



"SO I HAVE GOT YOU AT LAST!"

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CHAPTER X.

THE STAR OF KIMBERLY.

"Ah, Tom, my darling little Tom," cried Loffden in a tone of mocking triumph; "so I have got you at last! Ha, ha! yes, the day will soon come when you, my little beauty—you, the prettiest girl in all the Cape Countries—the Star of Kimberly—will not say me nay. Ah, my little beauty!" he said, as he raised the unconscious girl in his strong arms and bore her away. Somehow, the sight of that pale face, upon which was written such an unutterable expression of agony, as she lay upon the bosom of her fallen lover, sent a chill of horror and dread to his guilty heart.

The body of the murdered lover was searched and the diamond was found. Larger even, and more valuable than Jante had pictured it.

"Ah," said Loffden, "let me see, let me see! Yes, it must be named; ah, I have it! Yes, it shall be called, 'The Star of Kimberly'. It is the same diamond that was discovered by old Lovell, the hermit that lives down the road a few miles, some twenty years ago—the first diamond found where the diamond fields of Kimberly are now. Yes, it shall be called 'The Star of Kimberly', declared Loffden. "But let go us back to the village, for I must return to Perth to-night. I must get back before dark, so as to mislead the people and throw suspicion in some other direction. I will be there by

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sunset, and back here again by ten o'clock to-morrow. So saying, they set out on their return to the Kafir village.

Poor, little Tom! kind providence had drawn the veil of unconsciousness about her and she was spared the agony of parting from her lover, who lay stretched in death, for, he certainly must be dead, they thought. Silas Loffden never missed a shot, nor had he missed this time. At only twenty paces he had taken a steady and deliberate aim at the very centre of the broad, high forehead of Harry Lovejoy; and he had seen the red life-blood as it gushed from an ugly wound in the victim's temple.

Riding on till they reached the Kafir village, the four assassins rode directly to the hut from whence they had set out some five or six hours before. Here they stopped and dismounting, carried the still unconscious girl into the hut.

"Here old woman," cried the triumphant villain, here's the missie! Look after her well till I return, and if you keep her safe, I will make you rich for a year; but if anything happens to her while I am gone, I will put a bullet through your ugly head. Ho Jante, mark you, your life as well as your old woman's, depends on your keeping this girl safe! I'll pay you well, or I'll kill you dead, as the case merits.

Carrying the girl into an inner room, he lay her upon a bed and again cautioning and threatening the old woman and Jante, he turned to his two accomplices in crime—two men that had been with him for twenty years and had done many a dark and bloody deed for

his hire, two men that were as completely within his power as deeds of blood and power of gold, could place them; so completely in his power, that he feared not to trust them with a knowledge of his darkest crimes—turning to these two men, he said—

"Boys, you know how important is this work to me. So far everything is all right. Harry Lovejoy was the only man on earth that I had cause to fear; now, that he is out of the way, the titles to my fortune are secure. The old hermit, Lovell, is the only man that could rob me of my lands, but he will never do it. There are two reasons why—he knows I will kill him if he betrays me, for one reason, and the other reason is, that the old deeds which he has, would give the lands to Tom Winterstine. Her mother was the sole heir to all of this property, which, at her death, would go to her children—Tom is the one and only heirress. Old Lovell would rather see the devil have the lands than the Winterstines. Harry Lovejoy, though, would have bridged the chasm between these two old rivals. But I haven't time now to tell you how and why. You know as well as I what the trouble was between old Lovell and Winterstine, but the part that Harry would have played and the reasons for it, are altogether a different story. There's but one person living *now*, beside myself, that knows anything about it and that is old Zulu. I have nothing to fear from him now that Harry is out of the way. He knows that I would kill him if he should tell it, and he knows that old Lovell would kill him if he knew that old Zulu had done the deed. So you see the importance of the work we have done. It is important

to me and equally as important to you, too—important to me, because I get rid of the only man on earth that I fear, and, at the same time, gain possession of the one lawful heir to these lands; important to you, because you have gained possession of a diamond that is worth a fortune to you. Now, there's no use for me to caution you; guard the girl till I return, and you shall have the diamond for your reward. I will bring a magistrate with me, and little Tom, 'The Star of Kimberly', shall be my wife to-morrow night. Then will I hold all the trumps."

So saying he turned from the hut and was soon riding away toward Perth.

"Oden," said Fritz, Boss Silas is a deep villain. I've told you all along that when he is done with us, he will put us out of the way, and he'll do it. He'll put us out of the way for fear that we'll squeal on him. I tell you, he'd no more hesitate to take our lives if he was to gain by it, than he did to shoot that young fellow. It's only a question of a little time, and that time ain't far off either. He's just about done with us, and I tell why. He's going to marry that girl; she's the heir to all this property; no one beside us knows anything about this affair; if we were out of the way, nothing could be proven against him. The girl don't know that he had anything to do with the killing of Harry—no one but us and Jante knows anything about it. But that's not all; by putting us out of the way, he will not only destroy all evidence against him, but he will double his fortune. I tell you, Oden, if this hadn't been his plan, he never would have given up this diamond! No, by

thunder, Silas Loffden, the man who has murdered a half dozen human beings to forever silence their testimony against his illegal possession and title to a valuable estate, would not hesitate to silence us too, when, by doing so, he would not only gain a more valuable piece of property, but would accomplish the very object that he has been working for—to get rid of the last witness against him—that is you and I. I've been studying over this matter for a long time and this is my plan—I don't propose to let him put me out of the way. We've got all out of this that we want, if we will only just take it; and, by thunder, I am going to do it! We've got the diamond and we've got the girl—they are worth a million dollars apiece—we've got just as much right to them as Silas Loffden has. All we've got to do, is to skip out."

"But what can we do with the girl?" asked Oden doubtfully.

"If I were as young as you are, I would find a use for her," replied the older villain. "If you don't want her, I will take her myself. I simply offered her to you because you are the youngest, but I'll take her."

"No, you don't, I'll take her; but how are we to get her away?" said Oden.

"Carry her away, of course! Jante is dead drunk by this time; 'I'll fix the old woman so she won't make any racket, while you go and bring up the horses. The girl can ride on a man's saddle all right. 'We'll make her believe that we are friends and I'll guarantee, she'll make us no trouble."

"All right, I fetch the horses. You attend to the old

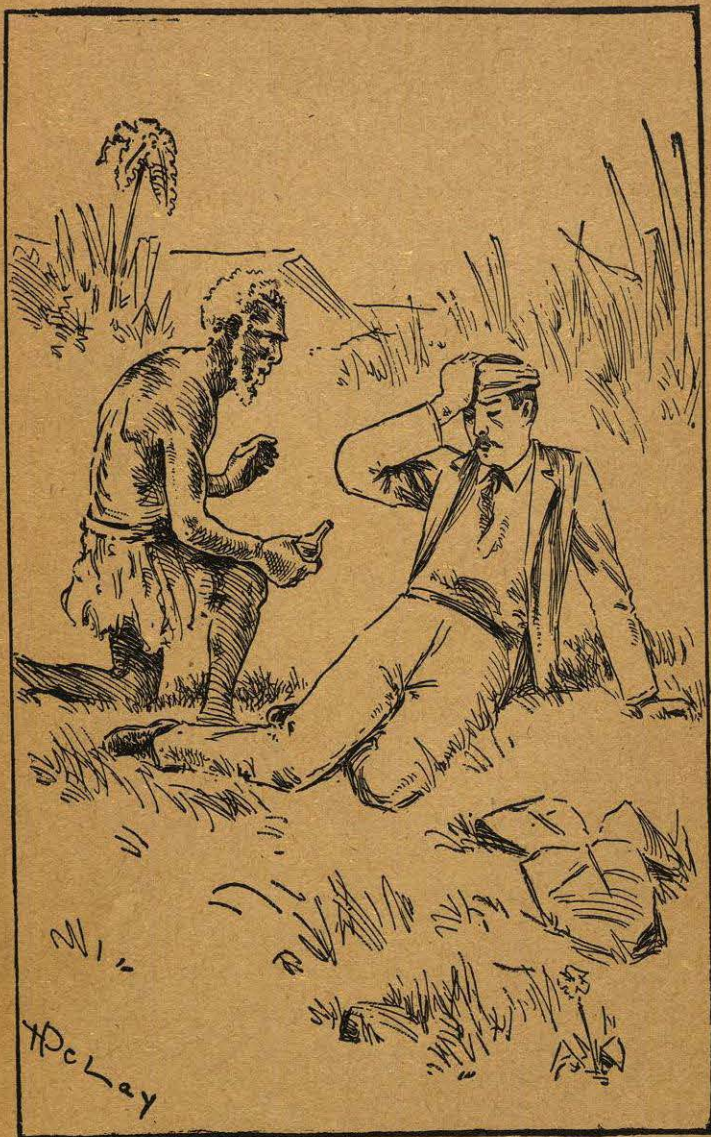
woman; hurry up, for the sooner we are off the better for us," he said; and went out to fetch the horses.

As his brother went out, Fritz went to the door of the room, in which the girl was confined and called to the old woman. As she came to the door, Fritz seized her by the throat to prevent an outcry, then, in a few moments, he had her securely bound and gagged, and then, dragging her back into the room, he assured the frightened girl, who by this time had recovered from her unconsciousness, that he was a friend, come to rescue her. This, of course, was easy enough, for the girl, it will be remembered, knew nothing about them, as she had not seen them.

"Quick, quick!" urged the villain, "the horses are ready, come!"

And he led the poor child, whose heart bounded with hope and gratitude, still further away from home and friends.

"Ah," he said, as he assisted her into the saddle, "no one sees us, Jante is drunk; the coast is clear." And they dashed away.



"O MY HEAD!" MOANED HARRY.

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CHAPTER XI.

PURSUIT.

Scarcely had Silas Loffden and his three hired assassins turned from the scene of that bloody tragedy in the quiet, little mountain dell, when a long, shriveled up old man, which was none other than the muttering old Zulu, appeared upon the scene.

Gliding noiselessly from the bushes, he went quickly over to the prostrate form of the stricken man and bent down till his ear touched the breast of the fallen lover.

For a moment he stood thus, and then drawing a flask from some mysterious portion of his scanty raiment, he pressed it to the wounded man's lips. In an incredibly short space of time he had bandaged the ugly looking wound across the young man's temple; and then, by the aid of cold water and the liquor which he carried in his flask, soon restored the man to consciousness.

"Ah," muttered the old man, "the Boss made a mistake this time; but it's the first. Ah, yah, Boss Silas does not often make a mistake. Yah, yah, Boss Silas; but we shall see, we shall see!"

"O my head!" moaned Harry, putting his hands to his head. "Oh, I remember now," he said, raising to a sitting posure and looking about him, "yes, yes, I saw him just as he shot, but couldn't dodge quick enough. It was Silas Loffden that shot me."

"Yah, yah," muttered the old Zulu; "that accounts

for it. Boss Silas never made a mistake of this kind before."

"Ah, old man, I believe I have seen you before, but I don't remember where. Were you here when they shot me?" asked Harry. "Do you know where they have gone? where they've taken the missie?"

"Yah," replied the old man, "I was not far away. They'll take the missie to the Kafir village where Jante and the old woman lives. Boss Loffden will return to Perth. The missie will be safe till morning, when Boss Silas will return to take her away. Ah, yah, Boss Silas, we shall see, we shall see!"

"Who was it with Loffden?" asked Harry.

"Fritz and Oden Goff," replied the old man. "Fritz and Oden Goff! Ah, yah, they are always with him when he has any evil deed on hand. Yah, yah, we shall see, Boss Silas, we shall see!"

"And they will return to the Kafir village? Then I must go there! Can you tell me where I can find them? where they will take the missie?"

"Yah, yah, Boas Harry, I can tell, but you must wait till night; they would shoot you if you were to go there now. But come, I will show you. Follow me. Ah, yah, we shall see, Boss Silas, we shall see," muttered the old Zulu as he led the way.

For several miles Harry followed the old man who, in spite of his old age and bent form, made such remarkable speed as to tax Harry's powers of locomotion to their utmost to keep up with him, when they arrived at the home of the old hermit where Tom and Harry had stopped but a few hours before.

With tears the old man listened to the story which Harry told. When he had finished, the hermit, after a moment of silence, said:

"Ah, my young friend, so you and Silas Loffden have met at last! Well, I need not tell you that he's a dangerous foe. I have known him all his life. I knew his father before him. Old Silas Loffden, James Winterstine and I came to this country together twenty-five years ago. Yes, yes, I knew him; he will not hesitate, as you have already seen, to take human life if it stands in his way. But some day he will stop. By right, he owns not a shilling of the immense property he possesses. The old deeds were lost and the new deeds which placed this property in Loffden's possession, were forged. The original deeds are still in existence, and some day they will be brought up to testify against him. I have labored long and persistently and have, at last, found the old deeds. Yes, I have all the evidence now, and I am waiting to arraign him before the bar of justice. The country is well settled now, and we have courts of justice now—ah, yes, the day of retribution is near at hand.

"Yah, yah," chimed in the old Zulu, "we shall see, Boss Silas, we shall see!"

"Yes," continued the old man, meditatively, "old Zulu has something against him. He killed the old Zulu's wife and two children for fear they would, some day, testify against him."

"We shall see, Boss Silas, we shall see!" reiterated the old Zulu; and his yellow skin turned livid with rage and his little black eye glittered vindictively.

But at last Harry's impatience would not allow him to

tarry any longer and finally, he prevailed upon the old Zulu to go with him to the Kafir village.

It was well after dark when they arrived at the hut where Jante lived, only to find to his horror and dismay, that they had gone—gone, no one knew where. The two villains who had aided Loffden had borne her away to the north. Nothing more was known; neither did any one know where Jante was.

“Yah, yah, Jante has gone to warn his master,” muttered the old Zulu.

For two days Harry scoured the country in every direction; and, at last, struck the trail of the missing girl and her abductors.

Some fifty miles to the northeast, they had passed a native village on their way to the sea-coast. The trail became plainer now, and the pursuing lover found no difficulty in following. For six days he had, almost without stopping, pursued them. Slowly, but surely he was gaining upon them.

Dark and threatening, the evening of the sixth day had gathered about him. Wearied and almost overcome by fatigue and hunger, Harry lay down by the roadside to rest, and in a few minutes was asleep.

How long he had slept, he knew not, when he was awakened by a wild, frightened cry that rang out loud and clear above the roar of the tempest which had just swooped down upon him from the high and rugged mountains to the north. Again came that cry—it was nearer now.

Springing quickly to his feet, and with drawn revolver, he bounded forward. Struggling and battling with the tempest, he pressed on. O how his heart beat

against its prison walls at the thought that, perhaps, that cry was uttered by little Tom. A cry, perhaps, for help, uttered in some awful fear.

On, on, he struggled, fiercely, furiously; peering intently into the darkness and listening for some sound to guide him. Presently, down upon the wings of the tempest, was borne to his listening ears, the clatter of horses hoofs rapidly approaching him. In a moment more, the indistinct outlines of two horsemen were seen.

On they dashed. They were within five paces now.

“Halt!” the command rang out loud and clear above the roar of the tempest. For one brief instant, the horsemen paused, then uttering a fearful oath, the leader, mounted upon a powerful coal-black horse, bounded forward; discharging his revolver at the dark form which had, so unexpectedly, barred the way.

As quick as had been the horseman’s act, the revolver of Harry Lovejoy blazed forth in answer. With one mighty spring, the coal-black horse bounded into the air and fell dead almost at his slayer’s feet. Again and again, rang out that note of death, as the other horseman, with some object bound upon the horse in front of him, wheeled his horse and made a desperate effort to escape the avenger’s hand. But his flight was short, for in a moment, the horse staggered and fell.

In an instant, the slayer sprang forward, and before the horseman could disengage himself from the fallen animal, for he had fallen upon the rider’s leg and held him fast, young Harry Lovejoy was upon him.

One swift and terrible blow from the heavy revolver,

dealt by the strong arm of Harry Lovejoy, laid the wretch quivering at his feet.

"O Tom, Tom!" cried Harry, as he looked down into the wild, frightened eyes of little Tom, as she lay bound upon the horse and partly beneath him. "O Tom, darling, are you hurt? Speak Tom!" he cried, as he severed the bands which held her and dragged her under the horse.

"O Harry!" was the glad cry, as she felt herself clasped, once again, in the strong arms of her lover.

"Are you hurt, Tom?" he cried, anxiously.

"No, no," she replied, "not much, Harry; but where is he—where is Loffden?"

"God!" cried Harry, in his excitement, forgetting his promise to little Tom to renounce profanity; for he had not thought of him before, so overjoyed was he at the knowledge that Tom was safe and unhurt.

"Come, let's see!" and he led the way back where the coal-black horse lay. As he drew near, a low moan told them of his presence and that he lived.