

## CHAPTER XL

### OTTER'S FAREWELL

The night which followed, Leonard is wont to declare, proved to be the very worst that he ever spent in his life. Notwithstanding his intense weariness, he could not sleep, his nerves were too shattered to allow of it. Whenever he shut his eyes, he saw himself hanging head downwards over the oubliette in the cell beneath the idol, or flying through the air across the dreadful gap in the ice-bridge, or in some other position of terror, similar to those with which they had made such intimate acquaintance of late. Did these visions cease, from time to time he seemed to hear the voice of Francisco bidding him farewell, the yell of Soa falling to her dreadful death, or Nam raving his last defiance at them. Also his hurts, which were many, gave him great pain, and though the climate here was mild, the breeze from the snow heights chilled him through, and they had not even a match wherewith to light a fire and scare the wild beasts that roared about them.

Rarely have three human beings been in a position more desolate and desperate than that in which they found themselves this night, exhausted, unarmed, almost without food or clothing, and wandering they knew not where through the vastness of Central Africa. Unless some help found them, as Leonard was aware, they must perish of starvation, by the fangs of lions, or the spears of natives. It was impossible that they could live through another week, and the thought came into his mind that

it would be well for them if they died that night and had done with it.

It would be well; yes, and it would have been better if he had been laid by the side of his brother Tom before ever he listened to Soa's accursed tale of the People of the Mist and their treasure of rubies. Only then he would never have known Juanna, for she must have died in the slave camp.

This was the fruit of putting faith in the visions of dying men. And yet, it was strange, he had nearly got the money and "by the help of a woman," for those rubies would have sufficed to buy back Outram ten times over. But, alas! nearly is not quite. That dream was done with, and even if they escaped, it would be to find himself more utterly beggared than before, for now he would be a married beggar.

At last the night wore away and the dawn came, but Juanna did not wake until the sun was high. Leonard, who had crept to a little distance--for now he was quite unable to walk--saw her sit up and crawled back to her. She stared at him vacantly and said something about Jane Beach. Then he knew that she was wandering. There was nothing to be done. What could be done in that wilderness with a woman in delirium, except wait for death?

Accordingly Leonard and Otter waited for some hours. Then the dwarf, who was in far the best condition of the three, took the spear--Olfan's gift--and said that he would go and seek for food, since their store was exhausted. Leonard nodded, though he knew that there was little chance

of a man armed with a spear alone being able to kill game, and Otter went.

Towards evening he returned, reporting that he had seen plenty of buck, but could not get near them, which was just what his master expected. That night they passed hungry, by turns watching Juanna, who was still delirious. At dawn Otter started out again, leaving Leonard, who had been unable to sleep as on the previous night, crouched at Juanna's side, his face buried in his hands.

Before noon Leonard chanced to look up, and saw the dwarf reeling towards him, for he also was faint with want of food. Indeed his great head and almost naked body, through the skin of which the misshapen bones seemed to start in every direction, presented so curious a spectacle that his master, whose brain was shaken by weakness, began to laugh.

"Don't laugh, Baas," gasped the dwarf; "either I am mad, or we are saved."

"Then I think that you must be mad, Otter, for we shall take a deal of saving," he answered wearily, for he had ceased to believe in good fortune. "What is it?"

"This, Baas. There is a white man coming this way and more than a hundred servants with him; they are marching up the mountain slope."

"You are certainly mad, Otter," Leonard replied. "What in the names of Jal and Aca is a white man doing here? I am the only one of that species who have been fool enough to penetrate these regions, I and Francisco," and he shut his eyes and dozed off.

Otter looked at him for a while, then he tapped his forehead significantly and started down the slope again. An hour later, Leonard, still dozing, was awakened by a sound of many voices, and by a hand that shook him not too gently.

"Awake, Baas," said the dwarf, for the hand was his; "I have caught the white man and brought him here."

Leonard staggered to his feet and saw before him, surrounded by gun-bearers and other attendants, an English gentleman, rather under than over middle age, with a round and kindly face tanned by the sun, and somewhat deep-set dark eyes having an eyeglass fixed in one of them, through which its wearer regarded him with much commiseration.

"How do you do, sir?" said the stranger in a pleasant voice. "So far as I can make out from your servant you seem to be in a baddish way. By George! there is a lady."

"How do you do?" answered Leonard. "Capital sun-helmet that of yours. I envy it, but you see I have had to go bare-headed lately," and he

ran his fingers through his matted hair. "Who is the maker of that eight-bore? Looks a good gun!"

"Achmet," said the stranger, turning to an Arab at his side, "go to the first donkey and fetch this lord of the earth a pint of champagne and some oatmeal cakes; he seems to want them. Tell the bearers also to bring up my tent and to pitch it there by the water. Quick, now."

Forty-eight hours had passed, and the benevolent stranger was sitting on a camp-stool in the door of his tent, looking at two forms that lay wrapped in blankets and comfortably asleep within it.

"I suppose that they will wake some time," he murmured, dropping his eyeglass and taking the pipe from his mouth. "The quinine and champagne have done them a lot of good: there is nothing like quinine and champagne. But what an unconscionable liar that dwarf must be! There is only one thing he can do better, and that is eat. I never saw a chap stow away so much grub, though I must say that he looks as though he needed it. Still, allowing for all deductions, it is a precious queer story. Who are they, and what the deuce are they doing here? One thing is clear: I never saw a finer-looking man nor a prettier girl." And he filled his pipe again, replaced the eyeglass in his eye, and began smoking.

Ten minutes later Juanna sat up suddenly, whereupon the stranger withdrew out of sight. She looked round her wildly, then, seeing Leonard

lying at the further side of the tent, she crept to him and began kissing him, saying: "Leonard! Thank God that you are still alive, Leonard! I dreamed that we both were dead. Thank God that you are alive!"

Then the man who had been thus adjured woke up also and returned her caresses.

"By George! this is quite affecting," said the traveller. "I suppose that they are married; if not, they ought to be. Any way, I had better clear out for a while."

An hour later he returned to find that the pair had made themselves as presentable as soap and water, and some few spare garments which he had sent to Leonard, would allow, and were now sitting in the sun outside the tent. He advanced, lifting his helmet, and they rose to meet him.

"I suppose that I had better introduce myself," he said with some hesitation, for he was a shy man. "I am an English traveller, doing a little exploring on my own account, for lack of any other occupation, and my name is Sydney Wallace."

"Mine is Leonard Outram," answered Leonard, "and this young lady is Miss Juanna Rodd."

Mr. Wallace started and bowed again. So they were not married!

"We are deeply indebted to you, sir," went on Leonard; "for you have rescued us from death."

"Not at all," answered Mr. Wallace. "You must thank that servant of yours, the dwarf, and not me, for if he had not seen us, I should have passed a mile or more to the left of you. The fact is that I am rather fond of mountaineering, and seeing this great peak above us--I am told that it is the highest in the Bisa-Mushinga Mountains--I thought that I might as well have a try at it before I turn homewards, via Lake Nyassa, Livingstonia, Blantyre, and Quilimane. But perhaps you will not mind telling me how you came to be here. I have heard something from the dwarf, but his tale seems a little too steep."

"I am afraid you will think ours rather steeper, Mr. Wallace," said Leonard, and he proceeded to give him a short outline of their adventures.

When he came to their arrival among the People of the Mist, and described the inauguration of Otter and Juanna as gods in the temple of the colossus, he noticed that his auditor had let the eyeglass fall from his round eye, and was regarding him with mild amazement.

"I am afraid that all this does not interest you," said Leonard stiffly.

"On the contrary, Mr. Outram, it interests me very much. I am

exceedingly fond of romances, and this is rather a good one."

"As I thought; it is scarcely worth while to go on," said Leonard again.

"Well, I cannot wonder that you do not believe me."

"Leonard," interposed Juanna quietly, "you still have the star ruby; show it to Mr. Wallace!"

He did so, somewhat sulkily, and then, as he seemed disinclined to say anything more, Juanna took up the tale, showing in evidence of its truth the spear, the frayed rope, and the tattered white robe which she had worn in her character of Aca, and, indeed, still wore beneath poor Francisco's cassock--for she had no other.

Mr. Wallace heard her out, then, without making any comment, he rose, saying that he must try to shoot some meat for the camp, and begged that they would make themselves comfortable until his return that evening.

Before sundown he reappeared, and, coming straight to the tent, asked their pardon for his incredulity.

"I have been up yonder," he said, "following your spoor backwards. I have seen the snow-bridge and the stones, and the nicks which the dwarf cut in the ice. All is just as you told me, and it only remains for me to congratulate you upon having escaped from the strangest series of dangers that ever I heard of"; and he held out his hand, which both



Leonard and Juanna shook warmly.

"By the way," he added, "I sent men to examine the gulf for several miles, but they report to me that they found no spot where it would be possible to descend it, and I fear, therefore, that the jewels are lost for ever. I confess that I should have liked to try to penetrate into the Mist country, but my nerves are not strong enough for the ice-bridge, and if they were, stones won't slide uphill. Besides, you must have had about enough of roughing it, and will be anxious to turn your faces towards civilisation. So after you have rested another couple of days I think that we had better start for Quilimane, which, barring accidents, is about three months' march from here."

Shortly afterwards they started accordingly, but with the details of their march we need not concern ourselves. An exception must be made, however, in the case of a single event which happened at the mission-station of Blantyre. That event was the wedding of Leonard and Juanna in conformance with the ceremonies of their own church.

No word of marriage had been spoken between them for some weeks, and yet the thought of it was never out of the minds of either. Indeed, had their feelings been much less tender towards each other than was the case, it would still have been desirable, in view of the extraordinary intimacy into which they had been thrown during the past months, that they should become man and wife. Leonard felt that alone as she was in the wide world, nothing short of mutual aversion would have justified

him in separating from Juanna, and as it was love and not aversion that he entertained towards her, this argument came home to him with overmastering force.

"Juanna," he said to her on the day of their arrival at Blantyre, "you remember some words that passed between your father and myself when he lay upon his death-bed, to the effect that, should we both wish it, he trusted to my honour to remarry you formally as soon as an opportunity might arise.

"Now the opportunity is here, and I ask you if you desire to take me for your husband, as, above everything in the world, I desire to make you my beloved wife."

She coloured to her beautiful eyes and answered in a voice that was almost a whisper:

"If you wish it and think me worthy of you, Leonard, you know that I wish it also. I have always loved you, dear, yes, even when I was behaving worst to you; but there is--Jane Beach!"

"I have told you before, Juanna," he answered with some little irritation, "and now I tell you again, that Jane Beach and I have done with each other."

"I am sure that I am very glad to hear it," Juanna replied, still

somewhat dubiously. The rest of that conversation, being of a private character, will scarcely interest the public.

When he spoke thus, Leonard little knew after what fashion Jane Beach and he had wound up their old love affair.

Two days later Leonard Outram took Juanna Rodd to wife, "to have and to hold, for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish till death did them part," and their rescuer, Sydney Wallace, who by now had become their fast friend, gave her away.

Very curious were the memories that passed through Juanna's mind as she stood by her husband's side in the little grass-roofed chapel of Blantyre, for was this not the third time that she had been married, and now only of her own free will? She bethought her of that wild scene in the slave camp; of Francisco who died to save her, and of the blessing which he had called down upon her and this very man; of that other scene in the rock prison, when, to protect Leonard's life, she was wed, according to the custom of the Children of the Mist, to that true-hearted gentleman and savage, Olfan, their king. Then she awoke with a happy sigh to know that the lover at her side could never be taken from her again until death claimed one of them.

"We shall be dreadfully poor, Leonard," she said to him afterwards; "it would have been much better for you, dear, if I had fallen into the gulf

instead of the rubies."

"I am not of your opinion, love," he answered with a smile for he was very happy. "Hang the rubies! Your price is far above rubies, and no man may struggle against fate. I have always been able to make a living for myself heretofore, and I do not doubt that I shall continue to do so for both of us, and we will leave the rest to Providence. You are more to me, Juanna, than any wealth--more even than Outram."

That evening Mr. Wallace found Otter gazing disconsolately at the little house in which Leonard and Juanna were staying.

"Are you sad because your master is married, Otter?" he asked.

"No," answered the dwarf, "I am glad. For months he has been running after her and dreaming of her, and now at last he has got her.

Henceforth she must dream of him and run after him, and he will have time to think about other people, who love him quite as well."

Another month or so went by while the party journeyed in easy stages towards the coast, and never had wedded lovers a happier honeymoon, or one more unconventional, than that passed by Leonard and Juanna, though perhaps Mr. Wallace and Otter did not find the contemplation of their raptures a very exhilarating occupation.

At last they reached Quilimane in safety, and pitched their camp on

some rising ground outside of the settlement, which is unhealthy. Next morning at daybreak Mr. Wallace started to the post-office, where he expected to find letters. Leonard and Juanna did not accompany him, but went for a walk before the sun grew hot. Then it was, as they walked, that a certain fact came home to them; namely, that they could not avail themselves of their host's kindness any longer, and, further, that they were quite penniless. When one is moving slowly across the vast African wilds, and living on the abounding game, love and kisses seem an ample provision for all wants. But the matter strikes the mind in a different light after the trip is done, and civilisation with its necessities looms large in the immediate future.

"What are we to do, Juanna?" asked Leonard in dismay. "We have no money to enable us to reach Natal or anywhere, and no credit on which to draw."

"I suppose that we must sell the great ruby," she answered, with a sigh, "though I shall be sorry to part with it."

"Nobody will buy such a stone here, Juanna, and it may not be a real ruby after all. Perhaps Wallace might be willing to advance me a trifle on it, though I hate having to ask him."

Then they went back to breakfast, which they did not find an altogether cheerful meal. As they were finishing, Mr. Wallace returned from the town.

"I have got good news," he said; "the British India mail will be here in two days, so I shall pay off my men and go up to Aden in her, and thence home. Of course you will come too, for, like me, I expect you have had enough of Africa for the present. Here are some copies of the weekly edition of the 'Times'; look through them, Mrs. Outram, and see the news while I read my letters."

Leonard turned aside moodily and lit his pipe. How was he to find money to take even a third-class passage on the British India mail? But Juanna, obeying the instinct that prompts a woman to keep up appearances at all hazards, took one of the papers and opened it, although the tears which swam in her eyes would scarcely suffer her to see the print. Thus things went on for ten minutes or more, as she idly turned the pages of two or three issues of the weekly "Times," trying to collect her thoughts and pick up the thread of current events.

But it is wonderful how uninteresting and far-away those events appear after the reader has been living a life to herself for a year or so, and Juanna, preoccupied as she was with her own thoughts, was about to give up the attempt as a failure, when the name of Outram started to her eyes.

A minute later her two companions heard a sharp exclamation and turned round.

"What is the matter, Mrs. Outram?" said Wallace. "Has France declared war against Germany, or is Mr. Gladstone dead?"

"Oh! no, something much more important than that. Listen to this advertisement, Leonard:--

"If Leonard Outram, second son of Sir Thomas Outram, Bart., late of Outram Hall, who was last heard of in the territory to the north of Delagoa Bay, Eastern Africa, or, in the event of his death, his lawful heirs, will communicate with the undersigned, he or they will hear of something very greatly to his or their advantage. Thomson & Turner, 2 Albert Court, London, E.C."

"Are you joking, Juanna?" said Leonard after a pause.

"Look for yourself," she answered.

He took the paper, and read and reread the notice.

"Well, there is one thing certain," he said, "that no one ever stood in greater need of hearing something to his advantage than I do at this moment, for excepting the ruby, which may not be a true stone, we haven't a stiver to bless ourselves with in the world. Indeed, I don't know how I am to avail myself of Messrs. Thomson & Turner's kind invitation, unless I write them a letter and go to live in a Kaffir hut

till the answer comes."

"Don't let that trouble you, my dear fellow," said Wallace; "I can get plenty of cash here, and it is very much at your service."

"I am ashamed to take further advantage of your kindness," answered Leonard, flushing. "This advertisement may mean nothing, or perhaps a legacy of fifty pounds, though I am sure I don't know who would leave me even that sum. And then, how should I repay you?"

"Stuff!" said Wallace.

"Well," replied Leonard, "beggars must put their pride in their pockets. If you will lend me a couple of hundred pounds and take the ruby in pledge, I shall be even more grateful to you than I am at present, and that is saying a good deal."

On this business basis the matter was ultimately arranged, though within half an hour Wallace handed back the great stone into Juanna's keeping, bidding her "keep it dark"; an injunction which she obeyed in every sense of the word, for she hid the ruby where once the poison had lain--in her hair.

Two busy days went by, and on the third morning a messenger came running from the town to announce that the northward mail was in sight. Then it was that Otter, who all this while had said nothing, advanced solemnly



towards Leonard and Juanna, holding his hand outstretched.

"What is the matter, Otter?" asked Leonard, who was engaged in helping Wallace to pack his hunting trophies.

"Nothing, Baas; I have come to say good-bye to you and the Shepherdess, that is all. I wish to go now before I see the Steam-fish carry you away."

"Go!" said Leonard; "you wish to go?"

Somehow Otter had become so much a part of their lives, that, even in their preparations to leave for England, neither of them had ever thought of parting from him.

"Why do you wish to go?" he added.

"Because I am an ugly old black dog, Baas, and can be of no further use to you out yonder," and he nodded towards the sea.

"I suppose you mean that you do not want to leave Africa, even for a while," said Leonard, with ill-concealed grief and vexation. "Well, it is hard to part with you like this. Also," he added with a little laugh, "it is awkward, for I owe you more than a year's wages, and have not the money to spare to pay you. Moreover, I had taken your passage on the ship."

"What does the Baas say?" asked Otter slowly; "that he has bought me a place in the Steam-fish?"

Leonard nodded.

"Then I beg your pardon, Baas. I thought that you had done with me and were going to throw me away like a worn-out spear."

"So you wish to come, Otter?" said Leonard.

"Wish to come!" he answered wonderingly. "Are you not my father and my mother, and is not the place where you may be my place? Do you know what I was going to do just now, Baas? I was going to climb to the top of a tree and watch the Steam-fish till it vanished over the edge of the world; then I would have taken this rope, which already has served me well among the People of the Mist, and set it about my throat and hanged myself there in the tree, for that is the best end for old dogs, Baas."

Leonard turned away to hide the tears which started to his eyes, for the dwarf's fidelity touched him more than he cared to show. Seeing his trouble, Juanna took up the talk to cover his confusion.

"I fear that you will find it cold over yonder, Otter," she said. "It is a land of fog, they tell me, and there are none of your own people, no wives or Kaffir beer. Also, we may be poor and have to live hardly."

"Of fog I have seen something lately, Shepherdess," answered the dwarf; "and yet I was happy in the fog, because I was near the Baas. Of hard living I have seen something also, and still I was happy, because I was near the Baas. Once I had a wife and beer in plenty, more than a man could want, and then I was unhappy, because they estranged me from the Baas, and he knew that I had ceased to be Otter, his servant whom he trusted, and had become a beast. Therefore, Shepherdess, I would see no more of wives and beer."

"Otter, you idiot," broke in Leonard brusquely, "you had better stop talking and get something to eat, for it will be the last meal that you will wish to see for many a day."

"The Baas is right," replied the dwarf; "moreover, I am hungry, for sorrow has kept me from food for these two days. Now I will fill myself full, that I may have something to offer to the Black Water when he shakes me in his anger."

ENVOI

THE END OF THE ADVENTURE

Six weeks or so had passed when a four-wheeled cab drew up at the door

of 2 Albert Court, London, E.C.

The progress of this vehicle had excited some remark among the more youthful and lighter-minded denizens of the City, for on its box, arrayed in an ill-fitting suit of dittoes and a brown hat some sizes too small for him, sat a most strange object, whose coal-black countenance, dwarfed frame, and enormous nose and shoulders attracted their ribald observance.

"Look at him, Bill," said one youth to an acquaintance; "he's escaped from Madame Tussaud's, he has. Painted hisself over with Day & Martin's best, and bought a secondhand Guy Fawkes nose."

Just then his remarks were cut short, for Otter, having been made to understand by the driver that they had arrived at their destination, descended from the box in a manner so original, that it is probably peculiar to the aborigines of Central Africa, and frightened that boy away.

From the cab emerged Leonard and Juanna, looking very much the better for their sea journey. Indeed, having recovered her health and spirits, and being very neatly dressed in a grey frock, with a wide black hat trimmed with ostrich feathers, Juanna looked what she was, a very lovely woman. Entering an outer office Leonard asked if Messrs. Thomson & Turner were to be seen.

"Mr. Turner is within, sir," answered a clerk of venerable appearance.

"Mr. Thomson"--here his glance fell upon Otter and suddenly he froze up, then added with a jerk--"has been dead a hundred years! Thomson, sir," he explained, recovering his dignity, but with his eyes still fixed on Otter, "was the founder of this firm; he died in the time of George III. That is his picture over the door--the person with a harelip and a snuffbox."

"Indeed!" said Leonard. "As Mr. Thomson is not available, perhaps you will tell Mr. Turner that a gentleman would like to speak to him."

"Certainly, sir," said the old clerk, still staring fixedly at Otter, whose aspect appeared to fascinate him as much as that worthy had been fascinated by the eyes of the Water-Dweller. "Have you an appointment, sir?"

"No," answered Leonard. "Tell him that it is in reference to an advertisement which his firm inserted in the 'Times' some months ago."

The clerk started, wondering if this could be the missing Mr. Outram. That much-sought-for individual was understood to have resided in Africa, which is the home of dwarfs and other oddities. Once more he stared at Otter and vanished through a swing door.

Presently he returned. "Mr. Turner will see you, sir, if you and the lady will please to step in. Does this--gentleman--wish to accompany

you?"

"No," said Leonard, "he can stop here."

Thereupon the clerk handed Otter a tall stool, on which the dwarf perched himself disconsolately. Then he opened the swing door and ushered Leonard and his wife into Mr. Turner's private room.

"Whom have I the pleasure of addressing?" said a bland, stout gentleman, rising from before a table strewn with papers. "Pray be seated, madam."

Leonard drew from his pocket a copy of the weekly "Times" and handed it to him, saying:

"I understand that you inserted this advertisement."

"Certainly we did," answered the lawyer after glancing at it. "Do you bring me any news of Mr. Leonard Outram?"

"Yes, I do. I am he, and this lady is my wife."

The lawyer bowed politely. "This is most fortunate," he said; "we had almost given up hope--but, of course, some proofs of identity will be required."

"I think that they can be furnished to your satisfaction," answered

Leonard briefly. "Meanwhile, for the sake of argument, perhaps you will assume that I am the person whom I state myself to be, and inform me to what this advertisement refers."

"Certainly," answered the lawyer, "there can be no harm in that. Sir Thomas Outram, the late baronet, as you are doubtless aware, had two sons, Thomas and Leonard. Leonard, the second son, as a young man was engaged to, or rather had some love entanglement with, a lady--really I forget her maiden name, but perhaps you can inform me of it----"

"Do you happen to mean Miss Jane Beach?" said Leonard quietly.

At this point Juanna turned in her chair and became extraordinarily, indeed almost fiercely, interested in the conversation.

"Quite so; Beach was the name. You must excuse my forgetfulness. Well, Sir Thomas's affairs fell into confusion, and after their father's death Mr. Leonard Outram, with his elder brother Thomas, emigrated to South Africa. In that same year Miss Jane--eh--Beach married a client of ours, Mr. Cohen, whose father had purchased the estate of Outram from the trustees in bankruptcy."

"Indeed!" said Leonard.

"Shortly afterwards," went on the lawyer, "Mr. Cohen, or rather Sir Jonas Cohen, succeeded to the estate on the death of his father. Two

years ago he died leaving all his property, real and personal, to his only child, a daughter named Jane, with reversion to his widow in fee simple. Within a month of his death the child Jane died also, and nine months later her mother, Lady Cohen, nee Jane Beach, followed her to the grave."

"Yes," said Leonard in a dull voice, and hiding his face in his hand; "go on, sir."

"Lady Cohen made a somewhat peculiar will. Under the terms of that will she bequeaths the mansion house and estates of Outram, together with most of her personal property, amounting in all to something over a hundred thousand pounds, to her old friend Leonard Outram and the heirs of his body, with reversion to her brother. This will has not been disputed; therefore, if you are Leonard Outram, I may congratulate you upon being once more the owner of your ancestral estate and a considerable fortune in cash."

For a while Leonard was too agitated to speak.

"I will prove to you," he said at last, "that I am this person, that is, I will prove it prima facie; afterwards you can satisfy yourself of the truth of my statements by the usual methods." And he proceeded to adduce a variety of evidence as to his identity which need not be set out here. The lawyer listened in silence, taking a note from time to time.



"I think," he said when Leonard had finished, "that, subject to those inquiries of which you yourself have pointed out the necessity in so grave a matter, I may accept it as proved that you are none other than Mr. Leonard Outram, or rather," he added, correcting himself, "if, as I understand, your elder brother Thomas is dead, than Sir Leonard Outram. Indeed you have so entirely convinced me that this is the case, that I have no hesitation in placing in your hands a letter addressed to you by the late Lady Cohen, and deposited with me together with the executed will; though, when you have read it, I shall request you to leave that letter with me for the present.

"By the way, it may interest you to learn," Mr. Turner added, as he went to a safe built into the wall and unlocked its iron door, "that we have been hunting for you for a year or more. We even sent a man to South Africa, and he tracked you to a spot in some mountains somewhere north of Delagoa Bay, where it was reported that you, with your brother Thomas and two friends, were digging for gold. He reached the spot on the night of the ninth of May last year."

"The very day that I left it," broke in Leonard.

"And found the site of your camp and three graves. At first our representative thought that you were all dead, but afterwards he fell in with a native who appears to have deserted from your service, and who told him that one of the brothers was dying when he left the camp, but

one was still in good health, though he did not know where he had gone."

"My brother Thomas died on the first of May--this day year," said Leonard.

"After that all trace of you was lost, but I still kept on advertising, for missing people have a wonderful way of turning up to claim fortunes, and you see the result. Here is the letter, Sir Leonard."

Leonard took the document and looked at it, while strange feelings crowded into his mind. This was the first letter that he had ever received from Jane Beach; also it was the last that he ever could receive.

"Before I open this, Mr. Turner," he said, "for my own satisfaction I may as well ask you to compare the handwriting of the address with another specimen of it that chances to be in my possession"; and producing the worn prayer-book from his pocket--Jane's parting gift--he opened it at the fly-leaf, and pointed out the inscription to the lawyer, placing the envelope beside it.

Mr. Turner took a reading-glass and examined first one writing and then the other.

"These words appear to have been written by the same hand," he said presently. "Lady Cohen's writing was peculiar, and it is difficult to

be mistaken on the point, though I am no expert. To free you from responsibility, with your consent I myself will open this letter," and he slit the envelope at the top with an ivory paper-knife, and, drawing out its contents, he handed them to Leonard. They ran thus:

"My dearest Leonard,--For so I, who am no longer a wife, may call you without shame, seeing that you are in truth the dearest to my heart, whether you be still living, or dead like my husband and my child.

"The will which I am to sign to-morrow will prove to you if you are yet alive, as I believe to be the case, how deep is my anxiety that that you should re-enter into possession of the ancestral home of which fortune has deprived you. It is with the greatest pleasure that I make you this bequest, and I can do so with a clear conscience, for my late husband has left everything at my absolute disposal--being himself without near relations--in the sad event which has occurred, of the death of his daughter, our only child.

"May you live long enough to enjoy the lands and fortune which I am enabled thus to return to your family, and may your children and their descendants sit at Outram for many a generation to come!

"And now I will talk no more of this matter, for I have an explanation to make and a pardon to ask.

"It may well be, Leonard, that when your eyes fall upon these lines, you will have forgotten me--most deservedly--and have found some other woman to love you. No, as I set this down I feel that it is not true; you will never forget me altogether, Leonard--your first love--and no other woman will ever be quite the same to you as I have been; or, at least, so I believe in my foolishness and vanity.

"You will ask what explanation is possible after the way in which I have treated you, and the outrage that I have done to my own love. Such as it is, however, I offer it to you.

"I was driven into this marriage, Leonard, by my late father, who could be very cruel when he chose. To admit this is, as I know, a proof of weakness. So be it, I have never concealed from myself that I am weak. Yet, believe me, I struggled while I could; I wrote to you even, but they intercepted my letter; and I told all the truth to Mr. Cohen, but he was self-willed and passionate, and would take no heed of my pleading. So I married him, Leonard, and was fairly happy with him, for he was kindness itself to me, but from that hour I began to die.

"And now more than six years have passed since the night of our parting in the snow, and the end is at hand, for I am really dying. It has pleased God to take my little daughter, and this last shock proved more than I can bear, and so I go to join her and to wait with her till such time as I shall once more see your unforgotten face.

"That is all that I have to say, dear Leonard.

"Pardon me, and I am selfish enough to add--do not forget me.

"JANE.

"P.S.--Why is it that an affection like ours, which has never borne fruit even, should in the end prove stronger than any other earthly tie? Heaven knows, and Heaven alone, how passionately I loved and love my dead child; and yet, now that my own hour is at hand, it is of you that I think the most, you who are neither child nor husband. I suppose that I shall understand ere long, but, O Leonard, Leonard, Leonard, if, as I believe, my nature is immortal, I swear that such love as mine for you, however much it be dishonoured and betrayed, is still the most immortal part of it!--J."

Leonard put down the letter on the table, and again he covered his face with his hand to hide his emotion, for his feelings overcame him as a sense of the depth and purity of this dead woman's undying love sank into his heart.

"May I read that letter, Leonard?" asked Juanna in a quiet voice.

"Yes, I suppose so, dear, if you like," he answered, feeling dully that it was better to make a clean breast of the matter at once, and thus to

prevent future misunderstandings.

Juanna took the letter and perused it twice, by which time she knew it as well as she did the Lord's Prayer, nor did she ever forget a single word of it. Then she handed it back to the lawyer, saying nothing.

"I understand," said Mr. Turner, breaking in on a silence which he felt to be painful, "that you will be able to produce the necessary proofs of identity within the next few days, and then we can get the will proved in the usual form. Meanwhile, you must want money, which I will take the risk of advancing you," and he wrote a cheque for a hundred pounds and gave it to Leonard.

Half an hour later Leonard and Juanna were alone in a room at their hotel, but as yet scarcely a word had passed between them since they left the lawyer's office.

"Don't you see, Leonard," his wife said almost fiercely, "it is most amusing, you made a mistake. Your brother's dying prophecy was like a Delphic oracle--it could be taken two ways, and, of course, you adopted the wrong interpretation. You left Grave Mountain a day too soon. It was by Jane Beach's help that you were to recover Outram, not by mine," and she laughed sadly.

"Don't talk like that, dear," said Leonard in a sad voice; "it pains me."

"How else am I to talk after reading that letter?" she answered, "for what woman can hold her own against a dead rival? Now also I must be indebted to her bounty all my days. Oh! if I had not lost the jewels--if only I had not lost the jewels!"

History does not relate how Leonard dealt with this unexpected and yet natural situation.

A week had passed and Leonard, with Juanna at his side, found himself once more in the great hall at Outram, where, on a bygone night, many years ago, he and his dead brother had sworn their oath. All was the same, for in this hall nothing had been changed--Jane had seen to that. There chained to its stand was the Bible, upon which they had registered their vow; there were the pictures of his ancestors gazing down calmly upon him, as though they cared little for the story of his struggles and of his strange triumph over fortune "by the help of a woman." There was the painted window, with its blazoned coats of arms and its proud mottoes--"For Heart, Home, and Honour," and "Per ardua ad astra." He had won the heart and home, and he had kept his honour and his oath. He had endured the toils and dangers and the crown of stars was his.

And yet, was Leonard altogether happy as he stood looking on these familiar things? Perhaps not quite, for yonder in the churchyard there was a grave, and within the church a monument in white marble, that was wonderfully like one who had loved him and whom he had loved, though

time and trouble had written a strange difference on her face. Also, he had failed: he had kept his oath indeed and fought on till the end was won, but himself he had not won it. What now was his had once belonged to his successful rival, who doubtless little dreamed of the payment that would be exacted from him by the decree of fate.

And was Juanna happy? She knew well that Leonard loved her truly; but oh! it was cruel that she who had shared the struggles should be deprived of her reward--that it should be left to another, who if not false had at least been weak, to give to her husband that which she had striven so hard to win--that which she had won--and lost. And harder still was it that in this ancient place which would henceforth be her home, by day and by night she must feel the presence of the shadow of a woman, a woman sweet and pale, who, as she believed, stood between her and that which she desired above all things--the complete and absolute possession of her husband's heart.

Doubtless she overrated the trouble; men and women do not spend their lives in brooding upon the memories of their first loves--if they did, this would be a melancholy world. But to Juanna it was real enough, and remained so for some years. And if a thing is true to the heart, it avails little that reason should give it the lie.

In short, now in the hour of their full property, Leonard and Juanna were making acquaintance with the fact that fortune never gives with both hands, as the French say, but loves to rob with one while she



bestows with the other. To few is it allowed to be completely miserable, to none to be completely happy. Their good luck had been so overwhelming in many ways, that it would have partaken of the unnatural, and might well have excited their fears for the future, had its completeness been unmarred by these drawbacks which, such as they were, probably they learned to disremember as the years passed over them bringing them new trials and added blessings.

Perhaps a peep into the future will tell us the rest of the story of Leonard and Juanna Outram better and more truly than any further chronicling of events.

Ten years or so have gone by and Sir Leonard, now a member of Parliament and the Lord-Lieutenant of his county, comes out of church on the first Sunday in May accompanied by his wife, the stateliest matron in the country-side, and some three or four children, boys and girls together, as healthy as they are handsome. After a glance at a certain grave that lies near to the chancel door, they walk homewards across the budding park in the sweet spring afternoon, till, a hundred yards or more from the door of Outram Hall, they pause at the gates of a dwelling known as "The Kraal," shaped like a beehive, fashioned of straw and sticks, and built by the hands of Otter alone.

Basking in the sunshine in front of this hut sits the dwarf himself, cutting broom-sticks with a knife out of the straightest of a bundle of ash saplings that lie beside him. He is dressed in a queer mixture of

native and European costume, but otherwise time has wrought no change in him.

"Greeting, Baas," he says as Leonard comes up. "Is Baas Wallace here yet?"

"No, he will be down in time for dinner. Mind that you are there to wait, Otter."

"I shall not be late, Baas, on this day of all days."

"Otter," cries a little maid, "you should not make brown-sticks on Sunday, it is very wrong."

The dwarf grins by way of answer, then speaks to Leonard in a tongue that none but he can understand.

"What did I tell you many years ago, Baas?" he says. "Did I not tell you that by this way or by that you should win the wealth, and that the great kraal across the water should be yours again, and that the children of strangers should wander there no more? See, it has come true," and he points to the happy group of youngsters. "Wow! I, otter, who am a fool in most things, have proved to be the best of prophets. Yet I will rest content and prophesy no more, lest I should lose my name for wisdom."

A few hours later and dinner is over in the larger hall. All the servants have gone except Otter, who dressed in a white smock stands behind his master's chair. There is no company present save Mr. Wallace, who has just returned from another African expedition, and sits smiling and observant, his eyeglass fixed in his eye as of yore. Juanna is arrayed in full evening dress, however, and a great star ruby blazes upon her breast.

"Why have you got the red stone on to-night, mother?" asks her eldest son Thomas, who with his two sisters has come down to desert.

"Hush, dear," she answers, as Otter advances to that stand on which the Bible is chained, holding a glass filled with port in his hand.

"Deliverer and Shepherdess," he says, speaking in Sisutu, "on this day eleven years gone Baas Tom died out yonder; I, who drink wine but once a year, drink to the memory of Baas Tom, and to our happy meeting with him in the gold House of the Great-Great"; and swallowing the port with a single gulp Otter throws the glass behind him, shattering it on the floor.

"Amen," says Leonard. "Now, love, your toast."

"I drink to the memory of Francisco who died to save me," says Juanna in a low voice.

"Amen," repeats her husband.

For a moment there is silence, for Leonard gives no toast; then the boy Thomas lifts his glass and cries,

"And I drink to Olfan, the king of the People of the Mist, and to Otter, who killed the Snake-god, and whom I love the best of all of them.

Mother, may Otter get the spear and the rope and tell us the story of how he dragged you and father up the ice-bridge?"