

CHAPTER XI. *Faces Set Toward Danger.* Lentala in Difficulties. The True Story of the Enterprising Young Men. Mr. Vancouver Faces the Unknown. Beelo Takes Us on a Journey.

Beelo was much excited and torn with impatience when I arrived. Despite that, he regarded me with an odd mixture of awe and fear.

“Choseph!” he exclaimed, “you are terrible and cruel! I couldn’t have believed—” His breath gave out.

“What’s the news, lad?”

The gentle solicitude in my voice steadied him, and he looked with his sunny smile.

“You are dear old Choseph, aren’t you?” he said. “Oh, everything has happened!” he flung out. “The king is terribly angry with Lentala for interfering with the arrest of the young men yesterday. I had to stay with her, and couldn’t come. I don’t know what trouble will come out of it, but the king is going to bring matters to a head at once, before we are nearly ready! Choseph! those young men ought not to have been let out of the valley. Gato is now on his way to the colony for a man, and you must go here immediately to attend to it. You must decide which man is to go.

His news, breathlessly given, stunned me. It was essential that we both be calm.

“Tell me what happened to the young men,” I asked.

“They climbed the wall, and expected to slip through. Why, Senatra men rained on them! Lentala got there as soon as she could with her private guard, but it was too late to save them from a terrible whipping. The guard had them bound and were taking them to the palace when Lentala arrived. She’s afraid now that the king will do what he has threatened,—either lock her up or give orders that will tie her hands so that she can’t do anything.”

I hesitated. “If she is powerless, Beelo, there will be no one to protect the man who will go out with Gato.”

His distress was poignant, and he dropped to the ground in a weary little heap.

“Lentala is equal to any task, lad,” I quietly said.

He looked up brightly. “Do you believe that much in her, Choseph?”

“She’s our one hope, lad, and she’ll never falter; and she has your wise little head and your bold heart to help her.”

He came strongly to his feet. “She can do anything if you think *that* of her, Choseph,” he gently said. Another moment found him his eager, active self. “A great deal will depend on the man you are to send out,” he said.

“Why? What awaits him?”

The answer was an appealing look. His remarks about the earthquakes and the storms had puzzled me, and while I knew that the subject was repugnant to him, I was forced to revive it. I repeated a remark by Captain Mason that a storm was brewing. Beelo straightened.

“Captain Mason ought to know!” he cried. “The king’s wise men have told him the same thing. Choseph, Choseph! It would be horrible!”

“Why, lad? I can’t work in the dark.”

His look was appealing.

“I must know,” I said. “You are acting like a child, and this is work for men. Tell me what the storm and the earthquake have to do with us, or I’ll refuse to surrender a man to Gato, and we’ll fight.”

“Choseph!” he exclaimed, frightened; then, after a pause: “The people think the Black Face must have all the castaways, or it will shake the ground with earthquakes and maybe send a

volcano to destroy everything. But if the earthquake is heavy, it terrifies the people. In that way you might escape if Lentala's plan fails. It was a great earthquake I was hoping for."

"The Black Face must have all the castaways?" I repeated. "How?"

"I don't know!" he desperately cried. "Lentala doesn't know. It has been concealed from us. But it's something horrible! A storm is coming, but it may bring no castaways, and the king won't wait any longer. He can't control the people."

"What kind of man should we send out, Beelo?"

"One who's brave and fears nothing," he promptly answered, studying me oddly.

"Then Rawley wouldn't do."

"No. Mr. Vancouver."

I had felt it coming. Of course he deserved any risk, any fate, but

"You are thinking of Annabel," said Beelo.

"Yes. She is innocent. Unless Lentala can keep him away from the king and save him from harm, I won't—"

"There, there, Choseph!" sweetly said the boy. "She'll manage. You'll send Mr. Vancouver?"

"Yes."

"Good! That will make the king think you aren't suspicious. As soon as he has gone with Gato, you and Christopher come here, and then we three will go out of the valley."

Captain Mason's heavy hand still lay as a hush on the camp when Gato, the giant leader of the soldiers, arrived an hour later with a band of his men. Christopher and I met him, and he informed us that he had come for the man who was to be taken out. I despatched Christopher for Captain Mason, whom I had informed of the decision to send Mr. Vancouver out. The storm had been gathering with a slowness that indicated destructive preparation. Mr. Vancouver was in his hut with Rawley and Annabel. Rawley's haggard face peered out at intervals and sent a straining look at me such as I had seen in the faces of the condemned peering through the cell-grate for any messenger that might bear a reprieve. They were not aware of our decision that Mr. Vancouver should go.

The president, cool and serious, came with Christopher.

"Summon Mr. Vancouver," he said.

The three came out. Mr. Vancouver, though pale, had a firm look, and it went straight to Captain Mason. Rawley was ghastly. Annabel held my attention most. Undoubtedly Mr. Vancouver had been trying to prepare her for the contingency of his leaving, and had made poor work of it.

Her glance first sought Captain Mason, and found a blank face with no eyes for her. Next she looked at me, and caught something that I was too slow in hiding. Thenceforward during the scene I knew that the ache within me for her sake was large print to her eyes. Her bearing was an accusation, a challenge for frankness, an appeal for protection.

The president said:

"Mr. Vancouver, the king has sent for one of our men. It would be my duty to go if I could be spared. Will you go?"

"Certainly," came the prompt answer.

Annabel shrank, and then bravely stepped forth. Her voice lost its quaver as she proceeded.

"Why send my father?" she demanded. "Are there no young men here with the courage to volunteer?"

She eagerly scanned the crowd, not heeding her father's restraining hand on her arm. Being a woman, she could never understand why not a single man made a sign, so heavy was the weight of Captain Mason's hand.

"It is a shame!" she passionately exclaimed. "I had thought there were more manliness and gratitude in the world." She turned upon me. "Mr. Tudor, I know *you* will go."

I could not bear it. "May I tell her in confidence what I am to do?" I asked Captain Mason under my breath.

"Not now," he answered. "Miss Vancouver," he said aloud, "Mr. Tudor cannot go. I beg to remind you that you are interfering with the business in hand."

Recollection of the morning's scene, when a woman had been sent away under guard, must have been what whitened her face with fear and then flushed it with anger. The lion in her father crouched at Captain Mason, but instantly remembered.

"Daughter," he peremptorily said, "spare us further humiliation. I am going."

"Then, I will go with you," she exclaimed. The entire colony was assembled, and all were expecting another measure of authority; but Captain Mason stood in patient silence.

"Impossible, child!" said Mr. Vancouver.

"Yes, I will go!" she cried. "I have a right to go, and I will!"

Mr. Vancouver sent Captain Mason an inquiring look, and found that the blue eyes had hardened. He knew the meaning of that; he must at once eliminate his daughter.

"Child," he coaxed, enclosing her in his arms, "it is impossible,—dangers would arise that wouldn't come if you were absent."

"I can't bear it,—I can't bear it!" she half sobbed.

She struggled to free herself. Rawley came forward.

"Don't touch me!" she cried. "Isn't there a *man*—"

A glance from Captain Mason sent Christopher to her side.

"It's me, ma' am.

Her father released her, and she turned in astonishment to Christopher. Annabel had a sense of the ludicrous, but one of tenderness also. She saw the angel behind the clown. Smiles went with her tears as she gave him her hand.

"You mustn't go," leaked his thin voice.

"Why?"

"They need you." His gesture swept the camp.

She was silent while she dried her eyes.

"Yes," she said, "but—"

"Them there savagers ud eat you.

"But my father—"

He ain't nice to eat."

Christopher had laid a daring finger on the mystery, but his words found all unheeding except Mr. Vancouver, who looked startled. The suggestion was evidently new to him.

"Very well, Christopher," Annabel said, smiling sadly, "I'll stay. Captain Mason," falteringly, "I ask your pardon." She turned to her father and embraced him. "Father, go. I'll pray for you." She held him off and looked long into his face. "You'll come back, won't you?"

"Of course. I shall see the king, and I know I can arrange everything happily for the colony."

Captain Mason beckoned Gato. Mr. Vancouver turned his face to the darkness and marched away with the guard.

When he had gone, Annabel still gazed. Rawley watched her for a look that might permit his consoling offices, but she did not see him. Only Christopher knew what to do.

"It's a-wanting of you, ma'am," he said.

She started. "What, Christopher?"

"It's mother, too."

"Yes, yes,—I'd forgotten." Without a glance at any of us, she went to the ailing child.

The colony began to stir. After a hurried conference with Captain Mason, Christopher and I left to keep the appointment with Beelo. We were ready for him when he came all out of breath. It made me uneasy to note that he studiously avoided my eyes and made no reference to the scene in camp.

"There's not a moment to lose," he said. "Come; follow me—cautiously." His manner betrayed a nervous haste.

"Beelo!" I said, seeing that he was too much excited.

He stood panting while he got himself in hand, but still kept his face turned from me.

"Now I'm all right," he said.

He threaded the jungle as though every shrub and tree and turning-place were familiar, and held a course on that side of the valley which brought us under the Face.

His agility taxed me. Not so Christopher: his deftness equaled Beelo's. We were a silent trio.

The transverse ridge was crossed, and we entered strange territory. Beelo's eyes and ears were incessantly on watch. Now and then he would come to an abrupt halt and hold his breath, but nothing appeared. We kept to the deepest shadows, which were further blackened by the steadily thickening darkness of the sky. I feared a downpour.

Without mishap we finally reached the lower end of the valley. I had been trying to see the opening through which the stream must run, but even when we halted near the cliff, not a break appeared.

Beelo dropped to the ground. "We'll rest," said he.

I found the adventure exciting, but was unprepared for its effect on Christopher. His usually dull eyes had intelligent vision; his slouchiness was gone.

After a few moments' rest Beelo rose, and led us to the stream. It was deep and slow here, and crept through a dense overhanging growth. We pushed through the tangle, and soon came to a little clearing near the bank, but screened from it. The bamboo raft which he and Christopher had made lay there.

We launched it. Christopher produced a pole from another hiding-place, boarded the raft, and knelt on the forward end. Beelo and I followed.

"Christopher," the lad inquired, "can you see in the dark?"

"Yes," and Christopher shoved off.

The vegetation grew denser as we slipped along, and its shadows combined with the darkness of the day to plunge us into night. Presently I realized that we must have traversed more than the distance between the launching-place and the wall.

"Where are we, Beelo?" I asked, but the sound of my voice informed me before the boy's answer:

"Under the mountain. We are going through."

To describe my sensations would be impertinent. Beelo's reticence was more than silence. The only sound was the swish of Christopher's pole as it dipped and scraped while we drifted. Beelo, sitting a little to the rear and at one side of me, crept nearer.

"Talk," he begged, edging still closer, till our arms touched.

“Very well, lad. Shall I tell you a story?”

We must have been on the floor of a lofty cavern, for my words came back.

“Hush!” he whispered.

His hand was groping for mine. Perfect blackness encompassed us. I took his hand. A slight tremor thrilled it, and I put an arm about his shoulders, drew him close, and pressed his head down in the hollow of my neck. There was none of his refractory wildness now. Poor lad! For all the pluck that he had shown in the past, the silence and the darkness of this gew-some passage had unmanned him. It was good to hear the comfort in his sigh, the fading of the tremor, and the firm grasp of his hand.

Evidently Beelo had never made this trip before, but I wondered that at least its upper end had been left unguarded and why it was not a highway for the natives. In a whisper I asked him.

“It is guarded,” he answered; “but when a storm or an earthquake comes, the men are afraid that what is in here will come out; and, besides, they think a storm is a better guard than they. But they weren’t far away. I knew how to avoid them.”

“Yes, but—”

“Down!” came sharply from Christopher simultaneously with a dull blow.

I flattened Beelo and myself.

“Up,” said Christopher.

Had his face or head encountered a low-hanging rock? Yet he had thought of us.

“Are you hurt?” I asked.

“No, sir.”

“Did your head strike?”

“Arm, sir.”

Perhaps an inscrutable power had given him the sense to raise his arm and guard his head at the moment of peril. I finished my question to Beelo:

“What is in here the natives fear?”

“The voices that send your words back.”

“Surely they are familiar with the echo in the mountains.”

“Not this kind, Choseph.” He had never called me that so easily. I hugged him closer, and he nestled like a kitten.

It was indeed a startling echo. At times even our whispers seemed to multiply and flock on wings, and come rustling back.

“There’s something still worse,” added Beelo.

“What is it?”

“I don’t know. They would never tell me.” I wondered whether he had felt the sudden leap of my heart. He must, for he snuggled closer, withdrew his hand from mine, caressed my cheek, and whispered:

“We’ll be brave.”

“Yes, lad, but if we knew only a little we should be the better prepared.”

He was silent.

“You know nothing about it?” I insisted.

“Nothing at all.”

“But natives have gone through safely, else they wouldn’t know.”

“Some did, a long time ago. That was the last.”

“Some did? Not all that started?”

“Not all. The others went mad. Don’t talk about it, dear Choseph.”

Assuredly Beelo had been driven to a desperate extremity to choose this way of escape from the valley. It showed how closely the ordinary outlets were guarded.

CHAPTER XII. *Dramatic Discoveries.* Plunged Into Mysterious Terrors. Christopher's Obscure Powers at Work. A Struggle for Our Lives. Stout Hearts Fail. A Dear One Lost.

The passage was crooked. The darkness was unqualified, and so dense that it seemed resistant and hard to breathe. It was the sort of blackness that penetrates to the heart and quenches the light there. Matches had long ago disappeared from the colony, and I had no means of making a light. Nor had Beelo provided against the blackness. All time-reckoning had been lost, but our rate was slow, and I knew that the passage must be long.

Thus far the odors had been of the sun-sweetened water crossed with those of the underground dank, and were pleasant. But presently a faint pungency invaded the cold air. I knew by the change in Beelo's breathing that his quick sense had discovered it. It suggested things over which my memory halted. Christopher gave no sign. With unflagging watchfulness, aided by a perception far keener than mine, he kept the raft free in the stream, except for occasional bumps.

"Do you smell it, Christopher?" I asked.

"Yes, sir."

"What is it?"

"Sir? "

"What is it?"

There was an interval before his answer, "Fire, sir."

Beelo covered in my embrace. Since Christopher had mentioned it, I knew it was fire; I cannot say how I knew, because the odor was unlike that from any combustion I had ever known.

"Do you know what is burning?" I asked.

"Me, sir?"

"Yes."

This silence was longer than the other; Christopher must have listened far.

"The world, sir."

Beelo shook with a silent chuckle, and squeezed my hand; but I knew that Christopher's words had a meaning.

"The world?" I quietly repeated.

"Yes, sir. I hear it."

Beelo and I straightened up and set our ears on a strain.

"I hear nothing," I said.

"I hear it, very faint," Beelo breathlessly returned. It made no difference with the steadiness of Christopher's work. The odor gradually grew more pronounced, and then I recalled an iron smelter that I had seen in boyhood. Presently I too heard a distant roar as of a furnace that ground while it burned. Beelo crept close under my arm again. I could feel his quick heart-beats and shortened breathing against my side.

Creeping through these increasing sensations came the deep note of falling water. Why ask Beelo whether he had ever heard that our stream took a subterranean plunge? Christopher kept coolly at his task. The sharp striking and scraping of his tireless pole had long ago informed me that rock made our channel and shores, which were uneven and dangerous. Now and then the raft would make a sudden swing to avoid underwater rocks that Christopher's soundings had

discovered. At other times it would come to a lurching halt until the man carrying our lives in his hand had made sure of the way.

“What do you think of that water falling, Christopher?” I asked.

He waited a long time, and his slow answer chilled me:

“I don’t know, sir.”

“You’ll go slow when we come nearer?”

“Yes, sir.”

Beelo gave me a hand-pressure intended to silence my foolish tongue.

With a growing intensity in the odor, in the furnace roar, and in the rumbling of the waterfall, came stealing something new and surpassingly uncanny. It was a very dim glow, with no visible source, and without the power to make anything seen but itself. Apparently it was but the darkness in a more oppressive phase. In vain did I strain my eyes to see Christopher, Beelo, the raft, the water,—anything that light could make visible; but the glow was as impenetrable as the darkness.

Beelo was going to pieces under the weight of this encompassing awe. I knew that his weakness was born of his yielding to an extraneous reliance—Christopher and me. He put his lips to my ear and whispered:

“I’m afraid.”

“Steady, lad. You are our guide; you are responsible for us.”

“Yes, I know.” He made a pathetic effort to regain himself. “This light—don’t you *feel* it, Choseph?”

“I do, dear lad, but my name isn’t Choseph.”

“Yoseph!” he triumphantly said.

“Joseph,” I insisted.

“Mr. Tudor!” In a whirlwind he threw both arms round my neck, and softly laughed. The old Beelo was on guard again, except that with his recovered courage he was uncommonly gentle and affectionate. I wondered if I should ever reach the end of the boy’s phases.

From some indeterminate direction came the muffled sound of an explosion.

“Hold tight!” cried Christopher, violently lurching the raft round and jamming it sharply against high jutting rocks on the bank. “Down!” he added.

A mighty rush as of many winds came tearing up the passage far ahead. I threw Beelo face down, and flattened my body. Then came the blow, and hurled Christopher backward upon us. In a moment he had recovered himself. The impact must have strained Beelo’s ribs, but he lay still.

It was a combination of atmospheric concussion and hot gases, principally steam, that had struck us. I raised my head, gasping for breath. Beelo was inert. I lifted him. One arm feebly groped for my neck, and clung there.

“We are safe!” I cheerily said. “Where is my brave little brother?”

He only held me the closer. Indeed, speech was difficult, since the air was packed with smothering vapors. The desire to breathe was checked by an instinctive fear to inhale.

Christopher cautiously pushed out, and again we drifted free. The pole dipped and clicked and scraped. But a change had come. The furnace roar had ceased; the waterfall grew louder. Most striking of all was the unearthly luminosity of the steam filling the tunnel. That vapor, rapidly chilling in the cold of the passage, increased in opaqueness, but glowed the more. Before long the light became radiant and faintly illuminating, and the air sweetened. I had known by Beelo’s breath on my cheek that his face was upturned to mine, and near. Thus it was that after long peering I found the light in his eyes. My arms were enclosing him.

“I see my lad!” I said in gladness.

A queer little movement of withdrawal began. I tried to hold him, but found no yielding. Gradually he slipped out of my clasp, and sat alone.

Christopher slowly took body in the haze, a ghostly Charon on the Styx. The color of the glow grew from white to rose, with an occasional effulgence of bluish purple. The surface of the earth knew no such tints in fire; these were royally plutonic. The black rocks overhead and on either hand assumed a vague, grim definition, and to my keyed fancy displayed grotesque suggestions. Blank spaces a shade darker than the grimacing, minatory rocks fell away; these I supposed to be cavernous reaches out of the passage, for from them came echoed multiples of the pole-sounds.

The temperature began to rise as the waterfall grew louder, the light more revealing, the haze weaker. We swung round a wide curve, and all at once a terrifying vision sprang forth in a blood-red light. Our stream opened into a small lake, which was violently churned by a cataract of crimson water brilliantly illuminated and plunging out of the overhead darkness into it. The roar was deafening.

Beelo, scrambling in terror to his feet, his eyes blazing with the red madness that packed the cavern, required a strong hand to subdue him. He struggled in my grasp, pointed frantically backward with implorings that we return, and fought my restraint with sheer animal desperation. Christopher’s conduct, though showing extraordinary exhilaration, betrayed no fear, but only a grimmer hold on our situation. With a rearward glance and the discovery that I was holding Beelo securely, he stood up, a gigantic red figure, and with all his might shot the raft forward into the maelstrom. The frail thing plunged in the surge, but Christopher’s eye and arm were sure. The suck of the water, curving downward where the cataract struck the pool, was cunningly avoided as he circled the rim of the lakelet, having as able work to do in avoiding the dripping rocks there as in keeping out of the breakers.

I thanked God there was light, formidable though it was; it helped me in my control of Beelo, whose struggles were becoming weaker, and enabled me to find a good grip on the raft, for there was danger of slipping off. Through all the wild lurching Christopher kept a sailor’s feet; and, although his back was toward me, I saw by his quick movements that all his shrewd forces were in the fight.

Whence came the light? It appeared to be in the cataract itself, a living flame in the heart of its greatest enemy. The water was joyously, terribly alive.

The raft described an arc of the pool, slipped out of the boiling churn, and, before Christopher was aware, caught an eddy and went swinging and lurching in behind the cataract. The man so strong in both soul and body threw up his hands in the surrender of terror, for a thing more awful than the red light and the waterfall confronted us. He dropped the pole. Its middle struck the edge of the raft, and our one weapon of defense rebounded into the water. Beelo saw the catastrophe. He clutched me frantically about the neck, nearly strangling me before I broke his hold.

Christopher looked about for the pole, and saw it bobbing on end as it struggled against submergence in the down-thrust behind the fall. It was twenty fatal feet away. The ferocity of elemental self-preservation seized on the man and transformed him. This was not the attitude of patient, gentle Christopher, the humble, serving Christopher, but that of a bayed animal. My hands were tied by the necessity of Beelo’s care.

The spectacle that had unmanned Christopher was in a profound recess reaching indeterminately out of the cavern and behind the waterfall. It had not been visible until we rounded the fall and went scurrying behind it in the eddy. Apparently far back,—I cannot guess how far,—ran a broad, high, fantastically irregular tunnel ending in a pit of boiling lava, at an

unknown depth below the level of the tunnel, which itself was slightly above the surface of the pool. Deep rumblings issued from it, as from a heavy ebullition, punctured with smothered detonations. Rising from it were thin, cloud-like masses of vapor, like the pale mauve haze of distant mountains. In its rolling it thickened concealingly here and opened revealingly there, with constantly shifting effects.

The dominant color was a deep, transparent crimson of a tint such as may be seen in the cooling iron of a foundry or in the great crater of Kilauea; but following the detonations came leaping flames of bluish purple. It was the red shining through the water that had made the cataract a fall of liquid crimson when seen from the front.

This, then, was the funnel of a volcano, with a lateral vent. Was it one of Pluto's cooling forges? Was its present activity transient? Was this the beginning of a seismic convulsion that might blow the valley rampart into the sea?

I cannot say when those questions arose. The urgency of an immediate threat demanded all attention. Beelo was in an ecstasy of terror, and Christopher was desperately casting about with all his reassembled wits. In the tumult of noises our voices were useless. We had been flung out of the larger eddy into a smaller one swirling between the back of the fall and the tunnel-mouth. It had a swifter and more dizzying whirl. Soon it seemed that we were still, except for the ceaseless rolling of our craft, and that the roaring fall and the grumbling, blazing tunnel were swinging round us. With the rest passed the bobbing pole, a live, insane thing, nodding this way and that, approaching the downpour gingerly, diving under a sharp water-blow, and leaping up with malicious sprightliness a few feet back. At any moment it might be caught sidewise and crushed.

There was another danger. The centrifugal force of our swing in the eddy was carrying us out to the periphery of the swirl. On one side were the rocks at the mouth of the tunnel; opposite was the waterfall, the slightest blow from which (since it fell from a height of at least a hundred feet) would mean the end. Our swinging was taking us nearer to both those dangers.

Something roused within, overcoming my pity for Beelo. I shook him and slapped his cheek. Astonishment and anger blazed in his eyes, and then with a mighty indignation he crawled away and sat glaring at me. At another time the comical picture would have amused me, for the boy behaved just as a proud kitten under similar treatment. Having secured the desired result with Beelo, I worked to the edge of the raft, and prepared to make a leap for the pole. I was waiting till the raft should swing round and bring me nearer. Before that happened, two soft arms were flung round me from behind, a cheek pressed mine, and I was borne down backward. Two small, firm hands held my wrists down. For the moment I was helpless.

Of course, Christopher knew that our nearer approach to danger brought us closer to hope, which lay in the pole. He was biding the moment, and it came. He crouched on the raft, and a long arm shot out. Beelo's nerves were quivering till Christopher rose; then they stilled, and he released me.

Christopher had learned from experience, and it was a surer hand now that gripped the pole and sent the raft spinning out of the eddy. To keep it somewhat trimmed against Christopher's movements had been a small part of my task hitherto, so thoughtful of everything had he been; but now that he saw Beelo and me better used to the situation, he quietly gave us something of that to do, thus securing more freedom of movement.

He found the egress of the stream from the pool, and pushed out. Slowly we crept through the gloomy, misty light, which paled as we went. Christopher must have felt a dread that oppressed me—the danger of recurrent explosions—for he worked with less extreme caution than before,

and our progress was better. After a time the light was too dim for me to see Beelo sitting in his sullen pout; and when darkness again fell, he crept up beside me and stole out a hand for mine. The noises had nearly ceased, and Beelo no longer feared the weird echoes.

"I'm glad it's past," he sighed, nestling against me. "Aren't you, Choseph?"

"Joseph."

He hugged my arm and softly laughed.

"Yes, I'm glad," I answered.

It seemed many hours since we had entered the passage, and I hoped we should emerge in the morning of the day following that of our start.

New conditions began to arise. Above the cataract the stream had been slow, with few approaches to rapids. Those had been the worst danger-points. Now we discovered that the current was swifter and the rapids more numerous and turbulent. The celerity of Christopher's movements increased. He no longer tried to spare us the water dripping from his pole as he repeatedly shifted it and groped for bearings. This made me more apprehensive. I wondered whether, even with better facilities, we could return to the valley through this passage, and how the two hundred and fifty colonists could manage to come safely through.

Presently I felt in the water a turgidity where the current was slow, and heard a hoarse, growling rumble quite different from the sounds that we had left behind. Beelo tightened his clutch and breathlessly said:

"It has come!"

"What has, lad?"

"Hush!"

Except for an unusual slapping of the water against the rocks, the commotion had passed. I wondered if the storm had broken in the valley and the torrent was coming; but this did not look like it.

"It has gone, Beelo. What was it?"

"No, it hasn't. Hold tight. Sit hard, Christopher!"

"Beelo," I impatiently demanded, "you must tell me what—"

The speech was stopped by a groaning crunch that tossed the stream, splashed the water high on the rocks, and filled the passage with a sound like that of crushing glass. Beelo was again in terror.

"Be quiet, lad. There's nothing—"

"Don't talk!" he desperately commanded. "The third one will come. That's the worst. Wait!"

The seconds dragged through an awful silence. Beelo's breath struggled spasmodically through the repression under which he tried to hold it.

The third shock came, and then, though I had never felt one before, I knew what it was. The whole world seemed to heave and writhe and jolt and grind, all with a fearful noise. The earthquake, grim brother of the boiling cauldron we had left, had us in its jaws, and its power was manifest in the ease with which it crushed and ground the rocks about us. Fragments of these began to splash in the water and rattle on the raft. Just in front, a huge block plunged into the stream and dashed us with water.

Beelo flung himself upon me; I again bent over him to shield him.

Another heavy stone struck tile raft in the narrow space between Christopher and us, and tore through it into the water, sending up a geyser through the hole.

A stiffening wave of terror overswept Beelo. He sprang to his knees and tightly embraced my neck in both arms.

“We are going to die!” he feebly cried, and pressed his lips to mine, sinking inert into my arms. My fingers anxiously sought his pulse. It was fluttering.

“Christopher!” I called in alarm,—not realizing that the earthquake had passed and that a dim light made visible the rocks in a turn ahead,—“Christopher! Something has happened to Beelo!”

Yes, sir,” came with the steady old calm.

“Stop! We must do something for him.”

“We are going out, sir.”

We swung the curve, and the blessed daylight smiled ahead. The raft slid out of the passage in placid water, which here, as at the other end, was deeply embowered. The glorious day, though overcast, was brilliant to our eyes as it sifted through and rested sweetly on the water. As Beelo was unconscious, Christopher observed extraordinary care in proceeding, and as soon as possible secured the raft in the sheltered reach.

I was looking down into Beelo’s face. His head had fallen back, and although his eyes were closed, his lips were open. It came over me with a pang that a richness and a maturity which I had not before noticed in his face, rested there now.

“How long has it taken us to come through?” I asked Christopher.

“Mos’ four hours, sir.”

I was surprised. It had seemed much longer.

He came to lift Beelo out, but I myself bore him ashore and laid him on the ground, and knelt over him. Christopher was standing near, studying him, but showing no anxiety.

“It is only fainting, isn’t it, Christopher?” I asked.

“That’s all, sir.”

To give him air, I began to open his blouse.

“I wouldn’t, sir,” interposed Christopher.

“Why?” I asked, looking up in surprise.

He only regarded me in silence. At first I thought that Christopher’s singular penetration had discovered that Beelo was lighter of color than a full-blooded native and was delicately warning me not to invade the carefully guarded secret. I recalled the story that I had told Beelo, and my suspicions as to the purity of his native blood. And what harm could come if I did learn?

Then the truth came upon me with the overwhelming force of long cumulation. His conduct in the tunnel, his sweetness and gentleness, the strange conclusion of the scene with Annabel when they had met,—a thousand memories of things that had passed unheeded in the stress of dangers,—came as a blinding light. I do not know when Christopher learned the truth, but in his chivalry he would have seen me go blind to the grave without a word from him in betrayal of Beelo’s secret.

The shock stunned me, and my head was bowed in reverence. When I again looked into the patient face, now having for me so sweet and touching a pathos, the deep-blue eyes were looking up into mine; then they turned to Christopher, and all about. The old mischievous, bantering smile parted the perfect lips. The eyes again sought mine.

“Choseph! It’s fine to be dead!” But the voice held a different music from that of the lad whom I had loved and who was now gone forever.

CHAPTER XIII. *Preparation for the Crisis.* In the Enemy’s Land. The Weird Light on the Valley Wall. Mr. Vancouver. A Visit with Lentala. She Tells a Secret Which I Already Know.

I would respect Beelo's wish that she appear as a boy, and must keep hammering into my mind the words, Boy, Lad, Dear Little Brother. I must not for a moment think of her otherwise. "Boy, Lad, Dear Little Brother."

"What are you dreaming, Choseph, and what are those words your lips are saying?" It was Beelo's cheery voice.

He was sitting up; I was beside him looking down at the gliding water. I woke to the familiar raillery, and turned with a smile.

"Dear lad!" I joyfully responded.

"You had forgotten me," he ruefully said. "And you, old Christopher! Don't you see I'm dying of thirst?"

Christopher plucked two large leaves, fashioned them into a cup, and brought the water, which Beelo eagerly drank. He held out his hand, and I helped him up. He tried his legs.

"That's better," he said.

The perfect grace of movement, the exquisite feminine figure so artfully concealed,—

"Boy, Lad, Dear Little Brother."

"Mooning again, and talking to yourself!" cried Beelo.

"It was a rough trip through the passage, boy. I'm a little shaken."

"That's past. Shake the other way." He was pirouetting round a tree.

"But how are we going back, lad?"

"This way," he carelessly answered, making wing-motions with his arms.

"There was an earthquake, Beelo."

He stopped short, and his eyes lighted deep.

"Yes!" he softly but impressively exclaimed.

The old caution settled in his face; he peered and listened warily, and then came a look of assured repose.

"That is good," he said,—*"if—"* a cloud drifted over his face—*"if they felt it on the surface."*

"They did," interposed Christopher.

"How do you know?" Beelo sharply demanded.

Christopher pointed to a large rock near us, to the path that it had freshly torn through the brush, and to a steep slope from which it had been dislodged.

"Good for Christopher!" said Beelo. He studied the sky, and dejectedly added, "But the storm is coming!" After a little reflection he remarked, as if to himself, "I don't know whether that should change our plans or not." He seated himself to think it out, and began arranging twigs on the ground. "No Senatras will be within miles of the passage," he ruminated. "They fear it, for the earthquake is born here, and they have run away. So, we can make better time. Mr. Vancouver is safe today; we won't go there."

"Where, dear little brother?"

Pain crossed his face. "To the clearing opposite the Face. If only another earthquake would come, or this had come sooner!"

"Is one usually followed by another?"

"Often. Sometimes not. Come! The sun will be setting before long, and we have miles to go.

We hid the battered raft and struck out. Our way led parallel to the stream, which tore foaming down a gorge of steeply sloping sides. It slipped into a pleasant valley, richly verdured. There we left it and began the ascent of a mountain on the west. Dusk was coming on. Beelo fearlessly pursued the trails in the darkening hours.

Occasionally we paused to rest. The valley which we had crossed lay a black-green sea below. Behind us the eastern sky was cut straight across by the level summit of our valley wall. Beelo was closely studying it.

“You see no sign of fire over there, do you?” he asked, pointing toward the clearing opposite the Face.

There was none, and Beelo was gratified. Our attention was diverted from that spot by a faint purplish flash, which slipped along the crest above the river passage, and was quickly gone. Beelo stood tense and still, and whispered:

“Did you see that?”

“Yes.”

We waited for its reappearance, but none came. Beelo said no more. The light had come from the subterranean lava-pot.

Beyond the wall was the blackest part of the sky. Under the horizon in that direction lightning was at play, as we judged from faint illuminations in the distant heavens, and the rumble of far thunder.

Night had nearly fallen when we reached the summit. The descent was rapid on the other side, for Beelo went with the sureness of familiarity. At last we stopped at an abandoned hut, hidden in the deep forest. Beelo paused on the door-step.

“See,” he said, pointing to a glow a mile or less away, down the valley. “That is the main settlement of the Senatras. The king’s palace, where Lentala and I live, is there. We will visit it tonight,—if Lentala agrees. You will rest here awhile and have something to eat. After the visit to the palace you will sleep here.”

He showed us within, closed the door, blew a flame from smothered embers on the hearth, and lighted a nut-oil lamp. He had been very sober and quiet all the way, but now his eyes began to dance.

“This is your mansion!” he exclaimed.

The place had been made clean and sweet, good beds of leaves were on the earth floor, and fresh water stood in calabashes. Beelo dragged forward a copper vessel, and took from it a generous food supply.

“Isn’t she pretty good—for a girl?” he casually asked.

“Who?”

“Lentala. She did these things.”

Ever since the scene at the end of the passage, sadness had sat upon me, and I was in no mood to enjoy Beelo’s pleasantries,—this, too, while I was deeply touched by the labor and gentle thoughtfulness with which everything had been done for our comfort. Still, something precious was gone from my life; my heart hungered for the lad. But he was here! In a swirl of perversity I seized Beelo’s hands, and held him before me.

“Dear lad,” I said, “I am walking in the dark. Believe me, little brother, I am grateful—more grateful than any words could say—for the skill and the kindness that we have seen from you. But my heart is sore, and you are laughing at me.”

Something between suspicion and embarrassment had been rapidly growing in Beelo’s face. Of a sudden he closed my mouth with his hand and made a brave rally of Beelo’s old flippancies.

“Christopher,” he said, “did you ever see such a goose? Such an old goose?”

I gently removed his hand.

“I am serious, boy.”

“Hush!” commanded Beelo in a whisper.

His hunt down into me was ruthless, but the hurt there helped me to steady my gaze. "When I fainted—" he began, and stopped, having found my face expressionless. He turned to Christopher, who, giving no attention to us, was setting out the supper on a mat. Beelo's sharp eyes came back to me.

Dear little brother,

"No, no! Not a word!" he broke in. "I haven't time, and you are hungry. Come, Choseph!"

He turned me to the supper and forced me to sit on the ground opposite Christopher. It was pleasant to be man-handled by Beelo. His abuse of me was always smoothed by affection. I had no appetite, but who could resist Beelo? He played that I was an invalid and unable to help myself. He patted my cheek, put food into my mouth, chattered nonsense as though I were a baby, and petted me with outrageous condescension. There was nothing to do but melt under his dear absurdities; and when he found me re-established, he kissed me on the forehead and dashed out, calling that he would be back before long.

When he returned he was brilliantly alive. There seemed no end to his vitality.

"It's glorious!" he cried, seizing Christopher and sending his bulk in a twirl across the hut. "It's splendid!" he went on, smashing my dignity with boy's-play. "It's just—" But his breath was gone, and he tumbled in a panting heap on the ground.

"What news, Beelo?" I inquired.

He sat up, but as yet had meager breath for speech. "Mr. Vancouver—is safe. Doesn't look very—happy. Hasn't seen—the king. Oh, no! Lentala,—who is an Angel—and Sweet—and Kind—and Beautiful,—is just dying—to see you. And—"

"Rest a minute," I interrupted.

He flung a little pout at me, and then archly demanded, "Aren't you good-natured yet, Choseph?"

I shook my head.

"You will be when you see Lentala," he said with mock melancholy. "Don't you like girls?" he suddenly fired at me.

"Y—es," I stammered consciously.

"You like Annabel!" with a spitfire touch on his tongue.

"I once liked, very much, a dear lad named Beelo more than any girl."

"*Once* liked Beelo!" His shining eyes were lances. "I like him just as much yet—when he is Beelo." I knew by his start that the thin ice on which I walked was cracking.

"And what is he when he isn't Beelo?"

"A little devil."

He laughed. "You aren't *quite* dead," he said, and a briskness sprang into his manner. "We must go. Most of the Senatras have already gone to sleep. Come."

He rapidly led us into the valley, meanwhile instructing us how to respond if greeted. The natives were not garrulous nor inquisitive, and we passed unnoticed, until the outskirts of the settlement were reached. There, in a dimly lighted hut, Mr. Vancouver was resting under guard, Beelo informed us. A barely visible figure challenged Beelo. The prompt response made the shape sink from view.

"We haven't time to see Mr. Vancouver now, said the lad to us.

A turn in a lane lined with huts brought us into a beautiful highway, broad and white, and picketed with odorous trees which arched overhead. The darkness would have been profound but for a diffused light which glowed ahead upon something white. We went rapidly toward it, and

found it to be a high stone wall; the light was from two lamps on posts where the highway swung to the left and ran at the foot of the wall.

Instead of following the main road Beelo turned into a narrow way to the right. The overhead growth was so dense that the light from the lamps was soon lost, but Beelo knew the way. At last he stopped, and slipped a key into a lock. The heavy wooden door, plated and strapped with iron, suggested a postern in an archaic fortress. He led us within and secured the door.

The nearer approach of the storm brought lightning, which increased Beelo's caution while revealing glimpses of our environment. In the region behind the wall the verdure was less dense and more orderly than in the park through which we had come. The lightning made the open spaces embarrassing to our guide, who hurried us across them to the shadows. Finely kept paths wound and interseded, but Beelo knew shorter routes. A rising wind assisted the stealth of our progress.

He brought us under the shadow of a low arcade, open on one side, and closed on the other with a long stone house. The pillars were massed in vines. Here the darkness was intense. The stone floor gave no sound under our tread.

Beelo stopped us, advanced a few paces, and rapped on a door. It was cautiously opened, but we could not see within as Beelo entered. A very faint light barely made him visible.

"Lentala!" he whispered, "they are here."

A voice fuller and mellower than Beelo's yet much like his, answered, "Yes? I had given you up, and was undressing for bed."

"You'll dress?" Beelo spoke nervously.

"Yes. Tell them to wait a little while. They are safe out there. Beelo, the king is furious because you ran away tonight. He is waiting for you. Go at once. It is something about the man from the colony." I resented her domineering manner toward Beelo.

Very well. I'll be back as soon as I can," he answered sweetly.

Coming back to us, he began to explain, but I told him we had heard. A reassuring hand was given to each of us, and he was hurrying across the garden fronting the arcade. He halted and came back.

"Don't stay with Lentala longer than ten minutes," he earnestly said. "The king may detain me. If I don't come, can you find your way back?"

I assured him that we could, and that even should he come, we would not let him conduct us to the hut.

He gave my hand a grateful little squeeze as he slipped the gate-key into it, and darted away, saying:

"Wait at Lentala's door till she opens it."

Presently she bade us enter. Instead of her barbarous but highly becoming dress at the feast, with neat jacket and short skirt blazing with gold embroidery, she now wore a plain, loose garment. It was partly redeemed by a low cut in the neck, a splendid girdle consisting of a heavy and elaborately linked chain of gold, and a necklace of wonderful diamonds.

I could not have explained why this dazzling woman, who had filled so wide a space in my fancy, now looked a negligible quantity, an intrusion. There was little of the sparkle that I had expedited. The childlike coquetries, the careless abandon, the subtleties that had flitted so unconsciously through the conduct of the Lentala I remembered,—these and a thousand other graces were absent from the sedate young woman smiling upon us and composedly seating us.

She had greeted us with a warning finger on her lips.

“My servants,” she explained in a low, rich voice, “are all in bed and asleep. But they are not far away, and we must be careful.” There was a curious reminder of Annabel’s preciseness in this new Lentala.

She must have felt my discomfort, for she let some of her consciousness slip away, and a dash of her native wildness gradually returned.

“Beelo has told me everything,” she said; “I’ll not trouble you with questions. And we are not to discuss any plans tonight.”

The beauty and richness of the room came forth, faint in the light of suspended lamps, which, clouded in thin fabrics, cast no shadows and softened all contours. A rich massing of hammered gold and silver, of exquisite bronzes and ivories, of hangings and rugs, was softened to grace by their perfect arrangement, and over that in turn was a fine breath of daintiness. My astonishment grew as the significance of it came over me. Did this girl, all seeming innocence, gentleness, and kindness, *feel* none of the crime and blood with which these treasures were drenched? Yet only the sweetest of spirits could have cast upon this charnel-house loot the cleansing that held its grisly suggestion back.

She had been moving about and gently chatting, and I had made empty responses. At last I discovered that she was growing nervous. A heavy crash of thunder brought out the cause. She looked anxious, and said:

“The storm is near. You must go before it breaks. Beela”—I noted her odd pronunciation of the final syllable—“said that if he didn’t return in ten minutes you must go without him, but I can’t think of that. He has been gone much longer.”

I tried to assure her that we could go alone, but still she was uneasy. Christopher and I rose. She came and laid a hand on my arm.

“Wait a little while.” She hesitated over the next words. “Do you like Beela—Beelo?”

“Very much,” I answered dully.

A liquid softness entered her beautiful eyes, and with it a sparkle of the old Lentala—and of Beelo too.

“I am going to tell you a secret,” she went on. “You will keep it?—and you. Christopher? And you’ll not let Beelo know?”

We pledged ourselves. She removed her hand, looked down, and while busying herself with a readjustment of her girdle, said, very low:

“Beelo isn’t a boy.”

Her fingers stopped in her acute tension. I stood silent. With an effort she raised her eyes to mine, and hers betrayed a keen suspense.

“Beelo is a girl,” she added, as though I had not heard. “Her name is Beela.” She found my look coolly meeting hers.

“You liked Beelo the boy,” she groped on; “don’t you like Beela the girl?”

“I—I’m not acquainted with her,” I fumbled.

For a moment the Lentala of the feast returned in a look of mischievous amusement, followed by one of pretended sorrow. I was enjoying the fine play in her face.

“But don’t you see,” she asked, “that in knowing and liking the boy, you knew and liked the girl?”

It would have been impossible for me to make her understand that I was not nimble in violent readjustments; so I held my peace.

“She was Beela the girl all the time,” Lentala insisted. “It couldn’t have been anything but the girl in her that you cared for.” She did not know in the least that she was talking to the wind.

"Of course," agreed I, very uncomfortable.

My tone made her turn impatiently away. With much spirit she went on as with ease and softness she paced the floor:

"After all she has done, too! I don't see—"

"Lentala!" I interrupted; "don't misunderstand. I do like—"

"No, you don't!" Her voice was growing unsteady.

"My poor little Beela! I know she's a madcap, but she is good, she is kind. She had to be a boy. I made her be one. She couldn't have done what she did—"

"Lentala, please—"

"—unless she *was* a boy. And now she is shamed and humiliated! Don't let my sweet sister ever know that. It would break her heart. Poor little Beela!"

"This is all wrong. I—"

"Even for *my* sake you might be generous. It—"

Three strides brought me to her, and I was unconscious of the power in my angry grip on her wrist, but her tongue went silent. She raised her eyes under the compulsion of mine.

"That is enough," I said.

There was a moment's matching of our forces. A ripple of mischievous and innocent surprise animated her, and she laughed with the glee of a gentle child. She was very much like her sister then.

A deepening thunder-crash came.

"You must go—now! I'm going with you. I won't let you—"

"You shall not go," I firmly said.

"I *must*. I *want* to. I'll get a—"

"No, Lentala. Good-night."

As I was turning away, I saw the second time in her face the look of one whose road has stopped at a wall. When I smiled and bowed to her as Christopher and I were passing out, she was standing where I left her, looking blankly at me.

CHAPTER XIV. *A Glimpse Into the Abyss.* The Fate Awaiting Mr. Vancouver. We Play a Trick on the Natives. My Nerves Give Way. A Ghastly Hint from Christopher. A Perilous Place.

The drenching, thunder-ridden storm was so favoring that I determined to investigate Mr. Vancouver's circumstances, and, if possible, ascertain the plans focusing in him; for since the discovery of Beela's sex, her horror and timidity concerning those intentions were explained.

I must now take the lead, since the work was not fitted to a woman.

No guards were outside Mr. Vancouver's hut when we arrived, and the wetting of the ground silenced our footfalls. My impulse was to enter, and cautiously ascertain the truth; but I realized that the risk was great. In creeping round the hut we overheard two native men talking near the rear wall.

"Hush!" continued one of the voices. "He is groaning again, and may wake."

In a little while the other remarked, "He is asleep. What were you telling me?"

"The king is very uneasy. The people all know that the white man is here."

"Is there dry wood?"

"Yes. It is stored in a thatch hut on the east side of the clearing. The people are clamoring for the white man to be taken to the stone."

"That can't be done while the storm rages."

“No; but the first hurricane never lasts long. The king has promised Gato that the white man shall be sent to the fire as soon as this storm passes. That may be tomorrow.”

“Does the white man suspect?”

“Undoubtedly. He frets and groans.”

“What are these stories about the Black Face?”

“The scouts sent by Gato say that it looks more ferocious than ever.

“Does the king realize that the people will rise unless he consents to the offering?”

“I don’t know. He is silent and deeply troubled. Danger stops any direction that he can take. But Gato is ready.”

A horror that I felt rather than understood came over me, and, fearing that I should betray our presence by some rash act, I was creeping away, when I discovered that Christopher, moving similarly, had started before me. Every tree-branch was a tempting club with which to break a savage head and free the prisoner.

Instead of returning to our hut, we went to the summit of the wall enclosing our valley. Clearly Christopher required no explanation to understand my purpose. With slow, sure caution we took an eastwardly course, parallel with the brink of the precipice and at a safe distance from any men that might be patrolling it. From time to time we would stop, creep nearer the edge, make a careful inspection, return in silence, and go on. The violence of the storm abated somewhat, thus making our progress swifter, but more risky.

With true instinct Christopher went straight to what we had been seeking,—the opening in the forest on the top of the wall fronting the Face. The clear space was smooth, level rock. One segment of the nearly circular opening was cut off by the sheer drop of the precipice. Near that edge was an exquisitely built circular stone platform some four feet high and ten in diameter. As we worked round for a nearer view, we discovered on its top old marks of fire which the rains had not washed off. I recognized it as the object that I had seen from the valley, opposite the Face. There was a moon, but only a faint glow from it filtered through the clouds; occasional flashes of lightning gave us clearer seeing. The air was stifling.

We edged nearer to the cliff and stood peering across the valley as we waited for light. It came, and revealed the Face. The sodden, sordid, worse than bestial mask, more repulsive than ever in the gloom of the storm, held its gaze fixed upon us. We were upon the scene of the unthinkable tragedy awaiting Mr. Vancouver.

We circled the eastern edge of the clearing. Soon we found a squat structure of thatch, half hidden in the edge of the forest. It was filled with neatly piled firewood. No surprise showed in Christopher’s face.

After further exploration of the vicinity, and satisfied that the place was unguarded, we loaded ourselves with wood from the hut, and plunged into the thicket. A short distance away I had discovered a deep cleft. We threw our loads into it; the fall was long before the sound came from the bottom. Thus, after many trips, we disposed of all the fuel, and hastened back to our hut for sleep. The night was far gone.

The storm broke afresh, and I lay sleepless, and listened to the elemental furies at play. Every nerve ached, and sleep was a sore need. Contingencies riding the hurricane would likely offer still heavier work for tomorrow. Whatever innocent pranks Beela might indulge, her profound seriousness and her appreciation of the dangerous risks in this undertaking were genuine.

With the swirl and dash of the rain came the roar of the tearing wind and the mighty bellow of thunder. Flash, peal, and boom rended the firmament. Our cabin braced itself and strained under

the tug, as though digging its claws into the ground to hold firm. Large trees on the slope behind us fell crashing.

This was more than a hurricane: it was a tornado; perhaps worse yet, a typhoon. Many ships ride out the worst of these; but mentally I saw brown men being told off to man the promontories of the bight, and to watch for staggering, heart-broken specks on the sea as the wind following the hurricane urged them on slowly to a pleasant beach, five hundred swordsmen, an oily savage king and a feast, and a march over the mountain to a guarded paradise; thence to be "sent away to their homes—their eternal homes—one at a time! one at a time! So far as civilization had reached, it had strangled an unspeakable practice in these seas.

Not even the churn of the storm in my veins could check the cold that ran in my blood. Was the father of Annabel to be only the first? Were we waiting as fattening hogs, instead of being out and afield, fighting a way to liberty, and dying, if we must, as men should? .

I found myself off the pallet and rolling on the floor.

"Christopher?" I called, staggering to my feet.

"Sir?"

I knew by the nearness of his voice that he was already beside me, but invisible in the blackness.

"Light the lamp. We are going to dress."

He obeyed without a word. I was feverishly rummaging for my clothes.

"There, sir," he said, pointing to my moccasins, but neglecting to fetch them to me.

I had forgotten that my dress was Senatra and that moccasins were the only part of it I had removed. I made a blundering affair of putting them on, for the clutch of my hand was shaped better for a bludgeon just then. Christopher was observing me with a mild, exasperating patience.

"Put yours on," I roughly commanded.

He made still denser the stupidity in his stare, and stood still.

"Hurry!" I cried.

"Sir?"

"Hurry, I say! You are going too."

"Me?"

"Yes! We are going to take Mr. Vancouver away from those beasts."

Without a change of expression he made a pretense of preparation. In doing so, he edged up to the barred door, placed his wide back against it, and calmly faced me.

"What do you mean by that?" I demanded in a fury.

"Sir?"

"Stand aside, Christopher!"

"Me, sir?"

In exasperation I seized the copper vessel and advanced upon him. Not a muscle of his body moved; his ape-like arms hung loose; his hands were open. But it was not his defenselessness that stayed me. Far more potent was the deep devotion in his eyes, which held a profounder sadness than usual. It was a dash of cold water on my heat, but not my determination. In all kindness I would reason with him.

"Christopher," I asked, "do you know what they are going to do with Mr. Vancouver?"

He omitted his formula, and simply gazed at me.

Then I told him, in raw, sore words. It was the first time they had been spoken by a member of the colony.

I was astonished at his placidity on hearing them.

“Do you understand?” I had to thunder the question above the outer din.
But he was listening to sounds that the storm did not make. I waited impatiently.

“They won’t him, sir, if they get you.”

“Why not?”

“You’re younger ’n’ fatter.”

Like most other of Christopher’s remarks, this one dealt in a conclusive terminal, omitting postulate and explication; but I understood. He had told a long and dramatic story in those halting words—our blind assault, our being beaten down and secured, and then the awful end. I wondered at that, and longed for the power to see into the working of his strangely luminous mind, its far light behind its frontal darkness.

“And there ain’t no dry wood, sir.”

The last of the ice in my blood broke and ran melting before him. I was very tired, and found myself shifting on my feet like a drunken man. Tongues of flame began to slip through the hut and dart hither and thither with curious dips and turns. Some of them were purple, but the most were crimson. A luminous vapor crept in. The boom of a waterfall rumbled; and then came a crashing subterranean detonation. Christopher was a gigantic ape floundering in a drowning sea of steam.

“Christopher!” I cried, trying to catch the wall as it swung past.

A firm, gentle arm went round me—an arm of a strength so great that my most desperate struggles could not break its hold, yet I was a very strong man. Slowly I was borne down on my pallet, and a thin, soothing voice came with a hand that tenderly closed my eyes and held the lids down. My breathing came easier.

* * *

It was daylight, and Christopher was standing in the open door, looking out. The rain had ceased, but the morning brightness was smothered under the overhead lowering. The pleasant odor of coffee perfumed the hut. Without appearing to notice my waking, Christopher served my breakfast, but said nothing. A dull lassitude made the straw bed more inviting than my feet.

Beela’s cheery good-morning an hour later was checked in alarm when she entered and found me prone; but her electric vitality palpitated through me and brought me smiling to a sitting posture. Her inquiring look at Christopher read nothing in the bland face. A shadow of uneasiness drifted through her eyes, but she drove it away.

“Good!” she said. “I’m glad you are resting. Lie down again.” She dropped to a seat beside me on the straw, and pushed my head down.

“That’s better,—Choseph.” Her hand was on my forehead.

“Joseph,” I insisted.

“You don’t like the way I talk, Ch—Dzhoseph?” banteringly, stealing sly hands to mine and pretending to stare mockingly at me while peering into my eyes.

“Very well, Beelo. Did you square yourself with the king and have a good rest last night?”

“Of course. Do you think any king

“Stop that.”

“What?”

“Trying to see if I’m sick. Even though I were dead, your coming would bring me to life.”

“My! Did you hear that, Christopher?”

The sensible man did not answer, nor even look at her. She made a mouh at his back, withdrew her hand, and edged away a few inches. Had I made a slip after that confidence and caution from Lentala? I roused myself.

“What’s the news, little brother? What game and what killing today?”

Her face fell grave. “Something has happened with you since I saw you last night, Choseph.”

I told her all, and she held her breath over the audacity of our work.

“I—I shouldn’t have dared to suggest it,” she said with charming helplessness as she gave Christopher and me a look of wondering admiration. “It was splendid, Choseph!” Her dear leaning girlishness, so natural and unconscious, started a tumult in me, and it was hard for me to keep the deception of her sex at work. “Now,” she went on, “Mr. Vancouver is safe so long as the weather is bad; and when it clears, time will be needed to gather dry wood. We’ll do nothing for the present.”

“But we must be ready,” I firmly protested, sitting up. “This matter is in my hands and Christopher’s now, not yours, my lad, for this is work that only men can plan and do.”

The timidity in her look was new, but not less charming than her surrender.

“What are you going to do, Choseph?” she inquired with a mocking exaggeration of a helpless reliance that was quite genuine.

“We shall be ready to take Mr. Vancouver by stealth or force the moment that actual danger comes near him. We will bring him to this hut and hide him here. But a man from the colony will be needed to guard him. I am going immediately to bring one out for that purpose.

Her eyes kindled with alarm. “No, no, Choseph! That would be impossible. You couldn’t find the way nor pass the guard. I will go.” Argument and persuasion were equally useless; she knew when to be firm. “I will go,” was her answer to everything, and she came to her feet. “You and Christopher come with me to the summit of the wall, and there you’ll hide near the guard, and wait. I’ll bring the man nearly to the place and send him ahead, and give you a signal. You must trick the guard out of the way, and meet him; I will follow. It would ruin everything for me to be seen.”

I agreed, and told her to bring Hobart.

“Beelo,” I said, “you understand that we have accomplished one of the tasks for which you brought us out of the valley, and in doing so have learned the fate awaiting our colony.”

Her face at once grew pinched. “Don’t speak of it, Choseph!” she cried. “I don’t know whether you have or not, and I don’t know what is in your mind. Simply think of saving Mr. Vancouver.”

“Of course, dear lad,” I agreed; “but we must be planning also for means to leave the island, since only something awful awaits us here. You must tell me all that I should know. I won’t dance any longer to your mysteries and concealments.”

It was as though I had struck her. She stared, her eyes flooding, her lips trembling.

“Choseph,” she answered, “there are things that you must see and hear for yourself, and they will come tonight and tomorrow. I’ll take you—”

“I must know now,” I demanded, not realizing the harshness of my tone.

“Choseph, I—”

“Did you speak to me, sir?” came from Christopher, standing behind her.

“No, Christopher. We’ll wait, dear little brother.”

The sunshine came swimming into her eyes again, and she made a grimace of triumph in which was an understanding that Christopher had disciplined me.

“You’ll be good now, won’t you, Choseph?” It was said in her most teasing manner, and I smiled.

We started under an angry sky through which heavy cloud-masses tumbled. It was a cautious journey. The very air seemed filled with expectancy. On the way we formulated a plan for tricking the guard.

In approaching the point of egress from the valley, Beela practiced the slyness of a lynx and the silence of a serpent. Every step was studied lest a twig snap; the leaves on the ground had been softened by the rain. Presently we sighted the guard—a draggled lot, unused to exposure and dispirited by the weather. There Beela left us in hiding. I now understood the perils that she had breasted in every trip to the valley. If they were so difficult under these conditions, how much more they must have been when fair weather made the guard alert and the ground noisy under foot!

Beela was to warn us of Hobart's coming by giving a certain bird-call thrice. Christopher's answering signal would be notice to Beela that Hobart was safe.

The savages, not twenty paces away—at least two dozen stalwart men—were variously squatting, sitting, and lounging. They were in a compact group, and were talking in low voices, but with an animation unusual to the race. I motioned Christopher to follow, and we crept nearer.

Some important news had just been brought by the relief guard.

“And so the king isn't going to wait for night,” said one, as though the news was surprising.

That is true,” came the answer. “He fears that the ground will shake at any time. Besides, the storm will likely come again tonight, and the great fire would be impossible then.”

CHAPTER XV. *The Lash in Unwilling Hands.* How We Outwitted the Guard. A Sword Encounter With a Native. Rawley Gives Me a Sensational Surprise. The Tragedy to Mr. Vancouver Delayed.

I was absorbed in conjuring up plans for Mr. Vancouver's rescue; but the more I thought of it, the madder the undertaking seemed. Suppose we should take him; would not the whole island swarm in a search?

I had calculated that Beela and Hobart should come in four hours. More than half that time was already gone when Christopher and I returned to our original hiding-place. That the storm, the Black Face, and Mr. Vancouver's fate were interwoven, there could be no doubt. Barring hindering contingencies, matters were rapidly drawing to a crisis. If the necessity for urgent action on Mr. Vancouver's account should arise before Beela's return with Hobart, that young man would be caught in a trap, as there would be none but savages to meet him. In whatsoever direction I turned, many chances for a fatal slip and added complications appeared.

A solution of one branch of the problem crept out of the strain,—that of clearing the way for Hobart. I mentioned it to Christopher, and was gratified at his acquiescence.

“But what about Mr. Vancouver?” I asked.

“We have to wait for her, sir,” he answered after listening, and his manner was final.

The triple bird-note came. We waited. It was repeated. I slipped round to the trail used by the guard, and openly approached them. They stared at me in silence. Beela had told me that in an emergency Christopher and I, to explain peculiarities of our appearance that no disguise could conceal, should explain that we were from the western end of the island, where some white blood had mingled with the native, producing, with other deviations from the normal type, men of a more aggressive and daring disposition, which gave them an advantage over the natives at this end, and that on occasion the king called on the western men for special services.

“Why haven't you done your duty?” I sternly demanded.

The guard showed only dull surprise, none either moving or speaking.

“Haven’t you seen the Black Face scowling?” I went on. “Go immediately and attend to your duty, or the Face won’t wait for a white man.”

They were impressed and frightened. “What shall we do?” asked one.

“Clean the stone in the clearing, and so make it ready. Every one of you go, at once. Then come back here.”

They looked from one to another, bewildered, the order evidently being extraordinary. “And leave the pass unguarded?” the same one inquired.

“Am I not here? Go immediately!”

“Did Gato send you?” asked a big fellow, advancing, sword in hand. His weapon was held threateningly, and scraped the bushes as he came.

Not daring to take any chances with him, and not having had sufficient experience with these people to interpret their motive from their conduct, I sprang past him before he could raise his weapon, snatched a sword from an astonished native, backed away to keep the crowd before me until I had faced the one who had advanced upon me, and went at him with a determination that opened his eyes and instinctively brought his sword to guard. I discovered that the sword which I held was a heavy affair, broad and very old-fashioned. Before my inexpert antagonist knew what had happened, my sword had twisted his from his grasp and sent it flying into the bushes, and my point was at his breast. There was an excited movement in the crowd, but before anything could be done I loudly said to my captive:

“I have a good mind to kill you. Take your squad to the clearing at once.”

“Yes,” he hastily agreed, staring at me in wonder, and added, as his interest overcame his panic, “Are they coming with him soon?”

“That is neither your affair nor mine. If you don’t go instantly I’ll arrest the entire squad and take you all to the palace.”

They obediently marched away.

In returning to Christopher I made a detour, so as to pass the spot where Hobart was to appear. I had instructed Christopher to remain a short distance away, as it would be easier for one to meet Hobart than two. My real reason, which I did not mention to Christopher, was that as a native his appearance was one of singular ferocity. I did not wish to run the risk of shocking Hobart out of his self-command.

To my astonishment, Rawley, not Hobart, rose above the edge of the bluff. Perhaps my angry exasperation showed in my manner, for Rawley, after a startled glance, and seeing me alone, sprang upon me in the moment of my hesitation. His leap was swift and stirring, but I avoided him, and began to speak in a low voice. It had no effect. Rawley sprang again. I caught the violent thrust of his body, and an elbow better trained than he had expected took him in the throat, crashed his teeth together jarringly, and sent him reeling and strangling.

I again spoke, but he was too dazed to hear, and came at me again, more warily, with the glare of killing in his eyes, and still not heeding my pacific words. The natural grace with which he began to work for an opening gave his feline ease a threat that set me tingling. He was desperately in earnest, and my windpipe was his objective. There was no falter in his play, which I critically observed as I stood on the defensive. And then it came to me that this was neither the madness of fear nor the desperation of the cornered coward, but the awakening of that ultimate manhood in him which for so long had been held down by an artificial life. Even had he not forced me to silence, the game was so fine and exciting that I should have been tempted to cease my efforts to explain in my desire to see it through.

As his leaps were astonishingly clever and he might land at any moment, I began to crowd him. While moving to do so, I heard Christopher's signal to Beela, but did not pause to see where he was; Rawley also must have heard it, for something spurred his activities. In order to save Beela from the trap in which he supposed himself to have fallen, he must finish me at once.

I dodged his next spring, but his fingers scraped my throat. Then he found himself crushed in my arms. The short blows which he sent into my ribs had no effect, but they were delivered with a will. Beela rose above the summit, and understood all at a glance.

But, Beela-like, she saw only that it was ridiculous. Without taking the trouble to enlighten Rawley, who desisted as soon as he saw her laughing, she passed from surprise into unrestrained mirth. Rawley, standing away from me, stared at her in astonishment.

Seeing no sign of Hobart, I sharply inquired in the native tongue where he was.

"Captain Mason sent this one instead," she answered after finding her breath.

I was aghast. "What reason did he give?"

"None, Choseph. He thought you would understand, I suppose."

The blunder was incredible. Here were Mr. Vancouver and Rawley, the arch-enemies of the colony, sent out armed with fresh opportunity for destroying us, and we charged with the safety of their lives! The game had been sufficiently difficult and dangerous without that. I bitterly resented Captain Mason's course. He was aware of the antagonism between Rawley and me.

"Why did Captain Mason send him?" I demanded.

"He begged to come, Choseph."

That staggered me. What had happened to the man to change him so? "What did he say?" I asked.

"I don't know. He said little, although he was very much in earnest. On the way he said to himself several times, 'She called me a coward. They all think I'm a coward.'"

Christopher had come up and was standing placidly by. Of a sudden Rawley recognized me as the savage who had visited Mr. Vancouver in the camp. He was composed, but had not yet discovered my real identity. A word from Beela disclosed Christopher and me to him. It broke in a crash on the young man. What reflections were belaboring him I could only guess from the shame crimsoning his face. I took his hand.

"Mr. Rawley," I said, "I am sorry that this has happened between us.

I interrupted something that he was trying to stammer by telling Beela how I had disposed of the guard. "They'll soon return," I added. "We must leave."

"Yes, but we must find out first whether they discovered the loss of the wood. Several hours would be required to bring up fresh fuel. Don't you think it's very interesting, Choseph? My! how solemn you look!"

Her careless insolence tried me, for the peril was great.

"It's a pity you never had any one to teach you to be serious," I let fly.

"That would be the funniest thing of all," she returned, amused. "Would you like to try it?"

Her sweet archness made me take a half angry, half possessing step forward, but a look stopped me.

"They are coming!" said she, and we hid.

The savages were more animated than before, and they wondered among themselves when the white man would be brought up from the settlement, and whether all or any of themselves would be relieved from guard duty, that they might witness the proceedings. It was clear that they had not missed the wood.

We slipped away. When we had come near our hut, Beela asked us to wait while she took Rawley to that hiding-place.

“Beelo,” I firmly said, “you don’t understand. That man and I cannot live together.”

She regarded me with a suspicious-looking sadness.

“Enemies among yourselves, Choseph! Is this the best that wise men with so much at stake can do?”

With a smile I took her hand. “Thank you, dear little brother,” I said. “I will do my part.”

Tears easily came to Beela’s eyes, and made them moist now.

“But you and Christopher are not to stay here any longer. Wouldn’t you like to be nearer the beautiful, the good, the angel Lentala?”

“Explain, lad.”

“Wait till I come back.”

She darted to the hut with Rawley, and soon returned.

“The first thing,” she said, “is to find out the plans for Mr. Vancouver. Although the wood is gone, the king won’t be balked, and the getting of more wood will be but a matter of hours. When we discover that the preparations are really afoot, Mr. Vancouver must be taken by you. Before that, there is plenty to do.”

We struck out for the slope overlooking the main settlement, and on the way passed near the hut where Mr. Vancouver was held. Beela disappeared within and soon returned with the news that the threatening weather was holding everything in abeyance.

Avoiding roads, we breasted the verdured heights and worked round the suburbs. As we mounted, the view expanded. The settlement, embowered among trees, made the fairest picture I had ever beheld. I longed to see it under the mellow sunshine, which would make its colors more vivid; but even without that, the scene was satisfying. It was a considerable city, which had grown more by natural accretion than by plan. Broad, tree-lined highways with curves instead of right lines swept lengthwise through it. Many houses were of stone roughly laid up, and with roofs of mud or thatch. Remarkable effects had been secured by use of the native stone in its color variations. Of exceeding beauty was a pleasant stream which loitered through the settlement.

Most conspicuous was the palace of the king, with its accessory buildings and walled grounds. Unlike all the other houses, the palace was two stories in height, was of great size, and sat in generous grounds enclosed with a massive stone wall. I discovered Lentala’s quarters; they were in a wing. Hamlets with adjoining farms dotted the farther slope and stretched up the valley; there were still more, said Beela, in other parts of the island.

With our further climbing, the ocean rose on the horizon, and a modern sea-going vessel sprang up inshore in a harbor at the foot of the settlement. My heart leaped as I studied her.

“What ship is that, Beelo?” I exclaimed.

“Yours, Choseph,” she answered with a bright smile. “I was waiting for you to find it. That is what is to take your people home if a great earthquake comes and we can bring them out of the valley. The king wanted to destroy it, but Lentala persuaded him not only to save it, but to put it in order, as he might need it some time.”

That she had reserved this precious information for so dramatic a use did not impress me at the time. Not till now did I realize that her purely feminine instinct for the theatrical made so large a figure in her withholdings and revelations.

My throat filled. I seized Christopher's arm and tried to speak, but no words issued, and I found that he was already gazing seaward. I had never seen in his eyes such wistfulness, so far and deep a vision, as when he raised them to mine.

From him I turned to Beela, and found a look of neglect and expectancy.

"Dear little brother," I said, and extended my hand; but she pouted, and put her arms behind her.

"I am not your dear little brother," she said, her lip trembling. "I am a savage. You gave your first joy to one of your race." The pain in her face was deep.

"Forgive me, lad." I was very humble, but her swimming eyes were turned away, and there was a swelling in her throat. What could I say? how make her understand? "Beelo, I—"

"It can't be explained," she interrupted, turning sadly away; and we went on in silence.

All at once, without any visible cause, she was her sunny, mischievous self again. I was exceedingly anxious for information,—what had become of the Hope's salvable cargo; whether her seizure by us was part of the plan to which we were working. But I had not the courage to mention the vessel again, lest pain come to Beela's face. Ever since her return from the valley I had been anxious for her report as to any plan of action that she had arranged with Captain Mason, and I now conjectured that she had deferred it until we should see our vessel. With a blunder in tact I had closed her lips.

Now," said she, "we'll return and keep an eye on Mr. Vancouver. Do you think you know the settlement now and could make your way in the night through it?"

"Perfectly," wondering at her impressiveness.

"And do you, Christopher?"

"Yes, ma am."

Unmistakably she had a very intelligent purpose in thus making us acquainted with the topography of the settlement and the presence of our vessel. With that idea I began to make a closer study of the approaches and thoroughfares, although I could form no conception of means whereby the colony might use them against the overwhelming horde of armed natives. But Beela's comely head was packed with shrewdness.

The weather became more threatening with the approach of evening. At night, Beela left us concealed near the prison hut, and went to bring our supper.

After she had returned and we had eaten, she suggested that Christopher and I go and see the prisoner, and learn all that we could. Gato would not be on duty, and the light was dim. Thence we should go to the postern in the palace wall, and there be met by her. Then she left.

When we were near the hut a shadow leaped out of the ground, and challenged. I answered as Beela had instructed, and the guard stepped aside. We entered, and the two natives sitting with the prisoner gave us only a glance. In an authoritative manner I bade them wait outside, and they obediently went.

Mr. Vancouver was sitting on a stool, his head bowed in dejection, but he quickly straightened, and drilled us with a keenly questioning look, in which fear, anxiety, and hope were present. It was evident that he was profoundly suspicious. He was too shrewd not to see the significance of his being kept under guard in a hovel instead of being the king's guest.

I asked him in Senatra English if he was comfortable. Over his haggard face flashed an eager interest.

"That is nothing," he impatiently answered. "I want to know why I am kept here."

"Do you really expect to see the king?" I asked.

He started. "What do you mean?" he demanded.

“What do you think you are here for?”

“The king sent for me—for a conference.” A red light came into his eyes.

“A conference. Suppose he has made up his mind that he can dispose of the white people without your help, and that you happen to be first.”

The sallowness that already had entered his face since his imprisonment became livid, and the red light flared.

“To be sent away?” he thickly asked.

“Yes. Sent away. That is as good a name for it as any other.”

I had ignored Christopher’s gentle tug at my sleeve. A quiver ran through Mr. Vancouver as if a knife had been slipped between his ribs. It was with difficulty that he found breath for speech.

“Doesn’t the king know that I can make him incredibly rich from his gold and silver and diamond mines? Doesn’t he understand that—”

“Perhaps he is as rich as he cares to be. Besides, he has never trusted a white man; and why should he trust one that betrays his own friends?” I could not avoid giving him that thrust.

He came weakly to his feet, terror and despair in every line.

“Did the king send you to say this?” he gasped.

I made no answer. The man sent a wild glance about as though to measure his strength with his prison, and to end all doubts quickly by any means. Then I saw that his wits were gone, and that the purpose of my talk, which was to prepare him for the revelation I had come to make, that he might be on his guard, had miscarried.

Christopher, in the background, edged round, keeping his back, as I kept mine, to the feeble light. I could not imagine that Mr. Vancouver, desperate though he was, would seize this moment to try issues with his fate; but I had not guessed soon enough that the red light meant madness. With a choking curse he snatched up his heavy stool and sprang with it upraised in both hands to crush me.

Before his leap was ended, a heavy body crashed into him, and two giant arms were cracking his joints and sending the stool flying over my head. The two guards came running in, but I sent them back. Christopher needed no aid.

The pinioned man rolled his head and eyes horribly, and cursed through foaming lips. He made futile efforts to sink his teeth into Christopher; he kicked wildly; he squirmed like an animal under a strangling hand. But Christopher’s arms knew the mercy of strength, and he kept dropping soothing words. Like a pillar sunk deep in the earth stood Christopher while his prisoner gasped curses and put fierce energy into every muscle.

“I know you!” he sputtered at me. “You are the infernal native dog that fooled me and trifled with me in camp. Let me at his throat, you baboon!”—to Christopher. “Loose me! Let me die with my arms free!” He called the king and me and all the natives unspeakable names. “In decency and mercy,” he fumed, “kill me at once! I know now what you are going to do with me,—you cannibals!”

Christopher’s quieting tongue was as persistent as his arms, and under them Mr. Vancouver was gradually breaking down. Christopher assured the wretch that no harm would befall him. The man who could resist such persuasion would be less than human and worse than mad. Mr. Vancouver’s curses straggled off his struggles ceased, and the red flame died in his eyes. Christopher had coaxed reason back.

He seated Mr. Vancouver, bathed his face, and gave him water to drink. With a gentle touch he unlaced and removed the sufferer’s shoes, and undressed him. The man had become a child in Christopher’s hands, and was wholly docile when made comfortable in bed.

There had been no personal heed of Christopher in Mr. Vancouver's yielding; but it evidently occurred to him at last that here was something strangely different from the manner of the natives—something nearer and humanly akin. He had been studying Christopher; and when he was composed, and Christopher was turning away, Mr. Vancouver seized his arm and held him, looking earnestly into his face, and then covering his figure with a startled glance. His eyes opened with astonishment.

“Who are you?” he demanded under his breath.

“You know, sir.”

“Christopher!”

“Yes, sir. Speak low.”

“What are you doing here, disguised like that?”

“Captain Mason sent us, sir.”

“What for?”

“To save you, sir. Don't talk.”

Mr. Vancouver breathed laboredly, and the veins in his forehead bulged.

“Who was sent with you?” he faintly asked.

“Him, sir,” indicating me.

I saw the knot come in the suffering man's throat as he rolled his bloodshot eyes upon me, half raised himself on his elbow, and stared while his breathing rasped.

“Who is he?” came chokingly, with a clutch on Christopher's arm.

“Mr. Tudor, sir.”

A spasm caught Mr. Vancouver in the chest, and a rigor ran through him. His eyes closed, his head swung back, his mouth fell open, and Christopher eased the insensible man down on the pillow.