

CHAPTER XXVIII.

AFTER SUPPER.

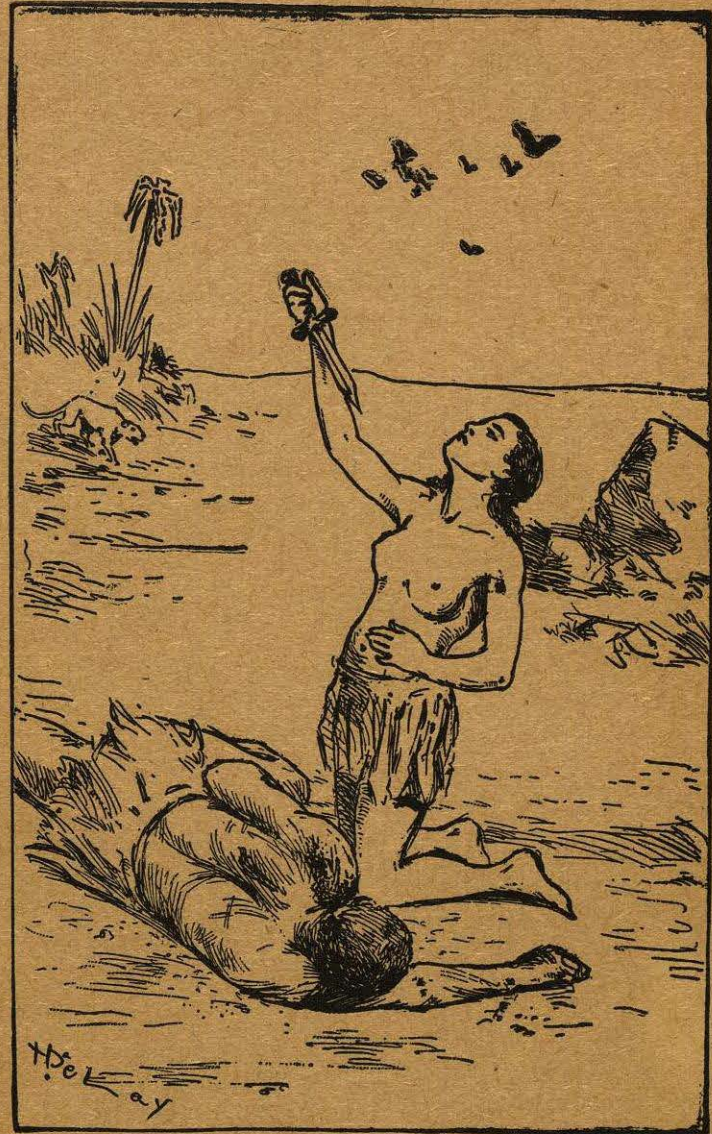
Supper was soon announced; and seating themselves at the table, they engaged in the ordinary conversation incident upon the meeting with friends or relatives from a far away country, whom they had not seen before or for a long time. Many questions were asked and answered till, finally, they arrived at the then present time.

"Ah, yes," said the old hermit, "many have come here to seek their fortunes—some have found it, many have not. But this is a good country; you could do no better than to come here."

"I would like to hear the story of the finding of that diamond, providing, of course, you feel like telling it," said Fred.

"Yes, yes," said the old man, "you are like all the others that come here to seek their fortunes—it is diamonds, great diamonds that you are looking for. Yes, I know how it is myself, for I came here with that ambitious hope, twenty-five years ago. I was a young man then, and I came as you have, to seek my fortune. I, in company with five others, went into the mines, but were unsuccessful; and after spending what little money we had, we set out in search of new fields. Weeks and months of hardship and suffering passed, still we found nothing. Wandering about the country, we finally came here and camped by the shore of the little lake out there.

(204)



SHE RETURNED TO HER DEAD LOVER, AND PLUNGED A
DAGGER INTO HER HEART.

P. 205

One day, some six weeks after we arrived here, an old Zulu Kafir, sick and nearly dead, came to our camp and asked us to help him. We took him in and cared for him as best we could till he got well and then we learned from him a strange tradition that was current among the Zulu tribe."

"For a great many years, so many that the first knowledge of its existence was buried in obscurity, a strange and mysterious light appeared at certain times of the night, always in the same place and could be seen only from a certain place. Strange to say, that particular locality had been the scene of a terrible and bloody tragedy. At the time of the tragedy, the Zulus were a powerful and intelligent people, ruled over by a young and beautiful queen, whose hand was sought by the young prince of the Kafir nation, then at war with the Zulus. This love affair led to the tragedy. As near as the Zulu could tell it, the prince kidnapped the fair queen; and while fleeing with his prize was overtaken upon that very spot where the strange light appeared, and at the precise time when it ever after appeared—surrounded by the friends of his rival, an old man and a near relative of the girl who aspired to the throne. After a long and fierce struggle the young man was overpowered and his body left to be devoured by the vultures and wild beasts. The next night the young queen made her escape, and returning to her dead lover, plunged a dagger into her heart and thus ended her life."

"The superstitious fancies of the Zulu had no particular charm for me, but I wished afterward that I had believed more of what they told me. One thing that he

told us was, that the peculiar and baneful light reflected by the mysterious object, which they called the 'Devil's Eye,' exerted such a baneful and mysterious power over anyone who came within the pale of its deadly influence, that they would ever after be haunted by the blood-thirsty demons and would sooner or later fall a victim to their wicked malice."

"But it was not these traditions that interested me; we gave no credence to the superstitious fancies of the natives. What interested us was, the cause of that mysterious light. We concluded to investigate the matter; so, in company with the old Zulu, we repaired to the only spot where the mysterious light could be seen. At the exact time that the old Zulu said the light could be seen, sure enough it appeared."

For several days we searched for the source of that mysterious light—a light which we were thoroughly convinced was reflected from a great diamond. 'What else could it be?' we asked ourselves. But why it could be seen only at a certain time of the night, was a mystery which we could never account for. It was easy enough to see and understand why it could only be seen from a certain point, for the light fell upon it in such a way and it occupied such a position that it could be seen from no other position."

"It was a very difficult matter to locate the exact spot from whence the light came, as it was nearly a half mile away and in the midst of a broad, gravelly valley, nearly in the center of the present diamond fields of Kimberly. But, at last, we succeeded in locating the place and soon found ourselves in possession of the largest diamond found at Kimberly. It had been said that the first

diamond found here, was found by a herder boy while tending his herd; but that is not true, for he found that stone more than a week after we found this one. The stone is as large as a common hen's egg, oval in shape and is blood-red in color."

"We felt that our fortunes were made, and with light and happy hearts we set out on our return to the Cape. But from the very first it seemed that some blighting curse had fallen upon us. Within two hours after finding the stone, one of the boys was caught and killed by a lion, while we were passing along the little brook just at the foot of the cliff yonder. That night, one of the five that was left disappeared and was never seen nor heard of afterwards. The four of us set out then for the Cape as fast as we could go and had almost reached the town when we were set upon by a band of outlaws, and my three companions were killed and I was left for dead."

"I told the story of the diamond and in less than a week the whole country was alive with people."

"The outlaws were hunted from the day they got possession of that stone till the last man had perished, but the diamond was not recovered. The last of the outlaws fled away into the mountains and when overtaken, threw the diamond into a rushing torrent rather than allow us to recover it."

"But, Uncle Henry, do you believe that there could possibly be anything in that stone, or about it, that could exert such an evil influence?" asked Fred, incredulously.

"I leave you to draw your own conclusions. No man has ever yet escaped unless he gave it up. You have

heard the story of the 'Star of Kimberly.' From the day little Tom found it, down to the Port Orange tragedy, fifteen men had lost their lives principally because of it. Harry nearly lost his life within two hours after they found it. He never had it more than six hours after going aboard that ship, till a storm came up and wrecked the ship and destroyed the lives of fifty people."

"But certainly uncle, that couldn't have had anything to do with that storm. Men may murder one another for it, but it certainly could not exert such an influence as to bring up a storm and destroy a ship and crew," declared Fred.

"Draw your own conclusions. I know this much. if Captain Marlin had known that Tom and Harry had that stone in their possession, he would never have allowed them to come aboard his vessel."

"Well, I will take my chances on it anyway. If I can find it, I will risk but what I can take care of it. I think that the great danger lies in letting it be known to others. There are six of us, and besides Tom and Harry, no one else will ever know that we are looking for it. We will go there and recover it if we can, taking care that no one else knows anything about what we are doing; we will even avoid being seen near the island."

Thus the plans for the safe recovery of the treasure were laid and the young fortune hunter waited only for a favorable decision from little Tom.

Till late into the night, Tom and Harry talked the matter over and finally, though with many misgivings upon the part of little Tom, it was decided that they would go to the island.

"Well then," said Fred, after receiving his answer the next morning, "I shall expect you day after to-morrow; and now, as I have to return to-day, I will bid you good-day."

Three days later, Tom and Harry stood upon the deck of the little yacht, "Lady Maud," as she weighed anchor and sailed proudly out of Table Bay on her mission.

Six days later, she dropped anchor under the lee of the huge pile of bleek and barren rocks upon which the gallant ship, "Cape Town," was lost that dark and stormy night.

CHAPTER XXIX.

ANOTHER VICTIM.

In a few days after reaching their destination, everything was ready for the search. A comfortable tent had been erected upon the barren and lonely island, in the most sheltered and most pleasant spot that could be found. No pains were spared to make it cheerful and homelike. But the awful fate of her shipmates that had perished there, cast such a shadow of melancholy about the place that it made the heart of little Tom sink with sadness.

From the door of their tent a good view of the field of operations was had; and sitting there, Tom and Harry watched day after day the progress of the work.

Five days had passed and, as yet, no signs of the wreck had been found. But upon the sixth day, a dark and stormy day, the signal flag that was to announce the discovery of the ship, was displayed at the mast-head of the little yacht. It was about eleven o'clock when Tom, looking from the door of her tent, saw the signal.

The wind was so high and the sea so rough, that nothing more could be done that day; so Fred came up to the tent to bring the good news. Rushing up to the tent, he cried out excitedly—

“We have found her, we have found her!”

“O Fred,” cried Tom, with tears in her great, blue eyes, while her voice trembled with emotion. “O Fred, I am afraid something is going to happen—”

(210)



TOM AND HARRY WATCHED DAY AFTER DAY THE
PROGRESS OF THE WORK.

"Happen!" interrupted Fred, "bet your sweet life that something is going to happen, my dear little cousin!" he cried, almost beside himself with excitement and eagerness.

"Fred," said Harry, quietly, "don't get excited over this thing. Keep cool; a little excitement, a little carelessness may result in a serious and perhaps fatal accident."

"Don't fear, Harry, I will guarantee there will be no accident because of any carelessness upon my part," he answered.

All the remainder of that day and all the next, the wind blew a perfect gale, so nothing could be done; but the next day was calm and the fortune hunters set to work with a will. As the day was so pleasant and the sea quiet, Tom and Harry went aboard to watch the progress of the work.

Everything went off smoothly and quietly until about ten o'clock, when the signal that was to announce that the treasure had been found, was given. In a moment, Fred and his partner who had the handling of the air pump, were so excited as to be totally unfit for the delicate task of managing the pump.

Tom and Harry were in the cabin, and as soon as the commotion was heard, Harry rushed upon the deck and in a tone of stern command, shouted—

"What in the name of God does all this excitement mean? Away with such boyishness!"

Just then a cry of alarm from Tom, drew Harry's attention to her.

"Look, look!" she cried. "O Harry, the men have dropped the signal lines and there's no one at the pump!"

"We've got it, we've got it!" fairly yelled the excited Fred, as with eager feverish haste and forgetting everything else in his intense excitement, he drew up the line to which the treasure was tied.

"Great God, man," cried Harry, seizing Fred and giving him such a shake as to nearly dislocate his neck, "get to the pump quick, quick, quick! What in thunder do you mean? Up with that diver, quick, you idiots!"

"O my God!" wailed little Tom, "another victim added to the list!"

"Perhaps not, Tom," said Tom encouragingly; "there, there, don't cry, Tom! Run back to the cabin, I can hear your baby crying.

"O Harry!" cried Tom, as Harry entered the cabin a few minutes later.

"He is dead," replied Harry sadly.

"Another victim!" groaned Tom. "O Harry, I can never forgive myself for consenting to do this thing!"

"It is not our fault, Tom," he answered, "so say no more about it."

This terrible accident, and the fact that it was caused by pure carelessness, though under a fit of uncontrollable excitement consequent upon the recovery of that valuable treasure, cast such a gloom over that little band of adventurers, that they became well-nigh demoralized; and to this state of affair, was, in a great measure responsible the accident which followed.

The day had been calm and pleasant and, but for the sad fate of poor George Peabody, the diver, and a member of the company of fortune hunters, would have

passed merrily in spite of the sad face and warning voice of little Tom.

But the day which had dawned so bright and with such bright prospects of success, was destined to end in yet another disaster.

Already, so it seemed, the shadows of doom hovered about them; and, as darkness settled down upon the bleak and barren island, it shut out from the view of our two soun' friends (Tom and Harry), and forever, the proud, beautiful, little yacht, which had borne them so gallantly to that ill-fated island.