

CHAPTER XXI. *Both Sides of the Wall.* A Mob at the Palace Gate. What the King Heard Through the Wall. Lentala's Call on Christopher to Save Her. The King Abdicates. Long Live the Queen!

Habit is the strongest force in animate nature. Though I was shaken, the bent of an urgent purpose remained, and I went forward to it with all the will at my command.

The roar of a mob—that most horrible of sounds—smote my hearing when Christopher and I emerged from the palace into the grounds. A turn in a broad, curving walk through the trees brought the barred main gate into view. It was a massive affair of wood, iron, and bolts, with a small wicket, which was closed.

The king, all alone, wearing his crown and his cloak of state, was awaiting us near the gate. He beckoned us to raise a ladder to the wall. It was done.

"I will presently go up alone," he said, calm but sad, "and will talk to them. Men have gone for a heavy beam with which to ram the gate. The crowd is densely packed here. That will make an attack on the gate impossible for a time. It is likely that the soldiers will assemble and clear a working space."

"What can we do, Sire?" I asked.

"Nothing now. The most that I can hope for is to hold the situation until Lentala returns."

"She has gone?"

"Yes. It was something about the white people. I couldn't keep her. She was confident we could hold the mob."

"And your Majesty's plan—?"

"I will show myself on the wall, and talk to them. At the proper moment I will call you up. If I am stricken down, you and your brother retreat to the palace. Defend it by any means and at any cost."

His sorrow was too great to be companioned by fear, and it bore an impressive dignity which his haggardness intensified.

"The mob is swelling rapidly," he said with perfect quiet. "Unless a diversion happens soon, many will be crushed against the gate and the wall."

Seeing that he stood inactive, I wondered whether he was so numbed as to be incapacitated; but he cleared the doubt.

"If the beam-carriers force their way through the mass, many will be maimed or killed. I am listening to the sounds."

His coolness and clearness were remarkable. Christopher, unruffled, was studying our surroundings.

"There come the beam-carriers," said the king. "They are much excited, and are not working smoothly together. . . . One fell then; he was stepped on and hurt. . . . Now they are forging ahead. They are blindly ramming the mass before them. . . . A woman is hurt."

The king's back was to the ladder and the wall. He was gazing into space behind me, listening.

". . . Hark! Yes, that is he,—one of Gato's captains, a big, strong man, with a great voice. He has just arrived, fighting his way through the crowd, and calling the soldiers, telling them that I have murdered Gato. I have been kind to this man. On the chance of Gato's being out of the way, he sees his opportunity to step into his leader's shoes, carry out his plan, and usurp the throne. . . . The soldiers are rallying. They fight ruthlessly for passage to the captain. . . . It is bungling, cruel work."

"Isn't this the moment for you to appear, Sire?" We had to shout.

“No.”

“Let me go up.”

“No.” He was firm as well as calm. “Wait. The soldiers are unwittingly preparing my moment. I have partisans as well as enemies there. If I showed myself now, it would increase the frenzy. My friends and enemies would at once begin a fight of factions. They could not, would not, hear my voice. I will let the soldiers clear the way.”

We waited.

“Why don’t they scale the wall, Sire?”

“That will come later,—by the soldiers.”

He stood listening. That was trying to my mercurial nature, and almost a mad desire to be over the wall in the thick of the mêlée was straining within me.

The king produced a key, handed it to me, and composedly said:

“That opens the vault containing the cargo from the white people’s vessel, including the arms. If I fall, you and your brother will know what to do in defending the palace. But don’t be hasty. Be merciful if you can. This outbreak will not last long. Violent earthquakes are likely to come again at any moment, and the red fire and purple flame on the summit make me think that there may be a volcanic eruption.”

“What will happen then?”

“The white people will seize the opportunity to escape from the valley,—if they have not already started. That would mean the annihilation of the entire party, for all the Senatras, including the army, would fall upon them. Then my people would be satisfied, and order would be restored.”

My respect for his insight gave his words a crushing force. But what did it mean that Lentala had told Captain Mason to bring the colony out?

I was moving toward the ladder under an impulse to be in action, but a firm grasp fell on my arm. An apologetic look of warning reminded me that Christopher never slept when a beloved one was in danger.

The king had noticed nothing, so deeply absorbed was he. A puzzle was sharpening his senses and wrinkling his brow.

“I don’t understand that,” he said.

“What, Sire?”

“I wish I knew that Lentala was safe.”

“How could she be in danger, your Majesty?”

“Her white blood. It makes her too daring.” He was looking about, but his attitude of concentrated listening returned. “There it is again!” he exclaimed.

“What, your Majesty?”

He did not answer for a while; then, “Do you hear that?”

“Yes.”

“It is a new trouble. It started on the outskirts of the mob, and is drawing nearer. . . . I can’t make it out.”

He was at the highest pitch of alertness, and was silent for a time.

“Don’t you hear the voice? That is no Senatra! His cries—don’t you hear them, man? . . . The people are falling away from him in terror. . . . Don’t you hear?”

“Yes, Sire.”

“They are crying, ‘A demon sent by the Black Face! He will take our children, and the hungry Face will devour them!’ Don’t you hear that?”

“Something of it, Sire.”

“The people are stricken with fear. . . . The women are fighting to escape. Don’t you hear their screams?”

“Yes, Sire. Isn’t it time to mount the wall?”

“No. There is no foreseeing what this diversion will accomplish.”

There was a pause.

“He is advancing toward the gate, bellowing. Surely you hear him?”

“Yes, Sire.” My heart bounded, for I recognized the voice.

“He is crying in English, ‘They brought me out to eat me!’ He thinks we are cannibals!” exclaimed the king, aghast.

“All the white people in the valley think so, your Majesty.”

He blazed with resentment, but his attention was again concentrated on the proceedings without.

“He is calling me the chief of the cannibals,” resumed the king, “and is fighting his way to the gate. He shouts that he must be the first to enter, and that he will find me and strangle me. . . . He is a maniac. The natives have a horror of that malady. The noise is subsiding. Don’t you notice?”

“Yes, Sire; and now I will rescue the madman.”

I started for the ladder, but with a fierce grip the king withheld me.

“Would you be a fool and spoil everything?” he shouted in a sudden fury.

He was again composed and listening. “Wonderful!” he said. “Some of the men, seeing how easily he clears the way, are hailing him as a leader. They are not the soldiers. . . . The beam-bearers are advancing again, for the madman is opening a passage. They carry the beam on their shoulders. . . . They are gradually approaching the gate. Don’t you hear the lunatic shouting?”

“Yes, Sire.”

“A considerable body of soldiers must be massed at the gate, awaiting the bearers, but they are silent. They must be consulting what to do. They are drawing their swords.”

“Sire!” I cried; “I won’t let that happen.”

“Wait,” he peremptorily commanded. “What is that?” He was listening more breathlessly than before. “Strange! . . . Strange! . . . It—”

“What is it?” I demanded in a rage of impatience.

“I don’t understand,” he resumed after a pause. “What can make it? There is no earthquake. Did you feel one?”

“No, Sire. But I can’t—”

“Wait.” His clutch was on my arm. “Surely it can’t be the white people from the valley!”

He reeled, and I seized the instant to spring upon the ladder. But I had forgotten Christopher. He turned me round to face the king.

The stricken monarch was standing in a tenseness sprung from unnamable fears. But he started as something new fell on his hearing.

“No,” he said, “not they. Something else. They are growing more quiet. . . . It is a woman. . . . They are hailing her. She speaks. Don’t you hear her voice?”

I could hear only a blur of noises.

“She is shaming the women. . . . And sending them away. . . . She is my friend! . . . Do you know the voice?” He seized my arm and gazed into my face.

“No, Sire.”

“She is fighting her way through the men. . . . She calls them fools, cowards, ingrates. . . . They are dazed. . . . Only one woman on all this island would have the courage to do that.”

“Sire, if you—”

“She is calling, pleading; she is saying that I am the kind, wise father of them all.”

I turned to Christopher, and found a startling transformation. No longer was he the dull, patient, waiting man. Every nerve was strung.

The king’s mouth was open; his eyes bulged; his clutch on my arm tightened.

“Listen!” he commanded. “She is—”

“Sire, you must mount the wall. We must rescue her!”

“No, no! She is in little danger. May the gods give her strength! . . . Hush! What is that? . . . They are going forward with the beam. She is standing erect upon it. . . . Did you hear that?”

“What, Sire?”

“The soldiers are advancing with drawn swords.”

With a violent effort I broke the king’s grasp and sprang for the ladder, but a giant hand fell on my shoulder and thrust me back. Above the subsiding din rose a clear, unterrified call from without:

“Christopher! Christopher!”

He had been waiting for that. His answer rang keen and far, and he leaped upon the ladder.

“Come when I call,” he said to us.

In a moment he was on the wall. In another he had deliberately sent the ladder crashing to the ground. He studied the outer scene a moment, crouched, and sprang into the maelstrom.

Five thousand throats opened at the spectacle.

“The gate, Sire! Give me the gate key!” I shouted.

“No! It would be death. The ladder!”

I knew that Christopher must have acted intelligently in throwing the ladder. Had he done it merely to delay our ascent? When it was up, the king interposed before my clutch at the rungs.

“Your king first,” he said.

“Mount then, Sire, in heaven’s name,” cried I, cursing inwardly at the delay and my own impotence.

“Stay below until I summon you,” said his Majesty.

“Your appearance at this time may bring ruin to us all.”

Vaguely realizing that he was in the right, I gritted my teeth and waited.

Meanwhile, what was happening to Christopher and Lentala in that swirl of blind mob passion beyond the wall, and what meant the groans of men and the clang of metal? Christopher might save her life until the king should create a diversion, but what could a man do for himself, with a hundred swords at his breast?

As with dignity and deliberation King Rangan stepped upon the broad top of the wall, the afternoon sun came forth in imperial splendor, and wrapped him in its glory. He slowly faced the mob, raised his hand, and held it firmly aloft.

He had been seen before assuming the impressive attitude, and a mighty shout of mingled adoration and derision arose; it continued jarringly till he raised his hand; then gradually it fell into the deep roar of breakers after a storm, and thus faded to a silence broken only by the rumble of distant hordes moving on the palace. The king swept the multitude with his gaze, and spoke:

“Your king has grown old in service to his people, and now—”

“Gato! Gato! Give us Gato!”

“Every true subject of mine holds his life at the service of his king.”

“Give us Gato!”

The king stood in an iron silence.

“Show us Gato! We must see him! We must have him!”

Rangan raised both arms, and a hush fell.

“Very well,” his deep voice rang out. “You shall have Gato.”

Before I could recover from my surprise he turned to me, tossed me a key, and in a manner that showed his perfect seriousness, ordered me to bring Gato immediately.

“Is all well with my brother and Lentala, Sire?” I begged.

“Yes, but go at once!”

I dashed through the grounds and the palace to the dungeon door, which upon reaching I flung open, and, unable to see within, said sharply:

“Bring Gato.” An echo as of emptiness buffeted my voice. “Be quick!” I called.

A stir began to rise. “What is going on?” stole a voice.

“Bring Gato!” I shouted, with a fury in my voice that brought immediate response.

The shadows took dim shapes, stooped and lifted something heavy, and shuffled hastily toward the door.

“On my shoulder!” I rapped.

They laid him across. I slammed the door, locked it, staggered up the steps, and arrived at the foot of the ladder.

The king was still addressing the mob, but his glance fell upon me in answer to my call.

“Bring him up,” he commanded. Again turning to the crowd, he said: “Gato is here. You shall see him; you shall have him. From him you will learn what it means to betray your king.”

I was nearly at the top of the ladder, which sagged and cracked under the double weight. The king made a detaining gesture toward me.

“Where is the ladder that I ordered?” he asked of those without.

“Here, Sire,” answered a liquid voice that ran sweetly over the wall and into my heart.

“Place it, you men. Good. Now you shall have Gato.”

I clambered upon the top.

“Stand him up to face the people,” directed the king for all to hear.

I dragged the stiffening Gato to his feet, and, my breast against his back and my arms locked round his body, turned him to the crowd. An inability to credit the senses held them dumb at first. They looked from one to another, horror in their eyes. His Majesty was calmly observing; then he spoke in the awed silence, and his voice carried grief and pity.

“You have called for Gato. Behold him! The gods have long, swift arms for those who strike at your king and you, O my people!”

A groan swept over the multitude; it passed, leaving a stillness inconceivably impressive.

“You wished to see Gato; you have seen him. You demanded him; you shall have him.” He gave me an order.

I raised Gato aloft, and started toward the gate, where the soldiers were massed. In a loud voice the king cried:

“Unfaithful soldiers of the king, take your leader!”

I hurled Gato down among them. The heavy body struck something,—I did not see what. Lentala was standing between the soldiers and the gate. Neither Christopher nor Mr. Vancouver was anywhere visible. The people, including the soldiers, were smitten deeply.

“Lentala!” rang the king’s voice.

A way to the foot of the ladder opened, and the king gave her a hand at the top. Deep sadness was in her eyes, as she turned them for a moment upon me.

The king, still holding her hand, reached for mine also. Standing thus between us, he addressed the throng:

“My people, these two and the one who leaped from the wall have been tried as by fire. They would die for their king if he but gave the word. You have seen Gato. Behold these!”

He gazed on the cowed soldiers, and resumed:

“Soldiers of the king, did I but raise my hand, thousands of my loyal and loving people would rend you where you stand. What should be done, my children,” turning to the mob, “to honored and trusted sons who would steal upon their father to strike him down with an assassin’s knife?”

A murmur which rapidly swelled, and a stir which began to seethe, warned the king.

“Peace!” he cried. “A king can forgive. My soldiers were never bad at heart; they were led away. Soldiers of the king, raise a hand in token of your loyalty.”

Every one obeyed. Besides those at the gate were many throughout the crowd.

“Your faithless leader gone, I appoint Lentala, my daughter, as commander of the army.

There was a craning of necks. The soldiers made no concealment of their surprise, but in their gratitude for the king’s pardon shouted their acceptance.

The king laid his hand on Lentala’s head.

“I now make this proclamation: I am old and broken, and the grief of this day has brought me near the end. To this one, true and wise, brave and devoted, so deeply loved and trusted by us all, I resign the ruler-ship of my people.” He removed his crown and cloak, and placed them on her. “Obey her as you love her, and peace and security will abide with you. This is your ruler henceforth.” He raised both arms, and, after a pause, cried, “Obeisance and greetings to Queen Lentala!”

A thrill ran through the gathering, and all sank to the ground. I was on my knees at her feet, pressing her fingers to my lips and trying to speak.

“Joseph!” she scolded under her breath, giving my hand a little squeeze; “don’t do that! How can I cry when you are so absurd!” Tears were falling from her lashes. She turned, put her arms on the king’s shoulders, and bowed her head, while mighty salvos of huzzas rent the skies.

CHAPTER XXII. *Wit and Dash to the Fore.* The New Sovereign Assumes Charge. Our Plans for Escape Go Awry. Victims Taken to the Sacrificial Altar. A Bold Act Turns a Tragic Event.

It was some time before Lentala could lift her face to her subjects. The king’s renunciation—the finishing touch to the bold diplomacy with which he had turned the crisis—had come to her as a bolt from heaven. I wondered how it would affect her deeply laid plans for the rescue of the colony; for, though it would give her extraordinary power, it would abruptly check her irresponsible freedom of movement. Furthermore, it had thrust upon her the necessity for swift rearrangement. Her hold on neither the people nor the army had been firmly secured. I knew that her quick understanding apprehended the new complications, and that she understood the king’s wisdom fitted to the hour’s need. She gave me a frightened look, and brightened under my smile.

With reassuring words the old man disengaged her hands, stepped back, and left her to face the crowd. Thus she stood alone between us. It seemed a cruelly trying moment in which to place a girl, but she made the fight to face her duty. It was not long. Her voice, tremulous at first, stole out clear and fine, reaching to the limits of the crowd; and as she proceeded it came rounder and fuller, bearing the richness that I knew.

“Thank you, my people. With the deepest love I accept the crown, and I pledge my life to wear it worthily. Only love and trust me as you have loved and trusted the good father who has ruled

us so long and so kindly, and you will find me faithful. This great change comes upon us at a trying time. Neither a king nor a queen can govern a people without their consent and love and confidence. Give me time to show that I am worthy of all that from you. I shall still have the advice of the good man who has placed upon me the crown, and of his able advisers. But I shall trust your own hearts and heads more than all the wisdom of the palace. I shall trust your confidence in me more than my power over you.

“We all know that there is a special cause for the present unrest. But be patient. The problem is not difficult, and you may depend upon me and my advisers to solve it. Every impatient act of yours shows distrust of your government, and if you rashly do anything to weaken the power of the crown, you lay yourselves open to dangers. The white people in the valley are only awaiting the moment when authority is destroyed and our people are in disorder to come forth and work havoc among us. They stand together as one, and are cool and not afraid. Those are the greatest powers that human beings in community can have. If you had worked your will today, how many of you would be alive tomorrow? Our beautiful island would have flowed with blood—the blood of our people.”

She ceased for a moment, to observe the effect. It ran as a low, frightened murmur.

“But nothing can go wrong if we ourselves keep cool and hold together and trust to the crown. The army will camp tonight in the palace walls, and every care will be taken to keep order in the kingdom. All will be well if you yourselves are calm. Therefore I command you one and all to go at once to your homes, and remain there in quiet and peace. No matter though storms may come, or the earth tremble, or the fires under the ground break forth, be not afraid; trust your queen and your army, for we have no fear. Be as brave and cheerful as we. All your problems will be solved, all your reasonable wishes will be granted, but that must be done by your queen.” She raised her arms in the manner of Rangan, and impressively added:

“Go now, with my love and my blessing.”

Another wave of affectionate loyalty swept over the multitude; it began to disintegrate, and to pacify and turn back belated incomers; but a shrill cry rose:

“Sacrifice! Give us a sacrifice!”

It had an instant effect. The moving crowd halted, and the cry ran to many throats, “Sacrifice! Sacrifice!”

The queen turned to old Rangan, and he almost imperceptibly nodded. Lentala hesitated as she faced the mob again, but refrained from looking at me. She raised her hand.

“Be patient!” she cried.

“Sacrifice! Sacrifice!”

“You shall have—”

The rest was drowned in a threatening shout. Lentala stood dazed, and in the ensuing buzzing and movement lost any opportunity she might have desired for further speech. So she stood as the still noisy crowd straggled off. Unrest had been rekindled, but to what extent I could not guess. The last loiterers often stopped to gaze at the little group on the wall, and the army stood in soldierly ranks before the gate.

“The army will salute the queen,” commanded Lentala.

It was finely given with the sword, and the men heartily responded to the oath that she gave them as soldiers of the queen. With a gesture to us that we follow, she tripped down the ladder, opened the gate, and admitted the army to the grounds. Next, after sending to liberate the soldiers in the dungeon, she had the palace astir with an order to prepare for the army a feast and accommodations for the night.

Rangan had been a silent observer of her whirlwind movements. I was not wholly satisfied with what I saw in his face, but with whatever else that I saw there was admiration. Obviously she was permitting him to remain until he should be satisfied that she was capable of assuming command of the army. As matters were quieting she asked him to go to his wife, and he tottered away, shaking his head and mumbling to himself.

She ordered the army to break ranks. The men showed their relief with childish inconsequence, and scattered at will. That left us alone. The bright look that she turned to me was a sudden change from royal sternness to Beela's challenge. She was my little work-mate of the valley.

Something had risen between us; consciousness of it showed in her glance, and I was sore without that. To have tricked me so unnecessarily as to Beela seemed wanton and cruel. Unreasonable as it may appear, I had been shocked so deeply that time for recovery would be required. I had seen the craftiness with the gentleness of the native blood in old Rangan. I had seen his hatred of the white man, and the merciless savagery that his show of benevolence masked. It had made me distrustful of the native blood, which composed half of Lentala. To the sweet, childish Beela whom I loved had been added something that—

“Choseph!”

I started, but could not bring a smile into the look that I gave her, even though the call had been Beela's.

“Don't you want to hear what has happened to me?” she asked, ignoring my stolidity.

“Yes, your Majesty.”

She stiffened slightly under that address, and subtly put Beela aside for the queen. With a hint of coldness she said:

“At the beginning of the outbreak I foresaw that Mr. Vancouver's guard would decamp; so I went to look after him; but he had already gone after being left alone. I followed him. That brought me to the crowd. When I found myself in danger there, I called Christopher. His daring leap from the wall and the fury with which he laid about him confused the crowd. He was helped by some loyal subjects whom his conduct inspired. I don't know how many skulls he cracked, but no one was killed. I pointed out the men for him to silence. No one could resist him. When he called for the king to ascend, he took Mr. Vancouver in charge and slipped away.”

I nodded, but she must have seen my gratitude for her taking such risks on Mr. Vancouver's account. Doubtless that was what made her eyes flash, but at the moment I did not know why. I reflected only that two matters of overshadowing importance must be attended to at once, and that possibly her plans had been disarranged.

“What has become of Christopher and Mr. Vancouver, your Majesty?” I asked.

“I told Christopher to take Mr. Vancouver to the hut, where Mr. Rawley was waiting,” she answered, “and then go to meet the colony.”

“Thank you. What is to be done with the colony, and what am I to do?”

She raised her eyes, and there was no trace of Beela in them. “I had asked Captain Mason,” she answered, “to have each member of the colony bring all the food possible, and had told him that you and Christopher would meet him in the first darkness following the earthquake, at a certain pass just to the west of the clearing where the sacrificial altar is, and that as the natives would be demoralized by the earthquake, you could lead them without much risk past the settlement to your vessel, which might be sailed away at once.”

My wonder and gratitude at the intelligence of her plan must have shown in my face, but her tone had no warmth when she added:

“Fortunately, matters have turned out so that I can take the army out of your way. The real danger lay there.”

That was why she had admitted the soldiers to the palace grounds and locked the gate. Could any other have given so brilliant a turn to a threatening situation? Yet I only looked at her in silence, and her face had not a trace of the old friendliness. Perhaps it was my own fault. There rang in my ears the demand for a sacrifice; I recalled old Rangan’s nod; I remembered the defenseless position of Rawley and Mr. Vancouver; and the brown blood in the Senatra queen unaccountably looked different from the brown blood in Beela.

“Your Majesty,” I said, “I will go now and see that all is well with Mr. Vancouver; then I will go and assure a clear opening for the colony, and arrange for Mr. Vancouver and Rawley to join us as we move down the eastern side of the settlement to the harbor.

“Yes,” she agreed. I was turning away, but she stopped me. “You will reflect,” she said, “that many people in the island are ignorant of what has taken place here today. I will send out runners, but still the entire island can’t be covered. All know that a white man has been held for sacrifice to the Black Face in order to stop the earthquakes and avert an eruption. If the earthquake returns, even the people who saw me crowned may become uncontrollable. Should that happen, I am not sufficiently sure of the army to trust it in stopping a sacrifice. There is just one thing to do.”

She ceased, and regarded me waitingly.

“What is it, your Majesty?”

She hardened still more. “Let’s consider the situation calmly. If some very strong diversion should arise tonight, the colony could pass through to the vessel without risk. On the other hand, the people are alarmed and restless; they won’t sleep soundly; many may be abroad in every direction. If some of them should see the colony escaping, a cry might be raised that would ring from one end of the island to the other. That would mean the instant gathering of a mob which no power could resist, and the colony would be annihilated.”

“I see, your Majesty. What diversion would prevent it?”

“The sacrifice of Mr. Vancouver and Rawley.” She spoke in a cold, business-like tone.

My horror must have been evident. “Your Majesty,” I said with warmth, “before that shall be submitted to, every member of our colony will die fighting.”

She shrugged. “That is your affair. I should hate to see any of my people killed in such a clash. It is interesting to see how jealous you are of Mr. Vancouver’s safety, when he had planned to destroy the colony.”

I saw the drift of her sneer, and was angry and silent. “He has a very charming daughter,” she went on. The humiliation that she was thrusting upon me was unbearable, but I could be patient, since I carried the lives of the colony in my hands; yet it was not pleasant to see this side of Lentala’s nature. The worst of it was that there was no possible argument to bring against hers. Mr. Vancouver richly deserved such a fate, and so did Rawley; their meeting it would certainly assure our escape to the Hope. But Lentala could see in my attitude nothing but consideration for Annabel, and she misconstrued that. It was all that I could do to restrain myself.

“I think we understand each other,” she remarked after a pause.

“Do you mean,” I burst out in a passion, “that you are going to order the sacrifice of Mr. Vancouver and Rawley?”

She looked at me steadily. Afterward I recalled the softening, the suffering, the dumb pleading in her face, but I did not see it at the time.

“It doesn’t appear,” she quietly said, “that I am called on to tell you any more of my plans at present. You are fully informed as to what you may do in trying to get the colony to the ship tonight.” Her manner was entirely that of a queen to her subject. “I think you understand to some extent what I have done to spare the lives of your people and help them leave the island. I will add that some trusted natives will try to make your passage to the ship safe. But it is one thing to make plans and another to carry them out in the face of a panic. There is no foreseeing what may happen before morning. My scouts will keep me informed every few minutes.”

There came an awkward pause. Her head was down; she stood in a waiting attitude. It seemed to me that all the world I loved had suddenly been swept away. Behind the woman confronting me I knew that my dear Beela stood sweet and laughing, all sunshine and dear womanliness. Only a fool would let her go.

“Beela!” I said.

She started, and raised sorrowing eyes to mine.

“Aren’t you going with us on the Hope?”

“My duty is here now, and I can think of nothing but that.”

“Does your unexpected elevation to a queenhood blot out all the past?” I asked.

She bit her lip. “I hadn’t expected that from you,” she said in sadness.

“Then, is it Annabel?” I insisted.

She did not answer at once. “You will see her again this evening,” she gently said.

“Of course, but—” I saw it was useless, and wondered if she was dismissing me. “Surely I shall see you also,” I said.

She smiled, but it was not the smile of Beela; it was that of a woman who knows care.

“Perhaps,” she returned; “yes, of course,—I think. Meanwhile, good-by,” and held out her hand.

I took it, and would not at first let her withdraw it; but with a little sigh, which she tried to conceal, she turned away and walked slowly to the palace.

Heavy-hearted, but determined to see Lentala before the colony sailed,—if it should ever have that good fortune,—I went about my duty.

The first task was to see that Mr. Vancouver was safe, for many contingencies might arise to overwhelm Christopher. I went to the hut where Beela had left Rawley, but it was vacant. Christopher must have taken the two men to a spot near the pass, to meet the outcoming colony. On going to the summit of the valley wall I faced the rising moon. When I had come within a few hundred yards of the spot where the colony would emerge,—it was the spot where Rawley had assaulted me,—I heard the low moaning of a man, followed by his querulous, childish talk. At first I marveled that Christopher should have left his charges in so exposed a place, as it was immediately near the main trail to the sacrificial stone.

“Will she come soon?” Mr. Vancouver plaintively asked.

“Very soon. Be patient,” kindly answered Rawley.

The men were invisible in the gloom, but it was imprudent for them to be speaking aloud. Yet I dared not show myself, lest Mr. Vancouver be thrown into noisy mania. Should the natives be seeking him, it would be easy to trail him to this spot; and the colony might be discovered through his presence. Again Mr. Vancouver broke the silence.

“She doesn’t suspect me, does she?”

“She is and always will be your loyal daughter.”

“I know.” His voice was not a madman’s. “Raise my head a little. It is bursting. Rawley, I’m damned. The visions I’ve had! In one of them two men came, looking like natives, but speaking

English. One of them spoke of my treachery and my death. I tried to kill him. The other prevented me, and then I saw that they were Tudor and Christopher. And today the one looking like Christopher rescued me from a hell of madmen. But how could I stay in that cabin when Annabel was coming?"

A rumbling and a quivering of the earth hurried me on. I ran to the edge of the valley wall. This brought me nearly opposite the Black Face. I had noticed a faint, weird light on the trees; now I saw the origin of it,—a purple flame was issuing from an orifice below the Face. It waved upward like an inverted streamer, wreathing the Face and lending to it a ghastly lifelikeness.

From below me rose faint cries of terror, quickly stilled, and soon the vanguard of the colony arrived from the valley. The earth-trembling had ceased; the flame was subsiding.

There was some trouble at first in making myself known. Annabel came up with Captain Mason and Christopher, and delayed my disclosure of the plan for escape.

"Where is my father?" she immediately asked.

I informed her, and learned that Christopher had told her all that he knew.

"Take me to him," she begged.

I replied that it would be safer to bring him to her. Directing Christopher to fetch a stretcher from which a woman had just been lifted, I left with him as the slender procession crept to the summit. Deep anxiety showed under Christopher's calm exterior.

Mr. Vancouver and Rawley were gone! A hasty search in the vicinity failed to discover them. We worked down to the trail leading to the clearing where the sacrifices were made. There we found a stream of silent, soft-footed natives hurrying toward the clearing. No speech was needed between Christopher and me to explain the situation. Christopher's wise plan had gone tragically awry. It had not been difficult for the dog-nosed natives to trail Christopher to the hut, and then Rawley and Mr. Vancouver to the spot where I had found them.

I was thrown into a momentary confusion. Lentala alone had known whither Christopher was to take Mr. Vancouver, and she had argued for his sacrifice as the surest means to save the colony! The thought was sickening. But it was inconceivable that Beela should have the heart for such a course,—sweet, gentle Beela! And had not Lentala nearly forfeited her life to the mob in trying to rescue Mr. Vancouver?

Christopher had slipped from my mind; but I observed him now, and he was listening far. I waited, knowing that by this time the two victims were already at the altar, and that the earthquake a few minutes ago had lent a fierce impetus to the proceedings. I could mentally see the main settlement and its outlying regions swarming as the whispered news flew from mouth to mouth that two white victims for the sacrifice had been found.

Christopher soon turned to me.

"They'll have to get wood, sir," he said.

"Yes. That will take time, but there are many men."

Lentala had said that her scouts would report often; but there was a chance that they would either conceal the present movement from her or give her the news too late. Even should she be starting at that moment, it would not be possible for her to arrive in time to stop the sacrifice. Yet she should be informed. If she refused to come, then I should know

"Christopher," I said, "go and tell the queen." I said nothing of a desperate plan that I had formed.

Christopher looked at me strangely. "Yes, sir," he replied. "And you can save 'em."

He gave me a look of dog-like love, and vanished.

I returned to Captain Mason, avoiding Annabel, and rapidly placed the entire situation before him. His jaws set hard in the moonlight. I could imagine his thoughts, which no doubt agreed with Lentala's; and I realized the terrible risk to the colony when the fanatics should find themselves balked in the sacrifice and should swarm in a search which the colony could not escape—unless my plan should prove successful to the last detail or the queen should bring up the army in time to prevent a battle. And there was mighty Christopher, the man of courage, resourcefulness, and prompt action. I hurled these arguments at Captain Mason, and pointed out Annabel, standing alone and suffering as she awaited her father.

"You and Hobart and I will make the dash," I urged. "It is the only chance, and we must hurry. Dr. Preston can be taken into the secret, and can quietly prepare the men to fight if necessary. They are all armed; the savages are not."

He responded by calling Dr. Preston and charging him as I had suggested, particularly warning him not to alarm the colony. Then he went to Annabel and gave her some quieting explanation. I borrowed a capable knife from a sailor, and we set out.

We bore down to the trail, and found it still swarming with a scurrying horde, all proceeding with a stealthy swiftness. Then I struck out on a straight course through the tangled forest, leading Captain Mason and Hobart a breathless pace. On arriving at the edge of the clearing and concealing ourselves, we found hundreds of savages already assembled and more pouring in.

"There they are," I said, pointing to a considerable open space between the sacrificial stone and a packed mass of men formed in a semi-circle, those in front sitting. Midway between the stone and the natives were the two doomed men, dim in the moonlight. The one lying on the ground was doubtless Mr. Vancouver, perhaps unconscious. Rawley, though his hands were tied behind him, sat erect, calmly facing his tormentors.

As Captain Mason and Hobart had no disguise, I alone must bring the two men out. My companions would take them to the colony; I would remain to face the issue and divert the pursuit. Captain Mason looked very grave, but Hobart was all eagerness; I could guess that his sore spirit yearned to heal itself by sharing my risk. A longing for Christopher, for his far-seeing eye, his steady nerve, his quick hand,—came over me.

"I remember," I explained in showing why I should not make the dash at once, "that a ring was fastened in the rock about where Mr. Vancouver and Rawley are sitting. They must be chained to it. I must wait until they are released."

We knew that the delay would mean an augmentation of the crowd and the danger.

Of course the theft of the wood had been discovered. The hut sheltering it had disappeared; its poles and dryer thatch were already piled on the altar. The sacrifice was only delayed, for two-score natives were coming in with dry wood for which they had foraged. In that pursuit one came near us, and I made ready, but in his eagerness he passed on, unseeing. The priest at the altar received the wood, examined it, cast out the useless, and carefully stacked the pyre, which steadily grew.

Silence rested on the crowd. Here was religion in its naked birth,—the elemental man using torture and murder for prayer, with greater reverence and faith than I have seen in some modern fashions of placation or appeal. Fronting them across the dim chasm of the valley was the embodied Force whose wrath must be appeased. Could the white blood in Lentala permit this form of worship?

We could see through the trees the indefinite black mass of the Face. At small intervals came low subterranean growls and slight tremors of the earth. It was as though the underground gods were gathering their strength.

Finally the priest's work was done. He slowly went to the chained men, stood over them, and raised his hand. Four men came forward, followed by four others, who took positions back of him. Twenty more came and formed a cordon about the altar.

The first four knelt, and the chains fell clanking. Rawley rose without assistance. Being speechless with a gag, he implored in dumb show for Mr. Vancouver, offering himself alone. There was a low colloquy between the priests and the four, at the end of which his gesture commanded that Mr. Vancouver also be taken to the stone. As two men stooped to lift him and two others took each an arm of Rawley, the priest began a solemn chant in a minor key, and started the slow march to the pyre, Mr. Vancouver on the shoulders of two men, Rawley walking firm and erect.

At the altar the priest ceased his chant, which was taken up by the crowd; but, though there were many hundreds of voices, they were so soft and in such fine unison that the volume was hardly greater than that of a dozen men. As it proceeded, the priest picked up a vessel containing smothered coals, blew them into life, and ignited the thatch at the four corners. Evidently the victims were to be further tied, and tossed aloft when the fire was hot.

As the priest stepped back to see the blaze rise, I bounded into the open.

I remember that the fire was hot in my face as I reached Rawley and nipped his thongs, and that the astonishment on the priest's face was comical. Also, I was conscious of a numbness in my right hand. I had used my fist perhaps more vigorously than necessary. Two or three natives were prone when I shouldered Mr. Vancouver and called to Rawley, and the darkness of the forest soon concealed us.

A roar delayed by astonishment rose behind us; a thousand devils had opened throat and were leaping to the pursuit.

CHAPTER XXIII. *The Great Catastrophe.* A Powerless Ruler Confronts a Mutiny. Death of the Sovereign Demanded. The Army Under My Command. Christopher's Sacrifice. The Final Cataclysm.

After a hard run, I laid Mr. Vancouver across Hobart's shoulder. There was no need to urge all speed to the colony. I turned back to meet the pursuers, and ran swiftly until I encountered the foremost. Before they had seen me I dropped to the ground and was diligently examining it when they came up and halted, others running behind.

"Which way?" inquired the first.

"Stand back!" I said. "I have the trail."

They obeyed, but my knife was ready for a contingency. I pretended to lose the signs, but found them again, followed a few paces, and announced that the fugitives had turned there and headed for the trail. "That will bring them into a trap," I added, "for people are still coming up the trail to the clearing. I will follow the runaways and give the alarm. You men spread up and down here, for they may double back. When others come from the clearing, turn them all back, for they will spoil the trail and I never can find it again. Then you too go back if you don't hear from me very soon. Send a man at once to the priest, and tell him to hold the people there, and to order up more wood and prepare for the sacrifice. I am a Suminali man and can trail like a dog."

I was turning away, but paused, to make sure of them. "Have you heard the news from the palace?" I inquired.

"No."

"The king has given the crown to Lentalala, and the command of the army also."

It surprised them. "Where's Gato?" asked one.

"He disobeyed the king, and is dead," I answered. "Tell the news to the priest. Spread it among the crowd." I was on my tongue to add that the queen would soon appear with the army and disperse the crowd, but there were dangers in it, and I held my peace. Sufficient for the present that I had stopped the pursuit.

On arriving at the road to the clearing I found a commotion, and learned that the army was rapidly approaching. The people did not know how to take that news,—whether it meant a forwarding or a breaking up of the sacrifice.

There came a scrambling of stragglers to escape the army, which advanced on the trot, Christopher running in front. He saw me, wheeled, and raised his hand. I knew that his glance at my face had told

him the whole story. My heart swelled to see Lentala, borne aloft in an uncanopied crimson velvet palanquin emblazoned with the royal insignia. Her dress was the one she had worn at the feast, with the addition of the crown. In her hand she carried a naked sword, fine and lean.

"Make way for the queen!" at intervals shouted a man running ahead of the queen and behind Christopher.

On seeing Christopher's signal she raised her sword, and the palanquin halted. She was anxiously watching the glow from the altar fire, but her glance discovered me, and a surprised joy sprang to her face.

"Am I too late?" she called in English.

"No, your Majesty. All is well."

"Choseph!" she chokingly cried, throwing her sword away and seizing both my hands.

It was a public scandal. The soldiers stared.

I gave her a warning look, and said, "Your Majesty!"

She drew away with freezing dignity. A soldier picked up her sword, wiped it as he would a baby's face, knelt, and handed it to her. She slammed it angrily into its scabbard, gave me a crushing glance, and opened her lips to speak, but I drove the words back by suddenly dropping in an obeisance. I would have given a good deal to see her face in the long pause before she bade me rise. My face was grave as I met her angry, suspicious gaze.

"This is no time nor place to make fun of me," she cuttingly said.

"I beg your Majesty's pardon."

She was studying me. "You have seen Annabel, I suppose?" she inquired.

"Yes, your Majesty."

"And talked with her?"

"Yes, your Majesty."

"You—were glad—to see each other?"

"Very, your Majesty."

"She is as lovely as ever?"

"Quite, your Majesty."

She examined the splendid jewel in the head of her sword-hilt, looked up with a composed face, and demanded that I tell her what had happened. I did so, and she beamed, forgetting Annabel.

"I'll take the army to the clearing," she said, "put a stop to the nonsense, and send the people home."

She said it confidently, either ignoring the danger or ignorant of it. Evidently her purpose was the protection of the colony, but I surmised that some power greater than hers would be required. Christopher had been standing near, a silent listener.

Her imposing arrival had a strong effect on the restless mob as in the cross-light of the moon and the altar fire she stood up in the palanquin and raised her sword for attention. She told them of her crowning, made a plea for their confidence, and commanded them to go home. But she said nothing about a sacrifice.

No sign of obedience appearing in the crowd, she gave me a glance that sought guidance. I knew that the moment was critical and the risk great, but it seemed the only recourse. I glanced at the army. She understood, hesitated a moment, and ordered the soldiers to clear the place. A slight movement and a buzz ran through the ranks, but there was no forward movement. Then rang a cry, instantly taken up till it became a roar:

“Sacrifice! Sacrifice!”

Lentala sprang to the ground, waved the palanquin-bearers away, and with a free sword confronted the soldiers, her head high, her eyes flashing. I knew she realized that there was but one way out of the desperate dilemma, and that she was casting about to find it without a confession of failure. Clearly she knew that, although old Rangan had deeply planted a sense of loyalty in the soldiers, she was hampered both by a want of experience in handling them and by the pressure of the mob behind her, which was swelling its demand for a sacrifice to a mutinous outbreak that the soldiers would have no spirit to meet, they being in sympathy with the movement. It became necessary for me to act.

I sprang forward and prostrated myself before her.

“Rise,” she said, extending her sword over me.

When I had come to my feet she gave me her sword, and said, her voice ringing clear and far:

“I must go among my people and quiet them. You were King Rangan’s friend; you are the man who threw Gato from the wall,—Gato, who had been unfaithful to his sovereign. I give you command of my army while I go among my people.”

I took her sword and promptly faced the bewildered ranks as Lentala drifted away; but not until I had seen that Christopher was observing; he would understand that I had turned her over to his protection.

It was fortunate that on the beach and during the march to the valley I had closely observed Gato’s method of handling his men. They were crude soldiers and their drill was childish, but my training knew the value of discipline to any extent, and I remembered Gato’s tactics. More important than any evolutions that they knew was the spirit of the one commanding them.

I rapped out an order for company formation, as the men were in loose order. As I had expected, some of them stared at me and the others at the rapidly growing mob spirit before them.

It should be explained that Gato’s organization was wholly different from that of civilized nations. While the men composing the army came nearly to half the number of a modern regiment, and while some rude idea of subsidiary groupings had been observed, the absence of actual experience in warfare had made the organization hardly more than a stolid, pompous mob, and the under-officers little besides repeaters and enforcers of the general orders. All officers were merely the “general’s” staff.

I did the best I could with such a machine. Upon repeating my order in a still sharper tone, and seeing only an uneasy, tentative pretense of obedience, I sprang toward the officer whom I may call the lieutenant-colonel, stung his cheek with the flat of my rapier, and sent him spinning

down the ranks. Another officer instantly found himself treated to a similar slap, and another, as I continued to shout the order. The fourth, a sullen brute, took the blow without wincing, and in both hands began to raise his sword to cleave me. He never knew what it was that sent his blade clattering to the ground; and his attention at once became engaged in a spouting rip in his arm. That brought the staring regiment to its senses; the under-officers all sprang to their duty.

Then, charging up and down the front rank while I raked the stomachs of the soldiers with my sword, I ordered platoon formation. Under other circumstances it would have been amusing to see the officers scrambling for minor commands not already occupied. Evidently there had never before been such sprightly movement required of them; my rapier continually flashed, and men winced when it came near.

Having thus secured control, I was in a dilemma. My purpose was to face them about, so that they should not see the turbulence rapidly increasing in the mob; but that would bring them facing the altar fire, which was burning emptily, reminding them that the people had been cheated. But there was no choice; I must be where I could face the storm breaking over Lentala and Christopher. There was no time for marching to secure a back-presentation to the mob; I must risk the awkwardness of a reverse formation.

The command to about-face was promptly obeyed, and the soldiers appeared to be surprised on finding me again before them. It was necessary to keep them absorbed in maneuvers, which, of the simplest kind, such as they could understand, I immediately put in force.

This did not distract my attention from the turbulence centering about Lentala. I saw the densely packed and highly excited mob crowding her; I heard the shouts for a sacrifice, the calls to the army to join the rebellion; I heard her clear, steady voice; I saw now and then glimpses of Christopher standing as a rock behind her; and all the time my sword was swinging and my orders were keeping the army at work. It would be but a matter of time when I might turn it to the service of the queen, but the danger was pressing alarmingly.

Of a sudden there was a commotion about Lentala. Before I could turn over the command to the officer next in rank and go to Lentala's rescue, Christopher, bearing her on his shoulder, broke through the mob, skirted my left flank on the run, and bounded toward the altar, the flames of which had sunk almost to a mass of glowing coals, exceedingly hot. Without attempting to comprehend his movement, but seeing that he had brought the queen behind the army for some purpose, I instantly opened the order of my men, commanded swords drawn, and cried:

"The queen's army to her defense!"

The command was taken up by every subordinate officer. Again the men found me facing them as the mob came howling at my back; but the double line stood firm as an interposing wall before the queen. Then I knew that I had them in hand, but I dared not risk a charge, and I must see what Christopher was doing. The tumbling mob halted before the drawn swords.

When Christopher reached the altar he stopped and turned, he and his burden making a striking silhouette against the red heap of coals. She appeared unconscious, for she hung limp over his shoulder, her arms pendent. The halting of the mob and Christopher's pause aided his unexpected dash in sending a hush on the crowd. In the midst of it rose Christopher's voice for all to hear:

"We'll sacrifice the queen! The queen!" With that he flung her to the ground and began savagely to tear her outer skirt into strips, with the obvious purpose of binding her.

The scene was clear to the mob through the open ranks of my men. I was no less appalled than were the savages at the audacity of the move and Christopher's ferocious method of procedure. And I made no attempt to keep the soldiers from turning their heads to see. My task was instantly

to find my cue in the drama that Christopher was playing. It came before I was ready. As Christopher, after the binding, which required but a moment, was carrying Lentala up to the pyre, she began to struggle, and called:

“My soldiers, save me!”

I bounded through the ranks as I gave the command to about-face and forward double-quick. But I outran the soldiers, struck Christopher down with my sword, and caught Lentala as she was falling. The shortest instant was needed to cut her bonds, but that was sufficient for me to lose control of the situation. Christopher’s splendid ruse had succeeded in saving the queen from the mob, and I knew that nothing concerning himself mattered beyond that. Indeed, I have always thought that he deliberately chose the time to give his life for her sake.

As the old king had said, the natives were children, and the sudden revulsion of feeling in favor of the queen was more even than the soldiers, who had a little discipline, could calmly bear. A wave of passionate devotion swept over them. It was only a mob that I faced with my sword as I stood before Lentala. Christopher was lying face downward on the ground as he had fallen. I knew he was unhurt and free to make a fight for his life. None could have realized more clearly than he that the mob would take vengeance on him, but none could have better understood that his resistance might imperil the queen. He had simply made the bold play for her sake, had won, and then lain down to die.

I could not bear that, nor could Lentala, who comprehended. Without hesitation she left me and bent over him, to receive the blow, and was careful that he should not know her purpose. I did what I could, shouting, commanding the soldiers to form, waving my sword menacingly. It had a staying effect, and I cannot now say with certainty that it would have failed.

Suddenly, with a sickening sensation, I felt the earth tremble beneath my feet. A strange sense of dizziness, of reeling, made my movements waver. The soldiers also were staggering, and their purpose to rend Christopher appeared to be relaxing; but nothing could withstand the pressure of the mob behind them. I had barely time to snatch up Lentala and cut a way back to the altar before Christopher, whose glance found Lentala and me safe, began to rise as the lurching horde hurled itself upon him.

In a staggering run, nearly tripped at every step, I bore her to the edge of the clearing, on the side toward the colony, and hid us both in the shadows. When I had picked her up she buried her face in my shoulder and clung to me with both arms round my neck.

“What is it?” she asked.

“A volcanic eruption.”

“Where’s Christopher?”

I put my hand on her lips, and she trembled as she clung closer. She was silent as the earthquake increased in violence, and presently asked:

“Do you see it, Choseph?”

I had been observing it since we were seated. “Yes. It is at the river passage. The mountain appears to be blown out there, and—”

“Stop!” she cried, holding me closer.

Undoubtedly the eruption had occurred at the boiling cauldron that we had passed under the mountain. Its first violence was already spent, and the earthquake was subsiding; but I reflected that the water from the valley stream and from the crimson fall must be pouring into the hot interior, and that the end was not yet.

The ejecta of the outburst were already falling about us from the great height to which the explosion had thrown them. Hot stones of all sizes rained. Had not the forest been damp, it would have broken into flame at a thousand places.

The writhing savages in the clearing were but dimly visible. No definiteness came out of the mass still crowded and heaped where we had left Christopher. All sufficiently near for me to see sat staring at the Face, which was now clearly taking its vengeance; all were moaning and howling, and prostrated with fear.

A deep-red flame rose with a rushing noise from the seat of the eruption as renewed rumblings and roarings came from the quivering ground. The rising flame plunged into a rapidly spreading canopy of smoke and ashes from the initial explosion. The hither edge of the vast cloud was wan in the moonlight, but the under surface reflected the crimson of the flame. All things adopted that dreadful hue. The green foliage took it on as the muddy purple of decay; the brown faces of the natives looked as if beaten to a pulp.

There came another light, and it woke a more insidious terror. Striating the crimson column and issuing snakily from many independent orifices distributed over a wide area of the valley rim, was the purple flame. And now the most wonderful of all was the great Face itself. The crimson light caught it in profile, and thus so sharpened its features as to make it seem a living monster of inconceivable ferocity. Nor was that the worst. The purple flame again issued from below the face with a great augmentation. In rising and spreading it cast a thin veil over the visage, making it ghastly.

The falling of heavy stones ceased, but the more numerous small ones began to pelt us. I drew my coat round Lentala's head, and broke tree-branches within reach to shield her body, for the stones had a vicious sting.

The heat was growing, both by radiation from the crimson column and by reflection from the canopy. Flames were leaping from the forest near the eruption, for the heat was drying the leaves.

As the ground opened in many seams under the strain, steam found numerous issues on the front of the opposite valley wall, near the Face. The quaking of the earth deepened; the moans of the natives became cries of frenzy.

"Is it growing worse, Joseph?"

She had been Beela since the scene at the altar, and I had nearly forgotten Lentala. It was sweet to feel her breath on my neck as she clung like a frightened child.

"Be brave," I said. "Remember, we came safely through the passage."

"I will, Joseph," but I felt a sob against my breast.

The increasing heat began to make wild mischief in the air. Little whirlwinds had been rising, twirling leaves upward. All at once they ceased, leaving an ominous calm. Then came a rushing, swirling roar, with the crashing of trees,—the noises of a tornado. I looked round. Nearly in a line with the moon rose a spinning column bearing upward dismembered trees, liberating them far above, and sending them down destructively. This monster, whose seizure would mean death, was mounting the slope in its approach to the volcano, and seemingly would sweep the clearing in its passage. I did not know what to do, and did not wish Lentala to see what was coming, but I must unconsciously have given an alarming sign, for she silently caught her breath and tightened her hold.

As I was looking about in helplessness, an extraordinary vision of tatters and despair staggered toward us out of the forest, peering about. Her staring eyes found me, and she stopped in fear.

"Annabel!" I cried.

Lentala sprang to her feet, her terror gone, and stared for a moment; then, springing forward, she took Annabel in her arms before I had reached her.

“Where is my father?” begged Annabel, recognizing us both.

“He is safe with Captain Mason at the colony, dear,” Lentala sweetly answered.

I confirmed the news, and because she was much more deeply shaken than Lentala, I took her to myself and made her sit on the ground. I seated myself beside her, took her hand, and told her cheerful things about her father and Mr. Rawley. She had become suspicious and left the colony to search for her father before Captain Mason’s return with him.

She was quietly sobbing in gratefulness. A woman’s gentler offices were needed now, and I looked round for Lentala. To my astonishment she had disappeared. That alarmed me. In looking about for her without leaving Annabel I discovered that the tornado had torn away the trees on the opposite side of the clearing, and was breaking to pieces after tumbling into the valley; but I could not guess what havoc, if any, it had wrought in the clearing, and a profound uneasiness on Lentala’s account made my duty to care for Annabel irksome. Even at the best, the collections of the tornado were falling about us and on the clearing, and an increase of the dismal howling indicated cruel results, in which both Lentala and Christopher might be involved. And the danger to Annabel and me was great. I did what I could to protect her from the merciless rain of riven timber.

It had been impossible for me to abandon hope on Christopher’s account. Even though I believed that he had lain down in perfect content to give his life for Lentala, the eruption had offered him an opportunity for which he must have been ready. If he was alive and anywhere near the zone of Lentala’s danger, she would be cared for. I could accept no other faith than that he was.

Annabel reasonably secure and quiet, I noted the progress of the catastrophe, knowing that Christopher would let me hear from him soon, if at all. The trembling of the ground had become remittent and more violent. The cries of the natives were falling to despairing moans. The tripping ground had made their flight impossible, even had fear not paralyzed them. Besides, the effect of the weird light on the Face was sufficient to hold them in a fascinated helplessness.

The volcanic pillar of fire had shortened, for the still spreading canopy was thickening downward. The roar was louder, with occasional detonations from lateral explosions which smashed the mountains environing the western end of the valley and made a still wider breach in the opening blasted by the first outbreak. The purple flame had found new exits, lending the opposite valley wall a cadaverous light, and, with the spreading flame issuing from below the Face, giving the horrible visage an unspeakable hideousness.

Worse than all that had gone before came next. The canopy suddenly effaced the moon, and looked like an enormous mushroom on a blood-red stem. Violent gusts of wind fell here and there with a rending force, working havoc in the forest and among the natives. Now and then rose a sharp solitary cry from one struck by a falling stone or spattered by blistering mud. At times a swarm of cries rang from the dip of scorching gases. Clouds were gathering. Lightning flashed between them and the canopy; the crash of near thunder swelled the tumult. I tried not to think of the colony.

“Where is Lentala?” cried Annabel in my ear, rousing out of a half-stupor.

“She has gone to the clearing,” I ventured.

“Go and find her,” urged Annabel in fright, forcibly withdrawing from me.

“How can I leave you?”

“I am safe here, and will wait for you. Go!”

I obeyed, staggering into the clearing and falling over the kneeling or prostrate savages. My heart presently gave a bound of joy; for, working side by side, fearless and devoted, were Lentala and Christopher, apparently unhurt, and doing all they could to pacify the frantic natives, encouraging them, binding their wounds, and sending them to the service of others, thus rapidly starting centers of control and help that enlarged with magical rapidity. I came near, but the two who were dear to me did not observe, so intent were they on their duty. I had never seen so lovely a look on Lentala's face, and I determined to let no foolish barrier stand between us thenceforth. Christopher saw me first, but gave no sign whatever. Then Lentala, and there was a divine light in her startled, happy face.

"You came to me, didn't you, Joseph?" she said, seizing my hand.

"Annabel discovered that you were gone, and sent me to find you.

Her face went blank, and she dropped my hand. Terrible though the moment was, her childishness angered me. It was no time for coquettish discipline.

"She wants your Majesty," I said. "Shall I bring her to you?"

Her eyes flashed, but she replied, "Take me to her."

I tried to take her hand, in order to lead her, for the ground was rolling and there were unpleasant things to see on the way in the red glare; but she walked alone and as steadily as I. As we approached the trees there came a sickening heave different from the earth-movements before. Christopher sprang past us toward Annabel, shouting:

"Down—on your faces!"

I seized Lentala and lurched ahead, but before we had quite reached Annabel and Christopher we went down in a blazing crash.

* * *

"Shake yourself up, sir," came in a thin voice from a great distance.

I could open my eyes but a moment under the vigorous shaking that Christopher gave me, for slimy, warm drops were falling on my face; but I had met the darkness that the blind know. A painful throbbing made my head roll as Christopher dragged me to shelter and propped me against a tree.

"Where are we?" I asked. My groping hands found a prone body at my left. I opened my eyes, and the world was blotted out.

"Keep still, sir."

"Are they both here?"

"Yes, sir."

"Alive?"

"Yes, sir."

"Choseph!" came feebly from the body under my hand.

My arms went round her and drew her up.

"Where's Annabel, Christopher?"

"On your right, sir."

"Unconscious?"

"Yes, sir."

Lentala lay collapsed in my arms. The rain of mud from the canopy pattered and splashed about us. The ground was still, and there was hardly a sound except the slimy drip.

"The volcano has stopped, hasn't it?"

“Yes, sir.”

I asked the next question in the conviction that I had been stricken blind: “Is there any light at all?”

“No, sir.”

Lentala clutched me. “I’m glad, Choseph! I thought I was blind.”

“What happened, Christopher?” I asked.

“The world blew up, sir.”

“What then?”

“Darkness.”

The rain had extinguished the forest fires, and the sirupy drip was mingled with the hissing of hot stones. There was nothing to do but wait. Wails began to creep out of the silent clearing. Lentala drew away.

“Poor children!” she said. “I can teach them better now. There’s a good life ahead for me here.”

Clearly she was thinking of nothing else, and she said it with a simple earnestness. During all these dark months her every plan and act had been for her own and our escape from the island. I had thought that she accepted the crown as a temporary expedient to restore order and save the colony; but now I knew that, while she still intended to send us safely away, she had severed all other bonds and would give her life where it was most needed. The conduct of the people during the eruption had given the finishing touch to her decision. It was the putting away of all her hopes and dreams; it was the dismissal of me.

I sat a moment in a desolate silence, and found her hand. She returned my clasp, but it was different from any she had ever given me before. It grew firmer, imparting a silent message of finality.

CHAPTER XXIV. *The Parting Hour.* A Chapter of Startling Surprises. The Fate of the Black Face. A Story of Two Girls. Wanted—a Coadjutor to the Crown. Beela Comes Back at Last.

There was something portentously solemn in Christopher’s manner when he came one brilliant morning with a summons from the queen to lunch with her and Annabel. I was aware of Captain Mason’s notice to her Majesty that in two hours the colony, which had been royally entertained in the palace and its adjunct buildings since the great catastrophe, would file past to bid her farewell. My absorbing duties in directing the stowing of the *Hope’s* cargo had kept me away from the queen and Annabel, who had become devoted friends; but a more potent barrier had been her Majesty’s cold reserve under her assumption of her queenly duties, which had been exceedingly severe. The destruction of the Black Face by the eruption had been joyously accepted as heaven’s endorsement of her accession to the throne, and the natives idolized her.

Nothing seemed clearer than her wish that I do my part to make as smooth as possible her determination to forget what had passed between us.

Confident, therefore, that she would carry off the parting pleasantly, and appreciating her kindness in inviting me, and her tact in providing for Annabel’s presence, I went with as stout a heart as I could command. Christopher and I had long ago laid aside our disguise. He led me in silence to the private room where Lentala had dreamed of a bright life far away. A table was set daintily for three; and as there were no native attendants, I knew that Christopher was to serve. Rangan was near the end of his days, and Rawley gave constant attendance on deeply stricken Mr. Vancouver.

As I entered, I heard the queen and Annabel chatting with astonishing gaiety in an adjoining room, the doorway into which was closed with a curtain. Whatever they were discussing was interrupted by my entrance.

“Choseph!” came challengingly from beyond the curtain. It was Beela’s voice, though every trace of her had disappeared since the eruption.

“Your Majesty,” I responded.

“Nonsense! Aren’t you going to behave?” It was Beela’s scold and the impatient stamp of her foot. “I’m not quite ready. Annabel will entertain you.”

Annabel came out. The sparkle in her eyes and the flush in her cheeks showed that she was excited, despite her effort to appear at ease. Christopher’s strange manner had already made me watchful, and I caught the knowing look that Annabel gave him. My heart bounded. Could it be that the queen had decided to renounce her kingdom and go with us? It so deluged me that for a moment I did not heed the chatter proceeding from the other room.

“Choseph!” came thence; “have you neither ears nor a tongue?” The voice rang with a cheer that even Beela’s had never known. “Here I’ve been trying to make you guess why I’m so happy, and you don’t show the slightest interest.”

“I’d be glad to know,” I returned.

“Annabel and her father and Mr. Rawley have decided not to go away, and Annabel and Mr. Rawley are going to be married!” She hurled it breathlessly, as a child in a hurry to tell important news.

So that was the great secret. But why had they kept it from me? An acute silence within accompanied my own. I was smiling at Annabel, who blushed deliciously.

“Christopher!”

“Your Majesty.”

“Don’t say that. I hate it. Do you love me?”

“Yes, ma’am.”

“But you are going to leave me.” She said it dolorously.

“No, I ain’t, ma’am.”

Something was dropped clattering to the floor within, and then came a sudden hush.

There was the queerest, brightest twinkle in Annabel’s eyes as she studied me. In astonishment I glanced at Christopher. The look with which he met mine was one of benevolent kindness.

“Dear old Christopher!” came softly from the other room; then, after a pause, “How can Mr. Tudor manage without you?”

“He can’t, ma’am.” He made the audacious answer while calmly regarding me.

Can it be believed that I dared not see Lentala’s challenge, and that something which I could not master held me a silent fool in the chair? Surely there must be men besides me whom love makes humble and timid. I have seen men love with a different measure; I have seen love make them bold and reckless.

Christopher had adroitly seated me with my back to the curtain. Hence I did not see a signal that Annabel, who was facing it, must have received, for with some excuse she withdrew, taking Christopher.

The queen’s voice was close to the curtain as she called in a breathless, frightened way, “Choseph!”

“Your Majesty.”

Before I could rise she was on me like a whirlwind, clapping her hands over my eyes from behind and pressing me down into the seat. Her cheek rested on my head. I thought the beating of my heart would suffocate me.

During the silence I sat in a trance. One soft hand held my eyes closed; the other slipped down and was pressed on my lips. I knew that Beela had come back, and I would submit to any outrage from her.

“Choseph,” she said in her sweet, coaxing voice, “sit still and don’t try to speak. You are much more interesting when you don’t talk. And then, I don’t want to be interrupted, for I’m going to tell you a story. It is about two girls and a man. Nod if you want to hear it.”

I nodded.

“The girls are named Beela and Lentala. The man imagines he is or *was* in love with one of those girls.” The voice above my head became very impressive. “Now, sir, you are the Man.”

Nod.

“We’ll easily agree that Lentala is much more dignified and reserved than Beela.”

Nod.

“And never so erratic and unconventional.”

Nod.

“And that Beela is rude and bold, wears outlandish clothes, and adopts scandalous disguises.”

My head was still for a time, so happy was I in her delicious fooling; then I nodded enthusiastically.

I knew she was trying to suppress a laugh; she ostentatiously sighed, and said: “You agree to that. It isn’t all. She tells fibs, and is heartless and cruel.”

I was motionless for a breathless space, and then nodded viciously. There came a long, still pause. I could bear it no longer.

“Choseph! Stop! You hurt my wrist,” and again she held me prisoned. “There. Be quiet. Well,” with a resigned sigh, “I suppose the foolish man will keep on loving Beela and hating Lentala, and end by breaking poor Lentala’s heart.”

I am not positive that I entirely succeeded in suppressing my laugh.

“It has to be Beela, then,” the sweet voice went on. “But, Choseph, suppose the madcap should really be very different from what she ever appeared to you, and you should discover that she had deceived you about an important matter,—you can’t be certain that you know all her disguises,—wouldn’t you think her unworthy of your trust and love?”

A very decided shake, and above me a soft laugh and a little squeeze of my head.

“Choseph, you know you had suspicions about her skill in staining you and Christopher.”

I had nearly forgotten it; but as her father had been a white man and her mother a native, her skin would require some staining to look exactly like a native’s. I made no response to her speech.

“Choseph, suppose a very little girl born in some other country had been wrecked with her father on this island. She might have been yellow, or—or almost anything. As she grew, it might have become necessary that she be given the color of the natives.” There was a pause, and then came the hurried question, “She’d still be the same girl, wouldn’t she?”

I nodded, simply to please her, for her chatter meant no more to me than that Beela was playing and teasing.

“Think, Joseph.” She was really serious. “Once, when Lentala dressed like Annabel, you were shocked, and said some strange things that made her very unhappy and uneasy, and she was

afraid to tell you the whole truth. And for other reasons she thought it best to keep up the deception. Could anything new that you might learn about her change your regard?"

I shook my head, but was puzzled and uneasy.

"Then," she gently said, pressing her sweet cheek to my temple, "it could make no difference at all what her real color is?"

Of course I shook my head. It was impossible for me to accept the absurd suggestion, and my simple lie could do no harm in her pretty play.

She straightened, drawing a deep breath. "That is a promise," she said. "There's something else. Now, no matter if, in showing her love and pity for the poor grown children who need her, she permits these islanders the harmless play of calling her their queen when they mean their leader, their teacher, their mother,—wouldn't she still be only Beela, and none the worse for accepting that love and trust and duty?"

My nod was reverential.

"But, Joseph, she would know her utter inability to discharge that task. She would stumble; she would fall many a time. There would come dark hours when she yearned in bitter loneliness for the help of a wise head and sure hand; for there is a people to civilize as well as govern. Joseph, the heart of a woman is a woman-heart under either a toy crown or a real one."

I gave no sign. There came a long pause, a deep breath, and a sudden change of tone.

"Joseph, suppose that some day a big, fine cavalier, with a tender heart and a strong hand, should drift to the poor little kingdom and find its queen torturing her soul over problems that would look so large to her and so small to him. It seems to me that he would be moved to offer her his services. She might make him her Prime Minister."

I tore myself loose, rose, and confronted her. Gazing at me was a beautiful young white woman, frightened and blushing, a thousand startled imps dancing in her eyes as she backed away. I was profoundly shocked.

"Forgive me, Joseph." It came tenderly, wistfully, from the perfect lips of Beela and in her dear voice. And those were her eyes; that was her delicate, high-bred nose, and that her light hair. And she was as daintily dressed as ever Annabel had been.

"Choseph!" she cried, stamping in a passion as I gazed in silence.

So overcoming a weakness assailed me that I had to catch the top of a chair.

"Of course I understand," I said, unevenly, and floundered on, with pauses: "I might have guessed, but . . . a cherished ideal is very real to me. When I lost Beela and found Lentala, I lost what I had come to love. No, not lost,—I am very foolish and blundering."

"No, Joseph." Her smile was dazzling.

"It never could be lost while I lived, and would live had she died. It was Lentala, not Beela, who put Beela away, and then me."

"You know what I thought, Joseph. I meant to be kind. And I never had the least idea until today that Annabel cared for Mr. Rawley. I thought she loved you, and that you had been very fond of her till Beela came. I reasoned that it would be best for you to go to your own country, marry Annabel, and forget Beela."

That sweet speech explained everything, but it was not possible for me to feel the ease in the presence of her radiant loveliness that I had felt toward Beela, the child-woman, the sprite, who could flutter into a man's heart and abide forever. I managed to say bluntly:

"I understand. And now that all is clear, may I stay and do whatever lies in my power and devotion to help you?"

She was regarding me curiously, and with a touch of uneasiness. "Simply because I've asked you?" she demanded.

"It is my dearest wish."

Still the strange look was in her eyes. I dared not interpret it as my heart commanded; I had never loved a woman before, and needed time to gather my courage. Of a sudden an impulse moved me to step forward, take her hands, and look deep into her eyes.

"Let me stay," I begged.

"I'd be glad and proud if you would, Joseph. You know Captain Mason is to return with the *Hope* as soon as he can, and will bring teachers and a clergyman from America, and Annabel and Mr. Rawley will be married then."

I do not know what it was that she saw—or that her sensitive pride made her see—in my face that made her quickly withdraw her hands and step back as her eyes flashed and her cheeks crimsoned.

"Joseph! I never dreamed that you could think I meant—*that!*"

"It was my love, my joy, dear heart. When the clergyman comes—"

Annabel and Christopher entered. The queen flew at her, embraced her and kissed her, and then, standing off in front of Christopher, cried in a teasing voice:

"Christopher, you do love me, don't you?"

"Yes, ma'am," he placidly answered as he set the chairs for luncheon.