those who witnessed the act stood by for the phase of excitement dearest of all to their hearts, a row. There was that in Hazon's look which told they were not to be disappointed.

"English manners?" he queried, in cutting, contemptuous tone.

"I'll teach you some," rejoined the fellow promptly. And without more ado he dashed out a terrific left-hander, which the other just escaped receiving full in the eye, but not entirely as to the cheekbone.

Hazon did not hit back, but what followed amazed even the bystanders. It was like the spring of an animal – of a leopard or a bull-dog – combining the lightning swiftness of the one with the grim, fell ferocity of purpose of the other. The powerful rowdy was lying upon his back in the red dust, swinging flail-like blows into empty air, and upon him, in leopard-like crouch, pressing him to the earth, the man whom he had so wantonly attacked. And his throat was compressed in those brown, lean, muscular fingers, as in a claw of steel. It was horrible. His eyes were starting from his head; his face grew blue, then black; his swollen tongue protruded hideously. His struggles were terrific, yet, powerful of frame as he was, he seemed like a child in the grasp of a panther.

A shout of dismay, of warning, broke from the spectators, some of whom sprang forward to separate the pair. But there was something so awful in the expression of Hazon's countenance, in the glare of the coal-black eyes, in the drawn-in brows and livid horror of fiendish wrath, that even they stopped short. It was, as they said afterwards, as though they had looked into the blasting countenance of a devil.

"Leave go!" they cried. "For God's sake, leave go! You're killing the man. He'll be dead in a second longer."

Hazon relaxed his grasp, and stood upright. Beyond a slight heaving of the chest attendant upon his exertion, he seemed as cool and collected as though nothing had happened.

"I believe you're right," he said, turning away. "Well, he isn't that yet."

The attention of the onlookers was concentrated on the prostrate bully, to restore whom a doctor was promptly sent for from the most likely bar, for it was midday. But all were constrained to allow that the fellow had only got what he deserved, which consensus of opinion may or may not have been due to the fact that he was, if anything, a trifle more unpopular than Hazon himself.

Now among those who had witnessed this scene from first to last was Laurence Stanninghame. Not among those who would have interfered – oh, no – for did he not hold it a primary tenet never, on any pretext, to interfere in what did not concern him? nor did this principle in those days involve any effort to keep, all impulse to violate it being long since dead. Moreover, if the last held good of the badly damaged bully, society at large could not but be the gainer, since it was clear that he was a fit representative of a class which is utterly destitute of any redeeming point which should go to justify its unspeakably vicious, useless, and rather dangerous existence.

This incident, while enhancing the respect in which Hazon was held, in no sense tended to lessen his unpopularity, and indeed at that time nobody had a good word to say for him. Either they said nothing, and looked the more, or they said a word that was not good – oh, no, not good.

Now in spite of all such ill repute, possibly by reason of it, his temperament being what it was, Laurence felt drawn towards this mysterious personage, for he was pre-eminently one given to forming his own judgment instead of accepting it ready made from Dick, Tom, and Harry. If Hazon was vindictive, why, so was he; if unscrupulous, so could he be if driven to it. He resolved to find an opportunity of cultivating the man, and if he could not find one he would make it. Now he saw such an opportunity.

"What do you think of this rumor that the revolution in Brazil is going to knock out our share market?" he said, suddenly looking up from the paper he was reading.

"It may do that," answered Hazon. "This year's boom has been a mere sick attempt at one. Wouldn't take much to knock out what little there is of it."

Laurence felt a cold qualm. There had been an ominous drop the last day or two. Still Rainsford and one or two others had recommended him to hold on. This man spoke so quietly, yet withal so prophetically. What if he, in his inscrutable way, were more than ordinarily in the know?

"Queer place this," pursued Hazon, the other having uttered a dubious affirmative. "Taking it all round, it and its crowd, it's not far from the queerest place I've ever seen in my life, and I've seen some queer places and some queerish crowds."

"I expect you have. By the way, I suppose you've done a good deal of up-country hunting?"

"A goodish deal. Are you fond of the gun? I notice you go out pretty often, but there's nothing to shoot around here."

"I just am fond of it," replied Laurence. "If things turn out all right I shall cut in with some fellow for an up-country trip if I can. Big game this time."

The other smiled darkly, enigmatically.

"Yes. That's real – real," he said. "Try some of this," handing his tobacco bag, as Laurence began to scratch out his empty pipe, "unless, that is, you haven't got over the new-comer's prejudice against the best tobacco in the world, the name whereof is Transvaal."

"Thanks. No, I have no prejudice against it. On the contrary, as to its merits I am disposed to agree with you."

Throughout this conversation Laurence, who had a keen ear for that sort of thing, could not help noticing the other's voice. It was a pleasing voice, a cultured voice, and refined withal, nor could his fastidious ear detect the faintest trace of provincialism or vulgarity about it. The intonation was perfect. There is nothing so quick to betray to the sensitive ear any strain of plebeian descent as the voice, and of this no one was more thoroughly aware than Laurence Stanninghame. This man, he decided, was of good birth.

The ice broken, they talked on, in the apparently careless, but in reality guarded way which had become second nature to both of them. More than one strange and very shady anecdote was Hazon able to narrate concerning the place and its inhabitants, and especially concerning certain among the latter who ranked high for morality, commercially or otherwise. There were actions done in their midst every day, he declared, which, for barefaced and unscrupulous rascality, would put to the blush other actions for which the law would hang a man without mercy, all other men applauding, but with this difference, that whereas the former demanded a creeping and crawling cowardliness to insure success, the latter involved iron nerve and the well-nigh daily shaking hands with death – death, too, in many an appalling and ghastly form. All of which was "dark" talking as far as Laurence was concerned, though the day was to come when its meaning should stand forth as clear as a printed page.

Even now, however, he was not absolutely mystified – far from it, indeed; for he himself was a hard thinker, owning an ever-vivid and busy brain. He could put half a dozen meanings to any one or other of his companion's utterances, and among them probably the right one. And, as they talked on,

he became alive to something almost magnetic – a sort of subtile, compelling force – about Hazon. Was it his voice or manner or general aspect, or a combination of all three? He could not tell. He could only realize that it existed.

For some days after this conversation the two men did not come together, though they would nod the time of day to each other as before, and Laurence, who had other considerations upon his hands – monetary and agreeable – did not give the matter a thought. At last he noticed that Hazon's place at the table was vacant – remembering, too, that it had been so for a day or two. Had he left?

To his inquiries on that head he obtained scant and uncordial response. Hazon was ill, some believed, while others charitably opined that he was "on the booze." Whatever it was no one cared, and strongly recommended Laurence to do likewise.

The latter, we have shown, was peculiarly unsusceptible to public opinion, which, if it influenced him at all, did so in the very opposite direction to that which was intended. Accordingly, he now made up his mind to ascertain the truth for himself – to which end he found himself speedily knocking at the door of Hazon's room, the while marvelling at his own unwonted perturbation lest his overture should be regarded as an intrusion.

"Heard you were ill," he said shortly, having entered in obedience to the responsive "Come in." "Rough luck being ill in a place like this, or indeed in any place, for that matter. Thought I'd see if there's anything I could do for you."

"Very good of you, Stanninghame. Sit down there on that box – it's lower than the chair, and therefore more comfortable. Yes, I feel a bit knocked out. A touch of the old up-country shivers, or something of the kind. It's a thing you never entirely pull round from, once you've had it. I'll be all right, though, in a day or two."

The speaker was lying on his bed, clad in his trousers and shirt. The latter, open from the throat, revealed part of a great livid scar, running diagonally across the swarthy chest, and representing what must have been a terrific slash. Two other scars also showed on the muscular forearm, half-way between elbow and wrist. What was it to Laurence whether this person or that person lived or died? Why, nothing. Yet there was something so pathetic, so helpless in the aspect of the man, lying there day after day, patient, solitary, uncomplaining – shunned and avoided by those around – that appealed powerfully to his feelings. Heavens! was he turning soft-hearted at his time of life, that he should feel so unaccountably stirred by the bare act of coming to visit this ailing and unbefriended stranger?

In truth, there was nothing awe-inspiring about the latter now. His piercing black eyes seemed large and soft; the expression of his dark face was one of weariful helplessness, yet of schooled patience. A queer thought flashed through Laurence's brain. Was it in Hazon's power to produce whatever effect he chose upon the minds of others? Had he chosen, for some inscrutable purpose, to render himself shunned and feared? Was he now, on like principle, adopting the surest means to win over to him this one man who had sought him out on his lonely sick-bed? and if so, to what end? It was more than a passing thought, nor from that moment onward could Laurence ever get it entirely out of his mind.

"Fill your pipe, Stanninghame," said Hazon, breaking into this train of thought, which, all unconsciously, had entailed a long gap of silence. "I don't in the least mind smoke, although I can't blow off a cloud myself just now – at least I have no inclination that way," he added, reaching for a bottle of white powder which stood upon a box by the bedside, and mixing himself a modicum of quinine.

"Had a doctor of any sort, Hazon?"

"What good would that do – except to the doctor? I know what's the matter with me, and I know exactly what to do for it. I don't want to pay another fellow a couple of guineas or so to tell me. Not but what doctors have their uses – in wounds and surgery, for instance. But I'm curiously like an animal. When I get anything the matter with me – which I don't often – I like to creep away and lie low. I like to take it alone."

"Well, I'm built rather that way myself, Hazon. I won't apologize for intruding, because you know as well as I do that no such consideration enters into the matter. Still, I want you to know that if there's anything I can do for you, you have only to say so."

"Thanks. You are not quite like – other people, Stanninghame. Life is no great thing, is it, that everybody should stir up such a mighty fuss about clearing out of it?"

"No, it's no great thing," assented Laurence darkly. "Yet it might be made so."

"How that?"

"With wealth. With wealth you can do anything – command anything – buy anything. They say that wealth won't purchase life, but very often it will."

"You're about three parts right. It will, for instance, enable a man to lead the life he needs in order to preserve his physical and mental vigour at its highest. Even from the moralist's point of view it is all round desirable, for nothing is so morally deteriorating as a life of narrow and cramped pinching, when all one's best years are spent in hungering and longing for what one will never again attain."

"You speak like a book, Hazon," said Laurence, not wondering that the other should have sized up his own case so exhaustively – not wondering, because he was an observer of human nature and a character-reader himself. Then, bitterly, "Yet that pumpkin-pated entity, the ponderous moralist, would contend that the lack of all that made life worth living was good as a stimulus to urge to exertion, and all the hollow old clap-trap."

"Quite so. But how many attain to the reward – the end of the said exertion? Not one in a hundred. And then, in nine cases out of ten, how does that one do it? By fraud, and thieving, and over-reaching, and sycophancy – in short, by running through the whole gamut of the scale of rascality – rascality of the meaner kind, mark you. Then when this winner in the battle of life comes out top, the world crowns him with fat and fulsome eulogy, and falls down and worships his cheque-book, crying, 'Behold a self-made man; go thou and do likewise!'"

"You've not merely hit the right nail on the head, Hazon, but you've driven it right home," said Laurence decisively, recognizing that here was a man after his own heart.

Two or three days went by before Hazon felt able or inclined to leave his bed, and a good part of each was spent by Laurence sitting in the sick man's room and talking. And it may have been that the lonely man felt cheered by the companionship and the friendliness that proffered it, what time all others held aloof; or that the two were akin in ideas, or both; but henceforward a sort of intimacy struck up between them, and it was noticed that Hazon no longer went about invariably alone. Then people began to look somewhat queerly at Laurence.

"You and 'the Pirate' have become quite thick together, Stanninghame," said Rainsford one day, meeting him alone.

"Well, why not?" answered Laurence, rather shortly, resenting the inquisitional nature of the question. Then point blank, "See here, Rainsford. Why are you all so down on the man? What has he done, anyway?"

"You needn't get your shirt out, old chap," was the answer, quite good-humouredly. "Look here, now – we are alone together – so just between ourselves. Do you notice how all of these up-country going fellows shunt him – Wheeler, for instance? and Garway, who is at your hotel, never speaks to him. And Garway, you'll admit, is as good a fellow as ever lived."

"Yes, I'll own up to that. What then?"

"Only this, that they know a good deal that we don't."

"Well, what do they know – or say they know?"

"Look here, Stanninghame," said Rainsford, rather mysteriously, "has Hazon ever told you any of his up-country experiences?"

"A few – yes."

"Did he ever suggest you should take a trip with him?"

"We have even discussed that possibility."

"Ah – !" Then Rainsford gave a long whistle, and his voice became impressive as he resumed: "Watch it, Stanninghame. From time to time other men have gone up country with Hazon, but —*not one of them has ever returned*."

"Oh, that's what you're all down on him about, is it?"

The other nodded; then, with a "so-long," he cut across the street and disappeared into an office where he had business.

CHAPTER VII.
"THE WHOLE SOUL PRISONER …"

No more foolish passion was ever implanted in the human breast than that of jealousy – unless it were that of which it is the direct outcome – nor is there any which the average human is less potent to resist. The victim of either, or both, is for the time being outside reason.

Now the first-mentioned form of disease is, to the philosophical mind, of all others the most essentially foolish – indeed, we can hardly call to mind any other so thoroughly calculated to turn the average well-constructed man or woman into an exuberantly incurable idiot. For what does it amount to when we come to pan it out? If there exist grounds for the misgiving, why then it is going begging – grovelling for something which the other party has not got to give; if groundless, is it not a fulfilling of the homely old saw relating to cutting off one's nose to spite one's face? (We disclaim any intent to pun.) In either case it is such a full and whole-souled giving of himself, or herself, away on the part of the patient; while on that of its object – is he, or she, worth it?

Now, from a very acute form of this insanity George Falkner was a chronic sufferer. He had cherished a secret weakness for Lilith, almost when she was yet in short frocks, but since her return from England, from the moment he had once more set eyes upon her on the deck of the *Persian*, he had tumbled madly, uncontrollably, headlong in love. Did a member of the opposite sex so much as exchange commonplaces with her, George Falkner's personality would contrive to loom, grim and dark, and almost threatening, in the background; while such male animal who should enjoy the pleasure of say an hour of Lilith's society *à deux*, even with no more flirtatious or ultimate intent than the same period spent in the society of his grandmother, would inspire in George a fell murderousness, which was nothing short of a reversion to first principles. As for Lilith herself, she was fond of him, very, in a sisterly, cousinly way – and what way, indeed, could be more fatal to that by which he desired to travel? Nor did it mend matters any that their mutual relatives were the reverse of favourable to his aspirations, on the ground of the near relationship existing between the parties. So, poor George, seeing no light, became morose and quarrelsome, and wholly and violently unreasonable – in short, a bore. All of which was a pity, because, this weakness apart, he was, on the whole, rather a good fellow.

He had come to the Rand, like everybody else, to wait for the boom – which boom, like the chariots of Israel, though totally unlike the children of the same, tarried long in coming; indeed, by that time there were not wanting those who feared that it might not come at all. He had pleaded with his aunt to invite Lilith at the same time, artfully putting it that the opportunity of his escort was too good to be missed; and Mrs. Falkner, with whom he was a prime favourite, although she did not approve his aspirations, weakly agreed. And so here they were beneath the same roof, with the addition of his second sister, the blue-eyed Mabel, whose acquaintance we have already made.

The latter, in her soft, fair-haired, pink and roses style, was a very pretty girl. She, for her part, could count "coup" to a creditable extent, and among the latest scalps which she had hung to her dainty twenty-inch girdle was that of our friend Holmes.

This – idiot, we were going to say, looked back upon that deadly, monotonous, starved, dusty, flea-bitten coach-ride of three days and two nights as a species of Elysium, and in the result was perennially importuning Laurence to take a stroll down to Booyseus, "Just for a constitutional, you know." And the latter would laugh, and good-naturedly acquiesce. It was a cheap way of setting up a character for amiability, he would say to himself satirically; for as yet Holmes hardly suspected he was almost as powerfully drawn thither as Holmes was himself – more powerfully, perhaps – only, with the advantage of years and experience and cooler brain, he had himself more in hand.

"Instead of making a prize gooseberry of me, Holmes, as a very appropriate item against the 'silly' season," he said one day, "you had much better go over by yourself. You are getting into Falkner's black books. He hates me like poison, you know."

"But that's just why I want you along, Stanninghame. While he's trying to stand you off in the other quarter, I'm in it, don't you see?" replied the other, with whole-hearted ingenuousness.

Holmes had stated no more than the truth. Of all the "rivals," real or imaginary, whom the jealous George hated and feared, *quâ* rival, none could touch Laurence Stanninghame. For by this time it had become patent to his watchful eyes that among the swarms of visitors of the male, and therefore, to him, obnoxious sex, at whose coming Lilith's glance would brighten, and with whom she would converse with a kind of affectionate confidentiality when others were present, and apparently even more so when others were not, that objectionable personage was the said Laurence Stanninghame.

This being the case, it followed that George Falkner, looking out on the *stoep* one fine afternoon, and descrying the approach of his bugbear, stifled a bad cuss-word or two, and then exploded aloud in more approved and passworthy fashion.

"There's that bounder coming here again."

"'Bounder' being Dutch for somebody you detest – eh, George?" said Lilith sweetly.

"Confound it! That everlasting trying to be sharp is one of the most deadly things a man has to put up with. It's catching – eh, Lilith?" was the sneering retort.

"But who is it?" said Mrs. Falkner, who was short-sighted, or affected to be.

"Oh, the great god, Stanninghame, of course, and his pup, Holmes."

Now the ill-conditioned George had stirred up a hornet's nest, for his sister took up the parable.

"Well, there are lessons to be learned even from 'pups,'" said Mabel scathingly. "They are not *always* growling, at any rate."

"Oh, you're on the would-be smart lay, too? Didn't I say it was catching?" he jeered.

"Yes, and you say a great many things that are supremely foolish," retorted Mabel, turning up her tip-tilted nose a little more, in fine scorn.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.