

# Diamonds of Malopo



by  
**VICTOR ROUSSEAU**

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(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, and also 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 91-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, proprietor of the local newspaper. He not only 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, notorious diamond dealer, one of De Witt's men, slips the stolen De Witt diamond into Winton's pocket and two policemen club Winton and arrest him. He escapes them and 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 the company meeting, and aided by a popular demonstration proves his identity, blocks the reorganization, 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 cooperation. He agrees, he says, "we'll smash you, old young fool."

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

**CHAPTER VIII.**—Winton hires Sam as night watchman. Van Vorst's gang steal the De Witt diamond. Winton pursues Van Vorst, who escapes with the big stone.

**CHAPTER IX.**—Winton is rescued by Sheila, on her way to a native village. There she kisses an old woman, only partly white, and says, "This is my mother." He again asks her to marry him. She refuses him, because of the race bar. Heart sick, he sets out for Malopo with a native guide.

**CHAPTER X.**—Winton succumbs. His guide robs and deserts him. Seaton rescues him. Burns's brain is affected; he cannot tell what happened. The workers in the mine return no stones. Winton is forced to borrow money from the syndicate, agreeing to pay in a month or lose the mine.

**CHAPTER XI.**—The syndicate makes further plans to oust Winton. His men search the native workers and secure many large diamonds. Seaton appears, confesses the plot and says he came to take his medicine.

**CHAPTER XII.**—Seaton is tried for diamond buying from the natives before Judge Crawford, who has succeeded Judge Davis. The crowd regarded De Witt as the real criminal and believes Davis to be behind De Witt. Seaton confesses everything. He tells how he shot a man and how De Witt, knowing about it, forced him to do all kinds of crooked work. De Witt, thinking Davis has abandoned him to his fate, voluntarily testifies that Davis is the man whom Seaton mistook for the man who had killed and that Sheila is Davis' daughter. Davis drops in a faint. De Witt flees from Malopo. Seaton is acquitted.

**CHAPTER XIII.**—Davis, much broken, is anxious to find Sheila and determined to kill Seaton. Davis and Winton find Sheila and her mother and Seaton in a native village. Davis and his wife recognize each other and go temporarily insane, talking as if twenty years had been obliterated. Seaton flees on horseback. Davis regains his mental balance and nurses Seaton. The two men race side by side, Davis trying to get his hands on Seaton. Then the narrow valley fills up with an enormous herd of migrating spring-buck. Part of the herd plunges over a precipice, burying both men under a mountain of dead antelope. Winton can find nothing of the two men but some brown stains on the rocks below. Horror-stricken, he returns to the village to find Sheila crouching beside her dead mother.

But as he spoke he heard a crackling sound above him and thin wreaths of smoke began to coil through the roof. The mob had withdrawn a little space and howled in triumph around the cottage.

The structure was of brick, but there was a wooden roof, baked so dry by the sun that the rains had hardly affected it. Burning brands had lit on it in half a dozen places.

As Winton looked wildly about him he caught sight of Sam going through extraordinary antics. He had begun to tear off his clothes as fast as he was able, until he stood up bare to the waist. In spite of their desperate situation Winton was shocked at the negro's action.

"Have you gone mad, Sam?" he demanded angrily.

But Sam, not satisfied, snatched up a knife and began ripping off the legs of his trousers at the knees. He picked up the spear. The transformation was astounding. Sam Simpson had evolved into one of the wild negroes of the compound.

The roof was blazing. There came another rush against the door. The yells were deafening. Winton caught Sheila to him and tried to reassure her in the brief interval of recharging his revolver. But the girl was terror-stricken, and she could hardly hide her fears. She clung to Winton, trembling.

"The tunnel!" gasped Sam, dragging Winton by the arm. And the thought of this had not entered Winton's mind. The safe had stood over the hole ever since the robbery. They pulled it aside. Beneath it gaped the excavation.

"Get down, Sam," cried Winton as the savages, believing that Winton was cowed, or had no more ammunition, made a concerted rush. The door began to splinter.

Sam lowered himself, Winton swung Sheila down and followed. He meant to try and replace the safe from below, but his feet had hardly touched the soft earth before the door crashed from its hinges. He dived after his companions, and heard the mine boys' shouts of discovery. Their feet, which seemed immediately overhead, made the walls of the tunnel tremble. Fine dust from the concussion set the three to choking.

"Go on with Miss Sheila, Sam," whispered Winton. He leveled his revolver along the tunnel. It was quite dark, but unless his ears failed him it would be impossible to miss his mark.

He heard the natives whispering together above, and the sudden silence made the tunnel eerier than ever.

They were at an immense disadvantage, for it was impossible to hurt a spear within the narrow passage, though one could be used for thrusting with deadly effect. But first the thruster would have to assume a prone position, and Winton knew that his revolver would have these several seconds' start of the spear.

He waited, hardly breathing, until there came to his ears, very faintly, the touch of bare feet upon the ground, followed by the suppressed breathing of a man not far away.

One of the negroes was evidently at the bottom of the excavation, but the excavation immediately beneath the safe was wider than the tunnel itself, and a projecting angle of soft earth afforded shelter. The man—or men—might therefore be out of the direct line of fire. Winton drew a match softly from his pocket and struck it suddenly along the side of his revolver butt. The little flaring light revealed the white eyeballs and peering face of one of the savages, not a dozen feet distant. Another face was looking over the shoulder. Everything above was deathly still.

The man's arm was drawn back, the spear, with a murderous shove-blade, held ready to thrust. Winton fired point-blank into the open mouth.

The match went out simultaneously with the discharge. There followed a choking cry and the sound of blood bubbling from the throat. An outburst of yells from above rolled in a hideous echo along the tunnel. The second savage turned and began scrambling back like a mole, but Winton fired again and heard the shuffling stop, as if the bullet had been instantaneously fatal. A shower of earth came rattling down.

And now the faint, reflected flare that came into the tunnel, and the roaring from above told Winton that the cottage was ablaze. The sounds of shouting grew fainter. The negroes must have been driven out by fire. Winton raised the body of the man nearest him and set it in the tunnel in such a way that it formed an obstacle to anyone approaching from the rear. He would hear the sound of its dislodgment if the attack were renewed.

But the savages had had enough of the tunnel. Winton loaded his revolver with his last handful of cartridges and began scrambling after Sam, calling in a low tone.

He heard Sam's distant answer, and made his way as fast as he could along the tunnel. Would the natives be waiting at the other end? They could make the distance above ground more swiftly than they could. But Winton doubted whether their minds would work in that manner, with plunder to be had in every compound store along the diamond ridge. He was right in his presumption, for presently he saw Sam and Sheila silhouetted against the faint light at the other end of the tunnel. He caught Sheila to him fiercely.

"Keep up your courage, dear!" he whispered. "We are going to be free. Stay here with Sam, while I go forward and explore."

For a moment she clung to him and pleaded with him not to expose himself to danger, but it was wonderful how brave she was. Instructing Sam to stay with Sheila, Winton began to creep forward along the ground.

But in a moment he saw Sam beside him. "Mr. Garrett, I'll go," said the negro. "I guess it's safer for me, looking like this."

That was a fact. Reluctantly—for he would have preferred to face the danger—Winton went back and allowed Sam to proceed upon his scouting mission.

All along the fields the stores were burning fiercely. Against the light of the leaping flames could be seen the bodies of the savages, struggling to carry off their plunder. Bales of cottons and cloth, blankets, packing cases of comestibles were being borne on naked black shoulders. The store on the compound into which the fugitives had emerged was, however, already gutted, and there were no natives immediately at hand.

It was the old story, repeated a hundred times in the bloody history of South Africa, of the untamable nature of the aborigine reasserting itself against white supervision grown lax.

Winton, a few yards from Sheila, suddenly perceived the body of a man



lying face downward upon the ground, immediately inside the barred wire which separated the compound in which he was from that adjoining. He recognized it as that of Joseph.

It was planned to the earth with two upright spears. Death must have been instantaneous.

Winton's jaws clamped with a spasm of fury. He sprang to his feet, but remembering the urgent need of caution, lay down again beside Sheila watching Sam.

He saw the negro worming his way along the ground upon his stomach. Suddenly Sam turned toward him with an imperative gesture to lie still. Looking up, Winton perceived a Kafir sentry, armed with a spear and shield, on guard at the desert road behind the devastated and smoldering store that had belonged once to Kash.

The presence of this man was ominous. If the outbreak had been confined to the diamond compounds, no sentry would have been set. The fact of his presence betokened a preconcerted rising, guided by shrewd minds from outside.

It betokened something more. For the man who had placed him there must have had a personal interest in Winton's capture. Yet Winton was no object of hatred on the part of the natives—rather he was one of the more popular among the claim-holders.

But Winton realized only the first part of the purpose, not its implications. He watched Sam spring to his feet and advance boldly toward the sentry, brandishing his spear. There was nothing to show that Sam was other than one of the marauders. He was just as black, and in the night he looked just as ferocious as any of them. The sentry turned and looked at Sam in inquiry, then went forward to meet him.

Sam's muscular arm went back, and the spear, driven unerringly, by some atavistic impulse, went home through the Kafir's throat.

The sentry dropped without a word or sound, the spear-point sticking into the ground behind him, supporting the falling corpse grotesquely for a moment, till the body, collapsing sideways, rolled into the road and lay still.

Sam came back slowly. "I've killed him," he began to whimper. "A good thrust, Sam."

"I've killed a human being. God forgive me!" whispered Sam, shaking as if he had an attack of fever.

"Come along," said Winton. "We must make the desert now. We can work round toward Malopo. If need be we'll hide in the bed of the stream for a day or two. We must hurry."

The tears were streaming down the negro's cheeks. With a gulp Sam pulled himself together. Winton raised Sheila to her feet, and the three raced across the road, crossed the ridge, and saw the desert before them.

It was beginning to grow light. From where they halted to get their breath they could see the long line of blazing stores and hear the distant shouting. A sudden outburst of rifle firing from the direction of the town gave the hope that Malopo had been warned in time and was putting up a defense.

They hurried on, keeping below the ridge, going a little distance into the

desert, then turning to strike the bed of the winding river, now a succession of pools, with a freeway of stones and boulders.

Once between the banks they would be in reasonable security. There were numerous caves and excavations there, in one of which a temporary refuge could be found. But as they halted upon the bank Sam uttered a cry and pointed toward the desert. Three men were riding toward them, with the evident intention of intercepting their flight.

They were just visible in the twilight, which made their figures, and those of their horses, at once enormous and shadowy.

Two of them, from their firm, stirrupless seat, were obviously Hottentots. The third was a white man.

There seemed nothing to fear and much to hope. The Hottentots were never on friendly terms with the Bechuanas, whom they despised as savages, and the presence of their master was still more reassuring.

The three spurred their horses and came galloping abreast. They were within five and twenty paces when Winton recognized the white man as De Witt.

Before he realized the man's hostile intentions De Witt had ridden straight at him. The Hottentots, with rearing horses, dashed at Sam. Winton saw Sam roll on the ground, and then he himself was down in a tangle of plunging hoofs.

He had a dim knowledge of firing his revolver, and then the scene faded out of his consciousness as quietly as if it were some moving-picture withdrawn from the white screen.

## CHAPTER XV

### Pursuit in the Desert.

"Mr. Garrett—wake up! For God's sake, open your eyes, sir!"

Winton obeyed. The river banks were swimming around him. He was lying on the stones in the bed of the stream, and Sam was kneeling beside him.

"Sheila!" Winton muttered.

"He's got her, Mr. Garrett."

Winton struggled into a sitting position and tried to collect himself.

"Who—when?" he mumbled.

"De Witt—half an hour ago. The horse kicked you on the head and stunned you. I was knocked down too. You shot one of the Hottentots and they snatched up Miss Sheila and put her on his horse and rode away with her."

Winton got on his feet, and, with Sam's aid, staggered up the bank. It was quite light now. From Malopo came the intermittent outbreaks of rifle firing, but there were no negroes in sight. The fields were totally deserted, the gutted stores were burning out in smoke. The broad expanses of the desert lay before Winton's eyes the risen sun dancing on the horizon. The body of the dead Hottentot lay a few yards away, but there was no living thing in sight.

"We must get horses, Sam," said Winton.

"Yes, sir. There's a horse feeding down the river."

"What's that?" cried Winton incredulously.

"It's one of the Malopo Deep's horses, Mr. Garrett. It's that gray. He's a fast goer. He's saddled, too. The boys must have tried to capture him, but he broke his halter and got away."

"We must catch him, Sam."

"I've caught him, sir. I saw you'd be coming to in a few minutes, and I went after him and tied him to a tree."

"Sam," cried Winton brokenly, "I can't thank you enough—not now. Get him, Sam! Get him!"

Sam came back in five minutes, leading the horse. Winton knew it very well. It was not so fast as De Witt's, but it had won prizes at the local handicaps. It was in first-class condition.

Sam had put one foot into the stirrup when Winton dragged him down.

"Let me go, Mr. Garrett. Let me go!" he pleaded. "You're not fit, sir."

"I'm going, Sam. I'll be back with Miss Sheila—or I'll not be back. No use, Sam. Leave it to me. It's my job, confound you!"

Sam took his foot out of the stirrup with a sigh. The tears were streaming down his black face.

"You're right, sir," he said humbly. "I—I—"

But neither man could speak, and Winton, wringing Sam's hand, mounted and rode away.

His burning anger gave him strength. The thought of Sheila's danger, of De Witt's trick at the end, nerved him to desperation. Within two days the wheel of his fortunes had made a complete revolution. Only the thought of Sheila in De Witt's power enabled him to maintain his mental equilibrium.

And for a while, as he rode over the lonely desert, touched here and there with the green of the young grass, he felt like a shadow moving in a phantom world.

He tried to concentrate his attention on the tracks of the three horses, which were distinct in the rain-soaked ground. So long as these were plain in sight he felt that he was nearing Sheila every moment, in spite of the fact that he could see no one. He discovered that what his horse lacked in speed it made up in staying powers, and hours passed without any slackening of the easy "triple" pace.

But the morning wore away, and it became clear to Winton that De Witt had at least maintained his lead. It was almost midday when he discovered that the tracks had disappeared.

For some time they had been growing less distinct, for the sandy earth

of the desert had yielded to flinty ground. Winton went back, found them, and discovered that the horses had struck off at an angle leading far away from the headquarters of the tribe.

Hitherto the horses had been traveling almost immediately toward the hills. Yet it had seemed improbable that De Witt could have allied himself with the Bechuanas. They would have rejected overtures from any white man; and De Witt, scoundrel though he was, would hardly have made them. Winton's suspicions now became a certainty in his mind. The Dutchman, who was well known throughout the desert country, had gathered about himself a few wandering Hottentots, probably old servants or cattle-men, by whose aid he hoped to strike across the desert into another territory.

The tracks led due west, toward the heart of the almost unknown Kalahari, the desert of salt pans, inhabited only by a few wandering Bushmen and the antelope on which they lived.

Winton knew that there was no settlement of any kind, not even a native one, for hundreds of miles in this direction. If one went far enough, however, and knew how to live on the wild melons that send their tap-roots hundreds of feet into the ground and draw up water, one would enter German territory, where the Herrero tribesmen lived among the infrequent oases. Thence one could strike the western shore.

And Winton suddenly began to think that Van Vorst must have taken this route. Probably the same Hottentots who had accompanied De Witt had helped Van Vorst across the desert. They might even have cached food and water in some lonely spot.

Winton's heart sank as he followed the faint tracks mile after mile, often reduced to a slow walk in order not to lose them. Sometimes only a tuft of down-trodden, withered grass, or a few displaced pebbles showed him his route. And then even the wisps of grass vanished, and the flinty desert lay smooth before him.

It was early afternoon. Winton had been guiding himself more by instinct and judgment than by any visible traces. He realized now that he had lost the trail, and lost it half an hour before, and had been deluding himself with signs which were nonexistent. Worse than that, it was impossible to pick up the spoor by going back.

His horse had gone gamely, but it was gradually giving out. He dismounted, and the beast stood panting, with drooping head. It had ceased to sweat—an ominous sign. He left it and began to cast about in a wide circle in the hope of lifting the tracks. But he found nothing; and, standing under the blistering sun, he knew that he was himself lost, that he had covered some five and thirty miles which, if retraced, must be retraced afoot.

He went back. The animal had not moved. He looked about him. In the far distance were the faintest blue outlines of hills. It occurred to him that De Witt might have been making for these. And he might as well go forward as turn back.

He trudged on endlessly, leading the horse, the sun a grilling fire above him. His boots were burned through from contact with the hot stones. Loose shale and flints slipped under his tread.

The sun, even in its descent, seemed to grow hotter. Winton was half dead from thirst. The panting horse was becoming a burden. At last it stood still and dropped slowly upon its knees. It looked at him and whinnied.

As Winton glanced hopelessly over the plain his eyes were arrested by the sight of a dark object lying an indefinite distance away. It was too large for a man—too black for a rock. And there were no rocks anywhere, for the whole plain seemed to have been crushed flat by a giant steam-roller.

Winton made his way toward it. It began to take form; it was a dead horse. It had dropped in its tracks, and its sufferings had been ended by a bullet through the head. But there were no signs of a rider, and it was impossible to distinguish any foot-prints on the stones.

It was no doubt the horse that had been ridden by one of the three. It was not De Witt's. Probably it was the Hottentot's.

Winton's spirits soared upward. He set his teeth grimly and went back to his animal. He must go on now, even if he had to leave the beast behind him.

He stood looking at it. It had fallen upon its stomach, and crouched thus, with its legs bent under it. It raised its head and whinnied again faintly. It was past saving, unless water could be procured immediately.

Winton drew his revolver, took careful aim behind the ear, and fired. The beast's head went down—it quivered, rolled on its side, and died.

And he went on. By degrees his journey became automatic, so that he was hardly conscious of his surroundings. He saw only the distant hills and the western sun descending with tantalizing slowness. His tongue, swollen and numb, seemed to distend his cheeks. Sometimes the stony desert yielded for a few steps to sparse patches of flinty earth, indicating the hope of some fertile region beyond, but it always began again.

The sun dipped into the west, and still the man staggered onward. The significance of the patches of thorn scrub was lost to him, of the rugged and broken terrain, of the foothills about him, with their straggling mi-

mosas. But suddenly Winton stopped, trembling.

Green grass was at his feet, and out of a fissure in the ground there bubbled a little spring, unguessed at by the map-makers. It was a tiny unknown oasis in the vast wilderness. De Witt had evidently possessed the secret, and had planned to make this his headquarters until the hue and cry had been dropped.

Winton flung himself upon the earth beside the spring, and, burying his face in the water, drank until his shriveled veins seemed to pulse with new blood.

The sun had set, and the intense heat was changing to the icy cold of the desert night when he arose, rested, and with all the grimness of his resolution nerving him to action, he knew that Sheila could not be far away. He looked at his revolver. To his consternation he discovered that only two shots remained. However, these should be enough—one, at least, would save Sheila from De Witt; the other—

He would not face the possibilities that unfolded themselves before him, but rose to his feet, and was about to follow the spring through a valley into the hills when something lying upon the ground attracted his attention.

It was Sheila's handkerchief.

He snatched it up and pressed it to his lips. He felt that Sheila had dropped it for an indication, knowing that he would follow. Lightly he stepped forward into the bush-clad hills, among the boulders.

The valley opened. The scene grew desolate again. All round Winton were hills of a precipitous character, which gradually grew steeper until he found himself in a sort of level amphitheater, apparently inclosed, save at the end through which he had come. Thin tufts of grass and sparse vegetation grew around the bases of the cliffs, but the central portion of the valley was of a dazzling whiteness, as if incrustated with salt or alkali.

Along one side were numerous trails, showing the sharp edges of the spoor of beasts.

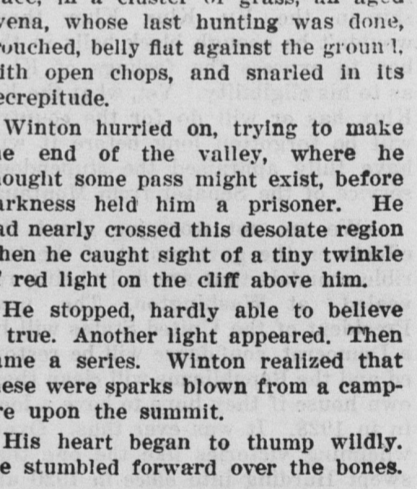
After a while Winton discovered that the white floor, on which he now walked, was not composed of mineral but of animal matter. It was a layer of pulverized bones, thousands upon thousands, picked bare by jackals and vultures, bleached by the sun and disintegrated by the passage of years.

Gradually the bones grew larger until Winton was stumbling on that uneven floor. It was one of those death places of the wild beasts of the veld, often described but seldom encountered. It was a natural resting-place for the antelope and creatures of prey, which, feeling the approach of death, drank their last drink at the spring and turned aside among the cliffs to die unmolested. It had been used for countless generations. Winton saw the immensely long tibiae-bones of the giraffe, exceeding the height of a man, though the beast had long since been driven northward. There were the skulls and horns of springbok, koodoo, hartbeeste and guu, with their varying forms and spirals. Gaunt ribs stood out like the framework of old, rotting boats; teeth gaped in skulls, and in one lonely place, in a cluster of grass, an aged hyena, whose last hunting was done, crouched, belly flat against the ground, with open chops, and snarled in its decrepitude.

Winton hurried on, trying to make the end of the valley, where he thought some pass might exist, before darkness held him a prisoner. He had nearly crossed this desolate region when he caught sight of a tiny twinkle of red light on the cliff above him.

He stopped, hardly able to believe it true. Another light appeared. Then came a series. Winton realized that these were sparks blown from a camp-fire upon the summit.

His heart began to thump wildly. He stumbled forward over the bones.



Darkness had fallen by the time he reached the narrow trail at the valley's end, and he had many narrow escapes among the boulders with which the way was strewn. On each side of him the cliff rose vertically, and the pass itself, hardly wide enough to permit a horse to ascend, seemed like a fissure in the mountain side made by some natural cleavage of the rocks.

He had ascended to within a few feet of the summit when some instinct halted him abruptly. Then a sudden drift of smoke toward him showed him that the camp-fire was just at the crest. The sound of voices reached his ears.

(Continued next week.)

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