

INTO THE PRIMITIVE

BY ROBERT AMES BENNET ILLUSTRATIONS BY RAY WALTERS

SYNOPSIS.

The story opens with the shipwreck of the steamer on which Miss Genevieve Leslie, an English belle, Lord Winthrop, an Englishman, and Tom Blake, a brusque American, were passengers.

CHAPTER XVII.—Continued.

When he came to the ant-hill, he found companions and honey alike gone. He went on to the cocoanuts. There he came upon Winthrop stretched flat beside the skin of honey.

"I say, Blake," drawled Winthrop, "you've been a deuced long time in coming. It was no end of a task to lug the honey—"

Blake brushed past without replying, and went on until he stood before the girl. As she glanced up at him, he held out the crimson blossom.

"Thought you might like posies," he said, in a hesitating voice.

Instead of taking the flower, she drew back with a gesture of repulsion.

"Oh, take it away!" she exclaimed. Blake flung the rejected gift on the ground, and crushed it beneath his heel.

"Catch me making a fool of myself again!" he growled.

"I did not mean it that way—really I didn't, Mr. Blake. It was the thought of that awful snake."

But Blake, cut to the quick, had turned away far too angry to heed what she said. He stopped short beside the Englishman; but only to sling the skin of honey upon his back. The load was by no means a light one, even for his strength.

As Winthrop rose and came forward to join Miss Leslie, he looked about closely for the bruised flower. It was nowhere in sight.

"Eh—beg pardon, Miss Genevieve, but did not Blake drop the blossom—blossom somewhere about here?"

"Perhaps he did," replied Miss Leslie. She spoke with studied indifference.

"I—ah—saw the fellow exhibit his impudence."

"Ye-es?"

"You know, I think it high time the boulder is taken down a peg."

"Ah, indeed! Then why do you not try it?"

"Miss Genevieve! you know that at present I am physically so much his inferior—"

"How about mentally?"

"Though the girl's eyes were veiled by their lashes, she saw Winthrop cast after Blake a look that seemed to her almost fiercely vindictive."

"Well?" she said, smiling, but watching him closely.

"Ah, indeed. However, this is now quite another matter. Has it not occurred to you, my dear, that this entire experience of ours since that beastly storm is rather—er—compromising?"

"You—you dare say such a thing! I'll go this instant and tell Mr. Blake! I'll—"

"Begging your pardon, madam—but are you prepared to marry that barbarous clothopper?"

"Precisely that. It is a question of marriage, if you'll pardon me. And, you see, I flatter myself, that when it comes to the point, it will not be Blake, but myself—"

"Ah, indeed! And if I should prefer neither of you?"

"Begging your pardon—I fancy you will honor me with your hand, my dear. For one thing, you admit that I am a gentleman."

"Oh, indeed!"

"One moment, please! I am trying to intimate to you, as delicately as possible, how—er—embarrassing you would find it to have these little oc-

INTO THE PRIMITIVE



"You Sneak! You Sham Gent!"

circumstances—above all, to-day's—noised abroad to the vulgar crowd, or even among your friends—"

"What do you mean? What do you want?" cried the girl, staring at him with a deepening fear in her bewildered eyes.

"Believe me, my dear, it grieves me to so perturb you; but—er—love must have its way, you know."

"You forget. There is Mr. Blake."

"Ah, to be sure! But really now, you would not ask, or even permit him to murder me; and one is not legally bound, you know, to observe promises—a pledge of silence, for example—when extorted under duress, under violence, you know."

Miss Leslie looked the Englishman up and down, her brown eyes sparkling with quick-returning anger. He met her scorn with a smile of smug complacency.

"Cad!" she cried, and turning her back upon him, she set out across the plain after Blake.

CHAPTER XVIII.

The Eavesdropper Caught.

EVEN had it not been for her doubts of Blake, the girl's modesty would have caused her to think twice before repeating to him the Englishman's insulting proposal.

While she yet hesitated and delayed, Winthrop came down with a second attack of fever. Blake, who until then had held himself sullenly apart from him as well as from Miss Leslie, at once softened to a gentler, or, at least, to a more considerate mood.

Though his speech and bearing continued morose, he took upon himself all the duties of night nurse, besides working and foraging several hours each day.

Much to Miss Leslie's surprise, she found herself tending the invalid through the daytime almost as though nothing had happened. But everything about this wild and perilous life was so strange and unnatural to her that she found herself accepting the most unconventional relations as a regular consequence of the situation.

She was feverishly eager for anything that might occupy her mind; for she felt that to brood over the future might mean madness. The mere thought of the possibilities was far too terrifying to be calmly dwelt upon.

Though there had been some little comfort in the belief that she could rely on Winthrop. But now she was left alone with her doubt and dread. Even if she had nothing to fear from Blake, there were all the savage dangers of the coast, and behind those, far worse, the fever.

A little before dawn he dipped two of his new arrow-heads in the sticky contents of the cigarette case, fitted them carefully to their shafts and stole away down the cleft. Dawn found him crouched low in the grass where the overflow from the pool ran out into the plain along its little channel. He

could see large forms moving away from him; then came the flood of crimson light, and he made out that the figures were a drove of huge eland.

His eyes flashed with eagerness. It was a long shot; but he knew that no more was required than to pierce the skin on any part of his quarry's body. He put his fingers between his teeth and sent out a piercing whistle. It was a trick he had tried more than once on deer and pronghorn antelope. As he expected, the eland halted and swung half around. Their ox-like sides presented a mark hard to miss.

He rose and shot as they were wheeling to fly. Before he could fit his second arrow to the string the whole herd were running off at a lumbering gallop. He lowered his bow and walked after the animals, smiling with grim anticipation. He had seen his arrow strike against the side of the young bull at which he had aimed.

So great was the abundance of meat that Blake worked all the remainder of the day and all night stringing the flesh on the curing racks, and Miss Leslie tried out pot after pot of fat and tallow, until every spare vessel was filled and she had to resort to a hollow in the rock beside the spring. Blake promised to make more pots as soon as he could fetch the clay, but he had first to dress the eland hide and prepare a new stock of thread and cord from parts of the animal which he was careful not to let her see.

Whatever their concern for the future—and even Blake's was keen and bitter—the party, as a party, for the time being might have been considered extremely fortunate. They had a shelter secure alike from the weather and from wild beasts; an abundance of nutritious food, and as material for clothing, the bushbuck, hyena and eland hides. To obtain more skins and more meat Blake now knew would be a simple matter so long as he had enough poison left in the cigarette case to moisten the tips of his arrows.

Even Winthrop's relapse proved far less serious than might reasonably have been expected. The fever soon left him and within a few days he regained strength enough to care for himself. Here, however, much to Blake's perplexity and concern, his progress seemed to stop, and all Blake's urging could do no more than cause him to move languidly from one shady spot to another. He would receive Blake's orders with a smile and a drawing "Ya-as, to be sure!"—and then absolutely ignore the matter.

Only in two ways did the invalid exhibit any signs of energy. He could and did eat with a heartiness little short of that shown by Blake, and he would insist upon seeking opportunities to press his attentions upon Miss Leslie. He was careful to avoid all offensive remarks; yet the veriest commonplace from his lips was now an offense to the girl. While he needed her as nurse she had endured his talk as part of her duty. But now she felt that she could no longer do so. Taking advantage of a time when the Englishman was, as she supposed, enjoying a noonday siesta down towards the

barriade, she went to meet Blake, who had been up on the cliff for eggs.

"Hello!" he sang out, as he swung down the tree, one hand gripping the clay pot in which he had gathered the eggs. "What you doing out in the sun? Get into the shade."

She stepped into the shade and waited until he had climbed down the pile of stones which he had built for steps at the foot of the tree.

"Mr. Blake," she began, "could not I do this work—gather the eggs?"

"You could, if I'd let you, Miss Jenny. But it strikes me you've got quite enough to do. Tell you the truth, I'd like to make Win take it in hand again. But all my cussing won't budge him an inch, and, you know, when it comes to the rub, I couldn't wallop a fellow who can hardly stand up."

"Is he really so weak?" she murmured.

"Well, you know how— Say, you don't mean that you think he's shamming?"

"I did not say that I thought so, Mr. Blake. I do not care to talk about him. What I wish is that you will let me attend to this work."

"Couldn't think of it, Miss Jenny! You're already doing your share."

"Mr. Blake—if you must know—I wish to have a place where I can go and be apart—alone."

Blake scowled. "Ainc with that dude! He'd soon find enough strength to climb up with you on the cliff."

"I—ah—Mr. Blake, would he be apt to follow me, if I told you distinctly I should rather be alone?"

"Would he? Well, I should rather guess not!" cried Blake, making no attempt to conceal his delight. "I'll give him a hint that'll make his hair curl. From now on, nobody climbs up this tree but you, without first asking your permission."

"Thank you, Mr. Blake! You are very kind."

"Kind to let you do more work! But say, I'll help out all I can on the other work. You know, Miss Jenny—a rough fellow like me don't know how to say it, but he can think it just the same—I'd do anything in the world for you!"

As he spoke, he held out his rough, powerful hand. She shrank back a little and caught her breath in sudden fright. But when she met his steady gaze, her fear left her as quickly as it had come. She impulsively thrust out her hand and he seized it in a grip that brought the tears to her eyes.

"Miss Jenny! Miss Jenny!" he murmured, utterly unconscious that he was hurting her, "you know now that I'm your friend, Miss Jenny!"

"Yes, Mr. Blake," she answered, blushing and drawing her hand free. "I believe you are a friend—I believe I can trust you."

"You can, by—Jiminy! But say," he continued, blundering with dense stupidity, "do you really mean that? Can you forgive me for being so confounded meddlesome the other day after the snake—"

He stopped short, for upon the instant she was facing him, as on that eventful day, scarlet with shame and anger.

"How dare you speak of it?" she cried. "You're—you're not a gentleman!"

Before he could reply she turned and left him, walking rapidly and with her head held high. Blake stared after her in bewilderment.

"Well, what in—what in thunder have I done now?" he exclaimed. "Ladies are certainly mighty funny! To go off at a touch—and just when I thought we were going to be chums! But then, of course, I've the whole thing to learn about nice girls—like her!"

"I—ah—must certainly agree with you there, Blake," drawled Winthrop, from beside the nearest bush.

Blake turned upon him with savage fury: "You dirty sneak!—you gentleman! You've been eavesdropping!"

The Englishman's yellow face paled to a sallow mottled gray. He had seen the same look in Blake's eyes twice before, and this time Blake was far more angry.

"You sneak!—you sham gent!" repeated the American, his voice sinking ominously.

Winthrop dropped in an abject heap, as though Blake had struck him with his club.

"No, no!" he protested, shrilly. "I am a real—I am—I'm a not—"

"That's it—you're a not! That's true!" broke in Blake, with sudden grim humor. "You're a nothing. A fellow can't even wipe his shoes on nothing!"

The change to sarcasm came as an immense relief to Winthrop.

"Ah, I say now, Blake," he drawled pulling together his assurance the instant the dangerous light left Blake's eyes, "I say, now, do you think it fair to pick on a man who is so much your—er—who is ill and weak?"

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(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Uncle William—Yes, Willie, I have had my nose to the grindstone all my life.

Willie—Is that what made it so red uncle?—Stray Stories.

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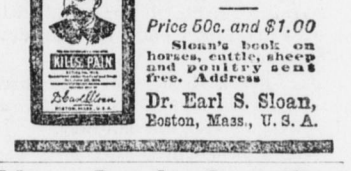
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