



Diamonds of Malopo

by
VICTOR ROUSSEAU

COPYRIGHT BY W.G. CHAPMAN

(Continued from last week.)

SYNOPSIS

CHAPTER I.—Winton Garrett, twenty-five and just out of college, calls by appointment on Archie Garrett, his New York cousin and executor, to receive his inheritance of \$100,000. Archie, honest, an easy mark and a fool for luck, assures Winton that he is practically a millionaire, as he has invested all but \$10,000 in a rubber plantation in either the East or West Indies and in a controlling interest in the Big Malopo diamond mine, somewhere or other in South Africa, sold him as a special favor by a Dutch promoter named De Witt.

CHAPTER II.—Winton, en route to his mine, finds the town of Taungas wildly excited over a big strike at Malopo, including the 95-carat "De Witt diamond." Two coach passengers are a disreputable old prospector, Daddy Seaton, and his daughter Sheila. On the journey a passenger, who turns out to be De Witt himself, insults Sheila. Winton fights De Witt and knocks him out. Sheila tells him to turn back. She says that her father is a broken English army officer, who has killed a man and is therefore in De Witt's power. That De Witt is all-powerful, being backed by Judge Davis, president of the diamond syndicate and also the resident magistrate and judge of the native protectorate.

CHAPTER III.—Winton finds Malopo in a turmoil, both over the strike and the theft of the De Witt diamond. Winton foolishly discloses his identity to Sam Simpson, a Jamaican negro, sub-editor of the local newspaper. He more wisely confides in Ned Burns, watchman at the Big Malopo, who tells him that the syndicate has planned to take control of the mine the next morning.

CHAPTER IV.—Winton finds that Sheila is cashier at the restaurant. He offers his friendship. She rebuffs him. Van Vorst, a notorious diamond thief, one of De Witt's men, slips the Sheila De Witt diamond into Winton's pocket and two policemen club Winton and arrest him. He escapes them when at his last gasp Sheila takes him into her house, bathes his wounds and saves him from his pursuers.

CHAPTER V.—The next morning Sheila offers Winton help in escaping from Malopo. He convinces her with difficulty that he did not steal the De Witt diamond and that he is president of the Big Malopo company. Bruised and blood-stained he runs across town, breaks by force into the company meeting, and aided by a popular demonstration proves his identity, blocks the reorganization and takes control. He asks Sheila to marry him. She laughs hysterically and refuses him.

CHAPTER VI.—Winton hires Seaton as compound manager and develops Big Malopo. Judge Davis, a philosophical old hypocrite of unknown past, offers him the syndicate's co-operation. Otherwise, he says, "we'll smash you, you 6-4 young fool."

CHAPTER VII.—Winton, infuriated by a scurrilous newspaper article about Sheila and himself, knocks Sam down and publicly threatens Judge Davis. He finds Sheila about to elope with De Witt, to save her father. He horsewhips De Witt. Sheila again refuses to marry him and says she is going away, never to see him or her father again.

Nobody was stirring in the compound, nobody was anywhere in sight. Forgetting Sam, who had not yet made his appearance, Winton ran through the compound, clambered over the gate, and made his way toward Seaton's cottage, to call him to go to Burns. But when he drew near it he saw with dismay that the door was wide open, and the interior a litter of rubbish. He ran on, passed the threshold, and entered the bedroom. It was



He entered the bedroom.

empty, the bed had not been occupied, and the old man had evidently departed.

For the first time the idea of treachery occurred to Winton.

He staggered out of the cottage. A blind rage took possession of him. He glared about him, and saw Sam in the distance, within the compound of the next claim, looking about him. He saw him point.

Following the direction indicated, Winton perceived a little native boy holding a horse behind Kash's store. At the same moment he saw a man slinking toward it against the edge of the compound. And he ran at full speed along the road to head him off.

As he ran he saw that Sam, too, was in pursuit of him. It seemed unlikely that the negro would be able to catch him, however, and Winton himself was fifty paces away.

The boy, apparently terrified at the turn of events, let the horse go and ran. The animal reared, but the run-

ner reached it and seized it by the bridle. The momentary delay enabled Sam to cover the ground between them.

He leaped at him as he was climbing quickly into the saddle. Winton recognized the man now as Van Vorst, the diamond thief.

Van Vorst lost his balance, but managed to pull a revolver from an open holster and fired at Sam pointblank. By a miracle of good luck Sam dodged the shot, and a moment later was racing at the top of his speed toward the shelter of Kash's store.

Van Vorst saw Winton and, standing beside his horse, aimed deliberately and fired. The bullet whizzed Winton's cheek. Next moment Winton was grappling with the thief. Van Vorst raised the revolver and brought it, but downward, smashing across Winton's head.

Winton dropped, but staggered to his feet in time to see Van Vorst leap into the saddle and ride away like the wind toward the desert. Then Sam's shout was heard. The negro appeared again, leading a horse by the halter, the saddle and bridle across his arm.

He had remembered that Kash kept a horse in his stable, a racer which he had acquired cheap as the result of a bet, and owing to an injury to the animal's fetlock. It was one of the best horses in Malopo, and the sight of it between the shafts of Kash's cart had created a good deal of feeling against the Armenian.

Sam began to slip on the bridle hastily, while Winton, snatching the saddle from him, adjusted it and began to pull in the girth.

"I'll catch him!" said Sam.

Winton would at any other time have been astonished at the transformation in the man. The negro who had run yelling from the Chronicle office on the day before now seemed devoid of fear.

"You get help for Ned Burns," said Winton, and mounted.

The horse needed no urging. It had been kept for days together in Kash's stable, its only exercise the pulling of the storekeeper's cart on the slow rounds of Malopo. The sense of a rider brought back the memories of the old days. It dashed off in pursuit of Van Vorst as if Winton's mind communicated to its own the urgency of capture.

Winton stuck to his seat doggedly and tried to keep his senses. The blow had reopened his old wound, and the blood was pouring into his eyes in a blinding torrent. But he concentrated all his will upon the chase. Unless he could regain the diamond the syndicate would oust him from his control of the Big Malopo, and make him the jest of the community which he had come to hate.

And somehow he felt that he was, in an unknown way, fighting for Sheila as well as for his own.

Van Vorst came into sight, a little speck far out upon the plains. He had left the road and was striking across the desert in the direction of the native territories, ten miles away. Malopo was a protectorate, the criminal law of the colony ran there. In the tribal lands, however, Van Vorst could laugh at pursuit until he found his opportunity to slip across the border into the Transvaal or Damaraland.

Winton knew this. The horse, sighting the fugitive, threw all its efforts into the chase and began to gain swiftly. It was an eery ride across the sand under the moonlight. Winton, sick from the chloroform and the blow, knew that he could not last long, but how he was going to return he did not stop to think. He felt in one of the holsters and found a revolver there. And, holding the weapon in his hand, he waited grimly while his horse overhauled the other.

They had raced past an outlying farm, which showed in the distance, the poplars standing up like ghostly sentinels across the flat. Now nothing was visible anywhere except the desert. Malopo was far behind. Winton gained steadily. He could distinguish that Van Vorst turned to watch him, and the action slowed his horse for a few moments. Winton gained more and more. Now only two hundred yards separated the fugitive and the pursuer.

When they were a hundred paces apart Van Vorst swung round in the saddle and fired. The bullet flew into the sand twelve paces away. Now only fifty paces separated them. Van Vorst pulled in suddenly and fired once more. He had only two more shots, and there would be no time to reload. Winton calculated that; but the ball whistled uncomfortably close, and this time he answered twice, without effect.

Van Vorst sat on his beast like a statue, aiming carefully at Winton's body. Winton spurred his horse, meaning to ride him down. At the same time he half swung himself out of the saddle, crushing against the animal's neck, so as to avoid presenting a mark. Van Vorst fired his fifth shot. It would have killed Winton; it struck

the saddle fairly and lodged under the tough pigskin. Winton was now almost upon him, his own revolver in his hand.

"Hands up!" he cried. He knew nothing of South African tricks of marksmanship, or the training of native mounts. For an instant he saw Van Vorst sitting on his horse, motionless; at the next the horse had curved to one side, and Winton's outstretched hand caught at nothing. Then Van Vorst fired his last shot.

The bullet pierced the horse's brain. It reared in its death agony. Winton, flung over its flank, fell prostrate.

As he fell, he managed to retain possession of his revolver. Van Vorst saw it; he snapped his weapon, but it was empty. With a curse he spurred his horse and galloped away.

Winton disengaged himself from his dead mount and staggered to his feet. He saw Van Vorst disappearing into the illimitable distance. All round him was the desert. He sat down wearily; when he was stronger he would have to pick his way back to Malopo by his horse's tracks.

He must have dozed for a few minutes, for when he looked up again he saw two riders cantering toward him across the desert.

CHAPTER IX.

Sheila's Secret.

As they came nearer he saw that one of them was a woman. He watched the pair with apathy; he felt too ill to be interested in anything very much.

But in a moment he was upon his feet, staring incredulously at the girl. The blaze of moonlight upon her face revealed to him—Sheila!

The other man was a Hottentot. At first he thought it was Bottlejohn. Then he perceived it was a shorter, younger man. He was evidently Sheila's escort.

But it was Sheila's appearance even more than her presence there that astonished Winton. She wore a ragged suit of khaki, with tall boots that reached to the edge of her knickerbockers, in her hair was a wreath of the pungent yellow flowers of the arid lands, her bare throat was encircled with a necklace of blue beads, and there were bracelets of hammered copper upon her wrists.

She leaped from her horse and ran to Winton. "Did he hurt you?" she cried.

Then, seeing the blood upon his face, she uttered an exclamation of fear and began to wipe it with a handkerchief that she drew from her pocket.

"You are wounded!"

"A slight hit on the head—like that other," said Winton. "I'm all right, I think. Sheila—"

"I'll tell you how I came here. I heard of the conspiracy. It was planned by De Witt. He meant to get the diamond so that you should not sell it and raise money. You would have to go to the syndicate."

"Well, Van Vorst has it all right," answered Winton.

He was still looking in wonder at the girl. Her whole demeanor had changed. She seemed freer, more confident, bolder, braver.

"I'll tell you how I came here," the girl repeated. "I learned of the scheme. Judge Davis hatched it through De Witt. They employed Van Vorst, promising him the diamond. Van Vorst wanted to get downcountry. He agreed. My father knew. They wished him to have a hand in it, but he was afraid. Oh, don't think it was loyalty to you!" she cried.

"I warned you from the beginning," the girl went on. "You should have left us alone. It was not for me to tell you that in his fear of De Witt my father would do anything, betray any trust rather than risk his life. That man has hounded us, and some day he will meet his deserts. But when I heard of the plan I rode in to warn you. And I have met you. That's all."

"No, Sheila," said Winton, looking at her and feeling the old mad infatuation for her again, mingled with the old doubts and uncertainties. "There is one thing you have not told me: how you came here, or from where you have come."

"If I tell you, I must tell you what I do not want to tell you," she answered quietly. "I have asked you, in memory of the honor you did me in the coach at Taungas to leave me, and to let me keep the truth from you. Isn't that enough?"

"It would be enough if I did not believe that you are the victim of a hallucination, Sheila," Winton answered.

"Then you shall know," cried the girl. "In any event, you cannot ride back to Malopo tonight, wounded as you are. It is eight miles away, and it is only five to my—my home." There was a bitterness in her voice as she spoke. "If you can ride, and will ride with me tonight, you shall know everything that you want to know before we part for the last time."

"I can ride," answered Winton. "And I wish to know, to prove to you that what seems so dreadful to you is a trifle, something that we can laugh at, Sheila."

The girl's attitude was expressive of intense excitement as she listened. She made no reply, but, turning to the Hottentot, addressed him in his own tongue. The man clicked in answer, dismounted from his horse, led it to Winton, and, placing the reins in his hands, set off at an even jog across the desert in the direction from which they had come.

Winton would have helped Sheila into the saddle, but she vaulted in without touching the stirrup, and sat upright on her mount, waiting for him. He clambered up, and they set off side by side.

The fresh breeze, blowing on Winton's face, drove the last traces of

the chloroform away. The scalp wound had ceased to bleed. Winton began to feel stronger. And he watched Sheila, riding gracefully at his side. He perceived that her saddle was of the thinnest and most pliable leather, her feet hardly touched the stirrups; she rode like one of the centauresque figures upon the Elgin marbles. Who and what was she? He could not believe that this girl was the child of the old thief and drunkard who had betrayed him.

But the sense of riding beside her across the free desert transported him to the seventh heaven of happiness. The Hottentot had disappeared; they were alone; he believed that within an hour he would have solved the mystery and proved it nothing.

Yet even then he was vaguely conscious that something in his brain checked the impulses of his heart, warning him, counseling prudence, questioning even his love.

The girl said nothing, and Winton did not break the silence. The miles were reeled off behind them; Winton did not know how long they traveled, but it was not yet dawn when the desert began to give place to a range of broken hills. They ascended a defile between two boulder-strewn elevations. Now the character of the country had changed. Imperceptibly the desert fell away. There was green grass underfoot, an occasional cactus raised its spiny joints among the rocks, here and there were clusters of acacias.

A man baboon barked at them from among the rocks, in challenge of their invasion of his domain, hurled a stone at them, and fled scrambling into his cave. Though no life was in evidence, there was that indefinite stirring around them that betokens the preparations for day. A breeze came up; then a line of amber appeared under the cloud banks in the east.

Dawn was at hand as they rode into the broken hills. Their horses climbed steep slopes, dislodging showers of stones, then began to descend into a fertile valley.

In the distance Winton could see a cluster of beehive huts, the headquarters of the native tribe. And still neither he nor Sheila had spoken.

The Hottentot who had set off afoot had arrived before them. He appeared out of a cleft in the mountains and indicated to Winton that he was ready to dismount. Winton and Sheila ascended a little slope afoot, toward the village.

In the center was a clearing, already occupied by a number of natives. They were naked, except for their loincloths, and carried long throwing spears and white ox-hide shields. At the two approached the chattering ceased.

Winton perceived in the middle of them a very old woman, wearing a waist cloth and a gaudily-colored blanket over her shoulders.

The natives sprang to their feet as Sheila drew near and uttered a deep voiced salutation. She spoke a few words, and silently they filed away into the huts. The old woman, Winton, and Sheila were alone in front of a smoldering fire.

The aged woman raised her eyes and fixed them on Winton's face. Winton looked at her intently. She was not unprepossessing, and he could see now that, like most of her race she had aged more quickly than the years of a white woman would have warranted. Perhaps she was about sixty.

Her skin was the color of a dark European's, sunburned rather than pigmented, and the features were regular; the eyes lacked the semibloque setting of the Hottentot's. It was clear that she had a considerable, perhaps a preponderating proportion of Caucasian blood.

Sheila turned to Winton, and in spite of his minimizing of her promised revelation he felt a chill at his heart at the sight of her face.

"This is my mother," she said, and bending, kissed the old woman.

Winton stood perfectly still. The revelation had stunned him. As in a dream he looked into the old creature's wrinkled face, conscious of Sheila's eyes fixed on his own. A bird broke into song; the tops of the mountains were silhouetted against the red of the sky; nothing seemed to stir, and the bird went on singing.

Sheila beckoned to Winton, and he followed her to the summit of the elevation. They were quite alone, looking down on the ring of native huts, and the doll-like figure of the old queen of the tribe, who had not stirred. Evidently she had not understood what Sheila had said.

Sheila faced Winton calmly. "It is your doing," she said quietly. "I wanted you to leave me. Yes, I am the daughter of a white man and a half-breed native woman."

"After my father ran away from civilization, fearing capture by the police, he made his way into these territories. So much De Witt told you. He wanted to tell you the rest. Perhaps it would have been better if he had done so, but I could not have borne it then. I had been honored by you, as by none of the men in Malopo who know who I am. A native woman, one with the least speck of black blood in her, is always a native in their eyes. Is it not so in your own land?"

"Yes," answered Winton.

"My father became a native chief, as many white men have done in South Africa. Unlike them, he married only one wife. That woman became my mother. I was brought up in her kraal. My earliest recollections are of the tribesmen going out to war. I have seen captives slaughtered, and warriors stabbed through the body with spears, and barbarous, bloody sacrifices. That was in the days when the interior of Bechuanaland was an unknown land. Do you wonder that I could never feel at home among white people, though

three-fourths of my blood is white? "My father became chief of this tribe. The natives would not let him lead them in battle. They set too



high a value on his counsel. And he governed them wisely. There is no man from one end of the country to the other who does not know 'King' Seaton.

"When I was six years old my father thought that the danger of pursuit was over. He planned to take me away, so that I might be brought up among his people. He thought I would forget my birth. He thought that he would give me what he considered to be my rightful heritage. He stole away by night, abandoning my mother. The tribe would not have let him go.

"But he found that it was not easy to sink his identity. He changed his name, but in vain. Wherever he went natives recognized him and told their masters. He had to flee constantly. Mr. De Witt knew his secret. He wanted to make use of him in some dishonest work for which only my father could help him. My father yielded to his threats, and thereafter De Witt hounded him.

"At last my father went back to his tribe, to find that my mother had succeeded to the leadership. He was already an outcast among the whites; now he became an outcast among the blacks also. The tribe respected him, but they feared him, they thought he was a government agent; they never trusted him. He had become the loneliest man in the whole world.

"And as for me, the memory of those early years was stamped indelibly upon my mind. I looked at men and things from the native's point of view. I, too, was known as one of native blood. People pitied me, derided me, but none held out a helping hand, and never, until you honored me in the coach had any man recognized that I might have the instincts of the white woman—some of them. Perhaps, if you had known you would have felt the same as they did."

"No, Sheila," answered Winton.

"I wanted you not to know. Has it ever occurred to you that a simple word from a stranger may change the entire course of our lives? You helped me when I had come to despair. Your kindness meant more to me than you can possibly recognize. For I will speak plainly to you now that at last you understand the fatuity of your course.

"When Mr. De Witt became infatuated with me I knew that he had a wife downcountry whom he had abandoned. And he knew that I knew it. He did not deceive me. It had never entered his mind that I could expect him to marry a woman with native blood. He had sworn to me that if I went away with him his persecution of my father should stop. There was nothing in his conduct toward me that might not have been done by any man in Malopo. No blame would have attached itself to him in Malopo's eyes.

"I told him that I was willing to sacrifice myself for my father's sake. Why not? I am a native woman; why should I obey the law of the whites when I am a thing shunned and despised?"

"Sheila!" cried Winton hoarsely.

"Yes, despised," she repeated, flinging out the words defiantly. "As you despise me now."

"You are wrong, Sheila. You have suffered, not through people's contempt, but because the world is thoughtless."

She laughed contemptuously.

"Never mind the world," she answered. "Listen to one thing, and be proud of it if you care to be. Before I met you, when life seemed hopeless, I had resolved to yield to De Witt to save my father's life, which is in his power. You saved me. I was going with him that night, but I know that there was murder in my heart. I was going to kill him. You showed me the better way; taught me to honor myself, even at the cost of my father's life if need be."

"Sheila, I honor you for what you have told me," said Winton. "I understand what you have suffered. I do not pity you. I admire your courage."

"Yes?" she answered, with an ironic infection in her voice. "Perhaps you will tell me that you still love me?"

"I love you, Sheila, as I have done from the first!" he cried.

"And would still ask me to be your wife?" she persisted relentlessly.

Winton was silent. He knew now that the inexorable law of the race is founded, not on prejudice, but upon some interior prompting that may be called divine. In spite of the spell that the girl exercised over him he shrank from the idea. And the thought of his own ostracism that must follow had the least part in his abhorrence.

Sheila laughed, and Winton cried

out, stung to the quick: "I am ready to marry you, Sheila. And I will take you away from Malopo; I will take you to America, where none will ever guess at the truth."

"You propose too high an honor for me," answered the girl ironically. But then, her bitter mood softened by the vehemence of his words, she went to him and put her hands on his shoulders with the old gesture. Her face was very tender.

"No, my dear," she answered. "I have made you suffer in my outraged pride; I have brought sorrow upon you in return for the kindness you have shown me. But I would never do you this wrong."

"Sheila, it is no wrong!"

"The race bar—"

"Means nothing. You have inherited none of the qualities of—of your mother."

"Are we responsible only to ourselves then?" asked the girl, seeming to shrink for the first time under her ordeal. "Or are we, each one of us, custodians of the race? You, at least, have your duty to the generation that is to follow yours."

"In the years to come you will thank me, if you cannot now. Good-by; and believe that, if my heart were not warped and twisted, it would be yours, though I could never be."

Of a sudden the sun's rim burst above the valley, turning it into a glow of gold. The lengthy shadows of the mountains swept it from end to end. In the huts beneath them there was a stirring. Women, their straight bodies as graceful as Greek statues, carrying water pitchers made from wild gourds upon their heads in classic guise, began to walk in single file along the path down to the spring. Winton saw a group of warriors standing, and looking up at them.

"I have one more word to say," Sheila added. "The tribesmen are disaffiliated about their lands, as you must know. There have been rumors of a rebellion. They are well founded. The meeting last night was to discuss the chances of an uprising. I know no more. But warn Malopo. This is the last service that I can do for those who are no longer my people."

She turned and began to descend the slope. Winton stood watching her until she had mingled with the throng of savages below. Then only did he seem to wake from the dream that had taken possession of him since the moment of their encounter in the desert.

He shuddered and sick and broken, tore himself with almost a physical effort and set his face toward the desert.

Only that obscure race duty which is never awakened in the vast majority of men prevented him from obeying his impulse to follow her into the native village and do what Seaton had done. In spite of Sheila's vehemence Winton believed that he could overcome her scruples. He felt that she loved him, or rather, that there was, beneath her moods, beneath her hardness, a spring of love, loyal and inexhaustible.

Presently Winton perceived the Hottentot whom he had encountered in the desert. The man came up to him and indicated by signs that it was his mission to guide him out of the mountains.

Winton followed him, not along the route by which they had come, but along a defile in the hills, which led, apparently, in the opposite direction, though, after many twistings, it finally turned southward.

The desert appeared again. Winton could see the vast, dead waste, which was so appropriate to his heart, extended, flat and like a frozen sea, toward the horizon. An indeterminate green line showed where the fertile valley ended. A ridge of cactus trees, which stood out upon the very verge of the sand, formed a sort of passade.

The land was ablaze with sunlight. Winton stopped at the edge of the desert and looked back. The mountains, concealing Sheila, holding her against him secretly, had drawn together. Nothing living seemed to stir among those clefts and peaks.

Yet, as Winton's eyes wandered upward they fixed themselves upon one living thing, on the very summit of the highest peak of all, which overhung the plain. It was the nude form of a black sentinel, armed with spear and ox-hide target.

With the superb gesture of a discobolus the man hurled the spear, straight as an arrow, toward the sun. It seemed to hang poised a moment in the void, and plunged downward, burying itself to the middle of the shaft in the sand at Winton's feet.

(Continued next week.)

HAMBONE'S MEDITATIONS

DEY AIN NO USE ER-TALKIN' -- EF A MAN BEES MUCH UV A MAN. DEY'S A RIGHT SMAHT O' GAWD IN 'IM!

