

Diamonds of Malopo

By
VICTOR ROUSSEAU

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(Continued from last week.)

Crawling slowly forward upon his stomach, and pulling himself to the level top of the mountain, Winton peered out from behind the cover of a mimosa tree, and saw a party of yellow Hottentots seated about the blaze.

There were six or eight of them, and behind the fire was a tent, which Winton knew concealed De Witt.

The fear that Sheila was there, in the man's power, tempted Winton to rush forward. He had to use all his judgment to give no sign of his presence as he crouched flat behind the little tree at the edge of the precipice.

Some movement must have alarmed one of the Hottentots, for he leaped to his feet with a guttural exclamation and hurled his knobkerrie toward the spot where Winton lay. It was fortunate that the party had no dogs with them. The missile, whirring past Winton's head, crashed against a boulder and dropped to the valley below, striking from rock to rock in the course of its descent.

The native, who had advanced to recover his weapon, stopped as the sound of the fall showed that it was irrecoverable, and went back to the fire.

Winton's fingers relaxed on his revolver butt. Another instant and he would have fired—and lost Sheila irrevocably.

He lay flat in the grass, watching the light of the fire play upon the fierce faces about it. Already the moon was rising. He could neither advance nor retire without immediate discovery. Desperate plans chased each other through his head in swift succession.

Each turned upon the feasibility of a rush, the snatching up of a spear after he had fired his remaining bullets, and a hopeless fight with the object of at least killing De Witt. Each plan was hopeless; but then everything else was hopeless.

The minutes seemed lengthening into hours. At last Winton's plans had simmered down to this: he would not risk discovery until he was assured that Sheila was in imminent danger. For the present she was probably safe. He felt sure she was not in De Witt's tent. Where, then, was she?

As his eyes traveled from spot to spot they lit upon a recess in a wall of rock at the summit of the mountain. The leaping flames of the fire illuminated the interior of what seemed a little cave. And somehow Winton sensed that Sheila was within that.

It was some thirty yards away, and he saw little chance of reaching it unobserved. There was a fringe of grass through which he might crawl for the greater part of the journey, but for the last few feet he would have to traverse bare rock, within a few feet of the fire. Yet he began his task, and it was infinitely arduous and slow. It was a matter of inch-long movements—first of one arm, then of the other, then of the corresponding lower limbs. The cry noises of grass crackled under the slightest movement.

The natives were dozing over the fire. Winton had gone perhaps six feet when one of the Hottentots raised himself suddenly to a kneeling position and thrust out his head toward him, peering intently through the grass. Winton, perfectly motionless, stared for at least five minutes into the yellow face within a few feet of his own. The man knelt like a statue, the eyeballs gleaming in the moonlight, the fingers encircling the spear-shaft.

Suddenly the sight faded. The moonlight was cut off abruptly, plunging the land into immediate darkness. Then a few drops of rain began to fall. In half a minute, a torrent was descending.

It was the characteristic beginning of one of the seasonal thunderstorms. As Winton crouched near the cave, preparing to cross the open space, there came a flash of lightning that made the world as bright as day. It showed him the form of the Hottentot, motionless where he had been watching, the fingers still about the spear. But it showed him another sight that drove the blood from his heart.

He saw De Witt crossing from the tent to the cave.

So momentary was the flash that the man's attitude, his gesture, and the movement of his body and limbs seemed caught as on a photographic plate. He was halfway to the cave, hurrying with head bent down to shield his face from the rain. But Winton could still see the look of anticipation on his features, and it was that which gave him, for the second time, the lust for murder.

It was borne in upon him then that by no possibility could De Witt and he live in the same world together.

The flash, which had given Winton his final clue to Shellah's hiding-place, had shown him the topography of the mountain cleft. The place was a natural fortress. The only apparent approach was the narrow neck along which he had come. Beyond the mountain dropped in a vertical cliff, and beyond that was the stony desert where no tree grew and nothing could live.

In the interval between two succeeding flashes Winton crept noiselessly across the open space in front of the cave and crept forward into the darkness of the interior. As he gained the shelter of the projecting wall, and crouched behind it, hidden alike from the sight of the Hottentots without and from those within, he heard Sheila speaking, and knew that his search was ended.

CHAPTER XVI

The Passing of De Witt.

"Yes, I am in your power, but do you think he will not avenge the wrong you would do me?" she asked.

"Sheila, listen to reason! We've both fought for you, and I've won. You'll never see him again. He can't find the way here, and even if he knew where you are he couldn't cross the desert. You're in my power—and I'm offering to marry you. Can I be fairer?"

"To your own wife?" asked Sheila scornfully.

"That happened years ago. Maybe she's dead. I haven't heard of her in five years, and nobody will know about it where I'll take you. You shall have your fling in Johannesburg and live with the best people. Sheila, I love you—"

"If you loved me, Mr. De Witt, you would scorn to threaten me."

"I'm talking plain sense. You're in my power—absolutely. If you'll say the one word you shall be set free, and we'll strike across country together. If you won't—well, you know—"

"No. That's my answer. You've had it before. No."

"You're mighty proud of that white blood of yours, I suppose," sneered De Witt.

"Suppose I was lying in court to get even with the old judge. Suppose you're half-nigger still. How about Garrett, then?"

"You told the truth," answered Sheila.

"What do you mean? Suppose I tell you it wasn't the truth?"

"But it was the truth," cried Sheila, "for I have always felt it. Blood tells, and mine has called out to me that I was white, white, ever since I was a child in the village. I clung to that belief in spite of everything."

"Well, it was the truth," said De Witt grudgingly. Then his tone softened. "Sheila, I've got you now, and, by Heavens, I won't let you go!" he said.

There was a struggle in the cave. The girl uttered a cry. And at that moment Winton bounded forward.

The second cry that came from Sheila's lips was drowned in the roll of the reverberating thunder that followed a vivid lightning flash. In that instant Winton saw De Witt standing one arm grasping Sheila to him, while his eyes dilated as he recognized her rescuer confronting him, revolver in hand.

The darkness and the echoes of the thunder seemed interminable. Sheila broke from De Witt with a cry and ran to Winton. He felt her arms about him, but he thrust her gently aside.

"I have you covered," he called to De Witt. "If I hear you stir, or if you cry out, I fire."

No answer came. Winton waited tense, his revolver aimed at the spot where he imagined De Witt to be. The next flash showed the outlaw standing with his back against the wall of the cave, a dozen feet distant. The flash and De Witt's shot were almost simultaneous.

Winton saw a chip fly from the rocky wall beside him. He sprang for De Witt, touched him, lost him, and stood panting for the next flash.

It came, and the two shots rang out together, though the sound of the discharge was lost in the rolling thunder and the pattering rain. Both missed. Winton fired again and missed again. He realized that his last bullet was gone. He must catch De Witt at the next flash and overcome him before he could fire. But he could hear nothing, and he lost his bearings in the complete darkness.

In the light of the next flash Winton saw that De Witt had disappeared. He glared furiously about him. Then a bullet whipped his cheek, he heard a faint crack from one side of him, and he saw, before the light vanished, De Witt's hand emerge apparently from behind the solid wall at the back of the cave.

A series of flashes illuminated the entire interior. Now Winton could see a narrow opening in the wall at the back of the recess. De Witt did not fire—perhaps he thought that Winton had him covered. Winton leaped forward, found the opening, and stopped. Some instinct of caution held him rooted to the spot.

The thunder peals were deafening. The rain was driving into the cave, which was ankle-deep in water. Suddenly Winton realized that the rivulet at his feet was feeding a waterfall. And then he understood his situation. He was standing upon the brink of a deep crevice. A single forward step would have hurled him to destruction.

The same warning instinct that had stopped him at the edge taught him to spring back behind the ledge of the protruding rocks. He had just re-

gained this refuge when another flash showed De Witt standing on the opposite brink, less than six feet distant, aiming at where Winton had been.

With horror Winton saw that Sheila stood in the line of fire. She was standing motionless, staring after Winton, horror and anguish on her face. The sight of her peril electrified Winton. He leaped into the darkness.

He heard the shot ring out, but his onset had deflected his enemy's aim. And this time he had De Witt in his arms, pinning the hand that held the revolver.

On the brink of the abyss the two fought for their lives. They were so equally matched that neither seemed able to budge the other. Each was nerved to the utmost by the realization of his peril. But Winton was fighting for Sheila—Sheila, whom the next flash showed standing, quivering with fear, upon the opposite edge.

"Go back!" Winton shouted to her. Even the utterance meant some infinitesimal diminution in the concentration of his muscles and will. In an instant he felt that De Witt had him at an advantage. The Dutchman's savage face was thrust into his own, his breath was hot on his cheek. He felt himself bend backward, he grasped at nothingness; he fell, dragging his enemy after him.

With a convulsive effort he caught at and clung to the projecting ledge. His feet felt for a hold. De Witt, who had evidently emptied his revolver, brought down the butt on Winton's hands. Winton clung with desperation. Across the chasm he heard Sheila screaming, and the lightning flashes, which were almost continuous, showed him her figure with hardly perceptible intervals of darkness.

De Witt was leaning forward over the chasm, his feet planted upon the edge, striving to detach Winton from his perilous hold. Again and again the revolver butt came down. Winton heard a bone in his wrist splinter. He let one hand go, swinging out over the chasm. De Witt, bracing himself against the wall, was pushing with all his strength.

Suddenly Winton remembered a school trick. If he should let himself go, De Witt's own impetus would carry him after him. Could he swing free and catch the opposite bank in falling?

He could hold on no longer. Opening his bruised hand, he plunged downward and forward. By a miracle he found the edge of the chasm on the outer side of the cave. He swung there dizzily. He drew himself upward.

At the same instant he heard De Witt fall forward. The Dutchman claved at the rocks, missed them, struck Winton; and with a scream that echoed above the thunder he went hurtling down to death.

(Continued next week.)

Real Estate Transfers.

George W. Zerby to Herbert Shadle, tract in Potter township; \$325.
Robert E. Kline, et ux, to Robert E. Kline, et ux, tract in Bellefonte; \$1.
Frederick G. Merkle, et ux, to Neil M. Fleming, et ux, tract in State College; \$1,250.
Adam H. Krumrine, et ux, to Fred-

erick G. Merkle, tract in State College; \$1,500.
Frederick G. Merkle, et ux, to William G. Killinger, et ux, tract in State College; \$1,250.
Harry E. Deitrick, et ux, to John C. Barnes, tract in Bellefonte; \$7,000.
Charles Marchello, et ux, to Glenn Hoover, tract in Rush township; \$1,000.

John F. O'Neil, et ux, to First National Bank, tract in Rush township; \$1.
Boyd Smith, et ux, to L. Earl Smith, tract in Potter township.
J. M. Keichline to W. R. Shope, tract in Bellefonte; \$4,000.
Thomas B. Beaver, et ux, to Charles D. Weider, tract in Spring township; \$600.

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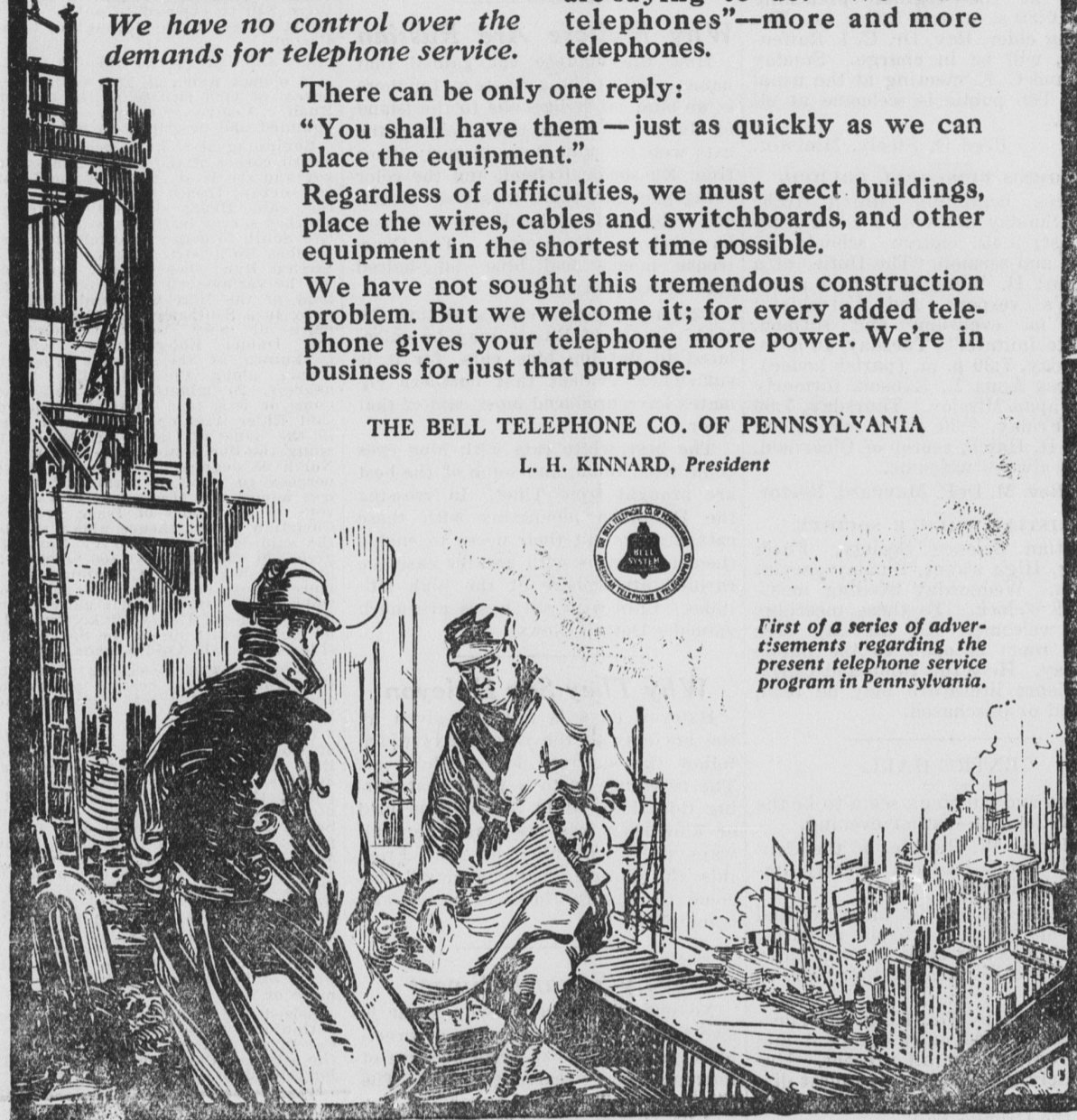
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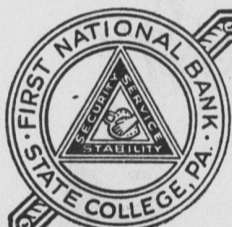
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