

CHAPTER XVI. *A Light in the Gloom.* Subtle Changes in Beela. A Startling Discovery in the Palace Vaults. The Secrets of the Council Chamber Overheard. Urgent Measures Planned.

“You are late!” blithely greeted Beela when we arrived at the palace gate after leaving Mr. Vancouver. “That shows how much you think of the beautiful, the angel, the sweet, the good Lentala,

you are to sleep in her quarters

We were just in time, for the heavens were opening, and the deluge was at hand.

With great caution Beela conducted us to a chamber in Lentala’s wing of the palace. Evidently it was a sanctuary, for it was quite different from the room in which Lentala had received us, and Beela carelessly remarked that in giving us the room, her sister was bestowing a special favor, since not even her servants were ever admitted.

“Because,” Beela chattered on as she lighted the beautiful lamps, “this is where she comes to lead alone the life that she dreams about, far, far away, where there are no Senatras,—the life that was born in our blood, Choseph, and that we can see very dimly, and in our dreams only. But this room helps Lentala to dream of it. Do you remember the story you told me one day? She has changed the room tonight merely by bringing in these couches for you and Christopher to sleep on.”

I felt something new in Beela’s manner,—a note of sentiment singing low in her voice, an augmented softness and grace in her bearing. She appeared to be struggling against it and striving to be the boy Beelo. Some success came, but the winning note still sang in her throat.

She opened an adjoining room, and disclosed a bath.

“Your Senatra tint is a little damaged,” she cheerily said. “Wash it off; you’ll not need it tonight. Here’s a fresh supply for tomorrow morning. Don’t forget to put it on! But there’s much to do before you sleep. I am going to take you to the Council Chamber. Dress as quickly as possible. I have to make some changes myself. When you are ready, give three light taps on that door.”

“Thank you, dear little brother, but where’s Lentala?”

“Lentala! Do you think she can sit up all night waiting for callers?”

“We are to see her in the morning, then?”

Beela had been bustling over finishing touches for our comfort, but my question—perhaps my tone—stopped her.

“Do you wish to see her?” she asked.

“Of course.”

“Why?”

“Beelo! Can you ask that? Unless we see Lentala whenever we come to the palace, the jungle is more comfortable.”

She turned away, pretending to be hurt.

“And so you don’t care for Beelo. It is nothing to sleep under the same roof with him.”

“But Beelo is a part of my life, dear lad. However far away he may be, he is always with me. Whenever and wherever I go, my dear little brother’s hand is in mine; and no matter when or where I sleep, his sweet breath is on my cheek; and the touch of his light fingers on my lids and the ring of his cheery laugh in my heart wake me in the morning. In my dreams—” I paused, for Beela embarrassed me by the breathless interest with which she was listening.

“In your dreams, Choseph?”

“Then Beelo comes with another. He leads that one by the hand, and smiles at me, and says in his musical voice, ‘This one also you must like, big brother, for this is Beelo’s best friend.’”

She came close and looked up into my eyes.

“That other one, big brother?”

“Is Lentala.”

Her breath caught as she moved away, and she was silent for a little while as she gave the last touches and started to leave. At the door she threw me a mischievous glance, and said:

“You have funny dreams, Choseph, but I’ll tell Lentala you wish to see her,” and was gone.

I had already observed that no touch of native savagery rested on this room. Every article of use or adornment was of a highly civilized production. The barbaric splendor of the reception-room was absent here, and a dainty, girlish simplicity was the note. Exceedingly charming were products of her needlework and other handicraft copied from foreign articles. There were some English books that showed signs of hard use. I picked up one and found a dainty handkerchief within it, and felt a pity for Lentala thus reaching out for what she could not understand.

Beela appeared in different clothes when I rapped, and was much fresher and smarter than I had ever seen her. She looked conscious under my admiring glance, and expressed gratification at the improvement in my looks.

“Beelo, you are as pretty as a girl. Fie!”

She pretended not to hear, and was busy lighting a lantern.

“They are all asleep in this wing,” she said. “Now we’ll go. Listen to the storm! Mr. Vancouver is safe for another day, I hope. And still no earthquake.”

I felt a twinge, but no opportunity had offered for my telling her of the incident in the hut. The truth is, I dreaded lest she find fault with Christopher for disclosing our identity to Mr. Vancouver and my knowledge of his perfidy.

It would be difficult to say in what lay the finer air of Beela’s dress. In cut the garments had a masculine approach, but in China they might have passed for feminine. The trousers and blouse were of fine dark-blue cloth, and were ample. In place of the somewhat shabby straw hat was a becoming red turban, and the shoes were Turkish, red, and richly embroidered in gold. The blouse opened like a V at the neck, and a negligee tie matching in shade the turban and the shoes was secured with a splendid diamond at the bottom of the V.

More insinuating than these outward things were the girl’s gentler voice and manner. There was a hint of the young mother in her caressing look and touch, and the cello note in her voice had fallen still softer and smoother.

In lighting the lantern, she disarranged her turban by striking it against a piece of furniture. She straightened, and raised her arms to readjust it. Her sleeves were wide and open, and they slipped down, baring her arms.

I had been trying with all my might to keep from my mind the delicious thought of Beelo’s metamorphosis, but self-deception was no longer possible. I *must* revel in this new and pleasant experience. The one duty that I must observe was the keeping of my promise to Lentala that I would not let her little sister know that I knew.

“Are we ready?” cheerily asked Beela, picking up the lantern and darkening it with a cloth. “Come. No talking till I give you leave. We must be careful in this wing, for Lentala’s servants might wake. The noises of the storm will help us, but the veranda is drenched. We must take the other way.

She opened the door through which she had entered last, and we were in darkness when she closed it; but I had dimly seen that it was a corridor.

“We can’t use the lantern yet,” she whispered, slipping her hand down my sleeve to my fingers. “Can you find your way, Christopher?”

“Yes.” There was always something tragic in Christopher’s whisper.

“Do you love me, Christopher?” she teasingly asked, squeezing my fingers.

“Yes, ma’am.”

It required great stoicism for me to hold my hand passive and not return the pressure, but I was amazed when she abruptly dropped my fingers. I could see nothing except a faint glow through the cloth about the lantern, but I peremptorily seized her sleeve, drew her arm up, took her hand, and squeezed it hard, for reproof. She made no resistance. Beela was very sweet in the dark,—I remembered the passage through the mountain.

We almost immediately turned into a much longer stretch, as I knew by the whispering echoes of our steps; and soon the shrouded light of Beela’s lantern made the walls visible. After leading us down a dark stair she halted before a door, unlocked it, ushered us within, relocked the door, and removed the cloth from the light.

This chamber was a disordered lumber-room, filled with odds and ends of broken things, native and foreign. I was less interested in the rubbish than in the new picture of Beela in the ascending light from the lantern. It made a witchery of her chin, emphasized the graceful curve of her lips, filled her delicate nostrils, and threw her eyes into mystical shadow. I tried to get her hand again, but failed. Beela in the light was not the same as Beela in the dark.

She paused, and breathed more freely.

“We are safe for a while now,” she said. It was hard to listen composedly to her words, so sweet was the tone of them.

She wound and twisted through the stores, we following, and brought up at a door which a stranger, likely, never would have found. This she unlocked, passed us through, and secured behind us. The air was dank and musty, and despite the lantern there were uncanny patches of phosphorescent light on walls otherwise invisible as yet. The space was roomy, the floor earthen. It proved to be a large cellar-like chamber with a low ceiling supported by stone pillars groined into arches, and was paved, furnished with grated windows, and sweet and dry. Here were immense stores:

American—tinned provisions in astonishing abundance bale upon bale of cloth of many kinds; modern farming implements, and machinery and tools for sawyers, carpenters, cabinet-makers, upholsterers, and many other useful trades; and at one side an array of firearms and ammunition.

Beela was watching me in my astonishment, for not the smallest item of this store had I seen in use by the natives.

“Don’t you know what it all is, Choseph?” she asked.

I shook my head.

“It is the cargo of your vessel.”

I was speechless. Two things were clear: one, that the water-tight bulkheads in the Hope had not given way (which accounted for her pursuit of us instead of sinking), and the other, that the natives had carefully repaired all the water-damage possible. The thorough care of the cargo very likely had extended to the vessel herself.

My emotion was profound. I wrung Beela’s hand, but something in my eyes made her dim and floating. Only vaguely could I see the sweet uplift and happiness in her face. Christopher was standing apart like a man of wood except that his eyes were living. If he needed any expression from me of the almost cruel joy that filled me, he gave no sign, but stood in the pathetic loneliness that forever invested him.

“We must go on,” said Beela. “It is time for the king’s privy council.”

A devious way through another storage vault filled with things no doubt of great value, the ascent of a stone stair, a turning into this passage and another into that, and a short flight of steps, brought us at last upon a curtained balcony overlooking a dimly lighted council hall of considerable size and rich in savage appointments. The king was on a throne facing us, and in a semi-circle before him, seated on rugs on the stone floor, were old and elderly native men splendidly appareled. The king was even more sumptuously robed than on the day of our reception by him. He had no personal attendants, for this, Beela explained in a whisper, was not a state council, but a secret one, called occasionally for extraordinary purposes, composed of selected wise men, and generally held late at night. The balcony where we sat was for the use of the queen and her feminine friends at state meetings. The diaphanous curtains, of an exquisite native texture and handsomely embroidered, could be seen through from our side, which was in shadow, but not from the other.

One thing had been puzzling me exceedingly. It was that no American and European articles looted from wrecks were in use in their original form by any of the natives except Lentala and Beela.

“Because,” Beela had told me in answer to my question, “the natives don’t need them, and are more content without them. The king is wise with his people, and they love him.”

The council was under way. An old man had been droning something that I did not hear, for his voice was weak and the storm noisy. The king nodded to another, a younger man, who came to his splendid full height. His gold-embroidered cloak of office slipped from his great right shoulder and arm after he had risen from his obeisance.

“What is the temper of the Senatras, Gato?” the king asked.

“Very impatient, Sire. There are murmurings and small secret gatherings. Rebellion is in the air.”

The king moved uneasily. “And your soldiers?” he inquired.

“I have them in hand as yet, but they are naturally affected by the restlessness among the people, and are sick of waiting and of guarding the passes. They have never been on duty so long. They love their homes and farms, and they can’t understand the delay. If a wreck should come with this storm, where will the people from it be held?”

“There is plenty of room in the valley,” snapped the king, making an impatient gesture. “And don’t our people know that the crowd we have there is different from any castaways we have had before? Of course we can’t let any of them leave the island, for they suspect its wealth, and would return with soldiers and guns, and destroy us. But we have to proceed cautiously. There are more than a hundred and fifty picked men in the party, and their leaders, Mason and Tudor, and the giant ape Christopher, are shrewd, bold men, and have no fear.”

We three were sitting close together, Beela in the middle. One of her hands stole out, took Christopher’s, squeezed it, and released it. The other found my hand; I closed on its warm softness and kept it prisoned.

“In some mysterious way,” Gato explained, “they have outwitted us. Our plan was to break them up by using the old traitor Vancouver, but they evidently discovered his treachery, and I have just learned that they sent him out as our first offering to the Black Face, while letting him think that he was going to betray them to us.

“I suppose,” said the king, “that he is as good as another for the sacrifice. That will satisfy the people for a time, but he is the first and the last that we’ll get from that crowd without bloody work, and I don’t wish my subjects to be killed.”

He paused, and the others waited. Beela's breathing had grown quick; there was a slight quiver in her hand.

The king went on:

"Mason evidently suspects that the people taken out of the valley will not be sent away, and so he is holding them together. No doubt they have armed themselves, and are ready to fight. Mason will be in no hurry to precipitate an issue with us, for they can subsist indefinitely where they are, we can't strengthen our position against them, and time, he reasons, may bring me to liberate them in a body."

It was impossible not to recognize the kindness and benevolence in the king's voice and words.

"May I speak, Sire?"

"Yes, Gato."

"I fear that Vancouver is going mad."

The king looked his dismay.

"He mumbles," proceeded Gato; "his eyes are wild at times; he calls for his daughter, and weeps like a child; he cannot eat, and his sleep is broken with loud cries."

"Is there much of that?" the king asked in alarm.

"No, Sire; only rarely. If he is taken to the sacrificial altar when he has a lucid period,

"The risk is great," groaned the king. "The people would resent the offering up of a madman; and we can do nothing while the storm lasts. The people can't assemble. We must wait. You men go among the Senatras tomorrow and pacify them. Tell them that all will be well. Do they say that the Face is threatening, Gato?"

"Yes, Sire. Some fools have seen it and spread tales about it. One is that green water streams out of its eyes, and another is that the mouth has opened and that purple flames come forth."

Beela's start thrilled me. The news brought the king to his feet.

"Is it true, Gato,—the open mouth and the purple flame?"

"I do not know, Sire. I have not seen it, and I do not believe it."

"But it may be true! Find out tomorrow morning, and let me know." He was leaving the throne, and although the light was poor, I could see a totter in his step and haggardness in his face.

The others were rising. The king turned to them, and said:

"If that is true,—" He did not finish, but stood in a daze. "The council is ended," he weakly added, and slowly left the chamber, the others filing after him.

CHAPTER XVII. *Disciplined by a Woman.* Lentala's Odd Mistake. Beela Finds Me Refractory. The Deep-Laid Plan of Gato. Christopher and I Charged With Service to the Old King.

Sleep held away that night. The revelations of the privy council had been startling. Some things were clear. One was that the king was a shrewd, easy-going, kindly man, vastly wiser than his subjects, and finding it simpler to rule them by pampering their superstitions than by raising them to his own understanding. Another was that he felt himself on the edge of a crisis, saw no way to avert a possible catastrophe, and was facing it with a paralyzing dread.

Lentala, fresh and radiant, brought our breakfast. Except for her color, not a trace of savagery remained about her. Her dress was a simple house-frock of fine white linen, and of a modern style. Her hair was done exactly like Annabel's.

It did not improve her appearance. Had she been white, there would have been no touch of the incongruous. But in this fresh, sweet daintiness, much of her savage splendor had been sunk, and

I felt a keen disappointment. The former Lentala, for all her barbarity, had never seemed an alien, but more a bringing back to me of a deeply rooted principle fundamental in my heritage.

She appeared to expect a compliment; but how could I be otherwise than sincere with her? Our greetings were pleasant; yet her clothes had set a constraint between us.

“You don’t like my dress, Mr. Tudor?” she ruefully asked.

“It is exquisite, Lentala, and

“I made it all myself, from a picture in a book out of your ship! I thought you would like it. Doesn’t Annabel dress this way?”

“Yes; but in the native dress your beautiful, rich color—” I paused in my floundering for a delicate way in which to say it. “Annabel is white, you know,” I blundered.

Foreseeing my explanation, she had turned flutteringly away before my final words came, and was still holding the empty copper tray on which she had brought our breakfast. It fell with a clatter; her back was turned to me when she picked it up in confusion.

“A white woman!” She did not look at me. “Yes, she can wear dainty things and be sweet; but a brown savage woman—I had risen from my seat at the table and was advancing toward her. She turned and faced me defiantly, backing away, her eyes flashing. In another second, with a lightning change which showed her near kinship with Beela, she smiled sweetly, and asked with a dash of her old coquetry:

“Would you like Lentala better if she were white and pink like Annabel?”

“How could I like Lentala white more than Lentala brown, since, first and last, it is Lentala that I like?”

She frowned comically in an effort to puzzle some sense out of that speech.

“I mean,” I added, laughing at her perplexity, “that I like Lentala because she is Lentala, not because she isn’t some one else.”

That was another poser, and she made just such a little wry face over it as I had seen Beela make many a time. Her face brightened as she made a dash at a short cut out:

“Do you like me *because* I’m brown?”

“That is a question! It isn’t because you aren’t white that I like you.”

“*Could* you like me if I were white?” She stamped impatiently.

“I’d try to,” I sighed.

She made a little pout, stuck up her chin, turned stiffly, and went out with great dignity. It was the Lentala of the feast!

Beela entered when we had finished breakfast. In her rough clothes and tightly bound hair, she made so sharp a contrast to Lentala that, for a moment, I could not think of her as a girl, but as the dear lad whom I had lost. She had none of her brilliant sparkle now, and my heart ached to see the weariness and anxiety that she tried so bravely to conceal.

“What’s afoot for today, dear little brother?” I cheerily inquired.

She was regarding me solemnly. “You’ve had your wish, I suppose. You’ve seen Lentala this morning.”

“Yes. She brought our breakfast. She’s an angel.”

“Pooh!” Beela was bored. “I’ve seen her. She looked a fright in those clothes. Trying to ape Annabel! She ought to have better sense. I know you were disgusted.”

“Beelo!”

“Don’t talk! I know.”

“You are tired and cross this morning, lad.”

She flopped into a chair, very glum. “Women are such fools!” she grumbled.

“Now I am grieved to learn that Lentala is not a woman, for she could never be a fool.”

Beela looked at me with sad reproach, and shook her head.

“Just now,” I went on, “she was a rich red rose sparkling with morning dew. Her smile started all the birds to singing. She—”

“Choseph!” She stamped the floor, much as Lentala had done, but a smile fringed her frown. “You know she made a fright of herself trying to look like Annabel,—and with that ugly brown face!”

“No, no, Beelo. The only trouble was that Lentala is too modest to realize how splendidly perfect she is as Lentala.”

“But wasn’t she still Lentala in those silly clothes?”

“She was as much less Lentala as her effort to be something else succeeded in making her.”

Beela looked puzzled exactly as Lentala had.

“But her heart is broken!” she cried. “She says that you laughed at her, and spoke in riddles!”

“I laughed *with* her, Beelo, not at her; and the riddles were a bit that I put in my mouth.”

“Why?”

“The temptation to say beautiful things to Lentala that might sound insincere is strong.”

She rose, with a confusion that was half amusement, and tried to hide the light in her eyes.

“Come, Choseph! There is much to do today.”

“I must see Lentala first.”

She could not mistake my seriousness. “Why?” in surprise.

“I won’t have her unhappy over that trifling incident. She is too sensitive,—she misunderstood. I must see her, lad.” I started for the door.

“Choseph!” came breathlessly. “Don’t!” I turned.

“Don’t look at me that way!” she exclaimed in genuine alarm. Christopher was moving round toward the door for which I had started.

“What way?”

“As though—as though you’d break down doors and kill anybody that stood in your way.”

“I want to see Lentala.”

“You can’t! She—she’s undressed. I’ll tell her. She’ll be satisfied.”

“Will you, lad? Thank you.”

She began making some preparations about the room. “You ought to be kept tied, Choseph,” she said, half to herself. “I never know what you are going to do next.” Yet a sweet note in her voice sounded low.

She came and stood before me, looking me straight in the eyes.

“I was going to give you and Christopher very delicate and important work to do this morning, Choseph, but I’m afraid you’ll do something rash and ruin us all.”

I felt the sting. “Trust me, little brother.”

She shook her head in trouble. “You’re not sly, Choseph; you’re not cunning and patient. Those are what are needed now. You have enough courage.”

“Trust me, lad.”

“You are to meet King Rangan, Choseph, and you are to do everything that he wishes you to do. You may think you ought not.”

“If you say that I ought, I will.”

“I do say so. If you refuse, or show temper, or do anything that a Senatra wouldn’t do, all is lost. Do you understand?”

“I am not a fool, Beelo.”

“Choseph! That was temper.”

“Trust me, lad,” I begged.

“It is very dangerous work—terribly so if you make a mistake.”

“There will be no mistake.”

“The king is much broken. He is growing old, and the problem of the colony is wearing on him. Choseph, will you think of him as kind and gentle, and as meaning well?”

“Yes.”

“And will you watch Christopher? Sometimes he understands more than you or I.”

“I will.”

“Very well.” Beela was much relieved. “Now I’ll explain. The king is failing rapidly. He needs such friends as you and Christopher, and—”

“Such friends as *we*, when he is holding us as fattening cattle?”

“Choseph!” Beela’s voice rang sharp, and she angrily stamped. Then came a hopeless look.

I took her hands. “Come, dear friend,” I pleaded. “That was the last. I am wholly in your hands. And remember, there is always Christopher.”

She turned away with a sigh, and began to put finishing touches to our efforts at the restoration of neatness in the room. She was evidently gathering herself, for presently she came and took a seat facing me, Christopher standing. Her manner was serious.

“This is the case,” she said: “The king has meant always to be kind to Lentala and me, and we are grateful. We love the queen dearly. We would lay down our lives before permitting any harm to befall them.”

Her emotion made her pause.

“Serious dangers are threatening them now,—more than they suspect,—and these have come because of your people. Before that, only one or two would be cast up from the wrecks. They gave no trouble.”

Horror came into her face, and she looked away.

“I always supposed that they were sent off,” she resumed. “Never once did I suspect the truth until shortly before your party came, and then my affection for the king died in me, and I was sick at heart. I don’t think the queen knows the truth to this day. I think the king would have stopped it long ago, but for Gato, who wanted to use it to keep the natives in savagery. He is a bad man, with great power. When your large party came, he saw a way to break the king, stir the people to rebellion, kill the king and queen, and take the throne himself.”

“Does Gato suspect that you know this about him?” I asked in astonishment.

“No. There is where our safety lies. I never should have suspected him if he hadn’t made love to Lentala and told her that if she would marry him she would soon be queen,—the beast! Then we watched and found out.”

After a thoughtful pause she proceeded:

“Gato is secretly stirring up the people. I have no doubt that he is about ready to strike. His plan will be this, I think: The palace guard are men whom he can trust to do his work; he will kill everybody here, and then take the army into your valley and slaughter all but a few. He will keep those for the sacrifices. It was he that induced the king to use Mr. Vancouver as your traitor. But, unlike the king, he doesn’t care how many natives might be killed in a fight with the colony when he has made himself king.”

She was regarding me curiously.

“And what are Christopher and I to do?” I cheerfully asked.

“Let me tell you some things before that,” she answered, but with hesitancy. “You won’t be hurt with me, Choseph, and you won’t be angry?”

“Assuredly not, dear lad.”

“I told Captain Mason all these things when I went into the valley the last time.” She waited anxiously.

“I am very glad of that,” I brightly answered.

She was much relieved, and with a sudden dash came over and squeezed my hand.

“You are really my dear big brother!” she said, and demurely resumed her seat. “I told him something else,” she went on with more confidence. “It was to have his entire colony ready to move at a moment’s notice,—not to bring anything with them, except all the food they could carry, but to be prepared at any time of the day or night to march in perfeCt silence out of the valley.”

“To the ship!” I exclaimed.

She smiled. “I advised him to pick some cool, trustworthy men to take charge of the march.”

“He said—?”

“That he already had his men chosen, and was glad that Hobart didn’t have to come out with me. He said it would be the making of Rawley to come, and that you would understand.”

I did at last. There was something almost magical in Captain Mason’s ability to dig the manhood out of men.

“And now for your work and Christopher’s,” resumed Beela. “I will take you to the king as English-speaking natives from the mountains beyond the valley on the west, which you have not seen. As I have told you, the natives there are wilder and fiercer than these, have little intercourse with them, and are largely independent. Their blood has mingled with that of a few castaways, and they are brighter. On this side is the ancient race, simple, gentle, dull. The king is proud of it, and wishes to keep it pure. But he will welcome the other men in this emergency, particularly if they speak English.”

“Has he full confidence in Gato?” I inquired.

“I think he is growing suspicious.”

“And we?”

“You are to be the king’s confidential agents; to find out, independently of Gato, all that is afoot; to be ready to protect the king; and especially to treat with the colony if any trouble should rise from that source. Is it all clear?”

“Nearly. We are to guard the king and maintain his authority at any cost?”

Beela studied me uneasily. “Yes, at any cost,” she slowly answered.

“I was thinking of Gato,” I explained. “We are to resort to any measures with him, however extreme, if we have good reason to think them necessary?”

“Yes,” somewhat anxiously. “What do you mean, Choseph?”

“Anything that may be wise and prudent.”

She glanced down. She made no reply, but gave this warning, still not looking up:

“Take no chances with him. When you strike, which you must, sooner or later, let the blow be swift and sure.”

“What will become of the army when he is out of the way?”

The question troubled her. “It is very uncertain,” she answered. “There may be leaders under him who are in his confidence. They or one of them may take command and lead the army against the palace.”

She sprang to her feet and glanced about.

“Let’s go to the king at once,” she said. “Lentala told him about you and promised to have you there by this time. I fear that Gato has already returned with his report of the Face with its open mouth and purple flame.”

“Just one thing, dear lad,” I interrupted. “I wish to see Lentala first.”

Her adaptability was as quick as a child’s. The seriousness which she had worn flashed into a teasing quirk of the mouth.

“What for?”

“You know very well.”

“Choseph,” she said, solemnly wagging her head at me, “how can you think of girls at such a time as this? Lentala would have too much sense to see you now. Come with me to the king.”

CHAPTER XVIII. *To the Rescue of the King.* Our Risky Audience With His Majesty. He Encoils Us in Allegiance. I Open His Eyes. Gato’s Scheme of Regicide. A Bold Act by Christopher.

On our way to the royal apartments, Beela again took us through the vaults. I used the opportunity to fix in my memory the exact places where the arms and ammunition from our vessel were kept. The king never permitted any of his subjects to handle firearms.

Hard by the vaults she showed us a dungeon. Not within her memory had it been occupied, and few, even in the palace, knew of its existence. It was an ingeniously designed prison, a grated window for ventilation and a little light being so placed that no sound could reach the outside; and the door was so deadened that no beating could make a noise.

Anxious that none of the king’s attendants should see her, Beela gave us directions how to go and what to say and do if we were halted, and slipped away, informing us that we might see her face at a small curtained window high in the east wall of the room where the king would receive us.

One after another of the attendants whom we encountered on the way eyed us curiously and, I thought, suspiciously, and put their heads together after we had passed. One of them gave a low whistle; two came forward from in front, stopped us, and demanded our identity and business. All these men were armed.

“The king expects us,” was my curt answer; but more effective was our cool assurance.

Thus we arrived at the door, which was open, a soldier on guard. More peremptorily than the others he demanded our names and errand.

“The king expects us,” I repeated, and was going within; but the fellow laid a hand on me. I flung it off and so confused him that we were within before he could interfere. He mustered some briskness to follow, but was too late, for the king had seen us.

I was shocked at his appearance in the clearer light of day. At the feast he had looked not far beyond his prime; his eyes were bright then, and he bore himself with a commanding dignity. Now he was sinking into decrepitude.

“I have been expecting these men,” he said, and the guard withdrew; but I knew that he was slyly listening at the door.

We made an obeisance. I caught a glimpse of Beela’s encouraging face at the window.

The king was lounging on a divan; he had been talking with two elderly men seated on rugs before him. They regarded us keenly as the king asked them to withdraw. When they had gone, Christopher closed and locked the door, and stood with his back to it. The surprised and curious

scrutiny of the king was on him, passing down his grotesque figure. From Christopher he turned to me.

“What do you wish?” he inquired.

“To serve you, Sire.”

“How?”

“Secretly, by finding out many things, by learning the truth; and in any other way.”

“I have men for that.”

“You have Lentala also, Sire. She knows that you need us, and that we will serve you intelligently, faithfully, and without fear.”

“Without fear of whom?”

“Every one of account has enemies, Sire.”

“Have I any? I want no guessing.”

“We will find out.”

“Does Lentala know?”

“Not positively, perhaps; but we all love her, and she has many ways of learning, since she is not hedged about and kept in the dark as your Majesty can be.”

The king was brightening; a faint eagerness crept into his face.

“Where did you learn to talk in that way?”

“I don’t understand your Majesty.”

“That inflection. It isn’t pure Senatra.”

“It is my misfortune, Sire. A long time ago a white man, an American, escaped from the natives with the aid of a Senatra girl. She went with him into the lonely mountains back of the village Sumanali. There my brother,” indicating Christopher, “and I were born. We speak our father’s language as well as our mother’s.”

“English?”

“Yes, Sire.”

“I meant something else, also, in your speech,—a quickness, a nimbleness.”

“The white man was bright and keen, Sire.”

“What is your name?” he asked me.

“Joseph, Sire.”

“And his?”

“Christopher, Sire.”

“Those are not Senatra names.

“Our father was an American, Sire.”

He put me through a further shrewd examination, and I answered readily. It was having a slow but conspicuous effect in heartening him. I was evidently a new and refreshing element, perhaps bringing hope. He appeared satisfied, and asked:

“Have you any suspicions?”

“I have, your Majesty.”

“Of what? and of whom?”

“Might it not be unjust, Sire, to express mere suspicions?”

He reflected a moment, and asked:

“Do you know Gato?”

“Yes, Sire.”

“And the Black Face?”

“Very well.”

“And the purple flame?”

“Yes. I saw it two days ago.

“Where?” asked he in excitement, sitting erect.

“It was slipping along the top of the valley wall, near the Face.”

The king’s perturbation increased, but he found no wavering of my eyes under his sharp gaze.

“More than that, Sire; my brother and I went into the river passage through the wall. We saw the red fire and barely missed a great explosion.”

The king’s astonishment brought him to his feet.

“Tell me more!” he demanded.

I gave him an account of all that we had seen and endured, including the flaming waterfall, the boiling cauldron, and the earthquake.

“You dared that passage!” he exclaimed, looking from one to the other of us in amazement. “It was the white blood. Not another man in the kingdom would do it. Gato could not make any of his men go; yet I was anxious to know.”

He was saying this partly to himself, as he aimlessly walked the floor.

“Why did you go?” he abruptly asked.

“We had heard that no one else was willing, and we wished to serve your Majesty.”

The king’s back being turned, I glanced up at the window. The curtain parted for a moment, and Beela’s beaming face nodded and smiled.

“Yes,” muttered the king in a profound disturbance, “it means that an upheaval is at hand,—and a crisis!” He came and stood before me, plumping this question at me: “Do you fear the Black Face, the flame, and the earthquake?”

“Not in the least, Sire,” I smilingly answered.

“All the others do.”

“Your Majesty has not forgotten that our father was white. He taught us many wise things.”

He was smitten with a look that seemed to come from his conscience, and sank with a groan into the divan.

“Had I only been as true to my duty, and led my people to the light!” he exclaimed. “Lentala begged me to. Now I must pay, I must pay!”

I needed no recalling of my pledge to Beela, for pity held me. I looked to the window, and the radiance coming thence lighted my wits.

“There is always hope, Sire,” I cheerfully said; “we can work and hope.”

He gave me a haggard look. “You know,” he said, “the Senatras believe that unless sacrifices are made of the white people in the valley there will come no more wrecks and castaways, and that the Black Face will therefore send the terrible earthquake and eruptions which frighten our people into madness, sweep the island with fire, and destroy lives and farms. But how can a sacrifice be made? The people think that to offer up a madman would infuriate the Face and cause frightful disaster. It is impossible to bring another white man from the valley, because the colony would fight rather than give him up. Yet unless there is a sacrifice the Senatras will rebel through fear of the Face, the army will revolt, my palace will be seized, and the queen, Lentala and I, with all our friends and servants, will be put to the sword.”

“A leader, who must be a traitor, would be required for that, your Majesty. That would mean a man of eminence among us; and not that alone, but one who has already laid his plans and is ready at this moment to strike.”

The king was staring at me in terror.

“You speak with a deep understanding,” he huskily said, “and you have more to tell me. Proceed.”

“Yes, Sire. The white people wish only to leave the island, and to go in peace. They will do no harm if they are not opposed; if they are, they will harm only those who oppose them.”

“How do you know?”

“I speak with knowledge from my white father.”

“But if they are permitted to go, they will spread tales of great riches here, and destroying ships and armies will come.”

“Permit me, Sire. In the first place, with such coadjutors as Lentala, my brother and I, you could make the island impregnable. That would be far wiser than the risk which you are now running, for the sea, even in my father’s time, was filling with ships, and the great countries were hunting new possessions. At any time a ship may come without the aid of the storms. She would see this large and beautiful island, and, though driven off, would inform her own country, which would send vessels and men to overwhelm us.”

“Yes, yes. But would it be possible for us to prepare defenses?”

“It is our duty to do all that we can, Sire. But there can be an additional protection. So long as we keep our present backwardness we shall be deemed the rightful prey of any nation. If we aim to be more like the great countries, and send ambassadors to them and make treaties with them, they will protect us against one another.”

This mightily impressed the king.

“That sounds reasonable,” he said with a pitiful air of wisdom, “but it may be attended to hereafter. We are facing a present crisis. You said that a leader of an insurrection would be required.”

“Yes, Sire.”

“The army could put down any trouble.”

“With the army itself in revolt?”

“But Gato’s control of the army is powerful.”

“Yet it is on the edge of revolt. If Gato is all-powerful with his men, and in spite of that fact says he can’t control them, But your Majesty is abler than I to draw inferences.”

The king came nervously to his feet.

“It is easy to understand, Sire,” I went on, “that an ambitious and unscrupulous man would see his opportunity when the people are paralyzed with fear of the Face or with an outburst of its wrath.”

“Opportunity for what?” the king demanded.

“What would he want, Sire? Your throne would be a temptation, and so would Lentala to a man who wanted a beautiful wife.”

The king gripped the edge of a table.

“He asked me for her,” the wretched man growled like a lion gnawing a bone. “I refused him. She is very dear to me. I wanted her to have a better man, of her own choosing. For I have provided that she is to rule my people when I am gone.”

Though greatly surprised, I refrained from looking toward the window, and kept silence while the broken man fought out his agony. When the urgency of his situation had measurably restored him, he began to pace the floor, and asked:

“Something has to be done immediately. What would you suggest?”

“What does your Majesty understand the case to be?”

“We are on the eve of a revolution. The task is to check it.”

“Meanwhile, Sire, I observe that a score of Gato’s soldiers are in the palace. Is that customary?”

The king stopped and turned a livid look on me.

“No. Gato suggested that it would be safer to have them here for the present as a protection.”

“Protection for whom, Sire?”

The hint in the question swept the breath out of him, and he stood staring.

“I hadn’t suspected—” he struggled for breath to begin. Then, “I see, I see.”

The imminence of danger electrified his dormant forces. He hardened and expanded, and fighting blood began to run in his veins. I said:

“There is one thing more, your Majesty. The white people in the valley are able, daring, and cunning. Already some of them have escaped and are at large in the island.”

“Impossible!” he exclaimed in consternation.

“I have seen them myself, Sire. They are perfectly disguised as natives.” A quick look at the window showed me a frightened but not a reprimanding face.

“You are positive?”

“Absolutely, Sire.”

“How did they come out?”

“Either by tricking Gato’s men, or by connivance with some one, of course.

A rap at the door prevented further discussion.

“That is Gato,” the king whispered. “Hide there,” pointing to a curtained door in the rear wall.

We were immediately concealed. The place was an anteroom. Through the curtain we could hear and see everything.

Gato entered.

“What news?” the king inquired in a friendly, business-like fashion.

“Everything is quiet, your Majesty.”

“How is the weather?”

“It is beginning to clear.”

“Good! If the storm has made any wrecks, a castaway for the sacrifice may drift ashore. That would restore order.”

Gato solemnly shook his head. The king reclined in silence, and then asked:

“How many soldiers have you in and about the palace?”

The man was surprised. “Twenty, Sire,” he hesitatingly answered.

“Send them to the Council Chamber, and summon Lentala.”

“May I ask your Majesty—”

Gato found a look that he was not accustomed to see. It was evident from the slowness with which he proceeded to obey that he was alarmed and was gaining time for new plans.

Christopher and I stepped forth when Gato was gone. Beela exhibited some fear, but I sent her a smile.

“You,” the king commanded me, “observe his manner with his men. You,” to Christopher, “follow him to Lentala and see that no harm befalls her; I will show you a way. Don’t let him see either of you. Come with me to the Council Chamber immediately after the soldiers have assembled.”

Beela nodded to me, and dropped the curtain. The king led Christopher into the anteroom, gave him hurried directions, opened a door leading out of that room, dismissed Christopher, and returned. By this time I was passing out, having observed that no one in the corridor was looking toward me.

Gato had formed his plan, and it contemplated swift execution, as I judged from his prompt, incisive manner with his men. In each instance he gave an order which I knew from the pantomime included the Council Chamber; then, in the man's ear, he added something which brought a start, a stiffening of the body, and an unconscious grip of the sword-hilt. As the men were straggling past me to assemble, the king leisurely strolled out into the corridor, and was sauntering beyond me, when he stopped, turned, and asked under his voice:

"What are the signs?"

"He has ordered them to kill you in the Council Chamber at a sign from him."

"Umph!" The king passed on toward his living-apartments, which he entered.

When he came quietly walking back, the corridor was clear of soldiers. He slipped a modern revolver into my hand.

"Do you understand its use?"

"Perfectly, Sire."

"May I trust your nerve and judgment to use it at the right moment and without missing?"

"You may, Sire."

"I think one shot will settle the matter. If not, —"

"There will be three of us, your Majesty."

He nodded, passed on, and turned back. He had become transformed, and appeared to look forward eagerly to the crucial moment.

"Gato ought to be here with Lentala by this time," he said.

He walked slowly to the private audience-room, looked in, and strolled back. Near me he stopped short, intently listening.

"Did you hear that?" he asked.

"No, Sire."

"It sounded like the roar of an infuriated animal."

His strolling began again, but with an increasing uneasiness.

"I don't understand it," he said. At intervals he stopped and listened. Finally he came back.

"I sent for her," he explained, "to announce that she was heir-apparent to the throne, and vested with present authority to take any measures in this crisis that would seem proper in her discretion."

I did not know before that my heart could be so touched by such a man.

His impatience at last slipped control. "We will go and see what detains them," he said.

We started down the corridor. At his own apartments he paused to send a servant to the Council Chamber with word that he would soon appear. We had gone but a short distance beyond, when we met Christopher.

"Is all well?" asked the king.

"Yes, Sire."

"Are Lentala and Gato coming?"

"No, Sire."

"Why not?"

"He's in the dungeon, Sire."

"In the dungeon! Locked up?" Yes, Sire."

"Who put him there?"

"Me, Sire."

"What for?"

"Your Majesty told me not to let him harm her."

“Harm her! Did he try to?”

“I was there. She wants to see you.” He turned to me. “And you, sir.

We three hastened to her apartments, where we found her lying on a couch and attended by a number of frightened women.

“Lentala!” the king anxiously said; “what is the matter?”

She forced a smile, held out one hand to the king and the other to me, gave mine a quick, tight squeeze, released our hands, in a weak voice bade us be seated, and with a wave of her hand dismissed the women.

“What has happened, child?” the king insisted. “Gato came. I was alone. He didn’t know that Christopher was behind him.” She was speaking with difficulty, often pausing. “He was impatient. He said he loved me and wanted me. And if I wouldn’t marry him, he’d . . . he’d strangle me here and now. . . . That his men were waiting in the Council Chamber to kill you, if I refused him, and then they would kill the queen. . . . I said no. I trusted Christopher. Gato’s fingers hooked like that,” she showed with her own hands, “his eyes glared terribly, and he came at me. . . . Christopher crept up, said to me, ‘Don’t scream,’ and leaped on Gato. They grappled, and rolled on the floor. Gato roared like a wild beast.” Lentala covered her eyes with her hands. “I heard things crack and break. I couldn’t look. Then came an awful squeak. Christopher said again to me, ‘Don’t scream.’ It meant he was safe. I felt myself falling. . . . When I saw again, I was lying on this divan, and my women were with me. Gato was gone. Christopher was standing in the door. I asked him where Gato was. He said, ‘In the dungeon.’ He would say no more, and I sent him for you.” She looked at him, and added, “Dear old Christopher!”

His face was blank.

“Can I do anything for you?” the king gently asked.

“No, thank you. I’m only a little shaken, and will be up in a few minutes.”

“Would you like the queen to come?”

“No. It would distress her. Not a word of this to her!

The king led us out. At the door I looked back and won a smile.

We went in silence, and the king stepped into his apartments, bidding us wait in the corridor a minute.

I turned a keen look on Christopher, and he met it frankly.

“Are you hurt?” I asked.

“No, sir.”

“Is he badly injured?”

“Him?”

“Yes.”

“He don’t need no doctor, sir.””

“Did he go with you quietly?”

“Yes, sir.”

“He’ll hang for this, Christopher.”

“Sir?”

“The king will hang him for this.”

Christopher’s gaze wandered vacantly round the corridor, and after a while he quietly said:

“It won’t hurt him, sir.”

The truth blazed through me. I had been misled by Christopher’s perfect calm.

“Christopher!” I cried, seizing his hand and wringing it; but he looked bored.

CHAPTER XIX. *The Strength of the White Blood.* Extraordinary Discipline by the King. His Uneasiness Concerning Our Loyalty. Lentala's Father. We Must Help Destroy Our Friends. Earthquakes.

Although the king was greatly shocked when I told him what had really happened to Gato, his gratification quickly rose, and he regarded Christopher curiously.

"Why didn't you tell me at once?" he inquired.

"That is not his way, Sire," I explained. "He avoids talking."

"It was a wonderful thing to do," his Majesty mused as we slowly went to the Council Chamber.

Something had given him a fearful blow, and I guessed it was the danger to which Lentala had been exposed. His face was haggard again; his gait was unsteady; he doddered and mumbled.

As we neared the Council Chamber, he said:

"Come in and stand near me, one on either side."

We found the soldiers in a huddle near the door, the racial dulness of their faces somewhat keyed with expectancy. The king gave them but a glance as he passed them and ascended the throne,—to be more impressive, no doubt. Christopher and I stood as flanks.

"Form a line facing me," the king sternly commanded.

The soldiers glanced at one another in wonder as they obeyed, and furtively had anxious eyes and ears for Gato. They were a fine crowd, selected for courage and dash.

"You understand," the king said, "that I am always in supreme command of the army, including Gato and every other officer. Any person who may be in immediate charge of you is serving as my agent, and is appointed and removed by me at my pleasure. All your fealty and loyalty are for me. You will now acknowledge that with an obeisance to your king."

The rascals were dazed. They might send shifting glances down the line if they liked, and wonder and waver if they pleased, but obey they must: every man felt it in his bones. The line went down.

Etiquette required the maintenance of the posture until the king gave the word to rise. The obeisance consisted in coming to the knees, resting the elbows, well advanced, on the floor, pressing the palms down, and rooting the floor with the forehead,—an easy performance if quickly finished, but a torturing one if sustained. On this occasion the king neglected the releasing command; and that was unheard of. In such a position the men could see nothing.

"A soldier's first duty," he resumed, "is to his king. In becoming a soldier he dedicates his manhood, his strength, his life, to his sovereign; that is to say, to his country. A true soldier is glad to die for the happiness and safety of his king. His duties are as sacred as those of a son to his father. A worthy son will remember the protection that his father has given him. If he hears him defamed, he will uphold his name; if blind, will lead him; if threatened, will defend him though death be the reward. So it is with a soldier and his king."

His voice weighted his words with a deep emotion, and he spoke slowly, with pauses. It was like listening to a passage from the Bible,—but much better read than commonly.

"A king may be kind to his soldiers; that will bring him their love with their fealty, and give their duty a double force. A king may grow old and stand in need of the strong, willing arms of young men whom he loves and who love him. A king may totter under the burden of long service to his people; his soldiers will then be his stay and comfort, and with joy in their hearts will do his high will. Serpents may crawl in the weeds about a king's throne: his soldiers will beat the weeds clear of them."

The king could not have failed to see a painful writhing that wormed through the line. His pause was long.

“A son who hears even his brother speak ill of their father, will reprove the brother and shame him. If that fails, he will chastise his brother if he can; but if the brother is stronger, the dutiful one will take the matter to their father, since the safeguard of the family is endangered by the disaffection of a single member. If a father discovers one of his sons jeopardizing the unity, prosperity, and safety of the family, he will give the faithless son such treatment as the security of the family demands.”

The pause this time was still longer. Meanwhile, the endurance of the men had nearly reached an end. Whatever may have been their mental state, their physical was one of excruciating pain.

“Some men are induced to do wrong through heedlessness or blindness, not knowing the gravity of their deeds, and not foreseeing a dire result. Others are weak and easily led; they are untrustworthy tools of their leaders, and shame is their greatest punishment. Others are cruel and wicked at heart; they will therefore be ready to betray the men who led them to betray others. All of those are poisonous serpents in the weeds about a king’s throne. And it is far worse in a soldier than in any one else.”

After another pause, he said:

“A king who is kind and wise will be slow to believe evil of his people. It will be natural for him to think that all will be as wise and kind as he. Yet he must be watchful; he cannot protect the people unless he protects himself. If he finds a scandal, he may hide it, lest it weaken the common faith in the strength and purity of his government. If he discovers that any are unfaithful, he will not make their treason public by hanging them before the people, unless he knows that a warning will stop other traitors. No; he will be merciful and keep them privately for a time, till they may walk forth erect in their recovered manhood.”

Here and there a gasp or a strangled groan broke the silence of the line. The king was heeding.

“The man at the right of the line will rise.”

The fellow came painfully to his feet, and stretched the agony out of his muscles.

“Advance and lay your sword on the dais,” ordered the king.

The man obeyed.

“Return to your obeisance.”

A start thrilled the soldier. He gave the king a desperate, pleading look, but found eyes with a cold sternness that sent him to obedience.

“The next, rise.”

The performance was repeated with him, and with the rest in turn.

“All rise,” said the king. They stood up. “I will now take you to a room in the palace, where you may consider in quiet what the soldiers of a king should be. You,” he ordered Christopher, “walk beside me at the head, and you,” to me, “follow the soldiers.”

The dignity of a mighty sorrow sat like a grace upon him as he slowly led the procession. Never were prisoners more securely manacled with steel than these men, though their members were free; and though there was a certain pomp in the march, it was that of a funeral, and the silence was louder than the blare of much brass.

The king turned into the corridor that led to the vaults, and descended the stair. This brought him and the others to the dungeon door. He halted, and Christopher unlocked it. It swung wide. The king and Christopher stood aside, and the men marched in. Christopher closed and locked the door.

“Your Majesty!” I exclaimed; “you surely have not forgotten that Gato

“My son,” he calmly answered, “what they have already endured has made the way easier to what they will find in there.

Without haste the king conducted us back to the chamber in which he had received us, and seated himself erect on the divan. He was studying us.

He inflated his cheeks and pursed his lips while his goggling eyes roamed, and queer wrinkles came and went in his face.

“The white blood,” he grunted, staring at me. “It accounts for your keenness. The white blood never sleeps. If it is with you, good; if against you,—” He rose and glared. “Which love you the more, son,” he growled, “the white blood or the brown?”

“Your Majesty sees our color. We came freely and offered our hearts, our arms, and our lives to your Majesty. And it is not forgotten, Sire, that Lentala sent us.”

“I remember.” The growl died in him, and he brightened. With both hands he clutched the edge of the couch. “It takes white blood to fight white blood,” he said. “Did your father tell you that?”

“Not that I recall, Sire.”

“Black blood and red blood and yellow blood and brown blood always fall before it, soon or late. He said nothing about that?”

“I think not, Sire.”

“You know it is true?”

“My father told me much of the great world.”

“Then he told you that. And I know. I saw it when I went abroad in my youth. I learned it from Lentala’s father. Does it mean anything to you that your mother was a Senatra?”

“It is sufficient that your Majesty and Lentala are Senatras.”

The king fixed a keen stare on me.

“You mention Lentala very often,” he said.

“She indorsed us to your Majesty.”

“Something more is here. That is the white blood in her. In you and in her the white blood knows its own.

His sudden confirmation of my surmise concerning Lentala choked the words in my throat.

“Why don’t you speak?” he roughly demanded. “Is it not true?”

I could only gaze at him.

“The white blood finds and knows its own,” he went on. “Two hundred and fifty of those with white blood are held on this island by a great horde of those with brown blood. I need a man of the white-blood shrewdness and boldness and courage to manage those two hundred and fifty to the safety of my people and my island. But if I take a man with white blood in his veins, it will side with the white blood that threatens me.

“Would Lentala hand over to treason and destruction your Majesty and the queen and all the other Senatras whom she loves, and the people to whom she belongs and the country that has nourished her?”

“Not wittingly, for she is a daughter of the gods; but the blood, my son, the blood!”

“Sire, a love early planted endures forever.”

He rose to fight his despair, and walked up and down the room.

“Yes, it is true,” he said at last. “Lentala has proved it. I spared her father, a castaway, because he stopped a great plague that was destroying my people. I myself was stricken, and he saved my life I feared him because he was of the white blood, and because of his wisdom and power. He held the secrets of the gods, and had no fear. I had planted deep in my people a hatred of the white blood; and I required that he not only disguise himself as a native, but remain within the

palace grounds. He taught me many things, but I refused to follow his advice to instruct my subjects. He educated Lentala.”

“Is he still alive?” I asked.

“He died two years ago. If he were only here now! We became strong friends. Lentala’s devotion to the islanders is returned by them almost as idolatry. I know how the white blood can love, but I know also how it can hate; and it knows its own.”

He suddenly halted, and wheeled upon me.

“You say,” he moaned, “that some of the white men are at large on the island. What mischief are they doing? What mines digging under me? My people are children,—I have kept them so, God help them! I need not alone a wit and a daring to match the white people’s, but Senatra devotion as well.”

“Your Majesty knows Lentala.”

He blazed on me. “Do you love Lentala?”

A fierce tingling raced through me, and dumbness held me.

“She is beautiful and sweet,” he went on. “She is steadfast; she is brave and able. There never was a woman to match her. You are big and strong and brave. She found you. Like finds like. Do you love her as a man loves a woman?”

I fought blindly for wit and words.

“Yes, Sire,” came the thin, even voice of Christopher.

We both turned in surprise. He beamed on us blandly.

“Does she love him as a woman loves a man?” the king asked him.

“Yes, Sire.”

His audacity held me speechless.

“I can trust her—and you,” the king said to me,—“so far as blood tempered by love and loyalty may be trusted, which is farther than it may trust itself. I am old and broken. Come, you two, and stand before me.”

We obeyed, I wondering.

“I have no other men to equal you, and I need you. You must serve me. Take time now, and remember your white blood. Remember that it is stronger than your brown, for I have seen its dominance in you today. Remember that when your allegiance is tested in a choice between white blood and brown, the white will be the stronger. Only one thing can save you and me and all my people.”

“And that, Sire, —”

“—is your manly pride to see and know and overcome your white blood, and serve and obey your king to the end.”

He paused, and looked from one to the other, as though expecting us to speak, but we were silent.

“The white blood,” he passionately resumed, “is the most terrible thing in the world. It is strong and shrewd; it never gives up; it pursues and fights relentlessly to the ends of the earth; without mercy or pity it hunts down, plunders, overwhelms, exterminates. Only one thing can hold it in check, and that is opposing white blood. Brown blood cannot cope with the white people in the valley, but white blood can; and for the task, the gods have sent me white blood mingled with brown seeded in my soil and grown to it with deep roots. That is my hope and trust.”

His gaze of affectionate yearning was on us.

“The duty of your Senatra blood is loyalty to your king; the task of your white blood is to outwit and outdo the people in the valley. I will place Lentala in command of the army. You must not take a step without her full concurrence, and you will obey her without question. Do you agree?”

“Gladly, Sire.”

“A hundred soldiers guard the passes from the valley, and are relieved every day. When not on duty they attend to their private affairs. I will at once send out messengers summoning these to assemble outside the palace wall, in the king’s highway passing the main gate. There I will address them and turn over the command to Lentala.”

He was profoundly studying me. His words, “to outwit and outdo the people in the valley,” were grinding within me, and I longed to demand an explanation. A savage ferocity was manifest through his benignity. To outwit and outdo the people in the valley,—my people, my friends! I would be his tool to betray and destroy them. The bottomless pit should have him first, and the hand that he would turn to treachery and murder would send him thither.

My face must have shown something of what I tried to conceal; for the king, his look growing desperate and malignant, stepped back a pace. There came from somewhere a sharp rap, which made me start, and sent my glance to the curtained window, to which the king had his back. I had supposed that Beela was with Lentala; but there she was at the window, her hand upraised in warning. It brought me instant control.

The king also had heard, and looked round sharply, but the curtain was down.

“What was that?” he inquired.

“My big toe, Sire,” answered Christopher.

“What did you do with it?”

“I cracked the joint.”

“Why?”

“It feels good, Sire.”

His Majesty curiously regarded Christopher’s feet. “It must be a large joint,” he said.

Christopher stood in gentle silence. The king turned to me, and found me docile.

“That look of rebellion was the white blood in you,” he said.

“Only for a moment. Your Majesty may trust me. Nevertheless, he was troubled, and shook his head. “He won’t no more, Sire,” said Christopher.

“How do you know?”

“I know him.”

“Explain.”

“He does little things short and big things long.”

My amused smile was fortunate, because it put an end to the king’s tragic gravity.

“I am satisfied,” he remarked. “Now, the first thing for you two to do, while the army is assembling, is to go out, find, and bring to the palace all the white men that have escaped. The next,—”

The sentence was never concluded, for there came a rumble and a sharp, pervading jolt. The king stiffened, looked about in fear, and groped for the table. Following was a gentle quiver, which rapidly increased till it became an oscillation, and with it a deep rumbling. It ended in a mighty wrench, and a violent swaying, accompanied with a hoarse explosive sound. The stones of the palace were grinding and groaning. The table slid a yard, stopped, and shot back as the king tried to seize it.

I found myself plunging and lurching for a footing as the oscillation continued, and so were the king and Christopher. They sat down on the floor. Surely the violence would ease in a moment. Instead, the convulsion rose to a fearful crash, which sent my feet away and my body smashing on Christopher. He caught me with one hand and with the other diverted the flying table from the king.

The spasm ended abruptly, but the menacing tremble was again in play.

“Be careful!” rasped the king; “the third is the worst.”

As before, the quiver rose through oscillation to a heavy swaying, more violent than ever, and ended in a tumult of jerks, which sent us sliding and scrambling as we fought the portable things that were hurled about the room.

It was suddenly gone. We rose, much dazed. There was no sign of Beela at the window.

“It is over,” weakly said the king. “The worst in many years. And what has it done? It has terrified my people into madness. I see them.” He was losing self-control, and was staring as at a vision. “They are beginning to rise from the ground. Many are digging out of their ruined huts. . . . Their teeth are chattering. They look at one another in horror. No one has a sister, a brother, a father, a mother, a friend. All are blind and mad. . . . They run hither and thither. They—”

A confused screech and roar, as of wild animals driven to a focus by a surrounding forest fire, rang through the closed door of the room. The king listened.

The palace servants,” he mumbled through quivering lips. “They are seeking me—their father and protector. Imagine from this how the island is swarming and groaning, and with a terror that is half vengeance.”

The man was beside himself.

“Peace, Sire!” I begged, but he did not hear.

“The terror does not abate: it increases with the freer flow of their blood after the shock. .

They are beginning to think. They look at one another and see their kind; then kindred and friends. . . . ‘The Black Face!’ says one, softly. ‘Ay, the Black Face!’ is the louder reply.”

The king stood with clasped hands and closed eyes.

“‘This is only the beginning,’ they say. ‘The Black Face has been denied while it looked down on abundance.’ Who has denied it? The heavens ring with the answer, ‘Our father whom we loved, our protector whom we trusted, our king whom we have thought a brother of the gods. Why has he flouted the Face and challenged its wrath? What terrors or witcheries have been wrought by the gods of the people in the valley, that our king has gone driveling behind his walls?’

“Your Majesty!” I called, shaking him by the arm.

He opened glazed eyes, and listened to the howling din at his door.

“The guard are leaving the passes. The white people are wise; they understand, and are joyful. They send scouts. . . . My soldiers mingle with my roaring, mobbing people. They all push and roll through the pools of rain-water in the highways, churning them to mud. They grind their teeth; they laugh horribly, like imbeciles. The palace is their aim, and their king sits grinning and mumbling there. All the trouble has come from the people in the valley. The white blood breeds all there is of that in the world. May ten thousand curses fall on it!”

He was flinging his arms and lunging about. I woke to the urgency of action, for undoubtedly in his madness he had correctly seen the turbulence in the island, and the sweating hordes plunging over all roads converging to the palace. A glance passed between Christopher and me, and I nodded toward the door, which a packed, howling mass was already straining.

“Come,” I said, seizing the tottering king about the waist and dragging him to the anteroom. I thrust him within, and secured the door back of the curtain.

When I turned, Christopher, his hand on the key of the door into the corridor, was listening. There was no sign of Beela at the window.

“What’s going on?” I inquired.

“Her, sir.”

“She’s out there?” I asked in alarm.

“Yes, sir.”

“Open the door,” I ordered, stepping back to guard the anteroom.

He opened it, swinging behind it against the wall.

It was done so suddenly that those pressed against it fell into the room. The next came tumbling on them, and more on these, squeezing horrible sounds from the mouths of the lowermost, and bringing unpleasant grimaces to their faces. In a second the opening was jammed half way to the top, and still the pile grew. Behind it were frenzied men and women, vociferating prodigiously, and fighting for the diminishing passage to the king.

The pressure outside being somewhat relieved, one of the more agile men leaped on the pile and sprang with a howl to the floor; but Christopher had emerged, and a blow from him dropped the adventurer. The next, less active than the first, was scrambling over the heap, and paused as he found himself grazed by the flying body of the first, for Christopher had picked him up and tossed him over the heap into the pandemonium beyond. The following man drew back, and slid down to the corridor floor.

I had been looking for Beela without, but she was not in range.

Before another maniac could mount the pile, Christopher had dragged a body off the squirming mass and flung it out. Another followed, and another, and others, the succession of them so close that none dared breast the fusillade. Christopher streamed with sweat, and the mildness in his eyes had become a glare.

All this had a cooling effect in the corridor. Christopher, not waiting to look for cracked ribs at the bottom of the heap, cleared the last away, and walked forth. None can say how much his unearthly pale eyes, minatory expression, and extraordinary figure had to do with what followed. I went to the door. A hush fell as he advanced on the mob, which fell back in silent terror. With each hand he seized a man, jammed their heads together with a murderous thwack, shook them, stood them up, left them stunned, and immediately snatched two others and treated them similarly. A third pair and a fourth nursed aching skulls. Christopher swept through the groups with two long, strong arms for scythes, mowing a wide swath as he brushed women along, sent a man spinning from a blow, dashed another against the wall, and brought them into subjugation with a counter-panic of his own manufacture. He came upon two men with some appearance of character, and ordered them to finish the work and send the people to their quarters. They obeyed him promptly. At last he sauntered back to me, calm but puffing.

Beela approached from the opposite direction. I stepped forward in gladness to meet her.

CHAPTER XX. *A Habit of Concealment.* Beela Undergoes a Transformation. The Uprising of the People. Contrition of Beela. I Declare Myself. An Amazing Disclosure by the King.

“What news, my friend?” I cheerily inquired.

“We’ll go to the king’s reception-room and talk,” she answered, looking at Christopher. “Dear old Christopher!” she said, deep and sweet.

“Yes,” I remarked; “I left the king in the anteroom.” Christopher and I followed her into the reception-room.

“He’s not there now,” she replied, seating herself, “but with the queen. Christopher, go and stand down the corridor, opposite the queen’s apartments, and wait for the king. Those lunatics may break loose again when they hear the mob outside the wall.”

He started.

“Christopher!” she called. He turned. “Do you love me?”

“Yes, ma’am.”

“That’s all.”

I had never seen her so calm and steady, so rich in ultimate qualities, so little the volatile, meteoric, yet wise child-woman who had been my sunshine, my tease, my playfellow. She had become a composed and gracious woman. It came to me with something like pain that this was the truer and finer Beela. There was another feeling,—one of a great need in my life.

She wore a becoming dress that might have suited either a woman or a man; but everything about her spoke of the sweetness and grace that only a lovely woman can have. I was tired of the foolish Beelo sham. We had grown too near for me longer to tolerate that absurd barrier.

“Now for your news, dear Beela,” I asked.

There was the slightest start when she heard that pronunciation of the name, but she did not turn to me at once.

“When the earthquake began,” she said, “I ran to the queen, for such things frighten her dreadfully. After it was over there came the uproar by the servants. I locked the queen’s apartments and kept them out. But their noise frightened her even more than the earthquake, for they battered her doors, It wouldn’t do to admit them. Presently the king came by the private entrance, and although he was badly shaken, the necessity to comfort the queen brought him composure. They are together and quiet now. Then I came to this corridor, where the servants were massed against the door. I could do nothing with them. For a moment I was frightened when the door opened, but when I saw what Christopher’s plan was, I knew that all was safe. I went then and secured the gates opening to the palace grounds.”

“And what’s ahead, Beela?”

“The worst,” she quietly answered, but gave me a slow, mischievous look over that repetition of her feminine name. “We have a little time before the king comes,” she brightly added, “and we need it to rest.” There was a challenge in her glance.

“But the mob is coming!” I protested.

“The king told me that you and Christopher and I should be quiet till it assembles. Then he will come for you.”

I drew up my stool facing her, took both her hands, and said:

“I have a confession to make, dear friend.”

“Really, Joseph?” she exclaimed in mock alarm, pronouncing the name perfectly.

“You know. And you’ve been only pretending that English wasn’t perfectly familiar to you.”

She gave a musical, purring little laugh. Any man would deserve great credit for self-restraint in resisting it—and the chin. Thenceforward she spoke in English of the purest accent.

“What’s the confession, Joseph?”

“I’ve known something for a long time, Beela, and I’ve been deceiving you with thinking that I didn’t know; but I did so because you evidently wished me to be deceived. Everything might have gone wrong if I had betrayed my knowledge to you. But it has served its time. You will forgive me for deceiving you,—dear?”

All that went to make her a miracle of precious womanhood was vibrant. There was the same sweet flutter that I had seen before in her velvety throat. Of course she enjoyed her little triumph of knowing that even for a time her deception had prospered, and she was a-thrill with the recollection of it. After that came contrition. A half-smile lingered on her lips, though her eyes were rueful.

“You are good and generous, Joseph, for not giving me a chiding word; and I don’t think there is the least of it in your big heart.”

“Chiding, sweet girl? I understood your feeling for the necessity of the deception. Your wish is my law, and to serve it is less a duty than a privilege.”

There was a slight puzzle in the glow that flooded her heavenly eyes.

“You found it out all by yourself, Joseph?”

“Yes, dear.”

“That is remarkable. Neither Christopher nor Annabel gave you the smallest hint? They knew.”

“Not the smallest.” The hurt of their keeping the secret from me must have shown in my face, for Beela laughed teasingly. It restored me. “You pledged Annabel not to tell me,” I said, “and Christopher is silent,—and a gentleman. Is that the explanation?”

“Yes.” A soft embarrassment crept over her, and she gently withdrew her hands and sat regarding me in sweet content. “I also have a confession to make, Joseph.” She tried hard to look just a trifle anxious.

“What, dear?”

“Joseph!” she cried, frowning and stamping; “how can I think when that is in your eyes and your voice! I won’t look, and I won’t listen.” She turned her shoulder to me.

“What is in my eyes and my voice, dear?”

She sat still a moment, and then slowly turned her head a trifle and peered at me as if baffled.

“You mustn’t tease me, Joseph.”

She saw my smile and again turned away.

“What is the confession?” I asked.

“Let’s go back to the beginning. There were two real reasons why I posed as a boy. One was that it gave me more freedom of limb for going through the forest and for scaling the valley wall, and the other was that it made me less conspicuous to the guards,—I could have escaped if they had detected me. On my word, dear Joseph, I never intended to deceive you long about that.”

She cautiously looked round at me, for I was silent. A cheap resentment at learning that I had been unnecessarily tricked must have betrayed itself, for the dear girl took my hands.

“Joseph,” she began.

“Then why did you keep it up, dear?” I asked.

“Joseph, the time was when your want of perception was mistaken by me for dulness, for obtuseness,—for such a lack of understanding as makes a man or a woman not worth while. But I discovered that it was not dulness at all. For a time I refused to believe that a human being could have what I saw in you.”

If I have ever seen wondering fondness it was in her eyes.

“What was it, dear?” I asked uneasily.

“Your trust which sees only the true, and, unwittingly taking into your heart the false with the true, makes the false true with your trust.”

I was silent with the deep thankfulness that God had sent such a woman into the world and into my meager life.

“So, Joseph, I prolonged that deception until all doubt of what you are was gone. I am glad that I did, and am sorry that I can think of no more tests.” There was a dash of her dear mischief in that speech. “And now that this is a time of confession and understanding,—you started it, remember,—I must say that one of the deceptions played on you They were really harmless, weren’t they, dear Joseph?”

“Perfectly,” I smiled.

“—That one of them was unnecessary. It was such fun to play those pranks on you, Joseph! I couldn’t help it. I know it was wicked, but you were always gentle and kind, and I knew you would forgive me. Joseph, you would forgive me anything, wouldn’t you?”

“Yes, dear heart.”

“It was delicious to see you walking so trustingly through the complications that beset you.

“Dear!” I cried, my senses afloat and my arms aching for her; “I am only human. Your sweetness

She pushed back her chair before my advance.

“And you don’t know in the least,” she went flying on, “how often I had to leap from one of my selves to the other, and how exciting it was.”

I was getting little out of her chatter except the music of her voice and the picture of loveliness that she made.

“Don’t you care to know which of the deceptions was unnecessary?” she demanded, trying to look injured.

“Indeed I do.”

She came and stood beside me, gazing down into my face and clasping my hand warmly in both her own.

“Beela,” she answered.

“Beela?” after a mystified pause; then, thinking that she was teasing, I laughed.

She appeared much relieved, and brightly said:

“I’m glad you understand and forgive me. . . . But you resented her at first.”

“Beelo had become very precious, dear, and so my readjustments where you are concerned are slow. But a new fondness grew with Beela’s coming.”

“Poor Joseph! And she wasn’t necessary. I am sorry now that I—”

“*She? Who?*”

“Beela.”

I was a little taken aback, but came to my feet with a dazzling consciousness that all the glories of earth were packed into this moment.

“Not at first, dear,” I said, “but in time she became more necessary than my life. My heart sits in gratitude at Lentala’s feet for sending me her sweet sister.”

She was stricken into a statue, and was staring at me as at some strange creature from another planet.

I stood in silent misery. How had I hurt her?

She took a turn of the room, and flung herself on her knees at the couch, buried her face in her arms, and went into laughter mingled with sobs. I seated myself on the couch and laid a caressing hand on her head.

“Beela,” I pleaded, “forgive me. Let me know what I have done that hurt you.”

“No,” she cried. “I wouldn’t for all the world! My heart is breaking with gladness!”

Surely no other mortal could have put such startling contradictions into so few words. My hand found hers; she caught it tight.

“You dear old Joseph!” she said. “Choseph, Choseph!”

It was plainly hysteria; the brave soul had been on a breaking strain too long. I drew her to me, bent her head to my shoulder, and pressed my cheek to hers.

“Dear heart!” I said.

She made no resistance, and gradually grew quiet.

“Sweet,” I went on, “we have been through many trials together, and there are more ahead. . . . The days were dark till Beelo came. He stole into my heart with hope, courage, and love. A shock came when he passed. I don’t know, but perhaps I never should have loved you but for him. He was the sunny highway leading to you; and now I have the daring to lay my love and my life at your feet.”

The sigh that drifted through her parted lips had no threat for my anxiety, but she did not answer. Her hand gently drew mine down from her cheek, and she rose. She studied me a moment.

“Let’s talk, Joseph. Perhaps we have been hasty.” I noted her patient weariness in her voice. She sat beside me, and after a short silence resumed: “I have never loved a man till it hasn’t been possible here. But you have known beautiful, lovely women.”

“Yes.”

“And liked them very much.”

“Very much.”

Her glance fell, and a little quiver crossed her lips.

“You have known Annabel a long time. You were close to her; you and she talked long and often.”

“Yes.”

“She is beautiful and sweet.”

“Exceptionally so.”

“And accomplished—and gracious—and has good manners and a velvet voice.”

“All of that.”

“And she’s kind—and gentle—and has high principles.”

“True.”

“She belongs to your people, your world.”

I only smiled.

“Joseph,” raising her sad eyes to mine, “you have loved her once, and now love me?”

“I have never loved Annabel, dear heart, but I do love you.”

“Why haven’t you loved her? How could you help it?”

“Because I was waiting for you.”

“You have never told her that you loved her?”

“No. But, dear Beela, I can’t discuss Annabel in this way.”

Her eyes blazed. “She loves you!”

“That is not true; and no one has the right to say such a thing of a woman without knowing that her love is returned.”

Beela bit her lip, and came stiffly to her feet.

“You are unkind!” she exclaimed. “I have a right—a woman’s right—to reasons for believing what is incredible without them.”

The picture of outraged dignity that she made was so ravishing that I feared my adoration would override the sternness which I had taken so much trouble to set in my face.

“What is incredible, dear?”

She impatiently turned away. I think she did it to hide a smile, but she was too wary to answer. Instead, she drew from her bosom the little toilet case I had given Lentala on the day of the feast, and gravely examined her reflection.

“If I were beautiful like Annabel,—” she began.

“Beela!”

“—or Lentala, and—”

“Beela! “

“—and were pink and white—”

“Beela!”

She made exactly such a face at herself in the mirror as Lentala had, and suddenly turned on me.

“Joseph, Lentala used to be beautiful and good and true, and an angel.”

“She is all of that yet.”

She returned the case to her bosom.

“I think you nearly loved her once.”

My tongue was silent. Beela laughed mischievously; little devils were dancing in her eyes.

“Joseph, I’m serious. Reflect; because it wouldn’t be wise to act hastily now and suffer for the rest of life. Annabel would make a perfect wife. She would play no pranks and childish deceptions. You understand her and she knows you. I’m only a wild, uncouth savage.”

“Anything more, dear?” I wearily asked.

She gathered breath to resume: “And there’s Lentala. She is to be a queen some day, and very rich. With rank and wealth, she would be a shining woman in America, and her husband would be the happiest man in the world; for with all of that he would have the far richer treasure of her love.”

“A worthy man will come to her some day, Beela.”

“Didn’t you think she was—was fascinating?”

“I do think so.”

“Reflect again, Joseph: Would you prefer her poor, obscure, wild little sister?”

“Yes. But what right have we to make so free with Lentala’s name, especially as she is foreign to the matter?”

Again Beela was offended, but she controlled herself.

“You would be ashamed of me with people of your kind.”

“You alone are of my kind, dear Beela; and shame for you would be shame for myself, shame for all that is precious to me.”

“Suppose, Joseph, that I should refuse to leave this island.”

“The highest privilege of my life would be to stay here with you.”

She stood in a melting happiness.

Her rosy mouth was conveniently near. I should have been a fool to let the opportunity pass, and she was not on her guard. She drew back too late. The dignity with which she came to her feet had a new tenderness. I also rose. She gazed at me with a wistfulness that searched all the hidden places in my soul. Never had she been so lovely as in this moment.

“Dear Joseph, take more time. There is something . . . you don’t know, though I . . . thought you understood. Now I dare not A great fear fills me.”

“Love knows no fear, sweetheart.”

“Not for itself but for its loved ones. Joseph, will you forgive me? It was a foolish thing to do, and I am very, very sorry. Your trust has shamed me. Dear Joseph, I But first let me tell you

something else. The colony must now be marching out of the valley, for I told Captain Mason that a severe earthquake would be his signal for starting at once. Annabel is coming, and—”

The door opened to the king and Christopher. His Majesty, anxious and broken though he was, gave us an approving smile,—perhaps from what he read in our faces.

“My maddened people are gathering,” he said. “It was wise of you to lock the gates, my child. When the crowd grows larger it will begin an assault. That will be the time for me to appear. I will call out the soldiers from the crowd and put them under your command.”

That surprised me. “Pardon me, Sire. I understood your Majesty to say an hour ago that *Lentala* was to have command.”

“So I did.”

“But your Majesty has just said that *Beela* is to have it.”

“Beela? I couldn’t have said that, as I don’t know any such person.

I was dismayed at the king’s apparent condition, and Beela in great perturbation was trying to speak. The man must be roused from his shaken state.

“This is Beela, Sire, *Lentala*’s sister.”

“She has no sister,” he answered clearly, and turned sharply on Beela. “*Lentala*, have you been playing one of your pranks?” He hurried her away as she was trying to speak.